SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 516 | MARCH 2023 UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE www.usip.org

China's Media Propaganda in Africa: A Strategic Assessment

By Joshua Eisenman

A vendor sits by the newspapers he is selling on a street in downtown Nairobi, Kenya, on August 6, 2022, three days before the country's general election. (Photo by AP)

Contents

Introduction 3
Africa in China's Geostrategy 4
China's External Media Propaganda 6
Key Elements of China's Media Propaganda in Africa 8
Evaluating China's Media Propaganda in Africa 14
Recommendations 15

Summary

- China's Africa-focused media propaganda is intended to improve African perceptions of the country and its political system while doing the opposite for the United States.
- Media outlets controlled by the Communist Party of China (CPC) offer African outlets cheap or free international content in order to amplify their messaging while disguising it beneath a veneer of grassroots legitimacy.
- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, China was hosting and training scores of African media professionals each year.
- Chinese officials entice, cajole, and intimidate African journalists and editors to produce only positive stories about China, the CPC, and its African partners. China's official media outlets work closely with its embassies to spread CPC propaganda while suppressing or discrediting any negative reports.
- China's propagandists are creating an increasing amount of "soft" content for African audiences, which Chinese firms are spreading to urban elites and youth via streaming services, social media, and phone apps.
- To counter China's anti-US media propaganda efforts in Africa, Washington should work with African partners to identify and expose China's disinformation and to support independent African journalism.

United States Institute of Peace
Making Peace Possible

SPECIAL REPORT

NO. 516 | MARCH 2023

DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE

ABOUT THE REPORT

This report examines China's ongoing involvement in the African media sector, which is intended to improve African perceptions of the country and its political system while doing the opposite for the United States. Research for this report included analyzing official Chinese statements and documents; an extensive review of English-language media articles, scholarly publications, and reports; and more than 200 informal interviews with policymakers, officials, journalists, and civil society representatives from China and several African countries.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Joshua Eisenman is associate professor of politics in the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame and senior fellow for China studies at the American Foreign Policy Council. His forthcoming book, *China's Relations with Africa: A New Era of Strategic Engagement*, co-authored with Ambassador David H. Shinn, will be published this year by Columbia University Press.

The views expressed in this report are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace. An online edition of this and related reports can be found on our website (www.usip.org), together with additional information on the subject.

© 2023 by the United States Institute of Peace

United States Institute of Peace
2301 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20037

Phone: (202) 457-1700
Fax: (202) 429-6063
E-mail: usip_requests@usip.org
Web: www.USIP.org

Special Report No. 516. First published 2023.

ISBN: 978-1-60127-909-5

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

A man carries a cable at the CCTV Africa Bureau in Nairobi, Kenya, on January 14, 2012. As Chinese state media organizations such as CCTV were rapidly expanding in Africa after the 2008 global financial crisis, Western media were scaling back. (Photo by Sven Torfinn/New York Times)

Introduction

In 2014, two years into his first term as general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), Xi Jinping told a gathering of top party leaders that "we should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative and better communicate China's messages to the world."[1] In the years since then, China has spread its propaganda around the world to do just that. While much has been written on campaigns taking place in the United States, Europe, and Asia, Beijing's Africa-focused propaganda has received comparably little attention.[2] This report explains and evaluates the objectives and methods of China's media propaganda in Africa, which in many ways reflect its approach toward the Global South more broadly.

China is working to develop compelling messaging and strengthen its capacity to reach African audiences. CPC propaganda emphasizes positive changes in African societies, which, whenever possible, are attributed to cooperation with, or learning from, China. But while enhancing Sino-African solidarity and undermining the United States are the most readily observable goals of China's Africa-focused propaganda, the evidence suggests it has had mixed results. On the one hand, Africans generally see China's presence on the continent favorably. China's official news agency, Xinhua, now has more bureaus in Africa than any other media agency, and China's Africa-focused propaganda programs have successfully cultivated dozens of influential African interlocutors who help promote the country's image and interests. On the other hand, despite spending untold millions of dollars each year on its Africa-focused propaganda work,

by some measures China's favorability lags behind that of the United States. Moreover, Beijing's official media outlets have low levels of African viewership and there is little overlap between the most common themes in their coverage and those in mainstream African media outlets.

Between 2017 and 2020, the author conducted informal interviews in China, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Namibia, and South Africa with more than 200 Chinese and African elites and third-country nationals, including political leaders, government officials, academics, journalists, and civil society representatives.[3] This assessment uses the information gleaned from these private discussions, as well as from official public statements and documents, scholarly publications, and surveys of residents in various African countries, to elucidate and evaluate China's extensive Africa-focused propaganda campaign.

The report begins by summarizing how Chinese leaders have increasingly come to consider developing countries, and African nations in particular, as partners in their efforts to secure China's "core national interests" (核心利益) and disparage the United States. Next, it identifies how China uses media propaganda to advance positive messaging to African audiences while enticing, cajoling, and intimidating African journalists into toeing the CPC's editorial line. After evaluating the effectiveness of China's strategy, the report concludes by offering two sets of US policy recommendations. The first considers how Washington might counter China's anti-US propaganda; the second offers suggestions on how to support objective, independent African journalism.

Africa in China's Geostrategy

The CPC seeks to build an international coalition of like-minded partners who help further its "core national interests." While there are various interpretations of this term, all assume three basic overlapping objectives: to ensure the CPC will continue to rule China, to maintain and defend China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to promote a stable international environment conducive to enhancing China's comprehensive national strength. "Although threats to national security in the traditional sense have been declining since the end of the Cold War, threats to the Chinese regime have been on the rise," according to Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.[4] To bolster regime security and oppose American "hegemony," the party uses propaganda to help create a "China-Africa Community of Shared Future" as a pillar in the larger "Community of Shared Future for Mankind."[5]

Following the 2008 global financial crisis, and accelerating since Xi Jinping became general secretary, developing countries, and African countries in particular, have become central to China's geostrategy. China's strategic "periphery" (周边)—which traditionally included Russia and countries in East Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia—has grown apace with the country's power and influence to become a "greater periphery" (大周边) that now includes parts of Africa.[6] "From 2012 to 2014, Chinese diplomacy transformed from 'keeping a low profile' to 'striving for achievements,'" according to Yan Xuetong at Qinghua University.[7]

As China's major power engagement has gone global, Beijing has increasingly prioritized relations with the Global South.[8] In 2016, He Yafei, former deputy minister of foreign affairs, argued that developing countries should remain "the bedrock and strategic focus of China's

Author's Note on Terminology

For decades, the Communist Party of China (CPC) defined the word *xuanchuan* (宣传) as "propaganda" when referring to its external influence campaigns. But as China's global engagement expanded in the 1990s, Beijing sought to distance itself from the negative connotations associated with the English word. In May 1998, a spokesperson from the State Council Information Office announced that the official English name of the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee of the CPC (中共中央宣传部) would be changed to the "Publicity Department," although the Chinese name would remain the same. He said the change was made because "the name 'propaganda department' did not help them to promote the country."[a] Over the last two decades, the term "publicity" has become Beijing's preferred translation for xuanchuan. *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* defines the noun as "propaganda"; the *Concise English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary* offers "dissemination" and "propaganda." Xuanchuan can also be used as a verb—"to declare," "to disseminate," "to publicize," "to propagate," "to spread propaganda," and "to propagandize."[b] This report translates xuanchuan as "propaganda" because it is the most accurate description of the CPC's external influence operations, which remain an essential instrument to achieve the party's desired political ends.

Notes

a. "Propaganda Tag Axed in Image Facelift," South China Morning Post, May 12, 1998, www.scmp.com/article/240408/propaganda-tag-axed-image-facelift.

b. *Mathews' Chinese-English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, 18th printing), 431; *Concise English-Chinese Chinese-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 497.

major-country diplomacy." He observed that China builds partnerships with like-minded developing countries to create a more "multi-polar world" and to promote the "reform of global governance." Moreover, he noted, China's relations with developing countries will continue to expand and deepen as those nations narrow their capability gap with developed countries.[9] China's 2019 defense white paper affirms this assessment: "As the realignment of international powers accelerates and the strength of emerging markets and developing countries keeps growing, the configuration of strategic power is becoming more balanced."[10] This geostrategic shift helps explain why the CPC continues to work to create what Yang Jiechi, the director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission General Office, called "favorable public opinion for the friendship and cooperation between China and Africa."[11]

In the 2000s and early 2010s, China's political engagement with developing countries was not intended to subvert the international order, nor to serve as hard balancing against the United States and its allies. However, amid rising tensions with the United States and other Western countries, this less confrontational approach has been altered. Many in Beijing now believe that the obstacles to "justice and peace" are hegemonism, power politics, and the self-serving behavior of "a few Western states" led by the United States.[12] According to the 2019 defense white paper, "International strategic competition is on the rise [and] the United States has adjusted its

national security and defense strategies, and adopted unilateral policies."[13] In response, African and other countries in the Global South have become increasingly important in the CPC's quest to undermine and eventually supplant American leadership.

As US-China relations have soured, Beijing's propagandists have sharpened their attacks on Washington. For instance, in 2020, China's ambassador to South Africa, Lin Songtian, suggested that COVID-19 "was caused by the leakage of [a] US biological laboratory," and that "this [was] a biological war launched by the United States against China."[14] Addressing the 2021 Forum for Democracy in Beijing, Shen Haixiong, deputy director of the Propaganda Department (which since 1998 has been officially called the "Publicity" Department), said:

> From the "democratization" of Africa and Latin America to the "Arab Spring," the U.S. has been pushing its U.S.-style democracy to the world regardless of other countries' history and national context, which has led to disastrous consequences in many countries, such as loss of countless lives and economic breakdown. This has undermined global peace and stability. The halo of the "global democracy beacon" of the United States has obviously faded. "American democracy" is obviously sick, and very seriously sick!

The director of the Propaganda Department, Huang Kunming, who also addressed the forum, contrasted America's decline with the CPC's "relentless commitment" to "China's socialist democracy," which he held up as "the broadest, most genuine, and most effective democracy."[15]

In sum, African partners are now viewed as essential assets in the CPC's strategy to advance its interests and constrain Washington through the creation of a more "democratic" and "multipolar" world order.[16] Beijing seeks to enlist a broad coalition of like-minded partners throughout the Global South to echo its claims that the Chinese political system is superior and that the United States is an unwelcome neo-imperialist.[17] In this way, Beijing's desire to mitigate perceived foreign threats has catalyzed the expansion of its propaganda work in Africa and throughout the Global South.

China's External Media Propaganda

Since its founding in 1921, the CPC has used propaganda to "educate the masses" (教育群众) and to "mobilize friends to strike at enemies" (动员党的朋友打击党的敌人). The External Propaganda Leading Group (对外宣传领导小组), which was established jointly between the CPC Central Committee and the State Council in 1980 and includes senior party leaders, sets the agenda for China's foreign-focused propaganda work. These plans are then implemented by the Propaganda Department—the sprawling, multilayered bureaucracy that "extends into virtually every medium concerned with the dissemination of information."[18] Speaking to the *New York Times*, Xiao Qiang of the University of California, Berkeley, has explained, "China has a politically weaponized system of censorship; it is refined, organized, coordinated and supported by the state's resources. . . . It's not just for deleting something. They also have a powerful apparatus to construct a narrative and aim it at any target with huge scale. . . . No other country has that."[19]

External propaganda work targets two primary audiences: overseas Chinese, who are beyond the scope of this report, and nonethnic Chinese foreigners—in this case, Africans. For

them, the Propaganda Department advances four mutually reinforcing messages: promoting a positive view of the CPC and China; promoting party policies and Chinese culture; countering hostile foreign forces; and asserting and normalizing China's territorial claims over Hong Kong, Taiwan, Tibet, the South China Sea, and other contested areas.[20] For example, in December 2022, South Africa's Independent Online Media (IOL) republished a Xinhua story on the COP27 climate talks in Egypt, which praised China for "reaching out to the continent with utmost sincerity," while accusing the West of "turning a deaf ear to Africa's call for deeper cooperation on green development."[21]

Xi Jinping has spoken repeatedly about the need to increase China's "soft power" (软实力) by creating a compelling Chinese narrative and strengthening the party's capacity to convey its political messages overseas.[22] At the 2013 National Conference on Propaganda and Ideological Work, Xi emphasized the "use of innovative outreach methods to tell a good Chinese story and promote China's views internationally."[23] China Radio International (CRI) general director Wang Gengnian told the meeting's participants that Beijing would enhance its "ability to influence and control international public opinion" and described the information space as a "battleground," with the enemy being US-led Western "discourse hegemony" (话语霸权). "The United States and some major Western countries use radio, satellite television, and other emerging media to create a comprehensive and three-dimensional siege network encircling China," Wang explained.[24]

In 2014, Xi introduced a new foreign media–management strategy intended to create "a new type of mainstream media" that is "powerful, influential, and credible."[25] And in 2017, Sun Zhijun, then deputy director of the Propaganda Department, said the party was working to enhance "the governance of external propaganda work," especially in the television and film sectors.[26] In 2021, the department announced that it would broaden the appeal of Chinese "cultural products" to foreign audiences using "overseas new media platforms" such as "films, television episodes and video games" to "carry out cultural investment and cooperation abroad, build international marketing networks and branches, and expand the scale of quality cultural assets abroad."[27]

Most recently, during his report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC in October 2022, Xi instructed the department to

> accelerate the development of Chinese discourse and narrative systems, effectively communicate the voice of China, and portray a credible, lovable, and respectable image of China. Improve our ability to communicate internationally, increase the effectiveness of our global communication, and strive for international discourse power commensurate with our comprehensive national power and international standing.[28]

Although official figures are not available for China's external propaganda expenditures, David Shambaugh of George Washington University valued them in 2017 at about $10 billion per year.[29] Between 2017 and 2020, Sarah Cook at Freedom House identified "a dramatic expansion in [China's] efforts to shape media content and narratives around the world, affecting every region and multiple languages." In 2020, she estimated that China spends "hundreds of millions of dollars a year" on external media propaganda.[30] In 2022, Freedom House estimated that Beijing was "devoting billions of dollars a year to its foreign propaganda and censorship efforts."[31] There are no estimates available for the Africa-focused portion of China's media propaganda expenditures.

Key Elements of China's Media Propaganda in Africa

China's Africa-focused media propaganda strategy has four key components: official and semi-official outlets; the CPC editorial line; content localization; and hosting and training media professionals.

OFFICIAL AND SEMIOFFICIAL OUTLETS

Africa is home to 1.46 billion of the world's approximately 8 billion people; by 2050, the continent's population will nearly double to 2.48 billion. Africa is also the world's youngest continent, with a median age of just 19.5 years and 41 percent of its population under the age of 15.[32] Amid this rapid demographic expansion, Chinese companies, led by Huawei and ZTE, have laid digital communications infrastructure in dozens of African countries.[33] By 2014, Chinese firms and agencies had provided $4.8 billion in financing for more than a hundred telecommunications projects throughout Africa.[34] Thanks in large part to these investments, Africans, especially young urbanites, are now online more than ever before. In 2019, there were approximately 437 million internet users in Africa, and by 2025 that number is expected to top 700 million.[35] As the continent's population grows and connectivity expands, Chinese propagandists are increasingly reaching out to ambitious young Africans.

China's party-controlled media outlets, which Yang Jiechi referred to as the "Big Four"—Xinhua, *China Daily*, CRI, and the China Global Television Network (CGTN, CCTV International until 2017)—target African audiences in various countries, regions, and linguistic groups.[36] Xinhua is China's highest-ranking state media organ and, unlike the other three, which answer directly to the Propaganda Department, is a ministry-level institution under the State Council. All four receive vast state resources that allow them to cover a wealth of stories using various types of media (print, television, radio, and online) in all six UN languages—Arabic, English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Chinese—four of which are official languages in at least one African country.[37] They do not identify themselves as CPC-controlled outlets, and each of them has numerous multilingual, outward-facing social media accounts with millions of followers on platforms that are blocked in China, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube.[38]

In 2006, the year China celebrated "the Year of Africa," Xinhua relocated its Africa editorial office from Paris to Nairobi, and CRI established a radio station there broadcasting in English, Chinese, and Swahili.[39] But it was not until the 2008 global financial crisis that China's media presence in Africa began expanding markedly. While budget cuts forced many Western news outlets to reduce their overseas coverage, China launched a worldwide $7.25 billion campaign known as "Big Foreign Propaganda" (大外宣). During the campaign, Xinhua increased the number and size of its foreign bureaus, the *Global Times*—a daily tabloid published by the *People's Daily*—started an English-language edition, and CCTV began broadcasting in Arabic.[40] *China Daily Africa* and the glossy magazine *ChinAfrica* were both launched in 2012.

In 2014, Xinhua had 30 bureaus, 60 journalists, and 400 local employees in Africa.[41] At the beginning of 2023, it was operating 37 bureaus, more than any other media agency on the

continent.[42] CRI broadcasts in at least nine African languages from its regional bureaus in Harare (Southern Africa), Lagos (West Africa), and Cairo (North Africa).[43] In 2018, the Propaganda Department combined CRI with its domestic sister station, China National Radio, to create the Voice of China and tasked its approximately 14,000 employees with "propagating the party's theories, directions, principles, and policies" and "telling good Chinese stories."[44] In 2019, the Big Four had more than a hundred local staff in Kenya, and the 16-story Xinhua Tower was completed in Nairobi to house the agency and about 40 Chinese staff and their families. That year, the *China Daily*'s Kenya Bureau employed two Chinese and two African staffers.[45]

Television remains an important medium for China's Africa-focused propaganda. Soon after CCTV established its Africa bureau in Nairobi in 2011, a group of senior Propaganda Department officials visited and called for it to become the largest international television broadcasting center in Africa. The bureau quickly began recruiting African anchors and local staff; by 2012, it had over a hundred employees, including about 70 Africans (mostly Kenyans) and 40 Chinese.[46] As of 2019, CGTN Africa had approximately 150, mostly African, employees spread across the continent.[47] The station has continued to modernize its studios and now produces high-quality graphics and video packages on par with the BBC and CNN.

The websites of the CPC's Africa-focused United Front groups (e.g., the Chinese-African People's Friendship Association) are designed to improve Africans' perceptions of China and encourage them to work with Chinese partners.[48] They post images that depict China as a friendly country (e.g., smiling faces and delicious foods) that has made cultural contributions (e.g., the Great Wall and Chinese New Year celebrations) and offers a successful development model (e.g., high-speed trains and skyscrapers). Alongside images of Africans happily embracing partnership with China, these websites include links to visitor programs and educational opportunities.[49] Chinese officials and friendship organizations in Africa use similar imagery and messaging on their Facebook pages.[50]

Since it began operating in Rwanda in 2008, StarTimes, a semiprivate satellite TV company with close links to Beijing, has acquired more than 13 million subscribers across 30 African countries, according to its website. Although the scale of the company's presence varies from country to country, it has facilitated the transition from analog to digital transmission in about 20.[51] Subscribers pay only a few dollars per month for digital TV programming that prioritizes China's state media and local channels over Western news networks, which are offered at a markup.[52] Chinese content carried by StarTimes includes Chinese Super League football, kung fu movies, and Chinese soap operas, which are translated into languages such as Hausa and Swahili. The company continues to produce an increasing amount of original content for African audiences.[53]

Another Chinese firm, Opera, delivers personalized content directly to Africans' mobile devices.[54] The app, which allows users to curate their own news and video feeds, was launched in Nigeria and Kenya in 2018. It has since expanded to Egypt, South Africa, and Ghana, and grown from 21 million monthly users in 2019 to more than 200 million in 2021.[55] Another semiprivate Chinese company, Transsnet, created Vskit—a short-video platform like TikTok aimed at younger Africans that grew from 10 million users in 2019 to more than 51 million in 2021.[56] In South Africa, the Alibaba Group's Alipay teamed up with Vodacom to create a "super app" similar to WeChat that offers banking and payment services to low-income residents.[57] The growing

number of users suggests Africans find the "softer" content, such as entertainment, gaming, and consumer services, offered by these semiprivate Chinese platforms more appealing than the traditional propaganda content distributed by the Big Four.

THE EDITORIAL LINE

The Propaganda Department's cadres dominate the editorial process at the Big Four and ensure that stories glorifying CPC leaders receive top billing. Emeka Umejei of the University of Ghana identified two types of Chinese staff working at CPC media outlets in Africa: officials from the department "masquerading as journalists," and "professional journalists." Although the former lack journalism training, they make the editorial decisions and oversee both the African and the Chinese journalists.[58] Working with their colleagues in Beijing, department cadres posted to Africa distinguish between public content, which is released among Xinhua's scores of daily reports, and "internal reference" reports, which cover sensitive topics and are distributed only to relevant government and party organs. In this way, China's propaganda outlets enforce the party line while channeling proprietary information and analysis back to Beijing. An African working at CGTN explained how department cadres dominate the editorial process:

> The deputy bureau chief of CGTN in Nairobi, Kenya, can call the shots professionally but he does not participate in the Wednesday meeting, which is strictly for members of the CPC. It is at that meeting that a lot of important decisions are taken, which means that if you're not present you cannot function. He is not a member and he is basically an outsider. No African journalist attends this meeting and most times, work has to stop during the meeting.[59]

To give their broadcasts an authentic flavor, CGTN headhunts recognizable African TV hosts and reporters and offers them well-paying jobs. After joining a Chinese state-media outlet, however, they learn that investigative journalism is unwelcome if it casts either China or its partners in a negative light. Working in China's official media means the African journalists must agree not to cover an ever-expanding group of topics deemed "sensitive" by the Propaganda Department.[60]

The editorial line looms over African journalists. As a *China Daily* reporter quoted in Umejei's book, *Chinese Media in Africa*, put it: "Within the periphery of the editorial policy, you have every freedom. . . . Outside the editorial policy, it is impossible to do any story." A CGTN journalist concurred: "We know what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. These things will be made clear to you when you join as to what kind of reporting is expected of you and what direction you are expected to take."[61]

Looking forward, China's propaganda outlets in Africa face a growing contradiction between the editorial line and their desire to compete with Western media sources. On the one hand, as China's interests in Africa grow, the Big Four are likely to receive more resources; on the other hand, more censorship at home means that more topics are off-limits abroad or must be reported in accordance with Propaganda Department instructions. In this way, China's shrinking domestic information space may help explain the proliferation of more nonpolitical, "soft" content, as well as Chinese firms' expanding investments in digital TV, streaming services, phone apps, and other nontraditional media.

CONTENT LOCALIZATION

China uses local outlets and influential African voices to disseminate and authenticate its Africa-focused propaganda, a strategy Anne-Marie Brady of the University of Canterbury identified as "using foreign strength to promote China" (利用外力为我宣传). Chinese interlocutors "forge close partnerships of mutual advantage with highly prominent foreign figures" such that "every country now has some prominent figures whom the CPC has designated 'friends of China.'"[62] The objective is to match party-controlled media conglomerates with local content providers to disguise reports in ways that "make them appear native to the independent publication," observes Sarah Cook.[63] These "friends" regularly appear on air and provide quotations or write articles for the Big Four. In return for pushing Beijing's propaganda, they may receive material or financial support and all-expenses-paid trips to China.

Beijing has long cultivated relationships with foreign journalists because, according to Liu Yunshan, director of the Propaganda Department until 2012, they help party cadres "enhance the appeal and affinity of overseas propaganda."[64] For instance, a Nigerian journalist who received training in China opened the Africa-China Press Centre, which signed a content-sharing agreement with Xinhua in 2019.[65] Chinese embassy officials have given Kenyan journalists phones, laptops, shopping vouchers, and paid holidays in exchange for favorable coverage ahead of major events such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) ministerial meetings or the visit of a senior Chinese official.[66]

Department officials also collaborate with Chinese embassy personnel to discourage or deride any publications that might make Africans reconsider engaging with China.[67] The head of the foreign desk at Nigeria's *This Day* newspaper described this "top-down strategy" to silence critical African voices. Unlike diplomats from the United States and European countries, he said, Chinese embassy staff "will locate the editor-in-chief. And once they do that, as a reporter you are threatened and even when you report, it might not be used."[68] When negative comments from African thought leaders are published, they often face direct criticism. In 2022, for instance, the department censored the director general of the World Health Organization and former Ethiopian foreign minister Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and labeled him "irresponsible" after he questioned the sustainability of Beijing's "zero-COVID" strategy.[69]

China increasingly uses business transactions to expand the reach of its Africa-focused propaganda. "Experience has shown that it is better when China's cultural products are 'sold out' rather than 'sent out,'" explains Liu Qibao, who succeeded Liu Yunshan as director of the Propaganda Department, a post he held until 2017.[70] To attract African outlets, China's state media use various content-sharing agreements, advertising purchases, paid inserts, and mergers and acquisitions.[71] Some smaller African media houses use Xinhua's international content, which they obtain via syndication agreements with larger African outlets or state broadcasters.[72] For cash-strapped African outlets, Xinhua's international reports and images can be an economic lifeline. For Beijing, these outlets' tight budgets offer an opportunity to amplify and disguise its propaganda beneath a veneer of grassroots legitimacy.[73] This tactic, known in English as "astroturfing" and in Chinese as "borrowing foreign media" (借用海外媒体) or "borrowing boats to reach the sea" (借船出海), launders Beijing's propaganda through either friendly or unwitting foreign media outlets.[74] It has been observed across the

> For cash-strapped African outlets, Xinhua's international reports and images can be an economic lifeline. For Beijing, [it is] an opportunity to amplify and disguise its propaganda beneath a veneer of grassroots legitimacy.

Global South from Thailand and Laos in Asia to Peru and Panama in Latin America.

The practice of using bilateral agreements to provide cheap or free content to entice African media outlets into voluntarily disseminating CPC propaganda can be traced to at least 2006.[75] In 2007, the heads of the state news agencies of Benin, Senegal, and Togo visited China, where they met with Xinhua's president, signed "news exchange agreements," and pledged to "learn from Xinhua experiences and strengthen cooperation with Chinese state media."[76] As of 2023, news organizations in Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are among those that have signed media cooperation and content-sharing agreements with Xinhua.[77] In Togo, Télévision Togolaise and Radio Lomé broadcast China's French-language television and radio reports, respectively.[78] By 2017, CRI had inked agreements with at least 70 overseas radio stations and 18 global internet radio services.[79] In Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal, CRI has built relay stations that carry its broadcasts to a wider audience.[80] Beijing has also provided equipment for ailing African state broadcasters, including the Ghana News Agency, Somalia's national broadcaster, and the Liberia Broadcasting System.[81] In 2019, the *People's Daily* launched the Belt and Road News Network, which includes media organizations from 25 developing countries, among them Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zambia.[82]

China's firms have used equity investments to enhance their influence over independent African publications.[83] In 2013, for instance, StarTimes acquired a majority stake in the South African satellite TV company TopTV.[84] The firm's partnership with TopStar, a Zambian state broadcaster, allowed it to obtain licenses for signal distribution and content provision.[85] The China-Africa Development Fund and the state-owned China International Television Corporation own a 20 percent stake in IOL, which has become the official media partner of China's embassy in South Africa.[86] In 2018, IOL columnist Azad Essa was fired after he criticized China's persecution of Muslims in his column.[87]

TRAINING AFRICAN MEDIA

In the 2018–21 FOCAC Action Plan, China committed "to hold training and capacity building seminars for African countries' media officials and journalists, promote more exchanges and mutual visits between Chinese and African media personnel and support more exchange of correspondents by media houses."[88] This approach, which Bob Wekesa of the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa calls "media-based public diplomacy," includes "anything where China lobbies the media industry of an African country for cooperation in the media sector itself—for instance, exchange visits, trips, short-term training and others."[89] The purpose of media exchanges and trainings, according to Nie Chenxi, deputy director of the Propaganda Department until June 2022, is to foster more cooperation "in media operations, program production, technical services and personnel training."[90]

China offers both bilateral and multilateral media training programs for African media professionals designed to entice them to disseminate its propaganda. This initiative began in

earnest between 2004 and 2011, when China hosted at least eight major training workshops for African media. By 2011, the CPC had trained over 300 African media officials from 48 countries, each of whom had spent about two weeks in China taking courses on topics such as "China's Experience and Achievements on Economic Reform and National Development," "The Taiwan Question," and "China's Journalistic View and the Operation of Chinese Press."[91]

In 2012, China's annual African journalist training workshops were upgraded to the first Forum on China-Africa Media Cooperation and placed under the FOCAC. Beijing hosted the second forum in 2014; and the following year, the China-Africa Media Summit was held in Cape Town prior to the FOCAC Summit.[92] The third forum, which was cosponsored by the Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was held in Beijing in 2016 and included more than 300 media professionals and officials from 44 African countries.[93] At the opening ceremony, Cai Fuchao, then deputy director of the Propaganda Department, stressed that media cooperation is "a powerful driving force behind China-Africa cooperation."[94]

The fourth Forum on China-Africa Media Cooperation, held in Beijing before the 2018 FOCAC Summit, included more than 400 officials and heads of media organizations from 40 African countries and focused on digitization and content development.[95] In his address, Propaganda Department director Huang Kunming called on Chinese and African media outlets "to enhance exchanges and cooperation to promote their common development."[96] In August 2022, Beijing hosted the fifth forum, although due to China's COVID-related travel restrictions, most of the African participants attended virtually.[97]

The Belt and Road Initiative has also provided opportunities for hosting African journalists. In 2018, a CPC United Front group, the All-China Journalists Association, convened the Belt and Road Journalists Forum, which was attended by nearly 100 representatives from media organizations in 47 developing countries. The gathering was designed to "improve relationships" and "enhance communication and mutual learning among media organizations and correspondents and editors."[98]

China also underwrites private bilateral and multilateral training sessions for African journalists and editors. Under normal conditions, these working-level seminars provide the optimal environment for building relationships. Having been feted in China, many attendees naturally return home feeling reluctant to produce content that impugns their generous hosts. The notion that one's criticism is dulled by good treatment is captured in the Chinese expression, "the mouth that eats the food of others is softened, the hand that takes the possessions of others is shortened" (吃人家的嘴软，拿人家的手短). Although these smaller gatherings were paused during the COVID-19 pandemic, they did continue virtually, albeit less frequently. In 2021, for example, the Hunan Province Professional Institute of Foreign Trade, the Hunan Film and Television Group, and the Ministry of Commerce held a two-week online training session for 65 French-speaking African journalists.[99] Still, online seminars cannot replace the comradery of in-person gatherings, which resumed after China lifted its pandemic-related travel restrictions in January 2023.

Evaluating China's Media Propaganda in Africa

China is doing more than ever to influence how Africans view the country and its ruling party. But has the CPC's multimillion-dollar campaign succeeded in developing "a new type of mainstream media" that is "powerful, influential, and credible" among Africans? Has Beijing's strategy created a network of friendly African media professionals? Is content from the Big Four more widely used than content from US and other Western media sources? And have Africans come to view China more favorably than the United States?

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the increasing number of sponsored exchanges, syndication agreements, and media training programs suggested that Chinese propagandists believed their outreach to African journalists and editors was working. Indeed, dozens of African media professionals do republish or share China's propaganda content. These cheerleaders legitimize the party's rule over China, advance Beijing's claims to lead the Global South, deflect criticism of China and its African partners, perpetuate anti-US narratives, and question the effectiveness of liberal democracy. As China's African "friends" gain resources and influence, the predictable result is that—even as concerns about China's intentions continue to mount in Western capitals—media in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, and Malawi are increasing their use of Xinhua content.[100]

Still, the reach of China's propaganda in Africa should not be overstated. After analyzing China's influence on media coverage in 30 African countries in the first half of 2020, Dani Madrid-Morales of the University of Houston concluded that "Chinese sources appear to be much less influential" than French or British outlets, but more influential than US media. He identified "a very significant gap between prevailing themes found in news coverage about China and COVID-19 in the Chinese media, and the most common themes in African media." China's official outlets, Madrid-Morales concludes, have "limited transnational intermedia agenda setting capabilities in Africa."[101]

One reason may be the size of their audience. In 2021, roughly 2 percent of Kenyans and South Africans listened to CRI or read the *China Daily*, and about 7 percent of Kenyans and 6 percent of South Africans watched CGTN. Not surprisingly, Madrid-Morales and Herman Wasserman of the University of Cape Town find that those who consume Chinese media tend to hold more positive views of China.[102] Thus, the Big Four's limited reach may help explain the decline in favorable opinions of China in these two countries between 2013 and 2019—down from 78 percent to 58 percent in Kenya and from 48 percent to 46 percent in South Africa, according to the Pew Research Center. Over the same period, the percentage of Nigerians holding favorable views of China fell from 76 to 70 percent.[103]

Still, African views of China and its role on the continent remain largely positive. Between 2019 and 2021, an in-person survey conducted by Ghana-based Afrobarometer found that 63 percent of Africans interviewed viewed China positively, compared with 60 percent who saw the United States in a favorable light.[104] More recently, an online survey conducted in June and

July 2022 by the Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS) found that majorities of respondents in Angola (59 percent), Egypt (52 percent), Ghana (57 percent), Kenya (55 percent), and Nigeria (70 percent) had positive perceptions of China. However, in all the African countries CEIAS surveyed, China was viewed less favorably than the United States, which had a decidedly positive image in Angola (80 percent), Egypt (57 percent), Ghana (80 percent), Kenya (82 percent), and Nigeria (88 percent). Even in Tunisia, where less than half of respondents viewed the US favorably (47 percent), an even smaller percentage (42 percent) held positive views of China. "China's influence on democracy in other countries, its military power, and its environmental impact are all perceived comparatively negatively," the CEIAS report concluded.[105]

Anecdotal observations during 2020–23 also suggest a dip in favorable perceptions of China among Africans. In Africa, as was the case elsewhere in the world, anti-Chinese views spread apace with COVID-19. These negative perceptions were further stoked by the expulsion of Africans living in China, the country's strict COVID-19 lockdowns and resulting mass protests in dozens of Chinese cities, as well as by the proliferation of online videos showing Chinese bosses abusing their African employees and African children unknowingly chanting racist statements in Chinese.[106] Although China has long faced criticism from African civil society and workers' rights groups, some previously reticent African policymakers have begun raising contentious issues such as tax evasion and illicit mining with their Chinese counterparts.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that while China has cultivated a large number of well-placed African media professionals and remains broadly popular among Africans, its popularity may be slipping somewhat; and despite its anti-US messaging, perceptions of the United States appear to be more positive. Ultimately, it is unclear whether China's propaganda has mitigated the fall in perceptions of China among Africans.

Recommendations

Beginning during the Trump administration and continuing under President Joe Biden, the United States has abandoned its efforts to transform China into a "responsible stakeholder" and has come to the conclusion that "long-term strategic competition" with Beijing is unavoidable.[107] Despite this recognition, the US government has yet to overtly contest China's anti-US media propaganda in Africa. The primary reason for this appears to be Washington's long-standing, bipartisan neglect of Africa. Instead of continuing with this laissez-faire approach, Washington should actively thwart CPC propaganda that wrongfully disparages or misrepresents the United States and invest in independent African journalism.

As officials in a liberal democratic nation that values the fourth estate, US policymakers have neither the bureaucratic apparatus nor the inclination to compete head-to-head with CPC propagandists. They cannot set a strict editorial line and enforce it by suppressing critical African voices. Instead, consistent with American traditions and values, Washington should help support independent African journalism that holds governments and leaders accountable. By investing in objective, high-quality local reporting and juxtaposing this grassroots approach with China's heavy-handed censorship, the United States can improve its national image on the continent.

The following recommendations are intended both to counter China's anti-US disinformation and to provide support for African media professionals whose objective journalism advances free and open public discourse in their home countries.

COUNTERING CHINA'S DISINFORMATION

The US government can take four steps to counter China's anti-US messaging to Africans.

First, the Voice of America (VOA) and the State Department's Bureau of Global Public Affairs (GPA) should **adopt a well-resourced and coordinated "go where the people are" strategy** that reflects emerging demographic trends and the ongoing transition to social media apps and streaming platforms. Despite Africa's population explosion, it has yet to become a priority for VOA, which in 2021 spent $32 million—less than 13 percent of its $253 million budget—on developing content for the continent.[108] VOA and GPA should prioritize funding, creating, and disseminating programming and communications that are attractive to African audiences. This means expanding their social media presence to include major African languages and accepting that messaging on social media will require paying for placement.

A second measure is to **work with African partners to identify and expose China's disinformation and untoward influence**. China's pressure on African journalists and editors to manipulate or conceal inconvenient facts can be clumsy and ham-fisted. When instances of these tactics have been revealed, there has often been a nationalist backlash that has empowered independent African voices. US entities such as the National Endowment for Democracy can work with local partners, such as the independent fact-checking organization Africa Check, to identify false or misleading reports and to shine a spotlight when Chinese officials or their African collaborators suppress critical reporting.

At home, the US government should **work with and encourage US social media companies to stem the spread of China's disinformation**. Relevant US agencies should establish regular dialogue mechanisms to share knowledge and ideas with US-based social media firms such as Meta (which owns Facebook and Instagram) and Twitter. In 2019, for instance, Twitter closed more than 200,000 accounts because they were part of a CPC-coordinated propaganda campaign.[109] In 2022, Facebook uncovered a covert influence operation run from China consisting of at least 80 fake accounts posing as Americans from across the political spectrum.[110] To ensure US firms are not inadvertently spreading Beijing's propaganda, social media companies should identify and purge such disinformation from their platforms.

Fourth, to raise awareness and develop effective policy responses, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, and the newly created Select Committee on the Strategic Competition between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party should **hold hearings on China's global media offensive** and its implications for the United States and its foreign partners.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT AFRICAN JOURNALISM

Investments in independent African journalism should focus on two related areas: support for independent African media outlets and the creation of training opportunities for African journalists.

By offering **grants for independent African media outlets and journalists**, US entities can encourage them to find alternatives to Chinese propaganda. These funds can be used to subsidize local staffing costs, support investigative reports, or purchase news feeds and images from agencies such as the Associated Press and Bloomberg. To access this support, the recipient would need to stop using Beijing's content.

The State Department's Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) or the GPA should establish a **short-term journalism training program** to help African media professionals develop the techniques and professional connections they need to resist China's inducements and intimidation. The success of the International Visitor Leadership Program and the Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists (the latter involves 150 participants and lasts three weeks) should inspire the creation of a similar program for select, high-impact African journalists. Such a program would include visits to US media organizations and news agencies, as well as meetings with well-known American journalists, experts, and policymakers. It should also match each African participant with an established American journalist with an eye toward potential co-author relationships. Applications to participate in the program could be submitted directly to US embassies in Africa, which would coordinate with the ECA or the GPA to identify a cohort of 20 to 25 participants per year. The Foreign Press Centers in Washington, DC, and New York, which are coordinated by the GPA, could provide venues for these training programs. Various additional short-term training programs could be underwritten by the VOA, the National Endowment for Democracy, the International Republican Institute, or the National Democratic Institute.

A related, but longer-term measure, would be to award **scholarships for Africans to pursue graduate degrees in journalism**. The ECA should work with US universities to create a scholarship program that provides a select group of promising African journalists with funding to complete a master's degree program in journalism and find an internship at an American media organization. Candidates would be selected by the universities to maintain distance between the recipients and the US government.

• • •

The same conditions that have precipitated China's investments in the African media sector—the continent's youthfulness and its growing population—should also be attractive to the United States. Despite decades of bipartisan neglect and China's best efforts, Africans in many countries continue to hold favorable views of the United States. Under these conditions, investments in independent African journalism are likely to have a disproportionately positive effect on perceptions of the United States.

Notes

1. "China's Xi Strikes Conciliatory Note, Broadens Diplomatic Focus," Reuters, November 30, 2014, www.reuters.com/article/us-china-southchinasea-idUSKCN0JE04J20141130.
2. See Josh Kurlantzick, *Beijing's Global Media Offensive: China's Uneven Campaign to Influence Asia and the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022); Sarah Cook et al., "Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022: Authoritarian Expansion and the Power of Democratic Resilience," Freedom House, September 2022, www.freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/BGMI_final_digital_090722.pdf; Vladimir Shopov, "Beijing's Megaphone: The Return of Party Propaganda in South-Eastern Europe," European Council on Foreign Relations, January 8, 2021, https://ecfr.eu/article/beijings-megaphone-the-return-of-party-propaganda-in-south-eastern-europe; Tarun Chhabra et al., "Global China: Regional Influence and Strategy," Brookings Institution, July 2020, www.brookings.edu/research/global-china-regional-influence-and-strategy; David Shullman, ed., "Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy: An Assessment of Chinese Interference in Thirteen Key Countries," International Republican Institute, 2019, www.iri.org/resource/new-report-exposes-chinas-malign-influence-and-corrosion-democracy-worldwide; Anne-Marie Brady, "Authoritarianism Goes Global (II): China's Foreign Propaganda Machine," *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 4 (2015): 51–59; and David Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System: Institutions, Processes and Efficacy," *China Journal*, no. 57 (2007): 25–58.
3. Many of these interviews were conducted in conjunction with Ambassador David H. Shinn.
4. Feng Zhongping and Huang Jing, "China's Strategic Partnership Diplomacy: Engaging with a Changing World," ESOP Working Paper no. 8, European Strategic Partnerships Observatory, June 2014, 13, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2459948.
5. Lei Yu, "China's Expanding Security Involvement in Africa: A Pillar for 'China–Africa Community of Common Destiny,'" *Global Policy* 9, no. 4 (2018): 490.
6. Chen Xiangyang, "The Right Time for China to Advance a 'Greater Periphery' Strategy" [in Chinese], China Foundation for International Studies, January 16, 2015, http://comment.cfisnet.com/2015/0116/1300445.html.
7. Yan Xuetong, "China Must Not Overplay its Strategic Hand," *Global Times*, September 8, 2017, www.carnegieendowment.org/2017/08/09/china-must-not-overplay-its-strategic-hand-pub-72872.
8. Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham, *China Steps Out: Beijing's Major Power Engagement with the Developing World* (New York: Routledge, 2018).
9. He Yafei, "China's Major–Country Diplomacy Progresses on All Fronts," *China Today*, March 6, 2016, www.china.org.cn/china/NPC_CPPCC_2016/2016-03/06/content_37950893.htm.
10. State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (PRC), "China's National Defense in the New Era," white paper, July 24, 2019, https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201907/24/content_WS5d3941ddc6d08408f502283d.html.
11. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, "The China-Africa Institute Established in Beijing Yang Jiechi Reads the Congratulatory Message from President Xi Jinping," April 9, 2019, www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/fzs_663828/xwlb_663830/201904/t20190415_541868.html.
12. Jin Xin and Lin Yongliang, "Together Promote the Deepening of World Multipolarity" [in Chinese], *People's Daily*, February 15, 2019, http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0215/c40531-30676679.html.
13. PRC, "China's National Defense in the New Era."
14. Embassy of the PRC in the Republic of South Africa, "The COVID-19 Is Spreading Globally but Neither 'Originated from China' Nor 'Made in China,'" March 8, 2020, http://za.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgxw/202003/t20200309_6097228.htm.
15. "Democracy, Shared Human Values: Forum on Democracy Opens in Beijing," CGTN, December 5, 2021, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-12-04/Opening-ceremony-of-international-forum-on-democracy-begins-in-Beijing-15IRPiuCnsI/index.html.
16. Joshua Eisenman and Eric Heginbotham, "Building a More 'Democratic' and 'Multipolar' World: China's Strategic Engagement with Developing Countries," *China Review* 19, no. 4 (2019): 55–84.
17. Joshua Eisenman, "Locating Africa in China's Community of Shared Future for Mankind: A Relational Approach," *Journal of International Development* 35, no. 1 (2023): 65–78.
18. Shambaugh, "China's Propaganda System," 27, 47.
19. Raymond Zhong et al., "No 'Negative' News: How China Censored the Coronavirus," *New York Times*, December 19, 2021, www.nytimes.com/2020/12/19/technology/china-coronavirus-censorship.html.
20. David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 194–210.

21. Xinhua, "Africa Urges Climate Actions Rather Than Broken Promises, Double Standards," *Independent Online*, December 2, 2022, www.iol.co.za/news/africa/africa-urges-climate-actions-rather-than-broken-promises-double-standards-ed92e05e-9bb6-4ed6-b91a-11eac6e6a968.
22. "Xi Jinping Discusses National Cultural Soft Power: Strengthening Chinese Character and Integrity" [in Chinese], Xinhua, June 25, 2015, www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2015-06/25/c_127949618.htm.
23. State Council Information Office of the PRC, "Xi Jinping: Tell China's Stories Well and Spread China's Voice Well" [in Chinese], September 4, 2013, www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/10/Document/1345245/1345245.htm.
24. Wang Gengnian, "Current Situation and Development Trend of International Communication in China" [in Chinese], *People's Daily*, September 12, 2013, http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2013/0912/c40531-22893707.html.
25. "Xi Jinping: Recruit Together to Make a Powerful Force for Reform" [in Chinese], Xinhua, August 18, 2014, www.xinhuanet.com//politics/2014-08/18/c_1112125779.htm.
26. "Press Conference on China's Efforts to Promote Ideological, Ethical, and Cultural Progress," *China.org.cn*, October 21, 2017, www.china.org.cn/china/2017-10/21/content_41769976.htm.
27. Coco Feng, "China in 'Culture Export' Push as It Seeks to Expand Soft Power Overseas with Global Media Platforms," *South China Morning Post*, October 29, 2021, www.scmp.com/tech/tech-trends/article/3154198/china-culture-export-push-it-seeks-expand-soft-power-overseas.
28. Xi Jinping, "Hold High the Great Banner of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, Unite in the Struggle for the Comprehensive Construction of a Modern Socialist Country: Report at the Twentieth National Congress of the Communist Party of China," October 16, 2022, https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JtCZU0lxRgnYxxszJhJCTeDmRYWzfb1M/edit.
29. "China Is Spending Billions to Make the World Love It," *The Economist*, March 23, 2017, www.economist.com/china/2017/03/23/china-is-spending-billions-to-make-the-world-love-it.
30. Sarah Cook, "Beijing's Global Megaphone: The Expansion of Chinese Communist Party Media Influence since 2017," Freedom House, January 2020, www.freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/beijings-global-megaphone.
31. Cook et al., "Beijing's Global Media Influence."
32. Mohamed Yahya, "Africa's Defining Challenge," Project Syndicate, August 7, 2017, www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/africa-youth-opportunities-policies-by-mohamed-yahya-2017-08; and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "Youth Population Trends and Sustainable Development," no. 2015/1, May 2015, www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/YouthPOP.pdf.
33. Iginio Gagliardone, *China, Africa, and the Future of the Internet* (London: Zed Books, 2019).
34. Dani Madrid-Morales, "Sino-African Media Cooperation: An Overview of a Longstanding Asymmetric Relationship," in *It Is about Their Story: How China, Turkey, and Russia Influence the Media in Africa* (Johannesburg: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Media Programme Sub-Saharan Africa, 2021), 20.
35. Celine Sui, "China Wants State Media to Peddle its 'Soft Power' in Africa, but Tech Platforms Are a Better Bet," *Quartz*, October 29, 2019, www.qz.com/africa/1736534/china-daily-cgtn-fight-for-influence-in-africa-vs-bbc-cnn; and Global System for Mobile Communications Association, "Mobile Internet Connectivity 2020: Sub-Saharan Africa Factsheet," September 2020, www.gsma.com/r/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Mobile-Internet-Connectivity-SSA-Fact-Sheet.pdf.
36. Zhang Xiaoling, "CCTV and the Race for Soft Power," Asian Dialogue, November 13, 2014, www.theasiadialogue.com/2014/11/13/cctv-and-the-race-for-soft-power.
37. Sui, "China Wants State Media to Peddle its 'Soft Power.'"
38. Cook, "Beijing's Global Megaphone."
39. Madrid-Morales, "Sino-African Media Cooperation."
40. Brady, "Authoritarianism Goes Global," 54.
41. Sergio Grassi, "Changing the Narrative: China's Media Offensive in Africa," Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, April 2014, 3, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/10700.pdf.
42. "Branches Outside the Country of Assignment" [in Chinese], Xinhua, n.d., www.xinhuanet.com/xhsld/2021-02/09/c_1211019859.htm.
43. "China Radio International Global Shortwave Schedule," CRI, October 29, 2017, https://alicliimg.clewm.net/408/426/1426408/15083834609901f3a2ba0a24c0d82d8ecd23da3e1cbb01508383429.pdf; and Catie Snow Bailard, "China in Africa: An Analysis of the Effect of Chinese Media Expansion on African Public Opinion," *International Journal of Press/Politics* 21, no. 4 (2016): 446–471.
44. Steven Jiang, "Beijing Has a New Propaganda Weapon: Voice of China," CNN, March 21, 2018, https://money.cnn.com/2018/03/21/media/voice-of-china-propaganda-broadcaster/index.html.

45. Sui, "China Wants State Media to Peddle its 'Soft Power'"; and John Nduire, "Xinhua's Nairobi Office Tower Set for Completion in February," *Construction Kenya*, March 12, 2018, www.constructionkenya.com/5329/xinhua-africa-tower-nairobi.
46. Iginio Gagliardone, "China as a Persuader: CCTV Africa's First Steps in the African Media Sphere," *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 34, no. 3 (2013): 29–30.
47. Sui, "China Wants State Media to Peddle its 'Soft Power.'"
48. For more on China's foreign-focused United Front groups, see Alexander Bowie, "China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States," US Economic and Security Review Commission, August 24, 2018, www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-overseas-united-front-work-background-and-implications-united-states.
49. Examples include the African-Chinese People's Friendship Association (www.acpfa.org), the China-Africa Business Council (http://en.cabc.org.cn), and the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (www.cpaffc.org.cn).
50. Jorge Marinho et al., "China in Africa (2019): Facebook & Twitter as Part of Public Diplomacy," *CPD Blog*, Center on Public Diplomacy, University of Southern California, August 14, 2020, www.uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/china-africa-2019-facebook-twitter-part-public-diplomacy. Examples of such Facebook pages include www.facebook.com/Director-General-Department-of-African-Affairs-MFA-China-108995937632751 and www.facebook.com/CIDCAofficial.
51. Jonathan Kaiman, "'China Has Conquered Kenya': Inside Beijing's New Strategy to Win African Hearts and Minds," *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 2017, www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-china-africa-kenya-20170807-htmlstory.html; and Eric Olander, "China's StarTimes Is Now One of Africa's Most Important Media Companies," *Medium*, August 26, 2017, www.medium.com/@eolander/chinas-startimes-is-now-one-of-africa-s-most-important-media-companies-103843ebc376.
52. "Ten Years of Contribution to Africa's Development from StarTimes," *New Times*, July 23, 2018, www.newtimes.co.rw/news/featured-ten-years-contribution-africas-development-startimes.
53. "China's StarTimes Launches New TV Program in Kenya to Help Fight COVID-19 Pandemic," Xinhua, March 25, 2020, www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/25/c_138916605.htm; and Javira Ssebwami, "Look into the East: New StarTimes Programme Highlights Africa-China Connection," *PML Daily*, January 29, 2021, www.pmldaily.com/news/2021/01/look-into-the-east-new-startimes-programme-highlights-africa-china-connection.html.
54. Sui, "China Wants State Media to Peddle its 'Soft Power.'"
55. Opera, "State of the Mobile Web 2019: Africa in Focus," 2019, https://blogs.opera.com/news/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SMW_2019.pdf; and Daniel Adeyemi, "Opera News Is Growing Fast in Africa but Has a Quality Problem," *Techcabal*, January 21, 2021, www.techcabal.com/2021/01/21/opera-news-is-growing-fast-in-africa-but-has-a-quality-problem.
56. Yu Jing and Bi Ran, "Chinese Video Apps Making Inroads into Global Markets," CGTN, November 9, 2019, https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-11-09/Chinese-video-apps-making-inroads-into-global-markets-Ltq898Kg0g/index.html; and Emma Okonji, "Vskit Hits 51m Users in Three Years, Unveils New Plans," *This Day*, November 22, 2021, www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/11/22/vskit-hits-51m-users-in-three-years-unveils-new-plans; and Brand Press, "Video Social and Sharing App, Vskit Hits a Milestone of 10 Million Users in Africa," Techpoint Africa, January 17, 2019, https://techpoint.africa/2019/01/17/video-social-and-sharing-app-vskit-hits-a-milestone-of-10-million-users-in-africa.
57. "Vodacom Partners with China's Alipay to Create 'Super App' in South Africa," Reuters, July 20, 2020, www.reuters.com/article/us-vodacom-grp-alipay-safrica-idUSKCN24L1LY.
58. Emeka Umejei, *Chinese Media in Africa: Perception, Performance, and Paradox* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), 76–77.
59. Umejei, *Chinese Media in Africa*, 77.
60. Umejei, *Chinese Media in Africa*, 69–70, 73.
61. Umejei, *Chinese Media in Africa*, 72.
62. Brady, "Authoritarianism Goes Global," 54.
63. Cook, "Beijing's Global Megaphone."
64. Hao Yalin, "Chinese Official Stresses Role of 'Propaganda' during Beijing Olympics," Xinhua, January 31, 2008.
65. Renmin University of China, "RUC Holds Completion Ceremony for African Journalists Undertaking 'Research on China Development Studies and Media Exchange' Course," November 3, 2016, www.ruc.edu.cn/archives/31079; and Ikenna Emewu, "Africa-China, Xinhua Sign Content Partnership," Africa China Economy, September 27, 2019, www.africachinapresscentre.org/2019/09/27/afri-china-xinhua-sign-content-partnership.
66. Cook et al., "Beijing's Global Media Influence." Created in 2000, FOCAC is an official forum between China and all African countries except Eswatini, which maintains diplomatic relations with Taipei. Beijing has helped establish similar frameworks with nearly every developing region, including the ASEAN+1 framework with Southeast Asian nations in 1996, the Shanghai Five regional

grouping with Central Asian nations in 2001, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum in 2004, the 16+1 Cooperation with Central and Eastern European Countries in 2012, and the China-Caribbean Economic and Trade Cooperation Forum in 2015.

67. Cook, "Beijing's Global Megaphone."
68. Cited in Emeka Umejei, "Newspaper Coverage of China's Engagement with Nigeria: Protector or Predator?," in *China-Africa Relations: Building Images through Cultural Cooperation, Media Representation and Communication*, eds. Kathryn Batchelor and Xiaoling Zhang (London: Routledge, 2017), 177.
69. "Tedros' Remarks on China's Zero-COVID 'Irresponsible,'" *Global Times*, May 11, 2022, www.globaltimes.cn/page/202205/1265409.shtml.
70. Liu Qibao, "Vigorously Promote Chinese Culture to the World" [in Chinese], *Guangming Daily*, May 22, 2014, https://epaper.gmw.cn/gmrb/html/2014-05/22/nw.D110000gmrb_20140522_1-03.htm.
71. Brady, "Authoritarianism Goes Global," 55; and Cook, "Beijing's Global Megaphone."
72. Herman Wasserman and Dani Madrid-Morales, "How Influential Are Chinese Media in Africa? An Audience Analysis in Kenya and South Africa," *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018): 2212–2231; and Dani Madrid-Morales, "African News with Chinese Characteristics: A Case Study of CGTN Africa" (PhD diss., City University of Hong Kong, June 2018).
73. For example, see Ikenna Emewu, "Exclusive: Covid-19 May Not Have Originated in China, Oxford University Expert Posits," *Africa China Economy*, July 5, 2020, www.africachinapresscentre.org/2020/07/05/exclusive-covid-19-may-not-have-originated-in-china-oxford-university-expert-posits; and He Wenping, "Demand Compensation from China, Devil in Hearts," *Daily News Egypt*, May 21, 2020, www.dailynewsegypt.com/2020/05/21/demand-compensation-from-china-devil-in-hearts.
74. Brady, "Authoritarianism Goes Global," 57.
75. Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, 201–03; and Gagliardone, "China as a Persuader," 25.
76. "Xinhua President Meets Heads of Four African News Agencies," Xinhua, June 13, 2007.
77. Ikenna Emewu, "Africa-China, Xinhua Sign Content Partnership," Africa China Economy, September 27, 2019, www.africachinapresscentre.org/2019/09/27/afri-china-xinhua-sign-content-partnership; "Daily News Egypt Signs Content, Images Sharing Agreement with Xinhua," *Daily News Egypt*, October 19, 2019, www.dailynewsegypt.com/2019/10/19/daily-news-egypt-signs-content-images-sharing-agreement-with-xinhua; Grassi, "Changing the Narrative," 3; and Cook, "Beijing's Global Megaphone."
78. Zhang, "CCTV and the Race for Soft Power."
79. Shaun Breslin, "China's Global Cultural Interactions," in *China and the World*, ed. David Shambaugh (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 144.
80. Selma Mihoubi, "La stratégie d'implantation de Radio Chine Internationale (RCI) en Afrique Sahélienne," *Norois*, no. 252 (2019): 89–102.
81. Samuel Dweh, "Liberia: China Rejuvenates 'Old School' State-Owned Media," *FPA*, January 21, 2019, www.frontpageafricaonline.com/news/liberia-china-rejuvenates-old-school-state-owned-media; "Chinese Embassy Offers Technical Assistance to GNA," *Graphic Online*, October 6, 2021, www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-chinese-embassy-offers-technical-assistance-to-gna.html; Eric Olander, "China to Upgrade Equipment at Somalia's Government-Run Media Outlets," *China Africa Project*, November 8, 2021, www.chinaafricaproject.com/2021/11/08/china-to-upgrade-equipment-at-somalias-government-run-media-outlets; and Iginio Gagliardone and Sam Geall, "China in Africa's Media and Telecommunications: Cooperation, Connectivity, and Control," Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, April 2014, www.files.ethz.ch/isn/179376/7880fd6b12b93bdd18eddcbd4f4e207f.pdf.
82. Eleanor Albert, "What Is the Belt and Road News Network?," *The Diplomat*, October 2, 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/what-is-the-belt-and-road-news-network.
83. Cook, "Beijing's Global Megaphone."
84. Tai Nichols, "StarTimes to Expand TV Reach in Africa with SES 5," *Via Satellite*, September 23, 2013, www.satellitetoday.com/broadcasting/2013/09/23/startimes-to-expand-tv-reach-in-africa-with-ses-5.
85. Sébastien Le Belzic, "'The Chinese Will to Censor Critical Opinions in Africa Is Worrying,'" *Modern Ghana*, November 3, 2018, www.modernghana.com/news/895069/the-chinese-will-to-censor-critical-opinions-in.html.
86. Craig McKune, "Chinese Companies Scoop Shares in Independent News," *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), August 15, 2013, https://mg.co.za/article/2013-08-16-chinese-companies-scoop-shares-in-independent-news.
87. Reporters Without Borders, "China's Pursuit of a New World Media Order," October 2019, 38, https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/en_rapport_chine_web_final.pdf.
88. Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, "Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021)," September 12, 2018, www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/201809/t20180912_7933578.htm.

89. Bob Wekesa, “Chinese Media and Diplomacy in Africa,” in *China-Africa Relations*, 160.
90. Fang Aiqing, “Media Cooperation with Africa Growing,” *China Daily*, June 27, 2018, www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201806/27/WS5b32e4a0a3103349141deffe.html.
91. For a description of the eight journalist training workshops held between 2004 and 2011, see Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa*, 203–07.
92. “The 2nd Forum on China-Africa Media Cooperation,” *Global Times*, June 16, 2014, www.ecns.cn/2014/06-16/119215.shtml.
93. CCTV.com, “3rd China-Africa Media Cooperation Forum Opens in Beijing,” State Council Information Office of the PRC, June 22, 2016, www.scio.gov.cn/m/32618/Document/1481308/1481308.htm.
94. African Union, “3rd Forum on China-Africa Media Issues Joint Statement to Strengthen Cooperation Ties,” press release, June 27, 2016, www.au.int/en/pressreleases/20160627-0.
95. Fang, “Media Cooperation with Africa Growing.”
96. State Council Information Office of the PRC, “Huang Kunming Calls for More Media Cooperation with Africa,” June 28, 2018, http://english.scio.gov.cn/topnews/2018-06/28/content_53778032.htm.
97. “China, African Countries to Strengthen Media Cooperation,” Xinhua, August 25, 2022, https://english.news.cn/20220825/d8f2cdced82841ffa398b9ec595a476b/c.html.
98. “2018 Belt and Road Journalist Forum Held in Beijing,” Xinhua, June 21, 2018, www.xinhuanet.com/zgjx/english/2018-06/21/c_137639682.htm.
99. Jordache Diala, “Coopération Chine–Afrique francophone/ 65 journalistes Africains participent à une formation sur la gestion de média cinématographique et télévisuel,” *La Prospérité* (Kinshasa), July 14, 2021, https://laprosperiteonline.net/2021/07/14/nation/cooperation-chine-afrique-francophone-65-journalistes-africains-participent-a-une-formation-sur-la-gestion-de-media-cinematographique-et-televisuel.
100. Dani Madrid-Morales, “Who Set the Narrative? Assessing the Influence of Chinese Global Media on News Coverage of COVID-19 in 30 African Countries,” *Global Media and China* 6, no. 2 (2021): 132.
101. Madrid-Morales, “Who Set the Narrative?,” 138, 146.
102. Dani Madrid-Morales and Herman Wasserman, “How Effective Are Chinese Media in Shaping Audiences’ Attitudes towards China? A Survey Analysis in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa,” *Online Media and Global Communication* 1, no. 4 (2022): 671–96.
103. Pew Research Center, “America’s Global Image Remains More Positive than China’s: But Many See China Becoming World’s Leading Power,” July 18, 2013, 24–33, www.pewresearch.org/global/2013/07/18/americas-global-image-remains-more-positive-than-chinas; and Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, “China’s Economic Growth Mostly Welcomed in Emerging Markets, But Neighbors Wary of Its Influence,” Pew Research Center, December 5, 2019, 27–40, www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/12/05/chinas-economic-growth-mostly-welcomed-in-emerging-markets-but-neighbors-wary-of-its-influence.
104. Josephine Sanny and Edem Selormey, “AD489: Africans Welcome China’s Influence but Maintain Democratic Aspirations,” Afrobarometer, November 15, 2021, www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad489-africans-welcome-chinas-influence-maintain-democratic-aspirations.
105. Richard Turcsanyi et al., “US-China Rivalry in the Global South? Insights from a Public Opinion Survey,” Central European Institute of Asian Studies, October 2022, www.ceias.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Global-South-FINAL.pdf.
106. Peter Jegwa, “Chinese Man Held Over Racist Videos,” BBC, June 20, 2022, www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61862619.
107. Jacob Fromer and Mark Magnier, “US, EU Must Prepare for ‘Long-term Strategic Competition with China,’ Says Joe Biden,” *South China Morning Post*, February 20, 2021, www.scmp.com/news/china/article/3122460/us-eu-must-prepare-long-term-strategic-competition-china-says-president.
108. US Agency for Global Media, “FY 2022 Congressional Budget Justification,” 131–33, www.usagm.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/USAGM-FY-2022-CBJ-Final-05.26.2021.pdf.
109. Elliot Hannon, “Twitter Suspends 200,000 Suspected China-Sponsored Accounts Targeting Hong Kong Protests,” *Slate*, August 20, 2019, www.slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/08/twitter-suspends-suspected-china-sponsored-accounts-targeting-hong-kong-protests-facebook.html.
110. Donie O’Sullivan, “Meta Shuts Down Covert Influence Campaigns It Says Were Run from China and Russia,” *CNN*, September 27, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/2022/09/27/tech/meta-china-russia-influence-campaigns/index.html.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The United States Institute of Peace is a national, nonpartisan, independent institute, founded by Congress and dedicated to the proposition that a world without violent conflict is possible, practical, and essential for US and global security. In conflict zones abroad, the Institute works with local partners to prevent, mitigate, and resolve violent conflict. To reduce future crises and the need for costly interventions, USIP works with governments and civil societies to build local capacities to manage conflict peacefully. The Institute pursues its mission by linking research, policy, training, analysis, and direct action to support to those who are working to build a more peaceful, inclusive world.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

George E. Moose (Chair), Adjunct Professor of Practice, The George Washington University • Judy Ansley (Vice Chair), Former Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor under George W. Bush • Jonathan Burks, Vice President, Global Public Policy, Walmart • Edward M. Gabriel, President and CEO, The Gabriel Company LLC • Stephen J. Hadley, Principal, Rice, Hadley, Gates & Manuel LLC • Kerry Kennedy, President, Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights • Jeremy A. Rabkin, Professor of Law, Antonin Scalia Law School, George Mason University • Nathalie Rayes, President and CEO, Latino Victory Project • Michael Singh, Managing Director, Washington Institute for Near East Policy • Mary Swig, President and CEO, Mary Green • Kathryn Wheelbarger, Vice President, Future Concepts, Lockheed Martin • Nancy Zirkin, Executive Vice President, Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

Members Ex Officio

Uzra Zeya, Under Secretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy, and Human Rights • Colin H. Kahl, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy • Michael T. Plehn, Lieutenant General, US Air Force; President, National Defense University • Lise Grande, President and CEO, United States Institute of Peace (nonvoting)

THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

Since 1991, the United States Institute of Peace Press has published hundreds of influential books, reports, and briefs on the prevention, management, and peaceful resolution of international conflicts. The Press is committed to advancing peace by publishing significant and useful works for policymakers, practitioners, scholars, diplomats, and students. In keeping with the best traditions of scholarly publishing, each work undergoes thorough peer review by external subject experts to ensure that the research, perspectives, and conclusions are balanced, relevant, and sound.

OTHER USIP PUBLICATIONS

- *China and Strategic Instability in Space: Pathways to Peace in an Era of US-China Strategic Competition* by Bruce W. MacDonald, Carla P. Freeman, and Alison McFarland (Special Report, February 2023)
- *Armed Actors and Environmental Peacebuilding: Lessons from Eastern DRC* by Judith Verweijen, Peer Schouten, and Fergus O'Leary Simpson (Peaceworks, November 2022)
- *Losing Facts to Fiction: Nationalism, Misinformation, and Conspiracy Theories in Pakistan* by Asfandyar Mir and Niloufer Siddiqui (Special Report, November 2022)
- *Maintaining International Religious Freedom as a Central Tenet of US National Security* by Knox Thames and Peter Mandaville (Special Report, October 2022)
- *Behavioral Science and Social Contact Peacemaking* by Josh Martin, Meghann Perez, and Ruben Grangaard (Peaceworks, October 2022)

UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

2301 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20037
(202) 457-1700
www.USIP.org