

BEIJING'S GLOBAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

Authoritarian Expansion and the Power of Democratic Resilience



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For the complete project, including in-depth country narratives and thematic essays on emerging tactics of media influence, visit www.freedomhouse.org.

ON THE COVER

Taipei, Taiwan – June 23, 2019
 – Protesters hold placards with messages that read “reject red media” and “safeguard the nation's democracy” during a rally against pro-China media in front of the Presidential Office building in Taipei. Photo credit: Hsu Tsunhsu/AFP via Getty Images

Key Findings

1

The Chinese government has expanded its global media footprint. The intensity of Beijing's media influence efforts was designated as High or Very High in 16 of the 30 countries examined in this study, which covers the period from January 2019 to December 2021. In 18 of the countries, the Chinese regime's efforts increased over the course of those three years.

2

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its proxies are using more sophisticated and coercive tactics to shape media narratives and suppress critical reporting. Mass distribution of Beijing-backed content via mainstream media, harassment and intimidation of outlets that publish news or opinions disfavored by the Chinese government, and the use of cyberbullying, fake social media accounts, and targeted disinformation campaigns are among the tactics that have been employed more widely since 2019.

3

The success of Beijing's efforts is often curtailed by independent media, civil society activity, and local laws protecting press freedom. Journalists, scholars, and civil society groups in all 30 countries responded to influence campaigns in ways that increased transparency, ensured diverse coverage, and enhanced local expertise on China. Laws governing freedom of information or media ownership, which are present in many democracies, helped to ensure transparency and insulate media ecosystems from CCP influence.

4

Inadequate government responses leave countries vulnerable or exacerbate the problem. Declines in press freedom and gaps in media regulations have reduced democratic resilience and created greater opportunities for future CCP media influence. In 23 countries, political leaders launched attacks on domestic media or exploited legitimate concerns about CCP influence to impose arbitrary restrictions, target critical outlets, or fuel xenophobic sentiment.

5

Democracies' ability to counter CCP media influence is alarmingly uneven. Only half of the countries examined in this study achieved a rating of Resilient, while the remaining half were designated as Vulnerable. Taiwan faced the most intense CCP influence efforts, but it also mounted the strongest response, followed in both respects by the United States. Nigeria was deemed the most vulnerable to Beijing's media influence campaigns.

6

Long-term democratic resilience will require a coordinated response. Governments, media outlets, civil society, and technology firms all have a role to play in enhancing democratic resilience in the face of increasingly aggressive CCP influence efforts. Building up independent, in-country expertise on China, supporting investigative journalism, improving transparency on media ownership and disinformation campaigns, and shoring up underlying protections for press freedom are all essential components of an effective response strategy. Governments should resist heavy-handed actions that limit access to information or otherwise conflict with human rights principles, instead forging partnerships with civil society and the media to ensure that all legislative and policy responses strengthen rather than weaken democratic institutions.

Authoritarian Expansion and the Power of Democratic Resilience

By Sarah Cook

“Wherever the readers are, wherever the viewers are, that is where propaganda reports must extend their tentacles.” —Xi Jinping, 2016

“It may be subtle, some of these tricks are geared toward coaxing you to be soft on them [Chinese state-affiliated actors]. As for stopping, they can’t stop me from writing.”
—Ghanaian journalist who wished to remain anonymous, 2021

The Chinese government, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, is accelerating a massive campaign to influence media outlets and news consumers around the world. While some aspects of this effort use the tools of traditional public diplomacy, many others are covert, coercive, and potentially corrupt. A growing number of countries have demonstrated considerable resistance in recent years, but Beijing’s tactics are simultaneously becoming more sophisticated, more aggressive, and harder to detect.

The regime’s investment has already achieved some results, establishing new routes through which Chinese state media content can reach vast audiences, incentivizing self-censorship on topics disfavored by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and co-opting government officials and media owners in some countries to assist in spreading propaganda narratives or suppressing critical coverage. Beijing’s actions also have long-term implications, particularly as it gains leverage over key portions of the information infrastructure in many settings. The possible future impact of these developments should not be underestimated.

Moreover, the experience of countries including Taiwan, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia point toward a recent turn to more aggressive, confrontational, or surreptitious tactics as milder influence efforts fail to achieve the desired results. This trend is likely to expand to additional countries in the coming years. More countries—and their researchers, journalists, and policymakers—should expect to encounter a rise in diplomatic intimidation, cyberbullying, manipulation by hired influencers on social media, and targeted disinformation campaigns designed to sow confusion about the CCP and their own societies. The Chinese regime and its proxies have shown that they have no qualms about deploying economic pressure to neutralize and suppress unfavorable coverage. As more governments and media owners face financial trouble, the likelihood increases that economic pressure from Beijing will be used, implicitly or explicitly, to reduce critical debate and reporting—not only on China’s domestic or geopolitical concerns, but also on its bilateral engagement with other countries.

Democracies are far from helpless in the face of the CCP’s influence efforts. In many countries, journalists and civil society groups have led the way by ensuring diversity of coverage, exposing coercive behavior and disinformation campaigns, and instilling both vigilance and resilience in a new generation of media workers, researchers, and news consumers. Meanwhile, some democratic governments are pursuing initiatives to increase transparency, improve coordination among relevant agencies, punish coercive

The Chinese government is accelerating a massive campaign to influence media outlets around the world.

actions by foreign officials, and spur public debate about the need for safeguards amid increased trade and investment with China. These measures will address Beijing's encroachments while strengthening democratic institutions and independent media against other domestic and international threats. Such steps may require considerable political will—and a reversal of recent domestic pressure on media freedom in many countries. But allowing the CCP's authoritarian media influence campaign to expand unchecked would carry its own costs for freedom of expression, access to uncensored information about China, and democratic governance in general.

For this report, Freedom House examined Beijing's media influence efforts across 30 countries, all of which were rated Free or Partly Free in *Freedom in the World* during the 2019–21 coverage period. Of this group, 18 countries encountered expanded media influence efforts. In 16 of the 30, the intensity of CCP influence efforts was found to be High or Very High, while 10 countries faced a Notable level and only 4 countries faced a Low level. At the same time, all 30 countries demonstrated at least one incident of active pushback by policymakers, news outlets, civic groups, or social media users that reduced the impact of Beijing's activities. Indeed, based on available data, public opinion toward China or the Chinese government has declined in most of the countries since 2018. This dynamic of greatly increased CCP investment offering comparatively modest returns—and even triggering a more active democratic response—is one of the key findings that emerged from the study.

Nevertheless, when the full constellation of media influence tactics, response efforts, and domestic liabilities—including crackdowns on independent media and gaps in legal

Journalists and civil society groups have led the way in mitigating the impact of Beijing's media influence efforts.

protections for press freedom—are taken into account, the resilience of many target countries appears more fragile. Among the 30 countries assessed using Freedom House's new methodology, only half were found to be resilient in the face of Beijing's media influence, and the other half were found to be vulnerable. This breakdown offers a stark warning as to the risk of complacency, even if many of the CCP's existing campaigns have floundered.

This report offers the most comprehensive assessment to date of Beijing's global media influence and the ways in which democracies are responding. Drawing on media investigations, interviews, scholarly publications, Chinese government sources, and on-the-ground research by local analysts, it covers developments in 30 countries during the period from January 2019 to December 2021. It updates and expands upon two previous Freedom House studies published in 2013¹ and 2020,² and it focuses largely on democracies to provide a more in-depth understanding of the deployment and reception of influence tactics in countries that possess relatively strong institutional protections for media freedom. Finally, the report offers recommendations to governments, the media sector, technology firms, and civil society groups on how they can bolster democratic defenses against CCP interference.

The goals and narratives of Beijing's influence campaign



London – Feb. 4, 2021 – The title screen of a program called “How Xi Jinping Pursues Happiness For People” from the archives of China Global Television Network (CGTN), the international arm of China’s state-run broadcaster, is seen as it plays on a computer monitor in London. Photo by Leon Neal/Getty Images

At the beginning of this report’s coverage period in January 2019, the CCP leadership appeared to be in a strong position, both domestically and internationally. Xi Jinping had successfully rewritten the constitution to remove limits on his tenure as president, and the party was sitting atop the world’s second-largest economy, a tightly controlled information environment at home, and a growing apparatus for exerting media influence abroad. But as the next three years progressed, the regime suffered a series of unprecedented, self-inflicted blows to its legitimacy: a crackdown on large-scale prodemocracy protests in Hong Kong, the attempted cover-up of the COVID-19 outbreak by officials in Wuhan and the central government’s draconian pandemic response, related economic contraction and mismanagement, and a regular drumbeat of credible exposés

regarding authorities’ brutal treatment of ethnic minority populations in Xinjiang.

China’s state media, diplomats, and other foreign-facing entities have been tasked with addressing these reputational challenges, expanding Beijing’s global influence, ensuring openness to Chinese investment, and limiting any international speech or actions that are perceived to threaten the CCP’s grip on power. Their efforts include both promotion of preferred narratives—about China, its regime, or its foreign policy priorities—and more aggressive attempts to marginalize, discredit, or entirely suppress any anti-CCP voices, incisive political commentary, or media exposés that present the Chinese government and its leaders in a negative light.

To achieve the regime’s goals, Chinese diplomats and state media outlets have invested significant resources in advancing particular narratives. The target audiences include foreign news consumers, Chinese expatriate or diaspora communities, and observers back home in China. In many countries, Chinese state propaganda includes a standard package of messages showcasing China’s economic and technological prowess, celebrating key anniversaries or the benefits of close bilateral relations, and highlighting attractive elements of Chinese culture. During the pandemic, there has been a major focus on applauding Beijing’s medical aid—such as the provision of masks, protective equipment, and Chinese-made vaccines. Many of these common themes are augmented with customized details intended to resonate with local audiences, and they are delivered in a wide range of languages. Chinese state media have leveraged numerous outlets and social media accounts that produce content in national or regional languages such as Kiswahili, Sinhala, and Romanian. In all 30 countries under study, CCP-linked actors published content in at least one major local language, and often in more than one.

But this study’s examination of state media content across the full sample of countries since 2019 also identified more problematic types of messaging. In every country, Chinese diplomats or state media outlets openly promoted falsehoods or misleading content to news consumers—on topics including the origins of COVID-19, the efficacy of certain vaccines, and prodemocracy protests in Hong Kong—in an apparent attempt to confuse foreign audiences and deflect criticism. Moreover, there was a concerted effort to whitewash and deny the human rights atrocities and violations of international law being committed against members of ethnic and religious minority groups in Xinjiang. Lastly, Chinese state-affiliated actors adopted stridently anti-American or anti-Western messaging to rebuff local concerns about Chinese state-linked activities, including those related to investment projects, opaque loans, or military expansionism, by attributing such concerns to a “Cold War mentality” or a misguided US-led attempt to “contain China.”

In every country examined, Chinese diplomats or state media outlets openly promoted falsehoods or misleading content to news consumers



Tunis, Tunisia – Feb. 18, 2022 – Tunisian Culture Minister Hayet Guerhazi (left) and Chinese Ambassador to Tunisia Zhang Jianguo attend the signing ceremony of the Tunisia-China Cultural Cooperation Protocol in Tunis, Tunisia, on Feb. 18, 2022. Photo by Adel Ezzine/Xinhua via Getty Images

The full range of tactics that are now being deployed go far beyond simple propaganda messaging. They involve deliberate efforts to conceal the source of pro-Beijing content and to censor unfavorable views. In at least some countries, activities by CCP-linked actors appeared to be aimed at gaining influence over key nodes in the media infrastructure, undermining electoral integrity and social cohesion, or exporting authoritarian approaches to journalism and information control.

Expanding authoritarian media influence tactics



Beijing – April 17, 2019 – Front pages of Chinese state-run newspapers China Daily (left), Beijing News (center), and Global Times (right) featuring reaction to the Notre Dame Cathedral fire, which took place on April 15, 2019. Photo by Nicolas Asfour/AFP via Getty Images

The CCP and its proxies engage in an array of media influence tactics, including propaganda, disinformation campaigns, censorship and intimidation, control over content-distribution infrastructure, trainings for media workers and officials, and co-optation of media serving local Chinese diaspora populations. The [30 in-depth country narratives](#) attached to this study analyze Beijing’s activities in each of these six categories, illustrating how such avenues of influence are utilized in different combinations by varied CCP-linked actors around the world.

Although the precise mixture of tactics varies from country to country, a global perspective reveals several noteworthy trends:

- **Increased Beijing-backed content in mainstream media:** Content-sharing agreements and other partnerships with mainstream media are the most significant avenue

through which Chinese state media reach large local audiences. The practice allows them to inject Chinese state-produced or Beijing-friendly material into print, television, radio, and online outlets that reach more news consumers and garner greater trust than Chinese state outlets are able to achieve on their own. The labeling of the content often fails to clearly inform readers and viewers that it came from Chinese state outlets. Examples of content placements by Beijing-backed entities were found in over 130 news outlets across 30 countries, reaching massive audiences. The Chinese embassy in India, for instance, has published advertorials in the *Hindu*, an English-language newspaper with an estimated daily readership of six million people.³ Besides inserted content, coproduction arrangements in 12 countries involved the Chinese side providing technical support or resources to aid reporting in or on China by their foreign counterparts in exchange for a degree of editorial control over the finished product. In nine countries—such as Romania and Kenya—monetary compensation or gifts

like electronic devices were also offered for the publication of pro-Beijing articles written by local journalists or commentators. Multiple China-based entities with CCP ties—ranging from flagship state news outlets like Xinhua News Agency, whose editorial lines are tightly controlled by the party, to provincial governments and companies with close CCP ties such as Huawei—are aggressively promoting such partnerships. New agreements were signed or upgraded in 16 of the 30 countries assessed since 2019. ([Read more on this trend at Freedom House’s website](#))

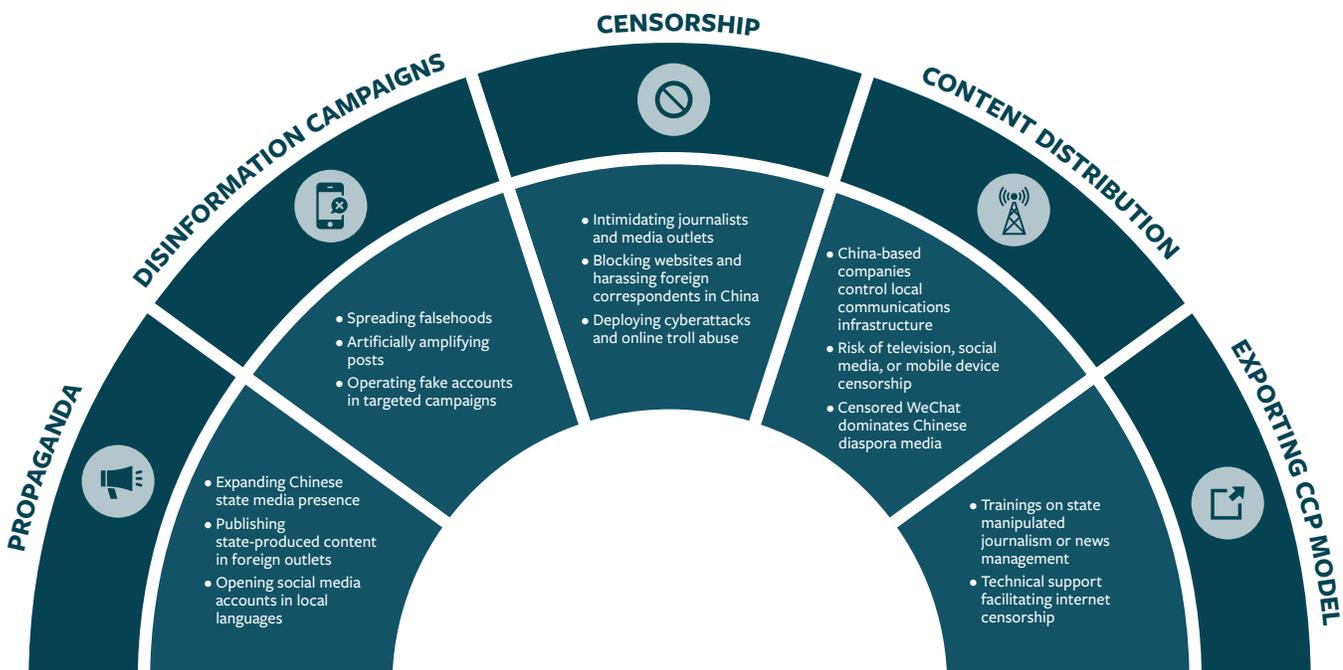
- A rise in coercive tactics:** More aggressive activities such as targeted intimidation of individual reporters, cyberbullying, and cyberattacks against disfavored news outlets have expanded since 2019, reaching 24 of the 30 countries under study in some form. In half of the countries examined, Chinese diplomats and other government representatives took actions to intimidate, harass, or pressure journalists, editors, or commentators in response to their coverage, at times issuing demands to retract or delete unfavorable content. The requests are often backed up by implicit or explicit threats of harm to bilateral relations, withdrawal of advertising,

Hong Kong authorities and the Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei have joined Chinese diplomats in threatening reprisals over unfavorable content.

defamation suits, or other legal repercussions if the media outlet, journalist, or commentator does not comply. In August 2021, the Chinese embassy in Kuwait successfully pressured the *Arab Times* to delete from its website an interview with Taiwan’s foreign minister after it was published in print. The online article was replaced with a statement from the embassy itself.⁴ Hong Kong authorities and the Chinese telecommunications firm Huawei have joined Chinese officials and diplomats in requesting censorship or engaging in legal harassment in countries such as France and the United Kingdom. In Israel, Hong

BEIJING’S TACTICS FOR GLOBAL MEDIA INFLUENCE

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its proxies influence news and information flows around the world through a range of activities. These were the most notable tactics observed in the 30 countries under study from 2019 to 2021.





Beijing – June 19, 2019 – A Chinese paramilitary police officer attempts to stop a foreign correspondent outside the Belgium embassy in Beijing. Photo by Nicolas Asfour/AFP via Getty Images

Kong authorities asked a website-hosting company to shutter a prodemocracy website and warned that refusal could result in fines or prison time for employees under the territory's National Security Law.⁵ In 17 countries, local officials, media owners, and top executives also intervened on their own initiative or at the Chinese embassy's request to suppress news coverage that was disfavored by Beijing. ([Read more on this trend at Freedom House's website](#))

- **Covert activities and manipulation on global social media platforms:** Well-known international platforms like Facebook and Twitter are an increasingly important and visible avenue for content dissemination by Chinese diplomats and state media outlets. In addition to global accounts that have gained tens of millions of followers, this study found country-specific accounts run by a diplomat or state media outlet in 28 of the 30 countries examined. Accounts affiliated with China Radio International and diplomats who genuinely engaged with local users appeared to gain authentic traction, even as others operated by Chinese officials or media entities were largely ignored or mocked by users. These mixed results may have motivated the turn to emerging tactics involving covert manipulation, such as the purchase of

fake followers. Armies of fake accounts that artificially amplify posts from diplomats were found in half of the countries assessed. Related initiatives to pay or train unaffiliated social media influencers to promote pro-Beijing content to their followers, without revealing their CCP ties, occurred in Taiwan, the United States, and the United Kingdom. In nine countries, there was at least one targeted disinformation campaign that employed networks of fake accounts to spread falsehoods or sow confusion. Several such campaigns reflected not just attempts to manipulate news and information about human rights abuses in China or Beijing's foreign policy priorities, but also a disconcerting trend of meddling in the domestic politics of the target country. ([Read more on this trend at Freedom House's website](#))

Beijing retains heavy influence over content consumed by Chinese speakers in much of the world, as the CCP considers potential political dissent among the global diaspora to be a key threat to regime security. In 21 of the 30 countries assessed, state-owned or pro-Beijing media played a dominant role shaping news content available to Chinese speakers, especially via the popular WeChat social media application. Chinese diaspora news outlets or politicians who

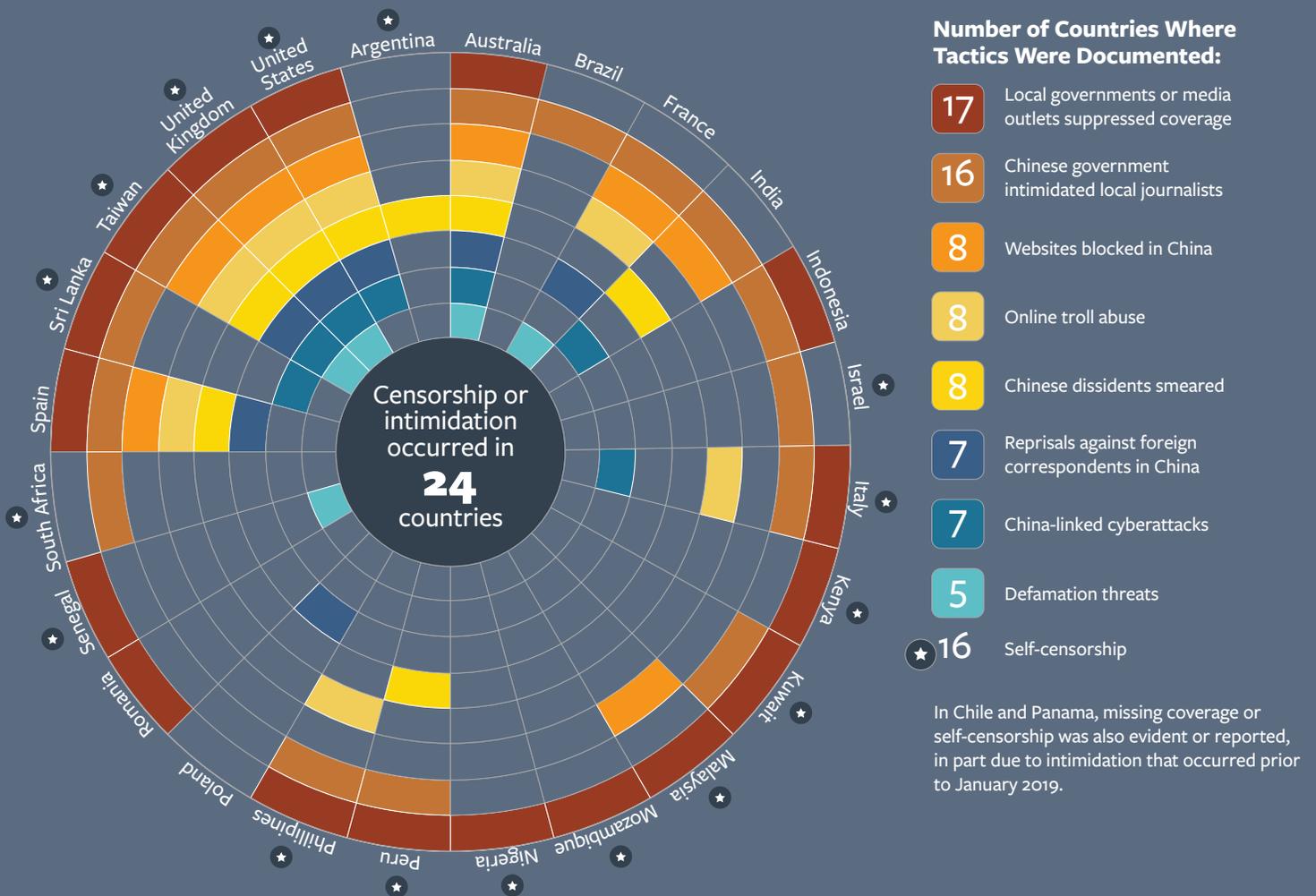
wish to broadcast posts to Chinese speakers outside China via the platform’s “official account” feature are subject to the same politicized censorship that is applied to accounts inside China, forcing administrators to screen the shared content.⁶

Several potentially important avenues of influence—such as the purchase of stakes in foreign news outlets and the export of censorship technologies for use by foreign governments—have not yet been widely exploited by Beijing. Nevertheless, both of those activities did occur in the study’s sample, and

they could become more common in the future. Moreover, in many countries, China-based companies with close CCP ties have gained a foothold in key sectors associated with content distribution, including social media and news aggregation (Tencent and ByteDance), digital television (StarTimes), and mobile devices and telecommunications infrastructure (Xiaomi and Huawei).⁷ Although systematic manipulation of information flows in politically and socially meaningful ways has not yet occurred, occasional incidents or evidence of latent capabilities have been documented in several countries.⁸

Beijing’s Tactics of Censorship and Intimidation

In 24 countries, Chinese officials or local actors used the following tactics in 2019-21 to intimidate journalists or suppress media coverage of China, the Chinese Communist Party, or state-linked actors’ activities abroad. Self-censorship or visible gaps in coverage were documented in 16 of those countries.



The strengths of the democratic response

Evidence of democratic pushback against Beijing's influence efforts proliferated during this report's three-year coverage period. Across all of the countries under study, journalists, commentators, civic groups, regulators, technology firms, and policymakers have taken steps that reduced the impact of the CCP's activities. In most countries, local media and civil society have been at the forefront of the response.

Many local journalists engaged in **investigative reporting** on China-linked projects or investments in their countries, exposing corruption, labor rights violations, environmental damage, or other harms. In 28 of the 30 countries, local

outlets specifically covered CCP political and media influence. For example, a media investigation in Israel uncovered Chinese state funding for a coproduction with the Israeli public broadcaster;⁹ a Malaysian news outlet mapped the introduction of false information about Hong Kong protesters into the local Chinese-language media ecosystem,¹⁰ and an Italian outlet uncovered disproportionate coverage of Chinese COVID-19 aid on local television stations that also had content partnerships with Chinese state outlets.¹¹ This reporting often raised public awareness and galvanized action to counter covert or corrupt influence tactics. In at least 10 countries, news outlets discontinued their content-sharing or other partnerships with Chinese state media. In 27 countries, even outlets that continued publishing Chinese state content also published more critical or unfavorable news about the Chinese government's policies at home or in the country in question, providing their readers with relatively balanced and diverse coverage overall. And despite the CCP's heavy influence over Chinese diaspora media, alternative sources of information have gained ground among Chinese-language audiences in countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Brazil, Indonesia, and Malaysia, while supplying Chinese speakers around the world with online access to independent news and analysis.

One of the most common vulnerabilities identified by the analysts and interviewees consulted for this study is a low level of independent expertise on China in local media, especially regarding domestic Chinese politics and CCP foreign influence. Many outlets compensated for this gap and provided a wealth of critical reporting to news consumers by making effective and widespread use of independent international news services for their coverage of China. Meanwhile, **civil society initiatives** are developing a new corps of journalists and researchers to provide a local perspective on bilateral relations, monitor for problematic CCP influence efforts, and share best practices for China-related reporting. These efforts include digital news platforms dedicated to covering China's relationship with Latin America and trainings for journalists in Nigeria, Kenya, and Tunisia on how to cover Chinese investment projects. New streams of work on CCP influence have emerged from think tanks in Indonesia, Australia, the United Kingdom, Poland, Argentina, and Romania. Joining them in many countries are local

Local reporting on Chinese Communist Party political and media influence was especially effective at raising awareness and galvanizing action to counter covert and coercive tactics.



Kuala Lumpur – July 5, 2019 – People take part in an event in front of the Chinese embassy in Kuala Lumpur in solidarity with the Uyghur community in China and to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the riots in Urumqi that left nearly 200 people dead. Photo by Mohd Rasfan/AFP via Getty Images

communities of Chinese dissidents, Hong Kongers, Tibetan and Uyghur exiles, and practitioners of Falun Gong who have striven to expose incidents of attempted media influence, censorship on China-based social media platforms like WeChat, and acts of transnational repression by the CCP and embassy officials.

Countries with a strong tradition of press freedom, and with networks of organizations dedicated to upholding its principles, tend to mount a more robust response to Chinese government influence efforts. In 10 of the countries under study, local press freedom groups and the broader journalistic community mobilized in solidarity to condemn

incidents in which Chinese government officials or affiliated companies engaged in intimidating or coercive behavior. In Kenya, the Media Council, a self-regulatory body for news outlets, rebuked the public broadcaster for publishing unlabeled Chinese state propaganda.¹² Taiwanese civil society has been instrumental in raising public awareness of CCP influence in local media, taking action in the form of mass demonstrations, legislative advocacy, journalist trainings, disinformation investigations, and media literacy programs.

The private sector in democracies also plays an important role. Globally popular **social media platforms** like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have improved their



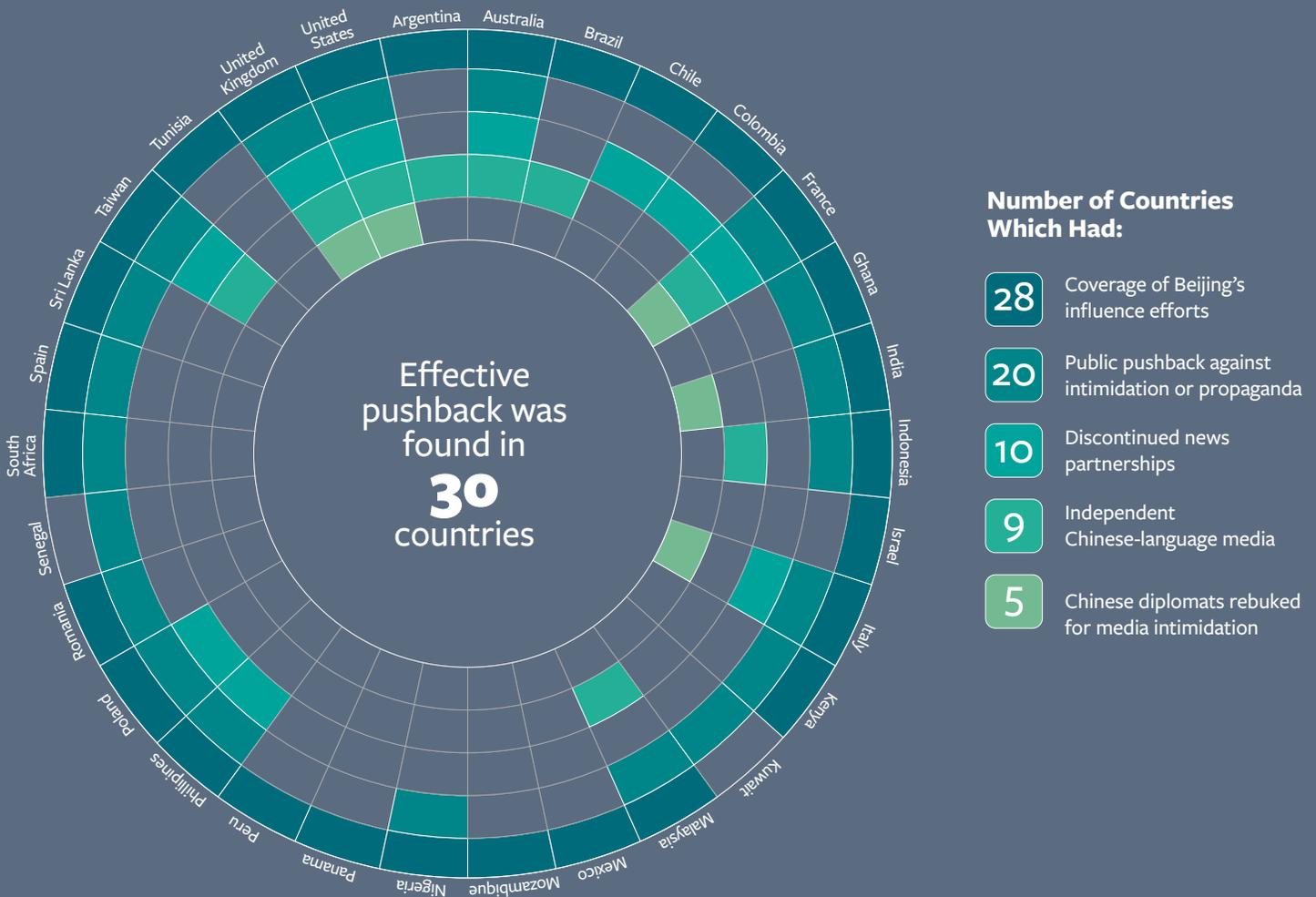
Hong Kong – Aug. 19, 2019 – Thousands of protesters take to the streets of Hong Kong to protest Chinese extradition legislation. Beijing’s foreign propaganda has attempted to defame prodemocracy protest movements in Hong Kong. Photo from Adobe Stock.

monitoring and response capacity over the past three years, in some cases rapidly detecting and removing fake accounts that were artificially amplifying Chinese diplomatic or state media content, spreading false information about perceived enemies of the CCP, or attempting to muddle public discourse about COVID-19, social tensions, or elections in countries such as the United States and Taiwan.

The platforms introduced labels for Chinese state-affiliated accounts and, in some cases, warnings to users about suspicious content, though there are still significant gaps in implementation. In 16 of the 30 countries, researchers found that Chinese government-affiliated accounts and news sources lacked the relevant labels on the leading social media platforms.

The Power of Pushback

In all 30 countries under study, journalists, officials, civil society actors, or the public took steps to push back against or reduce Beijing's media influence efforts between 2019-21. Freedom House identified these five actions as being particularly effective.



Legal safeguards and shortfalls in political leadership

As CCP influence efforts have received more media coverage, political elites in some countries have begun to recognize the potential threat to national interests and democratic values. However, coordinated policy responses were undertaken in only a few settings, typically those facing more aggressive influence efforts from Beijing. A more common reaction was to apply existing laws that either broadly protect press freedom or enhance scrutiny of foreign influence activities in order to support democratic resilience in China-related cases. In some countries, particularly those where democracy was already weak or under stress, government officials responded in ways that caused harm, for instance by infringing on freedom of expression, politicizing policy debates, or encouraging discrimination against members of the Chinese diaspora. Such cases highlight the need for democracies to adopt clear and narrowly tailored rules surrounding foreign influence and investment, with independent oversight and an emphasis on transparency mechanisms rather than criminalization or censorship.

Many democracies have laws and regulations with **transparency provisions** that can facilitate detection of CCP influence. Journalists in several countries—including the United Kingdom, Nigeria, and Peru—made use of freedom of information laws to reveal new details about Chinese government investments, loans, or provision of Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccines to corrupt local officials.¹³ In 24 of the 30 countries in this study, there were rules requiring some level of public reporting or transparency on the identity of media owners, their sources of revenue, and their other business interests. More than two-thirds of the countries under study had an investment screening and review mechanism for foreign companies' involvement with digital information infrastructure. And in the United States, despite concerns about the vague wording and inconsistent application of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, stronger enforcement with regard to Chinese state news outlets enhanced transparency on the financing of content placements in mainstream media, within and outside of the United States. This appeared to have a beneficial deterrent effect, as media outlets sought to avoid the reputational risk of publishing CCP propaganda.¹⁴

Rules governing **foreign media ownership**, especially in the broadcast sector, were present in 28 of the 30 countries, placing limitations on the size of foreign-owned stakes or requiring regulatory notification and approval before a stake is sold. Such measures help explain the paucity of examples of Chinese state entities owning stakes in foreign media outlets.

Yet these same sorts of laws and regulations can also be applied in ways that undermine free expression, particularly when they contain provisions that criminalize speech, establish politicized enforcement mechanisms, or impose sweeping, vaguely defined restrictions. In the Philippines and Mozambique, laws or proposals governing foreign ownership or content dissemination have been used by political leaders to target independent sources of news that carried criticism of the government.¹⁵ In Poland, the government tried to justify a push to change the US ownership of a private media company by citing the need to protect Polish media from control by foreign powers like China and Russia.¹⁶

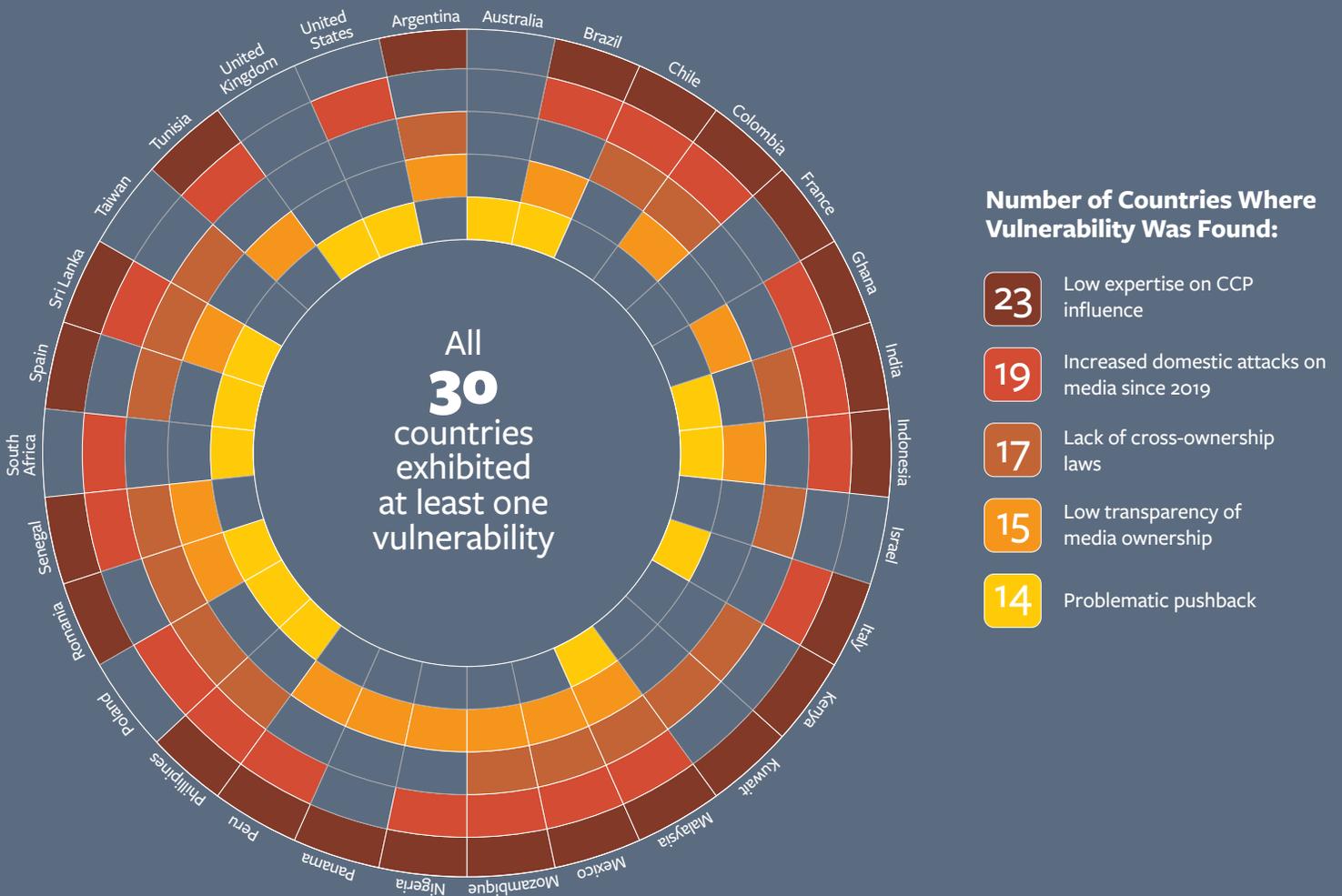
In India, investment-screening regulations introduced in 2020 for digital media companies, including news aggregators, require any foreign personnel working in the country—either as an employee or as a consultant—to obtain a security clearance from the government that can be revoked for “any reason whatsoever.”¹⁷ In Australia, the Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme has been credited with shedding light on foreign entities' activities in the country, but it has also been criticized for lacking reporting requirements on foreign-backed expenditures and contributing to an atmosphere of suspicion affecting Chinese Australians.¹⁸

Laws and regulations with transparency provisions facilitated detection of Chinese Communist Party influence.

Key Vulnerabilities to Beijing's Media Influence

While Beijing's influence efforts rely on many factors, including the actions of government officials and others within target countries, Freedom House identified five key vulnerabilities to Chinese Communist Party media influence.

At least one vulnerability was found in each country in this study in 2019-2021.



The existing legal frameworks in many countries lack strong safeguards for press freedom or contain other weaknesses that leave the media ecosystem more vulnerable to the influence campaigns of an economically powerful authoritarian state. Fewer than half of the 30 countries assessed had **laws limiting cross-ownership** that would, for instance, prevent content producers and content distributors from being controlled by a single entity. In

Senegal, Australia, and the United Kingdom, meanwhile, flawed defamation laws facilitated lawsuits or legal threats against journalists, news outlets, and commentators whose work addressed Chinese investment or political influence. In 11 countries—including Brazil, Panama, Peru, Poland, and India—powerful political and economic actors have similarly used civil and criminal defamation suits in recent years to penalize and deter critical news coverage unrelated to China,

indicating that journalists in those settings could also be vulnerable to the suppression of reporting related to CCP interests. Only nine of the 30 countries had anti-SLAPP (strategic lawsuits against public participation) laws or legal precedents in place to protect the work of journalists.

Rather than acting to address such vulnerabilities and fortify democratic resilience, government officials in 19 of the 30 countries have **increased their own attacks** on independent media, journalists, and civil society since 2019. Media outlets operating in more politically hostile or physically dangerous environments have less capacity to expose and resist the influence tactics deployed by the CCP and its proxies, especially if local political elites favor close ties with Beijing. In Ghana, Malaysia, Mozambique, Senegal, and Kuwait, local officials used their own political clout or restrictive regulations to suppress critical reporting or override independent oversight related to China. In Malaysia and the Philippines, the same independent news outlets that

have published investigative reports exposing China-linked disinformation campaigns have been at the receiving end of intense political pressure and judicial harassment because of critical coverage of their own governments.

Awareness of the threat posed by Beijing's efforts is undoubtedly growing around the world. While some political leaders in 23 countries—including presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, and members of parliament—echoed CCP talking points in their own comments to local media, other elected representatives in more than half of the countries in this study publicly expressed concern over the covert, coercive, or corrupting aspects of CCP influence campaigns, including in the political, media, and information sectors. They called parliamentary hearings or addressed questions to government ministers on topics such as the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative,¹⁹ Chinese government influence in academia,²⁰ foreign interference through



Ciudad Juarez, Mexico – Demonstrators march in Mexico on behalf of press freedom, carrying signs that say “don’t shoot, I’m a journalist” and “stop the murder of journalists. Media outlets operating in more politically hostile or physically dangerous environments have less capacity to expose and resist Beijing’s influence tactics. Photo by Protoplasmakid via Wikimedia Commons.

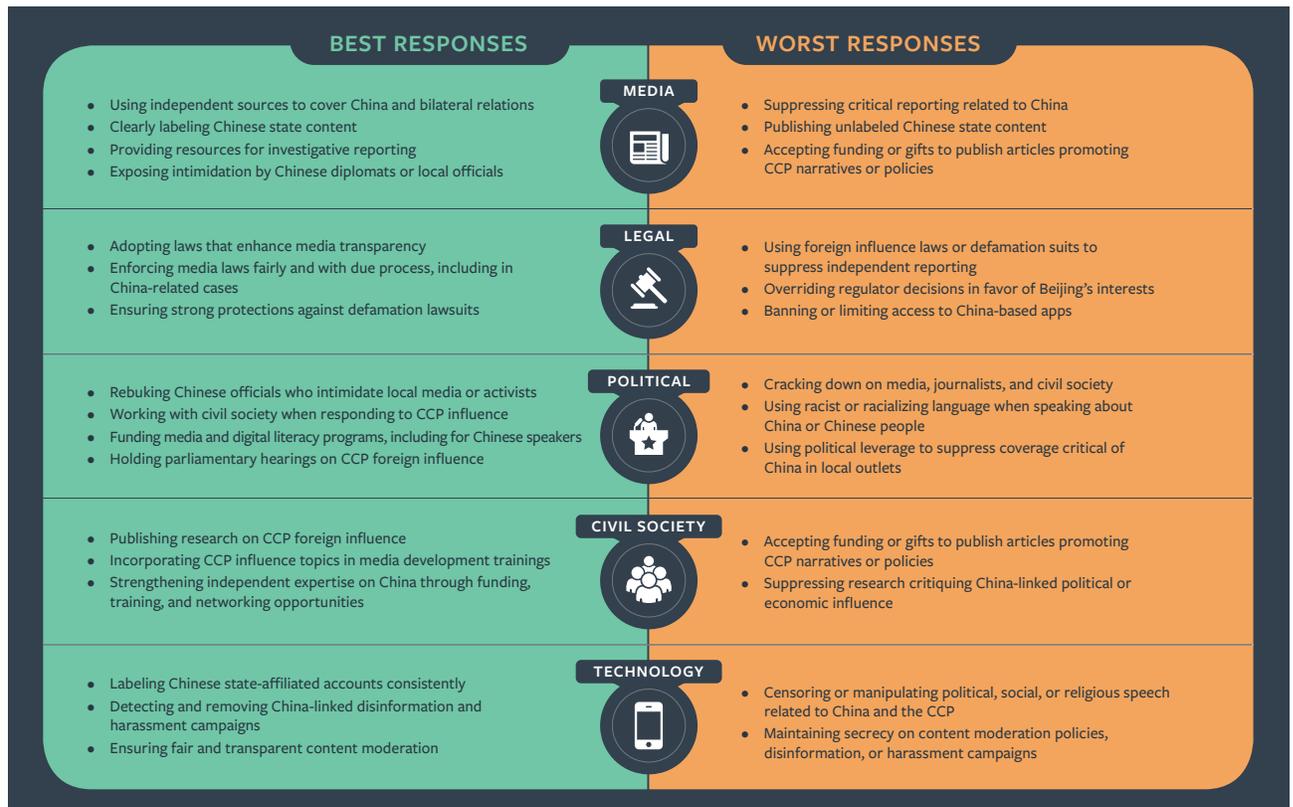
social media,²¹ and official responses to the persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang.²² In many cases, policymakers were careful to differentiate between the CCP and ordinary Chinese people.

Nevertheless, some politicians and public figures used the pretext of CCP interference to lash out indiscriminately at China-linked targets, for instance by enacting arbitrary

bans on popular mobile phone applications—as occurred in India and was attempted in the United States. In a more troubling phenomenon, local political leaders or prominent media personalities in 13 countries appeared to distort legitimate concerns about Beijing’s influence in a manner that fueled xenophobic, anti-Chinese sentiment. This seemingly contributed to hate crimes or unsubstantiated accusations of spying for members of the Chinese diaspora in eight countries.

BEST AND WORST RESPONSES TO BEIJING’S MEDIA INFLUENCE

The complex nature of Beijing’s media influence efforts requires a nuanced and multifaceted response. Actors in different sectors can take steps to limit the covert, coercive, and corrupting dimensions of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) media influence and avoid amplifying propaganda while protecting free expression.



Assessing the impact of Beijing's media influence



Dakar, Senegal – Nov. 29, 2021 – Chinese President Xi Jinping (on the screen) delivers a speech during the China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) meeting in Dakar. Photo by Seyllou/AFP via Getty Images

As the CCP devotes billions of dollars a year to its foreign propaganda and censorship efforts, it is important to ask how successful they are in different parts of the world, and what effects this could have on the health of global democracy in the future. It is significant that Chinese state narratives and content do not dominate coverage of China in most countries. Indeed, media outlets around the world continue to publish daily news that the CCP would prefer to quash and the public in many democracies is highly skeptical of obvious Chinese state propaganda.

Still, Beijing's media influence projects have achieved results with regard to limiting critical original reporting and commentary on China in many countries, establishing dominance over Chinese-language media, and building a foundation for further manipulation. Faced with implicit or

explicit threats of lost advertising, reduced access to China or Chinese diplomats, harm to relatives residing in China, or damage to bilateral relations, journalists and commentators in 18 countries in this study reportedly engaged in self-censorship or more cautious reporting on topics that are likely to anger the Chinese government.

These achievements alone grant the CCP a significant ability to reduce transparency and distort policy discussions on topics of vital importance. Many governments are making decisions about agreements with the Chinese state or China-based companies that could affect their countries for years to come in terms of national security, political autonomy, economic development, public debt, public health, and environmental degradation. Such agreements deserve scrutiny, including open debate about their advantages and

disadvantages, rather than back-room negotiations and vacuous “win-win” rhetoric. In places like Nigeria, Panama, and the Philippines, public suspicion and backlash emerged after local officials’ corrupt dealings linked to China were exposed in the media. But thanks in part to Beijing’s influence efforts, many bilateral accords are signed under conditions of opacity rather than transparency.

The suppression of independent reporting about China-related topics, including through reprisals against outlets that already struggle to survive in a competitive and financially unstable industry, also has the effect of obstructing public and elite understanding of China itself, its ruling party, and its globally active corporations. News consumers and businesses are less able to make informed judgments about the political stability of a major trading partner, respond to global health and environmental challenges in which China plays a pivotal role, or take action to support freedom and justice for China’s people. Instead, aggressive behavior toward journalists globally by Chinese diplomats, companies like Huawei, and pro-Beijing internet trolls brings China’s authoritarian reality to foreign shores, complete with the associated

fear of reprisals and self-censorship. This is particularly palpable in Chinese expatriate and exile communities, but it is increasingly evident among non-Chinese journalists and commentators as well.

Perhaps the most disturbing result of the CCP’s global media influence campaign is the extent to which it helps the regime avoid accountability for gross violations of international law, such as the persecution of minority populations in Xinjiang, the demolition of political rights and civil liberties in Hong Kong, and various acts of transnational repression targeting dissidents overseas. When a permanent member of the UN Security Council is able to commit atrocities and ignore international treaties with impunity, it erodes the integrity of the global human rights system as a whole, encouraging similar abuses by other regimes.

Of course, the effects of Beijing’s worldwide engagement in the media and information sector are not uniformly negative. In fact, it would not have achieved even its limited success to date if it were not addressing genuine needs. The availability of Chinese mobile technology and digital television services has expanded access to information and communication for millions of people, particularly in Africa and Southeast Asia. The provision of broadcasting equipment or uptake of a user-friendly mobile application like WeChat can empower local media and diaspora communities, even if they may also skew competition or facilitate surveillance and censorship. Any initiatives by democratic governments to counter CCP media influence efforts must take these factors into consideration.

Despite Beijing’s efforts, Chinese state narratives and content do not dominate coverage of China in most countries.

Conclusion: Growing investment, limited returns

For at least the past three decades, the CCP has sought to extend the reach of its robust propaganda and censorship apparatus beyond China's borders. Its first foreign influence efforts targeted Chinese-speaking communities in the aftermath of the regime's brutal crackdown on the 1989 prodemocracy movement, whose calls for freedom were widely supported by Chinese people living overseas. But since the early 2000s, acting on instructions from top leaders, CCP officials have invested billions of dollars in a far more ambitious campaign to shape media content and narratives around the world and in multiple languages. This mission has gained urgency and significance since 2019, as global audiences have displayed sympathy toward prodemocracy protesters in Hong Kong and Uyghurs detained in Xinjiang, while blaming Chinese officials for suppressing information about the initial outbreak of COVID-19.

The past three years have been marked by an increase in CCP media influence efforts and the emergence of new tactics on the one hand, but also by an apparent decline in the global reputation of Beijing and Xi Jinping on the other, particularly among residents of democracies. Indeed, when operating in democracies, Chinese diplomats, state media outlets, and their proxies have encountered serious obstacles. In addition to the underlying resilience associated with democratic protections for media freedom, there has been a growing public awareness of Beijing's activities and more diligent work by governments, investigative journalists, and civil society activists to detect, expose, and resist certain forms of influence.

The CCP's own actions often undermine the narratives it seeks to promote. Its domestic human rights abuses and aggressive foreign policy stances undercut the positive

story that Chinese diplomats and state media are trying to tell, of a responsible international stakeholder and a benign if authoritarian governance model. International and local media have covered these developments, and in 23 out of the 30 countries in this study, public opinion has become less favorable to China or the Chinese government.

These outcomes illustrate the importance of rights-respecting responses to authoritarian media influence efforts and of enhancements to underlying democratic resilience. In confronting the challenge of global authoritarianism, democracies are most effective when they uphold the very values and institutions that distinguish them from authoritarian regimes, including protections and support for independent media and civil society. Long-term success will require further action—including investments of financial and human capital, creativity, and innovation—to defend media independence against both foreign and domestic pressures. But despite fears about the supposed efficiency of autocratic models, the findings of this study offer substantial evidence that the core components of democracy are capable of insulating free societies against Beijing's authoritarian influence.

When operating in democracies, Chinese diplomats, state media outlets, and their proxies have encountered serious obstacles.

DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE GOES GLOBAL

Select cases of media, civil society, and government responses to Beijing's media influence since 2019



Recommendations

Long-term democratic resilience to Beijing's media influence will require a coordinated response across a variety of sectors. Governments, media outlets, civil society, and technology firms all have an essential role to play in protecting freedom of expression and access to information in the face of increasingly aggressive Chinese Communist Party (CCP) influence efforts, while ensuring adherence to democratic norms and international human rights standards.

For the media:

Protect and expand independent coverage of China. Media outlets should increase efforts to produce independent coverage and investigative reporting on their countries' bilateral relations with China, China-linked economic investment, Beijing's foreign influence, human rights conditions in China, and other topics of concern to the local population. They should ask challenging questions during interviews with Chinese diplomats and offer opportunities for critics of the Chinese government to air their views. Media owners and editors should avoid suppressing unfavorable reports related to China. Media outlets should increase newsroom diversity and ensure coverage of different perspectives within the Chinese diaspora, immigrant, and exile communities.

Revisit content-sharing agreements. Media outlets and journalists' unions should discontinue content-sharing partnerships, contracts for paid advertorials, and memorandums of understanding with Chinese state media entities, Chinese embassies, and the government-affiliated All-China Journalists Association. New agreements of this kind should be avoided. Outlets that decide to continue publishing content from Chinese sources should negotiate contracts that allow for editorial review and the discretion to reject any content that is false, misleading, or harmful.

Media outlets should clearly label the state-linked origin of content published via paid advertorials or other partnership agreements, including on television and radio.

Increase transparency regarding pressure tactics and cooperation agreements. Media outlets should publicly expose any pressure or intimidation they receive from Chinese officials, the Hong Kong authorities, or companies with close ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). They should disclose any content-sharing agreements or financial compensation for placement of Chinese state media content, commissioned articles, or diplomats' commentary.

Enhance journalistic training and ethical standards. Media outlets and journalists' unions should provide training for investigative reporting as well as ethical guidelines on best practices for coverage of China and the use of Chinese state-produced content. Journalists, editors, and media executives should avoid the conflicts of interest associated with accepting cash, gifts, or other special favors from Chinese state-linked actors, whether or not there is an explicit request to publish positive articles about the CCP, its policies, or Chinese companies, and should publicly disclose the provision of any good or service that could be deemed a conflict of interest.

For governments:

Preemptively expand and maximize safeguards. Even in countries where more aggressive CCP influence tactics have yet to emerge, democratic governments should establish a coordinator or task force that can facilitate interdepartmental responses to potential authoritarian influence campaigns, drawing in state institutions responsible for foreign affairs, electoral integrity, and investment screening, among other areas of work. Officials should also engage in discussions on China's foreign media influence tactics with civil society, technology firms, media outlets, and other democratic governments.

Impose penalties for transgressions by Chinese officials. When CCP representatives engage in bullying, intimidation, or other pressure aimed at a country's journalists and commentators, the government should respond promptly, for instance by issuing public statements of concern or diplomatic rebukes. In especially serious cases involving threats against journalists and their families, the government should consider declaring the perpetrators *persona non grata*. Governments should publicly condemn assaults on or obstruction of their countries' media correspondents in China, including the delay or denial of visas, and continue to pursue the matter until a satisfactory resolution is reached.

End domestic attacks on the media and civil society. Of the 30 countries covered in this report, officials in 19 have increased their own attacks on free expression since 2019, and officials in 12 took measures specifically to suppress coverage that might be disfavored by the Chinese government. To strengthen democratic resilience, governments should end domestic pressure on the media, civil society, and individuals exercising the right to free expression. Governments should also refrain from misusing laws that regulate foreign investment to suppress independent outlets or organizations. They should ensure that any measures taken to restrict or counter malign CCP influence are proportionate, provide for due process, and otherwise adhere to international human rights law and standards.

Increase transparency surrounding Chinese state media activities. Governments should consider adopting transparency requirements for foreign state-owned propaganda outlets operating in their country. Legislative language and enforcement should improve public access to

information about Chinese state media activities without casting suspicion on entire ethnic communities. Relevant laws should incorporate the advice of civil society experts and representatives of diaspora, immigrant, and exile communities to maximize their efficacy and avoid undue restrictions on fundamental rights. Appropriate regulations could include reporting requirements for foreign state media outlets' spending on paid advertorials, their ownership and editorial structures, and other ties to the political leadership in their home countries.

Ensure fair enforcement of relevant media laws. Governments should adopt and enforce laws governing media ownership and mergers that enhance transparency, improve competition and diversity, and limit cross-ownership, such as regulations that prevent single entities from controlling both content production and distribution channels. Governments should protect the independence of media regulators and allow them to apply relevant laws impartially, without political or diplomatic interference.

Improve protections against defamation. Governments should decriminalize defamation and adopt anti-SLAPP (strategic lawsuits against public participation) regulations to protect journalists, academics, and civil society activists from frivolous civil defamation suits aimed at silencing criticism of the CCP or other powerful interests.

Build safeguards against content manipulation by China-based apps and device makers: As mobile applications and devices produced by companies with close CCP ties gain global popularity, governments should take measures to detect and prevent any censorship or surveillance that might be facilitated by such products. Governments should hold hearings, introduce third-party risk assessment audits, and adopt laws that require companies to be more transparent on subjects including their content moderation, recommendation and algorithmic systems, collection and use of personal data, and targeted advertising practices, including for social media applications and browsers on mobile devices. Governments should also adopt strong data privacy laws that limit what information can be collected and how it can be used. Governments should avoid outright or arbitrary bans on China-based apps, as such restrictions run counter to the principles of internet freedom by obstructing the political, religious, and social expression of millions of users.

For civil society and donors:

Document and raise awareness of CCP influence efforts. Academic institutions, think tanks, and other civil society groups should build on existing work to research CCP influence efforts, including in the media sector. In the short term, they should investigate covert and coercive tactics and provide early-warning analysis ahead of elections, especially in countries that have previously faced targeted disinformation campaigns linked to China. Longer-term projects could include surveys of journalists and scholars regarding censorship pressures, detection of disinformation campaigns, tracking and analysis of Chinese diplomatic and state media content, or use of freedom of information laws to obtain details on public broadcasters' collaboration with Chinese state media. Researchers should also pursue any evidence of collaboration between the local government and CCP officials that could result in violations of press freedom or human rights.

Use strategic advocacy to inform policymakers and build coalitions. Press freedom groups and think tanks should provide policymakers with advice on laws or regulations that would help address authoritarian media influence efforts without infringing on human rights. Civil society groups can also file complaints with regulators to prompt stronger oversight under existing laws. Civil society has an important role to play in building coordination mechanisms—at the national and international levels—that could develop common responses and share best practices among government entities, technology firms, academic experts, and others working in this field.

Improve reporting on China through funding, training, and networking opportunities. Professional training programs for journalists and other media workers should include background material on China and its regime as well as case studies on CCP propaganda and censorship tactics around the world. To compete with Beijing-backed junkets and training programs, democratic donors should sponsor journalist travel and networking opportunities, including engagement with Chinese human rights defenders and

representatives of ethnic and religious groups that face persecution in China.

Strengthen media and digital literacy programs. Civil society should work with governments to strengthen media literacy programs and help the public to recognize and fact-check disinformation and propaganda. Programs tailored to improve expertise on China could provide background information on the different Chinese state media outlets and their ties to the CCP, examples of past disinformation campaigns, and China-based apps' track record of surveillance and censorship within China. Such initiatives should include components that serve Chinese-language news consumers and equip them to identify problematic content on WeChat and other CCP-influenced information sources.

Increase research and funding to bolster independent Chinese-language media. Civil society groups should conduct further research to understand influence efforts that target the Chinese diaspora, immigrant, and exile communities and their media ecosystem. Support for independent Chinese-language media should include increased funding and training opportunities, digital security assistance to counter cyberattacks and phishing attempts, and exploration of alternative platforms and channels that would allow the Chinese diaspora to communicate outside of censored China-based apps.

Support investigative journalism and Chinese-language study. Donors should support investigative journalism, including features on newsworthy China-related topics within a given country. To enhance media expertise on China, they should provide opportunities for journalists, scholars, and think tank researchers to study the Chinese language or attend educational or journalism classes. They should also finance research dedicated to tracking self-censorship and other subtle pressures on media outlets. Any projects focused on supporting Chinese-language media should include those serving diaspora, immigrant, and exile communities, or even provide dedicated funding for the latter.

For technology companies:

Label state-affiliated accounts. Social media platforms should consistently and comprehensively label accounts controlled by state media outlets and government officials, including Chinese state media and diplomats, to enhance transparency for users. Platforms should consult with civil society and media experts when determining which outlets reach the threshold of being state controlled. Advertising rights and other monetization opportunities should be restricted for accounts that have been labeled as state media.

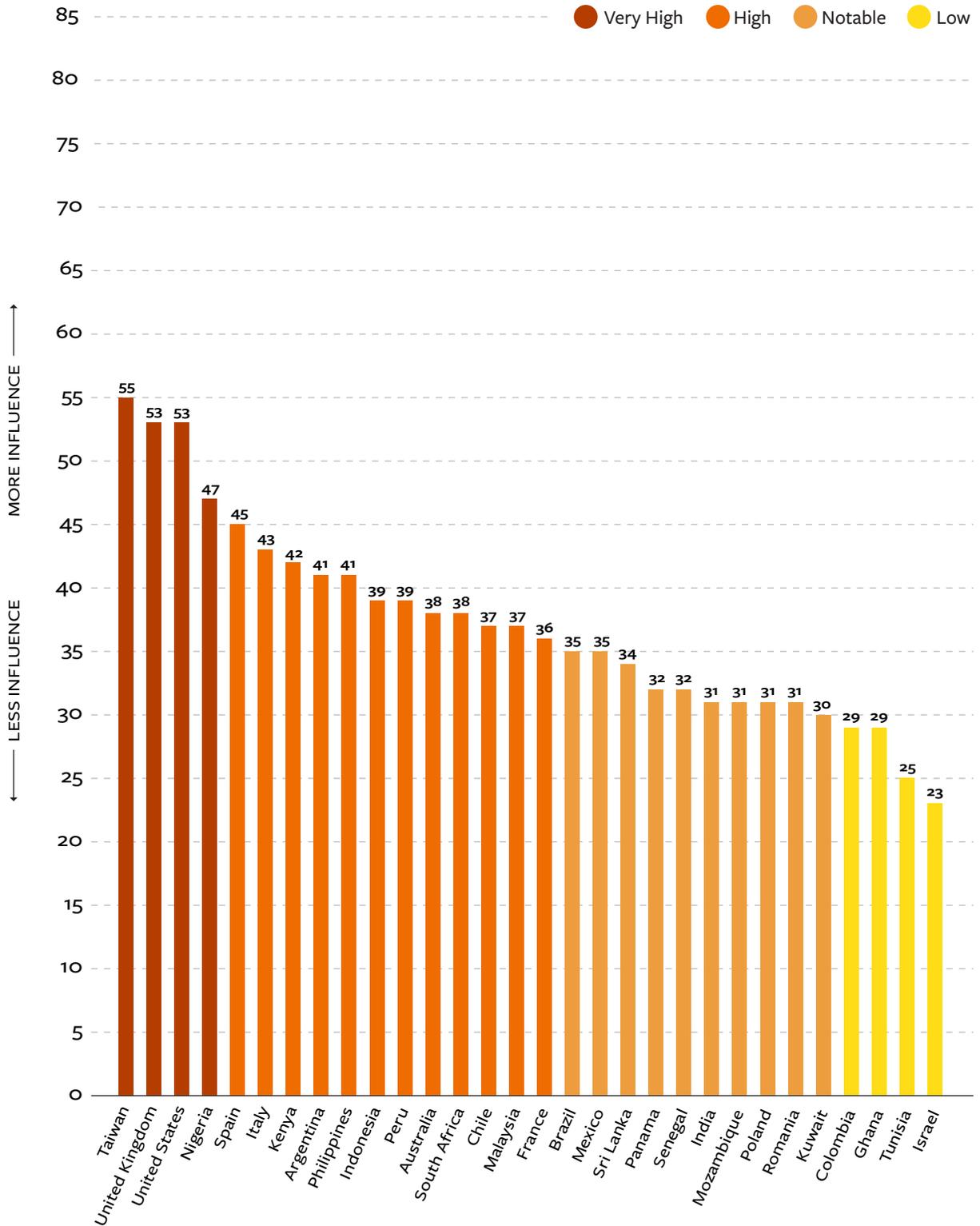
Invest resources to counter online disinformation. Technology companies should identify, dismantle, and publicly expose disinformation campaigns, making it clear when such campaigns have links to state actors. Companies should also invest resources to monitor for campaigns in a variety of languages, in addition to English and Chinese. Company representatives should engage in continuous dialogue with local civil society organizations and experts, and communicate openly about any new policies they may be implementing to counter disinformation.

Ensure fair and transparent content moderation. Technology companies should clearly and concretely define what speech is not permissible, what aims such restrictions serve, and how the platform assesses content. They should ensure that content producers who are critical of the Chinese government do not face improper censorship, including through malicious reporting by pro-Beijing trolls for alleged terms-of-service violations. They should also ensure that automatic systems for flagging and removing content include meaningful human review.

Publish detailed transparency reports on content takedowns. Media and technology companies based inside or outside of China should publicly document content removals and shadow bans, whether they were initiated by governments or the companies themselves. Platforms should provide an efficient and timely avenue of appeal for users who believe that their rights were unduly restricted. Companies should ensure that content removal requests from governments are in compliance with international human rights standards, using all available channels to push back against problematic requests.

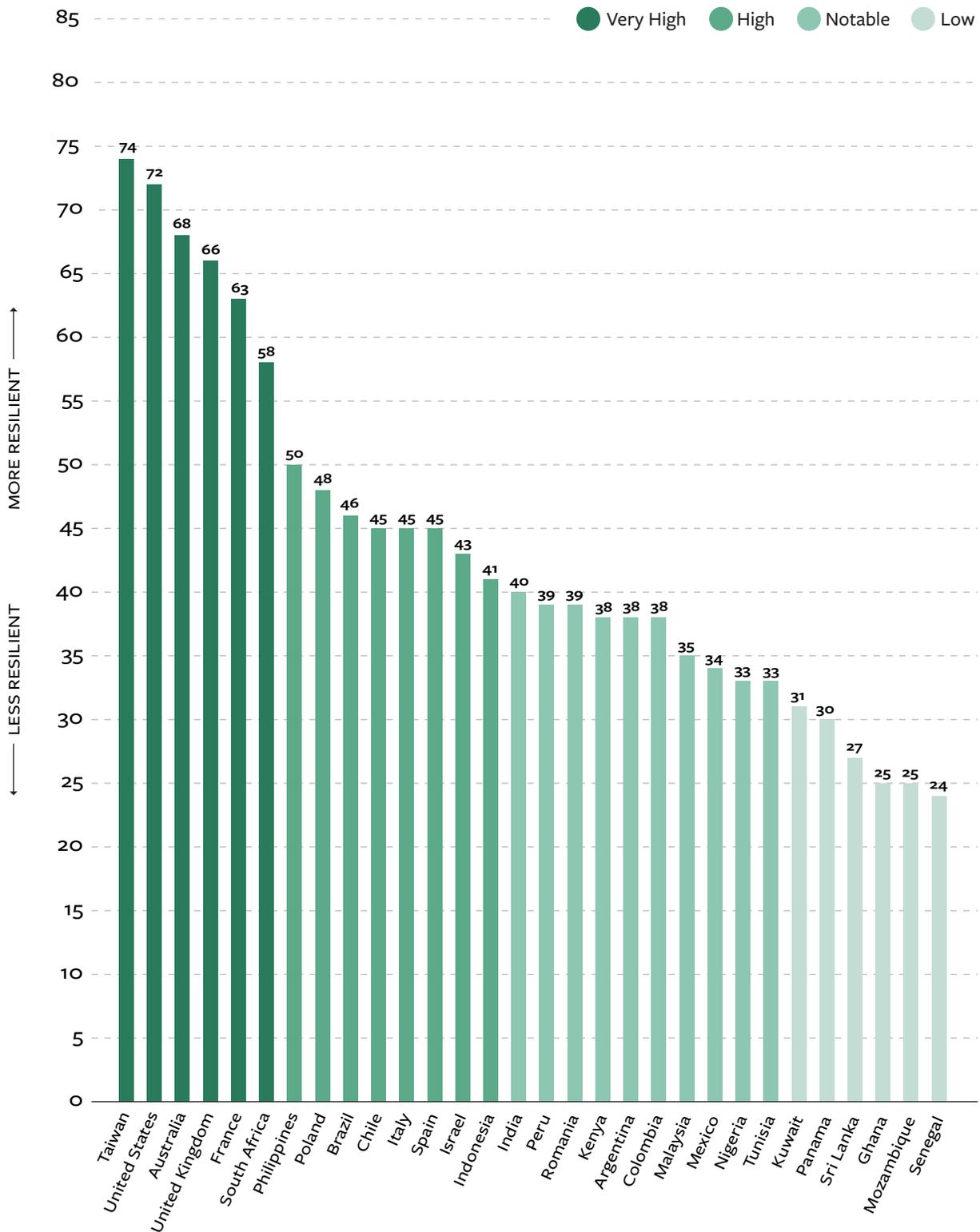
BEIJING'S INFLUENCE EFFORTS SCORE

85 = Most Influence o = Least Influence

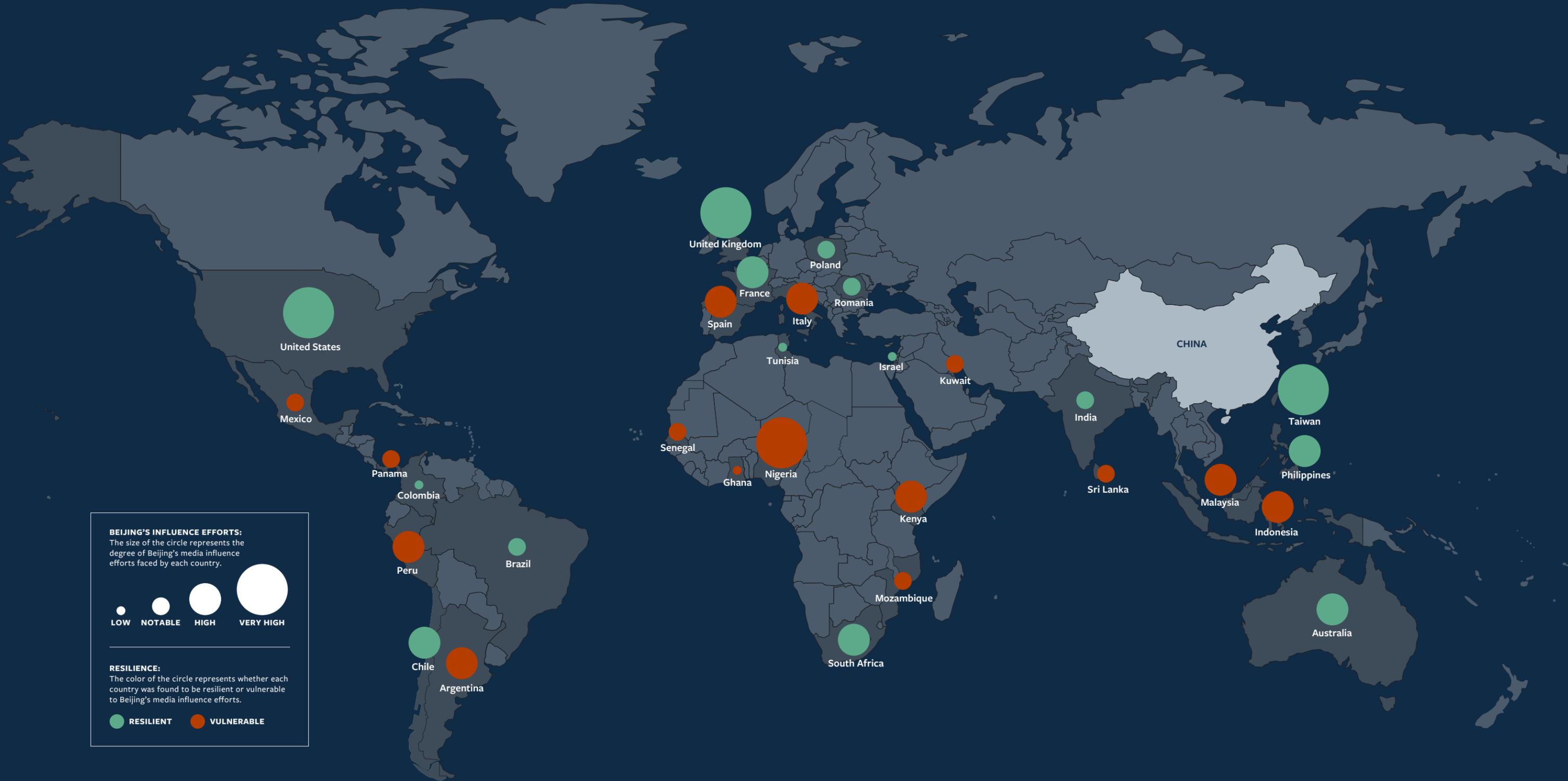


LOCAL RESILIENCE AND RESPONSE SCORE

85 = Most Resilience 0 = Least Resilience



BEIJING'S GLOBAL MEDIA INFLUENCE 2019-21



BEIJING'S INFLUENCE EFFORTS:
The size of the circle represents the degree of Beijing's media influence efforts faced by each country.

LOW NOTABLE HIGH VERY HIGH

RESILIENCE:
The color of the circle represents whether each country was found to be resilient or vulnerable to Beijing's media influence efforts.

RESILIENT VULNERABLE

Key Findings by Country

United States

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Very High 53 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Very High 72 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Increased use of covert and coercive tactics:** The methods deployed by Chinese state actors to influence the US media space have evolved since 2019. Disinformation campaigns, the use of paid social media influencers, cyberattacks on news outlets, and cyberbullying of journalists occurred with greater frequency as Chinese state media outlets struggled to gain a mainstream audience in the United States and public opinion toward Beijing became more negative.
- Limited public-opinion impact:** Mainstream media coverage in the United States is broadly independent and critical of the Chinese Communist Party, featuring reporting on rights abuses, giving voice to alternative perspectives from China and accounts by victims of persecution, and carrying investigations of Chinese companies and Chinese Communist Party political or media influence in the country. Narratives preferred by Beijing have gained some traction and repetition on the extremes of the political spectrum (both left and right) and among some state or local political and business leaders. For the most part, however, public opinion across the political spectrum is broadly unfavorable toward the Chinese regime, and aggressive messaging from Chinese officials tends to backfire.
- Problematic paid inserts and local radio programming:** Chinese state media content reaches news consumers in the United States directly through offline and online paid inserts from *China Daily* or the *Xinhua* news agency in national and regional news outlets, such as *Time* magazine, the *Los Angeles Times*, *USA Today*, CNN, and *Foreign Policy*. Filings with the Department of Justice indicate that from January 2019 to October 2021, *China Daily* paid print and online publications at least \$7 million to carry such material. At least two radio stations in the Washington, DC, and New York City areas broadcast China Radio International programming. The clarity and frequency of labeling attached to the Chinese state content for US news consumers is inconsistent. During the coverage period, several major news outlets—notably the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*—discontinued previous agreements on paid inserts.
- Broad influence efforts, including subsidized press trips:** Beijing maintains an arsenal of tactics and channels to influence the US information landscape. Diplomats publish op-eds and appear in interviews in mainstream news outlets; Chinese state media are listed as “featured partners” with newswires to share images and footage; vloggers are approached with payment and travel opportunities; and Chinese Communist Party-friendly entities and companies like Huawei subsidize trips for reporters to China. Even as regulators have restricted the presence of Chinese state-owned firms in the US telecommunications infrastructure, social media applications owned by China-based companies with track records of censorship and surveillance within China, notably Tencent’s WeChat and ByteDance’s TikTok, have gained a large following among US users.
- Emerging disinformation campaigns:** Multiple disinformation campaigns targeting US audiences were documented during the coverage period. Thousands of fake accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube were detected and shuttered for inauthentic behavior, including manipulation of the discourse about events within China (such as prodemocracy protests in Hong Kong and rights abuses in Xinjiang), US relations with Taiwan, the reputation of US-based critics of the Chinese Communist Party, and domestic issues like COVID-19 or US political divisions. Genuine user engagement with the accounts and their impact on public debate appeared limited, but no such campaigns were documented prior to 2019.
- Wide-ranging censorship efforts:** State-linked actors have deployed a relatively wide range of tactics in an attempt to restrict coverage opportunities for US correspondents in China, inhibit the operations of news outlets, and induce self-censorship. These include obstructing the movement of foreign correspondents, restricting their visas and expelling them from the country,

blocking websites and apps in China, retaliating against the families of US-based journalists in China, and engaging in cyberattacks against major news outlets. Increasingly, online actors have verbally attacked or trolled ethnic Chinese journalists working for US media, especially women. These activities have inhibited certain reporting and had a notable economic impact on US news outlets, though they continue to carry critical coverage.

- **Control over diaspora media:** Chinese Communist Party-linked media—especially state broadcaster Chinese Central Television and the pro-Beijing Phoenix TV—retain a strong foothold among Chinese-speaking communities in the United States, as do several pro-Beijing newspapers. WeChat is widely used among the diaspora, and some Chinese Americans—political dissidents, journalists, and average users—have reportedly faced censorship on the platform for sharing content that is critical of the party. Nevertheless, several mainstream outlets have Chinese-language editions online, while other US-based outlets founded by Chinese Americans continue to publish news on the internet, on television and radio, and in print that is critical of the Chinese Communist Party and often host political debates and cultural activities.
- **Robust civil society and government response:** A high level of expertise on China in academic and national media circles, bipartisan public skepticism about the Chinese regime, and a strong legal infrastructure contribute to a high degree of resilience in the face of Chinese Communist Party influence efforts. Laws governing foreign agent registration and investment

screening have been applied to Chinese media influence efforts, and strong legal protections against defamation suits support investigative journalism. Political leaders and government agencies have shown increasing awareness of the potential security challenges posed by Chinese Communist Party media influence, holding congressional hearings and creating new bureaucratic initiatives and government policies to address the problem. For example, since February 2020, the US government has treated Chinese state media operations as extensions of China's diplomatic missions in the country. News reporters, civil society groups, and technology firms have taken steps to monitor media influence and disinformation, uncovering networks of fake accounts and amplifying filings on paid inserts.

- **Vulnerabilities and problematic pushback:** Enforcement of laws like the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), which enhance transparency surrounding Chinese state media activities, remains incomplete, and interagency coordination on how to respond to the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to influence US politics is nascent. Political polarization and growing distrust in news outlets that are seen as aligned with specific political parties create a fertile environment for disinformation campaigns aimed at enhancing societal divisions, and for domestic actors to repeat talking points from Beijing, even if inaccurate, in pursuit of perceived political gain over their rivals. Growing anti-China sentiment during the COVID-19 pandemic is believed to have contributed to verbal and physical attacks against Asian Americans, while public opinion polling of these communities on relevant topics is lacking.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

In addition to the specific recommendations below, Freedom House urges governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders in the United States to implement the global policy recommendations included in this report.

For media, civil society, and donors:

- **Increase efforts to investigate CCP media influence in the United States.** US media outlets should allocate additional resources for investigations into the scope and impact of CCP political and media influence efforts in the United States, including detection of emergent disinformation campaigns, transnational repression against exile and diaspora communities, and pressure from Chinese officials on policymakers at the state and local levels. Major outlets should also work to increase newsroom diversity and hire Chinese-speaking journalists and editors.
- **Discontinue content-sharing agreements.** Mainstream media outlets in the United States should discontinue content-sharing partnerships and contracts for paid advertorials with Chinese state media entities and companies like Huawei. Outlets that continue publishing such content should screen for false or misleading narratives and clearly label it to indicate its Chinese government origin or the company's links to the state.
- **Support advocacy and capacity building.** Philanthropists should expand support for civil society research, advocacy, training, and media literacy programs that enhance US resilience in the face of CCP influence

efforts, including among Chinese speakers. Private resources for these activities are especially important given the limited availability of public funding.

For the federal government:

- **Enhance interagency and multistakeholder coordination.** The federal government should expand recent efforts to improve interagency coordination related to China's foreign media influence and targeted disinformation campaigns, particularly in advance of national and local elections. Civil society, technology firms, and media outlets should be routinely consulted on emerging trends and to coordinate effective responses.
- **Align US government designations of Chinese state media.** The Department of Justice should examine each of the Chinese state media outlets that have been designated as foreign missions by the Department of State since 2020 to determine whether those outlets should also be registered under FARA. For newly registered Chinese state outlets such as China Global Television Network and Xinhua, the Department of Justice should enforce FARA filing requirements, including submission of details on content partnerships with US media, to the extent possible under current law.
- **Increase Chinese-language capacity.** The federal government, with new funding from Congress, if necessary, should employ additional Chinese speakers at key US agencies that deal with CCP media influence.

ASIA-PACIFIC:

Australia

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

High 38 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Very High 68 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Influence tactics shift as Australian response expands:** Chinese Communist Party influence efforts became more adversarial and coercive during the coverage period of 2019-21. Softer approaches, through content sharing agreements with Australian media and an agreement with the state of Victoria to join the Belt and Road Initiative, were cancelled in 2020-21. Chinese authorities detained an Australian journalist in China and forced the remaining correspondents to leave, while Beijing described local reporting as “poisoning” bilateral relations in its list of “14 Disputes” against Canberra.
- Fewer state media interactions:** During the coverage period, local outlets largely eschewed the Chinese party-state’s efforts to influence them through paid inserts. Local media group Nine Entertainment, which publishes *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, and *Australian Financial Review* quietly discontinued cooperation agreements with *China Daily* to publish China Watch inserts. Public Special Broadcasting Service stopped broadcasting content from China Central Television and China Global Television Network following a civil society complaint over forced television confessions by political prisoners in China. Most state media content that is locally accessible, including social media posts and *Global Times* articles, is poorly received by Australian audiences. State outlets do maintain a physical presence in Canberra, Sydney, and Melbourne.
- Heightened public distrust:** Bilateral ties have come under intense public scrutiny, rendering the Chinese Communist Party’s influence efforts largely ineffective. Public perceptions of Chinese governance, Beijing’s human rights record, bilateral economic cooperation, and Chinese president Xi Jinping’s leadership have all worsened during the coverage period. In a 2020 Lowy Institute poll, over 80 percent of Australian respondents expressed concern about Chinese government influence.
- Limited disinformation campaigns:** Chinese officials and state media have amplified distorted images. In 2020, for example, a Chinese government spokesperson took to social media to share an image of an Australian soldier placing a knife at an Afghan child’s throat. Analytics firms found that the post was boosted by inauthentic accounts and that the Chinese consulate in Sydney had amplified information from inauthentic sources. There were also examples of misinformation on WeChat by Australian MPs to mislead Chinese Australian voters.
- Chinese authorities pressure Australian correspondents:** Australian media stopped placing correspondents in China in September 2020, after Chinese authorities sought to question two reporters from Australia Broadcasting Corporation and *Australian Financial Review* who were then pulled out by their outlets. Cheng Lei, an Australian journalist working with state outlet China Global Television Network, was detained in August 2020 and accused of disseminating state secrets; Cheng’s trial began behind closed doors in March 2022.
- Intimidation and self-censorship of Chinese Australian journalists:** Ethnic Chinese journalists and commentators faced threats and intimidation for discussing human rights issues in China, including from state-linked actors. Relatives residing in China, meanwhile, have faced police intimidation. Some Chinese Australian journalists at mainstream English-language outlets use pseudonyms when publishing articles criticizing Beijing in order to shield their relatives in China. Some Chinese Australian journalists also self-censor for business reasons as well as for their own safety.
- Diverse diaspora media environment:** The expatriate and diaspora population benefits from a significant media ecosystem. About 2.7 percent of the Australian population speaks Mandarin, the most widely spoken language after English. The diaspora’s primary Chinese-language news outlets are privately owned, including Vision China Times, which reports on human rights violations in China and local community news. Some

legacy Chinese-language outlets sought support from state-linked actors in the early 2000s, but many later reversed course due to inconsistent funding from Beijing and local backlash from readers and advertisers. There are over 130 WeChat Chinese-language news accounts in Australia. WeChat accounts are often registered as Chinese official accounts and are therefore subject to Beijing's domestic censorship regime.

- Skilled local journalists challenged by media concentration, partisanship, lack of diversity:** Local journalists are able to conduct in-depth investigations on bilateral relations, Chinese domestic issues, and Beijing's global influence. News outlets across the political spectrum, including the public broadcaster, have reported China-related news and investigations on CCP influence; however, conservative outlets more often carry such coverage. Local media ownership is heavily concentrated, with the News Corporation holding over 50 percent of the print market. Few Chinese Australian journalists work in mainstream outlets covering China.
- Weak defamation protection for media investigations:** Though Australia has laws related to preventing strategic lawsuits against public participation, press freedom groups raised concern over the lack of protection for public interest reporting in a court case related to an investigative report on suspected Chinese Communist Party foreign influence. The court ruled against Australia Broadcast Corporation and Fairfax Media in a February 2021 defamation lawsuit and awarded \$400,000 to the plaintiff, an Australian-Chinese businessman.

- Strong regulatory environment:** An independent regulator and several laws govern the local media sector, with transparency mechanisms regarding foreign ownership and limiting cross-ownership. A 2018 foreign influence law has been lauded as a step towards transparency of foreign actors' activities in Australia. However, it has been met with criticism for fostering an environment of racialized suspicion of ethnic Chinese, who are sometimes accused of functioning as agents of Beijing.
- Growing civil society and political response to disinformation:** Canberra and local outlets consult a large number of independent experts on China, including civil society organizations like the Lowy Institute and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. There is a growing effort to track the Chinese Communist Party's disinformation and influence efforts. The government is additionally mounting a response to dis- and misinformation on social media, including from foreign sources.
- Problematic political behavior exacerbates xenophobia:** Local politicians exaggerate and manipulate legitimate concerns over Beijing's influence to advance their own interests. During the 2022 federal electoral period, which was marred by anti-China rhetoric, the Liberal Party depicted the then opposition Labor Party as Beijing's preferred political partner. The political atmosphere, which grew starker during the pandemic, has contributed to an increase in ethnic discrimination. A 2021 Lowy Institute survey found that a third of Chinese Australians faced discriminatory treatment that year.

India

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 31 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 40 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Influence efforts ongoing, as bilateral relationship deteriorates:** The deadly military clash between India and China in June 2020, in the disputed Galwan Valley border region, prompted a marked deterioration in bilateral relations and in Indian public opinion toward China during the coverage period of 2019-2021. There was a corresponding uptick, after the incident, of Chinese state media articles that contained negative narratives about

Indian governance, Indian foreign policy, and the Indian government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. These narratives and other content penetrated the Indian media landscape through a variety of means. During the coverage period, press freedom in India declined significantly, as the Indian government pursued criminal charges against journalists and applied financial and editorial pressure on critical outlets.

- Widespread negative public opinion of China:** The Galwan Valley clash has had a significant impact on public opinion in India. A survey of young Indians in 2021 found that 77 percent of respondents distrusted China, for example. The Indian government's nationalistic response to the clash also has trickled into the Indian media, where most outlets are critical of the Chinese government. Media organizations that published interviews with Chinese ambassador Sun Weidong have faced public criticism.
- Local-language engagement draws large social media following:** Chinese state media outlets operate accounts on social media in Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and Urdu, and have a vast number of followers. The state broadcasting conglomerate China Media Group's Hindi Facebook page has 7.2 million followers, just below the 10 million followers of the British Broadcasting Corporation's Hindi Facebook page. China Media Group's Tamil Facebook page, China Radio International's Bengali page, and Xinhua's Urdu page have 8.8 million, 8.8 million, and 1.2 million followers, respectively. While these languages are also spoken widely in the neighboring countries of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (which are also the targets of Chinese Communist Party influence efforts), there are millions of speakers of these languages in India. China Radio International broadcasts also target Indian radio listeners with programming in Hindi, Bengali, Tamil, and Urdu. China Media Group hosts YouTube pages in Hindi and Bengali under the names "Hindi Masala" and "Bangla Sis" that are not labelled as Chinese state media. One Tamil-language China Radio International employee who uses the name Ilakkiya is a popular influencer, with over 600,000 followers of her account @IlakkiyaInChina; her account is also not labeled as being affiliated with Chinese state media.
- Placement of articles via paid inserts, news wires, and ambassador outreach:** Two major mainstream newspapers, the *Hindu* and *Business Line*, have published full-page advertorials paid for by the Chinese embassy, including a 2021 spread on the National Day of the People's Republic of China, which marks the establishment of the country on October 1, 1949. Chinese state media articles are still placed in Indian outlets through existing content-sharing agreements with Indian news wire services. China's ambassador to India has over 90,000 followers on Twitter, and his account receives significant engagement from Indian netizens. The ambassador also had at least 13 op-eds published in English during the coverage period in outlets including in the *Hindu*, the *Times of India*, the *Free Press Journal*, and the *Economic Times*, and has been interviewed by numerous local media outlets. Before the Galwan clash and the pandemic, Chinese state actors were actively engaged in efforts to cultivate ties with Indian journalists by offering subsidized trips to China, though these have since ebbed due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions.
- Chinese government blocking of websites and cyberattacks:** Indian mainstream media outlets are generally outspoken, and have broadly been critical of the Chinese government since the military clash in 2020. Many Indian news sites such as the *Hindu*, the *Times of India*, the *Wire*, the *Quint*, and their apps have been blocked in China in response to coverage of the Galwan Valley clash. In September 2021, researchers linked a hack of the media conglomerate the Times Group, the parent company of the *Times of India*, the *Economic Times*, and other outlets, to the Chinese state.
- Pressure on Tibetans in exile:** Tibetan media and civil society groups in exile are important independent sources of information on Chinese government repression in Tibet, with many maintaining contacts with those inside the region. Tibetan journalists and activists based in Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh—which borders Tibet and is the seat of the Tibetan government in exile—have faced pressure from both Chinese and Indian authorities. Tibetans in exile and members of the Tibetan diaspora have faced relentless phishing and hacking attacks, as well as intimidation and threats online, from the Chinese government. When ties between the Chinese and Indian governments were warmer, Indian authorities launched their own crackdowns, such as when 15 Tibetans from a youth exile group were arrested in 2019 ahead of Xi Jinping's visit to India.
- Limited targeting of small diaspora:** The Chinese diaspora in India is small and mostly based near Kolkata; the number of Chinese expatriates and diaspora is unknown, with even the Chinese government declining to provide an estimate. There is only one local Chinese-language newspaper Seong Pow (印度商報) based in the country, though the fate of the paper is unclear after its founder died in 2020. WeChat, typically a major source of news and information for Chinese speakers around the world, was banned in India in June 2020 after the military clash. It can be reached by Virtual Private Networks though it does not appear to have any significant social media penetration.
- Media pushback against Chinese government influence complicated by India's declining press freedom:** India's Ministry of External Affairs has expressed public support for reporting on Chinese government influence attempts: for instance, it declared

that “there is a free media in India” after journalists revealed efforts by the Chinese embassy to instruct Indian outlets on how to cover Taiwan. However, journalists’ ability to expose Chinese efforts to influence or coerce Indian media workers is complicated by an increase in the number of attacks on Indian media by the Indian government and by politically connected individuals. The risk of arrest, legal prosecutions, targeted censorship, online harassment, and other intimidation from the Indian government officials, state-aligned actors, and supporters of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party has exacerbated overall self-censorship in India. The deteriorating press freedom situation has created further opportunities for the Chinese Communist Party to attempt to co-opt elites, scholars, and politicians without scrutiny from the press.

- **Independent expertise on China and robust press freedom community:** Indian media outlets have a growing number of foreign correspondents based in China and Hong Kong. Independent scholars, journalists, and researchers working on China in India are often consulted by local media. Indian civil society, though embattled due to increasing legal harassment and other threats, has continued working to protect press freedom, track disinformation networks, and foster a reliable, diverse, and resilient information ecosystem more broadly. Media literacy programs in India are supported by the government, international technology companies, and international broadcasters.
- **Regulatory vulnerabilities and deteriorating environment for civil society:** India’s regulatory

environment allows the government to exercise control over the registration, accreditation, and travel of local and foreign journalists and media outlets, threatening their independence. Information Technology Rules introduced in 2021 impose an onerous regulatory structure on digital news outlets that civil society groups say may be abused to enact censorship (though the provisions are not yet in force as of August 2022 due to litigation). The state-owned All India Radio exercises a monopoly over radio news content. While there are legal limitations on foreign ownership in the media sector, recent legislation on foreign funding of civil society groups has been wielded by the government against perceived critics. Activists also risk severe harassment and arrest for engaging in rights work, contributing to self-censorship and potentially complicating any investigative work on Chinese influence.

- **Problematic pushback:** The Indian government has banned over 200 apps made by companies based in China on national security grounds, including WeChat and TikTok, which are owned by companies with a history of censorship inside China. The ban on such apps, however, limits freedom-of-expression and access-to-information rights of Indians. The blocking of WeChat has particularly affected Tibetans in exile—who are cut off from their families in China, since WeChat is the most commonly employed means of communication with relatives. Jingoistic political rhetoric toward China has also created an atmosphere of fear for the small community of Chinese Indians.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Increased influence efforts:** The Chinese government’s media influence efforts in Indonesia expanded during the coverage period of 2019-21. Beijing has successfully pushed for new agreements with the country’s national news agency and a major free-to-air television network, opened new diplomatic social media accounts, and appealed to Indonesia’s Muslim community through trips to Xinjiang that presented a government-controlled perspective of the region.
- **Limited impact, strong public skepticism of China:** Indonesian academics and politicians are wary of playing into geopolitical rivalries by taking a stance on controversial issues having to do with China. Available data show that Indonesians’ trust in China

remains low, continuing a trend that began in 2015. Those believing that China is a “revisionist power” increased by 15 percent from 2020 to 2021. Similar increases were found regarding perceptions of China as a strategic, political, and economic threat. Widespread skepticism towards Chinese state narratives is partly rooted in historical tensions and Chinese government policies in Xinjiang.

- **Penetration into national news agency, free-to-air television:** The free-to-air television network Metro TV, as well as Antara News Agency, regularly publish content from China Global Television Network and Xinhua, respectively, based on agreements signed in 2019, ensuring positive coverage of China in national news. China Radio International programming also airs on a popular radio station, while *China Daily* content appears in prominent newspapers like the *Jakarta Post*. Still, pro-Beijing news does not dominate coverage of China in Indonesia, which is informed by diverse sources, including international news wires.
- **Subsidized trips for journalists, influencers, Muslim leaders, and students:** Journalists and social media influencers have been invited on subsidized trips around China. Participants have repeated Beijing’s narratives during and after the trip, including denials of human rights abuses in Xinjiang. The Chinese government has also subsidized short trips to China (including Xinjiang), as well as long-term educational programs for students and leaders from Indonesia’s largest and most influential Islamic groups. Upon returning, some participants framed Chinese government policies in the region in a positive light, while others affirmed a critical stance. A significant portion of those who approve of Chinese government policies are Indonesian students at Chinese universities, many of whom have published their reflections in popular local outlets.
- **ByteDance censorship:** Chinese technology company ByteDance reportedly removed content critical of the Chinese government from its Indonesian news aggregator app, BaBe, between 2018 and 2020.
- **Limited usage of coercive and covert tactics:** Chinese state actors in Indonesia largely rely on promoting positive narratives about China instead of engaging in more aggressive strategies like intimidation or disinformation campaigns, although at least one incident of the Chinese embassy sending

confrontational messages to a journalist in response to critical coverage was recorded.

- **Strong influence on diaspora media, except regarding Indonesia’s national interests:** Chinese-language newspapers in Indonesia are dominated by pro-Beijing content. However, the papers do not promote Beijing’s narratives that challenge Indonesia’s national interests—such as on Chinese activity in the South China Sea. Chinese-language content in television and radio broadcasts is primarily cultural.
- **Political opposition to Chinese influence on strategic priorities:** While economic dependence and ideological affinities compel Indonesian elites to be cautious in pushing back against Beijing, political leaders from different parties have criticized the Chinese government’s actions in the South China Sea.
- **Growing academic, think tank, and media attention to Chinese influence:** There is increasing mainstream coverage of Chinese government influence tactics and their harms, including in the media sector. Coverage of Xinjiang remains largely critical, though Antara News Agency—with its partnership with Chinese state media—avoids coverage that counter Beijing’s line.
- **Advocacy on press freedom and Uyghur rights:** Indonesia has a robust press freedom community, with notable initiatives targeting disinformation. Civil society groups have lodged protests in front of the Chinese embassy in Jakarta over the treatment of Uyghurs and hashtags criticizing Chinese abuses in Xinjiang have gone viral on social media. At times, pushback against Chinese state narratives has included anti-Chinese conspiracy theories and disinformation propagated for political or financial gain, creating an atmosphere of fear for Indonesians with Chinese heritage.
- **Strong foreign ownership laws:** Indonesia has strong laws limiting foreign ownership, reducing the potential of Chinese state media to take control over local media outlets.
- **High media concentration, criminal penalties for defamation:** Indonesia does not have safeguards against media ownership concentration or partisan ownership. The media sector is dominated by a few tycoons with political party affiliations. Defamation remains a criminal offense and journalists covering sensitive topics face harassment, violence, and threats.

Malaysia

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

High 37/85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 35/85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Steady influence efforts:** The Chinese government's media influence efforts in Malaysia remained steady during the coverage period (2019-21), mostly building on inroads made in previous years. Subsidized journalist trips to Xinjiang increased until the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and new Chinese state social media accounts opened, but these were minor developments compared to influence activities prior to 2019.
 - Limited public opinion impact:** The Malaysian public is wary of all forms of state-controlled news and displays widespread skepticism to Chinese state narratives. Many Malaysians attribute the success of their country's COVID-19 recovery partly to assistance from China, but a majority worry about the Chinese government's strategic and economic influence, particularly regarding its growing footprint in the South China Sea. Recent polls of Malaysians consistently show increased wariness and skepticism of Chinese government motives in the region and internationally.
 - Wide reach of diplomatic writings:** Both Chinese ambassadors that served between 2019 and 2021 were active in publishing op-eds and participating in interviews, finding audiences in a wide range of popular outlets in Malay, Chinese, and English.
 - China Radio International and other state media content in Malay:** China Radio International is the only Chinese state media targeted to the majority Malay-speaking population, with over 600,000 followers on Facebook. Some Malay-language media, including Bernama news agency and *Sinar Harian*, occasionally republish Chinese state media content.
 - Strong influence on Chinese-language media, including via disinformation:** Ethnic Chinese comprise 25 percent of Malaysia's population. Ninety percent of the country's Chinese-language media is owned by a Chinese-Malaysian tycoon with strong business interests in China. The editorial lines of these outlets are accordingly dominated by pro-Beijing narratives and Chinese-language media publish less on politically sensitive topics compared to their English and Malay counterparts.
- Global Chinese-language disinformation campaigns have penetrated Chinese diaspora media in Malaysia on topics like prodemocracy protests in Hong Kong.
- Trips to Xinjiang for journalists and politicians:** Chinese state subsidized trips bringing politicians and Malay- and Chinese-language journalists to Xinjiang increased in 2019 but ceased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Both journalists and politicians repeated Chinese state talking points upon their return. *The Star*, a popular English-language paper owned by the Malaysian Chinese Association, regularly amplifies Chinese government narratives on Xinjiang. However, critical coverage of human rights abuses in the region from international news wires has continued to appear in other major media outlets.
 - Reprisals for critical reporting and self-censorship:** The Chinese government blocked the website of Malaysiakini, a prominent online news outlet, in China following reporting critical of the Chinese authorities. Another Chinese-language outlet critical of Beijing had its operating permit denied by Malaysia's Home Ministry, with the ministry explicitly citing a need to protect bilateral ties between Beijing and Kuala Lumpur as the reason. Chinese embassy officials have reportedly contacted journalists and media owners to express displeasure over certain articles, at times accompanied by threats to their advertising revenue. There appears to be a culture of self-censorship among both Malay- and Chinese-language journalists who are wary that critical reporting may result in retribution or harm bilateral ties.
 - Strong market share for PRC-based apps and devices:** Content-sharing apps—including messaging service WeChat, short video app TikTok, live streaming platform Bigo, and news aggregator Dong Bao—owned by companies based in the People's Republic of China are all among the top ten most downloaded apps in Malaysia. Some media outlets and local politicians have accounts on the apps, leaving them susceptible to future censorship or manipulation by the firms under pressure from Chinese authorities. However, no such incidents were recorded during the coverage period.

- **Diverse media with increasing critical coverage:** Malaysia’s media landscape offers resilience against Chinese state media narratives through availability of varied, critical coverage of China and Chinese influence, including using foreign news wires.
- **Legal vulnerabilities and lack of media self-regulation:** Malaysia does not yet have a press council to set ethical guidelines for journalists, and there are no

legal limits on cross-ownership or partisan ownership of media. Most Malaysian outlets are either directly or indirectly controlled by political parties, leaving them vulnerable to political influence. The government’s tight regulatory hold on traditional media and willingness to invoke sedition and other laws in response to critical reporting constrains investigative work and encourages self-censorship.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Steady influence efforts:** Over the past three years, the Chinese regime’s efforts to influence media in the Philippines has remained steady, building on important gains achieved before 2019. Notable during the coverage period of 2019–21 was the presence of a Beijing-linked disinformation campaign.
- **Limited impact, strong public skepticism of China:** Available data show that Filipinos have shifted away from perceiving the Chinese government as a positive influence or model, and that they still prefer the United States and other countries as partners. Filipinos display widespread skepticism toward Chinese state media narratives, especially amid a worsening territorial dispute between the two countries in the South China Sea. They have also increasingly conflated programs that promote Chinese culture with Chinese government narratives, contributing to the reduction of Chinese-language media programming in the Philippines. Public backlash has also disrupted coproduction agreements between Chinese state media and Philippine media.
- **Close government ties with local state broadcaster and other partnerships:** Chinese state media succeeded in establishing close ties with President Rodrigo Duterte prior to 2019, leading to the signing of formal media cooperation agreements that are still active. Chinese state media regularly provide content, including inserts, to state broadcaster People’s Television Network and major pro-government Philippine dailies like the Manila Bulletin and the *Manila Times*. The *Philippine Star* and *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, two of the country’s most popular outlets, have also published inserts and articles from Chinese state media.
- **Active social media presence but limited user engagement:** Chinese diplomats and state media have an active presence on social media platforms like Facebook, posting in both Tagalog and English. Some accounts have over 100,000 or even a million followers, though user engagement is limited and the number of fake accounts should not be underestimated.
- **Subsidized press trips:** At least 36 people from the Philippine media industry went on a subsidized trip to China in 2019, with some participants parroting Chinese state talking points upon their return. These trips stopped as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.
- **Targeted disinformation:** The Philippines is vulnerable to disinformation by pro-Beijing actors due to gaps in the country’s legal and policy safeguards as well as in public expertise and knowledge on the issue. A China-linked disinformation network operated unchecked for months in 2019 until it was identified and removed by Facebook; it included pro-Duterte messages and received high engagement from the Filipino online community while active.
- **Strong influence on Chinese diaspora media:** Chinese-language media in the Philippines are dominated by pro-Beijing content, which can influence local politics given that members of the Chinese diaspora are active in business and public affairs.
- **Low penetration in television and radio:** Partly due to public pushback and lack of local interest in their content, Chinese state media have not been successful in influencing television or radio, the two most trusted sources of news for Filipinos, despite the existence of a bilateral state broadcasting cooperation agreement.

- **Diverse and critical local media:** The Philippines’ diverse media landscape offers substantial resilience to Beijing’s influence efforts, providing varied and critical coverage of China and Chinese Communist Party influence, including through international newswires. Even generally pro-Beijing outlets are occasionally critical of the Chinese government, especially regarding the South China Sea. Several Philippine media outlets have a culture of watchdog journalism and significant capacity for investigative reporting. As a result, pro-Beijing narratives do not dominate coverage of China.
- **Increased media and civil society attention to Chinese Communist Party influence:** Filipino journalists and editors have pushed back against Chinese state efforts to publish misleading or unlabeled content. The Philippines’ vibrant press freedom community has increasingly mobilized against perceived Chinese state influence. In

March 2022, the National Journalist Union published guidelines for reporting on China, which urge journalists to maintain independence while asserting the Philippines’ position on the South China Sea. There are also emerging signs of civil society attention to disinformation and environmental harms related to Chinese investment.

- **Media vulnerability to political influence, violence, and legal reprisals:** Despite moderately robust transparency laws, the Philippines does not have laws against partisan ownership or cross-ownership of the media. As a result, domestic outlets are vulnerable to political influence. Further vulnerabilities exist due to high levels of violence against journalists and a constitutional ban on foreign investment in mass media, which has been wielded to penalize independent outlets critical of the Philippine government like Rappler.

Sri Lanka

Beijing’s Media Influence Efforts

Notable 34 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Low 27 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- **Increased influence efforts amid political change:** The Chinese party-state’s media influence efforts intensified during the coverage period of 2019-21. Pro-Beijing influencers have increased their activities in the social media space—particularly their outreach to younger Sri Lankans—and new agreements with elites, including in the think tank space, have shaped conversations in the media. The return of the Rajapaksa family to power in 2020 and protests ousting them in 2022 increased restrictions on press freedom and attacks on journalists.
- **Mixed public response:** China is sometimes viewed as a friendly power that can act as a balancing force against Western influence and which provided much needed COVID-19 aid. At the same time, public backlash and concern over its economic influence has grown since a Chinese state-run company was awarded a 99-year lease to Sri Lanka’s Hambantota Port in 2017.
- **Close ties with elites:** High-level ties between the Sri Lankan and Chinese governments have led to political and business leaders parroting Chinese propaganda points, in both domestic and international forums, including on adopting the Chinese governance model and the human rights situation in Xinjiang. State-owned paper *Daily News*,

national business paper the *Daily FT*, and some elite-run cultural organizations and think tanks have been consistent vessels for Chinese state content and narratives.

- **Aggressive diplomatic push on social media:** Chinese diplomats have adopted “wolf-warrior” tactics, regularly pushing back against criticism on social media platforms. Chinese diplomatic accounts in Sri Lanka have also benefited from amplification by fake accounts.
- **China Radio International:** China Radio International has content targeted to Sri Lankan audiences in the dominant local language Sinhala on FM radio. It is also available in both Sinhala and Tamil on social media, with over 1.4 million followers for one of the Sinhala accounts.
- **Social media influencers target youth:** Since 2020 especially, Facebook influencers affiliated with Chinese state media have increasingly pushed content targeting young adults in local languages including Sinhala. These accounts have up to 1.2 million followers and promote content that showcases the positive, apolitical sides of China while occasionally pushing pro-Chinese Communist Party content. Social media platforms have struggled to keep up with labeling them as Chinese state-controlled sources.

- **Embassy efforts to silence criticism:** Journalists and news outlets in Sri Lanka that report unfavorably on the Chinese government or its involvement in the country have been pressured by the Chinese embassy or other Chinese state-linked actors into issuing apologies or removing content. Such incidents have contributed to some self-censorship among journalists.
- **No local Chinese-language media:** There is no local Chinese-language media, reflective of the small size of the Chinese diaspora in the country.
- **Limited China expertise but growing civil society attention:** Sri Lanka has limited expertise on domestic Chinese politics and Chinese Communist Party influence mechanisms. However, there is a vibrant press freedom community and a growing contingent among civil society drawing attention to Chinese state propaganda, covert social media manipulation, and infrastructure projects involving China such as the Colombo Port City. Media

literacy is relatively high in the country, serving as another buffer to Chinese state influence.

- **Media self-regulation gaps:** Media professionalism in Sri Lanka is notably low, with little culture of investigative reporting. There is, however, a growing number of journalist training and government initiatives to tackle these gaps.
- **Lack of safeguards against political influence:** While there are laws enhancing ownership transparency and limiting foreign ownership, there are no laws against cross-ownership and partisan ownership, putting Sri Lankan media at risk of undue political influence—especially given strong governmental ties with China and the tendency for media outlets to have political affiliations. The government has also intensified its targeting of journalists in recent years, increasing the risk of self-censorship on perspectives that counter the government line.

<h1>Taiwan</h1>	Beijing's Media Influence Efforts	Local Resilience & Response	Resilient
	Very High 55 / 85	Very High 74 / 85	

KEY FINDINGS

- **Increased influence efforts and new tactics:** The Chinese Communist Party exerts considerable influence in Taiwanese media, and it stepped up its efforts during the coverage period of 2019–21. While Chinese state news outlets and Chinese diplomats lack a physical presence in Taiwan, the Chinese Communist Party has experimented with new media tactics and strategies intended to sow local divisions, harm Taiwan's foreign relations, and destabilize its government.
- **Heightened public opposition toward Chinese Communist Party propaganda:** The Taiwanese public is highly skeptical of Chinese state media, and polls showed that Taiwanese opposition to the Chinese government's "one country, two systems" formula for unification rose throughout the coverage period, reaching a high of nearly 90 percent in late 2021. The outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022 further pushed public opinion away from China amidst the specter of a Chinese Communist Party invasion of Taiwan. Nearly three out of four Taiwanese people believe that news media should be regulated to address Chinese Communist Party propaganda, according to a 2021 poll.
- **Covert partnerships with local media:** Chinese state-produced content is regularly placed in local media through illegal but widespread paid advertorials, coproduction deals, or content-sharing agreements. Such content is not clearly labeled as the product of Chinese state entities, and it may look like an independently written or produced news article, broadcast program, or other media material.
- **Subsidized press trips, online influencers:** Taiwanese journalists were routinely invited to participate in junkets, summits, or other paid trips to China with the aim of generating friendly news content before the pandemic stalled international travel. In 2019, the Cross-Strait Media Beijing Summit, hosted by Beijing Daily News Group and Want Want China Times Media Group, was attended by 85 Taiwanese media professionals, including owners, editors, and journalists. Taiwanese private companies and online influencers are also given subsidies or training by Beijing to shape content in Taiwan.
- **Business ties drive self-censorship:** Local media—especially outlets that are part of the Want Want China Times Media Group, owned by pro-Beijing Taiwanese

businessman Tsai Eng-meng—produce Beijing-friendly content and suppress stories about human rights or other issues that disfavor the Chinese government. Chinese authorities or pro-Beijing netizens have coerced Taiwanese celebrities and corporations into self-censoring or taking sides on Taiwan's status by warning that they could face financial penalties or lose Chinese market share, advertising revenue, or contracts.

- **Intensified disinformation campaigns:** Disinformation campaigns have been one of the most prominent tactics for the Chinese Communist Party to try and influence Taiwanese media discourse, especially during this report's coverage period. Dozens of campaigns mounted by Beijing-linked actors are detected monthly, with a significant focus on discrediting Taiwan's democratically elected government during the COVID-19 pandemic. False content is often directly published by Chinese state entities on social media platforms—such as Facebook, Twitter, Line, or YouTube—and then republished in local Taiwanese news outlets, or increasingly by alternative news sources like social media influencers.
 - **Defamation suits and cyberattacks:** Pro-Beijing actors like the Want Want China Times Media Group have used defamation lawsuits to target journalists and commentators who expose Beijing's influence in Taiwanese media. One lawsuit by the group's chairman in 2019 sought to punish a *Financial Times* correspondent and other media outlets for reporting that exposed the direct meddling of Chinese officials in Taiwanese editorial coverage. The Chinese government also engages in direct and indirect forms of censorship, including blocking the websites of Taiwanese outlets that carry critical content and launching cyberattacks against such outlets.
 - **Daily resistance within media outlets:** Many Taiwanese journalists have responded to self-censorship pressure inside their media outlets by adopting creative strategies of “internal” and “everyday resistance,” which can include complaining to the company or supervisors, disobeying instructions to remove or rewrite content, or deliberate inaction on orders to remove content.
 - **Flexible funding models:** Taiwanese outlets have used new funding strategies to address the financial pressures on the media sector, including nonprofit structures with grant-based funding, a social-enterprise model with responsible shareholders, or a mixture of public grants and commercial funding.
 - **Diverse civil society responses:** Taiwanese civil society has developed creative and positive responses to Beijing's influence that could strengthen Taiwan's democratic
- resilience, including initiatives to monitor Chinese-funded activities in Taiwan, support press freedom, track disinformation, and counter fake news with fact-checking. The 2019 Anti-Red Media Movement, which protested against Chinese infiltration of Taiwanese media and the participation of Taiwanese outlets in cross-strait media summits, mobilized 50,000 protesters and crowdfunded a campaign for legislation.
- **Media literacy efforts:** Civil society groups have also led the way in holding media and digital literacy workshops that teach residents of all ages how to recognize fake news, resist information manipulation online and particularly on social media, and use fact-checking platforms. The Ministry of Education has added media and online literacy programs to Taiwan's school curriculum.
 - **Government response through policy and legislation:** Taiwan's political leadership has elevated the issue of covert Chinese Communist Party influence to the highest levels of government, and it has begun proposing or enacting laws to address it, including on interference in elections and foreign agent and investment transparency measures. This approach is not universally supported in the country, and the new laws have received pushback and criticism from the main opposition party, though there remains cross-party support for Taiwan's democratic system. The government has responded to Chinese state-linked disinformation campaigns with new initiatives that require all government agencies to correct false narratives clearly and simply on social media within a set period of time.
 - **Tech company response:** International social media companies have responded vigorously to Chinese state-linked disinformation targeting Taiwan, for instance by taking down networks of inauthentic accounts, establishing a dedicated Elections Operation Center to counter disinformation during the 2020 presidential election, and sharing information about their work in Taiwan. However there remain concerns that platforms resist measures to enhance transparency and increased regulation, leaving the sector vulnerable to manipulation from Beijing.
 - **Gaps and vulnerabilities:** One of Taiwan's biggest vulnerabilities is that the private sector remains highly vulnerable to pressure from the Chinese government due to its economic activities in China. There also continue to be gaps in the regulatory framework, with the Foreign Influence Transparency Law still in draft form and concerns about its potential to stifle free expression. The ongoing failure to enact a law to prohibit media monopolies and cross-ownership and concerns over weak enforcement of the Anti-Infiltration Act are other important gaps.

AFRICA

Ghana

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Low

29 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Low

25 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Increased influence efforts:** Beijing's efforts to influence Ghanaian media increased during the coverage period of 2019–21. The Chinese embassy adjusted its response to negative coverage over illegal mining by deepening its relations with local journalists through a WhatsApp coordination group and by partnering with privately owned outlets.
- Limited impact to date:** Chinese media influence efforts in Ghana have been limited to date. Economic issues are of overriding importance to the local population, and public opinion toward China has become increasingly negative as a result of illegal mining concerns. Most Ghanaians are not very critical of the Chinese government, however, and instead hold the Ghanaian government primarily responsible for poor judgment regarding investments that have come at a high cost to the country.
- Content-sharing agreements with state and private media:** China's official news agency, Xinhua, has several partnerships with Ghanaian media, including content-sharing agreements with three influential state-run outlets: Ghana News Agency, *Ghanaian Times*, and *Daily Graphic*. These outlets often publish favorable material about China, and Ghana News Agency's reports are picked up by other local outlets. Starting during the coverage period, private Ghanaian media outlets like the *Finder* newspaper and *Business & Financial Times* also reached content-sharing agreements with Chinese sources or published their paid advertorials.
- Positive coverage after subsidized journalist trainings:** The Chinese government has sought to cultivate relationships with local journalists by sponsoring their travel to China for training programs. Some reported that they returned from such trips with a positive view of China, which they attempted to weave into their reporting, though others remained skeptical. Such trips occurred in 2019, after which the COVID-19 pandemic halted international travel. Journalists who attended the trainings were added to a group on the WhatsApp messaging platform and presented with statements and information from the Chinese embassy, some of which was later published.
- No disinformation campaigns:** During the coverage period, there were no documented disinformation campaigns that targeted or reached news consumers in Ghana.
- No direct censorship:** There was no evidence of direct censorship during the coverage period, though in 2017 the Chinese embassy warned that local media coverage threatened bilateral relations and demanded that the Ghanaian government "guide" local media. Ghanaian journalists say the embassy tends to build relationships with the media and encourage positive news coverage rather than attempting to dissuade them from covering certain issues.
- Growing control over content-distribution infrastructure:** Chinese companies own or are involved in a portion of Ghana's content-distribution infrastructure. This involvement extends to digital and satellite television services provided by the China-based company StarTimes, whose contract was canceled in 2015 and then reinstated by a new Ghanaian government in 2018—a decision that may have been subject to corrupt influence. Huawei is engaged in the construction and maintenance of the telecommunications infrastructure. The country's most popular social media application is the short-video platform TikTok, owned by the Chinese company ByteDance. Another Chinese company, Tecno, holds a large portion of the mobile phone market in Ghana.
- Limited Chinese diaspora media:** The Chinese expatriate and diaspora population in Ghana is estimated by Beijing at 30,000 to 50,000 people. Expatriates have on occasion publicly responded to events in China, for instance by holding a demonstration in 2019 in support of the Chinese government's crackdown on prodemocracy protests in Hong Kong. Chinese-language media in Ghana are limited largely to outlets that publish on the Chinese social media platform WeChat or are linked to the Chinese Communist Party.

- Strong tradition of press freedom and independent civil society:** Despite the fact that large Ghanaian media outlets are controlled by politically connected individuals, there is a strong underlying tradition of watchdog journalism, and Ghana's media sector was at one point ranked the freest in Africa. Ghana is home to several civil society organizations that work to strengthen press freedom and good governance, counter disinformation, and promote fact-checking and media literacy.
- Weak regulatory enforcement, media freedom under pressure:** Ghana's political leaders have developed close relations with Beijing and are rarely critical of the bilateral relationship. While the media sector is guided by the Ghana National Media Policy, its provisions are not upheld by statutory requirements, and enforcement of rules on foreign and cross-ownership is weak. An increase in politicized arrests of journalists during the coverage period is cause for alarm, and one prominent investigative journalist was murdered in 2019.

Kenya

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

High 42 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 38 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Increased influence efforts:** Beijing's media influence efforts in Kenya increased during the coverage period of 2019–21. The most significant shift was the expansion of state-linked outlets on social media, including in Kiswahili, and the establishment of diplomatic accounts that actively reach out to journalists and online users.
- Low return on investment:** Despite significant economic and political investment, Kenyan news readers do not often proactively turn to traditional forms of Chinese state media, though public opinion polls show the majority of Kenyans think overall Chinese influence in Kenya is beneficial for the country.
- Regional influence hub:** Beijing has made Kenya a central focus for media influence in East Africa and the African continent. Xinhua, China Radio International, China Daily, and China Global Television Network all have their Africa headquarters in Nairobi, and each office has local and Chinese staff. Many Kenyan journalists are attracted to these outlets by higher pay and ample job opportunities.
- Large-scale content dissemination:** Paid content, sponsored content, and content-sharing agreements between Chinese state media and Kenyan media allows Chinese Communist Party-backed messages to reach significant audiences. China Global Television Network holds a regular slot on public broadcaster Kenya Broadcasting Corporation's Channel 1 from 11:00 p.m. to midnight, Monday to Friday. China Radio International broadcasts for 19 hours a day in English, Chinese, and Kiswahili on a frequency provided by Kenya Broadcasting Corporation. Xinhua content is published at least once a day in major outlets; it covers pan-African news more frequently than local outlets. Chinese state-linked companies place paid inserts in Kenyan outlets at least weekly.
- Unlabeled state-produced content in local media and covert payments:** Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, a state entity, has published Chinese propaganda which is not clearly marked as coming from state media or the Chinese foreign ministry. Digital outlet Tuko TV has published Kiswahili content from China Radio International attacking criticism of Chinese government policies but is not labeled as coming Chinese state media. A few Kenyan journalists who returned from subsidized trips to China went on to publish articles repeating Chinese Communist Party propaganda, though they could not always find a local media outlet willing to publish them. The Chinese embassy in Kenya has also reportedly offered gifts, such as phones, laptops, shopping vouchers and paid holidays, to local journalists to report favorably on certain issues related to China.
- Increased engagement online, sometimes covert:** Authorities have made efforts to expand the reach of Chinese government-linked Kiswahili social media pages and influencers, sometimes obscuring state ties. The China Radio International Kiswahili Facebook page, which is run from China and Kenya, boasts 2 million

followers across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Burundi. The China Radio International-controlled Kiswahili Facebook page Yoyoasema, which has 35,000 followers, obscures its ties to the Chinese state and features videos of local Africans making positive remarks about China and Chinese engagement in Africa. To attract Kenya’s young and online population, Chinese diplomats have adopted an increasingly active presence on social media, responding to Kenyan media reporting and engaging directly with local users—efforts that likely have a greater impact on the local population than media output.

- **Growing control of infrastructure:** Chinese companies own or are involved in a significant portion of the content dissemination infrastructure in Kenya. Such involvement extends to digital and satellite television services, construction and maintenance of the telecoms infrastructure, and ownership of popular news and information-sharing social media apps; Chinese companies also hold a large portion of the mobile phone market share. A positive impact of Chinese media influence has been reduced costs for content infrastructure.

- **Chinese diaspora:** The Chinese diaspora in Kenya is relatively small, estimated between 20,000-36,000 individuals. There are no major independent, Chinese-language outlets targeting this population; the Chinese-language content that is available generally originates with state media or pro-Beijing actors.
- **Strong media ethics a source of resilience:** Media ethics and civil society initiatives on press freedom provide resilience to the covert and corrupting methods of Chinese Communist Party media influence. Kenyan journalists are unafraid to stand up to Chinese officials or criticize lopsided economic deals, and editors have defended their journalists when they come under attack by Chinese state-linked actors or take measures to limit the reach of Chinese state produced content. In November 2019, the Media Council of Kenya publicly rebuked Kenya Broadcasting Corporation for publishing Chinese propaganda.
- **Political and legal vulnerabilities:** Limited laws and regulations around foreign ownership, cross ownership, and political ownership of media, and the lack of political pushback to Chinese Communist Party media influence, are two prominent vulnerabilities in Kenya’s media sector.

Mozambique

Beijing’s Media Influence Efforts

Notable 31 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Low 25 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- **Growth potential for direct Chinese media influence:** Beijing’s media influence in Mozambique was established through a series of content-sharing and cooperation agreements with both state-owned and private media that began prior to the coverage period of 2019–21. Most Chinese state media content reaching Mozambican audiences is distributed indirectly via local outlets. However, vectors for direct media influence may increase as the country’s digital transition progresses.
- **Limited public impact:** Chinese state media targeting Mozambicans produce content only in Portuguese, limiting their potential audience. Portuguese is spoken by less than half of the population despite being the official language, with fluency concentrated among the political and economic elite. Some public opinion polling shows

that support for China as a model for state development has fallen since 2015, and that general awareness about Chinese investments or development aid in Mozambique remains low.

- **Cooperation and narrative alignment with state media:** State-owned media outlets in Mozambique—such as the news agency AIM (Agência de Informação de Moçambique), the television station TVM (Televisão de Moçambique), the radio broadcaster Rádio Moçambique, and the daily newspaper *Jornal Notícias*—have long-standing ties with Chinese media entities. They report favorably on China and its bilateral relationship with Mozambique. Signed articles by the Chinese ambassador are regularly featured in *Jornal Notícias*, which is the country’s largest newspaper by circulation, and his

comments are published more frequently than those of other nations' diplomats. Political elites such as President Filipe Nyusi have closely aligned themselves with Beijing's preferred talking points, and this alignment is reflected in the friendly coverage of China by progovernment media.

- **Small Chinese diaspora:** The Chinese diaspora in Mozambique is relatively new and small, with members likely numbering in the thousands. Local Chinese-language content aimed at this community is mostly produced by Beijing-friendly social media accounts.
- **No disinformation campaigns:** There was no evidence of Chinese state-backed disinformation campaigns that targeted or reached news consumers in Mozambique during the coverage period.
- **Deepening presence in distribution infrastructure and media governance norms:** Chinese companies have a significant presence in the content-distribution infrastructure in Mozambique and are positioned to expand in the coming years. The telecommunications firm Huawei has built data centers for e-government services and held technical training sessions for local officials. StarTimes built a significant portion of the country's digital television infrastructure and upgraded broadcasting equipment for state-owned television and radio stations, favoring state-controlled outlets over private media. StarTimes

also broadcasts satellite television in Mozambique, though its local operations were shuttered as part of an ongoing lawsuit in February 2022.

- **Private media and civil society resilient:** Private media in Mozambique are pluralistic, and formal legal protections for freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and access to information are supported by an active civil society sector. Some local journalists and researchers have published critical commentary and analysis about Chinese investments, economic activity, and propaganda.
- **State threats to media independence:** Government pressure on the media has led to a broader culture of self-censorship, and the industry suffers from a number of regulatory weaknesses. There are no rules curbing partisan or political ownership of media, or ownership across multiple media formats. Mozambique also lacks a specific governing framework or regulatory body to oversee broadcast media, though a new broadcast law and a revised press law were expected to be implemented in 2022. A Supreme Council for the Media ostensibly protects press freedoms, but its independence and effectiveness have been questioned. There are also no laws explicitly governing public-sector advertising. All these factors undercut the development of sustainable independent journalism.

Nigeria

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Very High 47 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 33 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- **Increased influence efforts amid deterioration of free expression rights:** Building on a strong foundation, Chinese state media expanded their influence efforts during the coverage period of 2019–21, including through new or deeper partnerships between local media and Chinese state media, even as travel to China by Nigerian journalists slowed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There were also several new indications that the Nigerian government viewed the Chinese regime as a model for its suppression of local free expression, and that it was using technology operated by China-based companies for this purpose.
- **Favorable public opinion on China, especially as an economic model:** Public opinion is very positive towards China as an economic model that Nigeria should emulate, though such views have been shrinking since 2019. Polls show that people who have engaged directly with Chinese actors hold more favorable opinions on Beijing's involvement in the country. Nigerian journalists generally have a positive perception of Chinese media sources but are concerned about the authoritarian character of Chinese state media outlets. Nigeria's vibrant and pluralistic media landscape, as well as the high public trust in and popularity of major international news outlets, also serve to mitigate the impact of Beijing's media influence.

- Local-language content, partnerships with local media, and frequent ambassador op-eds:** Content created by Chinese state actors reaches large numbers of Nigerian news consumers, either directly or via local outlets. China Radio International broadcasts in Hausa, a language spoken by 30 percent of Nigerians, and its Facebook page has one million followers. Chinese state media also reach local audiences through content-sharing agreements and partnerships with Nigerian state-run and private media. Chinese officials regularly engage in public diplomacy in the Nigerian media, with more than 50 op-eds by Chinese diplomats appearing across numerous outlets during the coverage period. Local opinion leaders and politicians also make pro-Beijing comments that are published in local media.
- Media trainings that influence reporting and promote Beijing’s model of journalism:** Chinese government training programs for journalists are highly sought after in Nigeria because they are well funded and offer capacity-building opportunities. The trainings have been successful in cultivating pro-Beijing voices in Nigerian media houses, with one former participant establishing his own outlet.
- Limited, nonspecific disinformation:** There is no evidence of Beijing-backed disinformation campaigns aimed specifically at Nigerians on social media.
- Censorship and self-censorship by Beijing-friendly outlets:** The Chinese embassy frequently reaches out to editors at major news outlets about news content and appears to be paying journalists not to cover negative stories about China. Outlets whose editors or publishers have a relationship with the Chinese embassy tend to censor reporters when they produce unfavorable articles. There are also instances of pro-Beijing commentators proactively avoiding publishing content that is disfavored by the Chinese government. The popular Chinese-owned news aggregator app, Opera News, has reportedly censored domestic issues on the platform.
- Prominent Chinese presence in digital television and telecommunications sectors:** StarTimes, a privately owned Chinese satellite company that has close ties to the Chinese Communist Party, plays an active role in the digital television infrastructure of Nigeria. StarTimes offers access to inexpensive subscription television packages that favor Chinese state media over other international broadcasters, though it has overall lowered the cost of digital television in the country. The state-run Nigerian Television Authority operates a joint venture with StarTimes. Huawei, a China-based company with close ties to the Chinese Communist Party and a record of building censorship and surveillance systems in China and abroad, has a dominant position in Nigeria’s digital infrastructure.
- Chinese diaspora reliance on pro-Beijing media:** The estimated 40,000 to 100,000 Chinese people living in Nigeria have two main local sources of Chinese-language media content, both of which have close ties to the Chinese government and publish pro-Beijing material.
- Civil society efforts to strengthen local media resilience:** Nigerian media outlets have some capacity to conduct investigative reporting, though expertise on China is limited. Civil society groups are working to promote good governance and strengthen democratic norms in the country through support for objective investigative reporting and development of journalistic skills.
- Investigative journalism on China-linked issues, vulnerabilities over deteriorating press freedom:** Despite limitations on their capacity for investigative journalism, politically and geographically diverse outlets have reported critically on China-related topics. During the coverage period, the media addressed increasing questions about Chinese loans and how the debt may affect Nigerian sovereignty. However, the Nigerian government has taken several actions to erode press freedom in the country, and the country’s weak or ineffective media regulations leave it more vulnerable to authoritarian influence from Beijing.

Senegal

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 32 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Low 24 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Steady influence efforts:** Beijing's media influence efforts in Senegal remained steady during the coverage period of 2019–21, though several significant outreach efforts occurred prior to the coverage period. Several local private and state-run media outlets have content-sharing agreements with Chinese state media. Beijing continued to use Senegal as a hub to target francophone West Africa, especially through the strong local presence of China Radio International.
- Limited impact:** Chinese media mainly broadcasts and publishes in French, but French is only spoken by an estimated 20 to 30 percent of the population (despite being the official language). French-language content generally reaches political and economic elites, but not ordinary Senegalese. According to opinion poll data from 2017, the most recent available, 64 percent majority of Senegalese people have a positive opinion of China; this is a decline from previous years.
- China Radio International presence:** The most significant state media presence in Senegal is the French-language China Radio International, which has one of the most modern radio and television studios among international media in Dakar. The organization has hired and trained several local journalists to work at the studio. China Radio International Français broadcasts in French and Chinese across four FM frequencies in Dakar, where 25 percent of the Senegal's population lives, and three geographically diverse cities in the north, center, and south of the country. China Radio International Senegal's website received 1.3 million total visitors between 2019 to 2021.
- Public diplomacy packaged with content-sharing agreements:** Xinhua has a content-sharing agreement with Seneweb, the most popular website in francophone sub-Saharan Africa. As a part of the agreement, Seneweb publishes opinion pieces from China's ambassador to Senegal. Xinhua also has an agreement with the Senegalese Press Agency, and China Media Group has signed an agreement with the national television broadcaster RTS. The government-owned daily newspaper *Le Soleil* has published pro-Beijing content uncritically.
- Limited coverage of Uyghur crisis:** While online access to pluralistic domestic and international media is relatively open, a lack of coverage in local outlets about the situation in Xinjiang, the Uyghur homeland and location of atrocity crimes against ethnic Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities, is notable in a country whose population is 95 percent Muslim, and may suggest self-censorship. During the coverage period, there was no evidence of disinformation campaigns using inauthentic accounts that targeted or reached news consumers in Senegal. However, the Chinese embassy organized local press conferences to spread false information about human rights abuses in China, which then circulated in local media.
- Control over content infrastructure:** Chinese companies have a significant position in the content-distribution infrastructure in Senegal. StarTimes, a privately owned company that has links to the Chinese Communist Party, provides satellite television and another private Chinese company controls 20 percent of the phone market share. Huawei, a company with close ties to the Chinese Communist party and a record of building censorship and surveillance systems in China and abroad, is involved in developing fifth-generation telecommunications infrastructure. Huawei equipment has been used by the Senegalese government to block access to website and the company is building a data center to house all government data. The Senegalese government has begun looking at adopting internet-control systems like the Chinese Communist Party's.
- Media and legal resilience:** During the coverage period, most resilience to the covert, corrupting, or coercive methods of Chinese Communist Party's influence was linked with the underlying strength of the media, strong journalistic ethics, and civil society's defense of press freedom. Some journalists working at outlets that had signed content-sharing agreements with Xinhua reported that to limit the spread of propaganda, they tended to share the outlet's sports or lifestyle coverage instead of its political coverage. Prior to the coverage period, in 2018, the national media regulator attempted to enforce media laws in a case against StarTimes. However, its decisions were ultimately overruled.

- Gaps and vulnerabilities:** There is not a high degree of independent, in-country expertise regarding China, the Chinese Communist Party, or the party-state’s human rights situation. Most individuals with experience working on China-related issues have links with either the Senegalese or Chinese governments. There are gaps in the regulatory framework around media ownership,

which is generally not transparent. Defamation lawsuits have been used against journalists reporting on Chinese investment in the country. A growing vulnerability is the increasing criminalization of press freedom, most notably through a new press code that came into force in 2021 and imposes prison sentences on journalists for defamation or publishing “fake news.”

<h1>South Africa</h1>	Beijing’s Media Influence Efforts High 38 / 85	Local Resilience & Response High 58 / 85	Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Decreased influence efforts:** The Chinese party-state’s efforts at influencing media in South Africa appear to have slowed compared to before 2019, with the most important gains achieved in earlier years, although some new social media accounts have been launched. Chinese state media in South Africa generally relies on promoting positive narratives and building ties with elites instead of more covert or coercive tactics.
- Limited public opinion impact:** Available data show that South African public opinion has shifted away from perceiving the Chinese government as a positive influence and model. South Africans as a whole—including journalists—display a high degree of skepticism of Chinese state narratives, though there is low public awareness of how the Chinese state media apparatus works.
- Strong ties to ruling party and major media group:** Chinese state media has succeeded in pursuing close ties with the incumbent African National Congress and major media company Independent Media, whose shareholders include two Chinese-state owned companies. This has led to increased pro-Beijing coverage of China and circulation of content from Xinhua news agency via the media group’s syndication service. Coverage of China in South African media remains overall diverse, however, and often critical of the Chinese government.
- Chinese state media targets elites:** The Chinese government’s media strategy appears elite-driven, targeting English speakers and political and business leaders. State media and diplomatic accounts do not publish in languages other than English and Chinese, despite the fact that approximately 83 percent of South

Africans do not speak either language as a first language. China Radio International and *People’s Daily* both have South African Facebook accounts with followings of over 775,000, although engagement from authentic users appears low. The *People’s Daily* runs paid features in both the print and online editions of the business paper *Business Day*, with a focus on promoting bilateral economic relations.

- Diplomatic outreach and inauthentic amplification:** China’s ambassadors and other diplomats to South Africa have been active commentators in media, publishing dozens of op-eds in recent years. Chinese diplomats publicly push back on unfavorable coverage, but rarely exert pressure against specific individuals. No targeted disinformation campaigns were detected but the Twitter account of the Chinese ambassador to South Africa was found to be among the biggest beneficiaries of a network of fake accounts retweeting posts from diplomatic accounts.
- StarTimes makes inroads into television:** Beijing-based StarTimes Group, a private company with links to the Chinese Communist Party, has made a twenty percent investment into popular satellite provider StarSat. The cheapest packages offered by StarSat include a variety of international channels in addition to Chinese state media channels.
- Strong influence on diaspora media:** Chinese-language media serving the estimated 300,000 Chinese in South Africa is dominated by pro-Beijing content. The diaspora has had a more visible and potentially vulnerable profile following the 2021 appointment by the African National

Congress of a local Chinese-South African businesswoman to parliament, which coincided with xenophobic media reports about her.

- **Diverse sources for coverage of China:** South Africa's pluralistic media offers substantial resilience against Chinese state influence. News outlets perform investigative reporting related to China and republish foreign news wires, contributing to varied and critical coverage alongside access to foreign news channels. South African academia also has independent expertise on bilateral relations and Chinese influence to help inform coverage. Nevertheless, the lack of Chinese language research and original reporting on China could serve as limiting factors in the future, especially if the Chinese Communist Party decides to expand its influence efforts.
- **Robust regulatory framework:** South Africa has a relatively strong and well-defined legal infrastructure governing press freedom, including limits on foreign and cross-ownership in the media. In 2021, a court dismissed a defamation case filed by a mining company against community activists, accepting public interest as a defense and strengthening protections for free expression.
- **Press freedom limits and gaps in transparency:** The African National Congress has pressured the public broadcaster in recent years to avoid negative coverage of the party, and there are reports of partisan reporting and self-censorship in other media outlets. This political encroachment into the media space could in the future lead to greater censorship and self-censorship of China-related topics among domestic media outlets, considering the ruling party's close ties to the Chinese government.

EUROPE

France

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

High 36 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

High 63 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Increased influence efforts:** Beijing's media influence efforts in France increased during the coverage period of 2019–21. Chinese diplomats and state-linked influencers tried to shape media narratives on the COVID-19 pandemic, including attacking France's response to the pandemic or French journalists and commentators, while also pushing propaganda about China on social media.
- Limited public opinion impact:** Despite increased influence efforts and the large physical presence of Chinese state media publishing French-language content, Beijing's narratives have mainly provoked political and media elites into investigating and exposing Chinese government's activities. The Chinese government's "Wolf Warrior" diplomatic social media strategy, exemplified by the combative Chinese ambassador to France Lu Shaye, has largely backfired by creating a public debate in France about Chinese Communist Party influence in the media and other sectors and pushing the French government to speak out publicly in defence of those under attack. Public opinion polls show an increase in unfavorable opinions towards the Chinese government.
- Official accounts on social media:** Social media has been one avenue to inject Chinese propaganda directly into French discourse. However, Chinese state media accounts appear to be inauthentically inflated by fake accounts. Influencers on social media, several of whom are China Global Television Network Français journalists or otherwise have links to Chinese state media, have hundreds of thousands of followers on Facebook.
- Paid content in local French outlets:** A major dissemination strategy of Chinese state media is paid content in local outlets, with major outlets across the political spectrum publishing state media content including *L'Opinion*, *Le Figaro*, *Jeune Afrique*, *Le Parisien*, *Le Monde*, and *Les Echos* during the coverage period. TV channel TV5Monde has had a content promotion agreement with CCTV since 2014 and is a member of the Belt and Road News Network.
- Generalized disinformation:** Chinese officials used their online presence to promote conspiracy theories and falsehoods, and on occasion to amplify information from fake accounts.
- Censorship efforts towards French media:** There have been public efforts by the Chinese embassy to harass and attack French journalists and commentators online, many of whom are subjected to trolling, an escalation from earlier efforts to quietly pressure media to censor coverage the embassy deemed unfavorable. Most major French media outlets are blocked in China. Journalists in France and regionally based correspondents covering China have faced physical and online harassment.
- Dominant influence on Chinese diaspora media in France and across Europe:** Chinese-language media in France is dominated by pro-Beijing outlets who partner with propaganda departments in China, though public radio broadcaster Radio France Internationale broadcasts in Mandarin about French, Chinese, and global issues. France is a major hub in Europe for pro-Beijing Chinese-language media distributed in other European countries. *Nouvelles d'Europe* (欧洲时报) is the oldest Chinese-language news outlet in France and is owned by a company controlled by the Chinese Communist Party's United Front Work Department.
- Pushback from French media:** Despite several French media outlets publishing paid inserts from Chinese state media, most have labeled or discontinued them, possibly due to reputational damage. Mainstream French media continues to conduct in-depth, independent, and critical investigative reporting on China-related issues in France and globally, including reports by Asia-based correspondents and coverage in Africa and the Middle East.
- Government awakening to Chinese Communist Party influence:** During the coverage period, the French government stands out for having twice summoned the Chinese ambassador in response to his and the Chinese embassy's threats and public attacks on French media, lawmakers, and commentators.

- **Legal and regulatory gaps and need for more attention from civil society:** France does not have laws that could limit lawsuits against reporting related to China or other topics that are in the public interest. Huawei, a China-based company with close ties to the Chinese Communist Party and a record of building censorship and surveillance systems in China and abroad, filed a

defamation lawsuit against a researcher in March 2019 for her comments about the company. There are no civil society organizations comprehensively tracking and exposing Chinese state-linked disinformation campaigns, social media presence, or influence operations in France and such research is done on an ad hoc basis by media or researchers.

Italy

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

High 43 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

High 45 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- **Increased influence efforts:** The Chinese government's media influence efforts intensified during the coverage period of 2019-21, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Media cooperation agreements and content sharing proliferated after Chinese president Xi Jinping's visit to Italy in March 2019 and Italy's subsequent signing of a Belt and Road Initiative Memorandum of Understanding. The early days of the pandemic featured increased levels of disinformation from Chinese state representatives. In September 2021, *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece, launched an Italian version.
- **Mixed public opinion:** Italian perceptions of China were overwhelmingly negative in the mid-2010s but warmed in the run-up to the Belt and Road Initiative agreement in 2019. Public opinion reached a high point in early 2020 amid Chinese pandemic aid and pro-Beijing narratives in the media. The Italian public attributes blame for the COVID-19 pandemic to the Chinese government, but also views its public health response as a model to emulate and pandemic support to Italy as genuine. By 2021, views were more cautious. Most survey respondents still supported greater cooperation in areas of shared concern, but a larger proportion saw China as a threat compared to 2018, preferring to ally with the United States and Europe.
- **Chinese state media cooperation with key public and private outlets:** Italy's National Associated Press Agency (ANSA) had a content-sharing agreement with the Chinese state news agency Xinhua throughout the coverage period, though in August 2022 reports emerged that it had been terminated. Agreements with other

Italian news agencies and broadcaster Mediaset have also dried up in recent years. Italian media company Class Editori, which publishes a business paper, still has partnerships with multiple Chinese state media outlets, including Xinhua and China Media Group. In 2019, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, a national daily business paper and one of the country's most trusted periodicals, signed a partnership with *Economic Daily*, a Chinese state-sponsored paper. The same year, Italian public broadcaster Rai signed a cooperation agreement with China Media Group. Various outlets that do not have formal cooperation agreements also regularly publish content from Chinese diplomats or state media, including *Il Giornale*, a paper known for its critical coverage of China.

- **Heavy engagement by China Radio International:** China Radio International is highly active in Italy, operating a bilingual magazine, a mobile application, and various social media accounts with over 500,000 followers. Some accounts, particularly that of China Radio International correspondent Liu Pai, receive high levels of engagement from users. Liu frequently appeared on mainstream television as a commentator in early 2020.
- **COVID-related disinformation, preferential coverage by public broadcaster:** A pro-Beijing disinformation network on Twitter amplified Chinese state media narratives regarding COVID-19, the European Union, and Chinese aid for two weeks in 2020 until it was exposed by local journalists. Italian national broadcasters—particularly Rai, with its China Media Group partnership—offered laudatory coverage of China amid Beijing's pandemic-related assistance to Italy.

- **Self-censorship due to Chinese embassy intimidation and media industry troubles:** Government budget cuts for Italy's traditionally state-dependent media have made foreign content deals and investments more attractive for news outlets and journalists, creating an incentive for Italian journalists to self-censor in order to maintain any Chinese patronage and access. Chinese diplomats also occasionally engage in intimidation to affect coverage.
- **Strong influence on Chinese diaspora media:** Chinese-language media are dominated by pro-Beijing content. The Chinese diaspora of approximately 300,000 is increasingly active in business and public affairs and has displayed a willingness to mobilize across the country, generating more influence in local politics.
- **Vibrant civil society and diversity of China coverage:** Italian civil society activists and journalists have increasingly focused their attention on foreign disinformation and interference, including from China. A wide range of news sources on China remain available, including international sources that offer critical coverage. China-related expertise is growing but has yet to meaningfully penetrate the mainstream media.
- **Shifting political reception, increased regulatory safeguards:** Italy's leadership presented a more conciliatory approach to China prior to a 2021 change in government but has since taken a stronger stance on criticizing Beijing's human rights record and Chinese Communist Party influence in Italy. The Italian government took steps to thwart influence efforts, including by requiring more sectors to undergo strategic investment screening, and limiting the presence of Chinese telecommunications companies like Huawei. Chinese companies still have a substantial presence in the telecommunications market and ties with content providers Mediaset and Rai.
- **Political threats to press freedom:** Press freedom in Italy has deteriorated in recent years, and Italian media still lack a robust self-regulatory system. Most outlets have links to political parties, media ownership concentration is high, and political actors continue to target journalists using defamation laws.

Poland

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 31 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

High 48 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- **Increased influence efforts:** Beijing's media influence efforts in Poland increased during the coverage period of 2019–21, with Chinese diplomats and China Radio International Poland making attempts to shape media narratives on issues such as the 2019 Hong Kong protests and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Limited public opinion impact:** In many cases, Chinese state propaganda messaging seemed unsophisticated or poorly tailored to Polish audiences. Thirty-four percent of Poles surveyed in one poll reported that their opinion of China had declined between 2019 and 2021 and in another survey less than one-fifth expressed confidence in Chinese leader Xi Jinping. Many local news outlets used international newswires in their coverage of China, and some continued to produce original reporting—aided by correspondents based in China—that was critical of the Chinese government.
- **Public media cooperation:** China Radio International Poland was a primary avenue for disseminating Chinese state media content in Polish, especially on social media, albeit to a small audience. The Polish Press Agency (PAP) and Telewizja Polska (TVP)—Polish public media entities that have become increasingly politicized under the current Polish government—signed content-sharing agreements with Chinese media groups and disseminated their stories. This content was not always clearly labeled for news consumers.
- **Private media cooperation:** In the commercial sector, media groups representing a variety of political perspectives increased their cooperation with the Chinese embassy, ranging from the conservative-leaning mainstream daily *Rzeczpospolita* to the fringe left-wing daily *Trybuna*. The embassy also has links with alternative forms of “new media,” including the blog *Chiny to Lubię*.

- **Generalized, not targeted, disinformation:** There was no evidence of significant disinformation campaigns targeting Polish news consumers, but social media comments supporting Chinese state media and diplomatic content bore clear signs of inauthentic behavior, and Chinese officials used their online presence to promote conspiracy theories linking the origins of COVID-19 to the United States.
- **Strong influence on Chinese diaspora media:** The Chinese expatriate and diaspora community in Poland is small, probably numbering fewer than 8,000 people. There do not seem to be any significant independent Chinese-language media in Poland, with most readers served by pan-European outlets or local social media accounts with ties to Chinese party-state actors.
- **Domestic political pressure on media as a threat to resilience:** Poland's resilience in the face of covert or coercive Chinese Communist Party media influence was rooted in its robust civil society, media professionalism, and generally democratic legal frameworks, as well as its small but growing community of experts on China. Poland's communist history has also led to strong public skepticism of Communist propaganda, reinforcing the country's resilience to foreign media influence efforts from countries such as China or Russia. Areas of vulnerability included political polarization, problematic instrumentalization of foreign ownership laws to silence independent media groups, and broader pressure on the media from the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość government.

Romania

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 31 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 39 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- **Increase in limited influence efforts:** Chinese state media influence has grown in Romania since 2019, due particularly to the efforts of an active Chinese embassy and increasingly aggressive online rhetoric from China Radio International Romania. Nonstate actors such as Huawei, a China-based company with close ties to the Chinese Communist Party and a record of building censorship and surveillance systems in China and abroad, also attempted to influence local media narratives related to Chinese investment and activity in the country, although these efforts were mostly unsuccessful.
- **Low impact on public opinion:** Chinese state media content production in the Romanian language was limited and did not appear to reach broader audiences across the Romanian mass media audience. Indeed, specific anti-US or pro-Huawei messaging campaigns appear to have backfired, and the limited survey data available indicates that favorable views on China decreased since 2016.
- **Embassy and state media partnerships:** Beijing's most meaningful media influence is mediated through the Chinese embassy, which has developed close relationships with news outlets such as *Economistul* and *Curierul National*, as well as the Romanian Union of Professional Journalists (UZPR). Since 2019, Chinese diplomats published 17 signed articles in news outlets across the political spectrum. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the embassy was heavily involved in coordinating sponsored press trips for Romanian journalists to visit China.
- **China Radio International:** China Radio International Romania represents a case in which Chinese state media has directly attempted to drive a wedge between Romania and its democratic partners. Its website has featured increasingly vitriolic content including false narratives about the origins of COVID-19. However, its audience is small.
- **Strong influence on diaspora media:** A handful of long-running, diaspora media publications supported by the Chinese Communist Party, including a free weekly, aim to serve Romania's small diaspora population of about 7,000 individuals and the Chinese-speaking community in neighboring countries like Moldova. No significant independent Chinese-language media appears to exist in Romania.
- **Unsuccessful 5G lobbying:** An intense lobbying effort by the Chinese technology giant Huawei, aimed at preventing

passage of a law that would block it from supplying future 5G gear in Romania, was unsuccessful. Despite its best efforts to present itself as a trustworthy and independent actor, Huawei was negatively portrayed in Romanian media as closely linked to the Chinese government. The 5G law was passed in 2021.

- **Public skepticism of Chinese communism:** Perhaps Romania’s most significant source of resilience to Chinese state media influence is its communist past, which has engendered popular skepticism of state-driven propaganda. The country’s independent media community and active civil society are also engaged in protecting press freedom and countering disinformation.
- **Transparency and funding challenges:** Insufficient media ownership transparency—especially in the print

and online sectors—combined with persistent funding challenges has left Romanian mass media vulnerable to politicization and polarization. Media regulators have responded to perceived threats of foreign influence, but such pushback has mostly occurred on a case-by-case basis rather than in comprehensive legal safeguards.

- **Broader vulnerabilities open doors for future influence:** A lack of more in-depth knowledge of Chinese state media influence tools and tactics leaves the Romanian media sector vulnerable, particularly if the Chinese embassy continues deepening ties with smaller independent media and political and academic elites. Growing disillusionment with democracy may also make some portions of the Romanian population more receptive to autocratic messaging.

Spain

Beijing’s Media Influence Efforts

High 45 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

High 45 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- **Steady influence:** Beijing’s media influence in Spain remained strong during the coverage period of 2019–21, following a significant effort to strengthen relations in the wake of Chinese president Xi Jinping’s 2017 visit. Chinese state media have maintained long-standing relationships with their local mainstream counterparts while developing new ties to regional and digital outlets. Chinese diplomats were increasingly active on social media, engaging directly with news audiences and critics online.
- **Varied avenues for content dissemination:** Major public and private mainstream outlets republish Chinese state media content. Notably, *El País* regularly disseminated *China Daily’s* China Watch supplement and *China Hoy* inserts. China Global Television Network and China FM are available on national television and radio networks. The national news agency EFE, which is widely used by Spanish-speaking news consumers worldwide, shares content from the Chinese state-run Xinhua news agency.
- **Limited impact and declining public opinion:** Spanish media generally offer robust and critical reporting on China, and several local outlets maintain correspondents

in China who provide journalistic expertise on the country. Beijing’s influence on Spanish public opinion is low. Long-standing concerns about the impact of Chinese economic activity on small local businesses, combined with pandemic-related fears, contributed to an apparent decline in Spaniards’ opinions of China.

- **Media narratives focus on bilateral ties, sovereignty:** Chinese state media narratives largely focus on boosting bilateral ties, specifically in investment, trade, and technological cooperation, all of which are attractive to Spanish elites. The Belt and Road Initiative is actively promoted, although Madrid does not formally participate in the framework. Both state media and diplomatic actors have repeatedly linked the situations in Hong Kong and Taiwan to the separatist movement in Catalonia, calling for solidarity against foreign interference in internal affairs.
- **Successful engagement with local elites:** Spanish media executives and journalists have participated in Chinese-led media cooperation initiatives such as the Belt and Road News Network and the World Media Summit. Former political leaders have praised Beijing’s COVID-19

response and contributions to global public health while offering open support for its One China principle. Influential think tanks and academic experts focus their commentary on promoting trade and engagement while apparently avoiding subjects Beijing considers sensitive, such as its repressive domestic policies or human rights violations. The local embassy has actively used press statements and social media to respond to or berate journalists, media commentators, politicians, and human rights activists who published content that Beijing deemed offensive.

- Generalized, not targeted disinformation campaigns:** There was no evidence of China-linked disinformation campaigns targeting or reaching audiences in Spain. However, Chinese state media and diplomats promoted false and misleading narratives on topics like forced labor in the Xinjiang region. They also repeatedly tied Beijing's position on Hong Kong and Taiwan to the issue of Catalan independence. Some of this content was picked up by local commentators. An Associated Press and the Oxford Internet Institute study in 2021 found that potentially inauthentic social media activity accounted for 12 percent of all engagement with Chinese diplomatic accounts in Spain.
- Strong influence in diaspora media:** Spain's Chinese expatriate and diaspora population is sizeable, numbering around 230,000. Chinese-language news outlets republish content from both Chinese and Spanish sources. Pro-Beijing editorial lines are dominant in the diaspora-facing

media, which provide little critical coverage of the Chinese Communist Party or Chinese state policy. Many print and digital groups have close relationships with the local Chinese embassy, and several are members of the state-run Global Chinese Media Cooperation Union.

- Strong media and legal safeguards:** The Spanish constitution has strong protections for freedoms of expression and the press. In addition, Madrid has begun to implement procedures and guidelines to combat foreign disinformation, in line with broader efforts promoted by the European Union. While no authority is specifically responsible for overseeing nonbroadcast media, foreign ownership is restricted in media and other sectors that are deemed strategic.
- Gaps and vulnerabilities:** Transparency in advertising and media ownership is poor, and there are no regulations governing cross-ownership. Access to information has been increasingly challenged in recent years, and public officials have targeted journalists with criminal prosecution and abusive civil lawsuits. Other ongoing challenges to Spain's media ecosystem include low public trust and widespread vulnerability to disinformation. Unlike some of their European counterparts, Spanish politicians have remained skeptical about the threat of coercive Chinese Communist Party influence, instead privileging the need to maintain friendly ties. Some opposition politicians have leveraged concerns about Chinese Communist Party influence to attack the ruling party.

United Kingdom

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Very High 53 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Very High 66 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Strong pushback against ongoing influence efforts:** The Chinese government's influence efforts faced a strong response from across the United Kingdom during the coverage period of 2019–21. Several media outlets discontinued paid inserts, the UK media regulator canceled China Global Television Network's license to broadcast, and public opinion towards the Chinese government deteriorated. China's ambassador until 2021, Liu Xiaoming, frequently published op-eds, participated

in interviews, and had a large following on social media. British journalists in China faced increased restrictions on their reporting.

- Negative public opinion toward Chinese government:** Despite expectations that the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union in 2020 would lead to closer relations with China, the bilateral relationship deteriorated during the coverage period due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Chinese government's

crackdown on civil and political liberties in Hong Kong. Several polls show worsening public opinion toward the Chinese government, though Chinese state propaganda has gained traction among certain business elites who conduct international trade. A 2020 survey from the Central European Institute of Asian Studies showed that nearly 70 percent of respondents said their view of China had worsened in the past three years.

- **Influential state media and diplomatic presence:** All major Chinese state media outlets—including *China Daily*, China Global Television Network, Xinhua, and *People’s Daily*—have offices in the country, some of which also coordinate their European operations. State-affiliated *Sing Tao* publishes in London to reach the Hong Kong diaspora. The British public engages little with Chinese state media, according to available data. Though the Office of Communications, the UK government regulator, revoked China Global Television Network’s license to broadcast in 2021, the company retained its large West London headquarters and operated its European social media presence from the country. Chinese diplomats in the United Kingdom increased their influence; former ambassador Liu Xiaoming was regularly featured on mainstream news and published over 10 op-eds during the coverage period. He has over 200,000 followers on Twitter, though that number may include automated accounts. His replacement in 2021 was notably less active.
- **Paid inserts in influential newspapers:** Several British news outlets, including *The Telegraph* and *The Economist*, published paid advertorial articles from Chinese state media until quietly discontinuing them in 2020 when Sino-British relations began to sour. Paid content from Huawei continues to appear in *The Economist* and the *Financial Times* carries “China Watch.” The Daily Mail and General Trust, a company with multiple widely known print publications, is a member of the Belt and Road News Network led by *People’s Daily*, though it also regularly publishes stories that criticize the Chinese government. Sky TV airs “China Hour,” a program that is coproduced with the state-run China International TV Corporation.
- **Multiple state-linked disinformation campaigns:** Researchers have documented several disinformation campaigns, particularly on social media platforms that are blocked within China, that were linked to Beijing and boosted Chinese Communist Party narratives or tried to sow discord among the British public. Twitter took down a network of automated “bot” accounts that were impersonating British residents so as to promote Chinese diplomats on Twitter; nearly half of former ambassador Liu’s retweets over eight months in 2020–21 had come from the network. Other campaigns sought to claim that Queen Elizabeth II had died. British influencers living in China who received funds or support from Chinese state actors have been used to manufacture propaganda about China’s domestic policies for British and English-speaking audiences. Chinese diplomats and state media also spread misleading or false information.
- **Limited access for news consumers due to Chinese government restrictions:** Journalists working for British media in China have been forced to leave after being threatened, denied visas to China and Hong Kong, physically obstructed from reporting on the ground, and targeted with state-orchestrated smear campaigns. The China-based relatives of British journalists and of Chinese dissidents in the United Kingdom have faced threats. State actors have been linked to hacking attempts on British journalists and a major cyberattack on News Corporation, the publisher of the *Times* and the *Sunday Times*. The Chinese embassy in London has threatened editors of UK media for critical coverage, including by means of angry telephone calls, and the *Sunday Times* received legal threats from Hong Kong officials. British journalists also report difficulty in getting the UK government to provide information on business deals with China.
- **A diverse diaspora:** The United Kingdom has diverse and vibrant Chinese diaspora and exile communities, coming from a range of cultural, linguistic, and geographic backgrounds. Chinese state and state-linked media do not dominate news consumption among British Chinese, who have access to independent sources like the British Broadcasting Corporation’s Chinese service. Nonetheless, pro-Beijing media maintain a strong position and covert relations with Chinese Communist Party-linked actors. Continuing efforts by Chinese state media, large and small, and related covert activity by CCP-linked groups have led to tension in the United Kingdom between Hong Kongers and pro-Beijing elements.
- **Well-developed, but vulnerable media landscape:** British media outlets have the skills, resources, and correspondents in China and Hong Kong to conduct in depth investigative reporting, including on Chinese domestic issues, Chinese foreign policy, and China’s role in the world for English-speaking audiences. Media across the geographic and political spectrum report on China, including the British Broadcasting Corporation, the *Guardian*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph*. However, several mainstream newspapers have published

the *China Daily's* “China Watch” supplement in exchange for hundreds of thousands of pounds; many discontinued the supplement during the coverage period. Vulnerabilities across the industry remain, including growing political polarization in the UK media sector, loss of trust after the 2011 phone-hacking scandal at newspapers owned by News Corporation.

- **Stable legal and regulatory environment, with weaknesses:** The United Kingdom has several laws to enhance transparency around media ownership, though the sector is dominated by three large publishing groups, both directly and indirectly. Parliament has begun debate around a foreign agents law similar to those in the United States and Australia. Disclosure of political and religious affiliations are required to hold a broadcasting license, though enhanced enforcement is necessary; the Office of Communications revoked China Global Television Network’s license only after a complaint from civil society groups. Rules ban cross-ownership of outlets, though there are no limitations on foreign ownership. Pro-Beijing actors have used defamation laws to issue legal threats that delay or increase the cost of reporting on Chinese government activities.
- **Robust civil society work:** The United Kingdom benefits from many independent civil society experts from the academic, nonprofit, and media spaces who are regularly featured in the media and consulted by the government. However, concerns have emerged about the Chinese Communist Party’s influence in academia. There are several nongovernmental organizations—such as Index on Censorship, Reporters Without Borders UK, and Transparency International UK—promoting press freedom in the United Kingdom and China more broadly.
- **Political response and problematic pushback:** In recent years, the British government has responded to the growth of Beijing’s influence in its politics and media spaces by holding hearings on the Chinese Communist Party’s influence in multilateral institutions, issuing statements, and summoning the Chinese ambassador over rights violations in Hong Kong. However, concerns have grown over the increasing frequency of physical attacks on people of Chinese and East Asian descent amid rising political tensions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some members of Parliament appear to have used criticism of Beijing’s influence to advance their own political careers or have used racist language toward people of Chinese heritage.

LATIN AMERICA

Argentina

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

High 41 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 38 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Increased influence efforts:** Beijing's media influence efforts in Argentina appeared to have increased steadily during the coverage period of 2019-21, following earlier significant gains. Chinese party-state media renewed cooperation agreements with Argentine public media and signed new agreements with at least one major private media group. The embassy registered a Twitter account in March 2020 and grew its engagements on social media in an effort to reach local audiences more directly.
- Support for trade, skepticism of rights record:** Public opinion polling in Buenos Aires found that respondents generally had a positive image of China but also lacked familiarity with the country. Favorable impressions of the Chinese government decreased during the reporting period, although a majority continued to support increased trade with China. In another poll, almost half of respondents lacked confidence in Xi Jinping's ability to do the right thing in world affairs, and a similar proportion had negative perceptions on China's human rights record.
- Coordination with local voices:** The Chinese embassy in Argentina maintains close ties with a variety of media groups, academics, political leaders, and influencers. It published dozens of signed articles, gave interviews to local outlets, and held media briefings to disseminate Beijing's preferred narratives on particular issues. In August 2021, the embassy organized a virtual media forum to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties. A range of government officials—including the Argentine ambassador to China and President Fernandez, who has actively pursued closer ties with China—have echoed the embassy's preferred talking points.
- Partnerships with diverse outlets:** Cooperation between Argentina's public media and Chinese state media goes back decades and is mediated through high-level channels. Multiple agreements are in effect between Xinhua news agency, the Spanish edition of *People's Daily*, China Daily, and the Argentine ministry of communications, publicly funded outlets, or major private media outlets. Although these agreements and resulting content cut across the political spectrum, some instances of media cooperation appear to be based on ideological sympathies between left-wing organizations and the Chinese Communist Party. China Global Television Network content disseminated by the Venezuelan news agency TeleSUR also reached left leaning audiences in Argentina.
- Focus on preferred narratives:** Chinese party-state propaganda has regularly emphasized close ties between the Chinese Communist Party and the ruling Justicialist Party of Argentina while promoting stronger bilateral relations. Diplomats regularly praised China's achievements in green development, economic growth, and poverty alleviation. They also promoted narratives of international solidarity against foreign interference in internal affairs and backed Argentina's claims to the Falklands/Malvinas Islands. Chinese coverage of anti-epidemic cooperation and the coronavirus response sometimes overlapped with anti-American messaging.
- Limited evidence of disinformation campaigns:** Researchers found limited evidence of Chinese cyber troop activity in Argentina, with suspicious accounts amplifying posts from Chinese state media outlets. A sprawling pro-Chinese propaganda network tracked by the research firm Graphika reached audiences in Argentina for the first time in early 2021 and was unknowingly amplified by local influencers.
- Heavy influence in diaspora media:** A large Chinese diaspora community numbering over 200,000 is served by a variety of local Chinese-language media outlets, many of which cooperate with the Chinese party-state and republish content from mainland outlets. Pro-Beijing editorial lines dominate Chinese-language content, including that which is produced by friendly local voices such as the bilingual *Dangdai* magazine.
- Critical media coverage, civil society pushback:** As China's economic influence in the country has grown, Argentina's pluralistic and vibrant media sector has

reported regularly on local scandals involving Chinese organized crime, in addition to environmental issues, labor disputes, or corruption cases related to Chinese investments in the country. News outlets that cooperate with Chinese state media do not appear to have shied away from participating in such critical coverage, and local media have also covered civil society efforts to push back against Chinese Communist Party influence.

- **Legal gaps and media vulnerabilities:** Concentrated media ownership as well as a lack of sufficient regulation to ensure transparency and accountability have hurt the development of sustainable and independent media. Low journalistic expertise on China combined with the Chinese Communist Party's continuing efforts to co-opt influential political and academic voices have created vulnerabilities to Chinese media influence.

Brazil

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 35 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

High 46 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- **Increasing influence:** Beijing's media influence in Brazil is significant and growing. During the coverage period of 2019–21, Chinese state media and diplomatic actors actively engaged in public diplomacy and expanded their social media presence. Chinese state media outlets also signed or renewed cooperation agreements with both private and public Brazilian media.
- **Limited audience and impact:** Experts interviewed for this report noted that there was a narrow audience for Chinese state media content in Brazil. Public opinion polling found widespread skepticism toward Beijing's positions on issues such as the efficacy of Chinese-made vaccines, broad anti-China sentiment that was sometimes fanned by Brazilian leaders for political ends, and a low level of general knowledge on China.
- **Propaganda emphasis on bilateral ties, vaccine diplomacy:** Chinese state media and diplomats in Brazil became more proactive in responding to local leaders' sometimes xenophobic comments, in addition to refuting what they saw as "erroneous" statements on sensitive topics such as Taiwan's independence or the efficacy of Chinese-made vaccines. Positive messaging about the economic relationship underscored the importance of China to Brazil's future development, including its rollout of fifth-generation telecommunications networks. In general, Chinese actors sought to present China as a generous and reliable partner for economic growth and multilateral cooperation.
- **Strong state media presence:** China Radio International, China Central Television, China News Service, and the official news agency Xinhua all have regional offices in Brazil. A publishing house owned by the Chinese Communist Party works with local partners to publish the newspaper *China Hoje* in Brazil, and Chinese state television programming is available to Brazilian audiences via content-sharing and coproduction agreements with major local broadcasters, including public media. *China Daily* has paid to publish advertorial content in the major newspapers *Folha de Sao Paulo*, *Editora Globo*, and *Correio Brasiliense*.
- **Active embassy communications:** Chinese diplomats were regularly interviewed by local print, radio, television, and online news outlets during the coverage period, although the use of signed articles to promote diplomatic messaging temporarily declined under the leadership of a new ambassador who was in office from 2018–22. Both the embassy and the ambassador's personal accounts were highly engaged with local audiences on Twitter and Facebook. The ambassador promoted false or misleading narratives about human rights in China. He also used his platform to weigh in on local news issues, with some of his comments circulating widely.
- **Subsidized press trips and journalism cooperation:** Representatives from Brazilian outlets participated in regional media cooperation forums organized by Chinese state media that have sought to centralize news production on China-related issues. Journalists who participated in short-term subsidized press trips to China reported being instructed to write positive news stories after their return.

- **No disinformation campaigns:** There was no evidence of disinformation campaigns originating in China that used coordinated or inauthentic behavior to specifically target news consumers in Brazil. However, both Chinese state media and diplomatic actors exposed Brazilian audiences to misleading narratives that Beijing was spreading internationally.
- **Heavy influence in diaspora media:** Brazil’s Chinese diaspora population is large, numbering around 300,000, and concentrated in urban areas. It has historically coexisted with a large Taiwanese community. Chinese readers are served by a variety of media outlets and online news platforms, including the largest Chinese-language newspaper in Latin America. While there are some outlets that support Taiwan, publications associated with China and the Chinese Communist Party now appear to dominate Chinese-language media in Brazil, though most seem focused on providing practical, local information for Chinese-language audiences rather than geopolitical news.
- **Strong media sector and civil society, growing independent expertise:** Brazil has strong limits on foreign ownership in the media and telecommunications

sectors. The country also has a tradition of investigative journalism, a diverse media ecosystem, and an active civil society sector, all of which serve as a foundation for resilience in the face of foreign media influence. Brazil is one of the few countries in Latin America that has a foreign correspondent based in China, and independent expertise on China among Brazilian journalists and academics is growing.

- **Gaps and vulnerabilities:** The media sector is highly concentrated and politicized. Regulations governing media ownership transparency, partisan ownership, and cross-ownership are weak. Violence against journalists has increased in the last decade, and the government’s hostility toward the press under President Jair Bolsonaro has damaged public trust in journalism and contributed to the spread of disinformation. Some media commentators and political leaders, including Bolsonaro himself, have leveraged rhetoric about the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party—as well as broader anti-China and anti-Chinese sentiment exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—for their own benefit, making accurate risk assessments and constructive democratic responses more difficult.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Increased media influence efforts:** Beijing’s media influence efforts in Chile increased during the coverage period of 2019-21. This was reflected in new diplomatic accounts on social media and more active messaging by the local embassy, as well as ongoing efforts to deepen ties with local news producers through content sharing agreements.
- **Positive impressions of China, but growing skepticism:** Polling data from 2019 and 2020 revealed that a majority of Chileans surveyed had a positive impression of China and China’s influence in Latin America and supported increasing bilateral ties with China. However, few see China as a possible model for Chile to emulate. Some politicians and media commentators have expressed skepticism about China’s aggressive diplomacy, its handling of human rights, and economic investment in Chile.
- **Aggressive diplomacy but limited social media presence:** Chinese diplomats were active in publishing op-eds and giving interviews in outlets across the political spectrum. The Chinese ambassador Xu Bu, who served until late 2020, had a tendency to respond aggressively to criticisms of Beijing. His successor continued to publish regularly in Chilean outlets, although his tone was less antagonistic. The embassy also developed a social media presence during the coverage period. However, its Twitter account, created in December 2019, had fewer than 2,000 followers by the end of 2021 and limited engagement from Chilean users during the coverage period.
- **Content dissemination via mainstream media:** Both the state-run China Media Group and Xinhua, the official state-run news agency, have been proactive in offering free content to Chilean media outlets. Several

mainstream news outlets, such as the right-wing outlet *El Mercurio* and the business-focused magazine *América Economía*, occasionally publish content from Chinese state media. In 2020, the center-left station Radio Cooperativa and right-wing daily *La Tercera* both inked content-sharing agreements with China Media Group. *La Tercera* only carried content in 2020, but Radio Cooperativa's agreement extended into 2021 and expanded beyond a radio program into a multi-media production. Some local news outlets participated in regional media cooperation summits organized by Chinese state media. One outlet, the private television network Megamedia, also worked with China Media Group to coproduce a series focused on Chinese culture.

- **Support among Chile's political elite:** Before the pandemic, several Chilean politicians were invited on trips to China. In 2019, on such a trip, then president Sebastián Piñera observed that countries should be free to choose their own political systems, echoing to local media one of Beijing's common deflections of international criticism of the Chinese Communist Party's repressive rule.
- **No targeted disinformation campaigns:** There was no evidence that disinformation campaigns originating in China specifically targeted news consumers in Chile, but Chilean researchers have found inauthentic accounts boosting engagement with Chinese state media Spanish-language accounts on Twitter. The Chinese embassy in Chile also promoted conspiracy theories obfuscating the origins of the COVID-19 virus, which the Chinese foreign ministry has spread internationally.
- **Strong influence on diaspora media:** The Chinese diaspora population in Chile is estimated at 30,000. It is served by a handful of traditional and online media

outlets founded within the last ten years that largely align with Beijing's preferred narratives on issues ranging from the government's policies in Xinjiang to China's COVID-19 response.

- **Growing awareness of Chinese influence:** Since 2019, several parliamentary members, from both the opposition and ruling parties, have questioned Beijing's human rights policies and denounced China's influence on critical infrastructure in Chile. Some journalists responded skeptically to local efforts to increase cooperation with Chinese state media. Outlets that have friendly relationships with Chinese state media (like *El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*) have also published pieces critical of Chinese government policies. Chilean experts on China are increasingly consulted by journalists and policymakers, though some opinion leaders remain reluctant to criticize Beijing.
- **Robust protections for press freedom:** Chile has relatively robust legal safeguards protecting media transparency and limiting foreign investment in the media, but lacks rules limiting cross-ownership or mechanisms to effectively screen foreign investments. There is also a growing culture of investigative journalism, particularly following anti-government protests in 2019. Reporters have expressed confidence in their freedom to report independently, despite some attacks on the media by the government in recent years.
- **Gaps in relevant expertise:** In-country expertise on Chinese politics and influence is expanding but still limited. Domestic expertise on disinformation is emerging, and civil society efforts to combat it so far have mostly focused on fact-checking, rather than researching or monitoring its origins.



KEY FINDINGS

- **Low influence, but growing media presence:** Beijing's media footprint in Colombia is small, due in part to the country's historically close ties with the United States and, until recently, its limited relationship with China. However, bilateral trade with China, Chinese direct investment, and

public-private partnerships between the two countries have grown significantly in recent years. Under the leadership of a highly engaged and telegenic ambassador Lan Hu who took office in 2020, the Chinese embassy developed a sophisticated media engagement strategy in

Colombia and sought to deepen ties with major national news outlets. President Iván Duque's pursuit of close ties with Beijing also opened new cooperation opportunities with the Chinese government in the media sector and beyond. The left-wing Gustavo Petro, who assumed the presidency in August 2022, is expected to continue his predecessor's friendly engagement with China.

- **Support for bilateral ties with China, but wariness of growing influence:** In Colombia, 53 percent of respondents to a 2020 survey conducted by Americas Barometer believed that Chinese influence in the region was negative. However, a majority of Colombians continued to view bilateral relations as being broadly good and thought that trade with China was good for Colombia's development. According to a 2021 content analysis by the academic Carolina Urrego-Sandoval, local media coverage of Chinese investments was generally positive, but likely limited by a lack of knowledge and capacity to report on topics connected to China. Negative coverage tended to focus on concerns regarding human rights violations and environmental degradation connected to Chinese companies' operations in Colombia. Chinese companies' involvement in the long-delayed Bogotá metro project have also been a considerable source of controversy.
- **Limited direct dissemination of Chinese state media content:** Within Colombia, China Global Television Network and China Central Television are available online or via satellite television, but their audiences are limited. Spanish-language Chinese state media such as Xinhua Español and Pueblo en Línea are available online, although these cater to broader regional audiences. National media outlets such as *El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *La República*, and the business magazine *Portafolio* sometimes publish free and paid content provided by Chinese diplomatic or state media entities, although at least one media outlet turned down Xinhua's efforts to establish a formal content-sharing agreement during the report coverage.
- **Growing cooperation with media outlets and friendly voices:** Colombian media outlets have participated in Chinese initiatives to boost regional media cooperation, such as the Beijing-hosted 2020 Latin America Partners Media Cooperation Online Forum and the 2021 China-LAC Media Action initiative. While efforts to disseminate Chinese state media content directly have had limited success, alignment with friendly local voices has arguably been more successful. Influential local leaders including President Duque have voiced support for Chinese government initiatives, including vaccine diplomacy, and attended the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.
- **Media narratives tout multilateral cooperation, economic partnership:** Chinese state media and diplomats in Colombia portray China as a reliable partner for economic development and promote multilateralism—often presenting China as an alternative to the “hegemonic” United States. Chinese diplomats promote their preferred narratives on controversial topics such as China's early handling of the coronavirus, restrictive national security legislation in Hong Kong, and friction surrounding diplomatic and trade relations between China and the United States. At times, the embassy has embarked on specific messaging campaigns around key anniversaries such as the 2020 centennial of the Chinese Communist Party. There was also a notable countermessaging push to shore up the legitimacy of Chinese-style “democracy” ahead of the United States-led Summit for Democracy in December 2021.
- **No disinformation campaigns:** There was no evidence of disinformation campaigns involving inauthentic bot activity that targeted or reached news consumers in Colombia during the coverage period.
- **Small Chinese diaspora:** Colombia's population of ethnic and diaspora Chinese is one of the smallest in Latin America, estimated at 8,000 people. The diaspora media ecosystem is minimal, although individuals may consume other Chinese-language media available online or rely on WeChat or other China-based apps for news content.
- **Media and legal safeguards against foreign influence:** Colombia has strong laws restricting foreign media ownership and a historically robust press, providing a foundation for resilience to potential malign or coercive media influence. Colombia's vibrant civil society has also been active in researching disinformation and foreign influence, and during the report coverage period new initiatives to monitor and respond to Beijing's state-sponsored disinformation and influence efforts were developed, including research conducted by the Andres Bello Foundation.
- **Media vulnerabilities:** Journalists face systemic challenges including extralegal surveillance carried out by intelligence agencies, the military, and the police as well as intimidation or harassment by illegal armed groups that impede their work. Local knowledge about China and the Chinese Communist Party is low, affecting the capacity for local reporters to develop expertise on China, and news audiences' interest in the topic.

Mexico

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 35 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 34 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Growing footprint, limited impact:** Beijing's media footprint in Mexico has grown in recent years. However, despite its efforts to increase cooperation with local media partners—including through regional frameworks like the China- Latin America and the Caribbean Media Action initiative—its audience remains small.
- Public opinions of China slightly dampened by pandemic:** Public opinion polling showed that negative perceptions of China increased after the coronavirus pandemic began, though most respondents still expressed a positive opinion of the country and its influence in the region. Polling data from 2019 showed a positive correlation between Mexican respondents' views towards China and the United States and support for increasing economic ties with both countries.
- Strong state media presence:** Chinese state television channels were locally available via satellite, cable, and free-to-air services during the coverage period of 2019–21. Print copies of the regional magazine *China Hoy* were distributed locally. The mainstream local outlet *Reforma*, which republished content from *People's Daily* on its website, was one of the most significant sources of China-related news for local media consumers. Chinese diplomats frequently contributed to mainstream print outlets like *El Financiero*, *Milenio*, and *El Universal*.
- Intensive social media engagement:** The Chinese embassy is active on Twitter and Facebook and has a strong following among local audiences. The embassy mostly shares cultural content but has also promoted misleading narratives about Beijing's human rights record and the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chinese state media journalists are also influential on social media, with one Facebook account having more than a million followers.
- Media narratives promoted economic cooperation and solidarity amid pandemic:** Chinese state media and diplomats promoted economic cooperation through the Belt and Road Initiative (although Mexico is not a member) and highlighted the importance of the two countries' deepening relationship. Both China and Mexico were described as major developing countries with considerable influence that would mutually benefit from cooperation, according to Beijing's preferred narrative. Chinese propaganda also highlighted bilateral cooperation to fight COVID-19, including the sale and joint production of vaccines.
- Business and content distribution infrastructure investment:** Chinese technology companies have a strong presence in Mexico. E-commerce companies such as Alibaba and Didi have invested in local digital-economy and digital-governance initiatives. The social media platform TikTok was one of the 10 most downloaded apps in Mexico during the coverage period, with local politicians and journalists using it to reach younger audiences. In addition to supplying equipment for Red Compartida, a wholesale wireless network developed by local telecommunications consortium Altán Redes, Huawei has also provided equipment for a major cable television provider. The state-owned China Telecom also holds a 3.2 percent stake in Red Compartida.
- No disinformation campaigns:** There was no evidence of disinformation campaigns attributed to Chinese actors that targeted or reached news consumers in Mexico.
- Small diaspora consumes pro-Beijing content:** The expatriate and diaspora population in Mexico is small, estimated to be around 10,000. Media content catering to this community was mostly produced by Chinese state media and pro-Beijing actors.
- Strong legal framework and civil society:** The Mexican legal system offers significant human rights guarantees, including freedom of expression and access to information. Civil society groups actively work to combat disinformation and protect press freedoms, providing an additional layer of resilience against Chinese Communist Party influence.
- Media vulnerabilities:** Mexico's media sector faces broad difficulties including violent reprisals against journalists, political corruption, and funding challenges. It has one of the highest media concentrations in the world according to the international press watchdog Reporters Without Borders. Such challenges limit local capacity to produce specialized China-related media coverage. Scholars are working to fill an existing gap in local expertise on China, while international wire services supplement local coverage.

Panama

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 32 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Low 30 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Steady influence efforts:** Beijing's media influence efforts in Panama stayed the same during the coverage period of 2019–21, particularly after the flurry of activity in 2017–8 following the switch in diplomatic relations. Chinese state-produced content was widely available in local media and Chinese diplomats active on social media.
- Growing public distrust:** Public opinion surveys suggest that distrust toward the Chinese government has increased since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Panama and China in 2017.
- State media narratives tout economic benefits:** Chinese state media and diplomats promote narratives that China is a strategic and natural partner for Panama, and that the newly established diplomatic relationship will translate into trade and economic opportunities.
- Reaching consumers through content sharing and advertorials:** A variety of Chinese state-linked entities—the local embassy, Xinhua news agency, and the Radio and Television Administration of China—have content-sharing or paid-insert agreements with mainstream Spanish-language media, including *La Estrella de Panamá*, the oldest newspaper in the country, and SERTV, the public broadcaster. As a result, a significant amount of Chinese state-produced content reaches local news consumers.
- Public diplomacy features mis- and disinformation:** Chinese diplomats in Panama are active on Twitter, and regularly give media interviews and publish editorial pieces in local media. Researchers have found that they sometimes amplify information from fake accounts on social media, and this content, while often on seemingly innocuous topics, has found its way into local media.
- Subsidized press trips:** Dozens of journalists from across the political and geographic spectrum of Panamanian media have traveled to China for trips or trainings at the expense of the Chinese government or Huawei since 2018. These trips typically carry an expectation that participating journalists publish positive news stories about China or the company upon their return.
- Heavy influence in diaspora media:** The Chinese Communist Party's footprint is heaviest in Chinese-language media that serves what is Central America's largest Chinese diaspora. There is essentially no independent Chinese-language media available in Panama; local Chinese-language outlets regularly publish pro-Beijing content produced by state media and avoid coverage of issues sensitive to the Chinese Communist Party.
- Significant market share for Huawei:** Huawei, a China-based company with close ties to the Chinese Communist Party and a record of building censorship and surveillance systems in China and abroad, has a 30 percent share of the mobile phone market.
- Safeguards in Panamanian media, civil society, laws:** Press freedom groups, laws restricting foreign ownership, and investigative journalism—including on the circumstances surrounding Panama's 2017 diplomatic switch from Taiwan to China—provide some foundation for resilience to problematic Chinese Communist Party influence. However, almost no initiatives for monitoring or responding to covert or coercive influence from Beijing exist.
- Vulnerabilities due to gaps in legal, regulatory environment and lack of China expertise:** There is a lack of transparency surrounding the precise ownership and holdings of many media outlets, and no laws prohibit ownership by a political party. Panama lacks laws limiting strategic lawsuits against public participation (anti-SLAPP laws) and journalists and media owners are regularly targeted with libel and defamation lawsuits. There is limited in-country expertise on China and media organizations often go to Chinese state-linked entities to obtain commentary on China-related and other news stories.

Peru

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

High 39 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 39 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- Steady media influence:** Beijing's media footprint in Peru is the result of a careful strategy that benefits from an earlier expansion of media cooperation. Local cable and satellite television providers carry China Global Television Network and China Central Television. Peruvian outlets distributed pro-Beijing content via special inserts, signed articles, and the magazine *China Hoy*. The embassy also expanded its social media activity during the coverage period of 2019-21, and its posts were regularly referenced by Peruvian journalists as a source for reporting on China in the absence of more direct access to information.
- Support for bilateral ties but increasing skepticism:** Recent controversies involving Chinese companies' local activities noticeably hurt China's reputation during the coverage period. In 2020, opinions on Chinese influence in Peru were mixed, but a majority of polling respondents still supported increasing trade and improving bilateral relations.
- Cooperation with local media:** Chinese state media content was shared by both public and private mainstream outlets, including leading business newspapers. Peruvian state-owned media played a key role in disseminating pro-Beijing content via special inserts, signed articles, and the magazine *China Hoy*. Most Chinese state media content is clearly labeled.
- Subsidized press trips:** Peruvian journalists participated in subsidized trips to China before the COVID-19 pandemic began. Both public and private media were represented at virtual regional media cooperation events organized by the Chinese Communist Party, which sought to promote a "constructive journalism" model that privileged positive messaging.
- Active and aggressive embassy:** The Chinese embassy regularly engages with local broadcast outlets and provides opinion pieces that appear in mainstream publications. The embassy reacted strongly to local coverage of sensitive issues; in early 2020, for example, it challenged reports on the origins of COVID-19. It published "fact sheets" in response to local reporting of alleged influence-peddling by Chinese companies and official corruption; it also warned local politicians to "stop spreading lies immediately." Diplomatic personnel reacted aggressively to local coverage that appeared to support Taiwanese independence and to perceived US efforts to "smear" Beijing's regional relationships. This behavior may have prompted local journalists to engage more cautiously when covering China-related stories.
- Propaganda and bilateral relations boosted by local voices:** Chinese state media and diplomats regularly highlighted the strength of the Sino-Peruvian strategic partnership—bolstered by a large local ethnic Chinese, or *tusan*, population—as a foundation for mutually beneficial exchange. The embassy has actively engaged with the *tusan* community and has also worked to build relationships with local business leaders, academics, and politicians who often lend their influential voices to promote Beijing's preferred narrative. Embassy communications frequently promoted strong trade links under the Belt and Road Initiative as well as growing overall cooperation. The embassy also highlighted bilateral landmarks such as the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2021.
- Strong influence in diaspora media:** The expatriate and diaspora population, which includes a significant Taiwanese population, is historic and large, estimated to be around 300,000. A variety of local Chinese-language outlets cater to both communities. Several diaspora outlets cooperate closely with the Chinese embassy, and researchers have noted that their editorial lines have become more supportive of Beijing. Relations between the diaspora and Beijing have grown alongside the overall Sino-Peruvian relationship, and pro-Beijing narratives now dominate the diaspora media environment.
- No disinformation campaigns:** There was no evidence of disinformation campaigns attributed to Chinese actors targeting or reaching news consumers in Peru during the coverage period. However, the Chinese embassy promoted misleading narratives to local audiences, including those aimed at countering US influence in the region or attempting to minimize Chinese actors' culpability in local scandals related to the supply of COVID-19 vaccines and illegal fishing.

- **Strong journalism and legal protections:** Peru has a strong history of investigative journalism, and major outlets have reported critically on environmental and labor issues related to Chinese investment in major mining projects. Local journalists revealed Chinese vaccine makers’ practice of sending “courtesy doses” to Peruvian officials as part of a wider vaccine-diplomacy effort. Established legal frameworks provide for the monitoring and regulation of media organizations and limit foreign ownership, serving as a foundation for resilience to corrupting or coercive Chinese media influence.
- **Media vulnerabilities:** Researchers have noted the troubling rise of disinformation in Peru, particularly related to the pandemic and the 2021 elections. Government

efforts to counter disinformation have been piecemeal and ineffective, and public trust in the media has diminished. Existing media regulations have failed to address a highly concentrated private media sector. The public media sector is highly centralized, risking journalistic pluralism. Powerful interests have wielded strategic lawsuits against public participation to punish critical reporting, particularly on controversial mining and environmental issues and on projects that have benefited from Chinese investment. According to local experts, most local coverage on China uncritically focuses on trade and investment. Local journalistic expertise on China is lacking, though private outlets use independent wire services to diversify their reporting.

MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

Israel

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Low 23/85

Local Resilience & Response

High 43/85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Recent reduction in influence:** Chinese state media, particularly China Radio International, and diplomatic representatives have made notable efforts in trying to shape public opinion. By 2019, these efforts had made gains in penetrating the Israeli media sector. However, focused public debate on problematic aspects of Chinese Communist Party influence, a new ambassador and new Israeli government, as well as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, appeared by 2021 to have dampened this influence compared to previous years.
- Changing views of China, skepticism of Chinese government:** Available public opinion surveys show a drop in favorable views towards China among Israelis since 2019, from 66 percent to 48 percent, with especially low confidence expressed towards Xi Jinping as a world leader (20 percent).
- Promotion of cultural affinity, responses to criticism:** Chinese party-state communications to Israeli audiences often appear aimed at encouraging a sense of historical closeness between Israel and China or between the Jewish and Chinese peoples. At times, they implicitly or explicitly counter the United States, defense industry, or other critics' concerns over the national security implications of too cozy a relationship.
- China Radio International:** The Chinese state media outlet with the broadest audience reach in Israel is China Radio International. The station does not air widely on the radio, but has a relatively strong social media presence and a charismatic young correspondent who speaks fluent Hebrew and who has emerged as a media personality in his own right. China Radio International also provided funding for and collaborated with Israel's public broadcaster to co-produce a video series about China.
- Embassy communications and subsidized press trips:** China's ambassadors to Israel and other diplomatic personnel have published multiple op-eds in Israeli media. In at least two documented incidents, the embassy contacted reporters who had been critical of the regime's rights abuses seeking an apology or retraction but were rebuffed and the incidents exposed. The Chinese government or related entities have invited Israeli journalists on all-expense-paid trips to China, including in some cases to Xinjiang. At least one reporter for *Israel Hayom* ("Israel Today"), a free daily and the country's most widely circulated newspaper, returned from such a trip in 2019 and published an article uncritically repeating Chinese government talking points. No evidence of China-linked disinformation campaigns targeting Israel were found, but Chinese diplomats and China Radio International posts have also included falsehoods or misleading information on Xinjiang.
- Indirect influence via academia:** Chinese government funding to Israel's academic sector has increased over the past two decades, indirectly affecting media coverage. Some scholars reported being encouraged to express a benign view of Beijing or being cautious about public commentary on human rights in China, even as others publicly expressed criticism of the Chinese government or conducted research on politically sensitive topics.
- Small diaspora media environment:** The Chinese diaspora and expatriate population in Israel is small, mostly comprised of migrants working in the construction sector. There is no known diaspora media ecosystem, but individuals may rely on WeChat or other mainland-based applications for news content.
- Strong coverage of China and Beijing's local influence:** Israel is home to a vibrant and independent media sector that in recent years has covered topics such as human rights violations and other politically sensitive subjects related to China, including about Chinese Communist Party media influence in Israel. Given the absence of foreign correspondents in China, Israeli media rely heavily on Hebrew translations of international news wires or other reporting for China coverage. Alongside several academic commentators, the "Seventh Eye" media monitoring website has played an important role exposing and critiquing incidents of Beijing's media influence.

- **Legal protections and investment screening:** Press freedom in Israel is protected under the Basic Laws, which serve as a mini-constitution, and an independent judiciary, but print articles on security matters are subject to a military censor. Israeli laws place some restrictions on foreign media ownership. In 2019, the Israeli cabinet established a committee to formalize screening of foreign investments, including from China.
- **Gaps and vulnerabilities:** The private media in Israel is heavily concentrated in the hands of tycoons with close ties to the political elite and in some cases, business interests in China, who are not required to provide financial or other disclosures to the public. Gaps in transparency, a fragmented media regulatory landscape, and weak enforcement amid frequent changes of government create potential openings for covert Chinese Communist Party influence.

Kuwait

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Notable 30 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Low 31 / 85

Vulnerable

KEY FINDINGS

- **Limited but growing influence:** Chinese diplomats and state media have increased their efforts to shape public opinion in Kuwait, building on long-standing ties with the state news agency and deepening relationships with political and media elites. During the coverage period of 2019–21, Chinese diplomats expanded their social media footprint and more intensely engaged with local media executives. A local mainstream outlet agreed to publish a column that served as a vehicle for Chinese Communist Party propaganda.
- **Promoting shared strategic priorities:** Ahead of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Kuwait in 2022, Chinese diplomats and state media highlighted the potential for further alignment, citing the Belt and Road Initiative and the Kuwaiti national development plan, Vision 2035. Chinese propaganda repeatedly stressed Beijing's commitment to maintaining state sovereignty, security, and peaceful development around the world while emphasizing opportunities to deepen cooperation in technology, trade, health care, and green development.
- **Local government support for preferred media narratives:** Chinese diplomats tailored their messaging to local audiences, presenting Beijing's position on the Palestine issue and responding to local reports about forced labor in Chinese-backed projects in Kuwait. Diplomats actively promoted Beijing's preferred narratives on controversial topics such as its repressive policy regarding the Xinjiang region and its position on Taiwanese independence. A narrative framework focusing on poverty and terrorism was employed to justify Beijing's actions in Xinjiang. Notwithstanding some civil society and parliamentary pushback, Kuwait City has supported Beijing's position on human rights and territorial sovereignty. In at least one incident, the Kuwaiti foreign ministry helped to censor commentary in a local outlet that was disfavored by Beijing.
- **Low knowledge and impact:** A 2019 opinion poll found that 49 percent of Kuwaitis supported stronger economic ties with China. However, respondents also demonstrated a low level of knowledge on China, despite Kuwait having one of the Persian Gulf region's strongest trade and diplomatic links with China.
- **No disinformation campaigns:** There were no documented disinformation campaigns originating in China that targeted or reached Kuwaiti audiences during the coverage period. However, Chinese state media and diplomats actively pushed false or misleading narratives that sought to obfuscate Beijing's role in the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic, legitimize the persecution of Muslims in Xinjiang, and promote alternative definitions of democracy and human rights.
- **Small diaspora media environment:** The Chinese expatriate and diaspora population in Kuwait is small, likely numbering in the thousands. A limited diaspora media ecosystem appears to consist primarily of digital news sources. Individuals may rely on WeChat or other mainland-based applications for news content that is subject to Beijing's domestic censorship regime.

- Civil society and independent media as sources of resilience:** Civil society and some media outlets have supported diaspora Uyghur groups in their attempts to raise awareness on the Chinese party-state's human rights abuses in Xinjiang. Privately owned outlets have also reported on Beijing's aggressive stance toward Taiwan and other subjects that are sensitive to the Chinese Communist Party, sometimes relying on international wire services to do so. Sitting lawmakers have publicly questioned the Kuwaiti government's support for Chinese policies in Xinjiang.
- Low media resilience and active state control:** The Kuwaiti state actively controls the country's media environment and provides few legal or political safeguards for independent, critical journalism. Newer digital outlets operating in a regulatory gray zone have a higher degree of independence and offer relatively diverse news content. However, strict media licensing regulations have hindered the development of smaller, independent, and digital outlets. A 2016 cybercrime law, along with other censorship rules, forbids media coverage that could hurt foreign relations. Journalists' access to information and freedom of expression remain restricted, although the media environment is relatively freer than in other Persian Gulf countries.

Tunisia

Beijing's Media Influence Efforts

Low 25 / 85

Local Resilience & Response

Notable 33 / 85

Resilient

KEY FINDINGS

- Limited but growing footprint:** Beijing's media presence in Tunisia is currently small, and research into its scale is complicated by a lack of transparency. The Chinese embassy noticeably increased its public diplomacy and social media engagement during the coverage period of 2019-21. Following a July 2021 power grab by President Kais Saïed, in which he dismissed the prime minister and suspended the parliament in order to rule by decree, Tunisia's broader media resilience has declined. The president's moves isolated him from more democratic governments, raising the likelihood that Tunisia would seek closer ties to Beijing.
- Favorable views, but little change:** According to one 2019 survey, a majority of Tunisians said they had favorable views of China and supported increasing economic relations and foreign aid. However, subsequent polling has shown that despite a ramped-up Chinese media engagement strategy in 2020 and 2021, public perceptions of China were unaffected by the COVID-19 pandemic or the recent strengthening of bilateral economic ties.
- Increased diplomatic op-eds, media outreach:** During the coverage period, Chinese diplomats promoted official narratives among Tunisian news consumers through at least 20 op-eds and interviews in prominent local print and broadcast news outlets, which were also featured on their social media. More broadly, the Chinese embassy has increased active outreach to individual journalists, media executives, and a local association of newspaper editors since 2019.
- Propaganda promoting aid and economic cooperation:** Chinese state media and diplomatic actors have promoted China's development model and supported deepening bilateral ties through the Belt and Road Initiative, which Tunisia joined in 2018. They have also leveraged Beijing's donations of medical supplies and vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic to present China as a sincere and generous partner in global public health efforts.
- Limited or distorted coverage of abuses in Xinjiang and Hong Kong:** Amid a more general lack of reporting on China, likely due in part to low levels of local interest and knowledge, the Tunisian media sector has offered relatively limited coverage of rights violations in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. Within this gap, Chinese diplomats have actively tried to shape media narratives on Beijing's human rights violations in Hong Kong and Xinjiang. During the coverage period, the embassy held press briefings and released detailed statements that featured proven falsehoods even as they sought to rebut so-called Western fallacies. Chinese diplomats also published op-eds that presented Chinese government policies in Xinjiang as

legitimate antipoverty and counterterrorism measures, in an apparent attempt to appeal to Tunisia's own struggles against extremism and inequality.

- **Journalism exchanges and technology cooperation:**

Both Chinese and Tunisian media representatives have signaled their willingness to increase cooperation. In 2019, Chinese state media outlets signed an agreement to air content on Tunisian public television during what has become a regular “China Television Week,” with programming that presents a positive narrative on China's development and Chinese culture. Tunisian journalists have reported taking part in media trainings through the framework of the Belt and Road News Network, and at least one prominent local journalist has worked for China Global Television Network, a state media outlet. Chinese actors have also shared technical equipment with public outlets in Tunisia.

- **No disinformation campaigns:** There were no documented cases of disinformation campaigns originating in China that specifically targeted local audiences in Tunisia during the coverage period.
- **Small diaspora:** The Chinese expatriate and diaspora population in Tunisia is small, probably numbering fewer than 1,000 people. There is no known diaspora media ecosystem, although individuals may rely on the Chinese

social media platform WeChat or other such applications subject to Beijing's domestic censorship regime to obtain news content.

- **Media resilience supported by vibrant civil society and international resources:** International organizations and Tunisia's own vibrant civil society actively monitor press freedom in the country. Local journalists generally lack the capacity and expertise to conduct in-depth original reporting on topics related to China. Instead, media outlets including the national press agency use international news sources to supplement their work. Tunisian outlets also announced their cooperation with the regional Africa-China Reporting Project to share knowledge and best practices for reporting on China.
- **Recent media vulnerabilities:** Tunisia's media landscape has been described as vulnerable and volatile amid the ongoing political crisis. Private media suffer from ownership concentration, are heavily politicized, and often operate in a legal gray zone. The presidential power grab in 2021 undermined legal protections for freedom of the press that had been established over the past decade, as the president began ruling by decree and cracked down on critical media including the pan-Arab news channel Al Jazeera and privately owned local outlets.

Methodology

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plays a leading role in advancing global authoritarianism, including through efforts to shape and manipulate news and information. *Beijing's Global Media Influence* (BGMI) is Freedom House's first global assessment of CCP media influence and democratic resilience to that influence. Our research has identified the key methods by which the CCP and its proxies work to influence news coverage abroad. Scores determined according to a comprehensive methodology and qualitative country narratives assess these methods, their impact, and a country's preparedness to safeguard against or respond to manipulation efforts.

WHAT WE STUDY

Beijing's methods for shaping information environments around the globe are complex and often opaque. The BGMI project aims to reveal the many forms media influence from Beijing can take—ranging from acceptable forms of public diplomacy to covert, coercive, or corrupting tactics that risk undermining democratic freedoms.

In conducting the research for this report, Freedom House identified five key strategies for CCP-linked foreign media influence efforts:

- Propaganda and promotion of preferred narratives, including overt and covert, and direct and indirect avenues for transmitting Chinese state--produced or influenced content to local audiences.
- Disinformation campaigns, defined for the purposes of this report as the purposeful dissemination of false or misleading content, especially through inauthentic activity—via fake accounts, for example—on global social media platforms.
- Censorship and intimidation, including restrictions placed on journalists in China that affect global news coverage, and coercive actions taken by Chinese state-linked actors to suppress or penalize critical reporting and commentary abroad.

- Control over content-distribution infrastructure, primarily by China-based companies with state ownership or other close CCP ties, and a record of complicity in politicized censorship or surveillance within China or abroad.
- Dissemination of CCP norms and governance model, such as trainings for foreign journalists and officials on CCP “news management” practices, or export of website-filtering equipment.

The project also examined direct responses to CCP media influence in each country under review, and its underlying resilience or vulnerability to problematic influence or manipulation efforts emanating from Beijing. Relevant factors considered include laws and practices that protect press freedom, the extent of critical and diverse news coverage related to China and Chinese investment in the local economy, and both generic and China-specific initiatives by governments and civil society to counter disinformation, screen investments in media and digital industries, enhance transparency, and protect press freedom and freedom of expression.

The BGMI methodology was created by Freedom House in consultation with international experts on media freedom and regulation, CCP foreign influence, disinformation, the Chinese diaspora, and the regions of the world under study. The resulting framework captures a vast array of issues related to understanding Beijing's media influence and potential country responses through the lens of upholding freedom of expression and human rights.

COUNTRY SELECTION

The 30 countries included in this study were selected based on several criteria. First, as a study not only of Beijing's influence efforts but also of the response and impact in democratic settings, the sample for this project was limited to countries that are rated Free or Partly Free by Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* index. Second, to achieve a robust global analysis we sought a diverse sample in terms

of geography (six regions covered), language (over 25 local languages), and nature of bilateral relations with China (friendly versus adversarial; Belt and Road Initiative member or not; China as a major or minor trading partner or source of investment). Third, we looked for countries where there was clear evidence of media influence from China, and examples of resilience to CCP media or political influence. Fourth, we considered a country's strategic importance and population size, with a preference for countries with relatively large populations or strategic relevance.

RESEARCH PROCESS

Freedom House staff invited at least one local researcher to serve as the primary analyst for each country, training them to assess Beijing's media influence efforts and local resilience according to the project's comprehensive research and scoring rubric. Local researchers conducted desk research and interviews with members of the media, government, and civil society, then submitted responses to a questionnaire ([see Freedom House's website for the full list of questions](#)), with responses determining proposed scores. Local researchers then attended a review meeting focused on their region to discuss key findings, regional trends, best practices, and recommendations. Freedom House staff fact-checked research, supplementing it as needed via Chinese-language or other research, and authored country reports. The local analyst, a regional adviser, and other relevant experts then reviewed the scores and country narratives. After completing regional and country consultations, Freedom House staff performed a final review of all narratives and scores to ensure their comparative consistency and integrity.

Country narratives (6,000-8,000 words) provide depth and nuance to the analysis, including details supporting scores and broader dynamics related to both influence efforts and domestic resilience and responses. Translations of all country reports into the dominant local language will be published to ensure accessibility of the research to policymakers, civil society, and media professionals in each country of study.

Drawing on the resulting data set and robust cross-country qualitative analysis, Freedom House staff determined the

global report's key findings. The resulting study is the first application of this methodology to a set of countries. Future editions, pending funding, may refine and update the methodology, including to incorporate emerging influence tactics or response initiatives. The end product represents the consensus of the analysts, advisers, and Freedom House staff, who are responsible for any final decisions.

SCORING PROCESS

The BGMI methodology's questionnaire includes 150 questions, divided into two main categories of equal value ([see Freedom House's website for the full list of questions](#)):

- **Beijing's Media Influence Efforts:** Eighty-five questions, each worth a single point, detail overt and covert forms of Chinese state media content dissemination, disinformation, censorship and intimidation, control over content infrastructure, and dissemination of CCP norms and practices. The total score is the sum of the number of avenues of influence that were found to be present in that country. Based on the score, Freedom House assigned the following status ratings reflecting the extent of Beijing's Media Influence Efforts in a particular country:
 - **Low:** 0-29
 - **Notable:** 30-35
 - **High:** 36-45
 - **Very High:** 46 or above
- **Resilience and Response:** 65 questions analyze various sources of resilience or responses to specific actions taken by the CCP and its proxies across four sectors: media, legal, political, and civil society. The final section of this category includes questions that account for problematic forms of pushback, which may have the effect of limiting CCP influence but which also infringe on freedom of information rights or well-being of members of the local Chinese diaspora.

Most questions are worth 1 point, assessing the presence or absence of a particular type of law, policy response, media action, or civil society initiative. Select questions are worth more than one point to

give sufficient weight to underlying democratic rights, press freedom protections, existing expertise on China, and public skepticism towards Chinese state-produced content. The “problematic pushback” section includes five questions each worth 1 negative point that is subtracted from the overall Resilience and Response score. The final score for the Resilience and Response is a sum of all points accrued, adjusted to an 85-point scale to match the range reflecting Beijing’s Media Influence Efforts. [Formula used to adjust the Resilience and Response score = (RR positive score - PP score) * (1.18)]

Based on the resilience and response score, Freedom House also assigned the following status ratings reflecting the extent of Resilience and Response in a particular country. (While the score is intended to reflect degree of resilience, countries may receive low scores due to a low rate of influence efforts to respond to.)

- o **Low:** 0-30
- o **Notable:** 31-40
- o **High:** 41-50
- o **Very High:** 51 and above

- **Vulnerable or Resilient:** The Beijing’s Media Influence Efforts score is subtracted from the Resilience and Response score to product the Resilience or Vulnerability rating. This rating reflects how well equipped a country is to respond to influence efforts it is facing. Freedom House assigned the status rating as follows:

- o **Resilient:** Difference of 6 points and above
- o **Vulnerable:** Difference of 5 points or fewer.

Scores strictly cover the period of January 2019 to December 2021, while analysis in narratives may extend beyond this timeframe as needed for context or updates.

BGMI METHODOLOGY QUESTIONS AND OPPORTUNITY FOR REPLICATION

Please see the Freedom House website for the full list of 150 questions comprising the BGMI methodology. Freedom House is also providing a blank template of the methodology questions and relevant formulas for arriving at a score and status for any researchers, journalists, or civic groups in a country not covered in the initial sample who would wish to apply the analytical framework to their own country. Please provide credit to Freedom House for the methodology.

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