



HOW DOES THE CCP UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY?



China's authoritarian influence depends on opacity and manipulation. The PRC party-state undermines democratic processes in targeted countries by exploiting governance gaps, greed, and local unfamiliarity with the risks of engagement with Beijing. While PRC-based entities may corrupt local elites through nontransparent infrastructure investment deals, the CCP works to shape local information spaces and influence domestic political decision-making in its favor through a variety of covert, coercive, and corrupting means. China employs these "sharp power" tools more aggressively as democracies begin to push back against its malign behavior.

IRI's Approach to CCP Influence

IRI has developed a flagship initiative to build resiliency against the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) efforts to exert authoritarian influence in vulnerable democracies.

The program—called **Building Resiliency for Interconnected Democracies in Global Environments (BRIDGE)**—takes a three-pronged approach to supporting actors in the global fight to bolster democratic resilience:

1. **Sharing** research on how the PRC undermines democratic processes and governance institutions;
2. **Empowering** local stakeholders with the means to conduct similar research independently; the skills to craft and message targeted advocacy campaigns to hold leaders accountable; and the tools and resources to devise and advance policy solutions that bolster their country's resilience to external influence; and
3. **Catalyzing** the development and adoption of responsive policy solutions.

IRI has enlisted researchers in **over 50 countries** around the world to document China's varied influence tactics and the sources of democratic resilience to them. This research forms the foundation for BRIDGE programming that builds the capacity of local IRI partners to identify, expose, and counteract authoritarian interference in their country's democratic processes and institutions, including through subgrants for innovative initiatives that mobilize change at official levels.

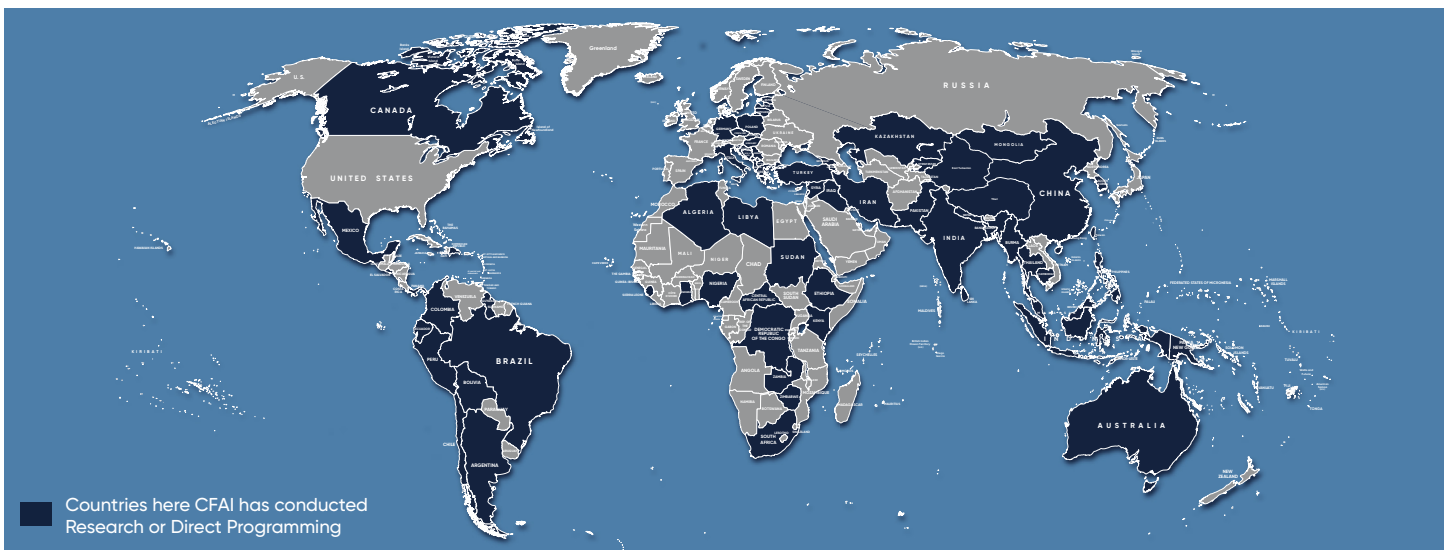
The BRIDGE approach is increasingly implemented through **tailored, region-specific** projects that include:

- Public opinion research of CCP influence in **Latin America and the Caribbean**;
- Countering CCP information operations in **Africa**; and
- Strengthening [policy responses](#) to CCP tactics among political parties in **Central and Eastern Europe**.

China

The PRC is increasingly corroding and undermining the independence of democracies around the world. Opaque deals struck by Chinese government-linked entities exacerbate corruption, saddle countries with debt, and give Beijing leverage over local leaders and policy decisions. The CCP-led party-state advances its interests by manipulating local narratives through information operations, interfering in political processes, and proposing an authoritarian governance model. IRI has identified the following four areas of CCP activity as the key components of influence and interference campaigns:

- **Information Operations:** China uses traditional and digital media to manipulate the information environment in individual countries and further a global propaganda campaign.
- **Economic Influence and Elite Capture:** China coerces or coopts political and business elites through economic leverage and campaigns of strategic corruption.
- **United Front Work:** Beijing attempts to subvert civil society and use the Chinese diaspora as an instrument for its activities.
- **Authoritarian Appeal:** The Chinese government seeks to popularize policies and technologies that bolster authoritarian models of governance, facilitated through trainings and exchanges between the CCP and political parties in democracies on issues such as party management and ideological work.



Examples of BRIDGE building democratic resilience:

- Since its inception, BRIDGE has directly engaged over 500 individuals from more than 50 countries, fostering democratic unity and solidarity in response to CCP influence and coercion.
- IRI provides material and technical support to grassroots activists in every region of the world to pilot initiatives that draw attention to the CCP's anti-democratic activities and develop the capacity to mitigate their negative effects.
- In Ghana, IRI has supported with a leading satirical artist to generate popular understanding of foreign authoritarian influence in a way that may resonate with the populace. Bright Ackwerh has produced a series of artworks depicting the Ghana-China relationship, including topics such as China's efforts to court and co-opt Ghana's ruling elite and China's sharp power campaigns to shape local narratives regarding China's presence in-country.
- In Europe, IRI has worked extensively with legislators to adopt policies to limit PRC influence. Recent efforts have contributed to national-level action, with Lithuania withdrawing from the 17+1 framework and other CEE countries moving in a similar direction, in addition to the emerging EU Anti-Coercion Instrument to tackle CCP economic coercion at the EU level.
- In Peru, one of IRI's partners, Derecho, Ambiente y Recursos Naturales, took on China's manipulation of Peru's regulatory systems, exposing the impact of projects funded and implemented by China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) on Peru's amazon and indigenous peoples. That research sparked public outcry that led the Chinese Embassy to hold dialogues with impacted groups.