



GLOBAL THOUGHT WORK

# Case Studies on PRC Influence in Africa's Information Space

NIGERIA • GHANA • ETHIOPIA

## Global Thought Work: Case Studies on PRC Influence in Africa's Information Space

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## Acknowledgements

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## About the CFAI Initiative

Over the past four years, IRI has developed and implemented a framework to build resiliency against growing foreign authoritarian influence and interference through its Countering Foreign Authoritarian Influence (CFAI) practice. IRI's CFAI work uses a three-pronged approach to mitigate the impact of authoritarian influence on developing democracies:

1. Researching malign actors such as the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Kremlin and their 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 to foreign authoritarian influence.

By engaging stakeholders across sectors — including government officials, political parties, media, private enterprise, and civil society activists — IRI's work promotes broad awareness of authoritarian tactics and the keys to shoring up vulnerable democratic institutions. The research presented in this report is part of a growing compendium of case studies documenting the CCP's varied authoritarian influence tactics across countries and the elements of effective democratic resilience, which directly informs IRI CFAI programming.

## Glossary: Key Terms and Abbreviations

**Belt and Road Initiative:** A global development strategy adopted by the Chinese government involving infrastructure development and investments across Asia, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and the Americas. The projects and methods of investment could serve to strengthen China's strategic economic and security interests and solidify a global order centered more firmly around Beijing.

**Chinese Communist Party:** The founding and ruling political party of the People's Republic of China.

**Disinformation:** False or misleading information deliberately spread to influence opinion, deceive, or obscure the truth.

**Economic Influence:** The use of economic assets to shape incentive structures and the behavior of foreign governments.

**Elite Capture:** A form of corruption in which public officials and national elites manage or direct government projects in a manner that enables them to misdirect resources for their own personal financial gain to the detriment of the public.

**Foreign Direct Investment:** An investment made by a firm or individual in one country in business interests located in another country; this sometimes refers to the aggregation of all foreign investments into or from a particular country.

**Information Operation:** The planned use or manipulation of information to influence the emotions, motives, objective reasoning and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups of people, and individuals.<sup>1</sup>

**Information Space:** Platforms/mediums through which information and perceptions are shared, distributed, and shaped in both public and private spaces.

**Malign Foreign Authoritarian Influence:** The combined effect of an authoritarian government's efforts to shape another country's internal disputation in ways in which are covert, coercive, and corrupt, which makes them malign, illegitimate, and distinguished from legitimate public diplomacy and engagement. To these ends, authoritarian actors and state-linked entities employ tactics such as information operations, graft, economic coercion, or the subversion of civil society.

**Sharp Power:** The means by which authoritarian actors manipulate their target influence audience by distorting the information that reaches them. 'Sharp power' pierces the information environment of target countries, weakening them by deterring legitimate debate in civil society and academia with implied threats of economic or political retribution.<sup>2</sup>

**Sovereign Debt:** The amount of money that a government has borrowed, either in international lending markets or directly from a bilateral lending partner, typically issued as bonds denominated in a reserve currency

**State-owned Enterprise:** A legal entity that is created by a government in order to partake in commercial activities on the government's behalf. China's SOEs, among the largest and most powerful in the world, are responsible for a large portion of BRI activity.

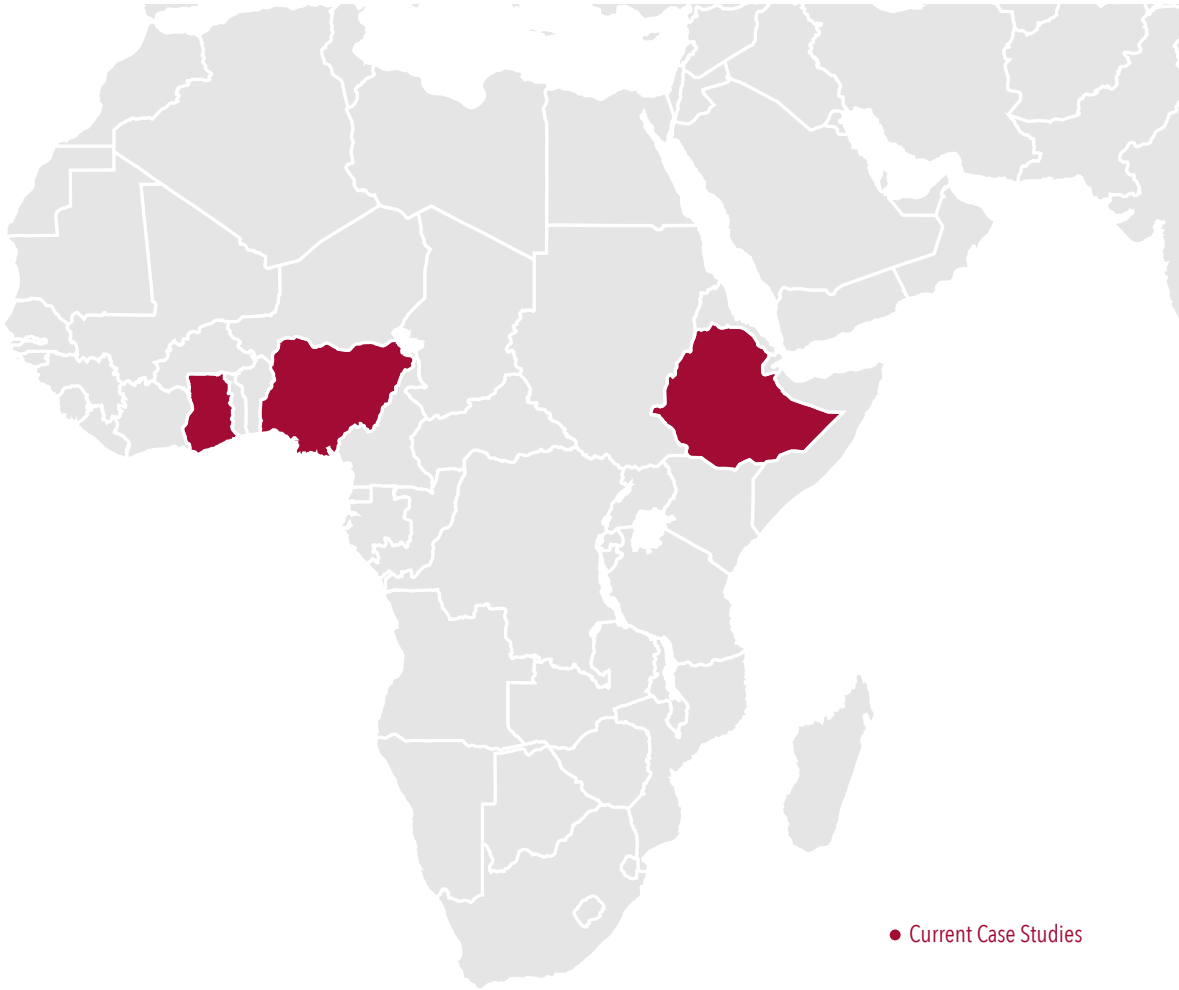
<sup>1</sup> Theohary, C. "Information Warfare: Issues for Congress" Congressional Research Service. 5 March 2018. [fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45142.pdf/](https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R45142.pdf/).

<sup>2</sup> Walker, C. "What is 'Sharp Power'?" Journal of Democracy Volume 29 Number 3, July 2018. [ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/what-is-sharp-power-christopher-walker-journal-of-democracy-july-2018.pdf/](https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/what-is-sharp-power-christopher-walker-journal-of-democracy-july-2018.pdf/).

## Common Acronyms

<b>CATTF:</b>	China-Africa Think Tank Forum
<b>CCP:</b>	Chinese Communist Party
<b>CI:</b>	Confucius Institute
<b>CITCC:</b>	China International Telecommunication Construction Corporation
<b>DTT:</b>	Digital terrestrial television
<b>EFCC:</b>	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
<b>EIA:</b>	Ethiopian Investment Agency
<b>ENA:</b>	Ethiopian News Agency
<b>EPRDF:</b>	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
<b>FDI:</b>	Foreign Direct Investment
<b>FOCAC:</b>	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
<b>GIBA:</b>	Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association
<b>GNA:</b>	Ghana News Agency
<b>ICC:</b>	International Commercial Court
<b>INSA:</b>	Information Network Security Agency
<b>IMF:</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>IRI:</b>	International Republican Institute
<b>MPSA:</b>	Master Project Support Agreement
<b>MoU:</b>	Memorandum of Understanding
<b>NDC:</b>	National Democratic Congress
<b>NEPC:</b>	Nigerian Export Promotion Council
<b>NICTIB 11:</b>	National Information and Communications Technology Infrastructure Backbone Phase 11
<b>NIIA:</b>	Nigerian Institute of International Affairs
<b>NIS:</b>	Nigeria's Immigration Service
<b>NPP:</b>	New Patriot Party
<b>PLA:</b>	People's Liberation Army
<b>PP:</b>	Propensity Party
<b>PRC:</b>	People's Republic of China
<b>RSF:</b>	Reporters Without Border
<b>SERAP:</b>	Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project
<b>SOE:</b>	State-owned enterprise
<b>UN:</b>	United Nations
<b>ZTE:</b>	Zhongxing Telecommunication Equipment Corporation

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## INTRODUCTION

Among the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) innovations in authoritarian governance, perhaps nothing stands out so much as its dedication to pursuing what it calls "thought work." Quite simply, thought work means that it is the party's job to inculcate in its people a "correct" view about politics and society—one that recognizes the necessity and the wisdom of the party's leadership, as well as its decisions (regardless of those decisions' actual effects). In this view, power, action, and thought are inseparable. The party's power over everything from the economy to the military exists to allow it to take the actions that lead to "correct" thought.

While the CCP's desire to control thought is by no means unique among authoritarian regimes, the party has set itself apart from other oppressive governments like Russia and Iran by the potency of the systems it has built to make sure that only the CCP-approved version of reality finds any broader purchase within People's Republic of China (PRC) public discourse. Thought work is foundational to CCP rule, and is built into virtually every aspect of its governance—from its formidable internet-censorship regime, to its education system, to security and policing, to tech policy regulation—with results that can range from disconcerting to fearsome. One example is the current plight of Xinjiang's Uyghurs, which expert outside observers have described as a genocide. The Uyghurs' waking nightmare is the natural result of the CCP's belief in thought work taken to its extreme, using the party's overlapping systems of control to erase the very beliefs that make Uyghurs a distinct people, replacing them with a "correct" set of beliefs more amenable to a "modern" citizen of the People's Republic of China.

Now, more than ever before, the party's thought work is global. As the PRC's global footprint grows, the tools and systems it uses to effect thought work at home now have a growing presence in other countries' information ecosystems, bringing with them many of the CCP's habits of intellectual control. This is increasingly by design: the CCP under Xi Jinping has made clear that it believes in the utility of the "China model" for other countries, and is more willing and able than ever to share the fruits of "Chinese wisdom" with other developing countries. The party's desire to share its "unique" governance experience with African countries is more than an olive branch in its development-assistance toolkit; it is a central element in the PRC's strategy for engagement with Africa.

This report is an attempt to map the risks inherent to this growing interchange in three of Africa's most important countries: Ghana, Nigeria and Ethiopia. The three sit on a spectrum, from a vibrant, successful democracy (Ghana) to an increasingly illiberal regime that has been described as the CCP's "best pupil" in Africa (Ethiopia). The PRC's deep engagement in Africa in many ways predates its significant engagement with other parts of the developing world; the tactics used by CCP in these countries may therefore be a useful preview of the shape of future PRC influence throughout other parts of the global south. This report adopts the conventions of "thought work" in mapping PRC influence on the three countries' information environments, taking into account the fact that economic leverage, academic exchanges, and direct engagement with ruling party elites can often be just as potent as control of media outlets or digital platforms as tools to influence how Africa speaks about and perceives China.

The picture that emerges is disquieting. Even in a robust democracy like Ghana, the PRC has gained significant footholds in its ability to influence both public discourse and the normal functioning of a sovereign democratic government, in ways that appear to undermine the government's commitment to transparency and accountability before its citizenry. In Nigeria, the president's office has openly sought the aid of the PRC's primary internet-censorship organ, seeking advice on how to "manage" the country's unruly online discourse. And in Ethiopia, the CCP has invested significant time and energy in training the ruling party on the methods that it uses to manage PRC society, rewarding and reinforcing the authoritarian habits of the country's single ruling party.

Perhaps most importantly, the report reveals that PRC economic engagement cannot be cleanly separated from its effect on a country's information ecosystem. Growing economic entanglement with China almost inevitably carries the risk of corresponding impacts on free discourse. As within China, "thought work," power and action are inextricably intertwined, with the PRC displaying little hesitancy to use its economic relationships with other countries as leverage to discourage critical discourse, or to encourage the authoritarian tendencies of would-be dictators. Perhaps counterintuitively, this report suggests that the best way to understand the PRC's potential impact on the liberty to speak freely is not by examining the front pages, but by examining the deals made behind closed doors in the halls of power.

It is therefore both encouraging and not entirely unexpected that the report illustrates the fact that emerging African democracies possess significant potential resilience in the face of this growing peril. Across the continent, a growing community of civil society, academics, journalists and political activists is demanding that its governments leave behind the corrupt, unaccountable politics of the past and answer more fully the demand of their citizenry for policies that benefit more than just a select few. This gives real reason for hope as these countries seek to navigate their relationships with a rising China. The PRC's power is growing but is not limitless, and can be both constrained and turned toward more constructive ends by the peoples of emerging democratic Africa. While outside democracies can and should do everything in their power to assist these groups, this report demonstrates clearly that the true hope for African's democratic future lies not without the continent, but within.

## NIGERIA

The most populous country in Africa, an emerging market, and home to strategic natural resources, Nigeria is of considerable importance to China and its economic and political ambitions in Africa. While the two countries established official relations in 1971, it wasn't until 2000 that the relationship between them began to flourish, when Nigeria joined the first Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).<sup>1</sup> Since that time, both economic and people-to-people ties between the two countries have grown significantly, in what China has characterized as a "win-win" partnership.

China's push for increased engagement in Nigeria is primarily motivated by three things: China's need to secure reliable sources of raw materials to fuel its growing economy, its desire to raise its global political influence, and Nigeria's potential as a major export market for Chinese goods. For Nigeria, China's infrastructure investments and trade ties have offered welcome opportunities – and financing – for economic development and to diversify the economy away from dependence on natural resources.

Engagement over the last two decades has been comprehensive, as Sino-Nigerian cooperation has spread throughout the economic, education, and media sectors. Trade between the two countries increased 650 percent between 2003 and 2018.<sup>2</sup> Chinese-built roads and rail lines now crisscross the country. Cultural and educational exchanges abound, with nearly 7,000 Nigerians studying in China and Confucius Institutes or cultural centers at Nigeria's leading universities. China has penetrated both Nigeria's media space and its foremost entertainment industry, Nollywood.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, relations between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Nigeria's ruling elite are growing closer, and in 2021, President Muhammadu Buhari appeared to be taking increasing inspiration, –and even direct assistance– from the CCP as he worked to establish tighter control over Nigerian society, particularly online discourse.

These investments, however, have not always been "win-win," causing strains in the burgeoning relationship. Nigerians are increasingly raising concerns about China's impact on everything from displacing domestic industry and employment to exacerbating already-endemic corruption and undermining information integrity. The crux of citizen concerns, expressed by both civil society and by a growing number of politicians outside of the elite business and political circles that personally benefit from China's investment, relate to the opaque nature of China's investment, and if and how it appears to be undermining democratic processes and institutions in the country.

### Economic Influence

Sino-Nigerian economic relations have grown significantly since the first ministerial gathering of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000. Trade, focused principally on Nigeria's export of crude oil to China and Nigeria's import of manufactured goods, increased from \$1.86 billion in 2003 to an estimated \$20 billion in 2019.<sup>4</sup> The trade balance runs heavily in China's favor, with a total trade surplus of \$17.5 billion from 2015 to 2018.<sup>5</sup> Beyond trade, the most salient element of the economic partnership is China's state-directed investment in major infrastructure and industrial projects, as Nigeria has increasingly looked to China for access to capital to fund crucial development needs.

<sup>1</sup> Halidu, Agaba, "Assessment Of Nigeria In The Forum On China-Africa Cooperation(FOCAC)," IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science, vol. 26, no. 8, August 2021, pp. 45-52

<sup>2</sup> Oshodi, Abdul-Gafar Tobi, "Nigeria and China: Understanding the imbalanced relationship, The Africa Report, 1 June 2020, <https://www.theafricareport.com/29060/nigeria-and-china-understanding-the-imbalanced-relationship/>.

<sup>3</sup> Halidu. "Assessment Of Nigeria In The Forum On China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC)," Odoh, Innocent. "Startimes invests \$220m in Nigeria as subscribers reach 4m." BusinessDay, 23 May 2019, <https://businessday.ng/uncategorized/article/startimes-invests-220m-in-nigeria-as-subscribers-reach-4m/>.

<sup>4</sup> Oshodi, Abdul-Gafar Tobi and Ufo Okeke Uzodike, "Fifty years, five problems – and how Nigeria can work with China in future," The Conversation, 13 April 2021, <https://theconversation.com/fifty-years-five-problems-and-how-nigeria-can-work-with-china-in-future-157254>.

<sup>5</sup> Oshod et al. "Fifty years, five problems – and how Nigeria can work with China in future."



President Xi Jinping and Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari at a signing ceremony in 2016 at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing (Photo by Kenzaburo Fukuhara / Stringer)

Since 2002, China has provided \$6.5 billion in loans for 17 critical infrastructure projects in Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> As part of the financing deals Chinese companies are awarded the contracts without any known public bidding,<sup>7</sup> raising serious concerns about the nature of loans and the transparency of the procurement process. In 2018 alone, figures provided by the PRC embassy in Abuja indicated that Chinese companies were awarded 175 contracts in the country, totaling \$17 billion.<sup>8</sup>

Such contracts have expanded under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which Nigeria officially joined in 2019, and Chinese companies are increasingly present in the Nigerian market. As of 2019, Nigeria was host to over 140 Chinese companies, including 70 construction companies, 40 investment firms, and 30 trading companies.<sup>9</sup> Among notable BRI projects financed and developed by China are the \$876 million Abuja-Kaduna railway,<sup>10</sup> \$1.5 billion Lagos-Ibadan railway,<sup>11</sup> \$1.2 billion Kano-Kaduna railway,<sup>12</sup> and \$600 million airport terminals in Abuja, Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Kano, in addition to investments in Nigeria's ICT and electricity infrastructure. The cost-effectiveness of these projects seems high at the outset, due to cheap cost of labor and funding arrangements.<sup>13</sup> However, in the long term these projects have come at higher cost than anticipated, as they have not generated anticipated local economic growth.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Adebayo, Taiwo-Hassan. "Exclusive: Inside China's \$6.5 billion loans to Nigeria since 2002." Premium Times, November 1, 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/360523-exclusive-inside-chinas-6-5-billion-loans-to-nigeria-since-2002.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Amaefule, Everest. "Chinese Firms Handling \$47bn key FG's Projects." Punch Nigeria, 29 August 2019. <https://punchng.com/chinese-firms-handling-47bn-key-fgs-projects/>.

<sup>8</sup> Eburnike, Nwachukwu. "Belt and Road Initiative projects ramp up Nigeria's favourable perception of China," Global Voices, 7 June 2021, <https://globalvoices.org/2021/06/07/belt-and-road-initiative-projects-ramp-up-nigerias-favourable-perception-of-china/>.

<sup>9</sup> Eburnike. "Belt and Road Initiative projects ramp up Nigeria's favourable perception of China."

<sup>10</sup> "Passengers Lament Over Abuja-Kaduna Rail Service." Infrastructure News, 30 August 2021. <http://infrastructurenews.ng/passengers-lament-over-abuja-kaduna-rail-service/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Nigeria Secures \$1.5 billion Chinese Loan for Lagos-Ibadan Rail." Africa News, 3 February 2017. <https://www.africanews.com/2017/02/03/nigeria-secures-15-billion-chinese-loan-for-lagos-ibadan-rail/>.

<sup>12</sup> Olurounbi, Ruth. "Nigeria Plans \$1.2 Billion Railway Linking Kano, Kaduna in North." Bloomberg, 2 July 2021. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-07-02/nigeria-plans-1-2-billion-railway-linking-kano-kaduna-in-north>.

<sup>13</sup> Amaefule, Everest. "Chinese Firms Handling \$47bn key FG's Projects." Punch Nigeria, 29 August 2019.

<sup>14</sup> Rosen, Daniel, "One Belt-One Road Project." Columbia School of International and Public Affairs, Spring 2019. <https://www.sipa.columbia.edu/academics/capstone-projects/one-belt-one-road-project>.

China's investment has been well-received, and in fact courted, by Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari and his inner circle, as a means to consolidate power. As noted during a September 2019 meeting with Yang Jiechi, a Politburo Standing Committee Member and Director of the Central Foreign Affairs Commission of the CCP, "now that we have a government in place, we know the provision of infrastructure is very important. It provides job opportunities and economic sustainability which are very important for political stability."<sup>15</sup> In spite of President Buhari's pronouncements, however, the projects have not provided the expected dividends, and the opaque nature through which the projects were tendered and financed appears to not only have been in violation of Nigerian law but also contributed to systemic corruption among Nigeria's political and business elite, as discussed below. Moreover, investments in natural resources extraction, have had a detrimental impact on the environment and further undermined already fragile governance in affected communities.

### Corruption

As in other countries, the PRC approach to infrastructure lending has resulted in opacity that may foster corruption, undermine international lending best practices, and subvert democratic accountability for the allocation of public funds.<sup>16</sup> Infrastructure projects financed by the Export-Import Bank of China are awarded to Chinese companies as part of the terms and conditions of the contract, rather than being subject to open tenders.<sup>17</sup> Many of the loans do not also conform to Paris Club standards, raising concerns about sustainable debt relief for Nigeria. Few details are available about the content of Nigeria's loan agreements with China, but the opaque nature in which they are negotiated indicate pricing and other terms could be uncompetitive. The confidentiality and non-concessionary nature of many of the PRC's loans to Nigeria violate the terms of the country's Fiscal Responsibility Act, which mandates open tenders and restricts new government sovereign debt to that obtained on concessionary terms.<sup>18</sup>

The veil of secrecy surrounding lending agreements with China can undermine efforts to promote government transparency and accountability, facilitate corruption, and fuel distrust in Nigeria's government. Exacerbating this secrecy is the Buhari Administration regular practice of bypassing the Bureau of Public Procurement and Debt Management Office and seemingly all existing laws and regulations governing public procurement when negotiating and approving agreements with China, instead granting this authority to the Federal Executive Council, comprised of the Cabinet.<sup>19</sup> The drivers of this practice and the extent of China's involvement are not clear, but it has allowed his government to engage with China with limited public oversight. This potentially enabling environment is particularly concerning given that several of the large PRC SOEs undertaking major infrastructure projects in Nigeria were blacklisted by the World Bank for violating the Bank's procurement fraud guidelines.<sup>20</sup>

Separately, Chinese companies in Nigeria have engaged in corruption directly, sometimes in ways that directly undermine Nigerian anti-corruption agencies. On May 11, 2020, the Sokoto Zonal Office of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria's anti-graft agency, arrested two Chinese nationals linked to a Chinese construction company -- China Zhonghao Nigeria Limited -- for attempting to bribe the head of the EFCC local office investigating the company.<sup>21,22</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Premium Times, 5 September 2019, Press Release: "We will honour all agreements with China-Buhari." <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/350763-well-honour-all-agreements-with-china-buhari.html>.

<sup>16</sup> For examples of such practices elsewhere, see Wright, Tom and Bradley Hope, "WSJ Investigation: China Offered to Bail Out Troubled Malaysian Fund in Return for Deals," 7 January 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-china-flexes-its-political-muscle-to-expand-power-overseas-11546890449>.

<sup>17</sup> Ekerube, Mma Amara. "China and Nigeria: Loans or Economic Colonialism." *Stears Business*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.stearsng.com/article/china-and-nigeria-loans-or-economic-colonialism>.

<sup>18</sup> "What to know about China loans and their implications for Nigeria," Premium Times, 4 August 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/406753-analysis-what-to-know-about-china-loans-and-their-implications-for-nigeria.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Nwabughio, Levinus. "COVID-19: Reps seek Review, Cancellation of Chinese loans to Nigeria." *Vanguard*, May 12, 2020, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/05/covid-19-reps-seek-review-cancellation-of-chinese-loans-to-nigeria/>; "What to know about China loans and their implications for Nigeria." <sup>20</sup> Ojoye, Taiwo, "Corruption: World Bank blacklists six Chinese firms in Nigeria," *Punch Nigeria*, August 20, 2019, <https://punchng.com/corruption-wbank-blacklists-six-chinese-firms-in-nigeria/>.

<sup>21</sup> Olander, Eric. "Two Chinese Nationals Arrested for Allegedly Trying to Bribe a Senior Official in Nigeria's Anti-Corruption Agency." *The China Africa Project*, 13 May 2020, [https://chinaafrica-project.com/2020/05/13/two-chinese-nationals-arrested-for-allegedly-trying-to-bribe-a-senior-official-in-nigerias-anti-corruption-agency/?utm\\_source=rss&utm\\_medium=rss&utm\\_campaign=two-chinese-nationals-arrested-for-allegedly-trying-to-bribe-a-senior-official-in-nigerias-anti-corruption-agency.ng.com/efcc-arrests-two-chinese-for-offering-n100m-bribe/](https://chinaafrica-project.com/2020/05/13/two-chinese-nationals-arrested-for-allegedly-trying-to-bribe-a-senior-official-in-nigerias-anti-corruption-agency/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=two-chinese-nationals-arrested-for-allegedly-trying-to-bribe-a-senior-official-in-nigerias-anti-corruption-agency.ng.com/efcc-arrests-two-chinese-for-offering-n100m-bribe/).

<sup>22</sup> Olugbemi, Adeniyi. "EFCC Arrests Two Chinese for Offering N100m Bribe." *Punch Nigeria*, 12 May 2020. <https://punchng.com/efcc-arrests-two-chinese-for-offering-n100m-bribe/>.

The company, which had been awarded \$125 million in contracts by the Zamfara state government from 2012 to 2019, had been disqualified from submitting tenders to the African Development Bank because of “fraudulent practices” by the company and its local associates.<sup>23</sup> In another example, Addax Petroleum, a subsidiary of Chinese oil and gas giant Sinopec, was suspected of spending more than \$20 million to bribe Nigerian government officials in 2014 and 2015, allegedly to secure contracts in the oil industry.<sup>24</sup> One Nigerian business executive who worked closely with the Chinese business community described anecdotally this willingness to facilitate corruption, saying that PRC firms have succeeded in Nigeria because “they know how to use cash to get their way....They know how to bribe and are usually really ready, to the police or government or anyone.”<sup>25</sup>

The propensity for corruption among Nigerian government officials and elites could expose the country to exploitation and open inroads for authoritarian foreign influence. Concerned about the potential for economic exploitation and coercion, Nigeria’s House of Representatives has called for a review of all bilateral agreements with China since 2000, with the aim of cancelling or renegotiating any agreements non-compliant with existing regulations, notably the Public Procurement Act, which governs the tendering and bidding process, and the Fiscal Responsibility Act.<sup>26</sup>

### *Case Study: PRC Involvement in Nigeria’s Extractive Sector*

Endemic corruption is particularly prevalent in natural resource extraction in Nigeria.<sup>27</sup> Whether through investment in the hydrocarbon sector or illicit resource extraction in the logging and mining sectors, PRC-linked companies have become enmeshed in corruption in some of Nigeria’s most fragile states, through unregulated activity by PRC nationals in concert with local Nigerian actors.<sup>28</sup> Such actors are often able to act with impunity, with both political and economic elites turning a blind eye for rent-seeking opportunities. Such activities can be attributed in part to the PRC state’s push – which began with the “go out” policy in 1999 and accelerated with the creation of the Belt and Road in 2013 – to send its companies and people outside of China for economic opportunities, without putting in place the regulatory mechanisms necessary to promote proper accountability by PRC-linked actors abroad. A closer look at China’s engagement in this sector demonstrates how this fact, blended with a toxic combination of corruption, greed, and lax regulations within Nigeria, have undermined governance and contributed to environmental degradation in some parts of the country.

The scope of China’s involvement in illegal logging and mining is clear. As the United States Institute of Peace documented, businesspeople from the PRC engage in illicit activities that enable criminal networks, destroy local livelihoods, and cause environmental degradation in communities already beset by conflict over resources.<sup>29</sup> According to the Environment Investigation Agency, starting in 2013 Chinese timber traders began seeking out and paying Nigerian middlemen to clandestinely harvest rosewood – a valuable and vulnerable hardwood species used for furniture in China.<sup>30</sup> This illicit trade targeted in Taraba, Kogi and Ogun states, and documented by the International Centre for Investigative Reporting, is driven by Chinese businessmen and facilitated by corruption at the local, regional, and national level, from the local officials that allow illegal logging to take place to the Ministry of Environment, the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), and the Nigerian Custom Service responsible for export oversight.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>23</sup> “Nigeria: Chinese bribery claimed to seek to sway probe,” Andalou Agency, 13 May 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigeria-chinese-bribery-claimed-to-seek-to-sway-probe/1839359#>.

<sup>24</sup> Ezeamalu, Ben, “How drowning Chinese-owned oil firm paid millions of dollars as bribe to Nigerian officials,” Premium Times, 25 November, 2017, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/250539-drowning-chinese-owned-oil-firm-paid-millions-dollars-bribe-nigerian-officials.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Page, Matthew, “The Intersection of China’s Commercial Interests and Nigeria’s Conflict Landscape,” United States Institute of Peace, 2018. <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/sr428-the-intersection-of-chinas-commercial-interests-and-nigerias-conflict-landscape.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Nwabughio. “COVID-19: Reps seek Review, Cancellation of Chinese loans to Nigeria.”

<sup>27</sup> Page, “The Intersection of China’s Commercial Interests and Nigeria’s Conflict Landscape,” September 2020. <https://independent.ng/how-china-fuels-deforestation-in-nigeria-west-africa-1/>.

<sup>28</sup> Momoh, Siaka, “How China Fuels Deforestation In Nigeria, West Africa,” Independent, 3 September 2020. <https://independent.ng/how-china-fuels-deforestation-in-nigeria-west-africa-1/>.

<sup>29</sup> Page, “The Intersection of China’s Commercial Interests and Nigeria’s Conflict Landscape.”

<sup>30</sup> Environment Investigation Agency, “The Rosewood Racket: China’s Billion Dollar Illegal Timber Trade and the Devastation of Nigeria’s Forests” (London: EIA, 2017) [https://content.eia-global.org/assets/2017/rosewood-racket/PDF/Rosewood+Racket+Report+\(High+Res\).pdf](https://content.eia-global.org/assets/2017/rosewood-racket/PDF/Rosewood+Racket+Report+(High+Res).pdf); “China in Nigeria: timber exploration, a ticking time bomb?” LIFE360, 27 August 2019, <https://jomec.co.uk/life360-2019/uncategorised/china-in-nigeria-timber-exploration-a-ticking-time-bomb>.

<sup>31</sup> Aiyetan, Dayo, “How China Fuels Deforestation in Nigeria, West Africa,” International Centre for Investigative Reporting (Nigeria), 18 January 2016, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/how-china-fuels-deforestation-in-nigeria-west-africa/>.

China does not condone this illegal activity – and has sought to boost efforts to fight illegal logging by its nationals. In 2019, China's National People's Congress Standing Committee revised the country's Forest Law in 2019 to include language that bars Chinese businesses from illegal resource extraction.<sup>32</sup> In spite of the law, illegal rosewood demand from China persists in Nigeria.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, given the nature of state control in China, some of these “buccaneering” Chinese businesspeople have ties to the CCP: many of them are members of the Chinese Wood Association of Nigeria, a local section of the “China Wood Importers Committee”<sup>34</sup> created by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the PRC. There is also evidence that the Chinese consulate was involved in facilitating a meeting between the Chinese businesses and the Vice President of Nigeria.<sup>35</sup> Per the USIP report, Smart Chinese businessmen are exploiting a lax regulatory and enforcement environment, loopholes in existing laws, lack of government policy and direction as well as official corruption by government officials to drive an illegal trade in and export of the country's forestry resources that might have grave consequences for both the environment and the economy.<sup>36</sup> In addition to depleting Nigeria's forestry reserves, there are resultant impacts on the ecosystem, including flooding, erosion, and therefore the removal of animal and plant ecosystems, leaving certain species facing extinction. Illegal logging additionally denies communities a supply of food and livelihoods and costs Nigeria billions of dollars in diverted revenue.<sup>37</sup>

Chinese businessmen and companies are also engaged in illegal mining in fragile parts of the country, whether directly in the resource extraction or by purchasing from Nigerian companies involved in illegal mining.<sup>38</sup> In Nigeria's Middle Belt, an epicenter of conflict, Sino-Nigerian syndicates have illegally mined minerals such as lead, zinc, tin, and tantalum for over a decade. In a 2017 raid on one such illegal mining operation at Kampanin Zurak, which had extracted \$278 million in illegal mined minerals, Nigerian police arrested 16 Chinese nationals.<sup>39</sup> This was not an isolated incident. In May 2020, police arrested 17 Chinese nationals in Osun state, in the country's southwest, for illegal mining.<sup>40</sup> Such operations not only lead to a large loss of state revenue, but also cause environmental damage, exacerbate corruption, and aggravate community grievances, whether over land or poor governance.

Ultimately, corruption by Nigerian political and economic stakeholders at local, regional, and national levels has enabled an environment in which Chinese businesses are able to act with impunity whilst causing negative environmental, economic, and political consequences. Two key drivers of conflict in Nigeria are resource competition and distrust in local governance actors.<sup>41</sup> Nigeria provides 45% of China's rosewood – all of which is illegally harvested, and though China's illegal rosewood harvesting might not directly spark violent conflict, it exacerbates pre-existing sources of tension by increasing local distrust in political actors who engage in corruption.<sup>42</sup> Beijing's response has been muted – this report found little evidence of a response to Nigeria's diplomatic overtures on the matter.<sup>43</sup>

As the United States Institute of Peace documented, businesspeople from the PRC engage in illicit activities that enable criminal networks, destroy local livelihoods, and cause environmental degradation in communities already beset by conflict over resources.

<sup>32</sup> Mukpo, Ashoka, “China's Revised Forest Law Could Boost Efforts to Fight Illegal Logging,” Mongabay, 19 March 2020, <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/03/chinas-revised-forest-law-could-boost-efforts-to-fight-illegal-logging/>.

<sup>33</sup> Page, “The Intersection of China's Commercial Interests and Nigeria's Conflict Landscape.”

<sup>34</sup> China Wood Importers Committee, <http://cnwoodtrade.org/en/>.

<sup>35</sup> “The Rosewood Racket: China's Billion Dollar Illegal Timber Trade and the Devastation of Nigeria's Forests.”

<sup>36</sup> Aiyetan, “How China Fuels Deforestation in Nigeria, West Africa.”

<sup>37</sup> Aiyetan, “How China Fuels Deforestation in Nigeria, West Africa.”

<sup>38</sup> Page, “The Intersection of China's Commercial Interests and Nigeria's Conflict Landscape.”

<sup>39</sup> Page, “The Intersection of China's Commercial Interests and Nigeria's Conflict Landscape.”

<sup>40</sup> “Nigeria: 17 Chinese illegal miners arrested,” Andalou Agency, 4 May 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/nigeria-17-chinese-illegal-miners-arrested/1828162>.

<sup>41</sup> Page, “The Intersection of China's Commercial Interests and Nigeria's Conflict Landscape.”

<sup>42</sup> Momoh, Siaka, “How China Fuels Deforestation in Nigeria, West Africa,” Independent, 3 September 2020, <https://independent.ng/how-china-fuels-deforestation-in-nigeria-west-africa-1/>.

<sup>43</sup> Chiedozie, Ihuoma, “How Chinese prospectors exploit local miners to cash in on Nigeria's gold,” Punch, 17 May 2020, <https://punchng.com/how-chinese-prospectors-exploit-local-miners-to-cash-in-on-nigerias-gold/>.

## Influence in Nigeria's Information Space

Alongside increased economic relations, China has increased its engagement through soft and sharp power initiatives in Nigeria over the past two decades. This includes building relationships in the Nigerian academic, media, and telecommunications spaces, gaining influence in Nigeria's information space. This is a potential source of concern, not only because of the PRC party-state's fundamental hostility to press freedom and freedom of speech, but because of its demonstrated willingness to leverage such relationships to coercively shape discourse in target countries.<sup>44</sup>

## Academia

In the academic domain, China has predominately focused on promoting cultural and education exchange and fostering relationships with students and thought leaders, to promote positive perceptions of China. In 2007, Beijing established the first Confucius Institute in the country at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, followed in 2009 by one at University of Lagos.<sup>45</sup>



Man holds welcome sign at Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport in Abuja, on April 8, 2020, as a team of Chinese medics arrived in Nigeria despite angry criticism from health workers in the west African nation (Photo by Kola Sulaimon / AFP)

<sup>44</sup> Schrader, Matt, "Friends and Enemies: A Framework for Understanding Chinese Political Interference in Democratic Countries," Alliance for Securing Democracy (German Marshall Fund), 22 April 2020, <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Friends-and-Enemies-A-Framework-for-Understanding-Chinese-Political-Interference-in-Democratic-Countries.pdf>.

<sup>45</sup> Ramani, Samuel. "China-Nigeria Relations: A Success story for Beijing's Soft Power." *The Diplomat*, 12 July 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/china-nigeria-relations-a-success-story-for-beijings-soft-power/>.

In 2016, China opened the Chinese Cultural Research Centre of Nigeria, also at Nnamdi Azikiwe. The Confucius Institutes and Research Centre provide Chinese language instruction and facilitate language and cultural exchange activities.<sup>46</sup> China's engagement in academic exchanges is a critical part of its efforts to promote China's image and interests in Nigeria.

Confucius Institutes have been an object of concern in other countries for a number of reasons. Staff are chosen by the PRC's Ministry of Education, in part based upon their perceived ideological reliability, and the institutes' curriculum is likewise provided by the PRC state.<sup>47</sup> Institutes have been accused of using this control over personnel and material to "subtly promote CCP positions on issues deemed critical or sensitive by the Chinese authorities, such as territorial disputes or religious minorities in China," and have been credibly accused of pressuring teachers and administrators in host institutions to avoid participating in "anti-China" events.<sup>48</sup> Since 1987, China has also provided 700 scholarships for Nigerian students to study in China to bolster bilateral ties.<sup>49</sup> China has also started programs to educate Chinese students in local Nigerian languages. This was designed to counter allegations of racism against Nigerian Muslims in China. Languages featured include the Igbo language, primarily spoken by minorities in Nigeria, as a way to improve communication and strengthen ties between Chinese and Nigerian people.

The PRC's presence in Nigeria's think tank space is also growing. Major Nigerian think tanks have partnered with the Chinese government and entities with close ties to the Party to reproduce narratives that mirror the PRC's, while avoiding criticism of the Chinese government. For example, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), a think tank closely associated with Nigeria's foreign ministry, has worked closely with the PRC embassy in Nigeria and PRC-based companies such as Huawei to praise PRC digital initiatives on the continent.<sup>50</sup> In another example, NIIA's Director of Research, Dr. Efem Ubi, participated in a roundtable organized by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution – a think tank established by Nigeria's foreign ministry -- aimed at discrediting any skepticism of Nigeria's partnership with China. Dr. Ubi argued that such skepticism derives from misinformation and Western propaganda, rather than informed criticism of China's authoritarian model of governance.<sup>51</sup> As in other countries, views held by senior think tank staff in Nigeria both reflect and can play an important role in shaping government policy and wider societal attitudes, and thus may reflect progress made by the PRC state in winning support for its alternative vision of development among African elites.<sup>52</sup>

PRC education partnerships in Nigeria also appear to have been misused by Nigerian elites in ways that reinforce pre-existing kleptocratic and authoritarian tendencies. In 2018, CCECC open applications for a scholarship program that would send 40 Nigerian students to China to study railway engineering.<sup>53</sup> Rather than allow open competition for the scholarship slots, the Nigerian Ministry of Transport only put forward candidates nominated by top officials in the Buhari administration in a clear sign of patronage. While the misuse occurred on the Nigerian side and was investigated by Nigeria's Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), it reflects Beijing's willingness to allow elites in Nigeria and other countries to misappropriate financial, educational, and technical engagement with the PRC for their own patronage networks, and a lack of accountability for such behavior on the PRC side.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Chidiebere, Edeh Emmanuel and Xu Li Hua, "Growing Influence of Chinese Language in Nigeria can impact the Socio-economic development," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, vol. 6, no. 12, 2019, pp. 184-191.

<sup>47</sup> "Confucius Institutes in the United States: Selected Issues," Congressional Research, 2 December 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11180>.

<sup>48</sup> Walker, Christopher, "China's Foreign Influence and Sharp Power Strategy to Shape and Influence Democratic Institutions," *National Endowment for Democracy*, 16 May 2019, <https://www.ned.org/chinas-foreign-influence-and-sharp-power-strategy-to-shape-and-influence-democratic-institutions/>; Allen-Ebrahman, Bethany, "How China Managed to Play Censor at a Conference on U.S. Soil," *Foreign Policy*, 9 May 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/09/how-china-managed-to-play-censor-at-a-conference-on-u-s-soil/>.

<sup>49</sup> International Centre for Investigative Reporting, "Editorial: 700 Nigerians Benefit from Chinese Scholarship," 19 August 2016, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/700-nigerians-benefit-chinese-scholarship>.

<sup>50</sup> "Chinese stake \$16bn in Nigeria's ICT sector," *Business a.m.*, 2 July 2018, <https://www.businessamlive.com/chinese-stake-16bn-in-nigerias-ict-sector/>.

<sup>51</sup> "Nigeria Not Ceding Sovereignty to China by Borrowing," *Vanguard*, 30 January 2021, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/01/nigeria-not-ceding-sovereignty-to-china-by-borrowing/>.

<sup>52</sup> Wapmuk, Sharkdam, "The Role of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) in Nigerian and African Development," in *Think Tanks, Foreign Policy and the Emerging Powers*, Springer Professional, 2019.

<sup>53</sup> Adeyemo, Ifeoluwa. "Ordinary Nigerians lose, Buhari's Ministers win as CCECC concludes Railway Scholarship," *Premium Times*, 30 July 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/278221-exclusive-ordinary-nigerians-lose-buharis-ministers-win-as-ccecc-concludes-railway-scholarship.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Adedigba, Azezat. "ICPC begins probe of Buhari's ministers, other officials involved in railway scholarship scandal." *Premium Times*, 7 July 2018, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/275312-exclusive-icpc-begins-probe-of-buharis-ministers-other-officials-involved-in-railway-scholarship-scandal.html>; Wright et al. "WSJ Investigation: China Offered to Bail Out Troubled Malaysian Fund in Return for Deals."

## Media

The media space comprises another key element in China's growing soft and sharp power in Nigeria. As in other African states, China has combined journalist exchanges, content sharing arrangements, and dominance of the emerging digital TV market to influence Nigerian perceptions of China. Elsewhere in Africa, this growing presence has come with growing demands by PRC government entities and state-affiliated companies that African partners avoid negative coverage of PRC infrastructure projects, or corruption associated with the PRC.<sup>55</sup> Policymakers and those working in the media industry are therefore concerned about how China's influence in Nigerian media could undermine freedom of expression and good governance.<sup>56</sup>

One important program, launched in 2014, demonstrated how China's efforts in Nigeria's information space have progressed, and shows how long-term investments in individuals can yield dividends. That year saw the launch of an exchange program for African journalists at Renmin University in Beijing. (Professors and staff at Renmin University's journalism department have long been pioneers in the PRC's efforts to "tell the China story well" and cooperate closely with the PRC government in doing so).<sup>57</sup> Organized by the China Africa Press Center, one Nigerian journalist is selected to participate annually in the ten-month program, alongside dozens of other journalists from throughout Africa. As with similar exchange programs run by the United States and other democratic countries, the program also offers China an opportunity to identify and empower members of Nigerian media sympathetic to PRC narratives and policy goals.<sup>58</sup>

Following the establishment of its journalists exchange program, the PRC government expanded its engagement in Nigeria by establishing two Xinhua bureaus in Abuja and Lagos respectively, as well as a China Radio International hub in Lagos. Xinhua was created by the CCP as the Party's official news agency in 1931 and has since offered the Party's officially sanctioned perspective on events inside and outside China. Media outlets inside China running stories on events potentially damaging to the Party's image are frequently instructed by the CCP's Propaganda Department simply to reproduce Xinhua content.<sup>59</sup> As such, Xinhua's growing presence inside Nigeria's media space could undermine attempts to offer a well-rounded, critical perspective on China.

In 2017, China and Nigeria signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance "friendly cooperation in media and information exchange." The MoU, signed between Nigeria's Ministry of Information and Culture and China's State Council Information Office, covers additional capacity building and exchange programs for Nigerian journalists, broadcasters, and media practitioners, as well as officials from the Ministry of Information and Culture. It aims to facilitate joint coverage of "economic, cultural and social news and other events in respective mass media."<sup>60</sup> The News Agency of Nigeria, run by the federal government, also maintains an MoU with its Chinese counterpart, Xinhua, to promote the Belt and Road Economic Information Partnership.<sup>61</sup> These MOUs demonstrate the steady, expanding effort by PRC state media to establish themselves as the first port of call for coverage of developments in and related to China.

More recently, China has expanded its presence in Nigeria's booming pay TV market and film industry. StarTimes, a Chinese private company which offers low-cost digital television services, has worked in partnership with the Nigerian Television Authority, Africa's largest television network, toward this end.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Mwakideu, Chrispin. "Experts warn of China's growing media influence in Africa." DW, 29 January 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/experts-warn-of-chinas-growing-media-influence-in-africa/a-56385420>

<sup>56</sup> Umejei, Emeka. "What is the Influence of Chinese Media in West Africa?," Council on Foreign Relations, 13 September 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/Chinese%20Media%20West%20Africa.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> "Telling China's Story to the World," China Daily, 7 November 2016, [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-11/07/content\\_27291258\\_2.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2016-11/07/content_27291258_2.htm); "Q&A with CPD: Zhao Qizheng," USC Center on Public Diplomacy, 15 June 2014, <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/story/qa-cpd-zhao-qizheng>; "RUC Holds Completion Ceremony for African Journalists Undertaking 'Research on China Development Studies and Media Exchange' Course" Renmin University of China, 3 November 2016, <https://www.ruc.edu.cn/archives/31079>

<sup>58</sup> Xuequan, Mu, "Foreign journalists impressed by China's 'development miracles,'" Xinhua, 11 December 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/11/c\\_138623871.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-12/11/c_138623871.htm); "Evaluation of ECA's Professional Journalism and Media Exchange Programs," United States Department of State, March 2012, <https://eca.state.gov/files/bureau/journalism-and-media-summary.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> Rudolph, Josh, "Minitrue: Follow Xinhua on Jiuzhaigou Earthquake," China Digital Times, 8 August 2017, <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2017/08/minitrue-follow-xinhua-lead-jiuzhai-gou-earthquake/>.

<sup>60</sup> "China, Nigeria sign MoU on information exchange," Xinhua, 12 August 2017, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/12/c\\_136519466.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-08/12/c_136519466.htm).

<sup>61</sup> "Xinhua signs MoU with NAN on economic information," News Agency of Nigeria, 9 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rd9c4llH5o8>.

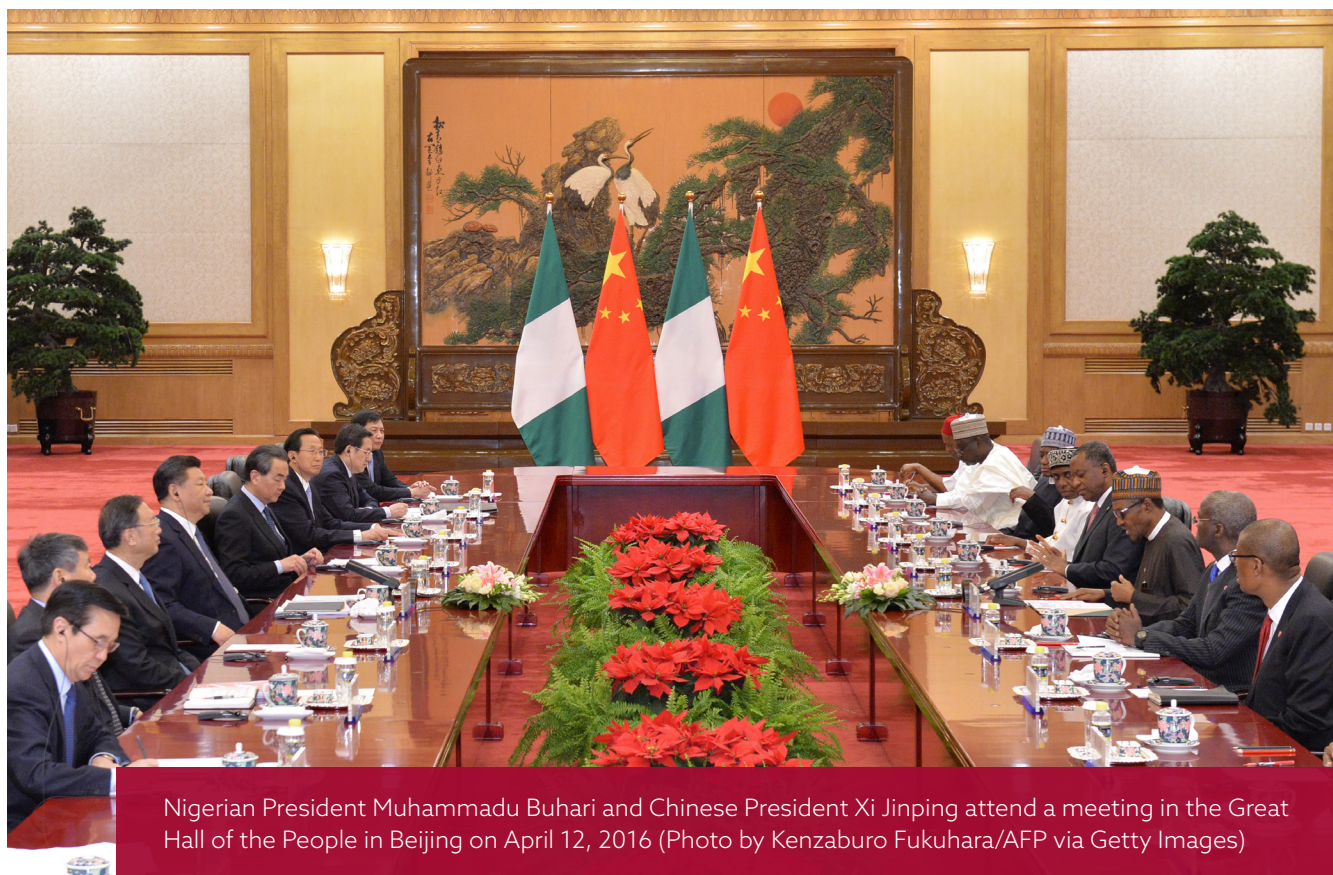
<sup>62</sup> Ramani. "China-Nigeria Relations: A Success Story for Beijing's Soft Power."

As a result of the low cost of streaming packages relative to other providers – and an investment blitz by StarTimes – many Nigerian viewers are migrating to the provider. Despite being a private company, StarTimes prioritizes access to pro-China programming – its basic packages include PRC state media news channels, while access to international news channels such as CNN and Al Jazeera require additional spending -- providing it with a platform in Nigeria to shape the perceptions within that country's rapidly growing market for digital TV services.<sup>63</sup>

### *ICT and Telecommunications*

Home to Africa's largest mobile market, Nigeria is also a key purchaser of PRC-provided telecommunications goods. Since 2002, PRC-based companies have made significant investments in information and communications technologies in Nigeria, and the country's ICT market is now dominated by two PRC-based providers of network equipment and services, Huawei and ZTE.<sup>64</sup> Nigeria has been Huawei's largest purchaser of network equipment in Africa since 2010, and Huawei and ZTE together hold 90% of the telecommunications equipment market in the country.<sup>65</sup>

Notable projects financed by China and awarded to either state-owned enterprises or companies with close links to the state include a 2005, \$200 million partnership agreement issued by Nigeria's Ministry of Communication to Huawei to deploy CDMA 450 wireless technology across the country, financed by the China Development Bank and a 2012, \$100 million contract to Huawei for a national security development system, financed by the EXIM Bank of China.<sup>66</sup>



Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari and Chinese President Xi Jinping attend a meeting in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on April 12, 2016 (Photo by Kenzaburo Fukuhara/AFP via Getty Images)

<sup>63</sup> Odutola, Abiola, "Multichoice, StarTimes, others' reception increase by 23% in Nigeria- Report," Nairametrics, 26 June 2020, <https://nairametrics.com/2020/06/26/multichoice-startimes-others-reception-increase-by-23-in-nigeria-report/>.

<sup>64</sup> Wang, Rong, François Bar, and Yu Hong, "ICT Aid Flows from China to African Countries: A Communication Network Perspective," *International Journal of Communication*, v. 14, 2020, pp. 1498-1523, [https://uknowledge.uky.edu/comm\\_facpub/14?utm\\_source=uknowledge.uky.edu%2Fcomm\\_facpub%2F14&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://uknowledge.uky.edu/comm_facpub/14?utm_source=uknowledge.uky.edu%2Fcomm_facpub%2F14&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages).

<sup>65</sup> Wang et al. "ICT Aid Flows from China to African Countries: A Communication Network Perspective."

<sup>66</sup> Hart, Melanie and Jordan Link, "There Is a Solution to the Huawei Challenge," *Center for American Progress*, 14 October 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/reports/2020/10/14/491476/solution-huawei-challenge/>.

In 2013, Nigeria's second largest mobile operator, Globacom, inked deals with both Huawei (\$750 million) and ZTE (\$500 million) to modernize and expand its network.<sup>67</sup> In addition, Huawei was awarded \$328 million through a contract in 2018 for the National Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure Backbone Phase 11 (NICTIB 11), with financing provided by the EXIM Bank of China.<sup>68</sup>

Although the Nigerian government has welcomed the companies' involvement in the country's ICT market, Huawei and ZTE's substantial presence in Nigeria is grounds for concern. Both companies have provided authoritarian governments in Africa and elsewhere with technology, training, and systems that were used to stifle free expression and political organizing, or to punish political opponents. In Uganda, for example, Huawei's long efforts to cultivate a relationship with the administration of President Yoweri Museveni culminated in a request from the president's office for assistance cracking the encrypted communications of a political opponent, a request to which Huawei acceded.<sup>69</sup> Both companies are also subject to PRC laws mandating their cooperation with PRC intelligence agencies, and would be unable to deny a PRC government request to use Huawei or ZTE-constructed networks for espionage, sabotage, or other forms of political pressure.<sup>70</sup>

Successive Nigerian governments and agencies have nevertheless welcomed Huawei's and ZTE's investment. Nigeria's Immigration Service (NIS) is the latest convert, noting in October 2021 that it would continue to strengthen its partnership with Huawei "to provide a digital platform for seamless and effective migration management across national borders for internal security."<sup>71</sup>

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Nigeria's adoption of Chinese technologies at core levels of its telecommunications infrastructure and system, and China's track record of leveraging its access to private information to bolster its political allies and interests creates further opportunities for potential abuse.

NIS' partnership with Huawei covers digital support on many of the e-services provided by the agency, including the e-Passport project, the electronic passenger registration system, and programs governing visas and work permits, allowing Huawei potentially unfettered access to the personal data of millions of Nigerians and foreigners alike. Nigeria's adoption of Chinese technologies at core levels of its telecommunications infrastructure and system, and China's track record of leveraging its access to private information to bolster its political allies and interests creates further opportunities for potential abuse.

### **Influence with the Ruling Party**

Sino-Nigeria relations deepened in recent years in part due President Buhari's active solicitation of closer economic and political ties. While his predecessors maintained strong relations<sup>72</sup> and Nigeria's longstanding "One-China Policy," which dates to 2005, President Buhari has become a more vocal and outspoken admirer of China's development model.

<sup>67</sup> "ZTE joins Huawei in Glo Nigeria network deal," IT Web, 20 April 2013, <https://itweb.africa/content/RgeVDMp02LP7KJN3>.

<sup>68</sup> "Nigeria, China to sign \$328m agreement on ICT - Presidency," Vanguard, 1 September 2018, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/09/nigeria-china-to-sign-328m-agreement-on-ict-presidency/>.

<sup>69</sup> Polyakova, Alina, and Meserole, Chris, "Exporting Digital Authoritarianism," Brookings Institution, August 2019, [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP\\_20190826\\_digital\\_authoritarianism\\_polyakova\\_meserole.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/FP_20190826_digital_authoritarianism_polyakova_meserole.pdf);

Parkinson, Joe, Nicholas Bariyo, and Josh Chin, "Huawei Technicians Helped African Governments Spy on Political Opponents," The Wall Street Journal, 15 August 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/huawei-technicians-helped-african-governments-spy-on-political-opponents-11565793017>.

<sup>70</sup> Jiang, Yang, Aki Tonami, and Adam Moe Fejerskov, "China's Overseas Investment in Critical Infrastructure: Nuclear Power and Telecommunications," Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016, [https://pure.diiis.dk/ws/files/727852/DIIS\\_RP\\_2016\\_8\\_WEB.pdf](https://pure.diiis.dk/ws/files/727852/DIIS_RP_2016_8_WEB.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> Olugbode, Michael, "Nigeria: NIS, Huawei Technologies Strengthen Ties for Digital Migration Management," This Day, 4 October 2021, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202110040850.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Ramani. "China-Nigeria Relations: A Success Story for Beijing's Soft Power."

President Buhari is clearly increasing cues from China's authoritarian governance model. Nowhere is this clearer than in his approach to internet governance, where Nigeria has sought to adopt CCP-inspired cybersecurity laws and an internet firewall modeled on China's. First Lady Buhari noted famously, "if China can control over 1.3 billion people on social media, I see no reason why Nigeria cannot attempt controlling only 180 million people."<sup>73</sup> This view is widely shared in the Buhari Administration – in October 2020, Nigerian Minister of Information and Culture Lai Mohammed, who had been previously engaged with the CCP as National Public Secretary of the APC, stated that the government should "dominate" cyberspace, referencing China as a positive example of restricting citizen access and freedom of expression online.<sup>74</sup> In June 2021, the Buhari government did just that, banning Twitter and regulating access to social media.<sup>75</sup> The day after the government banned Twitter, the Office of the Presidency reportedly reached out to the Cyberspace Administration of China to discuss plans to build Nigeria's version of the Great Firewall.<sup>76</sup>

President Buhari's affinity for the CCP's model also emerges in his regular praise for strong relations between the two countries, and his administration's unquestioning support for China's agenda at the United Nations and other international fora. In 2019, for example, Nigeria signed a letter to the United Nations praising China's human rights record in response to international pressure on China over human rights atrocities in Xinjiang.<sup>77</sup> In a July 2021 letter to Xi Jinping on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the CCP's founding, President Buhari extolled Xi's leadership and praised the CCP's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic using language that would not seem out of place in a speech by a CCP official, noting, "Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the CPC, with General Secretary Xi Jinping at the core, has led the Chinese people to realize remarkable economic and social progress."<sup>78</sup>

Outside of the president's office, party-to-party cooperation between China and Nigeria has been limited. Both of Nigeria's leading political parties, the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People's Democracy Party, have held exchanges with the CCP and participated in events celebrating the China-Nigeria partnership. However, the scale and pace of such exchanges has been small compared to places like Kenya and South Africa. Some party leaders are trying to change that, in cooperation with some of Nigeria's think tanks. At an event commemorating the 95th anniversary of the CCP in 2016, then-APC Senator and vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs Shehu Sani praised the CCP as a model for Nigerian political parties to emulate for its focus on principles and ideology.<sup>80</sup>

A June 2021 dialogue organized by the Abuja-based Center for China Studies to mark the 100th anniversary of the CCP focused on encouraging Nigerian political parties to better understand, learn from, and follow China's development model as an engine for growth in Nigeria.<sup>81</sup> While several of the political party leaders and members present called for increased oversight of Chinese lending to Nigeria, leaders of the Labour Party also called for deepening cooperation between Nigerian political parties and the CCP as a means to help Nigerian parties build a national consensus on "development values".<sup>82</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Green, Will, Leyton Nelson, and Brittney Washington, "China's Engagement with Africa: Foundations for an Alternative Governance Regime," U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 1 May 2020, [https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Chinas\\_Engagement\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2020-05/Chinas_Engagement_Africa.pdf).

<sup>74</sup> Asadu, Chinedu, "Can Nigeria Afford China's internet wall to silence online critics?" The Africa Report, 11 June 2021, <https://www.theafricareport.com/97144/can-nigeria-afford-chinas-internet-wall-to-silence-online-critics/>.

<sup>75</sup> Asadu, "Can Nigeria Afford China's internet wall to silence online critics?"

<sup>76</sup> Mbamalu, Socrates, "EXCLUSIVE: Presidency Meets With China's Cyber Regulator to Build Nigerian Internet Firewall," Foundation for Investigative Journalism, 6 June 2021, <https://fij.ng/article/exclusive-presidency-meets-with-chinas-cyber-regulator-to-build-nigerian-internet-firewall/>.

<sup>77</sup> Dahir, Abdi Latif, "Why these African countries are defending China's mass detention of Muslims," Quartz Africa, 16 July 2019, <https://qz.com/africa/1667141/african-leaders-defend-china-arrests-of-uyghur-muslims-in-xinjiang/>.

<sup>78</sup> Odunsi, Wade, "Buhari writes China's President Xi Jinping," Daily Post (Nigeria), 30 June 2021, <https://dailypost.ng/2021/06/30/buhari-writes-chinas-president-xi-jinping/>.

<sup>79</sup> In 2015, China's Ambassador to Nigeria met with the APC National Secretary Mai Mala Buni and National Public Secretary Lai Mohammed. See "Gu Xiaojie Met with All Progressives Congress National Secretary Mai Mala Buni and National Public Secretary Lai Mohammed Respectively," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 24 June 2015, <http://ng.china-embassy.org/eng/zngx/cne/t1275688.htm>;

In 2019, the International Department of the CCP hosted an APC delegation in Beijing as part of its efforts to promote the BRI. See Green et al. "China's Engagement with Africa: Foundations for an Alternative Governance Regime."

<sup>80</sup> Ramani, Samuel, "China-Nigeria Relations: A Success Story for Beijing's Soft Power," The Diplomat, 12 July 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/china-nigeria-relations-a-success-story-for-beijings-soft-power/>.

<sup>81</sup> Odoh, Innocent, "Lessons for Nigeria as Chinese Communist Party Marks 100 Years," Leadership (Nigeria), June 2021, <https://leadership.ng/lessons-for-nigeria-as-chinese-communist-party-marks-100-years/>.

<sup>82</sup> Odoh, "Lessons for Nigeria as Chinese Communist Party Marks 100 Years."

## Nigeria's Response

In spite of vulnerabilities in Nigeria's democracy in the face of Chinese influence and interference efforts, and some demonstrated successes for China in cultivating political influence with President Buhari and his entourage, Nigeria has several key sources of democratic resilience that have helped the country navigate its relationship with China and will continue to do so in the immediate future. Nigeria's robust and independent media, strong civil society and thought leaders, and the increasingly assertive House of Representatives, showcase the strength some democratic institutions can marshal to check China's negative influence in Nigeria.

Foremost among Nigeria's strengths is an independent and involved free press. Journalists from print and televised media have recently launched comprehensive investigations into many facets of Chinese activities and influence in the country.<sup>83</sup> These investigations have brought to light troubling details about China's political and economic engagement in the country and the complicity the Nigerian government in some corrupt and antidemocratic practices. Taken as a whole, these investigations paint a disturbing picture of Beijing's efforts to create channels of influence and shape internal debate in Nigeria. The investigations played a key role in exposing foreign authoritarian influence in the country, raising public awareness about it, and generating vibrant public debate over the parameters of Nigeria's engagement with China.

Media exposure has helped generate interest in the topic from Nigeria's House of Representatives, which has taken action in recent years to protect Nigeria's democratic institutions, practices, and processes from the malign impact of China's political and economic engagement. For example, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, media widely covered the racist treatment of Nigerian nationals in Guangzhou and Nigerian citizens lobbied their representatives to take action.<sup>84</sup> In response, the Nigerian House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a series of motions that condemned the maltreatment and institutional racial discrimination against Nigerians living in China.<sup>85</sup> While the topic of the motion was not explicitly related to China's engagement in Nigeria, it was the first time in recent history that a governing body in Nigeria took such a high-profile, decisive position condemning China.

A month later, in May 2020, the House of Representatives took more action vis-à-vis Nigeria's economic agreements with China, mandating several House Committees to liaise with the Debt Management Office and the Ministry of Finance to review or outright cancel loans from China on the principle of force majeure.<sup>86</sup> In June 2020, discontent triggered by the "sovereignty clause" controversy in loan agreements between Nigeria and China emerged when the Nigerian House of Representatives "raised the alarm over clauses in Article 8(1) of the commercial loan agreement signed between Nigeria and Export-Import Bank of China."<sup>87</sup> The agreement "allegedly concedes sovereignty of Nigeria to China in the \$400 million loan for the Nigeria National Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Infrastructure Backbone Phase II Project, signed in 2018."<sup>88</sup>

Further, in August 2020, the House summoned the Ministers of Transportation, Communication, and Finance to discuss the details of loans from the Export-Import Bank of China to finance the construction of railway lines in the country and the awarding of associated contracts to the Chinese companies.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>83</sup> See, for example: Adebayo. "Exclusive: Inside China's \$6.5billion loans to Nigeria since 2002."

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, Editorial Board, "Stop maltreating Africans in China," *The Guardian* (Nigeria), 5 May 2020, <https://guardian.ng/opinion/stop-maltreating-africans-in-china/>.

<sup>85</sup> Seye, Abdul, "Reps accuse China of xenophobic attack, ask Nigerian govt to repatriate stranded citizens," *Daily Post* (Nigeria), 28 April 2020, <https://dailypost.ng/2020/04/28/reps-accuse-china-of-xenophobic-attack-ask-nigerian-govt-to-repatriate-stranded-citizens/>

<sup>86</sup> Nwabughiguo. "COVID-19: Reps seek Review, Cancellation of Chinese loans to Nigeria."

<sup>87</sup> Onoja, Adagbo, "How China Lost Nigeria," *The Diplomat*, 25 August 2020, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2020/08/how-china-lost-nigeria/>; "Loan Agreements: House Uncovers Clauses Conceding Nigeria's Sovereignty to China," *This Day Live*, 29 July 29 2020, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/07/29/loan-agreements-house-uncovers-clauses-conceding-nigerias-sovereignty-to-china/>.

<sup>88</sup> "Loan Agreements: House Uncovers Clauses Conceding Nigeria's Sovereignty to China."

<sup>89</sup> Salem, Tordue, "\$500m Chinese loan: Reps summon Amaechi, Ahmed, Pantami over railway contracts," *Vanguard*, 28 July 28 2020, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/reps-summon-amaechi-ahmed-pantami-over-railway-contracts/>.

In response, the Minister of Transportation, Rotimi Chibuike Ameachi, expressed concerns about the timing of the inquiry and “appealed to the committee to consider national interest in carrying out their oversight function...If the Chinese government gets to know that there is a disagreement between the executive and legislature concerning the loans, the process may be truncated.”<sup>90</sup> Minister Ameachi’s stance reflects a clear understanding of economic threats China has made to other countries to ensure compliance with its terms of engagement. However, the House was unyielding in its request. The House of Representative’s investigations and summons have not yet resulted in any legal and policy changes, but they are signs of resilience among policymakers to take this issue seriously in the interests of government transparency and accountability. Nigerian civil society has also been active in building democratic resilience in the country. The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) is among the numerous NGOs actively working to promote transparency and accountability in Nigeria’s engagement with China.

It sued the government in 2019 and has been granted leave by the Federal High Court, Abuja to compel the Minister of Finance, Budget, and National Planning to “disclose details of local companies and Chinese contractors that received funds from the \$460 million Chinese loan for the failed Abuja CCTV project.”<sup>91</sup> The suit insisted that “transparency in the spending of Chinese loans is good for everyone, as this would help to increase the effectiveness, legitimacy, and contribution of the loans to the development of public goods and services, and the general public interests.”<sup>92</sup>

The Nigerian government has also faced heavy criticism for not enforcing labor safety laws in agreements with China. The 2021 death of a young female translator at a Chinese factory created an upheaval on social media due to allegations of inefficient occupational safety protocols.<sup>93</sup> The National Secretary of the Steel and Engineering Workers Union of Nigeria also alleged that the factory in question, Yonxing Steel Company, promised in 2015 to create a union after previous safety incidents.<sup>94</sup>

Other PRC-backed projects around the country have gone viral on social media and are facing public criticism due to a lack of quality of the infrastructure. In a visit to a newly built hospital in Northern Nigeria, the governor told representatives from Changjiang Construction Nigerian Ltd. on live TV that they would not be paid a “dime” until the infrastructure issues were fixed.<sup>95</sup>

Nigeria’s EFCC has also achieved some small wins in its efforts to crack down on corruption around Chinese-financed projects, as demonstrated in the Sokoto case cited previously. Many other instances of corruption, however, go unchecked. As Ifeoluwa Adeyemo, a journalist with Premium Times who investigated the CCECC scholarship scandal has surmised, “nothing has come off the promise of the EFCC to investigate the incident. Perhaps due to the complicity of the high brass political elites.”

Media exposure has helped generate interest in the topic from Nigeria’s House of Representatives, which has taken action in recent years to protect Nigeria’s democratic institutions, practices, and processes from the malign impact of China’s political and economic engagement.

<sup>90</sup> Salem, Tordue, “\$500m Chinese loan: Reps summon Amaechi, Ahmed, Pantami over railway contracts,” Vanguard, 28 July 2020, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/rep-sum-mon-amaechi-ahmed-pantami-over-railway-contracts/>.

<sup>91</sup> “SERAP wins round one in battle to get details of failed Chinese \$460m Abuja CCTV project,” Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project, 15 December 2019, <https://serap-nigeria.org/2019/12/15/serap-wins-round-one-in-battle-to-get-details-of-failed-chinese-460m-abuja-cctv-project/>.

<sup>92</sup> “SERAP wins round one in battle to get details of failed Chinese \$460m Abuja CCTV project.”

<sup>93</sup> Olander, Eric, “Many Nigerians Feel Abandoned By Their Government For Not Enforcing Labor Laws at Chinese Companies,” The China Africa Project, 23 September 2021. <https://chinaafricaproject.com/2021/09/23/many-nigerians-feel-abandoned-by-their-government-for-not-enforcing-labor-laws-at-chinese-companies/>.

<sup>94</sup> Aliu, Ozioruva, “Chinese Firm Woo Investors to Nigeria as Workers Differ on Union,” Vanguard, 29 September 2021. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/09/chinese-firm-woo-investors-to-nigeria-as-workers-differ-on-union/>.

<sup>95</sup> Olander, Eric, “Nigeria State Governor’s Tirade Against a Chinese Contractor Goes Viral,” The China Africa Project, 5 October 2021. <https://chinaafricaproject.com/2021/10/05/nigeria-state-governors-tirade-against-a-chinese-contractor-goes-viral/>.

## Conclusion

China's expanded presence in Nigeria has brought both opportunity and opportunism. Chinese investment has offered Nigeria opportunities for infrastructure development and economic diversification. With this opportunity has come opportunism on both sides. Chinese companies have benefitted from financing terms that award them contracts for Chinese-funded infrastructure projects. Nigeria's political and business elite have likely benefitted financially, given the opaque nature of Chinese lending and the propensity for corruption in public contracting in Nigeria. The PRC Party-state has benefited as well, using economic engagement as an inroad for expanding its political influence in the country. In return, Nigeria's government has, to date, been a willing defender of China and an advocate of its development model.

Yet, there are cracks in the relationship, driven in large part by concerns among Nigerian media, civil society, and policymakers about the impact of engagement with China on Nigeria's democratic institutions and domestic industry, as well as the human rights of its citizens. Recent efforts to promote transparency and accountability around the Nigerian government's engagement with China have come at a time, however, when President Buhari seems all the more willing to adopt elements of China's authoritarian governance model for his own political ends.

To effectively promote transparency and accountability around the China-Nigeria relationship going forward, democratic stakeholders in media, civil society, and Parliament must continue to understand, investigate, and expose if and how Chinese influence negatively impacts Nigerian democratic processes, practices, and institutions. To do so, media and civil society need additional resources and capacity building to uncover corruption and hold leaders accountable. Policymakers in Parliament must continue to explore avenues for enforcing existing laws and policies on public oversight of government procurement. Most importantly, Parliament must take all available measures to protect media freedom and limit executive overreach in controlling access to information, particularly around China-Nigeria relations in light of both CCP investments in the media space and President Buhari's recent initiatives on internet governance.

## ETHIOPIA

### Introduction

The second most populous country in Africa, gateway to the horn of Africa, and solicitous of the “China model,” Ethiopia is one of China’s most important political and economic partners in Africa.<sup>1</sup> Ethiopia recognized the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1970, but it was not until the onset of Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) rule in 1991 that the relationship materially deepened.<sup>2</sup> Since that time, Ethiopia has adopted many of the PRC Party-state structures implemented by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), with an emphasis on growing the economy and consolidating power through the injection of the party into all corners of the state.<sup>3</sup>

The transformation of the EPRDF into the Prosperity Party (PP) in 2019, and a shift in the composition of its members, did not materially change Ethiopia’s approach to relations with China. In fact, PRC support to Ethiopia during the COVID pandemic and Beijing’s public backing of the Prosperity Party in Ethiopia’s ongoing civil conflict have deepened ties between the two ruling parties.<sup>4</sup> Underlying the solidity of the relationship is a combination of PRC economic investment in Ethiopia, PRC-Ethiopian joint ventures backed by PRC financing, and PRC provision of technology and training used by the Ethiopian government to tighten its surveillance state.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the incorporation of Chinese surveillance technology, alleged technical expertise, and associated norms around censorship and limits on freedom of expression have enabled the Prosperity Party to expand its control of the information space, effectively preventing the opposition from political expression.

This is not purely a story of Beijing seeking to make its influence felt. While China’s involvement in Ethiopia has clearly fostered a political system that favors one-party rule and deep intermingling of the ruling party and the economy, Ethiopian ruling elites have actively sought the knowledge and tools to shape the ruling party in the mold of the CCP.<sup>6</sup> It has been Addis Ababa, not Beijing, that has made the choice since 1991 to consolidate power and isolate political opposition through illiberal methods.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the impact of China’s influence in Ethiopia is best described as facilitating an already present, persistent bend toward authoritarianism.

### Economic Influence

China’s investment and trade in the Ethiopian economy are one of the primary channels for its influence in the country. As in many African countries, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) accelerated Beijing’s access to Ethiopian industries and markets.<sup>8</sup> The economic relationship between Beijing and Addis Ababa, however, is distinguished from those with other African governments by Ethiopian officials’ open desire to use the “China model” to develop the country.<sup>9</sup> China has responded by providing economic investment and partnership to Ethiopian state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and party-linked businesses, as well as expertise to build the capacity of SOEs and train Ethiopia’s ruling political party to consolidate power.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “African Countries by Population (2022).” Worldometer, 2022, [worldometers.info/population/countries-in-africa-by-population/](https://worldometers.info/population/countries-in-africa-by-population/); Cabestan, Jean-Pierre. “China and Ethiopia: Authoritarian Affinities and Economic Cooperation.” *China Perspectives*, vol. 2012, no. 4, Centre d’Étude Français sur la Chine Contemporaine, 2012, pp. 53–62, [doi.org/10.4000/chin perspectives.6041](https://doi.org/10.4000/chin perspectives.6041); Sun, Yun. “Political Party Training: China’s Ideological Push in Africa?” *Brookings*, 5 July 2016, [brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/07/05/political-party-training-chinas-ideological-push-in-africa/](https://brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/07/05/political-party-training-chinas-ideological-push-in-africa/).

<sup>2</sup> Shinn, David H. “Ethiopia and China: Two Former Empires Connect in the 20th Century.” *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1 & 2, Tsehai Publishers, 2014, pp. 149–64.

<sup>3</sup> Ziso, Edson. “The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.” *Politics & Policy*, vol. 48, no. 5, 2020, pp. 908–31, [doi.org/10.1111/polp.12374](https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12374).

<sup>4</sup> Olander, Eric. “Wang Yi Gives Boost to Abiy with Official Visit to Ethiopia.” *The China-Africa Project*, 2 Dec. 2021, [chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/wang-yi-gives-boost-to-abiy-with-official-visit-to-ethiopia/](https://chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/wang-yi-gives-boost-to-abiy-with-official-visit-to-ethiopia/); Olander, Eric. “Why Jack Ma’s Donation is the Knock-Out Punch in the U.S.-China Soft Power Fight Over COVID-19 in Africa.” *The China-Africa Project*, 23 Mar. 2020, [chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/why-jack-mas-donation-is-the-knock-out-punch-in-the-u-s-china-soft-power-fight-over-covid-19-in-africa/](https://chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/why-jack-mas-donation-is-the-knock-out-punch-in-the-u-s-china-soft-power-fight-over-covid-19-in-africa/).

<sup>5</sup> Ziso. “The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.” “They Know Everything We Do”: Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia.” *Human Rights Watch*, 2014, [hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia0314\\_ForUpload\\_1.pdf](https://hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/ethiopia0314_ForUpload_1.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Ziso. “The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.”

<sup>7</sup> Ziso. “The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.” “Freedom in the World 2020—Ethiopia.” *Freedom House*, 2021, [freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020](https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-world/2020).

<sup>8</sup> Roland, Nadège. “A New Great Game?: Situating Africa in China’s Strategic Thinking.” *National Bureau of Asian Research*, 8 June 2021, [nabr.org/publication/a-new-great-game-situating-africa-in-chinas-strategic-thinking/](https://nabr.org/publication/a-new-great-game-situating-africa-in-chinas-strategic-thinking/); Calabrese, Linda, et al. “The Belt and Road and Chinese Enterprises in Ethiopia: Risks and Opportunities for Development.” *ODI*, Aug. 2021, [cdn.odi.org/media/documents/BRI\\_in\\_Ethiopia\\_Report\\_finalAug2021\\_m0Y5wm.pdf](https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/BRI_in_Ethiopia_Report_finalAug2021_m0Y5wm.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Sun. “Political Party Training: China’s Ideological Push in Africa?”; Ziso. “The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.”

<sup>10</sup> Sun. “Political Party Training.”; Ziso. “The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.”

This dynamic led to Beijing occupying a significant role in the Ethiopian economy. For instance, China is the largest bilateral owner of Ethiopia's external debt at 32 percent, representing a disproportionately higher debt-service payment of around 42 percent.<sup>11</sup> China is also the largest investor in Ethiopia, accounting for 60 percent of approved infrastructure projects in rail, telecommunications, and industrial sectors, among others.<sup>12</sup> Between 2005 and 2017, the number of Chinese-funded foreign direct investment (FDI) projects skyrocketed 1,320 percent, from 81 to 1,151.<sup>13</sup>

### *Party-State Development Model*

Under former Prime Minister Meles Zenawi's rule from 1995–2012, Ethiopia pursued the "developmental state" model, which is now termed the "China Model."<sup>14</sup> Through party exchanges between the EPRDF and the CCP (for more information, see the "Political Influence with the Ruling Party" section) and financial support from Chinese development banks, Ethiopia transformed its economy (and political system) to mirror core tenets of China's party-state development—namely, the centralization of the ruling party within the government and economy.<sup>15</sup>

Prior to its dissolution, the EPRDF (now the PP) was the largest and most consequential economic entity in the country.<sup>16</sup> Using elements of the CCP's integration into China's economy, EPRDF leaders forged their own path to inject the ruling party into the country's ethno-federal system by creating four for-profit, business-holding entities owned by "allied regional elites and politically connected associations of the four main ethnic groups comprising the party," while preventing other political and ethnic coalitions from doing the same.<sup>17</sup> These four entities, as well as other SOEs with deep ties to the party apparatus, received training sessions on sectoral skills and business management from PRC-based experts and organizations.<sup>18</sup>

The EPRDF staked a large portion of its economic success and public legitimacy on PRC investment.<sup>19</sup> For many public procurements during the EPRDF era, Ethiopian SOEs or party-linked companies entered into joint ventures with PRC SOEs to make their bids more financially and politically competitive.<sup>20</sup> The Ethiopian Investment Agency (EIA) facilitated continued PRC investment (and thus, Ethiopian SOE growth) through preferential treatment such as removing punitive taxes and tariffs on PRC trade and investment.<sup>21</sup> The partnership between Ethiopian SOEs, the PRC and associated state-owned enterprises expedited the Ethiopian party-state's capture of large parts of the economy, including public or discreet ownership of business in key sectors such as cigarettes, sugar, motor vehicles, and telecommunications.<sup>22</sup>

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Ethiopia transformed its economy (and political system) to mirror core tenets of China's party-state development—namely, the centralization of the ruling party within the government and economy.

<sup>11</sup> The second-largest owner of Ethiopia's debt is the World Bank, with roughly 31 percent. For more information on both China's debt portfolio in Ethiopia and the World Bank's, see: Olander, Eric. "Ethiopia's Appeal for Debt Relief Puts China's Loan Portfolio Under the Spotlight." *The China-Africa Project*, 2 Feb. 2021, [chinaafricaproject.com/2021/02/02/ethiopias-appeal-for-debt-relief-puts-chinas-loan-portfolio-under-the-spotlight/](http://chinaafricaproject.com/2021/02/02/ethiopias-appeal-for-debt-relief-puts-chinas-loan-portfolio-under-the-spotlight/).

<sup>12</sup> For information, see: "World Investment Report 2020." United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2020, [unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2020\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2020_en.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Gebrehiwot, Berihu A., et al. "Chinese Investment in Ethiopia: Contribution, Challenges, Opportunities and Policy Recommendations." Policy Studies Institute, Jan. 2020, [mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/109166/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_109166.pdf](https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/109166/1/MPRA_paper_109166.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia."

<sup>15</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.," see Chapter 1 in van Veen, Erwin. "Perpetuating Power: Ethiopia's Political Settlement and the Organization of Security." Clingendael, Sept. 2016, [clingendael.org/pub/2016/power\\_politics\\_and\\_security\\_in\\_ethiopia/1\\_past\\_and\\_present\\_of\\_political\\_power\\_in\\_ethiopia/](https://clingendael.org/pub/2016/power_politics_and_security_in_ethiopia/1_past_and_present_of_political_power_in_ethiopia/).

<sup>16</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia."

<sup>17</sup> These are: Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT or Tirit), owned by the TPLF (Tigray); Endeavour (Tiret) of ANDM (Amhara); Tumsa Endowment (formerly Dinsho), controlled by OPDO (Oromiya); and Wondo Group, controlled by SEPDM. See: Cabestan. "China and Ethiopia: Authoritarian Affinities and Economic Cooperation.," Van Veen. "Perpetuating Power.," Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia."

<sup>18</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia."

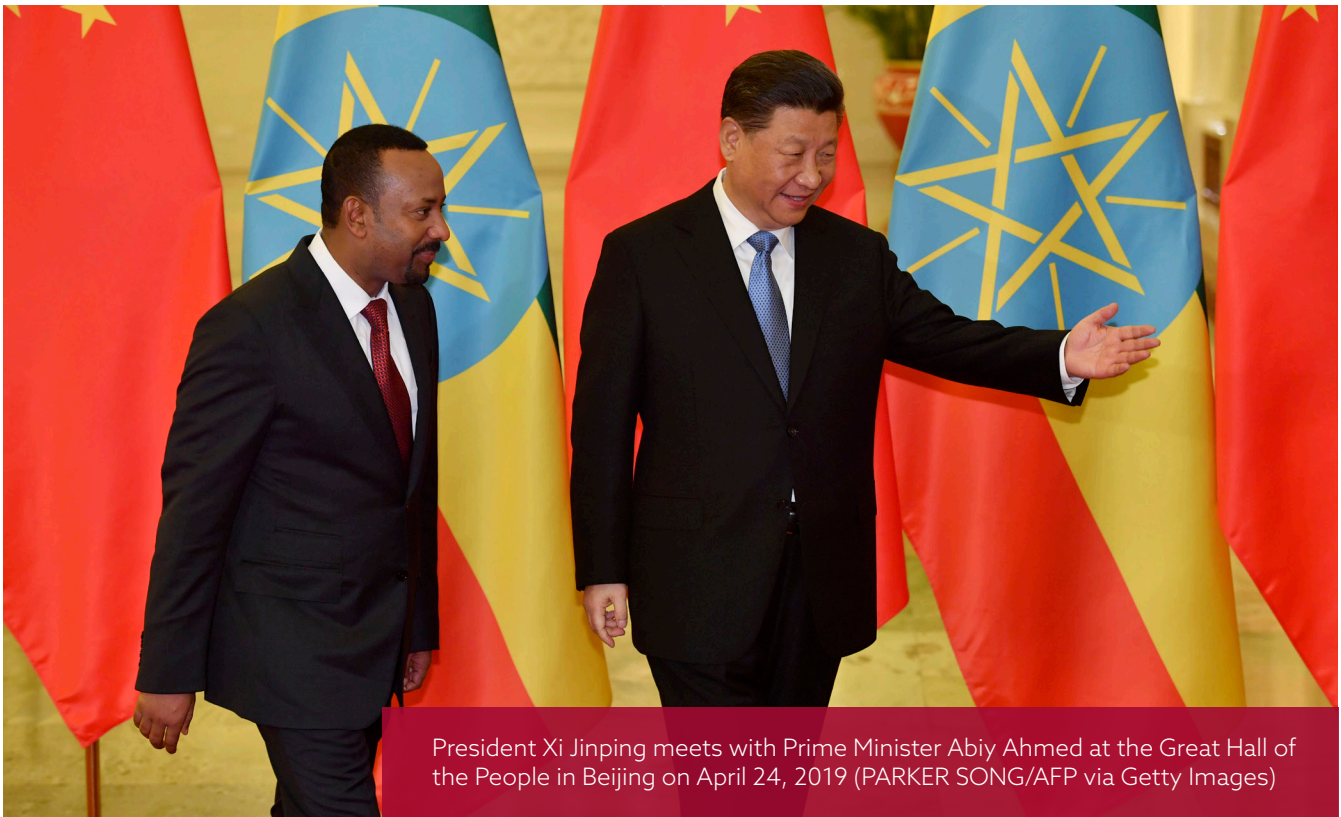
<sup>19</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia."

<sup>20</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.," "Ethiopia—Country Commercial Guide." International Trade Administration, United States Department of Commerce, 6 Sept. 2021, [trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/ethiopia-market-overview](https://trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/ethiopia-market-overview).

<sup>21</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.," "Ethiopia—Country Commercial Guide."

<sup>22</sup> Ziso. "The Political Economy of the Chinese Model in Ethiopia.," "Ethiopia—Country Commercial Guide.," Cabestan. "China and Ethiopia: Authoritarian Affinities and Economic Cooperation."

After decades of heavy PRC financing and investment in Ethiopia, this model has stalled as an engine for economic growth, and debt has become a formidable challenge.<sup>23</sup> Currently, 32 percent of public debt is owed to China with another 31 percent owed to the World Bank.<sup>24</sup> Loans have been used to fund telecommunications upgrades such as the well-known \$1.6-billion contract to ZTE and Huawei in 2013 and the supposedly transformational rail transit linking Djibouti to Addis Ababa.<sup>25</sup> As a result of Ethiopia's expanded debt portfolio with China and other multilateral donors, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has assessed Ethiopian debt sustainability as "high risk."<sup>26</sup> Ethiopian foreign reserves remain "low and vulnerable," requiring the government to request debt relief and outright debt cancellation on multiple occasions.<sup>27</sup> Even prior to the COVID pandemic and the current civil conflict, the continued "miracle" of Ethiopia's economic growth was called into question because of its overextended debt portfolio and decrease in SOE productivity.<sup>28</sup> Whether or not the PRC-inspired model will continue to thrive in Ethiopia will depend on the outcome of the country's ongoing civil conflict.



President Xi Jinping meets with Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on April 24, 2019 (PARKER SONG/AFP via Getty Images)

### Influence in Ethiopia's Information Space

Alongside fostering an Ethiopian development state, China has increased its engagements through soft-and sharp-power initiatives in Ethiopia. This includes establishing relationships with Ethiopia's academia, media personnel, and telecommunications experts, and gaining influence in Ethiopia's information space. This is a potential source of concern, not only because of the PRC party-state's fundamental hostility to press freedom and freedom of speech, but because of its demonstrated willingness to leverage such relationships and technologies to coercively shape discourse and political outcomes in target countries.

<sup>23</sup> Peissel, Joe, and Yike Fu. "Ethiopia-Data." *Africa Unconstrained*, [africaunconstrained.com/our-data/ethiopia-2/](https://africaunconstrained.com/our-data/ethiopia-2/).

<sup>24</sup> Peissel and Fu. "Ethiopia-Data."; Olander. "Ethiopia's Appeal for Debt Relief Puts China's Loan Portfolio Under the Spotlight."

<sup>25</sup> Peissel and Fu. "Ethiopia-Data."; Pilling, David, and Emily Feng. "Chinese Investments in Africa Go Off the Rails." *The Financial Times*, 5 Dec. 2018, [ft.com/content/82e-77d8a-e716-11e8-8a85-04b8afea6ea3](https://ft.com/content/82e-77d8a-e716-11e8-8a85-04b8afea6ea3).

<sup>26</sup> Peissel and Fu. "Ethiopia-Data."

<sup>27</sup> Olander. "Ethiopia's Appeal for Debt Relief Puts China's Loan Portfolio Under the Spotlight."

<sup>28</sup> "Is Ethiopia Headed for a Multifaceted Crisis?" *The Economist Intelligence Unit*, 27 Mar. 2020, [country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1219274305](https://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1219274305); Kopf, Dan. "Ethiopia's Economic Miracle Ride Is Set to Turn into a Bumpy Road." *Quartz Africa*, 4 Feb. 2020, [qz.com/africa/1785100/will-ethiopia-stay-one-of-fastest-growing-economies-in-the-world/](https://qz.com/africa/1785100/will-ethiopia-stay-one-of-fastest-growing-economies-in-the-world/).

<sup>29</sup> "Confucius Institutes a Bedrock of China's Growing Cultural Ties with Africa." *China Daily*, 23 Aug. 2018, [usa.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201808/23/WS5b7e209aa310add14f38753c.html](https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201808/23/WS5b7e209aa310add14f38753c.html); Nantulya, Paul. "Grand Strategy and China's Soft Power Push in Africa." *Africa Center for Strategic Studies*, 30 Aug. 2018, [africacenter.org/spotlight/grand-strategy-and-chinas-soft-power-push-in-africa](https://africacenter.org/spotlight/grand-strategy-and-chinas-soft-power-push-in-africa).

## Academia

Beginning in 2005, and accelerating since 2012, Confucius Institutes (CIs) have spread throughout the African continent.<sup>29</sup> Beijing established CIs to promote cultural and educational exchanges, as a nontraditional foreign policy instrument to promote positive perceptions of China, and to influence curriculum, staffing and events-programming decisions in host institutions in more “pro-China” directions.<sup>30</sup> CIs have been criticized by scholars and government officials in the United States and other countries on several grounds, including that the selection of staff is done by PRC’s Ministry of Education, which, in some cases, controls the content of CI curriculum.<sup>31</sup> As a result, CIs avoid mention of topics considered sensitive by the PRC government, such as Taiwan, Tibet or Xinjiang.<sup>32</sup>

In 2015, Addis Ababa University (AAU) opened the first Confucius Institute in Ethiopia. Another has since opened at the Technical & Vocational Education and Training Institute of Ethiopia.<sup>33</sup> As of 2018, the PRC government, through the two Confucius institutes, has provided 1,450 scholarships to Ethiopian students to study in China and training to more than 5,650 students in various fields, in addition to providing language classes to more than 10,000 students.<sup>34</sup> China has also recently seen an influx of Ethiopian students. Figures from the Chinese Ministry of Commerce indicate that in 2018 more than 7,697 Ethiopians received training in China.<sup>35</sup> Educational exchanges and engagement through the CIs provide China with a platform to foster ties with the next generation, which has the power to shape Ethiopia’s political development and future relations with China. Chinese telecommunications companies Huawei and ZTE have likewise provided educational opportunities for Ethiopians. For example, China supports Ethiopia’s higher-education institutions by furnishing laboratories with new equipment and teaching materials. In 2015, Huawei began to support the Addis Ababa School Net Project (AASNP), which was designed to promote education and “create connectivity among 65 educational institutions, including 64 secondary schools and one university college through ICT infrastructure, which was implemented by the Addis Ababa Educational Bureau, at a cost of 11.5 million dollars.”<sup>36</sup>

China has also made its influence felt in Ethiopian academia through the China-Africa Think Thank Forum (CATTF). Like the Confucius Institutes, CATTF aims to use local academics and analysts’ credibility to promote positive perceptions of, and gain support for, China’s approach to governance, development and Africa-China links generally.<sup>37</sup> The results of the CATTF in Ethiopia are yet to be determined. However, the inclusion of the Institute for Peace and Security Studies at the University of Addis Ababa in the PRC’s 2013 “10+10 Partnership Plan” indicates that at least one Ethiopian university is involved in CATTF’s operations.<sup>37</sup> The most visible output of this partnership is that the former vice president of Addis Ababa University, Zerihun Woldu, attended the seventh iteration of the China-Africa Think Forum in Beijing while moderating the panel “China-Africa Think Tanks and Media Cooperation: Strengthen the Effectiveness of Communication and Increase the Voice.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “Confucius Institutes a Bedrock of China’s Growing Cultural Ties with Africa.”; Nantulya. “Grand Strategy and China’s Soft Power Push in Africa.”; Allen-Ebrahimian, Bethany. “How China Managed to Play Censor at a Conference on U.S. Soil.” Foreign Affairs, 9 May 2018, foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/09/how-china-managed-to-play-censor-at-a-conference-on-u-s-soil; Redden, Elizabeth. “Closing Confucius Institutes.” Inside Higher Ed, 9 Jan. 2019, insidehighered.com/news/2019/01/09/colleges-move-close-chinese-government-funded-confucius-institutes-amid-increasing; Sharma, Yojana. “New Row over Confucius Institutes’ Role on Campuses.” University World News, 29 Oct. 2021, universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20211029094715105.

<sup>30</sup> “Confucius Institutes a Bedrock of China’s Growing Cultural Ties with Africa.”; Nantulya. “Grand Strategy and China’s Soft Power Push in Africa.”; Allen-Ebrahimian. “How China Managed to Play Censor at a Conference on U.S. Soil.”; Redden. “Closing Confucius Institutes.”; Sharma. “New Row over Confucius Institutes’ Role on Campuses.”; Peterson, Rachelle. “Get China’s Pernicious Confucius Institutes out of US Colleges.” The Hill, 22 Feb. 2018, thehill.com/opinion/education/375092-get-chinas-pernicious-confucius-institutes-out-of-us-colleges.

<sup>31</sup> “Confucius Institutes a Bedrock of China’s Growing Cultural Ties with Africa.”; Nantulya. “Grand Strategy and China’s Soft Power Push in Africa.”; Allen-Ebrahimian. “How China Managed to Play Censor at a Conference on U.S. Soil.”; Redden. “Closing Confucius Institutes.”; Sharma. “New Row over Confucius Institutes’ Role on Campuses.”; Peterson. “Get China’s Pernicious Confucius Institutes out of US Colleges.”

<sup>32</sup> “Confucius Institute Inaugurated in Addis Ababa University.” Embassy of the People’s Republic of China to the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, 9 Jan. 2015, mfa.gov.cn/ce/ceet/eng/zaqx/kewijl/t1227008.htm; “Feature: Confucius Institute Injects Momentum in Blooming Sino-Ethiopian Cultural Ties.” Xinhua, 6 Aug. 2021, xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2021-08/06/c\_1310112600.htm.

<sup>33</sup> “Ethiopian University to Start Master’s Degree in Chinese Language.” Xinhua, 20 Oct. 2021, xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/26/c\_137420265.htm; “Chinese Gov’t Provides More than 1,450 Scholarships to Ethiopians in 2018.” Xinhua, 26 Aug. 2018, xinhuanet.com/english/2018-08/26/c\_137420265.htm.

<sup>34</sup> “China Offers Scholarships to Ethiopian Students.” CGTN Africa, 7 Sept. 2019, africa.cgtn.com/2019/09/07/china-offers-scholarships-to-ethiopian-students.

<sup>35</sup> Tesfaye, Aaron. China in Ethiopia: the Long-Term Perspective. State University of New York Press, 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Nantulya. “Grand Strategy and China’s Soft Power Push in Africa.”; Sun, Yun. “China-Africa Think Tanks Forum: China Broadens Soft Power Campaigns in Africa.” Brookings, 1 Oct. 2015, brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2015/10/01/china-africa-think-tanks-forum-china-broadens-soft-power-campaigns-in-africa/.

<sup>37</sup> Roland. “A New Great Game?”

<sup>38</sup> Emewu, Ikenna. “Seventh China-Africa Think Tanks Forum Holds in Beijing.” Afri-China Media Centre, 4 July 2018, africachinapresscentre.org/2018/07/04/seventh-china-africa-think-tanks-forum-holds-in-beijing/.

The CATTF, Confucius Institutes and academic exchanges serve the same goal—to give the CCP greater influence over discourse about China in the region and on the global stage. As China continues its bid for global leadership, especially against the backdrop of “great-power competition” with the United States, the CCP believes positive perceptions of the “China model” will enable it to achieve its preferred policy outcomes.

### Media

Ethiopia’s information ecosystem remains fairly closed because of government surveillance and national security laws that regulate content critical of the government, creating an environment of forced censorship and self-censorship.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, credible accounts of intimidation and threats against the press have been documented.<sup>40</sup> In a closed media environment such as this, it can be challenging to evaluate the success of Beijing’s traditional soft- and sharp-power initiatives in Ethiopia. Furthermore, common media-influence initiatives such as the StarTimes’ “10,000 African Villages” appear to be absent. In 2018, however, StarTimes began offering digital pay-TV packages through its local agent, Bridgetech Broadcasting and Media.

It is clear, though, that well-established sharp-power efforts such as Beijing-led trainings for Ethiopian journalists and media executives exist.<sup>41</sup> Estimates of the number of Ethiopian journalists participating in these trainings are not available, but according to a 2019 Xinhua post, the state-run Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) and All-China Journalists Association (ACJA) seek to “enhance cooperation particularly on human resources development and exchange of information.”<sup>42</sup> This formalized partnership and associated activities are predated by the biography of Ethiopian journalist Yared Nigussie. According to his LinkedIn, in 2018 he received an “advanced certificate of Seminar on media Technology Experts for Ethiopia, 2018 (Phase I), organized by Hunan International Business Vocational College from May 3rd to June 1st 2018 Changsha, Hunan in the People’s Republic of China.”<sup>43</sup> In 2021, Nigussie wrote a pro-China article for one of Beijing’s most successful propaganda outlets, China Global Television Network (CGTN), titled “Why China’s Economic Miracle Should Still be a Model for Ethiopia.”<sup>44</sup> This cycle is concerning, as it extends the reach of pro-China news into target markets, while embodying the lack of freedom of expression included in the “China model.”

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The Ethiopian government has been proactive in upgrading its monitoring capabilities, in part, through its reliance on PRC-based ICT companies such as ZTE, Huawei and Siovatio.

### Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

A central node of China’s engagement in Ethiopia is its ICT and telecommunications investment. The Prosperity Party surveils its citizens online to an extreme degree, through tactics such as email monitoring, forced password disclosures, internet shutdowns and intrusive malware.<sup>45</sup> The ability to maintain robust surveillance mechanisms requires governments to keep pace with technological developments, and the Ethiopian government has been proactive in upgrading its monitoring capabilities, in part, through its reliance on PRC-based ICT companies such as ZTE, Huawei and Siovatio.<sup>46</sup>

In the last two decades, Ethio Telecom (formerly Ethiopia Telecommunications Corporation)—the state’s telecommunications monopoly—undertook aggressive infrastructure-modernization efforts through partnership with ZTE, Huawei and China International Telecom Corporation (CITCC).

<sup>39</sup> “They Know Everything We Do”: Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia.”

<sup>40</sup> “They Know Everything We Do”: Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia.”

<sup>41</sup> Nantulya. “Grand Strategy and China’s Soft Power Push in Africa.”

<sup>42</sup> “Roundup: Ethiopian, Chinese Media Pledge Efforts to Deepen People-to-People Ties.” Xinhua, 26 Mar. 2019, xinhuanet.com/english/2019-03/26/c\_137925344.htm.

<sup>43</sup> Yuan, Jialin. “Jialin Yuan.” LinkedIn, cn.linkedin.com/in/jialin-yuan-b9081834.

<sup>44</sup> Nigussie, Yared. “Why China’s Economic Miracle Should Still Be a Model for Ethiopia?” CGTN, 10 Mar. 2021, news.cgtn.com/news/2021-03-10/Why-China-s-economic-miracle-should-still-be-a-model-for-Ethiopia-YvCGZl5ipO/index.html.

<sup>45</sup> “They Know Everything We Do”: Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia.”

<sup>46</sup> “They Know Everything We Do”: Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia.”

This included two significant contracts: a \$1.6-billion ZTE in 2006 contract to upgrade fixed-line and mobile-infrastructure services and a \$1.6 billion contract to ZTE and Huawei in 2013 to transition the country's network to fourth-generation (4G) capability.<sup>47</sup> Following disagreements over maintenance costs, Ethio Telecom reduced the overall allocation to ZTE and Huawei by including Ericsson in this award.<sup>48</sup>

Upon completion of the 2006 ZTE contract, allegations of extrajudicial government censorship levied at the Ethiopian government, as well as at Ethio Telecom contractors such as ZTE, dramatically increased. According to Human Rights Watch, the Ethiopian government has used ZTE-supplied software for collecting and politically weaponizing phone call metadata, live interception of mobile communications, geotargeting and internet shutdowns, among other methods.<sup>50</sup> These tactics are often used against ethnic political factions outside the ruling party, such as the Oromo people and citizens who are sympathetic to causes or groups in conflict with government interests.<sup>51</sup>

Ethiopian reporters and former Ethiopian government employees allege that Chinese party officials, Chinese SOEs and private companies have provided specialized training to Ethiopian government officials to use Chinese technologies for unlawful surveillance, but evidence of these claims has yet to be provided. Moreover, it appears that, at least until 2017, the Ethiopian government's censorship decision-making processes were not controlled by a central organizing body. According to Human Rights Watch, "various government bodies—including the Information Network Security Agency (INSA), EthioTelecom, and the ICT ministry—seem to be implementing their own lists, contributing to a phenomenon of inconsistent blocking. This lack of transparency is exacerbated by the fact that the government denies implementing censorship."<sup>52</sup>

### **Influence with the Ruling Party**

The relationship between Ethiopia's ruling party and the Chinese Communist Party is long and considered to be one of the strongest on the continent. Beginning in 1994, the then EPRDF sent a senior delegation to China for "China's advice on Ethiopia's development."<sup>53</sup> Over the ensuing decades, the EPRDF requested and participated in more than 40 bilateral "exchanges and trainings," ultimately earning it the title "China's most eager student" from CCP officials and praise from Chinese scholars and media as "Ethiopia's biggest success of the China model in Africa."<sup>54</sup> During exchanges, the CCP shaped the EPRDF's concept of party management and party structure and provided technical assistance on the role of domestic development, strict control of the media, and propaganda creation and dissemination.<sup>55</sup>

The relationship between the PP and CCP has strengthened in the post-EPRDF era. The closer relationship has been attributed, in part, to China's COVID relief directed toward Ethiopia and Africa writ large.<sup>56</sup> In presumed response to the loyalty to Beijing demonstrated by Ethiopia Airway's decision to continue flights to China amid the emergence of the novel coronavirus, Chinese health authorities and the private sector donated large sums of personal protective equipment, test kits, medical expertise, and vaccines.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>47</sup> "They Know Everything We Do": Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia."

<sup>48</sup> Tinishu, Solomon. "Ethiopia: Ericsson Snatches More than Half of China's ZTE Telecom Deal." The Africa Report, 17 Dec. 2014, [theafricareport.com/3585/ethiopia-ericsson-snatches-more-than-half-of-chinas-zte-telecom-deal](http://theafricareport.com/3585/ethiopia-ericsson-snatches-more-than-half-of-chinas-zte-telecom-deal).

<sup>49</sup> "They Know Everything We Do": Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia."

<sup>50</sup> "They Know Everything We Do": Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia."

<sup>51</sup> "They Know Everything We Do": Telecom and Internet Surveillance in Ethiopia."; "Ethiopia: Ethnic Tigrayans Forcibly Disappeared." Human Rights Watch, 18 Aug. 2021, [hrw.org/news/2021/08/18/ethiopia-ethnic-tigrayans-forcibly-disappeared](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/08/18/ethiopia-ethnic-tigrayans-forcibly-disappeared).

<sup>52</sup> "Ethiopia—Freedom on the Net 2017." Freedom House, 2018, [freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-net/2017](https://freedomhouse.org/country/ethiopia/freedom-net/2017).

<sup>53</sup> Sun. "Political Party Training."

<sup>54</sup> Sun. "Political Party Training."

<sup>55</sup> Sun. "Political Party Training."; "A Delegation of Officials from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front Visits Guangxi." Chinanews, 29 Feb. 2016, [chinanews.com.cn/dl/2016/02-29/7777983.shtml](http://chinanews.com.cn/dl/2016/02-29/7777983.shtml); "Ethiopian Senior Cadre Training Class Visited Our County." Long'an County People's Government Portal, 28 June 2011, [web.archive.org/web/20160714215844/http://www.lax.gov.cn:80/contents/1293/67432.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20160714215844/http://www.lax.gov.cn:80/contents/1293/67432.html).

<sup>56</sup> Olander. "Why Jack Ma's Donation is the Knock-Out Punch in the U.S.-China Soft Power Fight Over COVID-19 in Africa."

<sup>57</sup> Hansrod, Zeenat. "China Makes Massive Donation of Medical Supplies to Fight Coronavirus in Africa." RFI, 23 Mar. 2020, [rfi.fr/en/international/20200323-china-africa-coronavirus-alibaba-health-medical-equipment](https://www.rfi.fr/en/international/20200323-china-africa-coronavirus-alibaba-health-medical-equipment); "Jack Ma Foundation Donates Masks, Testing Kits to Africa for COVID-19 Control." Xinhua, 17 Mar. 2020, [xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/17/c\\_138887624.htm](http://xinhuanet.com/english/2020-03/17/c_138887624.htm); Meseret, Elias, and Andrew Meldrum. "As Virus Spreads, Africa Gets Supplies from China's Jack Ma." ABC News, 22 Mar. 2020, [abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/africa-emergency-medical-supplies-chinas-jack-ma-69734247](https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/africa-emergency-medical-supplies-chinas-jack-ma-69734247); "Stopping Flights to China Not a Solution to Fight Novel Coronavirus: Ethiopian Airlines." Xinhua, 4 Mar. 2020, [news.cn/english/2020-03/04/c\\_138843815.htm](https://news.cn/english/2020-03/04/c_138843815.htm).

Ethiopia was also chosen by China to lead in the distribution of PRC-supplied medical assistance to the continent. Beijing's "donation diplomacy" and multilateral gatherings, similar to International Liaison Department exchanges in format and function, have become a central feature of its ruling-party cooperation and coordination with African countries in the COVID-19 era.<sup>58</sup>

The recent strengthening of ties also stems from the budding relationship between Xi Jinping and Abiy Ahmed, the Ethiopian prime minister. In early 2020, Abiy was the first African leader to speak with Xi about COVID-19, expressing support for China's efforts to contain the virus, as well as reaffirming Ethiopia's commitment to the PRC government's position that Taiwan is a part of China.<sup>59</sup> Likewise, throughout Ethiopia's increasingly violent civil conflict, PRC officials have publicly supported Abiy's government and the Prosperity Party's position. Most notably, in November 2021, PRC Foreign Minister Wang Yi made an unannounced visit to support the Ethiopian government's efforts. During the visit, he said, "China's confidence in the government of Ethiopia to stabilize situations in the country is demonstrated through my visit to Ethiopia today and China's restraint from blindly accepting the alarmist calls of the evacuation of [PRC] citizens from Addis Ababa."<sup>60</sup>

The PRC's public political support for Ethiopia's ruling party during a time of conflict is coupled with years of sustained engagement from the PRC's People's Liberation Army (PLA), which encourage the so-called party-army model "whose primary duty is the survival of the ruling party."<sup>61</sup> The PLA trains Ethiopian military officers and students through exchanges at military academies in China and at local academies established by the PLA, such as Ethiopia's Political School in Tatek.<sup>62</sup> At the academies, the PLA highlights mediums through which the CCP exercises control over the PRC's military, including Maoist ideology and practical guidance.<sup>63</sup> This budding politico-military relationship is an additional avenue for PRC officials to foster, maintain and—to some degree—influence the decision making of Ethiopian elite. Amid the ongoing civil conflict, it has been reported Chinese drones, namely the Wing Loong, have been supplied to the Ethiopian National Defense Force via United Arab Emirates interlocutors.<sup>64</sup>



A ceremony in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for 800,000 doses of Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccines donated by China on October 24, 2021 (Photo by Michael Tewelde/Xinhua via Getty Images)

<sup>58</sup> "President Xi Jinping Sends Written Message to the High-level Video Conference on Belt and Road International Cooperation." Embassy of the People's Republic of China in The Republic of Fiji, 18 June 2020, [mfa.gov.cn/ce/ce/fj/eng/topic/ZT1/t1791831.htm](http://mfa.gov.cn/ce/ce/fj/eng/topic/ZT1/t1791831.htm).

<sup>59</sup> "Wang Yi Holds Telephone Talks with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Gedu." ChinaMilitary, 12 May 2020, [81.cn/gjzx/2020-05/12/content\\_9811315.htm](http://81.cn/gjzx/2020-05/12/content_9811315.htm).

<sup>60</sup> Olander. "Wang Yi Gives Boost to Abiy With Official Visit to Ethiopia."

<sup>61</sup> Natulya, Paul. "China Promotes Its Party-Army Model in Africa." Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 28 July 2020, [africacenter.org/spotlight/china-promotes-its-party-army-model-in-africa](http://africacenter.org/spotlight/china-promotes-its-party-army-model-in-africa).

<sup>62</sup> Natulya. "China Promotes Its Party-Army Model in Africa."

<sup>63</sup> Natulya. "China Promotes Its Party-Army Model in Africa."

<sup>64</sup> Zwijnenburg, Wim. "Ethiopia Now Confirmed to Fly Chinese Armed Drones." Pax for Peace, 18 Nov. 2021, [paxforpeace.nl/news/blogs/ethiopia-now-confirmed-to-fly-chinese-armed-drones](http://paxforpeace.nl/news/blogs/ethiopia-now-confirmed-to-fly-chinese-armed-drones).

## Ethiopia's Response

Currently, there is little government pushback against China's authoritarian influence in Ethiopia. This is largely because the current and past administrations have actively sought the party-state's guidance on governance and economic concerns. As noted throughout this report, in 1994, the former EPRDF undertook efforts to build the party in the mold of the CCP, including adopting party-longevity initiatives, expanding the reach of the party in the state's economy, and capturing state institutions. The result is a deep relationship, both ideologically and materially, that leaves little space for contradicting opinions. Moreover, Ethiopia's restrictive media and civil society space limits the ability of this report to assess the extent to which there are grassroots campaigns, or even public desire, to reverse or rein in the excesses of the Ethiopian government's relationship with China and the Prosperity Party's modeling on the CCP.

The one area of observable pushback is in marginal economic gains and reform. First, on at least three separate occasions, Ethiopia has sought and received debt relief from Chinese creditors.<sup>65</sup> Second, Ethio Telecom was partially privatized through two licenses (roughly a 40-percent stake in the company).<sup>66</sup> The motivations for this reform are not entirely clear, but there are allegations that the sale is occurring to acquire funds to repay public debts.<sup>67</sup> In 2021, the first license was tendered to a global consortium comprising companies from the United Kingdom, Japan, and the United States.<sup>68</sup>



Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed speaks during the inauguration of Tana Beles No.1 sugar factory project, constructed by a PRC firm in Amhara regional state, June 6, 2021 (Photo by Xinhua via Getty Images)

<sup>65</sup> Olander. "Ethiopia's Appeal For Debt Relief Puts China's Loan Portfolio Under the Spotlight."

<sup>66</sup> Olander. "Ethiopia's Appeal For Debt Relief Puts China's Loan Portfolio Under the Spotlight."

<sup>67</sup> Manek, Nizar. "Ethiopia May Use Privatisation Funds to Repay State Lenders." Bloomberg, 17 Oct. 2019, [bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-17/ethiopia-may-use-privatisation-proceeds-to-repay-state-lenders](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-17/ethiopia-may-use-privatisation-proceeds-to-repay-state-lenders).

<sup>68</sup> Lennighan, Mary. "Vodafone et al Win Ethiopia Licence, But It's Not Over Yet." Telecoms.com, 24 May 2021, [telecoms.com/509868/vodafone-et-al-win-ethiopia-licence-but-its-not-over-yet/](https://www.telecoms.com/509868/vodafone-et-al-win-ethiopia-licence-but-its-not-over-yet/).

## Conclusion

Ethiopia is one of China's most important partners in the horn of Africa and the continent writ large, serving as its physical gateway to neighboring resource-rich countries and a political ally in continental and international fora. Likewise, China is one of Ethiopia's most important international partners, providing investment and ideological guidance. The former EPRDF saw the CCP as a governance model, aiming to replicate its structure and prominence within Ethiopia. The adoption of one-party systems—in both the Ethiopian economy and political space—was so successful that Ethiopia was nicknamed “China's most eager student.”

The political relationship between the CCP and PP has manifested in significant economic inroads for Chinese SOEs, particularly in the telecommunications and transit sectors. Through 15 years of significant Chinese investment, Ethiopia has an enormous debt burden of \$13.7 billion, with China the largest owner of that debt at around 32 percent. Exacerbated by the pandemic and civil conflict, Ethiopia's debt burdens are likely to slow economic growth and linger as a persistent hurdle to further development. Investments and training in the telecommunications sector, led by ZTE and Huawei, enabled the PP to upgrade its surveillance capabilities and weaponize the internet against political opposition. The partial privatization of the state-owned Ethio Telecom has the potential to alter the Ethiopian security state, but the necessary legal adjustments remain absent and the central's governments desire for private data is at an all-time high.

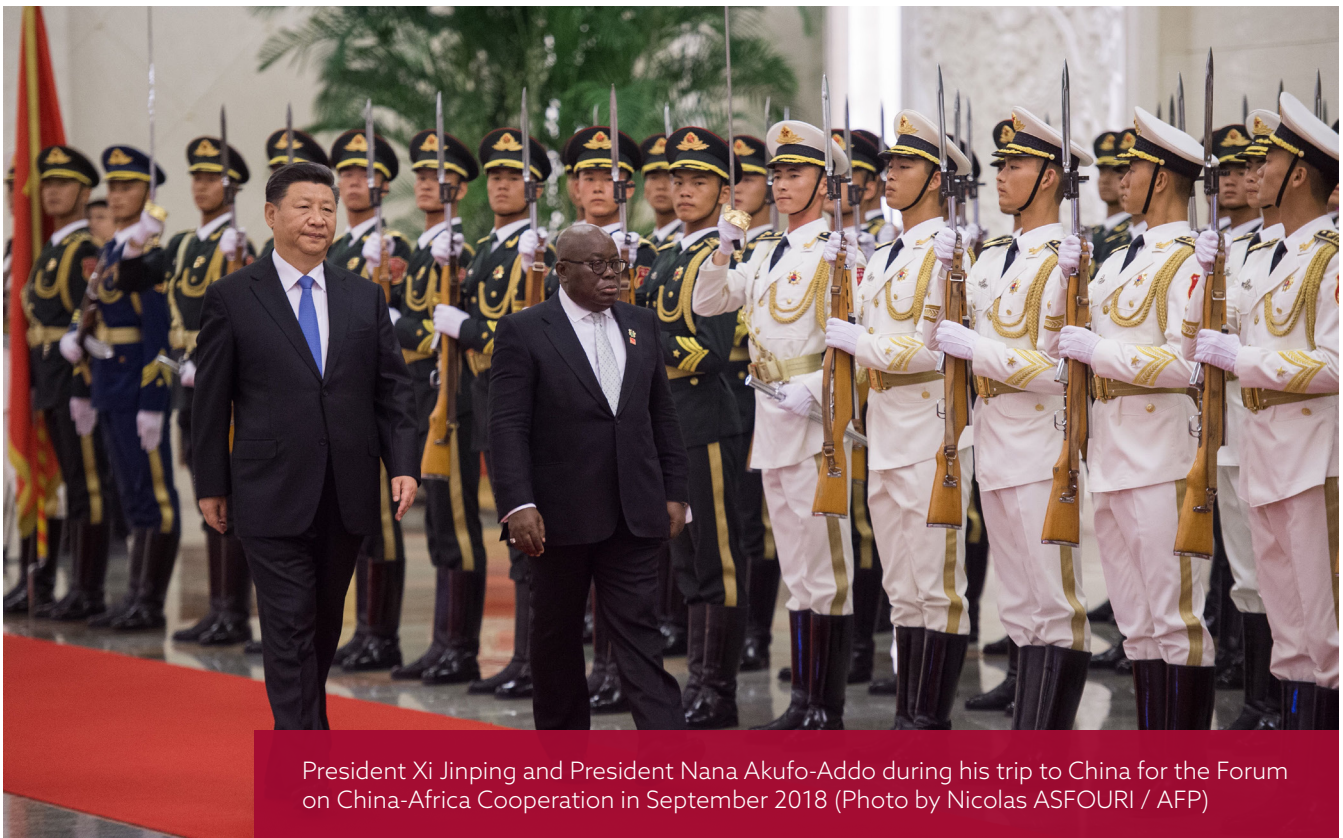
The results of the ongoing civil conflict in Ethiopia will have a serious impact on the Sino-Ethiopia relationship and the status of Ethiopian democracy. For the time being, it appears the CCP has doubled down on support for its longtime partner, the Prosperity Party. Additionally, the Ethiopian government has taken more flagrant extrajudicial measures in the face of more intense conflict. Combined, these factors make the prospects bleak for a new era of democracy and a more balanced relationship with the CCP.

## GHANA

### Introduction

Ghana was among the first African nations to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1960, when Ghana's foreign policy was grounded in communist ideological engagement led by former President Kwame Nkrumah. Ghana has been a longstanding political ally of the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a member of the Non-Aligned Movement, and it was an early advocate for the PRC's membership at the United Nations (UN) and UN Security Council. Ghana was also a vocal defender of the PRC during China's border war with India in 1962. Since Ghana's return to multiparty democracy in 1992, the relationship has been primarily sustained by economic interests.

Sino-Ghanaian relations have developed rapidly under the New Patriot Party (NPP) government, which returned to power in 2016. An intensive episode of elite engagement paved the way for Ghana's membership in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>1</sup> By courting investment from the PRC, the NPP government has acceded to the CCP's tendency to wield economic power for political gains. However, China's influence in Ghana has its limits. Domestically, political competition and a robust civil society keep the government accountable (or at least responsive) to its electorate, which will punish the government for deferring resources needed for Ghana's development. Internationally, Ghana has not demonstrated explicit support for China's "core interests" (e.g., policies regarding Xinjiang, Hong Kong, the South China Sea and Tibet) in international fora.



President Xi Jinping and President Nana Akufo-Addo during his trip to China for the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation in September 2018 (Photo by Nicolas ASFOURI / AFP)

<sup>1</sup> Joining the Belt and Road Initiative in 2018 was a deliverable from Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia's state visit to China the previous year. In 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping's Special Envoy and Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Wang Zhengwei and Vice Minister of Commerce Qian Keming visited Ghana in succession. See: "China Ready to Support Ghana's Economic Transformation—Chinese VP," GhanaWeb, 25 June 2017, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/China-ready-to-support-Ghana-s-economic-transformation-Chinese-VP-552294](http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/China-ready-to-support-Ghana-s-economic-transformation-Chinese-VP-552294); "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang's Regular Press Conference on June 27, 2017," Office of the Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, 26 June 2017, [fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cohk/eng/qwsy/t1473592.htm](http://fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cohk/eng/qwsy/t1473592.htm); "Ghana and China Sign Eight Cooperation Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding," Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Regional Integration—Republic of Ghana, 5 Sept. 2018, [mfa.gov.gh/index.php/ghana-and-china-sign-eight-cooperation-agreements-memoranda-of-understanding](http://mfa.gov.gh/index.php/ghana-and-china-sign-eight-cooperation-agreements-memoranda-of-understanding); Hudson, Kate B. "China-Ghana Relations Have Brighter Prospects—Outgoing Chinese Ambassador." Graphic Online, 12 Apr. 2018, [graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/china-ghana-relations-have-brighter-prospects-outgoing-chinese-ambassador.html](http://graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/china-ghana-relations-have-brighter-prospects-outgoing-chinese-ambassador.html).

## Economic Influence

The PRC's economic involvement with Ghana can be broken into three major sectors. The first is securing and maintaining access to Ghana's natural resources—notably oil and manganese, as well as the potential for large future exports of bauxite. Next is infrastructure financing, with loans secured through natural-resource supply agreements. Third is wildcat illegal mining by PRC nationals unsanctioned by the PRC state, a practice known in Ghana as *galamsey*. All three demonstrate how shortfalls in governance capacity can leave the Ghanaian state struggling to manage the risks of growing economic engagement with the PRC, opening the door to undesirable potential outcomes such as corruption, heavy debt burdens, and environmental degradation.

## Natural Resources

Oil is one of Ghana's largest exports to the PRC. As of 2019, Ghana exported \$2.38 billion in oil and petroleum products to China, accounting for more than 80 percent of all Ghanaian exports to China by value. Under a natural-resources-for-finance lending arrangement (discussed in greater detail below), China buys approximately 44 percent of Ghanaian exports of crude oil, in exchange for infrastructure lending. This makes China by far the largest purchaser of Ghanaian crude exports—ahead of South Africa, at 13.8 percent, and the United States, at 11.9 percent.

China is also a buyer of large amounts of Ghanaian manganese and has the potential to do the same for unrefined bauxite. Although China produces most of the world's manganese ore, it has increasingly relied on international sources as domestic supplies tighten.<sup>2</sup> As one of the few suppliers of manganese globally, Ghana's manganese exports to China expanded eightfold between 2015 and 2019, reaching 8.8 percent of China's total imports of the metal in 2019.<sup>3</sup>

Ghana is also rich in bauxite, an ore important to the production of aluminum. Ghana's untapped bauxite reserves are estimated at 900 million tons of unrefined ore, worth approximately \$400 billion if refined and sold at current market rates.<sup>4</sup> As in the case of steel, aluminum manufacturing is a major industry in the PRC, leaving the country vulnerable to supply disruptions.<sup>5</sup> Fluctuations in the price of bauxite ore after a recent coup in Guinea, China's largest supplier of bauxite, resulted in the unusual spectacle of the PRC government denouncing the overthrow of a democratically elected government.<sup>6</sup> Ghana recently passed laws regulating foreign involvement in the bauxite industry, and is targeting China as its main potential buyer as it ramps up local production.<sup>7</sup> A memorandum signed between the two countries in 2018 granted Beijing access to 5 percent of Ghana's surveyed bauxite reserves in exchange for \$2 billion worth of infrastructure financing.<sup>8</sup> The potential for disruptions of supply from Guinea, Australia and Indonesia—currently China's three largest partners in the bauxite trade—means that Ghana may be well positioned to become a leading supplier.<sup>9</sup>

In each extractive industry mentioned above, the Ghanaian government wants to move the country up the value chain, because the value of processed goods is typically much higher than that of raw materials. However, the ability to deliver processed goods depends on a variety of other factors, including sufficient infrastructure, a pool of skilled labor and reliable electricity supply.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, Neil. "China's Magnesium Shortage Threatens Global Car Industry." *The Financial Times*, 19 Oct. 2021, [ft.com/content/1611e936-08a5-4654-987e-664f50133a4b](https://ft.com/content/1611e936-08a5-4654-987e-664f50133a4b).

<sup>3</sup> "UN Comtrade." United Nations, 2014, [comtrade.un.org/](https://comtrade.un.org/); Elliott, R., et al. "Review of Manganese Processing for Production of TRIP/TWIP Steels, Part 1: Current Practice and Processing Fundamentals." *JOM*, vol. 70, no. 5, Springer U.S., 2018, pp. 680-90, doi.org/10.1007/s11837-018-2769-4.

<sup>4</sup> Dzawu, Moses M. "Ghana Signs \$1.2 Billion Deal to Develop Its Bauxite Resources." *Bloomberg*, 16 Sept. 2021, [bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-16/ghana-signs-1-2-billion-deal-to-develop-its-bauxite-resources](https://bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-09-16/ghana-signs-1-2-billion-deal-to-develop-its-bauxite-resources); Nortje, McKyla. "Ghana Promotes Local Content After Discovery." *Mining Weekly*, 2 Apr. 2021, [miningweekly.com/article/ghana-promotes-local-content-following-bauxite-discovery-2021-04-02/rep\\_id:3650](https://miningweekly.com/article/ghana-promotes-local-content-following-bauxite-discovery-2021-04-02/rep_id:3650).

<sup>5</sup> Daly, Tom. "Guinea Bauxite Can Make Up for Indonesia Ban, China's Antaiko Says." *Reuters*, 26 Nov. 2021, [reuters.com/world/china/guinea-bauxite-can-make-up-indonesia-ban-chinas-antaiko-says-2021-11-26/](https://reuters.com/world/china/guinea-bauxite-can-make-up-indonesia-ban-chinas-antaiko-says-2021-11-26/);

Siqi, Ji. "China's Energy Curbs Blunt Demand for Bauxite After Guinea Coup Stokes Supply Fears." *South China Morning Post*, 25 Sept. 2021, [scmp.com/economy/global-economy/article/3149988/chinas-energy-curbs-blunt-demand-bauxite-after-guinea-coup](https://scmp.com/economy/global-economy/article/3149988/chinas-energy-curbs-blunt-demand-bauxite-after-guinea-coup).

<sup>6</sup> Kumon, Takeshi, and Iori Kawate. "Guinea Coup Upends China Strategy as Aluminum Prices Soar." *Nikkei Asia*, 8 Sept. 2021, [asia.nikkei.com/Business/Markets/Commodities/Guinea-coup-upends-China-strategy-as-aluminum-prices-soar](https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Markets/Commodities/Guinea-coup-upends-China-strategy-as-aluminum-prices-soar); "Military Coup in Guinea Condemned." *Xinhua*, 6 Sept. 2021, [globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1233476.shtml](https://globaltimes.cn/page/202109/1233476.shtml).

<sup>7</sup> Nortje. "Ghana Promotes Local Content After Discovery."

<sup>8</sup> Smith, Elliot. "China's \$2 Billion Deal with Ghana Sparks Fears over Debt, Influence and the Environment." *CNBC*, 21 Nov. 2019, [cnbc.com/2019/11/21/chinas-2-billion-ghana-deal-fears-over-debt-influence-environment.html](https://cnbc.com/2019/11/21/chinas-2-billion-ghana-deal-fears-over-debt-influence-environment.html).

<sup>9</sup> Ajmera, Ankit. "Indonesia's Bauxite Export Ban to Have Limited Impact on China Supply." *S&P Global Platts*, 25 Nov. 2021, [spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/metals/112521-indonesias-bauxite-export-ban-to-have-limited-impact-on-china-supply](https://spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/latest-news/metals/112521-indonesias-bauxite-export-ban-to-have-limited-impact-on-china-supply).

The Ghanaian government has described the PRC as an important partner in realizing these interlinked economic-development objectives, with infrastructure particularly important. China's emphasis on intensive infrastructure development, especially in the transport sector, would significantly support the Ghanaian government's economic initiatives, such as "One-District-One-Factory," by opening essential transport routes to markets for the country's domestic products.<sup>10</sup>

### *Infrastructure Finance*

Although Ghana has had high hopes for inflows of China's finance, this money plays a relatively minor role when compared to those of other international actors.<sup>11</sup> In absolute terms, Ghana owes less than 10 percent of its outstanding public debt to China.<sup>12</sup> However, these figures might be inaccurate because the Ghanaian government classifies its agreements with the PRC as barter agreements in order to avoid the appearance of adding to public debt.<sup>13</sup> The conditions and outcomes of these financial agreements are controversial according to domestic critics and international standards.

The government of Ghana's financial dealings with China have been criticized by economic and environmental research institutions for Ghana's use of natural resources as collateral for infrastructure loans, because of how these dealings expose government finances to collapses in commodity prices. The risks of this finance model are discussed in greater detail in the case study below.<sup>14</sup>

"Resource-secured infrastructure finance" is not secured against existing assets, but against revenue earned through future exports of commodities. China Eximbank has frequently used this loan structure in Africa. When used properly, it can reduce risk to lenders and boost borrowers' capacity. When used improperly, it can mire borrowers in unsustainable debt, much like typical asset-backed loans.

### *Case Study: Master Project Finance Agreement*

Ghana is leveraging China's need for raw materials to fuel its development agenda by utilizing commodity-secured loans, or "resource-secured infrastructure finance."<sup>15</sup> For example, a 2018 agreement between the PRC and Ghanaian governments, known as the Master Project Support Agreement (MPSA), secured \$2 billion worth of infrastructure financing for Ghana against future sales of 5 percent of Ghana's surveyed bauxite reserves.<sup>16</sup>

The terms of the agreement offer a three-year grace period, beginning at the disbursement of funds for construction projects, which began drawing funds in 2019.<sup>17</sup> As of this writing, work has gone forward on a number of such construction projects, with the repayment grace periods for several ending in 2022.<sup>18</sup> Ghana's ability to repay the loans will depend on its development of a domestic aluminum-refining industry, which it currently lacks.

<sup>10</sup> "Chinese Ambassador to Ghana H.E. Mdm. Sun Baohong Published a Signed Article on Belt and Road Initiative." Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Ghana, 10 June 2017, [fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cegh/eng/sgxw/t1469261.htm](http://fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cegh/eng/sgxw/t1469261.htm). An initiative to spur growth and industry in Ghana was a flagship program of President Akufo-Addo's administration. See: "One District One Factory." Government of the Republic of Ghana, 2020, [1d1f.gov.gh](http://1d1f.gov.gh).

<sup>11</sup> "The 2020 Annual Public Debt Report." Republic of Ghana Ministry of Finance, 29 Mar. 2021, [mofep.gov.gh/sites/default/files/reports/economic/2020-Annual-Public-Debt-Report.pdf](http://mofep.gov.gh/sites/default/files/reports/economic/2020-Annual-Public-Debt-Report.pdf); "Ghana Joint World Bank-IMF Debt Sustainability Analysis." International Development Association/International Monetary Fund, Dec. 2019, [documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/707381592860938004/pdf/Ghana-Joint-World-Bank-IMF-Debt-Sustainability-Analysis.pdf](https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/707381592860938004/pdf/Ghana-Joint-World-Bank-IMF-Debt-Sustainability-Analysis.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Finance statistics shows that Ghana's outstanding debt to China reached approximately \$1.5 billion by the end of 2020. See: "The 2020 Annual Public Debt Report"; Brautigam, Deborah, et al. "Risky Business: New Data on Chinese Loans and Africa's Debt Problem." HKTDC Research, 18 Mar. 2021, [research.hktdc.com/en/article/Njk1Nzc1NTQz](https://research.hktdc.com/en/article/Njk1Nzc1NTQz).

<sup>13</sup> See page 5 in "Report of the Finance Committee on the Master Project Support Agreement (MPSA) Between the Government of the Republic of Ghana and Sinohydro Corporation Limited for an Amount Up to Two Billion United States Dollars (US\$ 2 Billion) for the Construction of Priority Infrastructure Projects." Parliament of the Republic of Ghana, Finance Committee, July 2018, [ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1280/BILLION%20CORPORATION.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://ir.parliament.gh/bitstream/handle/123456789/1280/BILLION%20CORPORATION.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

<sup>14</sup> Benefo, Angela, and Michael Addaney. "Promises and Pitfalls: China's Financing of the Atewa Bauxite Mining Project in Ghana." *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 11 July 2021, [gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/07/11/promises-and-pitfalls-chinas-financing-of-the-atewa-bauxite-mining-project-in-ghana](http://gjia.georgetown.edu/2021/07/11/promises-and-pitfalls-chinas-financing-of-the-atewa-bauxite-mining-project-in-ghana).

<sup>15</sup> Benefo and Addaney. "Promises and Pitfalls."; Brautigam, et al. "Risky Business."

<sup>16</sup> Emmanuel, Kojo. "Here's What You Need to Know about the \$2 Billion Sinohydro Deal." *Pulse Ghana*, 28 Sept. 2021, [pulse.com.gh/news/local/heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-dollar2-billion-sinohydro-deal/eq2xqj8](https://pulse.com.gh/news/local/heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-dollar2-billion-sinohydro-deal/eq2xqj8).

<sup>17</sup> Neal, Terrence. "The Environmental Implications of China-Africa Resource-Financed Infrastructure Agreements: Lessons Learned from Ghana's Sinohydro Agreement." Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, Duke University, Mar. 2021, [nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/The-Environmental-Implications-of-China-Africa-Resource-Financed-Infrastructure-Agreements-Lessons-Learned-from-Ghana%E2%80%99s-Sinohydro-Agreement.pdf](https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/The-Environmental-Implications-of-China-Africa-Resource-Financed-Infrastructure-Agreements-Lessons-Learned-from-Ghana%E2%80%99s-Sinohydro-Agreement.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Neal. "The Environmental Implications of China-Africa Resource-Financed Infrastructure Agreements."

Progress on this front has been slow. Under the terms of the MPSA, the government of Ghana planned to form joint ventures with private investors to develop the necessary mining, refining and smelting projects. As of December 2020, no such joint ventures had been formed.<sup>19</sup>

Ghana's Ministry of Trade and Industry has contended that the arrangement is a barter agreement, and not a loan.<sup>20</sup> However, critics within Ghana charge that, for all practical purposes, it is a loan with a regular repayment schedule—and with Ghanaian public funds placed at risk should Ghana be unable to make repayments through the export of refined alumina.<sup>21</sup> The government of Ghana has guaranteed that it will repay China out of receipts from transfers of refined bauxite to Sinohydro, making up the difference using public funds. The price of default is a 9-percent premium on the value of the loan; Ghana must maintain a balance of 8.5 percent of the total debt amount as collateral in an escrow account to ensure payment to Sinohydro. Failure to make repayments could, therefore, result in a significant burden on Ghana's already-indebted public finances.

To quickly develop greater sources of income and prevent default on repayment obligations, Ghana's government has bypassed environmental-protection procedures, clearing the way for three more bauxite mines, three refineries and a smelting plant without conducting appropriate environmental-impact assessments.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, the drive to meet the conditions of the resources-for-infrastructure agreement has the strong potential to damage the delicate ecosystems in the Atewa rainforest and pollute the waters of three major rivers that provide drinking water for more than five million people.<sup>23</sup>



Charge d'Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Ghana, Zhu Jing, presents medical supplies to First Lady of Ghana Rebecca Akufo-Addo in Accra, July 2020 (Photo by Xu Zheng/Xinhua via Getty)

<sup>19</sup> Neal. "The Environmental Implications of China-Africa Resource-Financed Infrastructure Agreements."

<sup>20</sup> See page 5 in "Report of the Finance Committee on the Master Project Support Agreement (MPSA) Between the Government of the Republic of Ghana and Sinohydro Corporation Limited for an Amount Up to Two Billion United States Dollars (US\$ 2 Billion) for the Construction of Priority Infrastructure Projects."

<sup>21</sup> See page 3 of "IMANI Alert: Government Must Clarify a Whole Lot in the Bauxite-Barter Deal with China. IMANI Recommends How Government Should Proceed." IMANI Center for Policy & Education, 11 Sept. 2018, [imaniafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/IMANI\\_Ghana\\_Sinohydro\\_Bauxite-Barter\\_Deal\\_Sept\\_11\\_2018.pdf](https://imaniafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/IMANI_Ghana_Sinohydro_Bauxite-Barter_Deal_Sept_11_2018.pdf).

<sup>22</sup> See page 2 of Neal. "The Environmental Implications of China-Africa Resource-Financed Infrastructure Agreements."

<sup>23</sup> Smith. "China's \$2 Billion Deal with Ghana Sparks Fears over Debt, Influence and the Environment"; "Coalition Demands Removal of Atewa Forest Reserve from Sinohydro Bauxite Deal." Ghanaian Times, 28 Nov. 2019, [ghanaianimes.com.gh/%EF%BB%BFcoalition-demands-removal-of-atewa-forest-reserve-from-sinohydro-bauxite-deal/](https://ghanaianimes.com.gh/%EF%BB%BFcoalition-demands-removal-of-atewa-forest-reserve-from-sinohydro-bauxite-deal/).

## Galamsey

Environmental impact from PRC-funded projects is already a sensitive issue in Ghana, because of a history of environmental degradation caused by PRC nationals illegally engaged in small-scale mining (a practice known in Ghana as *galamsey*). Ghanaian laws prohibit direct foreign participation in small-scale mining, because of difficulties in controlling the negative environmental impacts and the potential impact on the livelihood of local Ghanaian communities that depend on *galamsey*. Over the last decade, tens of thousands of PRC nationals migrated to Ghana's rural communities to engage in small-scale mining, squeezing local communities out of the industry and causing ecological damage. Sino-Ghanaian tension on this issue has persisted for much of the last decade, with critics charging that the government has been hesitant to take strong action against wildcat PRC miners, even if their activities are illegal and have not received the official sanction of the PRC government.<sup>24</sup>

The Ghanaian public's negative reaction to these illegal mining operations has caused tension in Sino-Ghanaian diplomatic ties, and has driven clumsy attempts by the PRC embassy to shut down criticism. In response to satirical illustrations by a local artist, the PRC embassy released a statement asking the Ghanaian government to "take the necessary action to stop such things from happening again and guide the media to give objective coverage on the illegal mining issue to create a good environment for further development of our bilateral exchanges and cooperation."<sup>25</sup>

The reaction demonstrates the PRC government's tendency to treat criticism abroad as it treats criticism at home: by trying to dampen or shut down debate of particularly sensitive or inflammatory issues. The PRC government has also leveraged its role as financier to force Ghana's hand on PRC nationals arrested for illegal mining. At the height of the Ghanaian government's enforcement efforts against illegal mining by PRC nationals, China slowed the disbursement of the remaining \$2.4 billion of the \$3-billion loan support earmarked for Ghana, and imposed implicit conditions on Ghana's ability to access the remaining funds, as well as future investment or finance.<sup>26</sup> This interplay of PRC pressure with Ghanaian economic self-interest may also have affected a recent case involving PRC national Huang Aisha, dubbed by some Ghanaian media as "queen of *galamsey*."<sup>27</sup> Huang was deported back to China in the middle of a trial for violating laws on *galamsey*, and public remarks by senior Ghanaian officials indicated that this outcome may have been influenced by a desire to preserve good relations with China during negotiations over the MPSA.<sup>28</sup>

Environmental impact from PRC-funded projects is already a sensitive issue in Ghana, because of a history of environmental degradation caused by PRC nationals illegally engaged in small-scale mining.



'We Dey Beg' by Bright Ackwerh is satirical piece depicting the Ghanaian government's relationship with the CCP. This artwork incited a response from the Chinese Embassy in Ghana.

<sup>24</sup> Mboya, Cliff. "Q&A: What Lessons Can the DRC Learn from Ghana's Experience Combatting Illegal Chinese Mining Activities?" The China Africa Project, 28 Sept. 2021, chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/qa-what-lessons-can-the-drc-learn-from-ghanas-experience-combatting-illegal-chinese-mining-activities/; Mboya, Cliff. "DRC: Lessons from Ghana's Dealings with Illegal Chinese Mining Companies." The Africa Report, 29 Sept. 2021, theafricareport.com/131390/drc-lessons-from-ghanas-dealings-with-illegal-chinese-mining-companies/.

<sup>25</sup> "This Cartoon by a Ghanaian Artist Has Made China Very Unhappy." Pulse Ghana, 8 Apr. 2017, pulse.com.gh/ece-frontpage/galamsey-fight-this-cartoon-by-a-ghanaian-artist-has-made-china-very-unhappy/24f8pgq; Nyabor, Jonas. "Chinese Mission Caution Ghana over Arrest of Illegal Miners." Citi FM Online, 8 Apr. 2017, citifmonline.com/2017/04/chinese-mission-caution-ghana-over-arrest-of-illegal-miners/.

<sup>26</sup> Debrah, Emmanuel, and Richard Asante. "Sino-Ghana Bilateral Relations and Chinese Migrants' Illegal Gold Mining in Ghana." Asian Journal of Political Science, vol. 27, no. 3, Routledge, 2019, pp. 286–307, doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2019.1669473. "China also decided to alter the ground rules for granting future loans to Ghana by including a soft condition that enjoins the Government of Ghana to resolve Chinese illegal miners' issue within Sino-Ghana diplomatic rules of engagement (Interview, Chinese Officials, November 2017)."

<sup>27</sup> Emmanuel, Kojo. "Nana Addo's Galamsey Fight Died the Day Govt Failed to Prosecute Galamsey Queen Aisha Huang—OccupyGhana." Pulse Ghana, 5 May 2021, pulse.com.gh/news/local/nana-addos-galamsey-fight-died-the-day-govt-failed-to-jail-galamsey-queen-aisha-huang/nsh79he.

<sup>28</sup> "Flashback: Jailing Aisha Huang in Ghana Wasn't Important; Won't Give Us Cash—Osafo Maafo." GhanaWeb, 21 Sept. 2019, ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/FLASHBACK-Jailing-Aisha-Huang-in-Ghana-wasn-t-important-won-t-give-us-cash-Osafo-Maafo-782723.

The apparent connection prompted critics to charge that pressure by the PRC was forcing selective application of Ghanaian law, with the outcry reaching a point that President Akufo-Addo was forced to concede that the decision to deport Huang had been a mistake.<sup>29</sup>

### Influence in Ghana's Information Space

Ghana has a large and vibrant media environment, and is among Africa's highest-ranked countries for media freedom according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF).<sup>30</sup> Ghana has more than 350 operational FM radio stations, 51 television stations and about 25 active newspaper titles across the country. However, local capacity to report on developments on China and east Asia is limited.<sup>31</sup> Coverage of China relies on access to international English-language sources, which has allowed the Xinhua News Agency to gain a foothold by supplying local papers with free coverage and content.<sup>32</sup>

In the print media space, the Xinhua has become one of the most important foreign news sources for Ghana's media. For instance, 5.42 percent of a total of 12,388 articles sourced from foreign news agencies during 24 months between 2011–2012 were sourced from Xinhua, behind only the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Reuters.<sup>33</sup> As in other African countries, Xinhua has grown its reach and access by hiring local talent; the bureau editor of Xinhua's Accra bureau, for example, was recruited from his position as chief editor at the Ghana News Agency (GNA).<sup>34</sup>

Ghana's government news agency and two of its major public newspapers have signed cooperation agreements with Xinhua, granting them free access to Xinhua's newswire in exchange for locally produced content and coverage.<sup>35</sup> To date, the cooperation has been one-directional—Xinhua has not filed any requests for Ghanaian-produced content, but has gained greater reach and access for its own.<sup>36</sup>

There are clear efforts by the PRC embassy in Ghana to curry favor with public media networks. For example, Ghana's public news agency—arguably the strongest and most professional in West Africa—has received donations of equipment from the Chinese embassy at regular intervals over the course of its partnership with Xinhua.<sup>37</sup> The donations are “aimed at strengthening the cooperation between the Embassy and the Ghanaian media” and to improve “objective coverage on China,” according to the PRC embassy.<sup>38</sup>

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There are clear efforts by the PRC embassy in Ghana to curry favor with public media networks.

<sup>29</sup> “Flashback: Jailing Aisha Huang in Ghana Wasn't Important; Won't Give Us Cash—Osafo Maafo.”; Issah, Hawa Suleimana. “Is Ghana Exchanging ‘Half Prosecution’ for Chinese Deals?” *Africanews*, 26 Apr. 2019, [africanews.com/2019/04/26/suspicious-mount-is-ghana-exchanging-half-prosecution-for-chinese-deals](https://africanews.com/2019/04/26/suspicious-mount-is-ghana-exchanging-half-prosecution-for-chinese-deals).

<sup>30</sup> “2021 World Press Freedom Index.” RSF—Reporters Without Borders, [rsf.org/en/ranking\\_table?sort=asc&order=Countries%20%26%20Regions](https://rsf.org/en/ranking_table?sort=asc&order=Countries%20%26%20Regions).

<sup>31</sup> Yeboah-Banin, Abena A., and Margaret I. Amoakohene. “The Dark Side of Multi-Platform Advertising in an Emerging Economy Context.” *Multi-Platform Advertising Strategies in the Global Marketplace*, edited by Kenneth C. C. Yang, IGI Global, 2017, 30–53; quoted in Yeboah-Banin, Abena A., et al. “A Chink in the Charm? A Framing Analysis of Coverage of Chinese Aid in the Ghanaian Media.” *African Journalism Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2019, pp. 53–66, 10.1080/23743670.2019.1610781.

<sup>32</sup> See pp. 188, 234–236, 279–281 in Serwornoo, Michael Y. W. (2018). *Africa's Image in the Ghanaian Press: the Influence of International News Agencies*. [Doctor of Philosophy Inaugural Dissertation, Ruhr-Universität Bochum], [hss-opus.ub.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/opus4/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/6140/file/diss.pdf](https://hss-opus.ub.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/opus4/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/6140/file/diss.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Serwornoo, Michael Y. W. “Exploring China's Emerging Global Media Visibility in Ghana: The Limits of Effective Public Diplomacy.” In *Towards Building Resilient Cities: Opportunities, Challenges, and Innovation—Proceedings of the China-Africa Urban Development Forum 2019*, Cape Coast, 3–4 October 2019, edited by Ishmael Mensah and Hu Liangcai, University of Cape Coast, 2019, pp. 125–135. Research Gate, [researchgate.net/publication/343127453\\_EXPLORING\\_CHINA'S\\_EMERGING\\_GLOBAL\\_MEDIA\\_VISIBILITY\\_IN\\_GHANA\\_THE\\_LIMITS\\_OF\\_EFFECTIVE\\_PUBLIC\\_DIPLOMACY](https://researchgate.net/publication/343127453_EXPLORING_CHINA'S_EMERGING_GLOBAL_MEDIA_VISIBILITY_IN_GHANA_THE_LIMITS_OF_EFFECTIVE_PUBLIC_DIPLOMACY).

<sup>34</sup> Ankamah, Ray. “Ray Ankamah.” LinkedIn, 2022, [linkedin.com/in/ray-ankomah-23130677/?originalSubdomain=gh](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ray-ankomah-23130677/?originalSubdomain=gh).

<sup>35</sup> “Chinese Embassy Equips Ghana News Agency to Deliver Effectively.” GhanaWeb, 9 Nov. 2018, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Chinese-Embassy-equips-Ghana-News-Agency-to-deliver-effectively-699481](https://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/Chinese-Embassy-equips-Ghana-News-Agency-to-deliver-effectively-699481).

<sup>36</sup> See pp. 234–236, 279–281 in Serwornoo. *Africa's Image in the Ghanaian Press*.

<sup>37</sup> “Chinese Embassy Donated Office Equipment to Ghana News Agency.” Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Ghana, 27 Feb. 2016, [fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cegh/eng/zjgx/whjh/t1343618.htm](https://fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cegh/eng/zjgx/whjh/t1343618.htm).

<sup>38</sup> “Chinese Embassy Donated Office Equipment to Ghana News Agency.”; “Chinese Embassy Offers Technical Assistance to GNA.” Ghana News Agency, 6 Oct. 2021, [gna.org.gh/1.21215311](https://gna.org.gh/1.21215311).

## StarTimes

StarTimes, a PRC-based provider of digital television services, is a good example of how even nominally “private” businesses have helped advance PRC influence over Ghana’s information space.

Headquartered in Beijing, StarTimes is one of the largest providers of digital television services to Africa. The company is run by Pang Xinxing, who served in the People’s Liberation Army prior to his business career, as well as in the Propaganda and Education Departments of a state-affiliated geological survey group.<sup>39</sup> Like many PRC-affiliated media companies, Pang’s has been credibly accused of using market power to promote positive narratives of China while downplaying critical coverage (for example, by including PRC state news channels in StarTimes’ least expensive content packages, while reserving non-PRC news channels for more expensive packages).<sup>40</sup>

In 2012, StarTimes won a Ghanaian government contract to help build out the country’s infrastructure for migration from analog to digital television.<sup>41</sup> The government cancelled the contract in 2015 after two years of non-performance, and awarded the contract to domestic provider K-Net.<sup>42</sup> StarTimes sued in protest. But in 2017, on the advice of Ghana’s attorney general and reportedly to preserve its relationship with the PRC, the NPP government chose to settle the case instead of proceeding with arbitration at the International Commercial Court (ICC) in London.<sup>43</sup> The Ghanaian government had a strong case due to StarTimes’ non-performance, and had already won the case in domestic courts.

Settling the lawsuit paved the way for StarTimes’ return to Ghana the following year, backed by the economic muscle of the PRC state. That year, the PRC government reportedly conditioned a \$19-billion infrastructure loan to Ghana on allowing StarTimes to build Ghana’s digital-television broadcasting infrastructure.<sup>44</sup> Although the Ghanaian government claimed it did not agree to PRC negotiators’ condition, StarTimes was ultimately given permission and policy support to “enhance” the digital terrestrial television (DTT) infrastructure originally installed by K-Net and to provide new access to digital television to 300 Ghanaian villages.<sup>45</sup>

The Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association (GIBA) fiercely opposed the Ghanaian government’s decision.<sup>46</sup> It claims that the Ghanaian parliament did not have the technical expertise to properly evaluate the deal, nor did it conduct consultations to do so. GIBA suggested that decision making was not done in the national interest, allowing the PRC to shape the agreement in its favor and take advantage of the Ghanaian government’s dearth in expertise.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>39</sup> See page 22 in Madrid-Morales, Dani, et al. “It Is about Their Story—How China, Turkey and Russia Influence the Media in Africa.” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021, [kas.de/documents/285576/0/How+China%2C+Turkey+and+Russia+influence+media+in+Africa.pdf/6594fc3e-f240-6aea-342d-92c8f90dbf43?version=1.2&t=1611811364948](https://kas.de/documents/285576/0/How+China%2C+Turkey+and+Russia+influence+media+in+Africa.pdf/6594fc3e-f240-6aea-342d-92c8f90dbf43?version=1.2&t=1611811364948); “创业之路 | 庞新星：让非洲百姓享受数字电视的美好 (Road to Entrepreneurship | Pang Xinxing: Let African People Enjoy the Beauty of Digital TV).” StarTimes, 7 Nov. 2019, [startimes.com.cn/2019/11/2158.html](http://startimes.com.cn/2019/11/2158.html).

<sup>39</sup> Umejei, Emeka. “Pay TV and the Success of Chinese Soft Power in Nigeria.” Africa-China Reporting Project, 6 Aug. 2013, [africachinareporting.co.za/2013/08/nigeria-chinese-soft-power](http://africachinareporting.co.za/2013/08/nigeria-chinese-soft-power).

<sup>40</sup> Umejei. “Pay TV and the Success of Chinese Soft Power in Nigeria.”; Cook, Sarah. “Beijing’s Global Megaphone.” Freedom House, 2020, [freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/beijings-global-megaphone](https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/beijings-global-megaphone).

<sup>41</sup> Amos, Amorose B. “Why Ursula Owusu Is ‘China-izing’ Ghana’s Digital Space in the Face of GIBA’s ‘Ugly’ Noise.” GhanaWeb, 24 Sept. 2018, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Why-Ursula-Owusu-is-China-lizing-Ghana-s-digital-space-in-the-face-of-GIBA-s-ugly-noise-687227](http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/Why-Ursula-Owusu-is-China-lizing-Ghana-s-digital-space-in-the-face-of-GIBA-s-ugly-noise-687227).

<sup>42</sup> Choice of the DTT over direct-to-home (DTH) broadcast technology was grounded in concerns about foreign control over broadcast infrastructure: DTH would rely on satellite broadcast whereas Ghana could exert sovereign control over DTT. See: “StarTimes Scheming to Takeover Broadcasting Space—GIBA.” GhanaWeb, 18 Sept. 2018, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/StarTimes-scheming-to-takeover-broadcasting-space-GIBA-685864](http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/StarTimes-scheming-to-takeover-broadcasting-space-GIBA-685864).

<sup>43</sup> Azumah, Oswald K. “A-G Advised US to Settle with StarTimes—ANDAH.” I-ARB AFRICA, 2 June 2017, [iarbafrica.com/en/news-list/17-news/814-a-g-advised-us-to-settle-with-startimes-%E2%80%93andah](http://iarbafrica.com/en/news-list/17-news/814-a-g-advised-us-to-settle-with-startimes-%E2%80%93andah); “Star Times Sues Ghana @ ICC Over Digital Migration Contract.” Peace FM Online, 11 July 2015, [peacefmonline.com/pages/local/news/201507/247471.php](http://peacefmonline.com/pages/local/news/201507/247471.php).

<sup>44</sup> “StarTimes Saga: IMANI Africa Holds Public Forum.” GhanaWeb, 26 Sept. 2018, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/StarTimes-Saga-IMANI-Africa-holds-public-forum-688119?video=1&jwsourc=cl](http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/business/StarTimes-Saga-IMANI-Africa-holds-public-forum-688119?video=1&jwsourc=cl); Gariba, Amodani. “The \$19 Billion Ghana-China Deal Does Not Serve Ghana’s Interest; Review It.” GhanaWeb, 5 Sept. 2018, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/The-19-billion-Ghana-China-deal-does-not-serve-Ghana-s-interest-review-it-682368](http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/features/The-19-billion-Ghana-China-deal-does-not-serve-Ghana-s-interest-review-it-682368).

<sup>45</sup> “We Have No Contract with StarTimes—Minister Clarifies.” ModernGhana, 20 Sept. 2018, [modernghana.com/news/884045/we-have-no-contract-with-startimes-minister-clari.html](http://modernghana.com/news/884045/we-have-no-contract-with-startimes-minister-clari.html); Acquaye, Nana A. “Experts Skeptical about Ghana’s StarTimes DTT Enhancement Move.” Biztech Africa, 5 Oct. 2018, [biztechafrica.com/article/experts-skeptical-about-ghanas-startimes-dtt-enhancement/13998/](http://biztechafrica.com/article/experts-skeptical-about-ghanas-startimes-dtt-enhancement/13998/).

<sup>46</sup> “StarTimes Scheming to Takeover Broadcasting Space—GIBA.” GhanaWeb, 18 Sept. 2018, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/StarTimes-scheming-to-takeover-broadcasting-space-GIBA-685864](http://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/StarTimes-scheming-to-takeover-broadcasting-space-GIBA-685864); “StarTimes Saga: IMANI Africa Holds Public Forum.”

<sup>47</sup> “StarTimes scheming to takeover broadcasting space—GIBA.”

## Political Influence

Developing infrastructure is high among Ghanaian voters' priorities, and successful implementation of infrastructure projects supported by PRC finance can yield substantial political dividends.<sup>48</sup> The Ghanaian government is aware of the CCP's tendency to use economic power to expand its political power, but the potential electoral benefits of cooperation with the PRC have mitigated against treating this tendency as a potential threat to national sovereignty. Rather, the Ghanaian government has been circumspect about issues on which offending the PRC might jeopardize access to development finance. At the same time, however—and in contrast with many other African governments—Ghana has not proactively offered support in international fora for PRC positions on “core interests” such as Hong Kong, Xinjiang and the South China Sea.<sup>49</sup>

A perceived affinity for China can be a political liability in Ghanaian politics. Both major political parties have accused the other of benefiting from PRC investment in Ghana.

A perceived affinity for China can be a political liability in Ghanaian politics. Both major political parties have accused the other of benefiting from PRC investment in Ghana. For instance, the National Democratic Congress (NDC) claims that some PRC-based companies operating in Ghana consorted with the NPP government to give it a political advantage ahead of the 2020 elections. The NPP, then in opposition, made similar allegations about the NDC during the 2016 and 2012 elections. In 2012, the NPP claimed that Huawei consorted with the NDC government by helping it print campaign paraphernalia worth millions of U.S. dollars.<sup>50</sup>

Although both parties accuse one another of using the PRC's support to gain an advantage in national elections, this has not reduced engagement with China when in power. Quite the opposite is true; criticism from the opposition NDC has actually driven deeper engagement with China by the NPP. For example, ranking members of Ghana's Finance Committee have criticized the government for jeopardizing Ghana's access to PRC financing and placing the country's development at risk by poorly implementing projects funded by agreements with China.<sup>51</sup>

The NPP government has been particularly averse to confrontation with China. As mentioned earlier, it openly defended its decision to selectively apply Ghanaian law against Chinese nationals caught conducting illegal mining operations in Ghana, citing economic interests it deems more important to preserve.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, the NDC made a campaign pledge to ask China to extradite Huang Aisha, the Chinese national in Ghana also known as the “galamsey queen,” who had managed large-scale illegal mining operations, should it come to power.<sup>53</sup> The NDC's resolve on this commitment was never tested, as the NPP won the 2020 elections.

## Ghana's Response

The competition between the two major political parties in Ghana has driven deeper economic engagement with the PRC, as discussed above, yet these democratic dynamics also promote financial accountability and efficient use of economic resources. Though the mechanisms used by the PRC to finance major investment projects in Ghana add to the government's exposure to fluctuations in the commodity market and potential debt distress, international development organizations remain Ghana's largest investors.

<sup>48</sup> “Highlights of Findings from the CDD-Ghana Pre-Election Survey

(September 28–October 16, 2020).” Ghana Center for Democratic Development, 30 Oct. 2020, [media.peacefmonline.com/docs/202010/707096830\\_543239.pdf](https://media.peacefmonline.com/docs/202010/707096830_543239.pdf).

<sup>49</sup> Yellinek, Roie, and Elizabeth Chen. “The ‘22 vs. 50’ Diplomatic Split Between the West and China Over Xinjiang and Human Rights.” Jamestown Foundation, 31 Dec. 2019, [jamestown.org/program/the-22-vs-50-diplomatic-split-between-the-west-and-china-over-xinjiang-and-human-rights/](https://jamestown.org/program/the-22-vs-50-diplomatic-split-between-the-west-and-china-over-xinjiang-and-human-rights/); Albert, Eleanor. “Which Countries Support the New Hong Kong National Security Law?” *The Diplomat*, 6 July 2020, [thediplomat.com/2016/07/who-supports-china-in-the-south-china-sea-and-why/](https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/who-supports-china-in-the-south-china-sea-and-why/); Wen, Wang, and Chen Xiaochen. “Who Supports China in the South China Sea and Why.” *The Diplomat*, 27 July 2016, [thediplomat.com/2016/07/who-supports-china-in-the-south-china-sea-and-why/](https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/who-supports-china-in-the-south-china-sea-and-why/).

<sup>50</sup> Nonor, Daniel. “Ghana: Chinese Coy Granted \$47 Million Tax Exemption Aiding NDC Campaign.” *AllAfrica*, 17 Oct. 2012, [allafrica.com/stories/201210180597.html](https://allafrica.com/stories/201210180597.html); “AFAG Exposes NDC-Huawei Corrupt Deals.” *GhanaWeb*, 18 Oct. 2012, [ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/AFAG-Exposes-NDC-Huawei-Corrupt-Deals-253492](https://ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/AFAG-Exposes-NDC-Huawei-Corrupt-Deals-253492).

<sup>51</sup> JoyNews. “PM Express Is Live with Evans Mensah as We Discuss the Sinohydro Deal on the JoyNews Channel.” Facebook, 27 Sept. 2021, [facebook.com/JoyNewsOnTV/vid-eos/392531465825373](https://facebook.com/JoyNewsOnTV/vid-eos/392531465825373).

<sup>52</sup> Nyabor, Jonas. “Jailing Aisha Huang Wouldn't Have Solved Ghana's Problems—Osafo Maafa.” *Citi Newsroom*, 19 Apr. 2019, [citinewsroom.com/2019/04/jailing-aisha-huang-wouldnt-have-solved-ghanas-problems-osafo-maafa/](https://citinewsroom.com/2019/04/jailing-aisha-huang-wouldnt-have-solved-ghanas-problems-osafo-maafa/).

<sup>53</sup> “NDC Will Extradite Aisha Huang to Ghana for Prosecution—Ablakwa.” *Graphic Online Ghana*, 27 Apr. 2019, [graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-ndc-plans-to-extradite-aisha-huang-for-prosecution-ablakwa.html](https://graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-ndc-plans-to-extradite-aisha-huang-for-prosecution-ablakwa.html).

This mitigates the risk of the PRC dominating the Ghanaian government's access to finance and gaining greater leverage and influence over it. Ghana's robust media environment plays a large role in keeping elected officials accountable and voters informed. However, critical reporting about China hinges on major Ghanaian news outlets' continued access to international English-language newswire services such as the BBC World Service and Reuters. Xinhua is poised to continue gaining ground as a source for international news in Ghana by offering its services at a subsidized rate, or free of charge through content-sharing agreements, and provide coverage that is more amenable to the CCP's interests.

There are no signs of intense Sino-Ghanaian relations abating—a situation driven by long-term economic interests in the form of development finance or access to resources. Though the Ghanaian government has shown that it is susceptible to pressure from the PRC—by allowing for political conditions to its access to lines of credit—it is primarily concerned with maintaining voter support and advancing its development agenda. So long as Ghana's vibrant civil society is able to hold the government accountable, as in the case of the Master Project Finance Agreement, there are encouraging signs that Ghana will be able to navigate this challenging relationship while maintaining its democratic integrity.

## Conclusion

Ghana is one of China's most important partners and a source of critical resources in Western Africa. China has a strategic interest in gaining access to critical natural resources and protecting those investments by promoting positive narratives about China in Ghana. Conversely, the political dividends derived from economic development continue to incentivize Ghanaian governments to accede to the Chinese government's demands to preserve its access to development finance—even at the cost of weakening democratic institutions such as the rule of law through its selective application of the penal code.



China's Vice Premier Sun Chunlan and Ghanaian Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia attend the launching ceremony of the Polytechnics, Technical, and Vocational Training Centers Upgrading Project of Ghana in Accra, November 2019. (Photo by Zhang Yu/Xinhua via Getty Images)

Ghana has a vibrant media market, but there is a dearth of indigenous critical reporting about China, its government and its influence in Ghana. Xinhua can continue to gain ground on paid international newswire services such as the BBC World Service and Reuters through its content-exchange agreement with local news providers. However, regardless of their capacity to report on China, an active press and civil society continue to hold the Ghanaian government accountable. There seems to be a pervasive realism in Ghanaian media regarding engagement with China. Ghanaians expect China to pursue agreements in its own interest, but they also expect accountability and competence from the Ghanaian government to minimize risks to Ghana's sovereignty and maximize opportunities for its development.<sup>54</sup>

Because Ghana is a source of manganese, bauxite, and oil, a growing consumer market and a nation with a consistent demand for development finance, China's engagement in Ghana is unlikely to waver anytime soon. Given this structural reality, it becomes doubly important not only for Ghanaians to continue holding their government accountable through incisive investigative reporting, but to develop and maintain greater literacy regarding the Chinese government, its behavior and its intentions in Ghana.

The consensus among Ghanaian political parties is that the importance of economic development incentivizes those in power to overlook the more unsavory aspects of China's engagement with the country. At the same time, robust criticism from political opposition consistently draws on governments' willingness to accede to China's demands as ammunition to erode the ruling party's political support. This healthy political competition is a democratic advantage to keep China's influence at bay and protect Ghanaian sovereignty.

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<sup>54</sup> "PM Express Is Live with Evans Mensah as We Discuss the Sinohydro Deal on the JoyNews Channel."

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## CONCLUSION

One survey after another reveals that, across the African continent, support for democracy remains high, in marked contrast to a growing disillusionment across other parts of the democratic world. Africans have fought hard for their democracies, and know precisely why they are worth cherishing: the ability to speak openly, and without fear of retaliation, about the actions and motivations of their countries' most powerful officials, and to demand accountability and equity from those who rule.

This is a fundamentally different set of values from those animating the PRC government's growing engagement in the African continent's information environment. "Thought work," as conceived of and acted upon by the CCP, expresses a relationship between power and information that is inimical to the democratic ideals Africans manifestly support; that is, one in which the priorities of the state, rather than society, determine who has the right to speak and what they can say.

As the case studies in this report reveal, while the CCP and CCP-linked actors can function effectively in information spaces underpinned by democratic norms, they do so in the service of a questionable vision of development that offers African leaders the prospect of power without accountability and prosperity without the messy demands of an unchecked public square. In the cases documented by this report and elsewhere, the hard foundation of African countries' engagement with China—loans, investment, trade, training and exchanges—is unmistakably being leveraged by the PRC party-state to constrict African public debate, erode African rule of law, and incentivize African leaders to ignore, downplay, or outright attack civil society, journalists and political opponents.

Despite Africa's democratic gains since its countries began to win their independence from colonial powers, the future of democracy on the continent is by no means a foregone conclusion. China offers Africa's dictators and would-be autocrats a set of financial, technological, and bureaucratic tools that can delay—or in some cases, even reverse—ongoing democratic consolidation. It remains deeply in the interest of the United States and other democratic countries to support a future in which Africa's grassroots voices are heard and heeded, rather than a future where those seeking to speak truth to power find ever more obstacles barring their participation in public discourse. It is, indeed, a question not only of national interest but of basic justice. But taking steps to make this a reality will not be easy.

There is much that external and domestic stakeholders alike could do to create alternatives to the CCP's vision of the future. Countries across North America and Europe, for example, could support Africa's democrats by addressing shortcomings in their own systems: doing away with the financial secrecy that allows kleptocrats from Africa and elsewhere to use developed banking systems as safe harbors for ill-gotten gains, holding to account companies that sell surveillance and tracking technologies without regard for who might misuse them or how, and pressing social media companies to devote the same time and resources to preventing the misuse of their platforms in Africa that they do misuse in their home markets. Taking hard steps at home will make developed democracies' expressed desire to help Africa build a better alternative to the CCP's authoritarian future all the more credible.

There are also steps African governments themselves could take. Strengthening independent anti-corruption bodies can help ensure that large infrastructure projects are not used to line the pockets of leaders, while empowering parliaments across the continent to conduct fiscal oversight can help push governments to strike better negotiated, more fiscally responsible deals with China and other bilateral lenders. Boosting support to neutral public broadcasting and reporting bodies can also ensure that citizens have reliable sources of impartial information to help them evaluate the impact of major PRC-led projects on their home countries.

Here, the United States and other democracies could be valuable partners by doing more to provide expertise on sovereign lending and borrowing to capacity-strained African governments, and by doing much more to help close knowledge deficits about China across the African continent by directly supporting journalists, civil society and homegrown media outlets. Programs supported by CCP-controlled government agencies and institutions should not be Africans' only substantial option for learning about their most important bilateral trading and financing partner. The promises the CCP makes to African governments are often premised on a one-sided presentation of China's successes, with none of the shortfalls or caveats that might give pause to someone seeking to emulate its model.

This report is part of an initial effort to close that gap, but much work remains to be done, across the African continent and around the world.

