



IRI'S COUNTERING FOREIGN AUTHORITARIAN INFLUENCE PRACTICE



IRI's Building Resiliency for Interconnected Democracies in Global Environments (BRIDGE) report, released in 2019, offers an unprecedented look into the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) influence tactics and their effect on 13 democracies. IRI is building on this initial compilation, working with experts on the ground in seven more countries to document China's increasingly aggressive approach and successful efforts to counter it. Strong democratic institutions—for example, a robust independent media—can provide a bulwark against CCP interference and contribute to its retreat.

IRI's Approach

Foreign authoritarian actors like China, Russia, and Iran are taking an increasingly aggressive approach to exerting influence in democracies around the world, efforts recently expanded under the cover of COVID-19 response. Utilizing economic leverage, information operations, and an expanding digital toolkit, these repressive states are bolstering autocrats and contributing to the erosion of democracy.

To aid vulnerable countries in the fight for freedom, IRI has developed programs that equip civil society, the media, government officials, political parties and the private sector with the knowledge and tools to expose and counter foreign authoritarian influence.

IRI takes a three-step approach to countering foreign authoritarian influence:

1. **Researching** foreign authoritarian influence and its impact on vulnerable democracies.
2. **Sharing** that research through tailored engagements with IRI's global network of partners on the ground.
3. **Equipping** these stakeholders with tools and resources to bolster democratic resilience and "go on offense" to counter foreign authoritarian interference.

The **BRIDGE Initiative** utilizes extensive case study research into China's influence efforts, training, and support for innovative programming to equip IRI's partners to inoculate their own countries against CCP malign influence. In 2020, IRI is sharing BRIDGE case studies on more than 20 countries with partners at workshops across Latin America, Africa, Europe, and Asia.

The **Beacon Project** conducts extensive quantitative and qualitative public opinion research and media-monitoring using its proprietary >versus< tool focusing on vulnerabilities to disinformation narratives in Central-Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans, among others. IRI uses this data to inform policymakers and develop integrated responses.

China

The CCP is increasingly corroding democracies around the world. Opaque deals struck by Chinese government-linked entities exacerbate corruption, saddle countries with debt, and give Beijing control over crucial local infrastructure and natural resources. The CCP advances its interests by manipulating local narratives through information operations, interfering in political processes, and promoting an authoritarian governance model.

Russia

The Kremlin is sowing discord throughout Europe, North America, and South America with online disinformation campaigns, state-sponsored propaganda and the exploitation of social fissures. Under Vladimir Putin, these tactics have become a hallmark of Russia's foreign policy, threatening social cohesion, governance, and the integrity of democratic elections.

Iran

Iran uses proxies, corruption, and misinformation to assert its sectarian interests across the Middle East. The degree of Iranian reach varies – ranging from a core feature of Lebanese power sharing to just one side of a complex competition in Iraq.

Examples from IRI's work in Countering Authoritarian Influence

Latin America

- IRI has conducted in-depth studies of CCP interference in Ecuador and Panama. Later this year, IRI will hold in Ecuador the first of many training workshops for partners across LAC.

Eurasia

- Field offices in Ukraine have been at the forefront of IRI's approach to countering foreign influence in the region. IRI is researching CCP influence in Georgia.

Middle East

- In Iraq, IRI projects seek to counter Iran's influence in the region by supporting emerging civic and political actors who are motivated to reveal and resist Iran's disinformation campaigns across the region, while producing counternarratives that resonate locally. IRI is also researching China's growing influence in Tunisia.

Africa

- In the Gambia, IRI programming has armed civil society and journalists with critical knowledge and skills to implement stronger oversight into federal budget processes, preventing exploitation by authoritarian countries seeking to buy influence. IRI is expanding BRIDGE case studies across Africa and later this year will hold in Kenya the first of many training workshops for the growing network of stakeholders across Africa seeking to counter CCP interference in their countries.

Europe

- IRI is using the >versus< media monitoring tool to scrape thousands of online media sources in the local languages of 13 countries. IRI provides access to >versus< free of charge to our partners in Europe, along with training on how to research the spread and impact of malign narratives in political discourse. BRIDGE workshops in Serbia and Poland have set a foundation for future work countering CCP influence with partners across Europe.

Asia

- IRI presented findings on CCP influence to partners in the Maldives, inviting Sri Lankan and Malaysian stakeholders to share successes in countering China's tactics in their countries. IRI is also working with local partners to monitor and document CCP disinformation and cyber-attacks in Taiwan. In Burma, IRI is building the capacity of state and regional governments to counter malign foreign influence. IRI convened in Delhi a global network of activists, journalists, artists, and influencers working to expose and counter CCP interference activities in their countries, who developed project ideas that IRI is funding.

INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE

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