

## **China's Authoritarian Influence: Ambition and Scale Meet Open Doors and New Opportunities**

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### **Summary**

A. Facing stark economic difficulties, severe demographic problems, and increasing domestic unrest, China is reaching deeper into overseas communities to crush voices that oppose it. Amid new global dynamics, China's influence-building tactics are taking root in a more permissive international environment. As a result, China has moved beyond simply expanding its influence to trying to rewrite legal and normative systems around the world to its advantage, leaving democratic actors to contend with new vulnerabilities.

### **B. Key Trends in Chinese Foreign Authoritarian Influence:**

1. China is not only finding new ways to silence critics with violent threats and financial pressure but also eroding safeguards against transnational repression (TNR) in countries around the world. By exporting its model of policing and undermining international institutions like the UN, China is creating new democratic vulnerabilities to exploit against its critics.
2. The country makes use of its economic relationships to allow its companies to operate abroad with impunity, bypassing public accountability systems.
3. Beijing is no longer just exporting its surveillance systems abroad—it supplies an entire operating system for authoritarian governance, from hardware and infrastructure, to software, content, legal norms, and the personnel trained to operate it.

### **C. Projected Trends and Democratic Vulnerabilities for 26-30:**

1. China will become more brazen in its use of TNR as democracies struggle to counter its growing security reach.
2. Beijing's influence will grow as it continues to use the UN to promote its narratives and silence its critics, spread propaganda at scale through state media and content-sharing agreements with foreign media outlets, and co-opt religious communities to deflect criticism of domestic crackdowns.
3. Beijing will continue to prioritize building strategically beneficial economic relations that grant it control over key supply chains and leverage over partner countries' political decisions. It will also continue to commit human rights abuses, disregard environmental standards, and engage in corruption in order to maintain access to critical minerals around the world.

In 2023, while civilians were dying in Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and just days after the International Criminal Court issued a warrant for Putin's arrest, Xi Jinping shook

Putin's hand, telling him that the global order was undergoing changes "the likes of which we haven't seen for 100 years" and that the two of them were "driving these changes together."<sup>1</sup> The episode epitomized both Beijing's ambitious global agenda and the sorts of partners the CCP is willing to enlist to achieve its aims.

Even as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) appears to stride confidently on the world stage, however, it faces stark economic difficulties, severe demographic problems, and increasing social unrest within its borders.<sup>2</sup> To maintain its ironfisted rule domestically, the regime feels it must reach ever deeper into foreign societies to crush voices that oppose it and shape an external environment that will be more conducive to its authoritarian practices.

This coercive transnational pressure on those who might loosen the regime's grip at home effectively hinders democracy abroad as well. In just one example from April 2026, the Zambian government abruptly canceled RightsCon, the world's largest annual gathering of human rights and democracy advocates, following pressure from People's Republic of China (PRC) officials who were concerned about criticism from Taiwanese participants.<sup>3</sup>

Beijing's aggressive campaign for international influence has been on display for nearly a decade, but its tactics are currently being applied at scale amid new global dynamics: the weakening of international institutions and the rules-based order, geopolitical reconfiguration in the wake of major U.S. foreign policy changes, and rival visions for technology governance linked to rising great power competition. As its escalating authoritarian influence efforts encounter this new and often more permissive international landscape, the PRC is rapidly reshaping legal and normative modes of interaction around the world.

Democratic actors now confront the challenge of assessing the vulnerabilities created by Beijing's manipulation of systems that were designed to ensure transparency, accountability, and adherence to international law. They must work to understand how the CCP's authoritarian influence practices are evolving on the new international terrain, and use this understanding to design a successful democratic response.

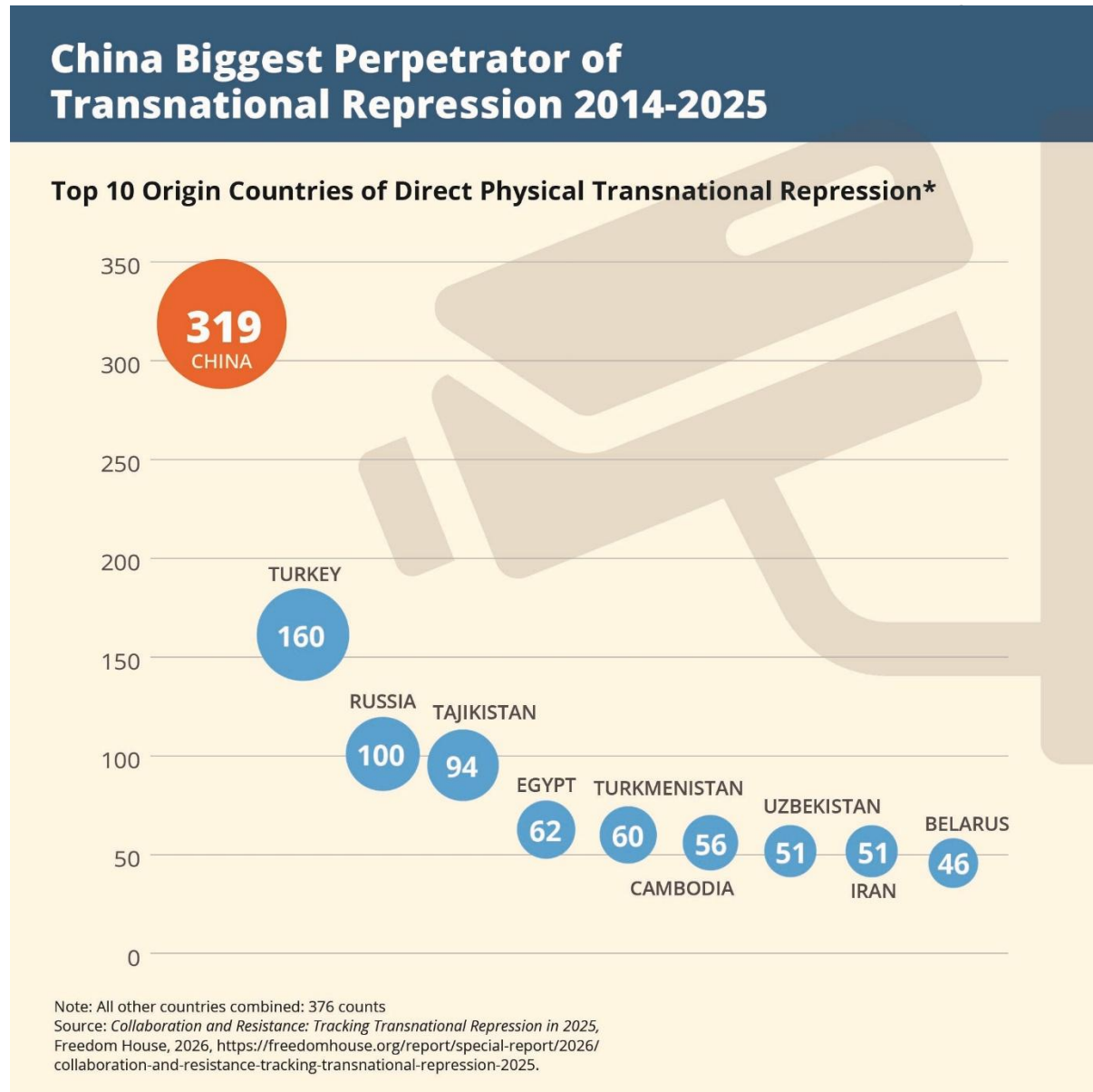
## **Exploiting the Openness of Democracies and International Institutions**

### **Violence, financial leverage, and technology enhance Beijing's transnational repression**

As the CCP has intensified its control over civil society in China over the last 10 to 15 years, many independent activists and journalists have moved overseas to continue their work.<sup>4</sup> Beijing has consequently pursued them, pouring enormous resources into transnational repression (TNR) operations that essentially internationalize its efforts to control dissent. These campaigns intimidate CCP critics living abroad as well as their China-based families, and they are often abetted by legal gaps in foreign countries that fail to recognize TNR for the blatant violation of sovereignty that it is.

According to Freedom House, the CCP is the world's most prolific perpetrator of TNR, accounting for more than 20 percent of the direct, physical incidents recorded between 2014 and 2025.<sup>5</sup> Historically, the TNR activities of PRC security services had been labor intensive and

geographically constrained.<sup>6</sup> Now, technological advances have allowed Beijing’s intimidation to traverse geographic barriers, enabling the surveillance of diaspora communities on an unprecedented scale. For example, a report by The Citizen Lab found that PRC operatives deployed customized malware through open-source Uyghur language software to surveil Uyghur human rights groups.<sup>7</sup> Separately, OpenAI disclosures have revealed that a ChatGPT account linked to PRC law enforcement was used to plan and document “cyber special operations,” including pro-CCP disinformation and smear campaigns targeting Beijing’s critics.<sup>8</sup>



PRC agents have also issued violent threats, and in some instances followed through on them. During CCP leader Xi Jinping’s visit to San Francisco for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in 2023, Beijing launched a massive operation involving numerous “united front” groups to harass, intimidate, and assault peaceful protesters,<sup>9</sup> including Tibetan activists calling for the preservation of Tibetan language and culture.<sup>10</sup> In another case, an office manager

at the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in London tracked dissidents, found their addresses, and discussed an alleged plan to hire members of criminal organizations living in the United Kingdom to physically attack a prodemocracy activist.<sup>11</sup> Online abuse campaigns against female dissidents—and male dissidents’ wives and daughters—also tend to take on an explicitly violent and sexual character.<sup>12</sup>

Beijing is increasingly using financial leverage to silence its overseas critics. Given the risk to their business interests in China, foreign financial institutions are complying with domestic PRC security laws that punish human rights defenders by closing their bank accounts, freezing their pension funds, and revoking their professional licenses.<sup>13</sup> For example, in 2020, HSBC froze the bank accounts of former Hong Kong legislator Ted Hui in order to comply with police orders under Hong Kong’s National Security Law.<sup>14</sup> An HSBC executive later told a UK parliamentary committee that his job was to “comply with the law,” not to “make moral or political judgments on these matters.”<sup>15</sup> The China Strategic Risks Institute has advised governments to define economic TNR in their national laws, and recommended that companies adopt special internal processes to respond to demands from foreign states that run afoul of international human rights principles.<sup>16</sup>

### **Foreign entities facilitate Beijing’s overseas law enforcement operations**

The PRC is extending its repressive policing efforts beyond its borders through two distinct but related means: weaponizing international law enforcement cooperation frameworks and conducting covert police operations abroad.

A recent report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace documented how Beijing has propagated the normative and intellectual foundations for its vision of state control around the world through expansive police training programs.<sup>17</sup> Between 2000 and 2025, PRC authorities trained up to 20,000 foreign police officers, including representatives from 82 percent of the world’s authoritarian regimes.<sup>18</sup> By integrating technical capacity-building with coercive tactics designed to protect an incumbent leadership’s political security, these programs normalize Beijing’s internal security model, which prioritizes control over speech and suppression of dissent. PRC law enforcement experts view these trainings and their multilateral Global Public Security Cooperation Forum as integral elements of a strategy to “actively promote a positive image of Chinese police”—despite their gross and systemic abuses of basic human rights and due process.<sup>19</sup>

## Most Countries Have Received Chinese Foreign Police Training

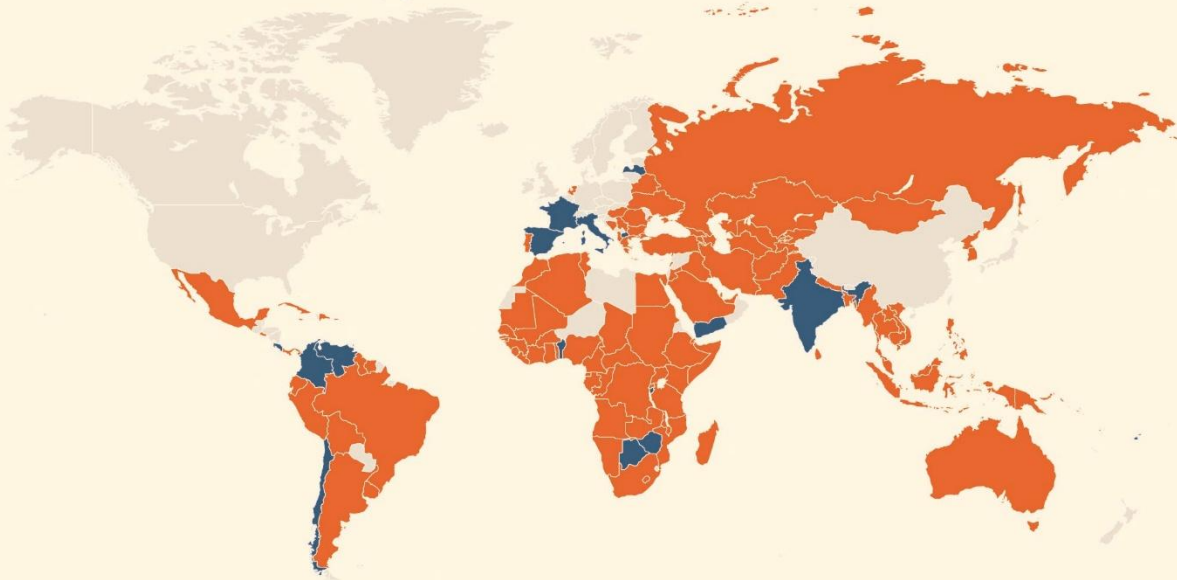
**138 countries** have received police training from China between 2000-2025. Of those, 114 have received bilateral training and 24 have only participated in multilateral training.

114

Bilateral training

24

Multilateral Training Only



Source: Sheena Chestnut Greitens, Isaac B. Kardon, and Cameron Waltz, "China's Foreign Police Training: A Global Footprint," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 13 November 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2025/11/chinas-foreign-police-training-a-global-footprint>

Beijing also sends law enforcement officers abroad to conduct illegal “persuasion to return” operations, in which PRC nationals are coerced into returning to China. The pressure campaigns often target victims’ family members, including children, and have included outright kidnapping.<sup>20</sup> Often weaponized against regime critics, persuasion to return operations extend the PRC authorities’ ability to monitor and neutralize overseas dissidents.<sup>21</sup> In 2022, Safeguard Defenders revealed that Beijing had established 102 police stations across 53 countries, some of them covertly, and others with explicit approval from the host government.<sup>22</sup> Although Beijing insists that these outposts merely perform administrative tasks, they have been used to conduct “persuasion to return” operations.<sup>23</sup>

Some governments have merely turned a blind eye to these operations, but others have deployed their own police forces to actively support them. In April 2026, a court in Kazakhstan sentenced 19 individuals who had taken part in a peaceful protest condemning the enforced disappearance of an ethnic Kazakh man in northwestern China’s Uyghur region.<sup>24</sup> Although the protesters had been detained at the scene and convicted of “petty hooliganism,” Kazakh authorities brought heavier charges against them just days after receiving a letter in which the PRC consulate called

the protest an “open provocation against the dignity of the PRC and an insult to the Communist Party of China and China’s leader.” Prosecutors cited the diplomatic letter in their decision to pursue the case. Kazakh police have also monitored members of the activist group responsible for the protest and detained other members for sharing footage of the protest on social media.<sup>25</sup>

When those arrested by host governments are foreign nationals, deportation is always a risk. In March 2026, under apparent pressure from Beijing, Malaysian authorities detained Uyghur religious scholar Abdulhakim Idris for 15 hours before deporting him to the United States, effectively preventing him from engaging with Malaysian civil society on Uyghur rights issues.<sup>26</sup> In the worst cases, the PRC has compelled states to deport Uyghurs back to China in violation of the international legal principle of nonrefoulement, which prohibits the return of individuals to situations in which inhumane treatment is likely. In February 2025, the Thai government defied the United Nations and U.S. lawmakers by repatriating more than 40 Uyghur men, portraying the forced returns as “family reunifications.”<sup>27</sup>

### **At the United Nations, Beijing reshapes human rights norms, funding, and leadership**

The UN human rights system, despite its flaws and uneven track record, has remained a source of credible condemnation for Beijing’s violations of international human rights law, with UN human rights bodies producing 146 communications to Beijing since 2018.<sup>28</sup>

Given that Xi Jinping has repeatedly claimed to support an international order with “the UN at its core,”<sup>29</sup> the UN system’s rebukes on human rights pose an awkward dilemma for Beijing. The regime has responded by deepening its engagement with the United Nations in order to reshape international human rights norms according to its preferences. For example, the PRC has worked behind the scenes to slash funding for the specific UN agencies in question.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, by boosting its overall UN staffing and financial contributions, Beijing has placed personnel in key leadership roles and injected the CCP’s authoritarian norms into the broader UN ecosystem.<sup>31</sup>

Beijing often introduces rights-eroding language into UN texts and debates to undermine established human rights norms and divert institutional capacity away from monitoring and accountability. For example, Chinese diplomats consistently insert language calling for human rights to be interpreted according to countries’ “national conditions,” thus weakening the universal standards that underpin frameworks like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.<sup>32</sup> Resolutions backed by the PRC have also tasked UN bodies with developing reports on “capacity-building in fostering mutually beneficial cooperation in promoting and protecting human rights.” These efforts have practical effects, diverting time and resources toward busywork and away from core watchdog functions, such as investigating abuses or promoting state accountability in countries such as Syria and North Korea.<sup>33</sup>

Beijing has also grown more assertive in UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) deliberations, coordinating with other authoritarian states to water down resolutions—particularly those that would strengthen civil and political rights, accountability mechanisms, or measures against TNR.<sup>34</sup>

PRC representatives have weaponized pseudo-independent CCP front organizations to shield authoritarian regimes at the UNHRC. These front organizations, sometimes referred to as government-organized nongovernmental organizations (GONGOs), use UN venues to intimidate prodemocracy advocates and shift criticism toward democracies. While their presence is not new, it has grown rapidly in recent years. CCP GONGO interventions at UNHRC sessions have surged sixteenfold since the initial U.S. withdrawal from the UNHRC in 2018.<sup>35</sup>

### **New PRC media models face weakened global competition**

Beijing is pouring enormous resources into its external propaganda infrastructure. Its new investments and adaptations come at a time when the United States has cut or suspended programs supporting hundreds of individuals and dozens of organizations that counter the CCP's false narratives, including news services, journalists, human rights defenders, and prodemocracy groups. In the absence of these independent actors, Beijing's media influence has grown unchecked. In Botswana, for example, the U.S. embassy reported in 2025 that—without U.S.-backed alternatives—Russia's Sputnik and the PRC's Xinhua were expected to become the country's main sources for international news.<sup>36</sup> Exploiting the vacuum left by that year's cuts to U.S. international news agencies, China Global Television Network announced an expansion to produce content in over 80 languages, and even began recruiting foreign journalists laid off by U.S. outlets.<sup>37</sup>

Since 2018, the PRC regime has also built nearly 150 “international communication centers”—entities run by Chinese provinces, cities, and counties to produce pro-CCP content and build partnerships with foreign media outlets.<sup>38</sup>

Meanwhile, Beijing is amplifying its foreign propaganda enterprise by enlisting young social media influencers to “tell China's story well.” In June 2025, *China Youth Daily* and the World Youth Development Forum launched the China–Global Youth Influencer Exchange Program. This initiative offered all-expenses-paid trips to prominent influencers in exchange for promoting a curated image of the country. The program was part of what appears to be a broader strategy of courting influencers from around the world. Throughout 2025, online content creators—including Kenyan comedians, Senegalese TikTokers, and the American live-streamers IShowSpeed and Hasan Piker—generated hundreds of millions of views from their trips to China.<sup>39</sup>

## **The Political and Legal Conditions of the PRC's Economic Relationships**

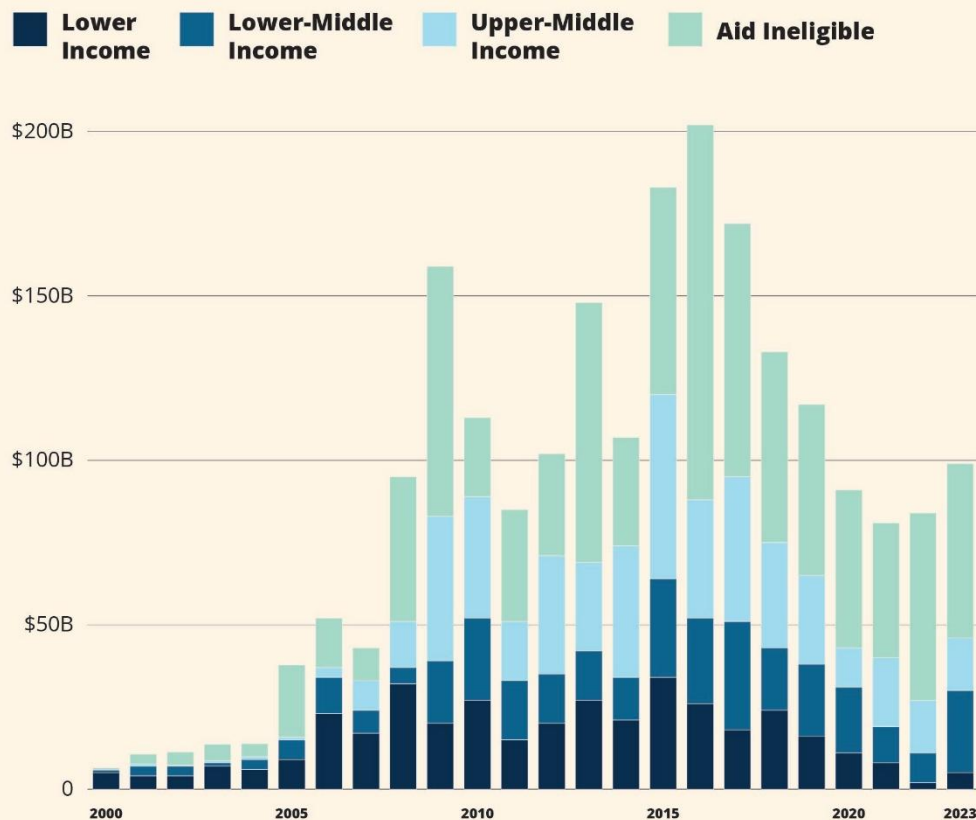
### **Economic ties with China can come with political strings attached and suppress public accountability**

While the United States since 2025 has increasingly sought to use tariffs as a tool to achieve its policy goals, the PRC has presented itself as a reliable guardian of free trade. As of mid-2026, Beijing was seeking to finalize at least 20 new trade deals, capitalizing on partner countries' unease with U.S. policy changes.<sup>40</sup> Economic ties with China are not inherently harmful, but they do expose democratic governments and prodemocracy actors to real risks. Beijing has repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to cut off normal commerce as a punishment for partner states that

criticize the CCP or take human rights actions against CCP interests. Although there are dozens of such cases, Lithuania, Australia, and Sweden serve as three examples of democracies that Beijing has recently targeted.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, Beijing has tried to market itself as steady partner for human development.<sup>42</sup> As the United States and Europe slashed foreign aid over the past two years, the PRC stepped in with modest but real funding that, in a few cases, mirrored the exact initiatives abandoned by the U.S. Agency for International Development just months earlier.<sup>43</sup>

## China Increasingly Provides Loans and Grants to Higher Income Countries



Note: Aid-ineligible countries refers to those with high incomes or who are otherwise ineligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA) through the OECD.  
Source: "China's Portfolio of Overseas Loans & Grants," AidData, <https://china.aiddata.org/>.

Despite these gestures, Beijing's overseas lending priorities are shifting away from the economic development and social welfare of recipient countries and toward the PRC's own economic competitiveness and national security. In recent years, PRC entities have diverted lending from poorer countries to richer ones; from big-ticket infrastructure to smaller, commercially viable projects; and from poverty reduction to strategic sectors such as technology and rare-earth minerals.<sup>44</sup> These changes are already underway, but they are set to accelerate following a December 2025 directive from Beijing's top economic agencies, which mandated that state

capital be synchronized with national security priorities.<sup>45</sup> When the geopolitical and commercial interests of both the PRC and host governments emphasize speed over regulatory enforcement, environmental, labor, and corruption-related abuses become inevitable. A recent report from the U.S. House of Representatives' Select Committee on China found that China's global network of mining companies engage in a wide range of rights abuses, including extortion, trafficking, loan sharking, contract manipulation, and the use of intimidation and violence.<sup>46</sup>

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### **PRC Mining Operations in Zambia: Speed over Safety, Opacity over Transparency**

The ways in which PRC corporate interests, Beijing's political interests, and local government complicity can align to harm civil society were on clear display last year in Zambia. After setting the ambitious goal of tripling copper production by 2033, Zambia became increasingly reliant on China-based partners to deliver the speed and scale necessary for such an expansion.<sup>47</sup> In February 2025, a dam failure at a Sino-Metals Leach Zambia mining facility devastated a river system that provided water for agriculture, industry, and human consumption, affecting 25 million people.<sup>48</sup> The authorities' decision to prioritize speed led them to overlook extreme negligence.

Sino-Metals Leach Zambia operated within the Zambia-China Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone, a special area designed to attract investment through tax breaks, limited regulatory oversight, and streamlined approvals, including for environmental reviews.<sup>49</sup> Despite long-standing warnings that tailings dams (large embankments used to contain mining waste) were being systematically mismanaged across Zambia's Copperbelt region, the Chinese company had chosen to store the waste from a new plant in one of these precarious structures.<sup>50</sup> Instead of building a new dam, the company raised an existing wall. After the containment project was finished, it was not subjected to routine inspections.<sup>51</sup> The dam was expanded again in 2022, even though a 2017 study had found that nearby groundwater was already contaminated.<sup>52</sup> The massive environmental, agricultural, and economic disaster ensued three years later.

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Beijing's overseas loans are also becoming more difficult to trace, with many transactions routed through shell companies in jurisdictions that are subject to strict banking secrecy laws.<sup>53</sup> This opacity prevents civil society activists from holding their governments accountable for potentially problematic terms and conditions attached to PRC loans, undermining a core pillar of democratic governance.

### **Exploiting liberal legal systems, the CCP applies its repressive standards abroad**

Since 2015, Beijing has enacted a growing number of laws that claim extraterritorial jurisdiction. These laws invoke a broad conception of national security to justify expanding the CCP regime's legal reach beyond its borders. When the PRC deems its wide-ranging national security interests to be at stake, the laws grant the authorities expansive jurisdiction over foreign nationals,

governments, and corporations. Statutes covering national security, intelligence, cybersecurity, and trade empower PRC officials to seize personal data, communications, and financial assets.<sup>54</sup>

Now, more than a decade later, PRC-affiliated entities have further exploited the more open and liberal legal systems of democracies to protect the reputation of the party-state and intimidate any civil society voices that push back. PRC firms are increasingly using host-country judicial systems to neutralize opposition to the CCP's overseas interests, particularly with respect to research that may trigger policy change. Employing local counsel, they initiate defamation suits and issue threatening legal letters with the aim of suppressing scrutiny and oversight. Nearly a dozen such incidents emerged between 2019 and 2025, with roughly half occurring in 2024–25.<sup>55</sup>

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### **Leveraging Open Legal Regimes to Silence Civil Society Transparency Efforts**

Following the February 2025 mining disaster, the Zambian media outlet News Diggers produced a documentary on the opportunities and environmental risks associated with PRC investment. When the outlet shared a teaser on Facebook, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce in Zambia secured an emergency injunction to block broadcasting. Neither the Chinese Chamber of Commerce nor the court conducted a prior review of the full film, but the court granted the injunction *ex parte*—denying News Diggers the right to formally respond. Although the case was later dismissed, it “cost News Diggers money it didn’t have,” according to the outlet’s editor in chief.<sup>56</sup> This pressure is not unique: an investigation by Inside Climate News found more than a dozen cases in which African journalists reporting on environmental or human rights harms caused by Chinese enterprises faced retaliation for their journalism, although it was unclear to what extent the Chinese government and local governments were involved in these repressive efforts.<sup>57</sup>

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## **Exporting Frontier Technology and Norms at Scale**

### **The PRC promotes an operating system for authoritarian repression**

Beijing is no longer just exporting its surveillance technology abroad. Today, the PRC supplies an entire operating system for authoritarian governance, from hardware and infrastructure to software, content, legal norms, and trained personnel.

PRC firms are selling increasingly sophisticated monitoring and censorship systems modeled on the PRC's domestic architecture to governments around the world. Most notably, the telecommunications firm Huawei has helped politicians in Uganda and Zambia access the phones of their opponents.<sup>58</sup> PRC cybersecurity firm Meiya Pico provided training on extracting data from phones and computers to foreign governments.<sup>59</sup> Another firm, Geedge Networks, founded by the “father of the Great Firewall,”<sup>60</sup> installed surveillance equipment directly into state-owned data centers, empowering the client governments to block websites, disable virtual

private networks (VPNs), and surveil users.<sup>61</sup> A September 2025 leak revealed that the Geedge dashboard was simultaneously monitoring 81 million internet connections in Burma alone.<sup>62</sup>

PRC-based providers are building on their long-running “smart city” partnerships to create “city brains”—powered by artificial intelligence (AI) systems—that integrate and centrally process data from across an entire city. Such a comprehensive, real-time surveillance apparatus poses an obvious threat to privacy rights and other individual liberties. PRC technology firms have exported “smart city” systems to governments in more than 80 countries to date, and in 2018, Kuala Lumpur became the first “city brain” outside of China.<sup>63</sup>

Beijing has helped rogue regimes build digital payment systems to evade sanctions. The United States and other democratic governments enforce sanctions in part by isolating banks from U.S. dollar clearing and the messaging system of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, or SWIFT. China’s e-CNY is a state-issued digital currency distributed via commercial banks and users’ digital wallets. Settling transactions directly in e-CNY allows sanctioned entities to trade outside traditional enforcement channels. Moreover, using Huawei technology and infrastructure, the military regime in Burma is now building its own digital currency, partly to bypass sanctions and insulate its transactions from external oversight.<sup>64</sup>

### **PRC-based AI models present censored information to global users**

The AI models developed by PRC-based companies are programmed to censor political content and advance CCP narratives,<sup>65</sup> and they are rapidly capturing the global market. Between 2024 and 2025, PRC AI models’ share of weekly global open-weight AI usage surged from 1.2 percent to 30 percent.<sup>66</sup> Fueled by government subsidies, training-data advantages, and efficient computation, these systems keep user costs 10 to 20 times lower than their foreign competitors.<sup>67</sup> To accelerate global adoption, Beijing bundles its AI systems with digital infrastructure offerings in emerging markets, and firms like Huawei are integrating the DeepSeek model into many of its leading products and devices.<sup>68</sup> Developers around the world—from cash-strapped start-ups to Fortune 500 companies—are now powering their applications with China’s AI models.<sup>69</sup>

Although skilled users can customize parameters to bypass CCP information guidance, most developers lack the resources or technical expertise to sufficiently disentangle their models from state-directed censorship priorities.<sup>70</sup> Of the 10 applications using PRC-based AI models that were tested by the China Media Project, none had successfully decoupled their systems from official censorship and propaganda.<sup>71</sup> This creates a global risk as the widely used PRC AI models subtly align with Beijing’s preferred narratives, mirroring CCP positions, for example, on the invasion of Ukraine, journalism, domestic Belgian and Kenyan politics, or human rights conditions in India, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia.<sup>72</sup>

### **Authoritarian states emulate Beijing on tech governance**

In addition to exporting techno-authoritarian tools, Beijing provides a governing template for global emulation. Repressive governments in countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe have enacted restrictive media and cybersecurity laws modeled on those in the PRC.<sup>73</sup> Russia’s state-controlled MAX application mirrors China’s WeChat, integrating a messaging

platform with government services, health care, and education under direct state oversight.<sup>74</sup> Iran's Supreme Council of Cyberspace performs the same role as China's Cyberspace Administration on an institutional level and has used PRC-supplied technology to suppress dissent.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, as Washington disengages from UN technical bodies, other democracies have failed to fill the vacuum, allowing CCP officials to secure top leadership positions. Within the International Telecommunication Union, Beijing is increasingly proposing internet protocols that are designed to help governments more easily monitor and block online content.<sup>76</sup> In December 2025, China outbid the United States to host the 2027 World Radiocommunications Conference, thus securing a critical opportunity to steer international telecommunications standards toward its censorship-friendly model and export its domestic digital architecture.<sup>77</sup>

## Projecting Trends for 2026–30

If Beijing's recent innovations and emerging practices are any guide, the following trends are likely to prevail over the next five years, presenting serious challenges for vulnerable democracies and civil society organizations seeking to counter authoritarian influence:

- **Beijing's TNR will become more brazen and consequential in vulnerable democracies.** With the assistance of AI tools, the CCP's TNR efforts will become more digitally sophisticated. The PRC will also utilize economic and lawfare tactics to target activists abroad. If host governments are unwilling to proactively prevent TNR, support victims, or impose costs on Beijing, its campaigns will only grow more aggressive. Chinese international students and diaspora communities already bear the brunt of Beijing's covert efforts, but if they feel unsupported or stigmatized, they may fail to report TNR incidents to host-country law enforcement authorities.
- **The PRC will attempt to sway international religious organizations.** As suggested by Beijing's targeted TNR operations against Uyghur religious figures, the PRC is likely to persecute other religious minority groups both at home and abroad. As the 14th Dalai Lama, currently 90, announces further details on the future of his institution, the CCP regime will seek to counter the authorized succession process and build acceptance in the international community for its preferred, illegitimate Dalai Lama. Similarly, to deflect criticism of its domestic crackdowns, Beijing will ramp up efforts to co-opt Muslim and Christian communities.
- **Countering Beijing's extraterritorial security claims will grow more challenging.** As the PRC's bilateral security relationships deepen, Beijing may more explicitly demand that partner governments comply with its political objectives, ensuring that their territory is not a safe haven for activities deemed detrimental to the CCP. Meanwhile, the regime will continue to use laws asserting extraterritorial jurisdiction to pursue its political interests abroad, and PRC companies will resort to time-consuming and expensive defamation lawsuits to silence their local critics.

- **CCP narratives will reach wider audiences as competitors struggle to keep pace.** Beijing's preferred narratives will gain traction around the world, not just through flagship state media outlets like Xinhua and CGTN, but through content-sharing partnerships with foreign outlets, journalist and social media influencer exchanges, and the subtle discourse guidance embedded in PRC-based AI tools.
- **Beijing will use the United Nations and related bodies to promote CCP narratives, silence dissent, and project stability.** As Beijing seeks to reshape human rights norms in its favor, it will continue to defund UN oversight bodies, install CCP personnel in leadership positions, inject authoritarian ideology into international frameworks, and deploy front organizations to silence dissent.
- **The PRC leadership will leverage economic engagement to achieve geopolitical goals.** Beijing will continue to prioritize building strategically beneficial economic relations that grant it control over key supply chains and leverage over partner countries' political decisions. China's growing economic power will serve as a force multiplier for the CCP's sharp power, motivating governments to overlook TNR incidents and PRC policing on their territory. Beijing is also likely to continue to commit human rights abuses, disregard environmental standards, and engage in corruption in order to maintain access to critical minerals around the world.<sup>78</sup>

If even some of these trends materialize in the coming years, democratic actors will be hard pressed to coordinate an effective response. In addition to addressing their own legal, institutional, and policy vulnerabilities, democracies must work together to help other states and international bodies do the same. A successful strategy must also go beyond defensive measures and devote attention to the domestic concerns that have long motivated the CCP's influence efforts abroad. The countless activists and intellectuals working for a more just China deserve our support.

<sup>1</sup> "China's Xi Tells Putin of 'Changes Not Seen for 100 Years,'" Al Jazeera, 22 March 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/22/xi-tells-putin-of-changes-not-seen-for-100>.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin Slaten, "Protests Appear to Be Increasing in China. What Can We Learn from Them?," Freedom House, 14 August 2025, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/protests-appear-be-increasing-china-what-can-we-learn-them>.

<sup>3</sup> Victoria Elliott and Zeyi Yang, "The Chinese Government Just Got the World's Largest Digital Rights Conference Canceled," *Wired*, 1 May 2026, <https://www.wired.com/story/the-chinese-government-pressured-zambia-to-cancel-the-worlds-largest-digital-rights-conference/>.

<sup>4</sup> "The Major Questions About China's Foreign NGO Law Are Now Settled," The China NGO Project, 8 August 2022, <https://www.chinafile.com/ngo/latest/major-questions-about-chinas-foreign-ngo-law-are-now-settled>; William Yang, "Why Are Foreign Journalists Fleeing China?," Deutsche Welle, 4 January 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/why-are-foreign-journalists-fleeing-china/a-57075732>.

<sup>5</sup> Yana Gorokhovskaia and Grady Vaughan, *Collaboration and Resistance: Tracking Transnational Repression in 2025*, Freedom House, 2026, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2026/collaboration-and-resistance-tracking-transnational-repression-2025>.

<sup>6</sup> *China: Transnational Repression Origin Country Case Study*, Freedom House, 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/transnational-repression/china>.

<sup>7</sup> Rebekah Brown et al., *Weaponized Words: Uyghur Language Software Hijacked to Deliver Malware*, The Citizen Lab, 28 April 2025, <https://citizenlab.ca/research/uyghur-language-software-hijacked-to-deliver-malware/>.

<sup>8</sup> *Disrupting Malicious Uses of Our Models: An Update, February 2026*, OpenAI, February 2026, <https://cdn.openai.com/pdf/df438d70-e3fe-4a6c-a403-ff632def8f79/disrupting-malicious-uses-of-ai.pdf>.

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<sup>9</sup> The “united front” refers to a group of organizations linked to the CCP that seek to expand the party’s influence and advance its goals. For more, see *The Party Speaks for You: Foreign Interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front System*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 9 June 2020, <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you/>.

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