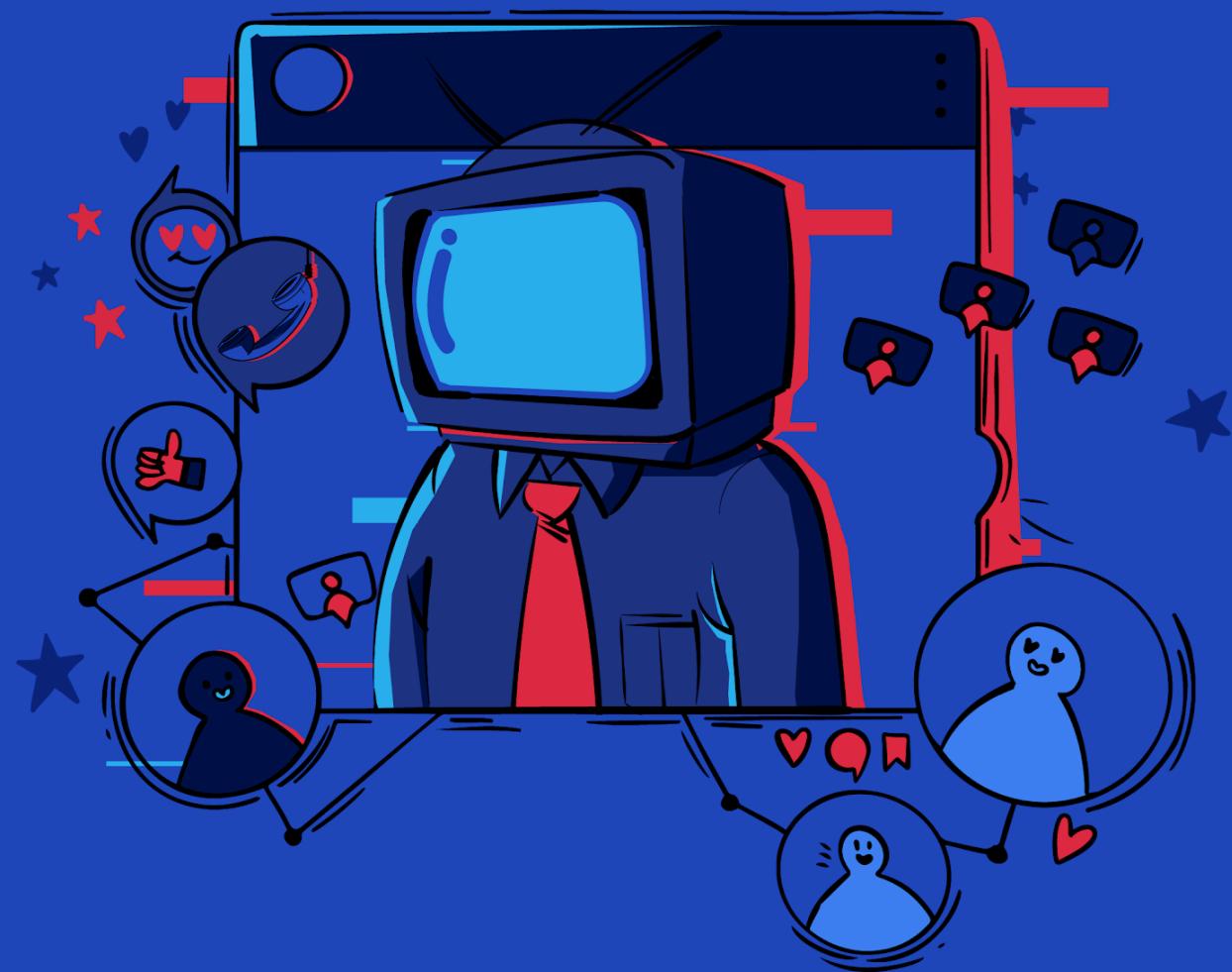


# Media Capture:

## How foreign states infiltrate African media



## Introduction

Foreign state-linked entities and special-interest lobbyists are employing covert tactics to inject their narratives into African media.

In this report, we focus on three techniques, tactics and procedures (TTPs) used by foreign states to subvert media independence in African countries. These are paid punditry, content-sharing agreements, and sponsored resources, all of which may have potential insidious effects.

We acknowledge that the states' use of the media to tell their story is not new and is not deceitful. Countries, especially those with international media organisations, also use it for soft diplomacy and country news.

However, this report is limited to research the deceptive attempts by foreign states to influence public opinion in their favour.

The first chapter of this report intends to set a baseline focused on Kenya, South Africa and Zambia where we mapped a baseline of editorial policies to assess the vulnerabilities to media capture. This analysis of editorial policies in these three countries gauges whether they are readily available, and if they can adequately manage the risks presented by external influence.

The following three chapters focus on the covert subversion of media in Africa using what we've termed 'Cuckoos': content-sharing agreements which allow for the spread of foreign state-produced content into trusted African media; and training, sponsorships and resources that serve to condition journalists to a particular point of view and influence their journalism.

The second chapter focuses on how lobbyists and propagandists systematically hijack the opinion and analysis sections in news media by using local pundits to spread particular narratives. These local pundits are allied with the agendas of foreign states and their op-eds are published without declaring provenance, often in foreign state media.

The third chapter explores content-sharing agreements between foreign state-owned news organisations and African news organisations. While content-sharing agreements are a legitimate option for newsrooms to acquire content and programming from outside their territories, these agreements can also result in reputable mastheads carrying propaganda content from foreign state actors. The chapter proposes recommendations to enhance transparency and oversight in African media to mitigate the risks presented by content partnerships.

The final chapter discusses journalism training programmes and sponsored support that foreign states and allied entities offer newsrooms, and questions whether such opportunities expose journalists to external influence. The chapter analyses some training programmes offered to African journalists which, unlike accepted media development programmes that uphold international journalism standards while maintaining independence from state influence, seek to influence their coverage of the sponsoring state.

While the research report explores how global media have developed policy guidelines and strategies to defend against subversion, it by no means covers all solutions and requires localised plans.

As journalism adapts to new technologies, support in upskilling staff and acquiring content to sustain production is crucial. This report aims to provide transparency and safeguards for media to consider and inoculate themselves against subversive external influence.

It is intended to spark deeper discussion within editors guilds and other media industry bodies and explore remedial measures that improve the credibility of news media content across the board, while also strengthening newsroom systems.

## Who we are

**Code for Africa (CfA)** is an ecosystem builder. It is the continent's largest network of non-profit civic technology and open data laboratories in 22 African countries. CfA builds digital democracy solutions that give citizens unfettered access to actionable information that empowers them to make informed decisions, and that strengthens civic engagement for improved public governance and accountability. This includes building infrastructure like the continent's largest open data portals at openAFRICA and sourceAFRICA. CfA incubates initiatives as diverse as the africanDRONE network, the PesaCheck fact-checking initiative, the machine-learning research and analysis lab at CivicSignal, the iLAB disinformation investigative team, and the sensors.AFRICA air quality sensor network. CfA also runs one of Africa's largest skills development initiatives for digital journalists, and seed funds cross-border collaboration.

**CivicSignal** is Africa's largest non-profit media monitoring/mapping initiative that uses machine learning/natural language processing tools for 'AI' analysis of media content across the continent. CivicSignal's analysis includes mapping media ownership and understanding the underlying media economy that shapes online content.

Its products, MediaCloud (for tracking content) and MediaData (for tracking media ownership) are regularly used by development agencies and regulators to develop intervention strategies.

**The African Data and Democracy Observatory (ADDO)** is a member-driven voluntary network of independent watchdog CSOs that use cutting-edge digital analysis and forensic research to better understand influence operations that seek to subvert or usurp public discourse across Africa.

ADDO was originally co-founded by the continent's largest civic technology and open data non-profit, Code for Africa (CfA), in partnership with the Atlantic Council's global Digital Forensic Lab (DFRLab) and the DT Institute in 2020 to help coordinate their ongoing research into foreign disinformation and propaganda campaigns that targeted an initial 21 sub-Saharan African countries.

*Cite this report as: Code for Africa and CivicSignal (2024) 'Media Capture'. African Data and Democracy Observatory.*

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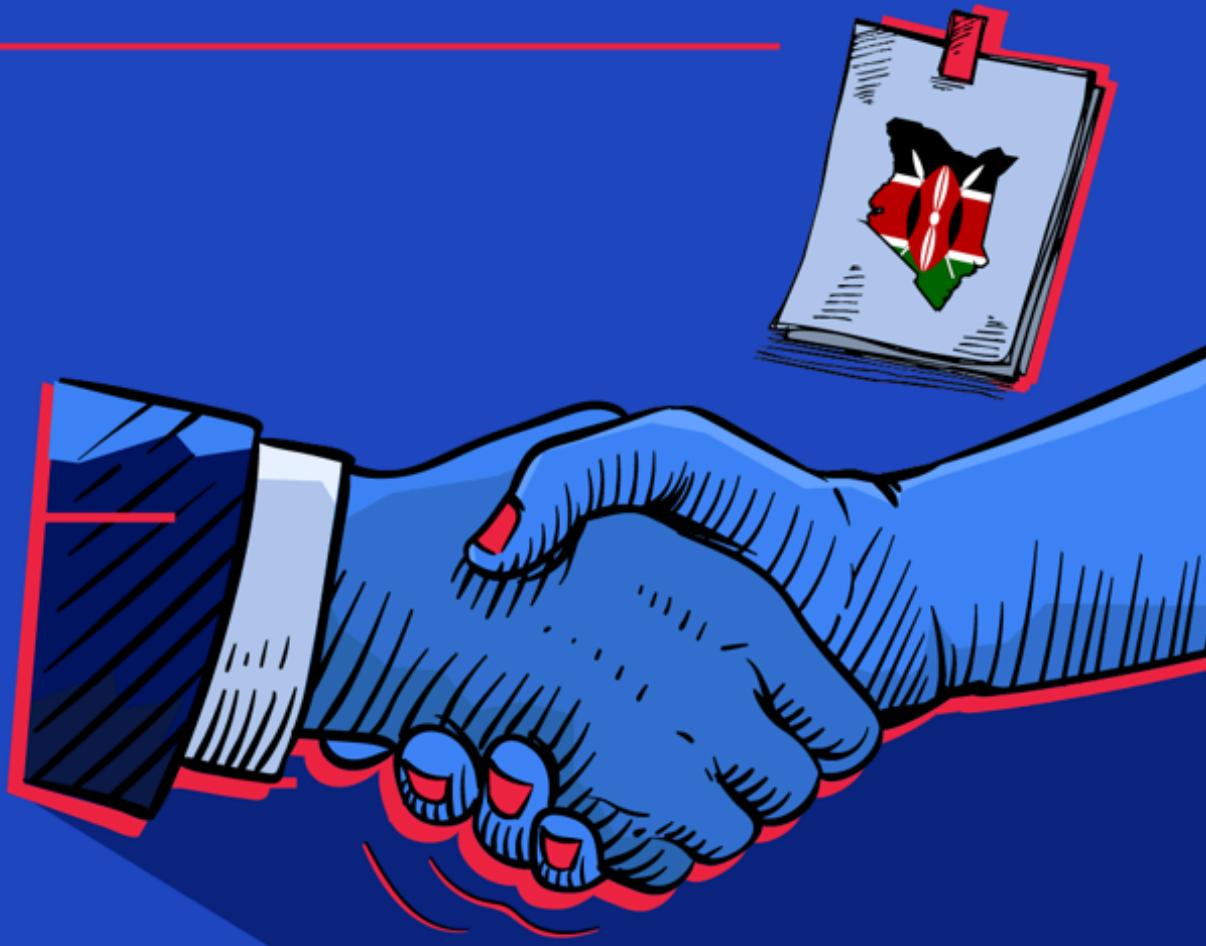
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# Transparency and trust: newsroom policies

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Kenya



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## 1. Executive summary

Code for Africa (CfA) has undertaken this analysis of editorial policies in newsrooms in Kenya to gauge whether existing newsroom policies adequately address news organisations' transparency about how they do journalism, and to being accurate, fair and inclusive. This research also gauges whether existing newsroom policies adequately surface and manage the risks presented by external influence.

Some of the policies that this research checked include: managing declarations of interest and vested interests by editorial staff, contributors and reporters; managing editorial staff non-partisanship; how articles are credited and attribution of information sources; policies governing gifts/gratuities and other benefits to editorial staff that may be perceived as inducements.

CfA also examined newsroom policies for managing training/fellowships and other professional development; policies for managing editorial grants/subsidies/support for reporting projects; disclosing media affiliations; and policies for providing transparency around media ownership and control, as well as disclosing media partnerships.

The research identified policy gaps in Kenyan newsrooms that could impact media accountability and contribute to diminishing trust in news media organisations.

Capture in this report refers to 'a situation in which the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own, nor able to exercise their main function, notably of informing people. Instead, they have persisted in an intermediate state, with vested interests, and not just the government, using them for malign purposes.<sup>1</sup>'

### a. Summary of key findings

- Only two out of the 41 newsrooms sampled in this research have published their full editorial policy guidelines on their websites.
- The contact page was the most common feature on the news websites we sampled. Only five media brands did not include ways to contact their newsroom.
- Only one news website has a corrections page, while three surveyed radio stations included a complaints page.
- A number of survey respondents indicated that the policies were private. However, our research found their editorial policies online. This suggests that some media staff were not aware that the public had access to their policies.
- Half of the respondents indicated that Artificial Intelligence (AI) was deployed in their newsrooms to identify news patterns and trends, but were not aware if there were policies that governed the use of it. There were no newsrooms with published AI policies.
- The majority of respondents thought that even though there were media policies, the audience did not know of their existence.
- Despite being the most popular source of news, radio outlets had the fewest public facing policies.

<sup>1</sup> [Media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own](#). In the service of power: Media capture and the threat to democracy, CIMA 2017

## b. Recommendations

**Newsroom adoption of artificial intelligence and adoption of guiding principles.** Use of AI in newsrooms is relatively new, but already plays a role in newsroom operations. It is deployed in areas such as recommendation of stories to readers, text to speech, and identification of media to accompany stories. Other potential areas of AI include synthetic media creation such as automation of sports results, and financial market updates. However, this is happening without appropriate policies to guide the deployment of AI, or understanding the effect the technology is having in shaping the narrative. A lack of AI and synthetic media policy which guides the use of such tools exposes the media to influence from foreign actors and technology firms, which could come in the form of research, tools, training and financing to set up AI operations in the newsroom and so influence the news agenda. This report recommends the development of policies to guide AI use in news.

**Media organisations should simplify the process to file complaints and pursue corrections by readers.** While this study has found that there has been a deliberate effort among some media organisations to make their policies public, only a minority have made clear to their audiences the avenues to complain about coverage and to pursue corrections. Aside from diminished trust, uncorrected errors have left media houses battling defamation cases and facing heavy costs. Litigation can be leveraged by bad actors to blackmail media houses, forcing them into compliance by publishing content beneficial to their interests.

**All staff should be trained on the editorial policies, where these are published, as well as how to declare their possible conflicts of interest.**

This analysis shows significant gaps in the publishing and accessibility of newsroom policies. It is recommended that the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG) is provided with an outline of best practice policies and templates, and works with newsrooms to adopt a standard.

## 2. Background and context

The media in Africa is facing an existential threat<sup>2</sup> brought on by factors including shrinking revenues and erosion of trust. Research has shown that trust in the media is declining. The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>3</sup>, which polled some 32, 000 respondents in 28 countries, including Kenya, on their level of trust in their country's media found that people trusted businesses more than the government and media. The findings were consistent with the 2022 report which established that 76% of Kenyan respondents felt the media was purposely trying to mislead people through spreading false information or gross exaggeration. In 2021, the report revealed that trust in the media was 'neutral' amid concerns about misinformation.

The contextual case in Kenya is no different. Kenya has a robust media industry serving its population of about 50 million people. CivicSignal's MediaData has to date mapped 623 media outlets in the country. The media industry was liberalised in the 1990s when the government allowed the private sector to provide media services, marking a period of growth of media brands across television, radio and print media. As a result, the country became one of the most diverse media scenes on the continent<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> [Modern journalism faces an existential threat](#), Media and Innovation Centre, Aga Khan University

<sup>3</sup> [2023 Edelman Trust Barometer](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Effects Of Liberalization Of Airwaves On Television Advertising In Kenya](#), Mbuba June, University of Nairobi

In 2023, for the third year in a row, a survey<sup>5</sup> commissioned by the Media Council of Kenya showed that the trust level in Kenyan media has dropped. The biggest concern the respondents had was 'fake news' and bias in the media.

This increasing mistrust comes as the news media faces growing competition from other sources of news such as social media, and has emboldened attacks on the media for being 'untrustworthy' or working against the interests of the state.

This distrust of the media and journalism in general is a sign of underlying institutional weaknesses as journalism's role in society becomes ever more important, courtesy of a global shift to repressive political tendencies<sup>6</sup>.

In recent years, mainstream news organisations have had to contend with a sceptical public, but the scrutiny has reached a jarring level, thanks to the changing political landscape in the country.

Some of the challenges the news media face include competition for people's attention from a myriad of other sources of information, and the rise of partisan media<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, with the increase of social media use, political actors have become less dependent on the news media to get their messages to the public<sup>8</sup>. While social media has made it possible to bypass the news media, it has also made them a target. This was seen in Kenya during the 2022 general elections.

For example, a tweet by Kericho Senator Aaron Cheruiyot<sup>9</sup> labelling the media as a cartel and calling for its dismantling received some approval from commenters despite condemnation from the media.

← Tweet

Aaron Cheruiyot @Aaroncheruiyot

Pres WSR will succeed in crushing every cartel in the country save for two that are extremely powerful.

1. KE Banks  
2. KE Media

Both are very powerful, influential, and synergise so well to protect each other's interest.

For public good, a way must be found.

12:21 PM · Mar 6, 2023 · 707.9K Views

418 Retweets 175 Quotes 2,477 Likes 46 Bookmarks

*Screenshot of tweet calling for the 'crushing' of Kenyan media. (Source: Twitter)*

CfA measured the public's sentiment on the tweet and found that it was moderately positive. The post went viral with 890 responses and 594 retweets. We performed the analysis using [TextBlob](#), which returned a polarity score of 0.28 indicating a positive sentiment. TextBlob calculates the sentiment of a text, and returns numeric values for polarity and subjectivity. Values lie between -1 and +1, -1 indicates negative sentiment and +1 indicates positive sentiments. The low support the tweet received could suggest that the public still views the media as a good source of news, but some improvements needed to be made.

<sup>5</sup> [State of The Media Report 2022](#), Media Council of Kenya, 09 February, 2023

<sup>6</sup> [Lack of trust in the news media, institutional weakness, and relational journalism as a potential way forward](#), Seth C Lewis, 2018

<sup>7</sup> [Challenges and opportunities for news media and journalism in an increasingly digital, mobile, and social media environment](#), Council of Europe, October 2016

<sup>8</sup> [The New Media's Role in Politics](#), Diana Owen, Georgetown University, Washington DC, USA

<sup>9</sup> [Twitter](#), Kericho Senator Aaron Cheruiyot, 07 March, 2023

The erosion of trust that the media is facing makes a case for an increased openness so as to reclaim some of the trust bestowed on it. Codes of ethics, as well as press councils and media criticism, play an important role in promoting transparency and restoring a higher degree of credibility in journalism<sup>10</sup>.

Political attacks on the media have increased since the 2010s, as phrases that refer to newspapers as only good for 'meat wrapping'<sup>11</sup> or as 'githeri media' gain common use. Since 2017, the phrase 'githeri media'<sup>12</sup> has been used to disparage media and draw ineptitude, or to outright discredit the media or its obsession with the trivial - a general view that mainstream media uses catchy headings but lack in substance. The usage of the pejorative term increased between September 2022 and March 2023, underscoring attempts by political actors to discredit the media.

An analysis using CrowdTangle shows that since September 2022, the phrase has occurred about 20,600 times on Twitter and 228 times in public pages and public groups on Facebook.

The incidents were caused by the mainstream media mistakenly referring to newly elected Kenyan president William Ruto as the deputy president. In this instance, the use of the word was pushed by leading political figures and picked up by their supporters.

The public-facing editorial policies of the newsrooms surveyed for this study communicated the news media organisations' value proposition: veracity and accuracy, or unbiased coverage.

Yet without public editorial policies to communicate to the audience the standard that the news organisation operates by, the public is in the dark about the true bias of the newsroom and their journalists.

Scholars on the subject of media transparency and conflict of interest in journalism have observed that 'the importance and influence of journalists and media is increasing and it is important for the audience (the society or community) to know which side of certain dilemmas or problems journalists support and what their values and attitudes to work are'<sup>13</sup>. The recipient of a media message has to know who 'explains' the world to them. In other words, the recipient should have trust in journalistic professionalism.

As the media space becomes more democratised, it is becoming ever more important that the public trusts the information they are receiving. If the public do not trust them, the media cannot claim to be effectively performing a watchdog role<sup>14</sup>.

According to a study<sup>15</sup> by Reuters Institute polling news audiences in the US and UK, editorial practices such as corrections policies used by organisations feed into audience's expectations of what constitutes 'good journalism'.

Recently, the media in Kenya came under criticism recently during opposition-led protests in Nairobi for the presence of some members of the press in a politician's vehicle. The concern centred on the objectivity of the journalists considering their proximity and dalliance to the subjects in the story.

<sup>10</sup> Meier, W. A., & Trappel, J. (2022). [Media transparency: Comparing how leading news media balance the need for transparency with professional ethics](#). In J. Trappel, & T. Tomaz (Eds.), Success and failure in news media performance: Comparative analysis in the Media for Democracy Monitor 2021 (pp. 255–273). Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

<sup>11</sup> [Uhuru accuses media of fanning rivalry among URP leaders](#). The Standard, 10 May 2015

<sup>12</sup> [Kenya's 2017 elections: how new media stole the mainstream's thunder](#). The Conversation, December 14, 2017

<sup>13</sup> Mecfai, S. (2011). [Conflicts of interest in journalism](#). A local journalist in the network of conflicts of interest. In J. e. S. Burdziej, Conflict of Interest in Central and Eastern Europe (pp. 99-113).

<sup>14</sup> Strömbäck, J., Tsafati, Y., Boomgaarden, H., Damstra, A., Lindgren, E., Vliegenthart, R., & Lindholm, T. (2020). [News media trust and its impact on media use: toward a framework for future research](#). Annals of the International Communication Association, 44(2), 139 - 156.

<sup>15</sup> [Listening to what trust in news means to users: qualitative evidence from four countries](#). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism

Ultimately, robust policies and practices are essential for safeguarding media freedom against influence operations by a variety of malign actors and, without them, the freedom of the press would be vulnerable to manipulation.

### 3. Methodology

This research covers a sample of 41 media organisations in Kenya. The study was conducted between January and March 2023. National media systems are overrepresented since the study focused on organisations that broadcast or publish their news in the official languages - English and Kiswahili.

In the television and newspaper mediums, there was certainty on which organisations we should study. However, the consensus was harder to reach for radio stations because of their sheer number. We eventually decided on stations that broadcast the news in either English or Kiswahili, and that have newsrooms.

We included only entities that have a newsroom and publish their news at a regular interval. For that reason, a number of radio stations that only play music, and television stations that broadcast only on YouTube were eliminated. We also made it a point to include content aggregators and online news websites that repurpose content published by larger media houses. We also thought it important that this research includes the largest media organisations in the country (by size and audience), as well as multiple brands from the same organisation that targeted different audience segments.

CfA carried out this research by combining the expertise from our own internal CivicSignal research analysts with a survey of senior editors, and by hosting a workshop with members from the Kenya Editors Guild (KEG). KEG is an association of editors in Kenya that includes practising print, broadcast and online editors, as well as former editors and freelancers who are now in academia.

The CivicSignal MediaData team checked the websites of the selected news organisations for the presence of the following policies:

- Privacy policy
- Copyright declaration
- Contact page
- Corrections page or a linked corrections policy
- Complaints page
- Ownership of the media organisation
- Management structure
- List of editorial staff
- Public facing editorial guidelines
- Ethics policy

Seventeen out of the 41 news media were radio stations, eight were print newspapers, 12 were digital-only outlets. Ten television stations were also part of the sample studied.

To identify the policies, we searched each platform's relevant webpages for the keywords 'editorial policy' or 'editorial guidelines' as well as related keywords like 'code of conduct' and 'newsroom guidelines'.

We also clicked through the various pages of the websites looking for any that contained any of the policies that were the focus of this research.

We also sent out a questionnaire, via KEG, to senior editors - the people who are responsible for writing and implementing the policies in the newsrooms.

The findings from the questionnaire have been matched with what our own research established to ensure that the results of this research are an unvarnished picture of the current state of the media in Kenya, and particularly newsrooms, as regards the policies they have in place.

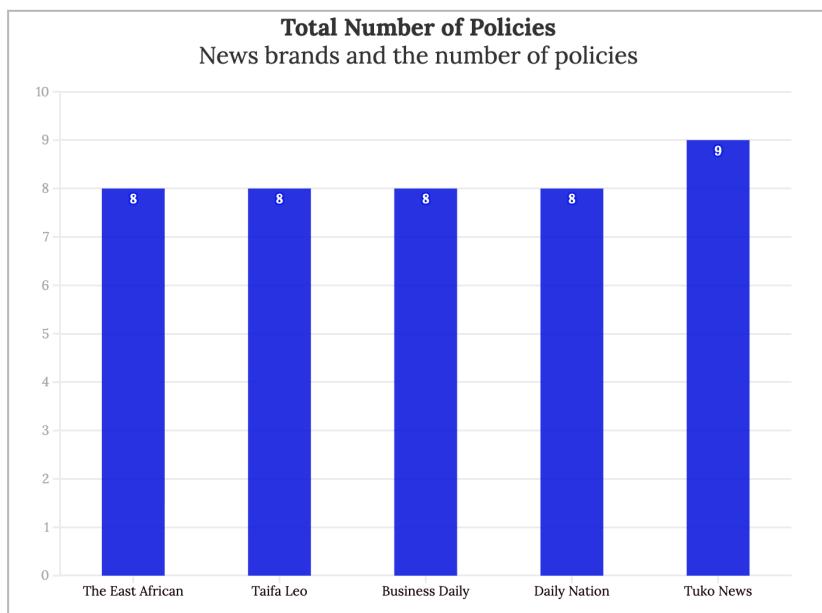
#### 4. Presentation and analysis of findings

The operations of the media - what they publish, how and when, are guided by both internal and external policies and codes. In Kenya, for instance, the Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism<sup>16</sup> by the Media Council of Kenya is one such document, as are other policies by the Communication Authority<sup>17</sup>.

The biggest marker, however, are the policies that the newsrooms abide by to be accountable to their audiences. Editorial policies govern all the editorial content and staff in the various media platforms run by an entity. It is an overarching document that outlines expectations on professionalism, as well as providing direction in newsroom operations and administration<sup>18</sup>.

Other areas stipulated by the policies include journalistic conduct in the field, their relationship with sources, and even their use of privileged information. Making these policies available and accessible to audiences is key to promoting transparency, accountability and ethical journalism, and reclaiming trust in journalism.

The research checked the websites of key news media organisations for the availability of a privacy policy, corrections page, complaints policy, management structure, the organisation's ownership, its editorial staff, a public facing editorial and ethics policy, as well as a contact page and a copyright declaration.



*News brands in Kenya with the most number of policies that the study focused on. (Source: CivicSignal)*

<sup>16</sup> [Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism](#), Media Council of Kenya

<sup>17</sup> [Communications Authority of Kenya](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Media Accountability in Africa: A Study of Policies and Practices at Two Newsrooms in Kenya](#), Jared Obuya, Taylor & Francis Online, 2021

### **a. Declaration of editorial staff, including editor-in-chief or equivalent decision makers**

Only nine of the newsrooms sampled declared their editorial leadership on their website. Users can easily access this information about the critical decision makers in the newsrooms of three organisations, one of them operating multiple brands across radio, television, online and print. Declaring the editorial staff would help to ensure that it's clear whether editors or journalists wear 'different hats' or moonlight for other organisations.

### **b. Declaration of interests policy: Non-partisanship, gifts/gratuities/benefits to media staff**

Out of the 41 newsrooms surveyed, only three have a declaration of interests policy accessible to their audience. The overwhelming majority (38 newsrooms) did not have a policy published on their website. Without a declaration of interests policy in newsrooms, there is a heightened risk of external influence through gifts, travel or training in return for favourable reporting. By establishing a well-defined policy, newsrooms can lay out clear guidelines on how to handle these situations.

Editorial policies from the three newsrooms that have published the document online, and which we analysed for this study, were explicit about the news organisation's commitment to protecting and upholding public interest and stressed the importance of factual accuracy, fairness and balance.

The policies sampled showed that the newsrooms were particularly insistent that staff working for their outlets remain independent of vested interests or external influences.

One newsroom whose policy is public has included clauses that prohibit financial journalists using their platforms to influence the performance of shares or securities they, or their close families or associates have an interest in, and advises that any such scenario be disclosed to the editor.

The policy also prohibits trading, either directly or through proxies, in shares or securities their journalists intend to write about in the near future.

Other newsroom policies caution against accepting gifts, bribes or 'brown envelopes', favours, free travel, free meals or drinks, special treatment or privileges as these can compromise the integrity of journalists, editors and their employers. Having such a policy protects journalists and media organisations from threats to their independence that could present themselves in apparently benign ways such as travel or gifts.

An editor said that newsrooms needed robust policies guarding against conflicts of interest because 'sometimes journalists have to embed themselves with politicians, the police, military, but the question is how do you tell a balanced story? You need these people for your protection but supposing you get there and find something contrary, how do you tell that story? It is for that reason that I feel we need to come up with policies that guide us on this.'

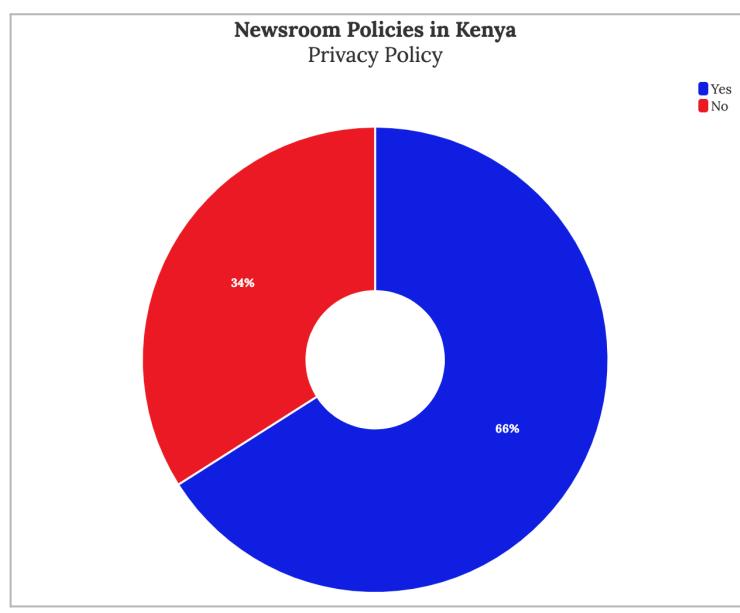
### **c. Policy for training, fellowships or professional development**

Respondents from one newsroom reported that any fellowship awards or professional development opportunities had to be reported to the editors, and through them the editorial director who had the ultimate say on how such opportunities would be handled. A follow-up interview with an editor revealed that newsroom management issued a memo directing the procedure for approvals for foreign

travels for conferences, training and fellowships. Previous research by CfA established that training and junkets were one of the ways news organisations in Kenya came under foreign influence. Lacking a policy to guide foreign conferences, training and fellowships was one of the weaknesses that the study established as leading to media capture. This lack of policy as to who trains newsroom staff means that there could be a 'return on investment' expected from the trainers. It would also pre-define which actors they would not accept training from in order to safeguard against possible influence.

#### d. Privacy policy

Out of the 41 newsrooms surveyed, 27 had an easily discoverable privacy policy. The newsrooms explain to their website visitors how personal data is gathered and managed. Newsrooms are legally required to have a privacy policy document which informs their audience of the type of information that is collected on the website, and how the newsroom intends to use that data. A privacy policy also assures the website visitors that the newsroom is committed to following the data privacy laws. Lacking such a policy could impact negatively on the media organisation by suggesting a disregard for laws governing the management of private data.



*Most newsrooms surveyed have public privacy policies. (Source: CivicSignal)*

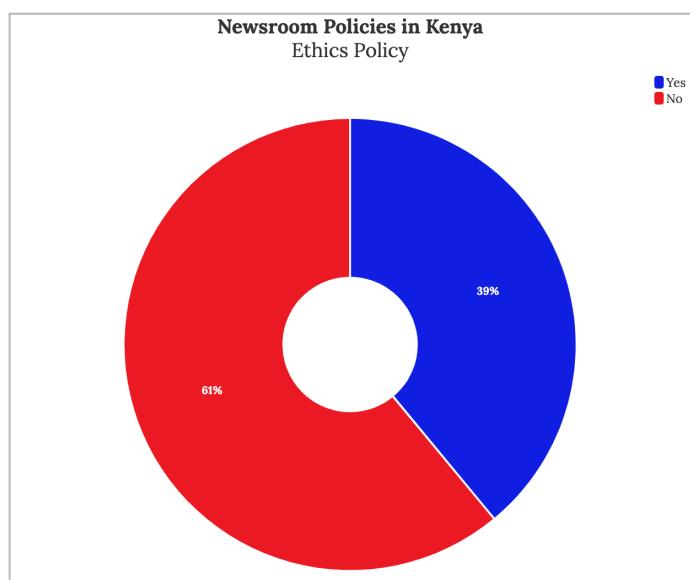
#### e. Ethics policy and code of conduct

This research surveyed news websites for ethics and codes of conduct, and found that the overwhelming majority of sites include these in a single, comprehensive policy document. The exception was the government wire service Kenya News Agency's national values and principles page. Government agencies in Kenya are bound by the constitution to commit to the National Values and Principles of Governance<sup>19</sup> when discharging their duties.

<sup>19</sup> [National values and principles of governance](#), Kenya Law Reform Commission (KLRC)

A review of these published editorial policies revealed the newsrooms have committed to being impartial and reporting credibly on issues of national and public interest and upholding the law of the jurisdictions in which they operate. Other news organisations have included, alongside their purpose, vision and mission statements, some of the values that drive them - even if they don't have a published code of conduct or ethics policy. The study also found that news organisations that had listed their ownership and management structure were more likely to also include the core values of the organisation.

It is noteworthy that two of the sampled media houses have published an internal whistleblowing policy in which they commit to abiding by the code of ethics for journalists and encourage members of the public to report any perceived wrongdoing by staff. This measure could be considered useful for accountability to a newsroom when their policies aren't adhered to. It also communicates that editorial staff are accountable for their actions, especially those deemed likely to influence their reporting.



*The occurrence of published ethics policies in the sample newsroom studied in Kenya. (Source: CivicSignal)*

#### f. AI policy

This study established that artificial intelligence was still a new frontier for almost all newsrooms sampled. Respondents said they used AI tools to suggest stories to their audiences, identify news patterns and trends and to fact-check images. However, only respondents from one newsroom said they had internal policies which addressed the deployment of AI tools in the news gathering and dissemination process. Yet newsrooms are already affected by AI algorithms which determine how and which news gets to the audience<sup>20</sup>. Especially in Kenya, where Chinese made phones are ubiquitous, news media organisations are at the mercy of web browsers which serve both as search engines and news aggregators and their algorithms determine the order that users will see content. One of the most popular new apps is Opera News, a Chinese owned AI-driven personalised app that gives people more of what they like, from trending topics to funny videos. Newsrooms therefore require policies to guide the deployment of AI, as well as an understanding of the effect the technology is having in the news process.

<sup>20</sup> [How algorithms decide the news you see](#), Columbia Journalism Review

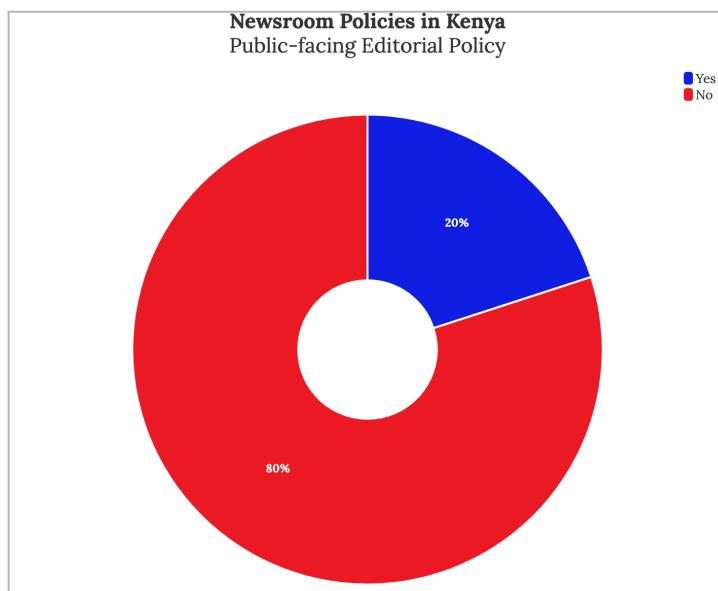
#### **g. Press code adherence**

None of the newsrooms we surveyed linked to the Media Council of Kenya's Code of Conduct or the Media Act. However, one newsroom states in its policy that its editorial guidelines are intended to be read together with the Code of Conduct. The policy also anticipates instances where its internal guidelines could fall short and advises that journalists should, in that instance, follow the country's press code.

#### **h. Public editorial policy**

For this survey, the presence of public editorial policies was established by asking respondents whether they were aware if their policies were available for public access. Respondents that said their newsrooms had internal editorial policies were highest at 73%, while those that said they did not have any policies were 10%. The rest, 7%, said the policies did not apply to their newsrooms.

Among newsrooms in Kenya, our research found that only Nation Media Group (NMG) and Tuko Media have published their editorial policy online.



*The proportion of news brands with public editorial policies among newsrooms studied in Kenya. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)*

Survey results showed that the majority (80%) of news organisations had not published their editorial policies, while only 20% of newsrooms shared their editorial policies and standards with their audience.

Tuko's policies are found under a policies and standards page on its website, while NMG's policy is hosted on its parent organisation's corporate website.

However, NMG has made strides towards greater accountability, announcing the publication of their editorial guidelines, including a link for the public to access the document. The media organisation also appointed a public editor in 2019 whom they describe as an independent news ombudsman who handles readers' complaints on editorial matters, including accuracy and journalistic standards.

The public editor receives complaints from the public and addresses them in a regular newspaper column. In an article outlining the reasons for the publication of its editorial policy, the organisation said that it was giving the public a standard by which to judge them.

In follow-up interviews with some of the respondents who said their newsrooms had internal policies in place, it was established that these policies were available on the intranet and their newsroom enforced familiarity with the guidelines. For instance, at the beginning of every year, the Standard Group required every one of their editorial staff to peruse and sign the Editorial Policy and Code of Conduct for the Practice of Journalism.

Some 83% of respondents said their newsrooms had strict policies for verifying and fact-checking reports to ensure accurate and unbiased reporting. However, these were not made public.

Another respondent, an editor at a large print outlet, said in a follow-up interview that all newsrooms had similar policies and likewise, a disregard for them. 'Newsrooms are run on consultation basis and individual discretion rather than, "what does the policy say on this?"

The public policies we researched outline the conditions for the publication of opinion pieces, underlining the need to accommodate numerous view points on a topic, but also the identification of the columnists' and commentators' name, expertise and affiliation. The insistence on attribution of news, articles and opinions and clear labelling of sponsored content was considered as a commitment to ethical journalism.

Participants in the workshop expressed the need for journalists to be part of the policy making process in their newsrooms because 'we cannot have editorial policies without editorial judgement. We need to be involved in the process of making these policies'.

Another participant said that while the policies were in place, there is a lack of awareness around them - and were often neither read nor internalised. 'I might have read all the policies but if you give me an exam on it, I guarantee that I will fail. My newsroom has all of its policies online, but I bet if you ask around the office how many know about the policies, or that they have been published, the figure will be really low.'

However, newsrooms just having policies is not sufficient to guard against capture. As one participant noted, the policies need to be reviewed and adapted to the prevailing environment to avoid the use of unwritten rules which in turn make organisations susceptible to capture. 'As an industry, the times we are in now have forced the newsrooms to keep reviewing the policies. The media is dynamic, you may have policies today and in the next hour you need to make a different decision and end up relying on discretion and unwritten rules.'

### **i. Ownership and management structure**

This survey found that less than half of newsrooms (41%) have made an attempt to be transparent about their ownership and management structure by listing the owners of the organisation, or their

board of directors.

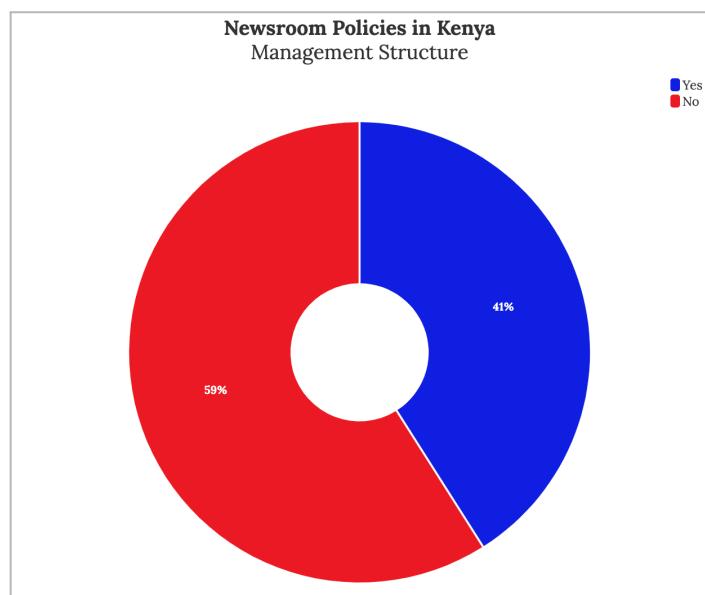
Out of the 41 news organisations sampled for this study, 18 had either their owners, or board of directors as well as executive members listed.

The majority (59%) of media organisations had not listed their ownership. The lack of clear ownership disclosure can create suspicions, especially when newsrooms publish potentially controversial investigations. This exposes the media organisation to media capture by either politicians or other foreign influences. Moreover, journalists in these media organisations could be under the editorial influence of their owners or could self-censor when reports cover their owners.

Editors at the workshop said that ownership has a bearing on the editorial process - especially during elections. Participants said they were often put in the difficult position of choosing between reporting impartially or according to the wishes of the media owners.

‘When we talk about media capture, everyone immediately thinks of the state, but there is capture internally as well. One of the challenges that we face internally is ownership. A story is brought to the newsroom and the instruction is that the owner wants the piece aired. What do you do as an editor in that instance? Do you go by what the newsroom policy states or by what the owners of the newsroom want? It has become a huge problem especially during the election period. When newsroom owners declare their political affiliation and bias, it trickles down to your journalists as well.’

The existence of robust policies declaring the ownership and management of a media organisation and their roles in the editorial process can help guide the operation of the newsrooms, and inform the audience the extent of their influence in the news.

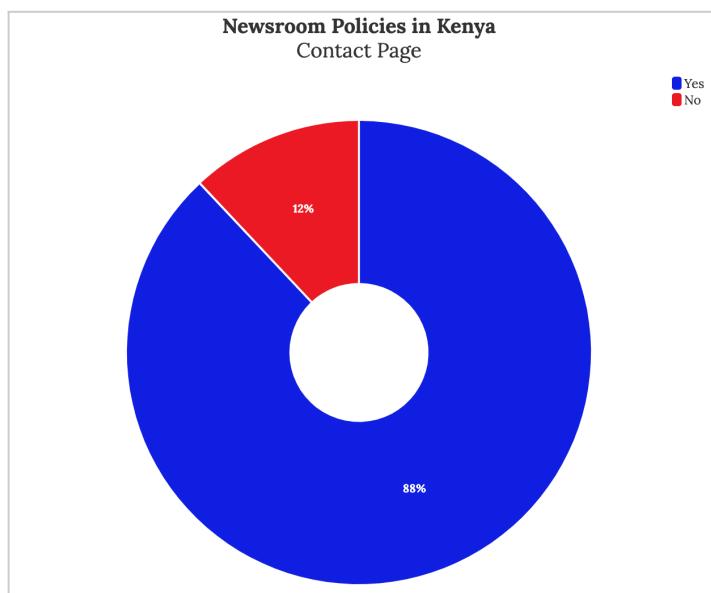


*Kenyan news sites that declare their management structure. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)*

#### j. Contact information

The contact page was the most common feature this study observed on the websites of the newsrooms studied. Thirty-six news sites provided their audience with a contact number, email address, mailing address and a physical location.

A number of them, radio stations especially, provided contact information for booking advertisements, yet failed to provide alternative means to reach the newsroom. Only five news organisations, or 12 % of the sample, either did not include a way to contact their organisation, or provided a dead link to a 'Contact Us' page.



*Share of outlets with a contact page among newsrooms surveyed in Kenya. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)*

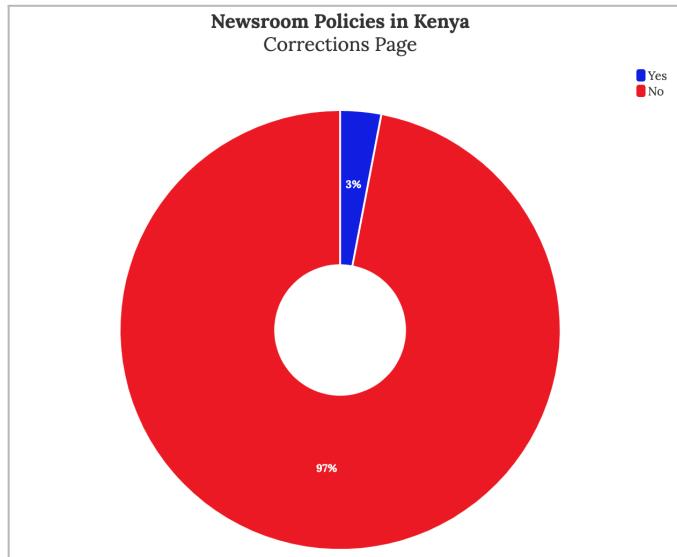
#### k. Corrections policy

The majority of newsrooms analysed for this study did not have a public corrections policy and explicit avenues for audience feedback.

Our research found that only one news organisation had made the criteria for retracting stories public, while only one online news brand included a corrections page on its website.

However, seven print publications have made it a policy that corrections are published on page 2 of the newspaper, and provided an email for readers to raise issues about their coverage.

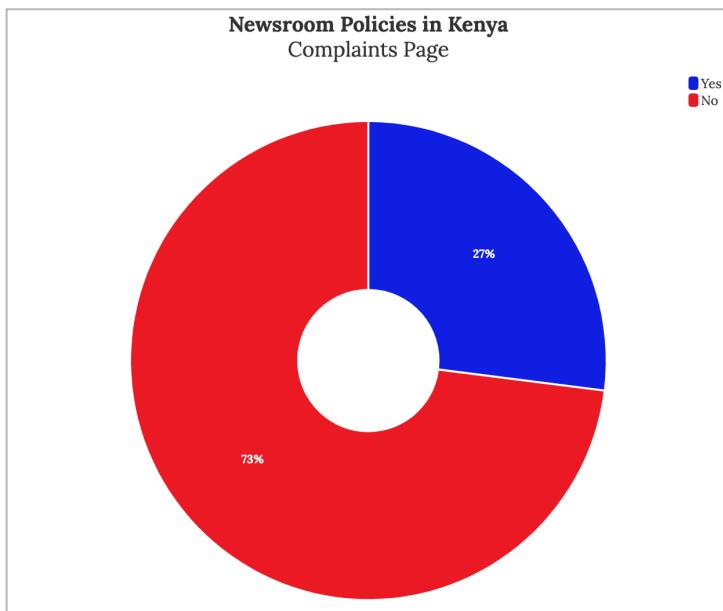
It's crucial for media organisations to receive feedback from their audience, not just to maintain their reputation, but also for audience input in the way an organisation operates. In fact, one digital news brand had to change their way of working after receiving feedback.



*Most newsrooms studied did not have corrections policies or a corrections page. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)*

## I. Complaints

The survey revealed that print and online newsrooms were more committed to receiving feedback from the public in the form of complaints. From the study, we found that 11 print and digital media brands had systems in place to receive complaints. Only one TV brand had a complaints mechanism. Overall, only 27 % of the news brands included a complaints page.



*The percentage of news brands that include a complaints page on their websites. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)*

## 5. Conclusion

The 2022 Reuters Digital News Report shows trust in news in Kenya at 57%, a 4pp drop on the year before. This is still high compared with other countries, with Kenya at number 6 of the 46 countries surveyed. It is essential to halt this decline, and take advantage of the current high trust that audiences have in Kenyan news organisations. Having policies that are well articulated and accessible to audiences and journalists alike is part of the mechanism that can help insulate news media organisations against attacks on their credibility and sustainability. The alternative is we run the risk of media capture because editorial independence can be compromised by pressure put on journalists by politicians, owners, professional organisations or publishers in the absence of accessible policies.

It is important that we increase the audience's understanding of how journalism works, especially the decision-making and newsgathering processes that shape how news is made. This will differentiate reputable news organisations from other less professional sources. While we have used some of the more popular and larger media organisations in Kenya as samples for this study, the media space is quickly transforming. Audience choices are gradually switching away from mainstream to social media, blogs, and even partisan media - which sometimes present as vernacular or community media organisations.

Our recommendations cover areas of support to media houses to develop up to date policies and guiding principles for their operations. Systems that rank the trustworthiness of news sites use AI-driven analysis of a site's structures to score a news organisation's vulnerability to information manipulation. News sites that do not have easily discoverable editorial policies and ownership structures will inevitably score low on these metrics, with a potential knock-on effect on revenue.

The awareness of the existence, variety and nature of accountability measures used by media increases the audience's trust, and news media can improve their relationship with readers by creating and maintaining an infrastructure of accountability practices that is accessible to those looking for it.

As Code for Africa 2021 studies into disinformation risk for Kenya and South Africa, co-authored with the Global Disinformation Index, found<sup>21</sup>, 'transparency about a newsroom's operations can be a key mechanism for building online user trust in news sites by dispelling any concerns about conflicts of interest or shadow owners.'<sup>22</sup>

The absence of key operational policies that are easily accessible was highly correlated with sites that were assessed as producing more sensational content, clickbait headlines and stories that negatively targeted groups. 'Similar relationships between a site's operational integrity and the reliability of a site's content emerge from the findings, particularly when sites in the sample were found to have clear correction policies and processes as well as statements of editorial independence.' Implementing and making available operational and editorial policies decreases news organisations' vulnerability to information manipulation and erosion of trust.

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<sup>21</sup> [Disinformation Risk Assessment: The Online News Market in Kenya](#), Global Disinformation Index, 2021

<sup>22</sup> [Media Market Risk Ratings: South Africa](#), Global Disinformation Index, Amanda Strydom, 2021

# Transparency and trust: newsroom policies

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*South Africa*



March 2023

# Contents

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1. Executive Summary
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## 1. Executive summary

Code for Africa (CfA) has undertaken this analysis of editorial policies in newsrooms in South Africa to gauge whether existing newsroom policies adequately address transparency in their operations. By analysing the policies, we also look at the media's susceptibility to 'capture' by foreign state actors.

One definition of media capture refers to 'a situation in which the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own, nor able to exercise their main function, notably of informing people. Instead, they have persisted in an intermediate state, with vested interests, and not just the government, using them for malign purposes.'<sup>23</sup> While this might be overstating it for most South African media, which is in general strongly independent, it does speak to potential vulnerabilities which have the potential to be exploited by bad actors.

### a. Summary of key findings

- Less than half of newsrooms in this sample declared their ownership and management structures on their websites.
- None of the newsrooms we sampled had a policy guiding or declaring their use of AI (artificial intelligence) or synthetic media.
- Out of the 30 newsrooms, only 12 listed their senior editors, editors-in-chief or equivalent decision makers.
- Two out of 30 newsrooms do not have contact pages.

### b. Recommendations

**Best practice policy templates.** Our analysis shows significant gaps in clear newsroom policies that are also of importance to have available to audiences. We recommend that CfA and SANEF co-create templates of best practice policies which can be adapted by newsrooms to match their requirements.

**Newsroom adoption of an AI policy.** Use of AI in newsrooms is relatively new, but already plays a significant role in newsroom operations. It is deployed in areas such as recommendation of stories to readers, text to speech, and identification of media to accompany stories. However, this is happening without appropriate policies to guide the deployment of AI, or understanding the effect the technology is having in shaping the narrative. This report recommends the development of policies to guide AI use in news.

**Media organisations should simplify the process to file complaints and pursue corrections by readers.** While this study has found that there has been a deliberate effort among some media

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<sup>23</sup> [Media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own](#) In the service of power, Media capture threat to democracy, CIMA 2017

organisations to make their policies public, only a minority have made clear to their audiences the avenues to complain about coverage and to pursue corrections. Aside from the effect it has on eroding trust in media, uncorrected errors have left media houses battling defamation cases and facing heavy costs.

## 2. Background and context

South African media's ranking on the press freedom index, as well as trust data from South African media research such as the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's Digital News Reports (Reuters DNR), paints a relatively positive picture of the landscape. The country has the highest ranking press freedom on the continent, according to the Reporters Without Borders 2022 Press Freedom Barometer.<sup>24</sup> The 2022 Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's Digital News Report (Reuters DNR)<sup>25</sup> indicated that trust in South African media had increased by 9pp to 61% - second only to Finland at 69% and matching Portugal, while the average for the 46 markets that feature in the research is at 42%.

However, this same research said that only 44% of respondents said that the media is free from business and political influence. Adding to that, concern about misinformation and 'worry about identifying the difference between what is real and fake on the internet when it comes to news' is higher in Africa (74%), with the global average at 58%. The 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer<sup>26</sup> indicates that trust in government declined by 4pp to 22%, whereas media stayed the same at 41%.

The 2023 Reuters DNR is due to be published in June, but our early access to a draft version reveals that, after four years of growth when trust in news in South Africa grew from 49% to 61%, 2023 has shown a decline. (The report is embargoed until June 2023.) South African media needs to take immediate steps to reverse this decline, and increased transparency and availability of editorial policies is a key part of this.

## 3. Methodology

This research covers a sample of 30 media organisations in South Africa. The study was conducted between February and March 2023 and focused on mostly national media houses that publish in English. The range covers broadcast, print and online media. We have included only entities that have a newsroom and publish their news at a regular interval.

To conduct this research, CfA used a combination of analysis from our internal CivicSignal MediaData analysts, in tandem with a survey of senior editors who are members of the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF), to determine whether the newsrooms have the editorial policies that

<sup>24</sup> [Index | RSF 2022](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022](#)

<sup>26</sup> [2023 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report](#)

we tracked. SANEF is a non-profit membership organisation for editors, senior journalists and journalism trainers in South Africa.

The CivicSignal MediaData team checked the websites of the selected news organisations for the presence of the following policies:

- Privacy policy
- Copyright Declaration
- Contact page
- Corrections page or a corrections policy,
- Complaints page,
- Ownership structure
- Management structure
- Declaration of editorial staff, including editor-in-chief or similar decision makers
- Public-facing editorial guidelines
- Ethics policy
- AI and synthetic media policy
- Link / declaration of adherence to the South African Press Code

Five of the organisations are print, six are television, six are radio, while 13 are online organisations. As a note, all of the brands we surveyed also publish their news online.

To identify the policies, we searched each platform's relevant webpages for the keywords 'editorial policy' or 'editorial guidelines' as well as related keywords like 'code of conduct' and 'newsroom guidelines'.

We also clicked through the various pages of the websites looking for any that contained any of the policies that were the focus of this research.

A questionnaire was sent out via SANEF to senior editors and newsroom managers. The findings from the questionnaire have been cross-referenced with the findings of our own research.

#### **4. Presentation and analysis of findings**

The operations of the media - what they publish, how and when - are guided by both internal and legal policies and codes. Editorial policies govern all the editorial content and staff in the various media platforms. The policy is an overarching document that directs issues of policy, professionalism, and the operations and administration of the newsroom.

Other areas stipulated by the policies include journalistic conduct in the field, journalists' relationship with sources, and their use of privileged information. Making these policies available and accessible to audiences is key in promoting transparency, accountability and ethical journalism, and bolstering trust in journalism.

For South Africa, we also compared the list of top 10 most-trusted brands as determined by the 2022 Reuters Digital News Report and the number of policies each had. We found that the ranking of top 10 most trusted media brands correlated with a high number of editorial policies in place, except for eNCA and EyeWitness News (ewn).

Media Entity	Ranking on DNR 2022	Number of editorial policies
News24	1	8
eNCA	2	2
SABC News	3	7
Sunday Times	4	7
Mail & Guardian	5	11
TimesLive	6	7
Citizen	7	7
EyeWitness News	8	3
City Press	9	8
Daily Maverick	10	7

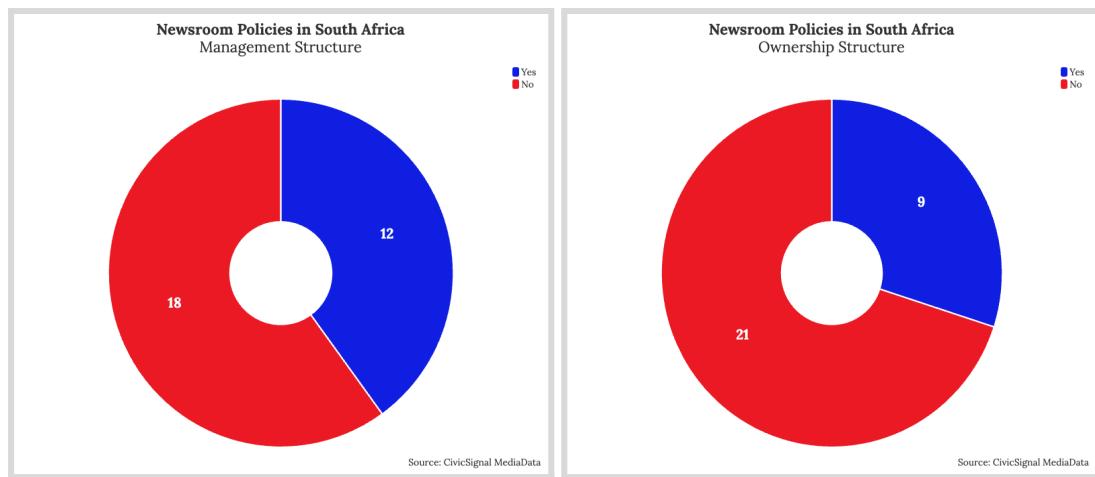
Two of the respondents to the survey gave further feedback to indicate that the policies exist within their newsrooms, but are only available on the intranet and are not public documents. Another newsroom's response said, 'In terms of your newsroom policy survey - some of the areas raised are covered on the about us page on the site but we don't have formal policies written up yet - your list has given me some good direction. With a smaller newsroom it was easier to verbally share what the policies were. So I guess my response is, it's a work in progress.'

#### a. Ownership and management structure

This data point checked whether a newsroom had a clear explanation of its ownership and management - either by linking to its holding company or a page published online. The sample of 30 newsrooms found that nine were transparent about their management structure by listing the owners of the organisation, or the members of its board of directors online.

Twelve media organisations had their management structures published or linked to from their websites. The lack of this policy means it's not clear to the public who owns these organisations, and leaves the newsroom open to suspicion and attack when it publishes sensitive investigations. This

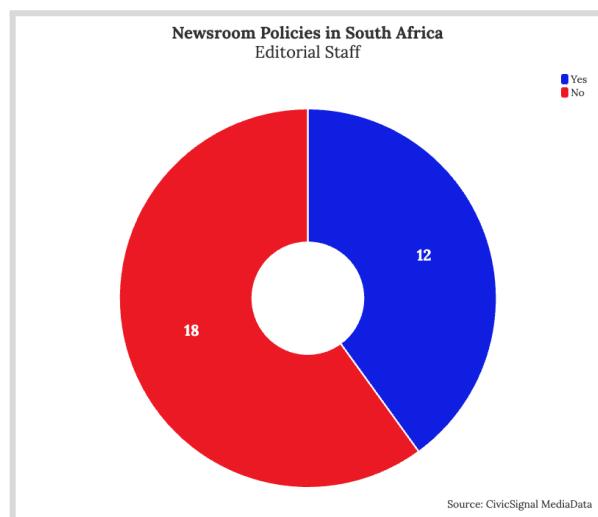
renders media organisations vulnerable to potential media capture by either politicians or other foreign influences. Moreover, journalists in these media organisations could be seen to be under the editorial influence of their owners, or could apply self-censorship when reports cover their owners.



*Eighteen newsrooms did not declare their management structure, and 21 did not declare their ownership structure.*

#### b. Declaration of editorial staff, including editor-in-chief

Just under half of the newsrooms surveyed had listed their editor-in-chief or equivalent decision makers. The declaration of the editorial management would help ensure that it's clear whether editors and journalists wear 'different hats' or might be compromised from a previous role.

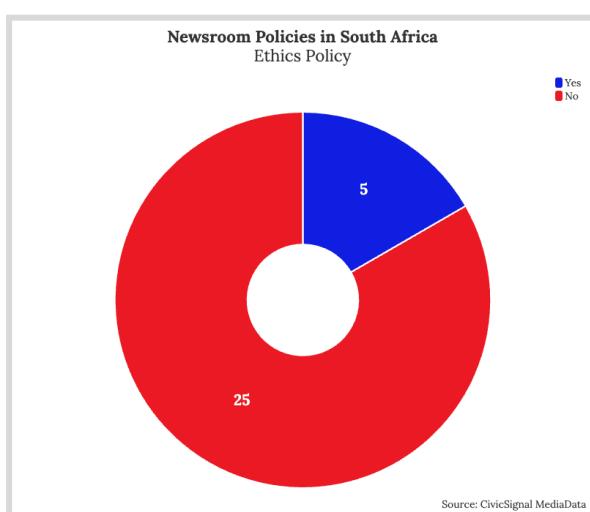


*Eighteen out 30 newsrooms have not listed their editorial managers.*

### c. Ethics, codes of conduct, gifts and gratuity policies

The majority of newsrooms had an ethics and code of conduct policy in place, mostly in one overarching document. This, together with the agreement to the South African Press Code<sup>27</sup>, offers a strong basis of accountability for newsrooms and journalists. In separate interviews, two newsrooms said the ethics and code of conduct policy was available internally and not published on their site. The Press Code adherence was declared on only 12 out of the 18 surveyed print and online websites, while the Broadcasting Complaints Commission appeared on five out of the 12 broadcasters' websites.

Along with ethics and code of conduct policies', newsrooms should have a well-defined policy to provide a clear guideline on how gifts, travel or training is declared. This would also help prevent journalists falling victim to political or external influence, with gifts or press junkets influencing them to report on a topic in a favourable way. A well-defined policy provides a clear guideline on how influence like this will be treated, and also ensures that any potential conflict is revealed to the reader.



*Twenty-five newsrooms did not have an ethics policy available on their websites.*

Editorial policies from the three newsrooms that have published the document online, and which we analysed for this study, were explicit about the news organisation's commitment to protecting and upholding public interest and stressed the importance of factual accuracy, fairness and balance.

The policies sampled showed that the newsrooms were particularly insistent that staff working for their outlets remain independent of vested interests or external influences.

As an example, the Mail & Guardian's editorial code of ethics says gifts over the value of R150 cannot be accepted in order 'to avoid an impression of a conflict of interest impacting on the reputation of the news organisation and its staff'.

<sup>27</sup> [Press Code](#)

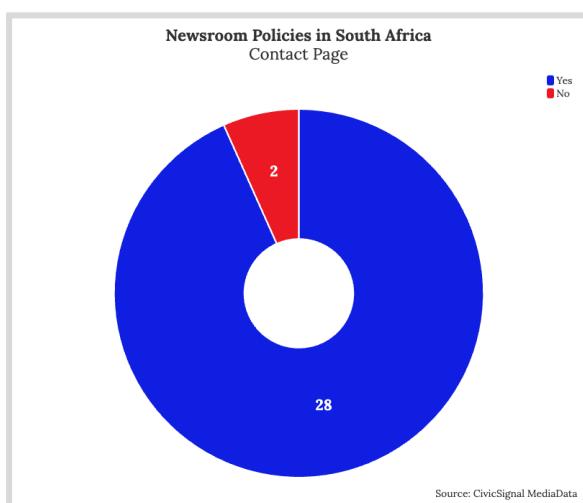
#### **d. Policy for training, fellowships or professional development**

This metric establishes whether newsrooms in South Africa have published their policy for training and professional development. Two out of the 30 newsrooms have published their policies. Previous research by CfA established that training and junkets were two ways news organisations in South Africa are rendered vulnerable to foreign influence.

This lack of policy as to who trains newsroom staff means that there could be a ‘return on investment’ expected from the trainers. It would also pre-define which actors they would not accept training from in order to safeguard against possible influence.

#### **e. Ethics policy and code of conduct**

The majority of media organisations we surveyed had contact details listed on their site specifically for the newsroom. Having this information in place provides contextual information to its audience and helps protect a newsroom from being operated anonymously from a foreign country.



*Two out of the 30 surveyed newsrooms did not have a contact page or contact details for the newsroom.*

#### **f. AI and synthetic media policy**

None of the newsrooms in South Africa had any publicly visible policy about the use of AI or synthetic media in the production or publishing of their content.

Lack of this policy exposes the media organisations to serious institutional damage as they may not be sure of the intentions of service providers, and may be prone to surveillance which in turn may lead to media capture. Newsrooms are already affected by the algorithms that control AI which determine how and what news gets to the audience, and not declaring where AI is used means that readers have

no way of gauging potential bias in reporting.

## 5. Conclusion

Having policies that are well articulated and accessible to audiences and journalists alike is part of the mechanism that can help insulate news media organisations against attacks on their credibility and sustainability. Not having these in place means newsrooms run the risk of media capture because editorial independence can be compromised by pressure put on journalists by politicians, owners, professional organisations or publishers in the absence of accessible policies. It also makes the newsroom vulnerable to influence manipulation by bad actors who profit from eroding trust in the media.

It is important that we increase the audience's understanding of how journalism works, especially the decision-making and newsgathering processes that shape how the news is made. This will differentiate reputable news organisations from other, less professional sources. While we have used some of the more popular and larger media organisations in South Africa as samples for this study, the media space is quickly transforming and the audience choices switching away from mainstream media to social media, bloggers, or even some partisan media, which sometimes presents themselves as vernacular or community media organisations.

Our recommendations cover areas of support to media houses to develop up to date policies and guiding principles for their operations. Systems that rank the trustworthiness of news sites use AI-driven analysis of a site's structures to score a news organisation's vulnerability to information manipulation. News sites that do not have easily discoverable editorial policies and ownership structures will inevitably score low on these metrics, with a potential knock-on effect on revenue.

The awareness of the existence, variety and nature of accountability measures used by media increases the audience's trust, and news media can improve their relationship with readers by creating and maintaining an infrastructure of accountability practices that is accessible to those looking for it.

As Code for Africa 2021 studies into Media Market Risk Ratings for Kenya and South Africa, co-authored with the Global Disinformation Index, found<sup>28</sup>, ‘transparency about a newsroom’s operations can be a key mechanism for building online user trust in news sites by dispelling any concerns about conflicts of interest or shadow owners.’<sup>29</sup>

The absence of key operational policies that are easily accessible was highly correlated with sites that were assessed as producing more sensational content, clickbait headlines and stories that negatively targeted groups. ‘Similar relationships between a site’s operational integrity and the reliability of a site’s content emerge from the findings, particularly when sites in the sample were found to have clear correction policies and processes as well as statements of editorial independence.’ Implementing and

<sup>28</sup> [Disinformation Risk Assessment: The Online News Market in Kenya](#), Global Disinformation Index, 2021

<sup>29</sup> [Media Market Risk Ratings: South Africa](#), Global Disinformation Index, Amanda Strydom, 2021

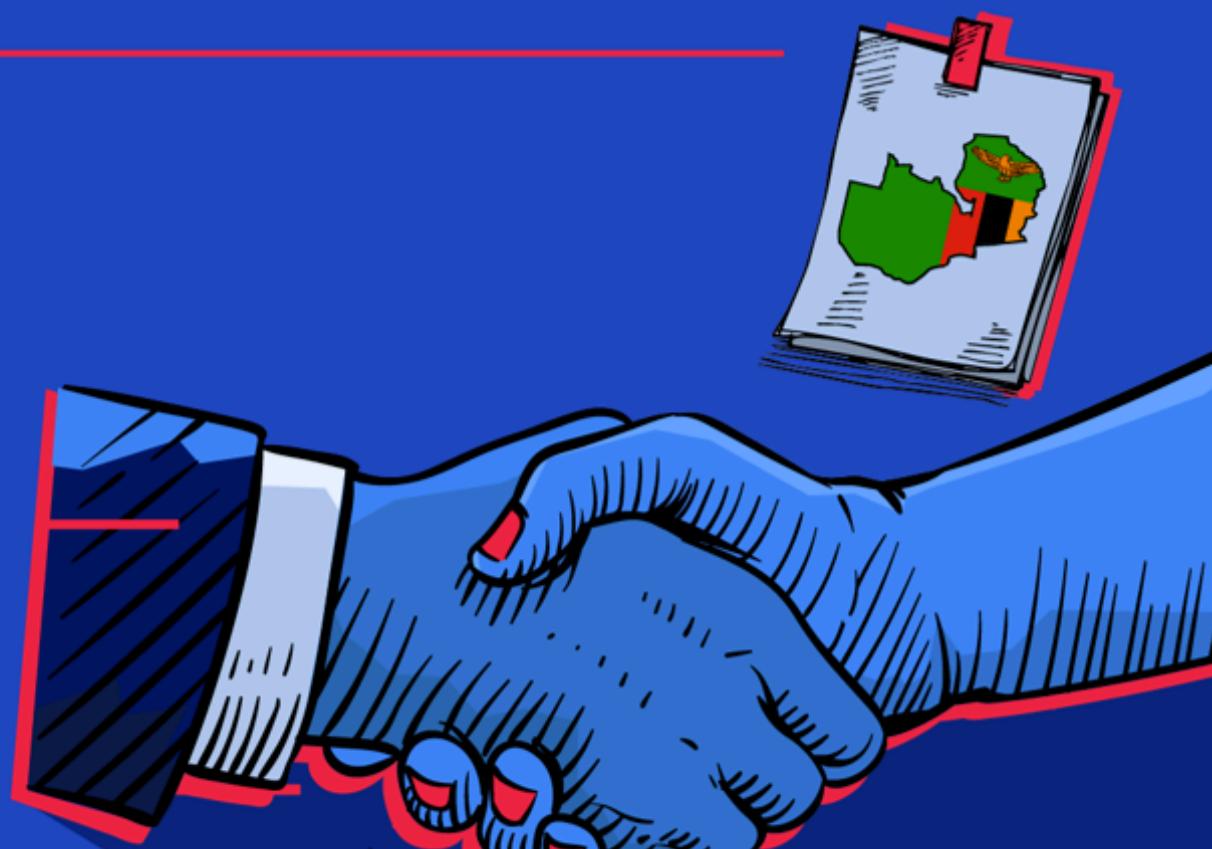
making available operational and editorial policies decreases news organisations' vulnerability to information manipulation and erosion of trust.



# Transparency and trust: newsroom policies

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Zambia



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## **5. Conclusion**

*Cite this report as: Code for Africa and CivicSignal (2024) ‘Media Capture’. African Data and Democracy Observatory.*

## 1. Executive summary

Code for Africa (CfA) has undertaken this survey to establish whether news organisations in Zambia have clear editorial policies and are transparent in their business operations. The research is also intended to examine the accessibility and availability of these policies for both internal and external stakeholders.

Additionally, the findings of this research provide insight into the state of media transparency and accountability in Zambia, and also inform a number of recommendations to address these inadequacies and how to build resilience and restore public trust in the media in order to be less susceptible to media capture. The study revealed policy gaps in newsrooms that could impact media credibility which in turn could contribute to diminishing trust.

Media capture in this report refers to 'a situation in which the media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own<sup>30</sup>, nor able to exercise their main function, notably of informing people. Instead, they have persisted in an intermediate state, with vested interests, and not just the government, using them for malign purposes'.

Drawing on survey findings, interviews and in-house research, this report examines the presence of newsroom policies in Zambia, and the need for greater accessibility and transparency in their implementation.

The report further highlights the challenges faced by media organisations in making newsroom policies accessible to both internal and external stakeholders, and the reluctance by media owners to share these policies publicly.

### a. Summary of key findings

In reviewing the policies, the study found that:

- The ethics policy and the contact page are the most shared with the public at 38% respectively, while the fact-checking policy was the most available policy at 38%.
- While none of the newsrooms surveyed had an Artificial Intelligence (AI) policy, 57% of the respondents indicated they use AI in different ways. Mwebantu News and Mufumbwe Community Radio said that they deployed AI to analyse videos and images for news content, while Mphangwe FM and Lubingu Lwansanse use it to write news bulletins.
- Only 19 websites of the 50 media organisations surveyed have a contact page and corrections pages.
- The two newsrooms sampled with the most number of policies available publicly were Makanday with 8 out of the 10 listed policies, and Diggers Newspaper with 7 policies published on its site.

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<sup>30</sup> [Media have not succeeded in becoming autonomous in manifesting a will of their own](#), In the service of power: Media capture and the threat to democracy, 2017

## b. Recommendations

**News organisations should adopt newsroom policies and guidelines.** To promote transparency, accountability and ethical journalism, media organisations must put in place clear newsroom policies and guidelines. This not only fosters trust in the media but also guards against media capture. In this regard, media owners should invest in the development of clear editorial policies, as well as provide the necessary resources to support quality journalism. Indeed news editors emphasised the importance of clear policies in ensuring editorial decisions are merit-based and devoid of external influences.

**Media houses should make ownership details and funding sources transparent.** Vague ownership details can breed suspicion of external influence and the media organisation's agenda. To guard against such concerns and to uphold media freedom, media organisations should adopt clear policies that support full disclosure of funding sources.

**All staff should be trained on the editorial policies, where these are published, as well as how to declare their possible conflicts of interest.** This analysis shows significant gaps in the publishing and accessibility of newsroom policies. It is recommended that MISA Zambia helps create an outline of best practice policies and templates, and works with newsrooms to adopt a standard.

**Newsroom adoption of artificial intelligence and adoption of guiding principles.** Use of AI in newsrooms is relatively new, but already plays a role in newsroom operations. It is deployed in areas such as recommendation of stories to readers, text to speech, and identification of media to accompany stories. Other potential areas of AI include synthetic media creation such as automation of sports results, and financial market updates. However, this is happening without appropriate policies to guide the deployment of AI, or understanding the effect the technology is having in shaping the narrative. A lack of AI and synthetic media policy which guides the use of such tools exposes the media to influence from foreign actors and technology firms, which could come in the form of research, tools, training and financing to set up AI operations in the newsroom and so influence the news agenda. This report recommends the development of policies to guide AI use in news.

## 2. Background and context

Zambia (population of approximately 18 million people) has a relatively diverse news media landscape with radio being the biggest news platform. MediaData has to date mapped 288 newsrooms across private, community, and state-owned media organisations. This research is an attempt to assess and understand the level of transparency of the country's media landscape by evaluating the availability and accessibility of newsroom editorial policies.

Trust in media has been affected by recent criticisms of reporting standards, and restrictions on the freedom of journalists to practise their craft, with some saying they have to self-censor for their own safety.<sup>31</sup>

There are increasing calls for transparency about how news organisations go about their business, which speaks directly to the recommendation of this study that editorial policies be clearly accessible on news sites, as well as management and ownership structures.

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<sup>31</sup> [Media self-censorship in Zambia](#), Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Caroline Katotobwe, 2022

### **3. Methodology and research process**

CfA conducted the study using research from our own internal CivicSignal research analysts, alongside a survey of senior editors affiliated with the Zambia chapter of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA Zambia), and held a roundtable discussion with other senior editors. MISA Zambia is a non-profit organisation that promotes media independence, pluralism and freedom of expression and its members include individual journalists, editors, academics and newsrooms.

The desktop research covered a sample of 50 organisations in Zambia. The organisations were selected based on their number of viewers, listeners and followers, or high levels of online engagement. The study was conducted between January and March 2023 and included online, print, radio and television. We included only entities that have a newsroom and publish their news at a regular interval. These newsrooms fall across the spectrum of state-owned, privately owned and community media organisations.

The objective of this study was to establish whether news organisations in Zambia have clear editorial and management policies, and whether the audiences of these news organisations could easily access this information on the prime publishing platforms. We used both quantitative and qualitative study methods by sending out surveys to news editors and managers.

The CivicSignal MediaData team also checked the websites of the selected news organisations for the presence of the following policies:

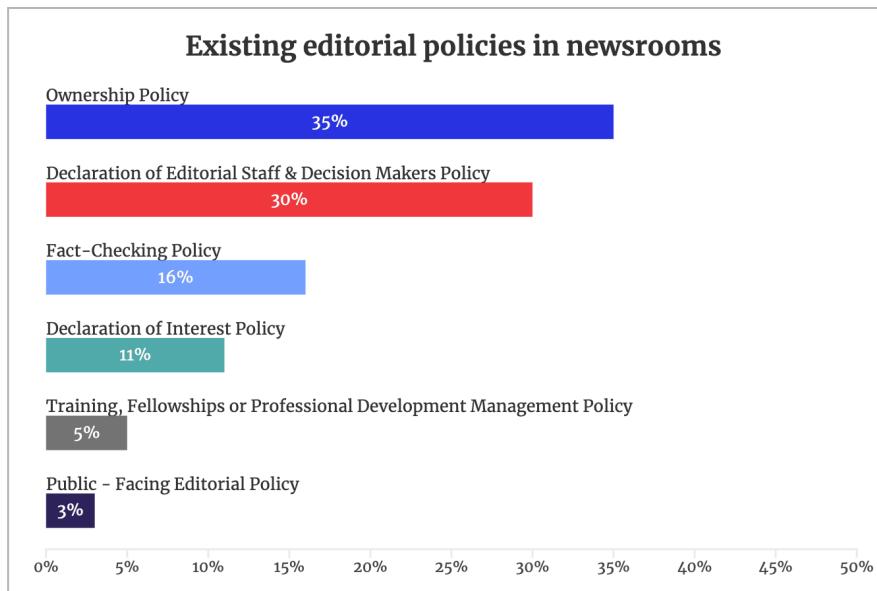
- Privacy policy
- Copyright declaration
- Contact page
- Corrections page or a linked corrections policy
- Complaints page
- Ownership of the media organisation
- Management structure
- List of editorial staff
- Public facing editorial guidelines
- Ethics policy

### **4. Newsroom policy**

A newsroom policy refers to a document or documents created or used by a media outlet and sets out the essential guidelines and rules for all employees and freelancers to abide by when producing content. The policies are important because they help to uphold the integrity of the media industry, maintain public trust in journalism, and ensure that journalists and news media organisations are held accountable for their work. This policy can include, among other things, the news organisation's position on the source of funding such as adverts, donations, commercial programmes, ownership, and whether it is privately funded by an individual or by an organisation, as well as corrections and privacy pages.

The policy should also state the structure for decision making in the newsroom, and the management structure that is responsible for the entire organisation. The availability and accessibility of newsroom policies is important to build trust, as they enable internal and external stakeholders to understand the standards and expectations for news reporting.

In an analysis of newsroom social media policies, the African Centre for Media Excellence<sup>32</sup> (ACME) said that 'while existing editorial guidelines might comprehensively cover journalistic standards, they may not address all the nuances of fast-evolving digital platforms'.



*This chart reflects the current status of editorial policies in newsrooms. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)*

### a. Availability of newsroom policies

The availability and accessibility of newsroom policies is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and ethical journalism in news organisations. Transparency International said<sup>33</sup> that 'the lack of media ownership transparency, especially the lack of information on media companies' beneficial owners; non-transparent financing; and the substantial increase in non-transparent use of both state and private advertising' is one of the issues threatening integrity in media.

Our study found that most media organisations, despite having certain policies in place, did not make them publicly available. The data indicated that 30 out of the 50 newsrooms we used as the sample did not have active websites, but had an active Facebook presence.

The two newsrooms that had the most policies published were Makanday and Diggers Newspaper with eight and seven of the checked policies available respectively. The Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), the country's public broadcaster, had the ownership structure, privacy policy, complaints page, and contact details published on their site, while a community radio station Radio Chikaya listed the ownership and management structure, editorial staff, and contact information on its website.

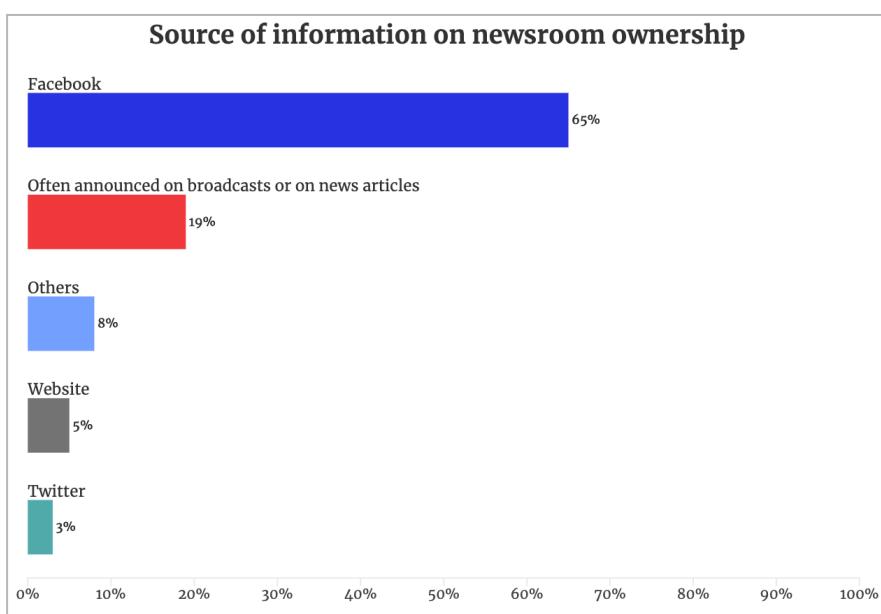
<sup>32</sup> [Newsrooms should apply social media policies fairly](#), African Centre for Media Excellence, March 2023

<sup>33</sup> [Good practices to ensure transparency and integrity](#), Transparency International, May 2016

### b. Ownership and management structure policy

These are the most common and publicly available policies in newsrooms at 34% and 24% respectively. Interestingly, the majority of newsrooms said in the survey that their ownership information was published on their newsroom's Facebook page but none of this information existed on their facebook page.

A senior editor observed at a roundtable discussion event that lack of declaration of media ownership leaves media organisations open to suspicion especially when they publish potentially sensitive investigations. It also makes them vulnerable to manipulation by either politicians or other foreign influences. Moreover, journalists in these media organisations could be under the editorial influence of their owners or could self-censor when reports conflict with their owners' interests.



*Respondents to the survey said their audience could use a range of platforms to access information on the structure of control and ownership of their newsrooms. (Source: CivicSignal MediaData)*

### c. Declaration of editorial staff policy

Only 36% of the newsrooms surveyed declared having an editorial staff policy and only 32% of these shared the policy with the public.

A lack of this policy brings about mistrust which poses a risk to newsrooms and their editorial staff. This declaration is important in building public trust in journalism as it allows journalists and news media organisations to be held accountable for their work. Further, it helps guard against potential conflicts of interest arising, for instance, from editors or journalists wearing 'different hats' or moonlighting for other organisations.

### d. Declaration of interests policy

Only 18 of the surveyed newsrooms (36%) have a declaration of interests policy. Of these, only 10 newsrooms (20%) made the policy publicly available. The lack of transparency heightens the risk of

newsrooms falling victim to political or external influence through gifts, travel or training in exchange for favourable coverage.

During a roundtable discussion, editors highlighted the vulnerability of journalists to outside influences primarily due to their low salaries. The absence of a living wage for journalists and newsroom staff, in addition to the lack of clear editorial policies may increase their susceptibility to media capture.

#### e. Training fellowships or professional development policy

Seven newsrooms indicated that their policy existed but only 2 newsrooms shared it with the public. This study revealed that most media organisations do not have this policy in place which poses a danger to professionalism as trained journalists or media organisations become susceptible to media capture. In follow-up interviews, news editors said that newsroom staff tended to find their own training programmes, and would request permission from their editor to attend abroad. However, they indicated some staff are seconded for specialised training locally.

Of the media organisations surveyed, 15 community radio stations indicated that in their training policy, there is a clause that untrained staff who are sponsored for training within the country by the organisation sign an agreement to continue working for the organisation for a period of four years upon completion of the studies.

Previous research by CfA established that training and junkets were one of the ways news organisations in Zambia came under foreign influence. Lack of policies to guide foreign conferences, training and fellowships was one of the weaknesses that the study established as leading to media capture.

This lack of policy to provide guidance on who trains newsroom staff means that there could be a 'return on investment' required from the trainers. It also would pre-define who the actors are they would not accept training from in order to safeguard against possible influence. A clear policy also provides a clear guideline on how influence like this will be treated by newsrooms. Newsrooms should develop policies that caution against accepting financial favours and gifts as this has the potential to influence performance and cause conflicts of interest at work.

#### f. Public-facing editorial policy

From the survey, respondents said only 10% shared this policy with members of the public. The majority of newsrooms indicated that while they have an overarching editorial policy in place, it was not shared with the public. Newsrooms are advised to have this policy and make it accessible to the public to show news organisations' commitment to sharing impartial, accurate and credible content.

#### g. Privacy policy

No newsrooms indicated that they had this policy in place during the survey. Our research found 6 out of 50 media organisations published this on their website. Newsrooms are legally required to have a privacy policy document which informs their audience of the type of information that is collected on the website, and how the newsroom intends to use that data.

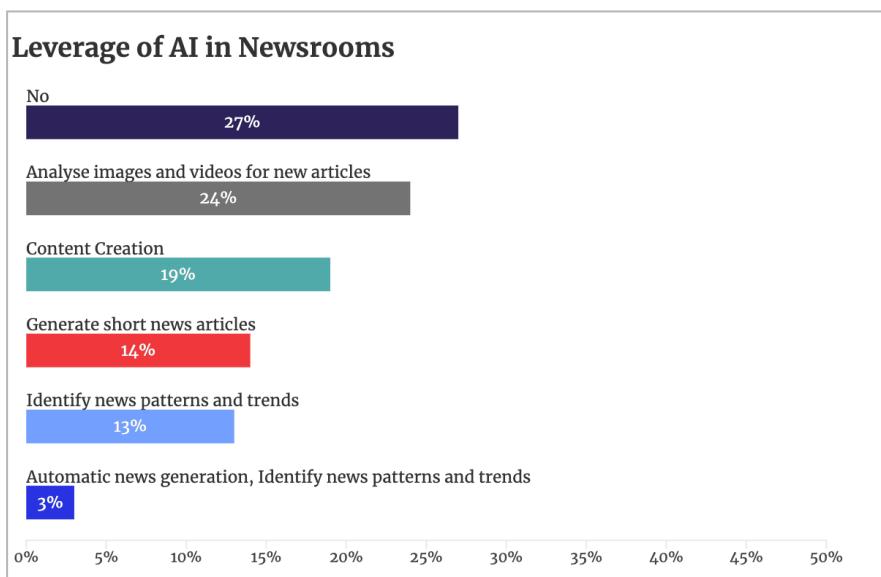
## **h. Ethics policy**

This policy was declared by 26% of the surveyed newsrooms, but out of these only 38% shared it publicly. This study established that this is the most shared policy among all newsroom policies. However, in a follow up interview all the respondents said the policy existed in their newsrooms not as a stand alone policy but is incorporated in an overarching editorial policy.

They revealed that all staff members are required to follow these ethical guidelines when executing their duty. This study also established that broadcasting media organisations relied on the ethical guidelines set by Zambia's Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA).

## **i. AI policy**

The survey addressed both the use of AI in newsrooms as well as policies that govern it within newsrooms. No newsrooms had policies in place, but 57% indicated that they use AI tools in their newsroom.



*How newsrooms leverage AI in their work. (Source: CivicSignal Media Data)*

Of the 57%, 24 % said they used AI tools to analyse images and videos for news articles, while 19% used it for content creation. A further 14% indicated they use it to generate short news articles, 13% to identify news patterns and trends, while 3% used it for automatic news generation.

For newsrooms to fully leverage AI in their work, they should ensure to have this policy in place, adhere to its guidelines and also understand how it affects their work. Lack of this policy exposes the media organisations to serious institutional damage as they may not be sure of the intentions of service providers and may be prone to surveillance which in turn may lead to media capture.

Yet newsrooms are already affected by the algorithms that control AI which determine how and which news gets to the audience.

In Zambia, where Chinese made phones are ubiquitous, news media organisations are at the mercy of web browsers which serve both as search engines and news aggregators with algorithms that determine the content users will see.

#### j. Corrections page or a linked corrections policy

Nine media organisations indicated on the survey that they have a corrections page. Out of these, only 4 organisations said they shared the corrections policy page with the public. However, a physical check on websites indicated none of the media organisations had a corrections page. In a follow-up interview with the respondents, they said that media organisations did make corrections to published stories whenever an error was brought to their attention. These corrections or retractions were made public in both electronic and print media.

### 5. Conclusion

Trust in news is declining globally, and had fallen in almost half the countries surveyed in the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism's 2022 Digital News survey<sup>34</sup>. Having policies that are well articulated and accessible to audiences and journalists alike is part of the mechanism that can not only help insulate news media organisations against attacks on their credibility, but also ensure their sustainability.

It is important that newsrooms increase the audience's understanding of how journalism works, especially the decision-making and newsgathering processes that shape how the news is made. This will differentiate reputable news organisations from other less professional sources. While we have used some of the more popular and larger media organisations in Zambia as samples for this study, the media space is quickly shifting, with audiences moving away from mainstream media and towards other newer means of news consumption such as social media, blogs, or even partisan media that sometimes masquerade as vernacular or community media organisations.

Our recommendations cover areas of support to media houses to develop up to date policies and guiding principles for their operations. Systems that rank the trustworthiness of news sites use AI-driven analysis of a site's structures to score a news organisation's vulnerability to information manipulation. News sites that do not have easily discoverable editorial policies and ownership structures will inevitably score low on these metrics, with a potential knock-on effect on revenue.

The awareness of the existence, variety and nature of accountability measures used by media increases the audience's trust, and news media can improve their relationship with readers by creating and maintaining an infrastructure of accountability practices that is accessible to those looking for it.

As Code for Africa 2021 studies, co-authored with the Global Disinformation Index, found<sup>35</sup>, 'transparency about a newsroom's operations can be a key mechanism for building online user trust in news sites by dispelling any concerns about conflicts of interest or shadow owners.'<sup>36</sup>

The absence of key operational policies that are easily accessible was highly correlated with sites that were assessed as producing more sensational content, clickbait headlines and stories that negatively targeted groups. 'Similar relationships between a site's operational integrity and the reliability of a site's content emerge from the findings, particularly when sites in the sample were found to have clear

<sup>34</sup> [Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022](#), Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022

<sup>35</sup> [Disinformation Risk Assessment: The Online News Market in Kenya](#), Global Disinformation Index, 2021

<sup>36</sup> [Media Market Risk Ratings: South Africa](#), Global Disinformation Index, Amanda Strydom, 2021

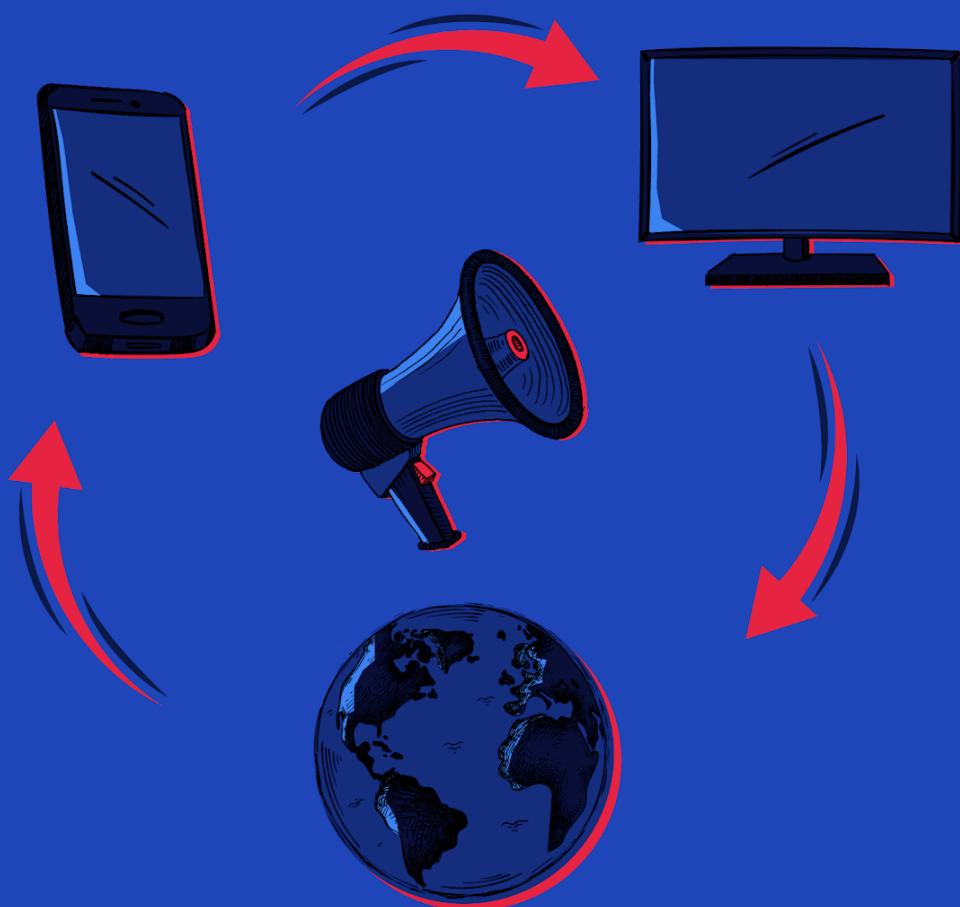
correction policies and processes as well as statements of editorial independence.<sup>1</sup> Implementing and making available operational and editorial policies decreases news organisations' vulnerability to information manipulation and erosion of trust.

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# The Cuckoos:

## How puppet pundits inject propaganda into African media

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Cite this report as: Code for Africa and CivicSignal (2024) 'Media Capture'. African Data and Democracy Observatory.

## 1. Executive summary

### a. Context

This report is part of a wider examination into how African media independence is systematically undermined and ‘captured’ by external influence peddlers. The study uses political scientist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi’s 2013 definition of the concept, where external powerful interest groups with vested interests subvert or sway the media for their own interests.<sup>37</sup>

The **Media Capture** series is co-produced with African editor guilds, to ensure the research reflects everyday realities facing local newsrooms. The resulting reports are intended to give local media managers and development strategists a clearer understanding of exactly how newsrooms are subverted, while also offering pragmatic suggestions for how media defenders might improve their resilience to capture.

This report, ‘**The Cuckoos**’, is one of four reports published in 2024. It examines how lobbyists and propagandists hijack the opinion and analysis sections in news media. The second, ‘**Gift Horse**’, report looks at how ‘free’ content and collaboration agreements offered by lobbyists and propagandists further dilute editorial independence. The third report, ‘**Media Grooming**’, questions whether free journalism training, sponsored media trips or reporting grants, and gifts of newsroom equipment or other resources make media vulnerable to external influence. The fourth report, ‘**Guardrails**’, explores how media elsewhere have developed effective policy guidelines and newsroom strategies to defend against subversion.

### b. Introduction

Africa’s leading independent media is riddled with opinion columns authored by pundits who are in thrall to professional lobbyists and propagandists.

The pundits seldom disclose that their policy analysis or geo-political commentary on contentious issues was originally commissioned by foreign state agencies, or are the result of partnerships with lobbyists.

Once republished unwittingly by African media, the ‘cuckoo’ content is amplified by the pundits’ original benefactors, through a ‘rinse-cycle’ laundromat process that covertly uses further resources controlled either by foreign nation states or by public relations (PR) teams. The term ‘cuckoo’ is used to describe the phenomenon of the species laying its eggs in other birds’ nests and the unsuspecting bird hatching the cuckoo’s eggs.

The public is unaware that the flurry of academic and opinionista articles and follow-up news reportage or other media coverage triggered by a pundit’s op-ed article, which often includes ‘responses’ from political or public officials, is not authentic public debate. Instead, it is a covert attempt to subvert public opinion and shape African government policies.

This report does not seek to question the use of pundits in the media. Pundits’ views as domain experts on particular issues, even when they come with a degree of partiality and bias, are widely recognised as important for offering nuanced insights to the public. But, audiences need to be aware of the nature

<sup>37</sup> In Schiffrin, A. (2017) ‘Introduction’, in [In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy](#). Center for International Media Assistance, p 2.

of a pundits' partisanship, to be able to put the viewpoints in context.<sup>38</sup> Transparency on a pundits' affiliations are also key for newsrooms to understand how best to frame the op-eds on their platforms.

This report therefore focuses specifically on pundits who publish in mainstream digital media without adequately disclosing their relationship with either state agencies or lobbyists, or without disclosing the provenance of their published commentaries. The research does not intend to prove disinformation which, by definition, always includes false claims or fabricated facts, or the use of inorganic social media amplification using bots or other digital techniques. Rather, the report explains the phenomenon of professional lobbyists or foreign governments using local pundits to spread a particular narrative.

### c. Key findings

#### **Propagandistic punditry**

- i. Multiple foreign states, including China, France, Israel, Russia, and others, have been identified as undertaking influence operations targeting African countries to shape opinions and narratives. Some of these state operations exploit African voices, institutions, and media to covertly project perspectives that support foreign political and economic agendas.
- ii. Tactics include hiring local groups as proxies, using fabricated social media personas, and co-opting real African experts to serve as 'propagandistic pundits' or 'cuckoos'.
- iii. Some individuals, including academics, activists, diplomats, and journalists, write their commentary to be used for state propaganda purposes, obscuring conflicts of interest.
- iv. State-affiliated media outlets publish the African pundits to lend credibility to messaging, which is then amplified by systematic syndication into local African media environments.

#### **Lobbyist punditry**

- i. Lobbyist pundits use their credentials and expertise to subtly promote preferred narratives or shift perceptions on policy issues without transparently disclosing their agendas or incentives.
- ii. Some lobbyist pundits artificially manufacture credibility by creating multiple organisations or astroturfing (creating the impression of grassroots support)<sup>39</sup> for their fringe views. This false appearance of broad validation is not revealed to audiences.
- iii. The appearance of expertise cultivated through prolific self-published commentary, and citing each other, enables pundits to become quoted authorities reinforcing aligned narratives across media.
- iv. Automated publishing of commercial PR content injected into media websites is not clearly labelled as paid content and/or inadequately attributed.

#### **Common punditry patterns**

- i. Reputable African media outlets unwittingly amplify campaigns by republishing or quoting content from pundits without scrutinising the original source or disclosing either lobbyist or foreign state ties.
- ii. The foreign state co-optation of ostensibly credible voices makes propaganda more difficult to recognise and resist. Hyper-partisan views are laundered as organic perspectives from pundits considered experts.
- iii. Influence operations undermine democratic debate and institutions by distorting public discourse using disinformation.

<sup>38</sup>The Line Between Journalism and Punditry (And That's OK Too), *Social Media Today*, 10 May 2011

<sup>39</sup>Chan, J. (2022) 'Online Astroturfing: A Problem Beyond Disinformation', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, p 1-22

#### d. Recommendations

The systematic abuse of the media's commitment to provide space for academics and other experts to publish their insights can be countered in simple, cost effective ways using a combination of the following suggested measures to strengthen transparency and oversight:

- i. Media guilds need to urge newsrooms to adopt far more robust **disclosure standards** with explicit, detailed guidelines around authorship, including contributions to an opinion article by researchers or editors other than the lead author, along with clearer guidelines on disclosure around source attribution and content provenance.
- ii. Media guilds need to assist newsrooms in implementing stronger **editorial safeguards**, including establishing verification processes or desks as a core part of the copy-editing process that use digital plagiarism checking tools to verify authorship and other attribution in op-eds, as well as to help confirm to provenance.
- iii. Media guilds should consider expanding the scope of **ombuds systems**, either at an industry level (such as through the Press Council of South Africa's ombud<sup>40</sup>) or at the media house level, to include a public charter explaining the media's commitment to transparency and disclosure for all its journalists and contributors, with ethics complaint hotlines that explicitly cater to concerns around vested interests. The ombud system should also embrace regular audits and simplify the process for public complaints.

This report is the result of a relatively narrowly focused initial research project, focused on three primary African countries (Kenya, South Africa, and Zambia) and executed with limited resources. It is intended to spark deeper discussion within editor guilds and other media industry bodies in the target countries to explore suggested remedial measures that improve the credibility of op-eds while also strengthening newsroom systems. The research has deliberately sought to widen the geographic scope to include a broader cross-section of case studies and examples from elsewhere in Africa, but editor guilds outside the focus countries are encouraged to replicate the methodology to better understand whether op-ed sections in local media are also being subverted.

## 2. The problem

The media's mission as the fourth estate is to act as a watchdog, to inform and educate its audience, and to offer accurate and actionable information. Key to achieving this is building audience trust. This mission can however be compromised, intentionally or unintentionally, by deviations from the ethical foundations of reputable media practice.

In Africa, the mandate of media is confirmed in the 1991 Windhoek Declaration<sup>41</sup>, which stressed the role of an independent media in securing democracy.

The Windhoek+30 Declaration expanded on this in 2021, calling on newsrooms to deliver content in a 'transparent manner and following adequate public consultation, guaranteeing the exercise of journalism free of governmental interference, whether formal or informal'<sup>42</sup>. The declaration also includes the need for commitments from the media to 'implement specific policies, along with relevant

<sup>40</sup> The Press Council of South Africa's Press Ombud, accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>41</sup> [1991 Windhoek Declaration](#), accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>42</sup> [Windhoek +30 Declaration on Media Independence](#), accessed 14 November 2023

safeguards, to promote the production of independent, quality journalism, with the aim of ensuring people’s access to relevant, diverse and reliable information’.

The 2023 Regional Conference on Information Communication Rights in Africa builds on this, calling on the media and information providers to adopt practices to prevent the dissemination of false or misleading content, including ‘stringent verification processes, transparent disclosure of sponsored content, and measures to combat ad fraud’<sup>43</sup>.

As part of the media’s public interest mission to explain the context behind news events, it gives external opinion-setters and experts – also known as pundits – opportunities to offer arguments, insight and nuanced in-depth analyses on complex issues. A pundit, as defined by the Poynter Institute’s Politifact, is ‘someone who offers analysis or opinions on the news, particularly politics and public policy.’<sup>44</sup>

Ethical codes for news organisations are put in place to provide clear editorial guidelines on the attribution of sources; standardising of reporting formats; and distinction between news, commentary, and paid content. This is often approached in two ways: by a self-regulatory body of journalists or news media organisations that uphold a specific set of codes and an in-house guide adhered to by a newsroom. Globally, these codes mostly follow similar patterns.

As examples, the Society for Professional Journalists ethics code requires news media partners to ‘label advocacy and commentary’<sup>45</sup> and the Australian Press Council requires news media to ‘ensure that factual material in news reports and elsewhere is accurate and not misleading, and is distinguishable from other material such as opinion.’<sup>46</sup>

The Canadian Radio Television Digital News Association guideline states that ‘the basic principle of any ethical consideration of journalism is that a clear distinction must be drawn between news and opinions, making it impossible to confuse them … News events and public issues may be analysed and put into context, but commentary, opinion, or editorialising must be kept distinct from regular news coverage.’<sup>47</sup>

The Al Jazeera ethics code states that it should ‘distinguish between news material, opinion, and analysis to avoid the snares of speculation and propaganda’<sup>48</sup> and the Stony Brook Centre Ethics of the Opinion Journalist code repeats a similar sentiment, stating that ‘analysis and commentary should be labelled and not misrepresent fact or context.’<sup>49</sup>

In Africa, the Media Council of Kenya requires that newsrooms subject to the Media Council Act 2013 ‘clearly label opinion and commentary’.<sup>50</sup> The Ghanaian Journalists Association code of ethics requires that a journalist ‘differentiates between fact, opinion, and commentary, such that news is presented objectively without embellishments’.<sup>51</sup> The South African Press Code, to which media are expected to sign up voluntarily, says that media must ‘keep editorial material clearly distinct from advertising and sponsored events’. The Press Code adds that ‘media may strongly advocate for their own views on controversial topics, provided that they clearly distinguish between fact and opinion.’<sup>52</sup>

<sup>43</sup> [The 2023 Regional Conference on Information and Communication Rights in Africa Outcome Statement](#), 2 June 2023, accessed 14 November 2023.

<sup>44</sup> [What is a pundit?](#), *Politifact*, accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>45</sup> [Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics](#), Society of Professional Journalists, accessed 14 Nov 2023

<sup>46</sup> [Statement of principles - Australian Press Council](#), accessed 14 Nov 2023

<sup>47</sup> [Code of Journalistic Ethics](#), accessed 14 Nov2023

<sup>48</sup> [Code of Ethics](#), Al Jazeera, accessed 14 Nov 2023

<sup>49</sup> [The Ethics of the Opinion Journalist | Stony Brook Center for News Literacy](#), accessed 14 Nov 2023

<sup>50</sup> [Regulations | Media Council of Kenya](#), accessed 14 Nov 2023

<sup>51</sup> [Code of Ethics, Ghanaian Journalists Association](#), accessed on 14 Nov 2023

<sup>52</sup> The [South African Press Code](#), accessed 14 Nov 2023

The BBC editorial guidelines to its editorial staff say that ‘[w]e should not automatically assume that contributors from other organisations (such as academics, journalists, researchers and representatives of charities and think tanks) are unbiased. Appropriate information about their affiliations, funding, and particular viewpoints should be made available to the audience, when relevant to the context.’<sup>53</sup>

The demarcation between news content and opinion also serves as a signal for the reader to understand that there are different editorial standards for op-eds. Op-eds differ from news in that they are often a form of persuasive media communications, which can be split into two categories<sup>54</sup>: consensual and non-consensual. As per Bakir et al’s conceptual framework for research on public relations, propaganda, and promotional culture, ‘consensual’ media clearly shows its intent, so the audience is not unknowingly manipulated. This report looks specifically at non-consensual or deceptive media, including propaganda or lobbying by companies or governments.

Research on propaganda in the Majority World<sup>55</sup> often focuses on providing audiences with ‘media literacy’ skills to resist it, but this has often failed to inoculate audiences against the impact of propaganda.<sup>56</sup>

In this report, we discuss two forms of ‘cuckoos’ punditry, where a ‘cuckoo’ is defined as a person whose actions are controlled by another, often using a deceptive identity. One form, termed propagandistic punditry, serves countries’ or states’ interests, through favourable or aligned commentary. The other form is lobbyist punditry, where pundits act on behalf of clients, appearing to be from legitimate interest groups and civil society organisations (CSOs). These two forms of punditry corrode audience trust, because they distort public discourse and use deceptive practices by not disclosing their institutional or financial ties.

When a pundit’s affiliations or inducements are not disclosed, or are hidden, audiences are unable to easily understand whether there are vested interests or other factors colouring the content. In this way, it is non-consensual.

This is the reason they are termed cuckoos. Cuckoos are a species of birds who engage in brood parasitism – they lay eggs in the nests of other bird species, who then raise the cuckoo chick as their own. The cuckoo chick often evicts the real chicks from the nest, either by pushing them out or by taking all the food from the foster parents.

This behaviour is an apt metaphor for how propagandistic pundits operate. They implant state narratives into independent commentary, impersonating true, objective experts. Their biased perspectives can crowd out impartial analysis in the media, just as cuckoo chicks limit resources for native birds. The pundits’ hidden agendas prevent audiences from recognising their covert influence, much like a cuckoo chick tricks foster parents into feeding it as one of their own.

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<sup>53</sup> [BBC Editorial Guidelines](#), accessed on 14 Nov 2023

<sup>54</sup> Bakir, V., Herring, E., Miller, D., & Robinson, P. (2019). [Organised Persuasive Communication: A new conceptual framework for research on public relations, propaganda and promotional culture](#). *Critical Sociology*, 45(3), 311-328.

<sup>55</sup> [The Majority World – what’s in a phrase? - Philanthropy Australia](#), Philanthropy Australia, 4 November 2022

<sup>56</sup> Abhishek, A. (2021). [Overlooking the political economy in the research on propaganda](#). *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* [Preprint].

### 3. Propagandistic punditry

Propaganda is the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape public perceptions, manipulate cognition, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers a desired intent.<sup>57</sup>

A growing body of forensic research documents how state-affiliated agencies in a wide cross-sector of non-African countries are systematically targeting the continent using propagandistic ‘influence operations’ in ongoing attempts to shape public opinion on a diverse range of issues. Investigations have spotlighted Africa-focused operations by countries in Europe, such as France<sup>58 59</sup> and Türkiye<sup>60 61</sup>, as well as agencies in Middle Eastern countries such as Iran<sup>62 63</sup> and Israel<sup>64 65</sup>, alongside operations originating in major African development partners such as China<sup>66 67 68</sup>, Russia<sup>69 70 71 72</sup>, and the US<sup>73</sup>.

Sometimes African actors operate on the continent on behalf of foreign states. In March 2020, Meta removed a network of sock puppets consisting of 49 Facebook accounts, 69 pages and 85 Instagram accounts operated by local nationals in Ghana and Nigeria.<sup>74</sup> The network, effectively a disinfo-for-hire factory, was in the early stages of building an audience on behalf of individuals in Russia and intended to poison the political atmosphere in the US ahead of elections. Meta linked the activity to a Ghanaian nongovernmental organisation (NGO) calling itself Eliminating Barriers for the Liberation of Africa (EBLA) and the Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA). The network engaged in a number of deceptive tactics and techniques. These included using fake accounts posing as NGOs or personal blogs to manage Facebook pages and posts in groups and coordinating with one another to mislead people.

A CNN investigation revealed that the man spearheading the campaign called himself Mr Amara and claimed to be South African, but was in reality Seth Wiredu, a Ghanaian who lives in Russia. Wiredu has also appeared in the Russian propaganda film The Tourist (2021)<sup>75</sup>.

Wiredu coordinated a troll farm in Ghana that had more than 200 accounts on Facebook, Twitter<sup>76</sup>, and Instagram.<sup>77 78</sup> The troll farm consisted of 16 individuals based in Ghana, mostly in their 20s, using cellphones to spread content on divisive racial issues in the US. Twitter removed 71 accounts associated with this network.

<sup>57</sup> Wilbur, D. S. (2021). [Propaganda or Not? Journal of Information Warfare](#), 20(3), 146-156

<sup>58</sup> [Removing Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior from France and Russia, Meta](#), accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>59</sup> Graphika and The Stanford Internet Observatory (2020) [More-Troll Kombat: French and Russian Influence Operations Go Head to Head Targeting Audiences in Africa](#). Graphika & The Stanford Internet Observatory

<sup>60</sup> [Turkije's growing influence in Africa: A story of scholarships, schools and soft power](#). TRT Afrika, 21 March 2023

<sup>61</sup> Grossman, S. et al. (2020) [Political Retweet Rings and Compromised Accounts: A Twitter Influence Operation Linked to the Youth Wing of Turkey's Ruling Party](#). Stanford Internet Observatory

<sup>62</sup> Brooking, E.T. and Kianpour, S. (2020) [Iranian Digital Influence Efforts: Guerrilla Broadcasting for the Twenty-First Century](#). Atlantic Council

<sup>63</sup> Stanford Internet Observatory, Stanford (2020) [Analysis of an October 2020 Facebook Takedown Linked to the Islamic Movement in Nigeria](#). Stanford Internet Observatory

<sup>64</sup> Andrzejewski, C. (2023) [The "Masters of Perception": Burkina Faso and the International Committee of the Red Cross: Anatomy of a Manipulation Campaign, Forbidden Stories](#).

<sup>65</sup> [Age of Disinformation: Building a next level bot to subvert Africa's elections](#). Daily Maverick, 8 March 2023

<sup>66</sup> [Concealed Chinese Propaganda in Nigeria Aims to Change Negative Media Narrative on Shanghai Lockdowns](#). China Global South, 18 April 2022 (Paywalled)

<sup>67</sup> Shirk, S.L. (2007) [Changing Media, Changing Foreign Policy in China](#). Japanese Journal of Political Science, 8 (1)

<sup>68</sup> GEC (2023) [How the People's Republic of China Seeks to Reshape the Global Information Environment](#). Global Engagement Center

<sup>69</sup> [Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa](#). Stanford Internet Observatory, 30 October 2019

<sup>70</sup> [How the Russian propaganda machine works in Africa](#). Le Monde, 31 July 2023

<sup>71</sup> [Evidence of Russia-Linked Influence Operations in Africa](#). Stanford Internet Observatory, 30 October 2019

<sup>72</sup> [RT Russia Today TV Channel Opens First Africa Bureau](#). Bloomberg, 22 July 2022

<sup>73</sup> Graphika and Stanford Internet Observatory (2022) [Unheard Voice: Evaluating five years of pro-Western covert influence operations](#). Graphika & Stanford Internet Observatory.

<sup>74</sup> Clifford, C. and Gruzd, S. (2022) [Russian and African Media: Exercising Soft Power](#). SAIIA Policy Insights 125.

<sup>75</sup> Le Roux, J. and Knight, T. (2023) [The Disinformation Landscape in West Africa and Beyond](#). DFRLab

<sup>76</sup> Note: this report retains the name Twitter for posts predating July 2023, when Twitter rebranded as X.

<sup>77</sup> [Russian election meddling is back – via Ghana and Nigeria – and in your feeds](#). CNN, 11 April 2020

<sup>78</sup> [Is Ghana a new target for Russian influence ops?](#). African Digital Democracy Observatory, 6 September 2023

Again using the guise of CSOs as cover, a 2021-22 Russian influence operation in Mali used a series of accounts posing as charity, nonprofit, and community pages to mobilise public support for Russian mercenaries before the withdrawal of French soldiers and the insertion of troops from the Wagner Group private military company. Wagner provides paramilitary capabilities that further Russian foreign policy objectives in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>79</sup> An investigation by the Atlantic Council’s Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) found that a network of Facebook pages, administered from Mali, promoted pro-Russian and anti-French narratives drumming up support for Wagner Group mercenaries before the official arrival of the private military group in Mali. These pages also mobilised support for the postponement of democratic elections after the successful coup in May 2021<sup>80</sup>.

The campaign sought to capitalise on anti-French sentiment using social media campaigns, while mobilising support for anti-democratic protests, the military junta, and Russian presence. By June 2022, 140 accounts were maintained, one of which had more than 100,000 followers.<sup>81</sup>

In other cases, foreign states intervene to target opposition leaders in favour of the preferred incumbent, thereby suppressing genuine civil society advocacy. In Zimbabwe, a DFRLab investigation found that Chinese influence campaigns have sought to suppress journalists and civil society critical of the government.<sup>82</sup> WeChat, Twitter, and partisan news media acting on behalf of political parties in the respective countries were used to undertake such campaigns. ‘A campaign using the hashtag #Mr1k (referring to the alleged \$1,000 per pitch the US supposedly paid for negative China stories) attacked Zimbabwe-based NGOs and journalists for undermining Chinese businesses, claiming they were paid agents of the US.’

While assuming the guise of an organic social media campaign, the #Mr1k hashtag was based on misinformation (by which we mean misleading information)<sup>83</sup> published through collusion between Chinese and Zimbabwean state media outlets.<sup>84</sup> State-controlled newspapers like *The Herald* propagated the narrative that the US government was paying opposition leaders and journalists massive fees per story to criticise Chinese businesses operating in Zimbabwe. The Chinese embassy’s Twitter account also promoted the hashtag, accusing journalists of spreading ‘falsehoods’ about China’s investments. The use of the hashtag peaked on the day a civil society coalition criticised Chinese businesses. It gained 5.91 million impressions over one year (from August 2021) and reached 2.62 million Twitter users. The material that fuelled outrage was provided by the Chinese and Zimbabwean state media. This shows the scale and coordination between social media and state media outlets in Zimbabwe and China in spreading this manufactured narrative, which attacked opposition leaders and suppressed civil society across supposedly legitimate media and social media.

Influence campaigns can also be profitable. An investigation by journalism consortium Forbidden Stories<sup>85</sup> exposed an Israeli private security company, Percepto International, that had created a network of fictitious persons, or ‘fake avatars’ and bots to amplify messaging to rig elections and undermine humanitarian efforts by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Burkina Faso<sup>86</sup>. The investigation revealed in 2021 that Percepto had undertaken this campaign ostensibly at the request of the Burkinabe government. The company used a French magazine, *Valeurs Actuelles*, and its journalist to publish an article<sup>87</sup> based on a source claiming to be advising the Burkina Faso

<sup>79</sup> Neethling, T. (2023) *Russian Para-Military Operations in Africa: The Wagner Group as a De Facto Foreign Policy Instrument*, *Scientia Militaria*, 51(1).

<sup>80</sup> [Pro-Russian Facebook assets in Mali coordinated support for Wagner Group, anti-democracy protests](#), DFRLab, accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>81</sup> Le Roux, J. and Knight, T. (2023) [The Disinformation Landscape in West Africa and Beyond](#), DFRLab

<sup>82</sup> [China spearheads social media campaign to attack civil society in Zimbabwe](#), DFRLab, 9 November 2022

<sup>83</sup> Dame Adjin-Tettey, T. (2022) ‘[Combating fake news, disinformation, and misinformation: Experimental evidence for media literacy education](#)’, *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 9(1)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> [Age of Disinformation: Building a next level bot to subvert Africa’s elections](#), Daily Maverick, 8 March 2023

<sup>86</sup> [The ‘masters of perception’: Burkina Faso and the ICRC: anatomy of a manipulation campaign](#), *Forbidden Stories*, 16 February 2023

<sup>87</sup> [Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge, parrain involontaire du terrorisme au Burkina Faso?](#), *Valeurs Actuelles*, 3 August 2020

presidency on communications. The story was then picked up by media in Burkina Faso. The article, which is still available on the *Valeurs Actuelles* website, questioned the ICRC's neutrality in Burkina Faso, accusing it of compromising with terrorists (including providing food supplies to them in exchange for access to 'the northern regions, East, and Sahel'). Percepto offers influence services<sup>88</sup> and boasts of creating 'deep avatars', online entities, and people who appear authentic. *Valeurs Actuelles* admitted being duped, indicating an 'editorial error'.

There have also been instances in which African media outlets have been duped by coordinated influence operations. A report commissioned by the Global Engagement Center (GEC), a US state department agency, claims that China-affiliated agencies also use fictitious personas to write op-eds promoting favourable views on a range of Chinese topics. [Disclosure: GEC is a Code for Africa (CfA) donor. The grant agreement explicitly guarantees CfA's journalistic/research independence] The sock-puppet op-eds are framed as organic sentiment.<sup>89</sup> GEC reports that the fake personas include Yi Fan, who appears to have been published with media in Kenya<sup>90</sup> <sup>91</sup> and South Africa<sup>92</sup>. Yi's writer biography describes her as a 'Beijing-based international affairs commentator', without any specific institutional affiliation. Yi's published pieces in Kenya praised China's development and peacekeeping role in Africa, and promoted the Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa (BRICS) economic partnership. Yi's South African writing focused on Sino-African health partnerships and BRICS.

These examples of documented influence operations that weaponise punditry both highlight how vulnerable media are to manipulation, and shed light on the success of pervasive activities of state misinformation campaigns targeting numerous African countries. The evidence reveals a number of foreign states engaging in influence operations with diverse motivations, ranging from geopolitical interests and soft power to economic gain. Other evidence also highlights how individuals outside of state structures opportunistically seek monetary and political rewards through covert digital operations.

The case studies shown in this report covered under propagandistic and lobbyist punditry include actors in national African environments – the Central African Republic (CAR), Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria and South Africa, but also across national boundaries, impacting several countries within regions. One covers content posted to West Africa, including Benin and Mali (and likely producing content for other Francophone countries); another southern Africa, South Africa, and Zimbabwe; and a further case study covers Central Africa, including CAR. Other countries the content focused on were Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Côte d'Ivoire.

In total, the content from the pundits we have covered in this report has appeared in 14 different countries, and likely more. The state actors in these countries were China, France, Russia, and Türkiye. In conducting this study we looked at 20 foreign state media organisations: 13 from China, three from Russia, three from Türkiye, and one from France. To do this we looked at the sponsor countries' media for themes in line with known state narratives, and traced stories through different media. For lobbyist pundits, we traced known actors in the two industries and the content they created.

Given this intricate interplay of state and non-state actors pursuing various agendas, there is room for a specific opaque propaganda tactic – using real African experts as propagandistic pundits or 'cuckoos'. These individuals act as conduits for state narratives, camouflaging affiliations while engaging in the dissemination of misinformation. By unveiling these previously concealed relationships, our analysis

<sup>88</sup> [Influence - Percepto International](#), Percepto, accessed on 15 Nov 2023

<sup>89</sup> Global Engagement Center (2023). [How the People's Republic of China Seeks to Reshape the Global Information Environment](#).

<sup>90</sup> [Yi Fan: China doing its part to ensure peace, development in Africa](#), Star Kenya, 9 May 2022

<sup>91</sup> [Into 2023: BRICS Will Continue To Shine](#), Capital FM, 3 April 2023

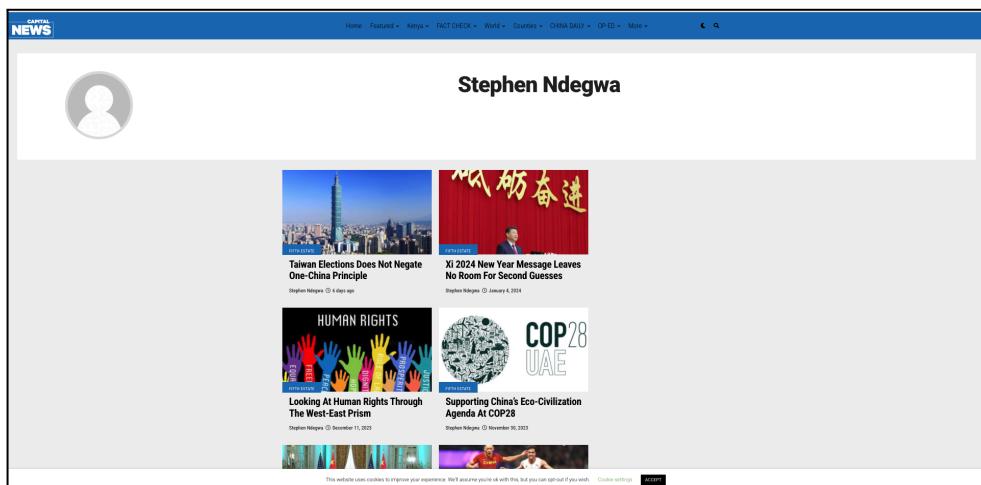
<sup>92</sup> [The less-told stories of China's health cooperation with Africa](#), IOL, 31 July 2023

aims to highlight how cuckoos can hatch unnoticed in various roles, including activists, academics, diplomats, politicians, and media practitioners.

### a. The academic cuckoo

On 17 October 2020, *China Global Television Network (CGTN)*<sup>93</sup> published an opinion article by Stephen Ndegwa about China's success in poverty eradication. Ndegwa wrote on this topic again on 01 March 2021, this time for *China Daily*<sup>94</sup> following an announcement by President Xi Jinping that China had achieved complete victory against poverty.

Less than a week later, on 07 March 2021, *People Daily*, a free newspaper published by MediaMax Networks in Kenya, ran Ndegwa's op-ed 'China helps to reduce global absolute poverty by 70 per cent'<sup>95</sup>. The op-ed was a republication of the Chinese president's speech and the two earlier pieces Ndegwa had written for the Chinese state outlets. The opinion was published without declaring this provenance, but instead highlights his academic credentials.



A screenshot of Stephen Ndegwa's author page on Capital News. (Source: CfA on 26 Jan 2024)

Ndegwa is a lecturer at the United States International University-Africa, where he teaches courses on international relations, and he is also founder and director of South-South Dialogues,<sup>96</sup> a development communications think tank. The website for South-South Dialogues was created in June 2021<sup>97</sup>. His organisation 'comprises a dynamic team of social scientists and scholars in the humanities based in Kenya'. The think tank's website provides a list of programmes it covers, including education, health, environment and climate change, and post-Covid-19 recovery. It also features CGTN op-eds by different authors and stories about the projects it has undertaken in a section called 'Developing News'.

<sup>93</sup> [China stands at the threshold of poverty eradication](#), CGTN, 17 October 2020

<sup>94</sup> [China changes the conversation on poverty alleviation](#), China Daily, 1 March 2021

<sup>95</sup> [China helps to reduce global absolute poverty by 70 per cent](#), People Daily, 7 March 2021

<sup>96</sup> [South-South Dialogues](#), accessed 26 January 2024.

<sup>97</sup> <https://whois.domaintools.com/southdialogues.org>

Ndegwa has personally contributed more than 150 opinion pieces to CGTN between 7 April 2021 and 12 January 2024. He also regularly writes for other state-affiliated media in China, including china.org.cn, and appears as an expert on CCTV, *China Daily*, and Xinhua.<sup>98 99 100</sup>

Capital Digital Media, which owns the brands Capital News and Capital FM, regularly syndicates Ndegwa's CGTN content and publishes his original op-eds about China and Sino-African relations. Ndegwa also has a significant presence in other news outlets in Kenya, including *The Standard*<sup>101</sup>, *People Daily*<sup>102</sup>, KBC<sup>103</sup> and *The Star*<sup>104</sup> (which has published 131 of his op-eds).

Some of his recent opinions for *The Star* have been verbatim republication of Chinese government documents such as policy documents and presidential speeches, which are presented as his organic thought.

Examples include his op-ed published 19 December 2023 titled 'China's government single-minded push towards modernisation'<sup>105</sup> which is taken word for word from an article published on the website of China's Permanent Mission to the United Nations Office at Geneva on 5 October 2023.<sup>106</sup> This same practice is repeated in another Star op-ed published on 20 November 2023<sup>107</sup> which is really Xi's speech at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum on November 16. Similarly, an op-ed published 11 December 2023 titled 'Pursuing a country-specific path to human rights progress'<sup>108</sup>, is China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi speech at the opening ceremony of the International Symposium Commemorating the 75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Beijing.<sup>109</sup>

He also contributes original content related to China to *Business Today*.<sup>110</sup> Outside Kenya, he has been published by *Africa Renewal*,<sup>111</sup> and *Modern Ghana*.<sup>112</sup> He is always described as an African academic, rather than a prolific commentator for Chinese state media.

For example, on 3 June 2022,<sup>113</sup> Xinhua, a prominent Chinese state media producer,<sup>114</sup> published a video and accompanying article to mark the 100th day of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which featured Ndegwa as an 'international relations lecturer at the United States International University-Africa in Kenya'. The story 'Hidden truths of an avoidable conflict: how US hegemony endangers world peace' includes excerpts from an interview of Ndegwa saying 'the arms industry in America is one of the biggest beneficiaries ... by putting sanctions on Russia, they want to make sure that Russia's economy is battered'.

Ndegwa is beginning to do more than just author op-eds for the media. On 24 May 2022, Kenyan public broadcaster KBC published a news story titled 'Central Kenya youth benefit from online training courtesy of China-sponsored South-South Initiative'. The report covered a two-day training on internet use, which was funded by the Chinese Embassy in Kenya and run by Ndegwa's

<sup>98</sup> [Healing the world is a universal call of duty](#), CGTN, 22 April 2021

<sup>99</sup> [CPC, the soul of Chinese nation, serving interests of its people: Kenyan expert](#), Xinhua, 3 July 2023

<sup>100</sup> [Instagram post](#), CCTV, 13 April 2022

<sup>101</sup> [China mulls solidarity and cooperation to a new world order post Covid-19](#), *The Standard*, 27 October 2020

<sup>102</sup> [China's footprint in the fight against climate change](#), *People Daily*, 29 October 2021

<sup>103</sup> [China's inspired foreign relations breakthroughs in 2023 - KBC](#), KBC, 22 January 2024

<sup>104</sup> [China's government single-minded push towards modernisation](#), *The Star*, 19 December 2023

<sup>105</sup> [China's government single-minded push towards modernisation](#), *The Star*, 19 December 2023

<sup>106</sup> [Chinese Modernization: Modernization Pursued Under the Leadership of the CPC](#).

<sup>107</sup> [China writing a new chapter for Asia-Pacific cooperation](#), *The Star*, 20 November 2023

<sup>108</sup> [Pursuing a country-specific path to human rights progress](#), *The Star*, 11 December 2023

<sup>109</sup> [Wang Yi Talks about the Historic Achievements of China's Human Rights Cause](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 5 December 2023

<sup>110</sup> [China's Economy Soaring Based On Sound Fundamentals](#), *Business Today*, 21 September, 2021

<sup>111</sup> [Stephen Ndegwa](#), *Africa Renewal*, accessed 26 January 2024.

<sup>112</sup> [Bringing Hope To Children With Autism](#), *Modern Ghana*, 23 August 2019.

<sup>113</sup> [Hidden truths of an avoidable conflict: how U.S. hegemony endangers world peace](#), Xinhua, 3 June 2022

<sup>114</sup> [About us](#), Xinhua, accessed 30 January 2024.

organisation.<sup>115</sup> Ndegwa also delivered the closing remarks at the event, again identifying him as a Kenyan academic rather than Chinese state media commentator.



A screenshot image bearing Ndegwa's name and position (Source: CfA using Xinhua on 26 Jan 2024)

### b. The diplomat cuckoo

On 18 May 2021, Chinese state-owned media *China Daily* published an opinion piece<sup>116</sup> authored by former South Africa ambassador Gert Grobler. The op-ed was titled ‘Rejection of lies and fabrications’. In it Grobler said that there was no credible evidence of the mistreatment of Muslim Uygurs in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. The article called for the rejection of the falsehoods by the US and its allies about so-called ‘genocide’ and ‘crimes against humanity’ in the region.

This op-ed was republished in South Africa by Independent Online (IOL)<sup>117</sup> nine days later, retitled ‘China’s Xinjiang autonomous region: need to sift the truth from the chaff,’ with minimal revisions from the original. It was marked as opinion, with Grobler still as author, stressing his role as a former diplomat and think tank researcher, but without indicating that it was originally published in the *China Daily*.

Grobler is a diplomat turned senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University (IANSZU). Grobler joined IANSZU in about March 2019.<sup>118</sup> Before that he was employed by the South African department of international relations and cooperation and served as the country’s ambassador to Spain, Japan, and Madagascar between 2002 and 2016.

IOL is the online division of South Africa’s Independent Media Group (IMG). IMG is owned by Sekunjalo Investments, a consortium that acquired a 20% stake in the media group in 2013 with financial backing from two Chinese state-affiliated entities.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> [Central Kenya youth benefit from online training courtesy of China-sponsored South-South Initiative](#), KBC, 24 May 2022.

<sup>116</sup> [Rejection of lies and fabrications](#), China Daily, 18 May 2021

<sup>117</sup> [China’s Xinjiang autonomous region: need to sift the truth from the chaff](#), IOL, 27 May 2021

<sup>118</sup> <https://twitter.com/DrHodanOsman/status/1105661197108441088>

<sup>119</sup> [Chinese companies scoop shares in Independent News](#), Mail & Guardian, 16 August 2013

On 27 May 2020, IOL published an open letter authored by Grobler, but marked as sponsored content on the website. It was titled ‘An open letter from Gert Grobler: Stop unprovoked accusations and work together to defeat shared enemies’.<sup>120</sup> The article was clearly marked as sponsored content, but did not disclose who had paid for it. The letter is co-signed by six other people. Public records indicate that at least three of the six have apparent ties to Chinese state-backed institutions:

- Dr Cheng Cheng, who signed as chief economist at the Made in Africa Initiative. Its website highlights offices in Nigeria and China but contains broken links.<sup>121</sup> According to the site, the initiative sees potential for African industrialisation based on China’s development model. Cheng has consulted to African countries and currently lives in China.<sup>122</sup>
- Dr Bisi Olawuyi serves as faculty at the department of communication and language arts at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and had previously published an opinion piece on CGTN, lauding China’s people-centred development as an example for Nigeria.<sup>123</sup> He has a research interest in the impact of Chinese media on African journalism.<sup>124</sup>
- Donatien Niyonzima, now a PhD candidate in communication studies at the Communication University of China<sup>125</sup> and an editorial consultant with ChinAfrica<sup>126</sup>. ChinAfrica is an international branch of the *Beijing Review*, based in Johannesburg, South Africa.<sup>127</sup> At the time of signing the letter, Niyonzima was a Rwandan media analyst.<sup>128</sup>

A *China Daily* article titled ‘Former S African diplomat voices support for China’s Covid-19 battle’ was published on 21 July 2020.<sup>129</sup> The article reports on parts of a proposal that was made after a conference attended by Chinese and African experts on Covid-19 and development practitioners. In both of these examples, Grobler is again referred to only as a former diplomat, without disclosing his links to the Chinese university.<sup>130</sup>

The article repeats parts of the released proposal that Grobler presented as his own words. As a result, Grobler calls the Covid-19 response from China ‘comprehensive, resolute, and aggressive’ and ‘applauded internationally’. Both the article and the proposal refer to China playing a ‘role of a responsible major country’ in its pandemic response and Covid-19 posing an ‘unprecedented threat to the health of all African citizens’.

<sup>120</sup> [An open letter from Gert Grobler: Stop unprovoked accusations and work together to defeat shared enemies](#), IOL, 27 May 2020

<sup>121</sup> [Made in Africa Initiative](#), accessed 25 January 2024

<sup>122</sup> [Cheng Cheng](#), LinkedIn accessed 25 January 2024

<sup>123</sup> [CPC Putting people first](#), CGTN, 16 November 2022

<sup>124</sup> Olawuyi, Bisi. (2023). [Can News also be ‘Made in China?’](#). *International Journal of Current Research in the Humanities*. 26. 1-24.

<sup>125</sup> [Rwandan scholar lauds CPC’s role in China’s achievements](#), *China Daily*, 4 July 2023

<sup>126</sup> [International explorers delve into China’s digital domain](#), *Beijing Review*, 30 June 2023

<sup>127</sup> [About Us](#), *ChinAfrica*, accessed 25 January 2024.

<sup>128</sup> [An open letter from Gert Grobler: Stop unprovoked accusations and work together to defeat shared enemies](#), IOL, 27 May 2020

<sup>129</sup> [Former S African diplomat voices support for China’s Covid-19 battle](#), *China Daily*, 21 July 2020

<sup>130</sup> [A Joint Proposal on Africa and China Working Together to Fight Against Covid-19](#), China’s Embassy in Ghana, 23 April 2023



*Grobler speaks at the New Era, New Thinking Conference with the theme “Long March from Red Boat.” on the 100th anniversary of the CPC’s founding, presenting the African perspective of the significant historical status of the Red Boat on Nanhu Lake. (Source: Jinhua)<sup>131</sup>*

This *China Daily* article was republished on two more websites a few days later. It appeared on the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) website on 22 July 2022.<sup>132</sup> FOCAC is an official forum between China and African states. It was also published on *China Daily Zhejiang* regional news website on 23 July 2022.<sup>133</sup> Grobler currently resides in Zhejiang.

Grobler remains a contributor to *China Daily* and offers expertise on other Chinese state media platforms, such as CGTN.<sup>134</sup> His bio reads: ‘The author is a senior research fellow at the Institute of African Studies at Zhejiang Normal University and a former senior diplomat in the South African department of international relations and cooperation. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by *China Daily*.<sup>135</sup>

### c. The political cuckoo

On 27 July 2021, *China Daily* published two news reports about Chinese president Xi Jinping’s visit to Tibet. One of the articles is a news feature describing Xi’s interaction with a family in Galai village in Nyingchi<sup>136</sup> and the other a news report analysing the implication of the visit.<sup>137</sup>

China’s state media reported the visit as one that ‘laid out a new vision for ethnic unity, lasting peace and stability, and the high-quality development of the Tibet autonomous region.’

After the two articles, on 17 August 2021 IOL published an op-ed authored by South African student leader Buyile Matiwane.<sup>138</sup> The article was titled ‘President Xi visits Tibet’ and was published as ‘Sponsored Content’. This IOL article was syndicated by Ghanaian outlet Ghana News.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>131</sup> [Gert Grobler Attends New Era, New Thinking Conference](#), Jinhua, 30 June 2021

<sup>132</sup> [Former S African diplomat voices support for China's Covid-19 battle](#), FOCAC, 22 July 2020

<sup>133</sup> [Former S African diplomat voices support for China's Covid-19 battle](#), *China Daily Zhejiang*, 23 July 2020

<sup>134</sup> [CGTN](#), Twitter, 26 April 2023

<sup>135</sup> [Initiative taken on its merits - Opinion](#), *China Daily*, 13 October 2023

<sup>136</sup> [Xi visits Tibetan family, praises hard work](#), *China Daily*, 27 July 2021

<sup>137</sup> [Xi's Tibet visit seen as boost for ethnic unity](#), *China Daily*, 27 July 2021

<sup>138</sup> [President Xi visits Tibet](#), IOL, 17 August 2021

<sup>139</sup> [President Xi visits Tibet - Ghanamma.com](#), 17 August 2021

Although appearing with his byline, Matiwane's op-ed was a republication of China Daily's coverage of Xi's Tibet visit. It is near-identical to the two China Daily news reports of the July 2021 visit written by two other journalists. The introduction, in which Matiwane describes 'offerings of barley wine in exquisite silver bowls, along with other traditional offerings' is directly from the China Daily news article.

Matiwane writes in an op-ed article that: 'The Dawa family... warmly welcomed President Xi to their home in Galai village of Nyingchi, Tibet autonomous region.' China Daily had written: 'members of Dawa Gyaltsan's family ... warmly welcomed President Xi Jinping to their home.'

He also writes that 'the Dawa family was wearing their newest and best traditional Tibetan attire...', while China Daily had written that the family was 'wearing their newest and best traditional Tibetan attire'.

In addition to the op-ed copying China Daily reporting, it also contained similar language and content to another op-ed by a Nigerian journalist, Ikenna Emewu, discussing Xi's visit, infrastructure development, poverty alleviation, and the emphasis on ethnic unity and stability in Tibet.<sup>140</sup>

Matiwane's articles also appear on the South African media website, IOL. Op-eds are first published on IOL and are then rewritten by Chinese state media entities as news articles that report what he said. His op-eds published by IOL have been reproduced as news articles by Xinhua; after their publication by the wire agency, the opinions are further amplified by other Chinese media outlets.

For example, on 8 March 2022, Xinhua published an article urging the US to release details of biological laboratories in Ukraine after Russia claimed it had found evidence that the US was using these facilities for biological military programmes.<sup>141</sup> However, fact-checks published by the *New York Times*<sup>142</sup> on 11 March 2022 and the BBC<sup>143</sup> on 15 March 2022 found these claims to be untrue.

After this Xinhua article, on 26 March IOL published an op-ed<sup>144</sup> by Matiwane that raised concern about the presence and lack of 'widespread outcry around the discovery of biolabs in Ukraine'. Less than a week later, on 1 April, Xinhua<sup>145</sup> published a news article with the title 'US Biolabs in Ukraine raise worldwide concerns: S African youth leader'.

Xinhua published his opinion as news, amplifying these claims. Other Chinese news websites<sup>146</sup> published the wire copy from Xinhua in Mandarin, also amplifying the disinformation under the headline '南非青年学生领袖发文抨击美生物实验室对全球造成严重威胁' which translates to 'South Africa's young student leaders criticised US biological laboratories for posing a serious threat to the world'. It attempted to create the impression that Matiwane's opinion was widely held, and that there were more student leaders who voiced that opinion.

On 8 December 2021, IOL<sup>147</sup> published Matiwane's op-ed arguing that a planned US Summit on Democracy was hypocritical. CGTN's French-language website<sup>148</sup> then published a news story on 11 December 2021 reporting that South African outlets Pretoria News, The Mercury, and The Cape Times had published an opinion article authored by Matiwane. All the listed outlets are operated by Independent Media Group and it is organisational practice to republish content across all its outlets.

<sup>140</sup> [Xi's Tibet visit endorses Chinese pluralism, religious rights](#), CGTN, 26 July 2021

<sup>141</sup> [China urges U.S. to release details of bio-labs in Ukraine](#)-Xinhua, 8 March 2022

<sup>142</sup> [Theory About U.S.-Funded Bioweapons Labs in Ukraine Is Unfounded](#), The New York Times, 11 March 2022

<sup>143</sup> [Ukraine war: Fact-checking Russia's biological weapons claims](#), BBC, 15 March 2022

<sup>144</sup> [We should all be very concerned about US biolabs in Ukraine](#), IOL, 26 March 2022

<sup>145</sup> [US biolabs in Ukraine raise worldwide concerns: S. African youth leader](#), Xinhua, 1 April 2022

<sup>146</sup> [南非青年学生领袖发文抨击美生物实验室对全球造成严重威胁](#), Sina News, 29 March 2022

<sup>147</sup> [What right does the US have to host a democracy summit?](#) IOL, 8 December 2021

<sup>148</sup> [Buyile Matiwane : Quel droit ont les États-Unis d'accueillir un sommet sur la démocratie?](#) CGTN, 11 December 2021

The CGTN article summarises the opinion piece, quoting key paragraphs, including a screenshot of the IOL article and linking to the original piece. Although the CGTN article refers to Matiwane as the author, it does not disclose his affiliations.

Matiwane authors op-ed “What right does US have to host a democracy summit?” in Independent Online on December 8th. An edited version was republished in China Daily on December 11th as “Buyile Matiwane: What right does the United States have to host a summit on democracy?”. (Source: CfA using IOL/China Daily on 13 February 2024)<sup>149 150</sup>

In another of his op-eds, published by IOL on 9 March 2022 and this time discussing the US record on human rights<sup>151</sup>, was also reported by Xinhua in French on 11 March 2022.<sup>152</sup> Matiwane also weighed in on the Winter Olympics in Beijing<sup>153</sup>, writing on IOL on 27 December 2021 that the games should not be a platform for political posturing. Xinhua incorporated quotes from this op-ed into a news story<sup>154</sup>, which it published on 1 January 2022.

Matiwane (now deceased) was a politician in South Africa. He served as the South African Student Congress (SASCO) deputy president and was an African National Congress Youth League member. He has written 17 articles in defence and support of China for IOL.

Matiwane was a 2019 Dongfang Scholar at Peking University<sup>155</sup> in Beijing, where he studied governance and policy. He spent six months<sup>156</sup> in China as part of the exchange programme.<sup>157</sup> In October 2020, Matiwane delivered a speech to provincial leaders in China, which was published on the SASCO Facebook page.<sup>158</sup> According to the Facebook post, Matiwane had been in China for a number of weeks, alongside ‘presidential advisors, journalists, academics, policy heads, kings, chiefs of staff, data analysts, career diplomats, and military men’ for a programme about cooperation with China.

In news articles published in China, Chinese state media referred to Matiwane as a scholar, but his time at Peking University, or that he was sponsored by the Chinese government, is not disclosed. For instance, a news story by Xinhua on 16 March 2022, which reported on Matiwane’s op-ed on IOL

<sup>149</sup> [What right does the US have to host a democracy summit?](#) IOL, 8 December 2021

<sup>150</sup> [Buyile Matiwane : Ouel droit ont les Etats-Unis d'accueillir un sommet sur la démocratie?](#) CGTN, 11 December 2021

<sup>151</sup> [United States is in no position to hold forth on human rights.](#) IOL, 9 March 2022

<sup>152</sup> [U.S. in no position to preach others on human rights: S. African youth leader.](#) Xinhua, 11 March 2022

<sup>153</sup> [The Olympics will help reignite the human spirit dulled by Covid-19 pandemic, says IOC president.](#) IOL, 27 December 2021

<sup>154</sup> [Winter Olympics should not serve as a platform for political posturing: youth leader.](#) Xinhua, 1 January 2022

<sup>155</sup> [Vaccine collaboration is essential to beat Covid-19.](#) IOL, 23 August 2021

<sup>156</sup> [Waking up in a New China Quite Different.](#) The Mercury, 15 June 2021

<sup>157</sup> [Chinese embassy in SA sends 31 Sasco student leaders to China.](#) POWER 98.7, 11 September 2019

<sup>158</sup> [SASCO Facebook Page](#), accessed 12 November 2023

carries the title ‘No fixed model of democracy: S African scholar’, referring to Matiwane as ‘deputy-president of the South African Students Congress.’<sup>159</sup>

Matiwane died on 11 July 2022 and the Chinese embassy in South Africa was among the organisations that provided a tribute to him. During his memorial service, professor Chris Nhlapo, the vice-chancellor and principal of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, reflected on Matiwane’s interest in strengthening his ties with institutions in China. He also recalled meeting him at the Chinese embassy in Cape Town, South Africa and joking that ‘the only thing that is remaining is to learn Mandarin. Because your ties with China are very strong and you seem to be hitting the right button all the time. Because if you say the Chinese ambassador will be here, I know for sure that the Chinese ambassador will be here.’<sup>160</sup>

#### 4. Lobbyist punditry by special-interest cuckoos

Lobbying as a form of advocacy is the attempt to influence legislators in policy formulation. This can be direct lobbying, involving persuasion efforts at government representatives themselves, or grassroots lobbying, which indirectly mobilises the public around issues to drive policy change<sup>161</sup>. Pundits act as lobbyists when they use their expertise to advocate for these changes by writing content or providing comment for media organisations. This can be either direct or grassroots lobbying.

Lobbying is considered ethical persuasive communication as long as it does not deceive, incentivise, or coerce<sup>162</sup>. However, if deceptive tactics are used it should be considered non-consensual persuasive communication.

By using a PR company’s ‘newsroom’, articles written by a PR company or its clients are placed directly and programmatically<sup>163</sup> on African news websites. This allows for widespread distribution of opinion content through multiple publications with little or no editorial oversight by the publications themselves. This distribution of opinion, which is not checked for content nor bias, is done at scale. One such PR ‘newsroom’ company claims to guarantee content placement in more than 300 outlets in Africa<sup>164</sup>. This is a deceptive activity, as these articles are published alongside genuine journalism and news with little indication that these serve to promote a specific agenda.

Another tactic is the placing of punditry and opinion in publications as paid ‘guest posts’ without being tagged as such. Through the use of third-party search engine optimisation (SEO) services,<sup>165</sup> opinion pieces are published as paid content without disclosing this fact. This is effectively advertorial or native advertising, which is not specifically labelled as paid content, and with intent to deceive.

A third tactic is the placing of multiple opinion pieces (under the banner of various forums or voluntary organisations) in a publication with poor editorial oversight, enabling a lobbyist to create the credible appearance of expertise in a particular subject. He is then able to leverage that authority as a

<sup>159</sup> [No fixed model of democracy: S. African scholar](#), Xinhua 16 March 2023

<sup>160</sup> [Memorial service for Buyile Sangolekhaya Matiwane](#), YouTube, 19 July 2022

<sup>161</sup> Fakhar, M. (2022) [A Conceptual Underpinning of Lobbying and Propaganda as Policy Influencing Tools for Peace and Conflict](#), *Journal of Development and Social Sciences*, 3(2), pp. 225–237.

<sup>162</sup> Bakir, V., Herring, E., Miller, D., & Robinson, P. (2019) *Critical Sociology*, 45(3), 311–328. Bakir, V. et al. (2019) ‘[Organised Persuasive Communication: A New Conceptual Framework for Research on Public Relations, Propaganda and Promotional Culture](#)’, *Critical Sociology*, 45(3), pp. 311–328

<sup>163</sup> [APO Group - Africa Newsroom / Africa related content](#), accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>164</sup> [APO Group home page](#), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>165</sup> [EasyLink Studio](#) accessed 10 November 2023

quoted pundit in other, more credible outlets. This may also involve the creation of one or many organisations or forums to provide the deceptive appearance of legitimacy. Astroturfing<sup>166</sup> occurs when an entity artificially creates an impression of widespread support for a product, policy, or concept, when in reality only limited support exists. Thus, although the pundit's views may represent a fringe belief, they are presented as legitimate and widespread. This use of small, issue-focused, and often faceless organisations to add a sense of legitimacy to their views is generally not transparent, and often deceptive.

The following case studies detail methods that use incentives and deception (mostly relating to motives and authority of the source content).

#### a. Case study: Widespread dissemination of writings by oil and gas lobbyists

In November 2022, the Washington Examiner published an opinion piece titled, 'ESG in Africa is colonialism 2.0'<sup>167</sup>, which argues that environmental, social, and governance (ESG) targets used to assess fossil fuel investments in Africa are imposing the West's 'unrealistic ideologies on an unwilling but still desperate continent'. The opinion piece was written by the chairperson of the African Energy Chamber, NJ Ayuk. It argues that African countries should follow their own path when evaluating energy solutions, especially when that path includes oil and gas exploitation. Although it accuses Western countries of imperialism, the biggest beneficiaries of fossil-fuel exploitation in Africa would be Western corporations.

The Washington Examiner, a conservative outlet known for climate denial<sup>168</sup> and for publishing propaganda from a commentator who did not exist<sup>169</sup>, is not a well-known media source in Africa. However, a day later, London-based Africa Briefing, a bimonthly magazine featured the identical opinion piece<sup>170</sup> on its website, with no attribution to the Washington Examiner. The Pan African Visions<sup>171</sup> magazine website and a website called The African<sup>172</sup> published the opinion piece but with attribution to the Washington Examiner.

Shortly after this Moneyweb<sup>173</sup>, a South African financial news outlet, published an article that quoted liberally from the original Washington Examiner opinion piece. The Moneyweb article was then syndicated to several African publications (for example, Business Weekly in Zimbabwe<sup>174</sup>, and Head Topics<sup>175</sup> in South Africa). Good Governance Africa<sup>176</sup> featured an opinion piece that quoted liberally from the original. That opinion piece was then syndicated to a Nigerian financial news site, Financial Edge<sup>177</sup>.

An opinion piece, written for a relatively obscure climate-sceptic publication in the US, was republished, syndicated, and quoted in multiple African media outlets thanks to a sophisticated distribution system for oil and gas lobbying narratives in Africa.

The African Energy Chamber (AEC) presents itself as an energy advocacy group and is based in South Africa. It was founded in 2018 by Ayuk, a Cameroonian attorney. Although the chamber says it acts as an advocacy group to 'improve the landscape of the African energy sector'<sup>178</sup>, critics have pointed out

<sup>166</sup> Chan, J. (2022) 'Online Astroturfing: A Problem Beyond Disinformation', *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, p 1-22

<sup>167</sup> ESG in Africa is Colonialism 2.0, *The Washington Examiner*, 30 November 2022

<sup>168</sup> Washington Examiner op-ed cherry-picks data and misleads readers about climate models, Climate Feedback, 31 August 2019

<sup>169</sup> Right-Wing Media Outlets Duped by a Middle-East Propaganda Campaign, *The Daily Beast*, 7 July 2020

<sup>170</sup> ESG in Africa is Colonialism 2.0, *Africa Briefing*, 1 December 2022

<sup>171</sup> Pan African Visions: ESG in Africa is Colonialism 2.0, *Pan African Visions*, December 2022

<sup>172</sup> Environmental Social Governance in Africa is Colonialism 2.0, *The African*, 5 December 2022

<sup>173</sup> ESG in Africa is Colonialism 2.0, Moneyweb, 6 December 2022

<sup>174</sup> ESG in Africa is Colonialism 2.0, *Business Weekly*, 9 December 2022

<sup>175</sup> ESG in Africa is Colonialism 2.0, Head Topics, 6 December 2022

<sup>176</sup> Is ESG in Africa is just Colonialism 2.0, *Good Governance Africa*, 23 January 2023

<sup>177</sup> Environmental Social Governance integration is required to promote a just energy transition in Africa, *Financial Edge*, 28 January 2023

<sup>178</sup> African Energy Chamber, accessed 10 November 2023

that the AEC's activities are heavily weighted towards supporting the expansion of gas and oil exploitation in Africa<sup>179</sup>. It organises fossil-fuel friendly conferences in multiple venues and is the convener of the annual African Energy Week<sup>180</sup> which is attended by many of the continent's minerals and energy ministers, as well as a huge array of multinational oil and gas corporations.

Ayuk and the AEC use sophisticated public relations tactics to position their arguments within the African media space. Over a period of a few years Ayuk has positioned himself as an expert on energy issues in Africa, mostly through news releases and opinion pieces. These opinion pieces are then distributed in a number of ways, the first being through an international PR firm, the APO Group<sup>181</sup>.

APO offers what it describes as 'award-winning communications services', access to all 54 countries in Africa, and a reach of 450,000 journalists and bloggers on the continent. However, the group's strongest selling point is that it offers 'guaranteed publication on 300+ African news sites and platforms'. This is achieved through a dedicated newsroom feed on many of the continent's news outlets. For example, the abovementioned *Pan African Visions* magazine website has a dedicated news page populated directly by APO<sup>182</sup>. The Pulselive site in Kenya has a byline titled 'APO Importer'<sup>183</sup> and similarly, in Nigeria, Latest Nigerian News has a byline crediting 'APO Africa Newsroom'<sup>184</sup>. The News Trends website in Kenya also features content directly from APO's 'newsroom'<sup>185</sup>, as does Ventures Africa<sup>186</sup>. All of this content is created by APO or its clients and then distributed and published without any editorial input from the media sites themselves.

To increase his visibility, Ayuk is also known to use paid content services such as Easylink Studio<sup>187</sup>. These services offer a way to improve content searchability via backlinks by selling what they term as 'guest posts'. These guest posts are effectively paid opinion pieces<sup>188 189</sup> and native advertising that is placed on news and blog sites. Again, there is no editorial oversight and most of these sites do not indicate that this is paid content.

The African Energy Chamber, like its founder, is pro-fossil fuels<sup>190</sup>, and appears well-funded through the sponsorship of its events and speaking engagements.

<sup>179</sup> [ALEX LENFERNA: Snake oil and gas salesmen are trying to sell off the continent](#), *BusinessLive*, 17 October 2023

<sup>180</sup> [African Energy Week](#), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>181</sup> [APO Group](#), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>182</sup> [Pan African Vision APO PAV](#), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>183</sup> [The African Energy Chamber Launches African Green Dialogue Initiative at African Energy Week 2021](#), *Pulselive Kenya*, 11 November 2021

<sup>184</sup> [African Energy Chamber Launches 'The State of African Energy: 2023 Outlook'](#), *Latest Nigerian News*, 27 October 2022

<sup>185</sup> [African Energy Chamber Chairman NJ Ayuk Signs Book deal to write upcoming book A Just Transition](#), *News Trends*, 18 July 2022

<sup>186</sup> [South Africa's Energy Ministry Has His Priorities Right: It's Time for the World to Respect Them \(By NJ Ayuk\)](#), *Ventures Africa*, 10 August 2023

<sup>187</sup> [EasyLink Studio](#), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>188</sup> [No need to lament about the Oil Discovery in Namibia's Kavango Basin. What About the Huge Benefits It Represents for Namibians? \(By NJ Ayuk\)](#), *Africa Business*, 6 August 2021

<sup>189</sup> [Centurion Law Acquires IMANI Lawyers, Launches An Africa Flexible Legal Services Model](#), 5 November 2018

<sup>190</sup> [Cop27 bulletin: Meet Africa's biggest gas fan](#), *Climate Change News*, 9 November 2023

BUSINESS POLICY INNOVATION LIFE BIZHIVE ENT + MAGAZINES  
APO AFRICA

# SOUTH AFRICA'S ENERGY MINISTRY HAS HIS PRIORITIES RIGHT; IT'S TIME FOR THE WORLD TO RESPECT THEM (BY NJ AYUK)

AUTHOR  
Published August 10, 2023  
*Our Digital Entertainment Issue is Out!*  
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*Ayuk speaks at an African Energy Week in a photograph accompanying the article “South Africa’s energy ministry has his priorities right; it’s time for the world to respect them” as Executive Chairman of the African Energy Chamber, a gas lobbyist group. (Source: CfA using Ventures Africa on 13 February 2024)<sup>191</sup>*

Ayuk himself has a controversial history. He is a US-educated Cameroonian lawyer, who has founded a law firm<sup>192</sup> with offices in multiple African countries. He has spent a lot of time and effort building a reputation as an energy and legal expert<sup>193</sup>, but critics claim that he has a past that includes fraudulent and unethical activity. He pled guilty to fraud in the US and was deported in 2007<sup>194</sup>. He has been accused of money laundering in Ghana<sup>195</sup> and was found guilty of defamation after criticising the Ghana report<sup>196</sup>. On at least two separate occasions Ayuk was accused of using fake copyright (DMCA)<sup>197</sup> claims to muzzle unflattering coverage<sup>198</sup>. Nevertheless, he is an influential figure, with the ear of key African government ministers.

### b. Case study: Energy forums and faux authority

IOL is a source of many opinion pieces on political and social issues. The quality and slant of these opinion pieces varies greatly and, in several cases, the publication fails to distance itself from the contents with a disclaimer.

Given South Africa’s issues with electricity supply<sup>199</sup>, many of these opinion pieces focus strongly on energy issues in South Africa, with some promoting an agenda opposing the government’s energy

<sup>191</sup> [South Africa’s Energy Ministry Has His Priorities Right. It’s Time for the World to Respect Them \(By NJ Ayuk\)](#), Ventures Africa, 10 August 2023

<sup>192</sup> [Centurion Law Group](#), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>193</sup> [‘100 Most Reputable Africans’ in 2023 announced](#), AfricNews, 3 January 2023

<sup>194</sup> [Former Payne intern pleads guilty to illegally using congressman’s stationery and signature stamp](#), Politico, 6 July 2007

<sup>195</sup> [Detenida en Ghana Geneviève Océansey abogada de Mhega Obiang Lima por blanquear \\$2.5 millones](#), Dario Rombe, 26 November 2015

<sup>196</sup> [South African Court Rules NJ Ayuk Defamed Journalist & OCCRP](#), OCCRP, 16 December 2022

<sup>197</sup> [CENSORED](#), Mail & Guardian, September 2019

<sup>198</sup> [How fake copyright complaints are muzzling journalists](#), BBC, 2 March 2023

<sup>199</sup> [South African energy crisis](#), Wikipedia, accessed 10 November 2023

policies. Some of these narratives are pushed by newly formed, sometimes obscure associations, groups, or organisations. IOL is often the first platform on which these organisations become visible.

Hlathi ‘Zak’ Madela writes often for IOL as the executive director of the South African Energy Forum (SAEF)<sup>200 201 202</sup>. Madela is also a pundit quoted and interviewed on energy issues by public broadcaster the SABC<sup>203 204</sup> and other television news broadcasters<sup>205</sup>. The themes that he writes about tend to include criticism of governmental energy policy, particularly around the decommissioning of coal power, the roll-out of renewables, and the absence of nuclear power in the energy planning mix. SAEF itself has no website. It was registered as a nonprofit company in 2018 with its registration address being that of Madela’s home, however, it is in the process of being deregistered due to failure to provide annual returns.

The Economic Intervention Forum of South Africa (EIFSA)<sup>206</sup> is another organisation that provides comment to IOL and various other media outlets, as does its chief executive, Mthunzi Luthuli<sup>207</sup>. Many of the themes tend to mirror what Madela presents as the SAEF position, unsurprisingly, considering that Madela is the chairperson of the EIFSA board.

The screenshot shows the IOL website's header with navigation links like SHOP @ LOOT, PERSONAL FINANCE, ISOLEZWE, DAILY VOICE, IOL PROPERTY, and DIGI MAGS. The date is TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2024. Below the header is a search bar and social media icons. The main menu includes NEWS, BUSINESS, LIFESTYLE, ENTERTAINMENT, SPORT, TRAVEL, VIDEO, MORE, NEWSPAPERS, and a red SUBSCRIBE button. The article title 'Just energy transition cannot be at the expense of the security of SA electricity supply' is displayed in bold, with 'BUSINESS REPORT' and 'ENERGY' tags. The author is listed as 'Written by John Mokoena' under the 'Opinion' section. A photograph of an Eskom coal-fired power station is shown with the caption 'An Eskom coal fired power station. File'. The entire screenshot is framed by a light grey border.

*Mokoena authors article “Just energy transition cannot be at the expense of the security of SA electricity supply” as published on August 7, 2023. (Source: CfA using: IOL on 13 February 2024)<sup>208</sup>*

The Engineering League of Progress (ELoP) is another organisation that publishes opinion pieces on IOL. In August 2023, John Mokoena, a co-author of one of EloP’s position papers,<sup>209</sup> wrote a column that criticised South Africa’s Just Energy Transition Plan (JETP)<sup>210</sup>. The column included some

<sup>200</sup> [Drama unfolds in the energy space as SA drifts off its agreed path](#), IOL, 7 June 2023

<sup>201</sup> [SA electricity planning must stick to a democratic Integrated Energy Plan](#), IOL, 31 May 2023

<sup>202</sup> [Anti-nuclear sentiments and voices in Africa are misplaced, baseless and devoid of facts](#), IOL, 19 July 2023

<sup>203</sup> [Decommissioning of Eskom’s coal-fired power stations: Zak Madela](#), SABC News, 22 April 2023

<sup>204</sup> [Godongwana was not ill advised decision on the Eskom’s PFMA exemption: Zak Madela](#), SABC News, 5 April 2023

<sup>205</sup> [SA’s electricity crisis! Generation capacity could improve by end of week](#), eNCA News, 5 September 2023

<sup>206</sup> [Economic Intervention Forum of South Africa](#), accessed 13 November 2023

<sup>207</sup> [Economic feasibility of using Karpowerships in SA](#), IOL, 21 June 2023

<sup>208</sup> [Just energy transition cannot be at the expense of the security of SA electricity supply](#), IOL, 7 August 2023

<sup>209</sup> [Position Papers – Engineering League Progress](#), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>210</sup> [Just energy transition cannot be at the expense of the security of SA electricity supply](#), IOL, 7 August 2023

debunked<sup>211</sup> arguments about the repurposing of the Komati power station and was generally dismissive of South Africa's embrace of renewables in the energy mix.

SAEF was vehemently opposed to the appointment of André de Ruyter as Eskom chief executive<sup>212</sup>, and wrote critical opinion pieces during his tenure<sup>213</sup> at the state-owned electricity company (from December 2019 to February 2023). On de Ruyter's resignation, Madela, representing SAEF as an energy expert, appeared on SABC News calling for de Ruyter to be charged with treason<sup>214</sup>. The evidence of Madela's expertise as an energy specialist pundit is limited to several opinion pieces in a single, compliant media outlet.

The ubiquitousness of Madela in these sometimes faceless organisations and the similarity in arguments provided in their opinion pieces seem to indicate that they are, if not astro-turfed, at the very least, highly aligned in terms of messaging and personnel.

These organisations' opinion pieces seemingly become the basis for Madela and other authors to become self-created 'expert' pundits for other media outlets (for example, SABC news<sup>215</sup>, eNCA news<sup>216</sup>, or Newzroom Africa<sup>217</sup>), thereby providing additional outlets and perceived credibility for their position.

Madela is a South African chemical engineer and has run as a political candidate<sup>218</sup>. He was previously the business development manager for Rosatom Africa (the Russian state atomic agency's African subsidiary)<sup>219</sup>. He is the founder or a member of several energy and engineering organisations in the nuclear and energy space.

## 5. Different punditry, common patterns

The proliferation of undeclared punditry and commentary raises serious concerns about the corruption of democratic discourse. Lobbyists or cuckoos for special interests, be they corporations or foreign states, manufacture and use policy experts and analysts to subtly promote self-serving narratives while bypassing transparency safeguards. By obscuring conflicts of interest, they are able to present biased perspectives as independent expertise.

The manufacturing of authority through incestuous self-citation, mutual admiration within closed circles, and flooding commentary space establishes pundits as seemingly credible experts. In the case of state cuckoos, by being quoted in foreign media and using diplomatic sources and lobbyists among themselves, within their industries.

Astroturfing manufactures a false impression of grassroots support for fringe views by creating fake forums and organisations. This facade of broad endorsement, based on artifice rather than evidence, gives undue weight to extreme narratives in public debates. Such deception is employed by both corporate and state actors equally.

Using publication or impersonating grassroots movement lends false authority to cuckoos and enables the insertion of biased perspectives into mainstream discourse and media. Again, this playbook is exploited by lobbyists and propagandists alike.

<sup>211</sup> Despite Minister Gwede Mantashe's claims, the evidence is clear – clean coal is a dirty lie and economically unviable, Daily Maverick, 22 August 2023

<sup>212</sup> Energy Forum Questions De Ruyter's Appointment, SABC News, 20 November 2019

<sup>213</sup> It's time to come clean on load shedding, Eskom, IOL, 28 April 2022

<sup>214</sup> André de Ruyter must be charged with treason: Zak Madela, SABC News, 23 February 2023

<sup>215</sup> Decommissioning of Eskom's coal-fired power stations: Zak Madela, SABC News, 22 April 2023

<sup>216</sup> SA's electricity crisis | Generation capacity could improve by end of week, eNCA News, 5 September 2023

<sup>217</sup> SA's electricity crisis | Generation capacity could improve by end of week, Newzroom Afrika, 5 September 2023

<sup>218</sup> African People's Convention (APC), accessed 10 November 2023

<sup>219</sup> New anti-Ramaphosa crew takes up the IPP battle, Business Live, 27 February 2019

The transferability of techniques across contexts is striking. Corporate lobbyists and foreign propagandists alike cultivate and use respected voices to validate preferred policy stances and shift public opinion. Both use media, state cuckoos through providing seemingly independent analysis, special interest cuckoos additionally use public relations companies to disseminate ideological messaging devoid of editorial oversight, deceiving audiences through presentation as journalism rather than opinion.

Obscuring the underlying sponsorship and direction of messaging allows pundits to bypass the accountability and transparency expected of registered lobbyists. By promoting agendas behind the innocuous veneer of commentary, they avoid scrutiny and readers are deprived of context essential to evaluating fairness and accuracy.

The proliferation of unvetted external perspectives creates an environment ripe for manipulation. Those actors able to widely distribute slickly packaged narratives can readily hijack public understanding. It becomes increasingly impossible for citizens and policymakers to discern where objectivity ends and advocacy begins.

Fact-based, solutions-oriented policymaking suffers when discourse becomes polluted by undeclared agendas. Misinformation and false dichotomies oversimplify complex issues. Hyper-partisanship fueled by punditry crowds out nuance and consensus-building. It is worth remembering that some cuckoos kill the chicks of parents with which they nest; they evict the other residents of their nest, hurling them over the edge and to their death.

The common techniques used across the corporate and state sectors highlights the transnational nature of the crisis of credibility emerging from unregulated punditry and its commercialisation. Distorting democratic deliberation for strategic advantage, whether for profit or power, is indefensible. Addressing this crisis is essential to informed debate and sovereignty.

## 6. Amplification mechanisms

Content sponsors seek to amplify the content they plant. Content reaches bigger audiences by co-opting mainstream media or other unwitting stakeholders. In the case of propagandistic punditry, states seek both to make the content look like expert analysis from Africans and amplify it in the local and international press. This section explores the rinse-cycle technique states use to legitimise official talking points.

Rinse-cycling or laundering content is defined as a ‘self-feeding cycle’, through which pundit content is created and processed to disguise its true nature and to make it more credible to the audience.<sup>220</sup>

An example of this technique was covered in a 2021 DFRLab report, which demonstrated the technique China deployed in South Africa to amplify Chinese-approved narratives about the origins of Covid-19.

China’s rinse-cycling begins with a narrative originating from a foreign state or state-linked media, which is then placed in African media as an op-ed. This content is then editorialised and recycled into the foreign state media, framed as organic, authentic African affirmation of the deceptive or propagandistic state narratives.

<sup>220</sup> [China’s Covid-19 messaging makes its way to South Africa](#), DFRLab, 22 December 2021

The editorialised version is then looped back into the African media ecosystem and amplified through news agency content-sharing agreements. This content, commissioned by foreign state media, intends to deceive a reader by not declaring its provenance.



*The rinse-cycle process used by state media to amplify content authored by cuckoos. The content is commissioned by foreign state media, published in African media, republished in foreign media, reported as news in the sponsor state, then republished again in Africa by allied media as news (Source: CfA)*

This laundering technique is one of the ways through which China's foreign state-allied pundits are published and republished in media in different African and non-African media. The sentiments of these pundits are used to seek legitimacy for government policies abroad, as well as locally by showing support from global opinion leaders.

A step in the rinse-cycle strategy involves quoting African experts in news published in Chinese domestic media and emphasising the author's credentials, such as 'African scholar' or 'former African diplomat' in the headline, while neglecting to disclose their connections to the sponsor state.<sup>221</sup>

The amplification playbook also benefits from news aggregators and affiliated African wire services. By using content partnership agreements with publishers such as African News Agency (ANA) and Ghana News Agency (GNA), the rinse-cycled content receives further amplification. ANA is associated with the Independent Media Group in South Africa. ANA republishes content from state sources in China, including Xinhua, with which it signed a content-sharing agreement in 2015.<sup>222</sup>

<sup>221</sup> Fang, K. (2022). [Praise from the international community: How China uses foreign experts to legitimise authoritarian rule](#), *The China Journal*, 87(1), 72-91.

<sup>222</sup> [South Africa: Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022 Country Report](#), Freedom House, accessed 29 January 2024

Ghana's state-owned news agency GNA also has a content-sharing agreement with Xinhua.<sup>223</sup> Content originating from commissioned pundits is syndicated across a broader spectrum of African news environments through the reach of these influenced news agencies.

Although both China and Russia make use of steps in this rinse cycle, the former employs a comprehensive rinse-cycle technique that stages and amplifies content to maximise legitimacy. Russia's approach to completing the full rinse cycle appears less systematic than the France and Turkish campaign.

#### a. Case study: China

The case studies below highlight how China's narratives, including its Winter Olympics messaging, BRICS and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) partnerships were rinse-cycled in Kenya using allied pundits.

The process began with Chinese state sources pushing a narrative of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing promoting green energy transition, China's ability to contain Covid-19 spread and underplaying concerns of a diplomatic boycott of the Games by Australia, Britain, Canada, and the US.<sup>224</sup>

These same themes are present in a 17 November 2021 opinion piece<sup>225</sup> by Adhere Cavince, for Nation.Africa in Kenya, expressing his positive opinion of the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. He said that the Games would be fully reliant on renewable energy; offer an opportunity for global ties to be strengthened; that the enthusiasm for the games challenged calls for boycotts; and that China, unlike Japan in the 2020 Olympics, would better protect athletes against Covid infection. A day later, Xinhua published a news story<sup>226</sup> that framed the op-ed as news. This news article was then further syndicated in *China Daily*,<sup>227</sup> *Global Times*<sup>228</sup>, and *People's Daily*.<sup>229</sup> On 12 January 2022, Chinese state-owned English-language newspaper *China Daily* republished the original op-ed on its website.<sup>230</sup>

After the Winter Olympics, Cavince wrote another new op-ed<sup>231</sup> published by Capital FM on 21 February 2022, which celebrated China's success as hosts. This op-ed was republished on *China Daily* on 9 March 2022.<sup>232</sup> On 14 March, Xinhua wrote a news article reporting<sup>233</sup> Cavince's opinion on the Games' success alongside similar sentiments from people from other countries. A former Egyptian tourism advisor, a chief editor of a Pakistani media organisation, a professor at Japan's Kyorin University, and a member of the executive board of Thailand's National Olympic Committee are among those quoted.

Cavince is Kenyan and a former journalist who now works as a researcher. He visited Johannesburg in August 2023 to attend side events at the BRICS summit and was interviewed for the China Global South Project podcast.<sup>234</sup>

<sup>223</sup> [Ghana: Beijing's Global Media Influence Report](#), Freedom House, accessed 29 January 2024

<sup>224</sup> [Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on October 14, 2021](#), Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Kingdom of the Netherlands

<sup>225</sup> [Beijing Olympics chance to promote global ties through sports](#), *Nation Africa*, 17 November 2021

<sup>226</sup> [Beijing Winter Olympics to foster int'l solidarity, peace, and green transition](#): Kenyan scholar, *Xinhua*, 18 November 2021

<sup>227</sup> [Beijing Winter Olympics to foster unity, human excellence](#): Kenyan scholar, *China Daily*, 30 January 2022

<sup>228</sup> [Beijing Winter Olympics to foster unity, human excellence](#): Kenyan scholar, *Global Times*, 18 November 2021

<sup>229</sup> [Beijing Winter Olympics to foster int'l solidarity, peace, and green transition](#): Kenyan scholar, *People's Daily Online*, 18 November 2021

<sup>230</sup> [Games offer chance to promote global ties via sports](#), *China Daily*, 12 January 2022

<sup>231</sup> [China Defied Odds To Deliver Impressive Winter Olympics](#), Capital FM, 21 February 2022

<sup>232</sup> [China defied odds to deliver an impressive Winter Olympics](#), *China Daily*, 9 March 2022

<sup>233</sup> [Success of Beijing Winter Olympics, Paralympics epitomises spirit of community with shared future for mankind -- experts](#), English News (Xinhua), 14 March 2022

<sup>234</sup> [The China-Global South Project on X](#)

Cavince studied journalism and held roles in radio and writing web content before working as a deputy corporate communications officer at a Kenyan university. During his stint at the university he wrote news stories about the institution published by *The Standard*.<sup>235 236 237</sup>

In 2019, Cavince was awarded a China government-sponsored scholarship to study towards his PhD in International Relations at Central China Normal University in Wuhan, China. On his return to Kenya in 2022, he marketed himself as an international relations scholar with a focus on China-Africa cooperation. He has written op-eds that have been published in Kenya on *Capital News*<sup>238</sup>, *Nation*,<sup>239</sup> *The Star*<sup>240</sup>, and *The Standard*<sup>241</sup>, and internationally in China, Tanzania,<sup>242</sup> and Ethiopia.<sup>243</sup>

Some of his opinions have been published in Kenya without the provenance being declared.

On 28 August 2023, *China Daily*<sup>244</sup> published an op-ed authored by Cavince discussing the BRICS Summit held in South Africa and the expansion of the initiative. The piece's headline was 'BRICS expansion a win for multilateralism, shared prosperity.' The next day, 29 August, the op-ed was published in Kenyan media by *Nation.Africa*<sup>245</sup> without disclosure of its original publication in Chinese state media. The op-ed was also published in *The Star*,<sup>246</sup> another Kenyan print outlet, on 12 September without stating the provenance of the piece on *China Daily*.

The similar pattern of republishing op-eds originally published in African media and then in Chinese media is seen applied to op-eds by Dennis Munene. On 2 October 2023, Munene published an op-ed in *The Star*<sup>247</sup> titled 'Belt and Road Initiative Fosters Strategic Partnerships', which was subsequently republished on 17 October 2023 in *Global Times*<sup>248</sup> titled 'BRI in Nature Emancipates Development Potential'.

Munene, is the executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute, a think tank in Nairobi, Kenya. In addition to *China Daily*, his op-eds and interviews have been published in *Global Times*<sup>249</sup>, *People's Daily*<sup>250</sup>, CGTN<sup>251</sup>, and Xinhua<sup>252</sup>. Munene also offers his opinion in op-eds published in media in neighbouring countries such as *The Citizen*<sup>253</sup> in Tanzania and *Juba Echo*<sup>254</sup> in South Sudan.

An investigation by DFRLab found that the technique applied in these cases was also used to spread Covid-19 misinformation and Chinese state views in South Africa.

Chinese state sources pushed favourable narratives, which were picked up by China-funded local news sources like *IOL* and China allied pundits who amplified organic sentiment under their own banners

<sup>235</sup> [Kenyan scholar wins coveted global award in UK](#), *The Standard*, accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>236</sup> [Kenya to establish data sharing centre at JKUAT](#), *The Standard*, accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>237</sup> [JKUAT attains double ISO certifications](#), *The Standard*, accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>238</sup> [Reuters Disinformation On Kenya-China Ties Draws Anger](#), Capital FM, 26 May 2023

<sup>239</sup> [China minister visit opens new ground for Africa ties](#), *Nation Africa*, 20 January 2023

<sup>240</sup> [CAVINCE: China's congress opens new cooperation opportunities for Kenya](#), *The Star*, 30 October 2022

<sup>241</sup> [Too much ado about China's presence in Africa](#), *The Standard*, accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>242</sup> [Why US summit must promote global development](#), *The Citizen*, 30 November 2021

<sup>243</sup> [Discriminatory EU Vaccines Passport Mark of Duplicity](#), *Ethiopian Monitor*, 12 July 2021

<sup>244</sup> [BRICS expansion a win for multilateralism, shared prosperity](#), *China Daily Global*, 28 August 2023

<sup>245</sup> [BRICS expansion win for multilateralism and shared prosperity](#), *Nation Africa*, 29 August 2023

<sup>246</sup> [ADHERE: BRICS expansion win for multilateralism and shared prosperity](#), *The Star*, 12 September 2023

<sup>247</sup> [MUNENE: Belt and Road Initiative fosters strategic partnerships](#), *The Star*, 2 October 2023.

<sup>248</sup> [BRI in nature emancipates development potential](#), *Global Times*, 17 October 2023

<sup>249</sup> [Ibid](#)

<sup>250</sup> [Interview: U.S. military hegemony poses threat to global peace, stability – Kenyan scholar](#), *People's Daily Online*, 11 September 2023

<sup>251</sup> [Expert: China and Africa face new challenges in preserving democracy](#), CGTN, 25 March 2023

<sup>252</sup> [Guest Opinion: Sound China-U.S. ties will benefit global community](#), Xinhua, 15 November 2023

<sup>253</sup> [Sino-African cooperation on health more vital than ever](#), *The Citizen*, 1 May 2023

<sup>254</sup> [China can help Horn of Africa boost food security](#), *Juba Echo*, 15 November 2022

and bylines. Chinese state media editorialised these local opinions before feeding them back into the South African media ecosystem through its distribution agreements.<sup>255</sup>

### b. Case study: Russia

Russian state actors use very similar techniques, recruiting African public intellectuals to work as pundits in support of its influence operations.<sup>256</sup> These pundits are particularly active in West African countries in which the Wagner Group is active<sup>257</sup>, as well as Francophone countries in which Russia is engaged in a battle of supremacy with France. One such African who is deployed in such a manner is French-Beninese pan-Africanist activist Kemi Séba, who has previously been revealed as taking money from Russian state actors.<sup>258</sup> He has amassed a following on social media for his rhetoric targeting French influence in Africa.<sup>259</sup> Séba describes himself as an ‘African revolutionary’ and has supported militarism in Central African states, defending the presence of Wagner Group mercenaries. As revealed in a previous investigative report, he has received financial support from the Russian state-linked Wagner Group.<sup>260 261</sup> Séba is also allegedly a director of Afrique Média TV.<sup>262</sup>

Russian agents will also co-opt African outlets to publish the content from the allied pundits and influencers to amplify Russian-commissioned views. Cameroonian outlet Afrique Média TV plays this role. The media organisation, which has established links with Russian state actors and the Wagner Group, amplifies Russian content, including Séba’s.<sup>263 264</sup> One of its executives, Justin B Tagouh, has been photographed with Wagner leaders and former Wagner leader Yevgeny Prigozhin’s voice notes have been sent exclusively to Afrique Média TV. The outlet frequently provides Séba with a platform for his anti-French rhetoric.<sup>265</sup> A report based on monitoring the outlet’s pro-Russian content over a two-year period<sup>266</sup> found Afrique Média TV consistently and comprehensively covered Wagner Group regional operations, and amplified content from Kremlin diplomatic accounts and Russia’s official websites.

Once links have been established, Russian state media such as Sputnik, RT, or TASS will sign content-sharing agreements. This guarantees that content published by Russia state media will be republished in Africa by partners. Afrique Média TV signed a partnership agreement with RT in December 2022 that allows for content exchange and is aimed at ‘countering propaganda churned out by Western media on the African continent’<sup>267</sup>. The channel republishes RT content, which includes interviews by Russian state media with pro-Russian Africans such as Séba, and Nathalie Yamb (known as ‘the lady of Sochi’ for her pro-Russian comments at the 2019 Russia-Africa Summit).<sup>268 269</sup>

The African-based pundits make television appearances in which they make statements that support Russian government-sanctioned positions or policies, or which support Russia’s geopolitical aims. Russian state media then publishes these statements. For instance, on 11 October 2021, Sputnik published an op-ed titled ‘Capitaliser sur la société civile africaine’: Macron sur les pas du département d’État américain?<sup>270</sup> (‘Capitalising on African civil society’: Macron in the footsteps of

<sup>255</sup> [China’s COVID-19 messaging makes its way to South Africa](#), DFRLab, 22 December 2021

<sup>256</sup> [https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2023-04-03-pan-africanist-activist--seba-responds-to-journalistic-investigation-into-his-links-with-wagner\\_BJbjVBWdb2.html](https://www.tellerreport.com/news/2023-04-03-pan-africanist-activist--seba-responds-to-journalistic-investigation-into-his-links-with-wagner_BJbjVBWdb2.html)

<sup>257</sup> Vukšanović, V. (2023) [Moscow’s Continent: The Principles of Russia’s Africa Policy Engagement](#). Occasional Paper 341, South African Institute of International Affairs

<sup>258</sup> [Séba Officiel \(@Seba1\)](#), X, accessed 8 December 2023.

<sup>259</sup> [Russia Uses Local Voices to Spread Propaganda](#), Africa Defense Forum, 20 June 2023.

<sup>260</sup> [In Niger, Yevgeny Prigozhin’s Wagner Group is exploiting a rising anti-France sentiment](#), ABC News, 8 August 2023

<sup>261</sup> [Russia: How Yevgeny Prigozhin funded Séba to serve his own African ambitions](#), The Africa Report, 11 April 2023

<sup>262</sup> Weiss, M. and Vaux, P. (2020) [The Company You Keep: Yevgeny Prigozhin’s Influence Operations in Africa](#). Free Russia Foundation.

<sup>263</sup> [Afrique Média TV: Kremlin’s new African mouthpiece?](#), ADDO, 20 September 2023

<sup>264</sup> [Niger : Séba met en garde contre la France et la CEDEAO](#), Afrique Média, 4 October 2023

<sup>265</sup> Vuk Vukšanović (2023) [Moscow’s Continent: The Principles of Russia’s Africa Policy Engagement](#). Occasional Paper 341. SAIIA

<sup>266</sup> [Afrique Média TV: Kremlin’s new African mouthpiece?](#), ADDO, 20 September 2023

<sup>267</sup> ibid

<sup>268</sup> ibid

<sup>269</sup> [Russia Uses Local Voices to Spread Propaganda](#), ADF, 20 June 2023

<sup>270</sup> ["Capitaliser sur la société civile africaine": Macron sur les pas du département d'État américain?](#), Sputnik Afrique, 11 October 2021

the American State Department?). The article reported Séba's thoughts about the Africa-France summit in Montpellier, which was attended by African civil society actors. Séba states that the summit was a desperate move by French president Emmanuel Macron to win over the African public, given the increasing influence of the pan-Africanist movement.

When the content has been published by Russian state media, it will be republished by Russian allied media in Africa such as Afrique Média TV and then shared on their social media pages to increase the reach. Afrique Media TV republished the Sputnik news report about Séba's opinion of the Africa-France summit on 12 October 2021.<sup>271</sup> In another instance, RT France published a news article on 30 August 2022 titled 'L'Afrique sous influence russe ? Séba renvoie Macron à sa "négrophobie pathologique"'<sup>272</sup> (Africa under Russian influence? Séba refers to Macron as his "pathological negrophobia"). The news report is sourced from a post Séba had made on his public Facebook page<sup>273</sup>, in which he responded to Macron's comments during his visit to Algeria on 26 August 2022. Afrique Média TV republished the RT article the next day and amplified the opinions.<sup>274</sup>

This case study illustrates an example of Russian state-sponsored media campaigns in West Africa using recognisable and influential African individuals and popular media on the continent. The influence operation has gone much farther and is more refined in Latin America.

The US state department's November 2023 media note, 'The Kremlin's Efforts to Covertly Spread Disinformation in Latin America', reported that Russia was implementing an information manipulation campaign designed to covertly exploit the media and information environment of Latin American countries to launder propaganda and disinformation.<sup>275</sup>

These countries included Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Similar to the campaign in Africa, Russian state actors seeded original stories or amplified pre-existing popular or divisive discourse in Latin America using a network of state media, proxy, and social media influence actors. In Africa's case, the discourse was Russia's aversion to neocolonialism, a message that is beneficial to Russian battle with France for influence in West Africa and the support of Russian private military presence in West Africa.

## 7. Other media influence campaigns

### a. Case study: France's use of news media and social media across various platforms

French state media overtures to African media, unlike China, which relies on allied pundits and content-sharing agreements to amplify its perspectives, are not as overt. France's influence relies on France24, which former French president Jacques Chirac said, during its creation in 2006, was intended to 'export French values and viewpoints across the world'.

However, research has found that individuals linked to France have been involved in influence campaigns on social media by using fake accounts to amplify French government talking points.

Organisations investigating coordinated inauthentic behaviour have uncovered campaigns originating in France primarily targeting CAR and Mali and, to a lesser extent, Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte

<sup>271</sup> "Capitaliser sur la société civile africaine". Macron sur les pas du département d'Etat américain? Afrique Média, 12 October 2021

<sup>272</sup> L'Afrique sous influence russe ? Séba renvoie Macron à sa «négrophobie pathologique», RT Français, 30 August 2022

<sup>273</sup> Séba, Facebook, 29 August 2022

<sup>274</sup> L'Afrique sous influence russe ? Séba renvoie Macron à sa «négrophobie pathologique», Afrique Media, 31 August 2022

<sup>275</sup> The Kremlin's Efforts to Covertly Spread Disinformation in Latin America, United States department of state, 7 November 2023

d'Ivoire, and Niger. Competition between French and Russian interests in Africa, particularly in West Africa, is playing out across social media and in long-form news articles written by actors involved in influence operations.<sup>276</sup>

A December 2020 report by Graphika and the Stanford Internet Observatory, based on Facebook data, found that individuals linked to the French military used fake accounts to pose as locals in the countries they targeted, post and comment on content, and manage pages and groups. They also directed traffic to news websites by sharing links to favourable news stories. For example, French operatives shared stories by Corbeau News in CAR criticising Russia, although there is no evidence of external manipulation. The investigation also found evidence of unsuccessful attempts to create a poll of a news report.

The French operation focused on the security situation in Mali, praising the Malian and French armed forces and attacking the jihadist groups, and in CAR to counter the presence of Russian businesses and mercenaries linked to Prigozhin and Wagner.

This investigation had not sought to find evidence of French state media repeating any of the articles that were favourable to a French or international audience. There is no evidence that the one African news website cited in the research was cited at all in France.<sup>24</sup>

#### **b. Case study: Türkiye's local media amplification**

An investigation by the Cyber Policy Center of Stanford University found evidence of Turkish involvement in a coordinated campaign in support of Guinean president Alpha Condé ahead of the country's 2020 elections.<sup>277</sup> Ninety-four Facebook pages, with a combined following of more than 800,000, posted pro-Condé messages and images, and amplified videos from Guinea state-linked news accounts. Based on the number of pages with a Turkish administrator, the Center investigated the network's posting behaviour on topics of interest to Türkiye.

It found that the network (including some pages with a Turkish administrator) had posted several times about a Turkish conglomerate with significant ties to Condé: the Albayrak Group. Albayrak is chaired by Ahmet Calik, a close ally of president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's and was formerly headed by Berat Albayrak, Erdogan's son-in-law. The posts were positive towards Albayrak. Ten of these pages had 'a single page administrator in Türkiye, suggesting that a common foreign individual or firm may be involved with managing these pages. Seven additional pages outside this cluster (a total of 17 pages in the network) also have a Turkish administrator.'<sup>278</sup>

Although that evidence is largely circumstantial, it would be prudent to monitor the evolution of Türkiye's interventions in the African media environment. On 25 May 2022, 80 journalists from 45 African countries converged in Istanbul for the Türkiye-Africa Media Summit, which spelled out Türkiye's ambition for media influence on the African continent. In April 2023, Türkiye's public broadcaster, TRT, launched TRT Afrika<sup>279</sup> and broadcasts in four languages – English, French, Hausa, and Swahili. TRT Afrika was launched only recently, but TRT had already begun broadcasting in the Hausa language in 2017 and in the Swahili language in 2020. We did not find any evidence of rinse-cycling, however, the website's navigation is concerning because it blurs the line between opinion and news.

<sup>276</sup> Graphika and Stanford Internet Observatory (2020) [More-Troll Kombat: French and Russian Influence Operations Go Head to Head Targeting Audiences in Africa](#), Graphika & The Stanford Internet Observatory

<sup>277</sup> [Who Are the President of Guinea's Facebook Trolls? The Blurry Line Between Modern Campaigning and Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior](#), Stanford Internet Observatory, 21 September 2020

<sup>278</sup> Ibid.

<sup>279</sup> [Breaking News From Africa and Around the World](#), TRT Afrika, accessed 10 November 2023.

## 8. Solutions

Building on the general newsroom policies discussed previously, journalist associations and media outlets globally have implemented more robust safeguards to protect against external commentary promoting hidden agendas. Some provisions that go beyond labelling commentary to uphold standards include:

- v. Stony Brook Centre's Ethics of the Opinion Journalist requires that **commentators should not distort facts**: 'analysis and commentary should [...] not misrepresent fact or context'.<sup>280</sup>
- vi. The LBR Editorial Code of Ethics requires the **vetting of contributors**, by providing an 'opportunity for trusted external contributors from around the world, who are vetted for their standing and knowledge, to showcase their expertise before our readers'.<sup>281</sup>
- vii. The Guardian News and Media requires **all external contributors to be bound by the editorial code**<sup>282</sup> and forbids the endorsement of commercial products. 'No *Guardian* or *Observer* journalist or freelance contributor primarily associated with GNM should personally endorse commercial products without the express permission of the editor-in-chief, or the US editor or Australia editor, or the managing editor.' It also requires journalists and freelancers/contributors to declare personal interests to 'something with which they have a significant connection.'

Such tightening of policy provisions mean there is less scope for op-ed content to run counter to the ethics of news. They also require factual accuracy, vetting of external contributors, and disclosing any conflicts of interest or commercial affiliations that could undermine new media credibility.

The broader publishing industry has also developed additional guidelines that might be useful for sparking new thinking in the media.

1. The Committee on Publication Ethics in the UK has develop a set of guidelines<sup>283</sup> for authors and editors at universities, research institutes and publishing houses to **disclose any additional contributors** who helped to shape an article or other published work. The guideline also includes suggestions for how to handle '**ghost authors**' (authors who are not included in the byline) and '**gift authors**' (authors who are named, but did not actually contribute to the writing). The guideline is intended to provide transparency about who contributed to the work and in what capacity, to help publishers to manage potential conflicts of interest.
2. The University of Cambridge's Research Integrity Guidelines on Authorship<sup>284</sup> takes a similar stance on disclosing contributors, suggesting clear criteria for when contributors should be disclosed in the interests of transparency. The suggested criteria include naming everyone who made a significant contribution to the **conception or design of the article** or project, including the **analysis or interpretation of data**, or who drafted the work or **reviewed/revised it critically** for important intellectual content.
3. The UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO) adds additional guidelines around conflicts of interest<sup>285</sup> for combatting what it terms '**advocacy-based authorship**', in which literature is planned, financed, and produced by either companies or other parties, and is then fronted by academics or pundits, thereby enabling messages to be presented to an audience by 'their

<sup>280</sup> [The Ethics of the Opinion Journalist](#), Stony Brook Center for News Literacy, accessed 14 November 2023

<sup>281</sup> [LBR Editorial Code of Ethics](#), Global Investigations Review, accessed 14 December 2023.

<sup>282</sup> [Editorial code of practice and guidance](#), *Guardian News & Media*, accessed 14 December 2023.

<sup>283</sup> [Authorship and contributorship](#), COPE: Committee on Publication Ethics, accessed 14 December 2023

<sup>284</sup> [Guidelines on Authorship](#), Research Integrity, accessed 14 December 2023

<sup>285</sup> [Authorship](#), UK Research Integrity Office, , accessed 14 December 2023

respected peers' rather than the organisation that designs the message themselves. UKRIO suggests a five-step protocol for improving transparency.

The publishing industry recommendations all focus on attribution and transparency, with clear record-keeping to avoid misunderstandings or disputes.

## 9. Recommendations

Op-eds that offer expert insights and context, even when presented with partiality or bias, are an important form of actionable information to help audiences to consider alternate views.

The media has a duty, however, to ensure that its audience is aware of the full nature of a pundit's affiliations and partisanship, as well as all the contributors to an op-ed, and whether the article was originally commissioned or first produced elsewhere. This provenance is crucial for helping the audience to put the viewpoints in the op-ed in context.

Masking provenance, selectively attributing authorship, or inauthentically amplifying the reach of the op-ed to create misleading perceptions about its origin or impact is a violation of audience trust.

This cynical practice not only threatens to confuse and replace legitimate public debate: it also risks discrediting the media's use of any external experts for its opinion sections. The issues identified in this report therefore require urgent redress.

Editors' guilds and media industry bodies should work with member newsrooms to strengthen editorial standards for transparent disclosure. In addition, they should develop more effective ombuds mechanisms that allow journalists and the public to flag if pundits fail to adhere to ethical editorial standards.

Specifically, we recommend the introduction of:

### Disclosure standards

- i. **Authorship:** newsrooms should establish clear guidelines for attributing authorship. This includes the requirement that contributors disclose any research or other editorial support, including any review/copy editing of op-eds before submission to media. This will allow readers to better understand who shaped the final article.
- ii. **Attribution:** newsrooms should develop and enforce strict guidelines for attributing the original publication for any article, including indicating if the source is state-affiliated media or other vested-interest media (such as industry publications). This will allow readers to gauge whether they trust the original source and, therefore, the resulting article.
- iii. **Provenance:** newsrooms should develop guidelines requiring contributors to disclose whether the article was originally commissioned by a third party other than the newsroom considering publication of the op-ed. The disclosure will help both editors and readers to understand the original impetus for the article.
- iv. **Inducement:** newsrooms should require full disclosure of any beneficial affiliation, vested interests, or other inducements that contributed to writing or offering the article for publication. This will help both editors and readers to understand any vested interests or other agendas related to the article.

### **Editorial systems**

- i. **Author register:** pundits publishing commentary should be vetted and have a public profile that lists their credentials, affiliations, and confirmation from the publication that it has verified their identity. This author profile should disclose affiliations and declare interests, as well as academic degrees, professional certifications, or positions held that qualify the author to opine on a topic.
- ii. **Charter for opinion sections:** newsrooms should prominently publish editorial guidelines stipulating acceptable practices for op-ed contributors. (These should be created if they do not already exist.) Such a ‘charter’ should outline the ethics required from pundits, for example, that they should not misrepresent the facts; a full disclosure of personal interests (anything or anyone with which they have a significant connection, relevant to their contributions); and what constitutes acceptable (and unacceptable) behaviour from op-ed contributors. The charter should also specify that pundits who plagiarise, are inaccurate, or do not disclose conflicts of interest will be disqualified from future submissions.
- iii. **Verification desk and plagiarism checker:** Newsrooms should use plagiarism detection software and independent fact-checking to vet submissions for originality, attribution, and factual correctness. All contributions should be fact checked before publication.
- iv. **Audits:** newsrooms should regularly audit published op-eds to ensure compliance with disclosure and other editorial policies. The audits should include retrospective content analysis to identify any patterns in previously published material suggesting content laundering or misattribution and take corrective action as needed. Newsrooms should periodically confirm the current affiliations and activities of contributors to ensure they do not have undisclosed conflicts of interest.
- v. **Training:** newsrooms should regularly train editorial staff and contributors on ethical sourcing, attribution, and disclosure practices. They should update editorial policies when deemed necessary, bearing in mind the potential impact of new media platforms.

### **Ombuds mechanisms**

- i. **Ethics hotline:** Ombuds should establish a confidential channel that newsroom staff and the public can use to raise editorial ethics concerns. Given the rapid spread of information manipulation, collaborative efforts are essential to effectively combat it. This system could also facilitate the reporting of ethical concerns about a pundit across multiple publications, ensuring crucial accountability for opinion pieces. Editorial guilds might have the opportunity to establish and oversee this system.
- ii. **Collaboration:** ombuds or editorial guilds should create mechanisms for newsrooms to collaborate or share information about questionable content or sources and work together to improve industry standards around content providence and attribution.

As noted in the executive summary, this report was initially commissioned with a very narrow geographic focus: Kenya, South Africa, and Zambia. Information, and the media, are however borderless. And the propagandists and lobbyists who seek to subvert the media are even more so. The techniques used by the puppet-masters to circumvent safeguards also evolve rapidly. We, therefore, recommend that editorial guilds in the three target countries treat this report as a baseline scoping analysis that should be expanded as an annual self-assessment exercise.

The recommendations should also be viewed as preliminary suggestions to be tested and expanded on during guild workshops, to ensure that the final measures adopted as industry guidelines are pragmatic solutions that can be easily implemented.

Finally, we recommend that editor guilds or other media industry bodies elsewhere in Africa should consider replicating the research in their regions to determine whether media there are also being subverted by propagandists and lobbyists.

## 10. Conclusion

This report highlights the presence of ‘cuckoos’ – state-affiliated propagandists and lobbyists – operating as pundits who duplicitously shape public discourse through opinion pieces and commentary. By obscuring their affiliations and incentives, these ‘cuckoos’ effectively implant deceptive narratives into supposedly independent analysis published in African media.

Subversive or false narratives harm public debate, trust in media, and policymaking. Corporate and state interests alike exploit African experts as undeclared lobbyists and conduits for propaganda. The manufacturing of bogus expertise and authority enables the insertion of partisan agendas into mainstream discourse under the guise of impartial commentary.

Propagandistic punditry is just one concerning tactic in the arsenal of foreign influence campaigns targeting African media independence. Yet its potential impacts are far-reaching, precisely because it corrupts sources of analysis and perspectives that audiences rely on for objective takes on specialist areas. Masked biases and hidden agendas prevent citizens, leaders, and journalists themselves from making informed assessments and choices. Most concerning is the impact these cuckoos can have on trust in media and, subsequently, the media’s ability to contribute to the health of democracies being undermined. The public’s views and perceptions should be shaped more by organic content and less by opinions that have been curated to spread official views or inhibit criticism and debate.

As media in Africa increasingly comes under financial pressure, opportunities will open up for malign actors to influence the media in their favour. The integrity of media organisations will be strengthened by an awareness of how the system of commissioning articles to run in local media houses and republishing them for foreign state audiences works. As the research highlights, sometimes this could take place without the awareness of the newsrooms, which in this case are mere pawns in a larger game of peddling global narratives.

Although this research stresses the importance of media plurality, media houses would be served with the knowledge of some of the techniques used by malign actors to influence the narrative. Urgent action is required to reassert ethical standards, enact reforms, and empower journalists and the public to recognise and resist illegitimate attempts to shape narratives. By illuminating techniques that have previously operated undetected, this report aims to spur collective efforts to reclaim African media environments for honest, evidence-based debate that serves democratic progress and continental sovereignty.

## 11. Methodology

This report relies on a combination of desktop literature reviews and primary research to surface new evidence. The literature review was designed to help the authors to understand existing academic research and industry views on the topic, as well as to identify gaps in industry knowledge as avenues for further research. The framing for the report was workshopped with editor guilds in the target countries at in-person stakeholder roundtable meetings. The new primary research was led by full-time researchers, who combined key informant interviews with digital research that draws on both open source intelligence (OSINT) and social media intelligence (SOCMINT) techniques to identify pundits

who originally publish in state-affiliated media outside Africa before republishing the same content on the content.

The OSINT and SOCMINT research methodology made extensive use of specialised analysis frameworks, including the ABCDE and DISARM frameworks.

The resulting report was written by a principal researcher, supported by assistant researchers/analysts, working under the supervision of the report editor. The draft report was validated by in-house fact-checkers, and then reviewed by representatives from the editor guilds, who contributed to context and helped to shape the recommendations

A full explanation of the methodology, including an explanation of the tools and digital techniques used, can be found in annexure A.

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# Trojan Horse:

## How state agencies use content-sharing agreements to co-opt African media



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Cite this report as: *Code for Africa and CivicSignal (2024) ‘Media Capture’. African Data and Democracy Observatory.*

## 1. Executive Summary

### a. Context

This report is part of a wider examination into how African media independence is systematically undermined, and ‘captured,’ by external influence-peddlers. The series uses political scientist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi’s 2013 definition of the concept where external powerful interest groups with vested interests subvert or sway the media for their own interests.<sup>286</sup>

The **Media Capture** series is co-produced with African editor guilds, to ensure the research reflects everyday realities facing local newsrooms. The resulting reports are intended to give local media managers and development strategists a clearer understanding of exactly how newsrooms are subverted, while also offering suggestions for how media defenders might improve their resilience against capture.

This report, the ‘**Trojan Gift Horse**’, is one of four reports published in 2024. It examines how ‘free’ content offered by propagandists for republishing, including media for creating new editorial products, can dilute editorial independence. It follows from the first report ‘**The Cuckoos**’ which looked at how lobbyists and propagandists hijack the opinion and analysis sections in news media. The third report, ‘**Media Grooming**’, questions whether free journalism training, sponsored media trips and gifts of newsroom equipment or other resources make media vulnerable to external influence. A fourth report, ‘**Guardrails**’, explores how media elsewhere have developed effective policy guidelines and newsroom strategies to defend against subversion.

### b. Introduction

African newsrooms need newswire content to provide reporting on other countries and continents, informing their public about important events. Foreign state and public media offer cheap or free content to African media outlets. Such content partnerships may follow bilateral or multilateral agreements to collaborate on cultural products, with news media included.

This research sought to identify existing content agreements between non-African state or public media and African outlets. In this study, 67 of the 93 identified content sharing agreements were signed between foreign ‘sponsor’ state media entities and either African state or public media or government agencies. Such institutions may be encouraged (or compelled) to sign such agreements after governmental accords, providing an opportunity for state-sponsored, propagandistic content to stream into the African media ecosystem. While independent African outlets may be party to such agreements, this research found such content agreements with sponsor state media entities were uncommon.

These content partnerships have the potential to function as ‘Trojan gift horses’ - appearing benign or even helpful - but carrying hidden influence aims that may not serve the public interest of African citizens. Specifically, the sponsor states providing syndicated wire content or co-producing stories with African outlets could leverage these arrangements to subtly alter news agendas and insert narratives that skew more favourably to their geopolitical interests rather than the information needs of local African audiences. In the worst cases, such content sharing agreements may deliver outright propagandistic content or well-packaged PR materials to audiences. This research maps the prevalence of these partnerships to determine exactly what Trojan horse traps may be laid out for African media. It provides recommendations to strengthen transparency and oversight for African media to avoid such traps.

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<sup>286</sup> In Schiffrin, A. (2017) ‘Introduction’, in *In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy*. Center for International Media Assistance, p 2.

### c. Key Findings

#### **Prominent African media content partners for foreign state media**

- i. Sponsor state media partnerships were formed with more African news agencies and public or state media than other media outlets, together these outlets accounted for 67 of the 90 identified content sharing agreements.
- ii. Such content-sharing agreements arise after intergovernmental agreements.

#### **African news agency partners**

- i. The majority of identified agreements with news agencies were with government-controlled wire services (33 of the 34).
- ii. Chinese state media accounted for the most agreements with African news agencies at 17 agreements, followed by Russian state media at 15 and Türkiye at two.
- iii. Signed content agreements did not always translate to continuous content publishing by African news agencies. For instance, the South African Government News Agency (SAnews) content from Sputnik was largely published in 2017.
- iv. The African News Agency, based in South Africa and partly owned (20%) by a Chinese state-owned entity, and the Republic of Congo's Central African News Agency's (ADIAC) were the only non-state agencies identified as having agreements with foreign state media entities.
- v. Syndicated foreign state-supplied content from Xinhua formed a quarter of ANAs published stories from 31 October 2022 to 31 October 2023.
- vi. Partnerships with news agencies can allow content to permeate across subscriber networks into other African media outlets.

#### **African public or state media as partners**

- i. Thirty-three agreements were found between state media providers and African public/state media.
- ii. Most of the content-sharing agreements between state or public African media and Chinese state media entities (21), followed by Russia (9), Türkiye had two, and France one.
- iii. Some agreements were long-term with a KBC foreign affairs programme being supplied with Xinhua footage since at least 2011
- iv. Others were for short periods, with different Chinese government entities working with the Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) to produce documentaries.
- v. Both the NBC and SABC documentaries were launched to coincide with the anniversaries of the respective countries' diplomatic relations with China.
- vi. Foreign states seeking media influence form partnerships with African state and public media that grants access to a larger audience and geographical reach.
- vii. Government pressure for foreign state media content in public broadcasting and the inclusion of content supplied by foreign state media contradicts the broadcasters fundamental principle of independence and the public interest.

#### **Content types resulting from agreements**

- i. African outlets syndicated content, directly publishing prepackaged news articles, often unchanged.
- ii. Republishing state media supplied content risks spreading propaganda, and improper or absent labelling goes against journalism best-practice.

- iii. African outlets co-produced items for broadcast, using footage supplied by foreign state media entities.
- iv. The use of public broadcasters to celebrate diplomatic relations, allows for subtle shaping of narratives.
- v. Coproductions open doors for external propaganda to infiltrate under the guise of locally-produced content.

#### **d. Recommendations**

The use of propaganda funnelled into African media can be countered using a combination of the following suggested ways to strengthen transparency and oversight.

- i. Disclosure standards: Newsrooms should adopt clear partnership declarations and minimum standards on types of content published or broadcast.
- ii. Editorial safeguards: Media guilds should work with partner newsrooms to create and implement clear policies that maintain independence and the public's trust. Such policies should provide guidelines for selecting and using supplied free content, and mandated fact-checking and balancing perspectives on political issues.
- iii. Sustainability: Editorial guilds should lead with strategies on alternative methods to ensure sustainability of newsrooms within ecosystems by fostering regional collaborations and content exchanges, and supporting financial resilience by developing business skills.

## **2. The Problem**

Newswires offer newsrooms the ability to cover news outside of their geographical reach and provide audiences with access to global news. In this report, we look at content-sharing agreements between African newsrooms and foreign state media entities. Such agreements include the syndication or the republishing of existing news from a newswire agency, and the provision of media to create new content.

Newsrooms pay a fee to subscribe and enter into a typical content-sharing agreement with traditional news agencies. Examples of these are agreements with agencies like Reuters or Agence France-Presse (AFP). These agencies are ‘paid services that employ their journalists to report and produce news that is then sold to newspapers and other news outlets’.<sup>287</sup>

The main focus of this report is subversive propaganda disguised as news that is offered at discounted or at no charge from state-owned media agencies.

In examining the use of content partnerships by states, we identify two main categories. Firstly, content syndication which involves publishing or broadcasting news content ‘as is’. Secondly, providing media for reuse to create new media products by sharing materials with partners in video, audio, written formats or data. Examples of this is the supply of raw footage or pre-created news packages that form part of a larger news broadcast.

Traditional newswire content is considered trustworthy, as it has been through rigorous editorial checks, and is mostly published as it appears. This trust leaves a vulnerability when editors treat all newswires - including state-owned ones - the same way. As foreign state actors such as China and Russia expand their media reach across the continent, such uncritical stances to wire content risk state

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<sup>287</sup> [Newswire definition](#), TOP Agency, accessed 22 November 2023

propaganda appearing verbatim without fact-checking. The established and new players, as well as their growth in syndication agreements, are discussed here.

News agencies such as Reuters and AFP offer subscriptions to news media to republish their content.<sup>288</sup> These, and other established news agencies derive income from agreements for the use of their content, with costs varying based on the media outlet's audience size.<sup>289</sup> They provide affordable international coverage and cover a spectrum of topics. While newswire agencies are not immune from biased reporting and/or improper labelling of advertorials or other paid marketing, they are largely considered credible sources.

A Dutch study in 2018 found that wire stories accounted for 75% of print and online news in the Netherlands and that the original story was mostly used verbatim.<sup>290</sup> Journalists may skip accuracy checks when relying on wire copy credibility, leading to the publication of inadequately fact-checked articles.

#### a. Public and state media contributing content to the African media ecosystem

Free news agency content is also available from various public institutions. BBC and Deutsche Welle (DW) provide free content.<sup>291 292 293</sup> The BBC is a British public broadcaster, principally funded by public funds in the form of a TV licence.<sup>294</sup> As part of the BBC's charter<sup>295</sup>, it provides free content to media around the world. In a 2019 study conducted in Ghana, the majority of local journalists surveyed regarded the BBC as a producer of influential journalism<sup>296</sup>. While the BBC doesn't generally operate by explicitly providing propaganda for the UK, its actions and content are shaped within a British or Western cultural context.

DW is the foreign service arm of the German public media and works separately from local stations. Unlike the BBC, only local channels are funded by the broadcasting fee, and DW itself is financed by tax revenue.<sup>297</sup> The brand has also grown in Africa via syndication agreements and partnerships with local media houses to broadcast some of its shows. It also produces programming in French, English and Arabic, which is broadcast on 86 partner TV stations in 26 African countries.<sup>298 299</sup>

Public and state media overlap, particularly when servicing international audiences. France 24 and Radio France Internationale (RFI) also offer programming produced for international audiences. France 24 and RFI fall under France Médias Monde, the group in charge of French international broadcasting. The international arm of France Médias Monde states that it provides 'a French perspective on global affairs'<sup>300</sup> and French President Emmanuel Macron has referred to France Médias Monde as a 'formidable lever of influence'.<sup>301</sup>

RFI is considered the most influential radio station in some countries such as DRC, where more than 80% of the population of the capital Kinshasa are listeners.<sup>302</sup> RFI has partnered with about 380 radio

<sup>288</sup> Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> [The challenges faced by the international news agencies AFP, Reuters, AP and Bloomberg in the era of GAFA and Artificial Intelligence](#), Pat White, 3 April 2023

<sup>290</sup> Boumans, J. (2018) 'The Agency Makes the (Online) News World Go Round: The Impact of News Agency Content on Print and Online News'. *International Journal of Communication*, v12

<sup>291</sup> Madrid-Morales, D. [Africa in the News: Is News Coverage by Chinese Media Any Different?](#), University of Houston, accessed 22 November 2023

<sup>292</sup> [Can I use BBC content?](#), BBC, accessed 27 November 2023

<sup>293</sup> [DW Terms & Conditions](#), DW, accessed 27 November 2023

<sup>294</sup> [Licence fee and funding](#), BBC, accessed 27 November 2023

<sup>295</sup> [BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2022/23](#), accessed 27 November 2023

<sup>296</sup> Serworno, M.Y.W. (2019) 'Postcolonial Trajectories of Foreign News Selection in the Ghanaian Press: BBC remains the ultimate reference', *Journalism Studies*, 20(9), pp. 1357–1375.

<sup>297</sup> [Who finances Deutsche Welle?](#), DW, accessed 27 November 2023

<sup>298</sup> [Regional reception information for Deutsche Welle in Africa | DW](#), accessed 22 November 2023

<sup>299</sup> Fiedler, A. and Frère, M.-S. (2016) '"Radio France Internationale" and "Deutsche Welle" in Francophone Africa: International Broadcasters in a Time of Change: International Broadcasters in a Time of Change', *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 9(1), pp. 68–85.

<sup>300</sup> [Who are we?](#), France 24, accessed 27 November 2023

<sup>301</sup> [Emmanuel Macron pointe le risque d'un « affaiblissement de l'Occident »](#), La Tribune, 28 August 2023

<sup>302</sup> Fiedler, A. and Frère, M.-S. (2016) '"Radio France Internationale" and "Deutsche Welle" in Francophone Africa: International Broadcasters in a Time of Change: International Broadcasters in a Time of Change', *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 9(1), pp. 68–85.

stations<sup>303</sup> in Africa, mostly in Francophone countries. However, French media have faced upheaval in parts of West Africa, where some governments have banned France 24 and RFI over criticism that they act as a tool for colonialism and cultural imperialism.<sup>304 305 306 307</sup> Russian influence campaigns linked to Wagner in some countries may have increased existing anger at such French media.<sup>308 309</sup>

State-owned media agencies from the PRC and Russia offer free or cheap content to media<sup>310 311 312 313</sup> through its various platforms and serve as information hubs to promote state narratives.<sup>314 315 316</sup>

The PRC has multiple avenues for sharing state-produced content.<sup>317 318 319</sup> China's central control of news dissemination, the Central Propaganda Department, manages the messaging from government agencies, academia and business entities.<sup>320</sup> Starting in 2009, Chinese state media outlets such as China Central Television (CCTV), Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International and China Daily expanded their presence globally, including launching dedicated Africa operations/bureaus.

Xinhua is the Chinese state news agency and is fully controlled by the PRC government.<sup>321</sup> It is a platform for the distribution of the 'Chinese story'<sup>322</sup> and Chinese state propaganda.<sup>323</sup> The content audience strategy is twofold: news media for Chinese nationals living outside of the PRC, and then localised content for the specific market.

PRC media agencies have signed cooperation agreements with media in 29 African countries. The list of countries is detailed in Annexure I.

Russian state media also share content with African media. The 2019 Russia-Africa Summit, organised to encourage Russian-African collaboration, explicitly mentioned media in the declaration, committing to 'encourage further exchanges, joint training, and cooperation in the academic field, as well as in culture, education, technology, sports, health care, tourism and mass media.'<sup>324</sup> Since 2019,<sup>325</sup> Russia has actively strengthened its connections with African media outlets. While gaining influence and presence in Africa, the invasion of Ukraine led to bans of Russian media in the European Union (EU), Australia and Canada, and their US office ceased operations in 2022.<sup>326 327</sup> Russia's international-facing media is predominantly represented by two state news agencies. Sputnik News Agency offers subscriptions to organisations and media entities<sup>328</sup>, facilitating wider access to its content, while RT allows free use of its content with attribution.<sup>329</sup> Russian content is increasingly

<sup>303</sup> [Les radios partenaires](#), RFI, accessed 22 November 2023

<sup>304</sup> [RFI and France 24 condemn the suspension of their broadcasts in Niger](#), France 24, 3 August 2023

<sup>305</sup> [Burkina Faso suspends French media outlet, accuses it of 'discrediting' military](#), RFI, 26 September 2023

<sup>306</sup> [Gabon crisis is another challenge to France's African strategy](#), Euronews, 31 August 2023

<sup>307</sup> [Domino effect: France's disintegrating influence in Africa](#), New Arab, 4 September, 2023

<sup>308</sup> Duursma, A. and Masuhr, N. (2022) 'Russia's return to Africa in a historical and global context: Anti-imperialism, patronage, and opportunism', *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 29(4), p. 417.

<sup>309</sup> Siegle, J. (2022) [Chapter 10: Russia and Africa: Expanding Influence and Instability](#), in *Russia's Global Reach: A Security and Statecraft Assessment*. Marshall Center

<sup>310</sup> [Global News Agencies: Economic, Political and Socio-Cultural Implications of Their Negative Reportage of Developing Nations like Nigeria](#), European - American Journal, accessed 22 November, 2023.

<sup>311</sup> Madrid-Morales, D. et al. (2021) [It Is About Their Story: How China, Turkey, and Russia Influence the Media in Africa](#). KASMedia Africa.

<sup>312</sup> Wu, Y.-S. (2016) [China's media and public diplomacy approach in Africa: illustrations from South Africa](#), *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 9(1), pp. 81–97

<sup>313</sup> [It is about their story: How China, Turkey and Russia influence the media in Africa](#), Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, accessed 22 November 2023

<sup>314</sup> Limonier, K. (2018) [Diffusion De L'information Russe En Afrique](#), Note de recherche [Preprint], (66)

<sup>315</sup> Cook, S. (2020) [Beijing's Global Megaphone](#), Freedom House

<sup>316</sup> Madrid-Morales, D. (2021) [Sino-African Media Cooperation An Overview of a Longstanding Asymmetric Relationship](#), in D. Madrid-Morales et al. (eds) *It Is About Their Story: How China, Turkey, and Russia Influence the Media in Africa*. KASMedia Africa

<sup>317</sup> Jedlowski, A. and Röschenthaler, U. (2017) [China-Africa media interactions: media and popular culture between business and state intervention](#), *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 29(1), pp. 1–10

<sup>318</sup> Wu, Y.-S. (2016) [China's media and public diplomacy approach in Africa: illustrations from South Africa](#), *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 9(1), pp. 81–97

<sup>319</sup> Thibaut, K. (2022) [Chinese discourse power: Ambitions and reality in the digital domain](#), DFRLab

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> [Xinhua: the world's biggest propaganda agency](#), RSF, 20 January 2016

<sup>322</sup> Cheng, Z., Golan, G.J. and Kouassis, S. (2016) [The Second-Level Agenda-Building Function of the Xinhua News Agency: Examining the role of government-sponsored news in mediated public diplomacy](#), *Journalism Practice*, 10(6), pp. 744–762.

<sup>323</sup> [Xinhua: the world's biggest propaganda agency](#), RSF, 20 January 2016

<sup>324</sup> [Declaration of the First Russia–Africa Summit](#), accessed 21 November 2023

<sup>325</sup> Clifford, C. and Grudz, S. (2002) [Russian and African Media: Exercising Soft Power](#), SAIIA Policy Insights, 125.

<sup>326</sup> [Chinese discourse power: Ambitions and reality in the digital domain](#), Atlantic Council, accessed 22 November, 2023.

<sup>327</sup> [RT America Shuts Down Amid Russian State-Media Bans](#), Vulture, 6 March 2022

<sup>328</sup> [Telling the Untold](#), Sputnik, accessed 22 November 2023

<sup>329</sup> [Terms of Use](#), RT, accessed, 21 November, 2023

syndicated by African media. In 2019 more than 600 African news websites syndicated content from Sputnik and RT.<sup>330</sup>

Türkiye has also been actively enhancing its connection with Africa through its media initiatives.<sup>331</sup> The state's public broadcaster, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), took a significant step in April 2023 by introducing TRT Afrika.<sup>332</sup> The Anadolu Agency, a key player in Türkiye's media landscape, has created African content tailored for a Turkish audience,<sup>333 334</sup> but has diversified to offer content to African audiences too. The agency extends its services by offering subscription packages and copyrights for its content.

### b. International agreements and content partnerships

International agreements, especially bilateral relations, commonly facilitate content sharing between state news providers and national public broadcasters. Multilateral agreements also lead to the creation of cultural products, including news content partnerships between state news agencies and state media. However, bilateral deals have more power in enabling targeted narrative shaping and closer cultural relations between two countries, particularly when partners differ in terms of economic power.<sup>335</sup>

These deals allow for content provision, personnel swaps, and co-productions that align with diplomatic priorities.<sup>336</sup> The news media are often included in the ambit of cultural cooperation.<sup>337</sup> By working through national state media, states gain visibility, influence perceptions, and cultivate relationships.<sup>338</sup> The states in bilateral agreements often attempt to leverage the distribution reach of major media players to shape narratives for domestic audiences,<sup>339</sup> in this case, Africans. However, often the economically stronger partner is more likely to be successful in their diplomatic aims.<sup>340</sup>

While the ideal is for public broadcasters to be completely independent of state control, this is not enshrined in the law of all countries, and even where legally supported, is likely to be undermined through government control efforts.<sup>341</sup> The number and independence of state or public media differs based on national law. For instance, in South Africa, the law makes provision for public broadcasting, but not state newspapers,<sup>342</sup> so the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is the only public broadcaster. Despite legislative independence, the SABC has repeatedly come under some form of government influence.<sup>343</sup> A counter-example is provided by Zambia, where law allows for state newspapers under the Zambia News and Information Services (ZANIS).<sup>344</sup>

The SABC, like other public broadcasters, may be instructed to sign collaboration agreements with state media as part of international agreements. Likewise, many governments have news agencies under government communication functions. For example, South Africa has a news agency under the Government Communication and Information Service (GCIS), called SAnews.<sup>345</sup> Such institutions

<sup>330</sup> [Documented Disinformation Campaigns in Africa](#), Africa Center for Strategic Studies, accessed 21 November 2023

<sup>331</sup> Dahir, A. (2021) [‘The Turkey-Africa Bromance’](#), *Insight Turkey*, 23(4), pp. 27–38.

<sup>332</sup> [Breaking News From Africa and Around the World](#), TRT Afrika, accessed 22 November 2023.

<sup>333</sup> Czerep, J. (2019) ‘Nº 173: [Turkey’s Soft-Power Crisis in Africa](#)’, Polish Institute of International Affairs.

<sup>334</sup> [Subscription Requests](#), Anadolu Agency, accessed 22 November 2023

<sup>335</sup> Ibid

<sup>336</sup> Andrew Calabrese and Marco Briziarelli (2011) [‘Policy Imperialism: Bilateral Trade Agreements as Instruments of Media Governance’](#), in R. Mansell and M. Raboy (eds) *The Handbook of Global Media and Communication Policy*. 1st edn. Wiley.

<sup>337</sup> Chakravarthy, P. (2006) [Media policy and globalization](#). Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid

<sup>341</sup> Chakravarthy, P. (2006) [Media policy and globalization](#). Edinburgh University Press, 89

<sup>342</sup> Limpitlaw, J. (2021) [‘South Africa’](#), Media Law Handbook for Southern Africa. 2nd edn.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid.

<sup>344</sup> [Zambia News and Information Services](#), archived.

<sup>345</sup> [South African Government News Agency](#), accessed 9 January 2023

may also be instructed to sign such agreements. Both the SABC<sup>346</sup> and SAnews<sup>347</sup> have signed content partnerships with state media of trading partners.

Such government agencies may also be carrying sponsor-state media content as a result of international agreements.

Unsurprisingly, African state-owned news agencies tend to attract suspicion from legitimate news providers; even agencies that potentially syndicate content from these agencies can be tainted with suspicion.<sup>348</sup>

So, while newswires offer newsrooms the ability to cover news outside of their geographical reach and provide audiences with access to global news, content from state media may draw suspicion from independent media and audiences. Public broadcasters may face political pressure to syndicate or modify existing content from partner state media. Such content may serve diplomatic, not editorial aims at best and be propagandistic at worst.

### 3. Content-sharing Influence Practices

Foreign states pursue influence in African countries through the signing of content-sharing agreements. News agencies and public or state media, under the control of African governments, may be encouraged or even obliged to sign such agreements, agreeing to use content supplied by foreign state media. African news agencies and public or state media may seem like attractive conduits to larger audiences through their access to other African news outlets or national publics directly. This makes them key content partners accounting for 67 out of the 90 identified agreements. The utility of these agreements may be limited and content may not be sustained on the back of them. Mainstream media suspicion of state-created content, both by African state media agencies and foreign states, and the need for newsworthy or at the very least entertaining content may have these content arrangements peter out. Independent agencies may be a more attractive option for foreign states, but a preponderance of foreign state content may override the credibility of the content. We explore sponsor state media content partnerships with both African news agencies as well as public and state media to identify partnership strategies. The section also explores the two main types of content agreement approaches - the supply of content for syndication and the supply of materials to produce new media products.

#### a. Partnering with African news agencies

Many African countries have state news agencies,<sup>349</sup> often connected to government information services or communications ministries. Agencies may sign agreements with foreign state news providers due to their governmental connections. Independent agencies may also sign content-sharing agreements. In total, we found 34 verified content agreements. The findings suggest, however, that the actual duration of content sharing within these agreements can vary significantly; for instance, it may be brief, as exemplified by SAnews (mostly confined to content in 2017 only), or persist over time, as observed in the instance of the Ghana News Agency (GNA), which still carries foreign state media content. Independent agencies such as the African News Agency (ANA), which is part of a large South African media group may also sign agreements. We found a total of 34 agreements between sponsor state media agencies and African media agencies. Chinese state media accounted for the most at 17 agreements, followed by Russian state media at 15 and Türkiye at two. Most of the agreements were found between African government-controlled agencies (32), rather than independent or private

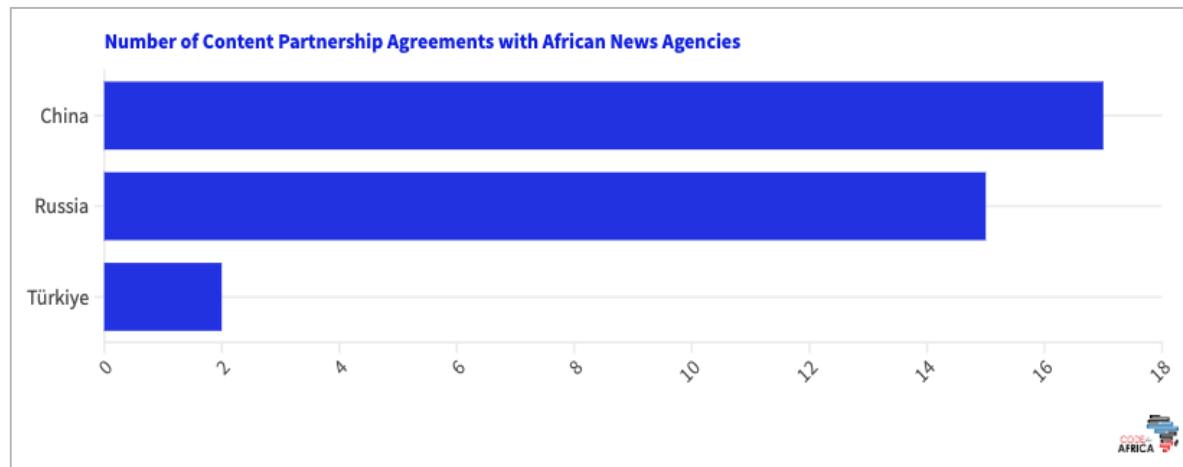
<sup>346</sup> China, South Africa announce docuseries on 'brotherly' friendship - CGTN, CGTN, 24 August 2023

<sup>347</sup> The Kremlin's Expanding Media Conglomerate, Institute for the Study of War, 15 January, 2020

<sup>348</sup> Jansen, Z.L. (2010) *Global news flows: news exchange relationships among news agencies in South Africa*, PhD Thesis, p. 387

<sup>349</sup> List of news agencies, - Wikipedia, accessed 9 January 202

agencies (only two). Numerous other independent agencies were explored for such agreements. Through agencies, sponsor state media gain access to the African media ecosystem.



*China and Russia had more agreements than Türkiye identified in our search (Source: Code for Africa)*

### State news agencies

One African state-owned news agency with such an agreement is the Ghanaian state-run news agency GNA, which has an agreement with Chinese state media. A full list appears in Appendix I.

GNA signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Xinhua News Agency in May 2018, which included provisions for 'the exchange of customised information that would be of mutual interest to both Ghana and China'.<sup>350</sup>

The agreement with Xinhua has led to the GNA publishing up to seven Xinhua stories a day in 2022 and 2023, it serves as a distribution platform for Xinhua content, both news and opinion. Between November 2020 and March 2021, in addition to republishing Xinhua news articles, the Agency published 15 opinion pieces that contain Chinese official views and push back against its critics. For example, An opinion piece<sup>351</sup> published by Xinhua on 23 March 2021 with the headline 'Xinhua Commentary: Stop meddling in China's internal affairs under the guise of human rights' is republished by GNA under their byline a day later.<sup>352</sup>

However, not all content-sharing agreements are as active. SAnews, the South African state-run news agency that falls under the Department of Communication and Digital Technology's government information service (GCIS), has an agreement with the Russian state news agency Sputnik. The GCIS and Sputnik signed an agreement that was publicly announced on 7 March 2017. A press release announced the cooperation agreement between the two countries and said they would exchange news. It also includes the GCIS publication, Vukuzenzele.<sup>353</sup>

Some content resulted from the agreement. For instance, in November 2017, during the events preceding the resignation of Robert Mugabe and the swearing-in of his successor, SAnews ran stories reported by Sputnik's correspondent in Harare.<sup>354</sup> A story about the inauguration of Zimbabwe's new president Emerson Mnangagwa later in 2017 ran with the shared byline of the two news agencies -

<sup>350</sup> [GNA commits to China's Belt and Road Economic Information Partnership](#), BusinessGhana, 28 May 2018

<sup>351</sup> [Xinhua Commentary: Stop meddling in China's internal affairs under guise of human rights](#), Xinhua, 23 March 2021

<sup>352</sup> [Xinhua Commentary: Stop meddling in China's internal affairs under guise of human rights](#), Ghana News Agency, 24 March 2021

<sup>353</sup> [Vukuzenzele Newspaper](#), accessed 9 January 2023.

<sup>354</sup> [President Mugabe resigns - Speaker](#), SAnews, 21 November 2017

Snews.gov.za-Sputnik.<sup>355</sup> Since then, there has been little evidence that the agreement between the two entities is still operational.

State media agencies may be required to sign agreements, but the extent and longevity of the content production may vary.

### 'Independent' news agencies

The African News Agency (ANA), acts as a funnel for Chinese state-produced content to African media. ANA is one of the media offerings of Sekunjalo Group, which includes the Independent Media Group based in South Africa. As an agency, it is only nominally a private company. Independent Media is partly owned (20%) by Chinese state-owned enterprises (China International Television Corporation and the China Africa Development Fund)<sup>356</sup>.

In an analysis of content on the Africa News Agency (ANA) platform from 31 October 2022 to 31 October 2023, we found an imbalance in the volume of content contributed across ANA's various media partners. ANA produced under a third of its content. Xinhua content carried on the platform accounted for almost 25% of content, rising up to 75% of total stories on some days. In contrast, African content partners contribute between 1 and 3% of the content. On average, ANA published 154 news stories a day, excluding opinion and PR content in this analysis. While the agency boasts over 40 media business partners, and 10 African partners that supply content to the platform<sup>357</sup>, total average content provided daily from most content partners (such as *Daily Trust*, *Raddarr Africa*, *The Maravi Post*, the *Voice Botswana*, Times Group Malawi, the *Exchange*, the *New Dawn*, and *iHarare*) is intermittent, accounting for well under 1% of the total each, with *The Exchange* contributing more on average at just over 2%.

A subscription to ANA allows media organisations to access feeds from all its partners, including Xinhua, without requiring individual content-sharing agreements, and in turn Xinhua can filter its content through the news agency. ANA charges a subscription fee of between USD 300 - 1,500 per month, depending on the level of content access.

In looking for news agencies with sponsor-state media agreements, we found independent agencies typically didn't have agreements with the named sponsor-state media. We screened seven independent agencies from different parts of the continent and no agreements were found. It is also unclear whether ANA makes any money as an agency, given its clear sponsor-state content arrangement.

### b. Partnerships with state/public media

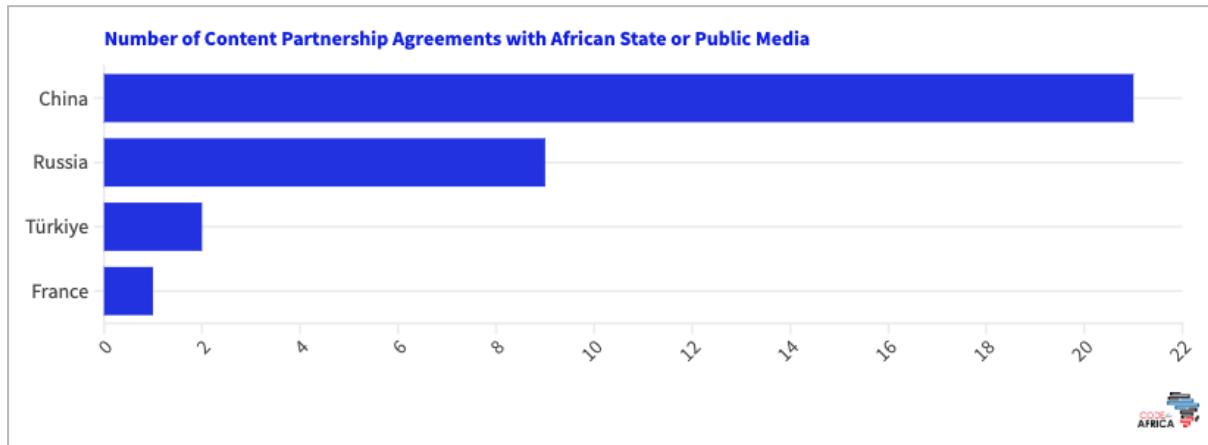
State and public broadcasters make for attractive partners for content co-production and distribution as they serve large audiences and often wide geographic areas within countries and state and public media do enter into such agreements. In this study, we identified 33 such agreements. Should content produced as a result of these agreements prove valuable to the public or state media, they can continue for many years. This is the case with the partnership for the production of an international affairs programme by the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). Other partnerships are of shorter duration. Both provide opportunities for sponsor governments to promote their messages to the audience of public and state broadcasters. To do this, the foreign state media must provide valuable materials that will result in entertaining content, or risk flagging interest from African media partners.

<sup>355</sup> [Mnangagwa inaugurated as Zimbabwe's President](#), Snews, 24 November 2017

<sup>356</sup> [About IOL](#), IOL, accessed 22 November 2023.

<sup>357</sup> [Our Content Products and Services](#), ANA, accessed 21 December 2023

Together, we identified 33 agreements between state media providers from China, France, Russia and Türkiye with public or state media in Africa. Content partnerships between state or public African media and Chinese state media entities were the most common, with 21 agreements in place. Russia had nine agreements with African national state and public media corporations, while Türkiye had two, and France one.



*More Chinese state media agencies' agreements were identified with African state or public media than Russia, Türkiye or France (Source: Code for Africa)*

The two case studies below indicate how content is broadcast because of partnerships between African state or publicly-funded media and foreign state media.

In this case, both resulting programmes are created in partnership with Chinese institutions but represent very different end products. The first is a foreign affairs programme by the KBC produced in partnership with Xinhua, the second is a documentary series celebrating 30 years of diplomatic relations between Namibia and China. The case studies present contrasting approaches, the former providing international stories, together with local stories using Xinhua-supplied footage, the latter focusing on Namibia-China diplomacy, produced together with CCTV.

#### **KBC's '*Dunia Wiki Hii*'**

Kenya's public broadcaster KBC has had an agreement with Xinhua, whose earliest evidence is May 2011<sup>358</sup>, for the production of a television show. The foreign affairs programme, *Dunia Wiki Hii*, is a round-up of the biggest foreign affairs news during the week based on footage and reporting provided by the Chinese news agency. The programme runs every Saturday and is broadcast in Swahili. The anchors disclose at the beginning of the half-hour programme that it is produced together with Xinhua.

Each episode includes a segment with newsflashes about Chinese institutions or activities globally. This segment takes about five minutes of the programme's 30-minute runtime. Both parties benefit through the partnership, the PRC getting positive coverage of their activities in Kenya and elsewhere and the KBC can produce inexpensive quality programming because of the footage made available to them. Xinhua's footage is clearly disclosed during the programme.

<sup>358</sup> [Dunia Wiki Hii](#), YouTube, 28 May 2011

The KBC show airs every Saturday and is uploaded on YouTube after. *Dunia Wiki Hii*, has been a fixture in KBC programming for over two decades, but in its current form, Xinhua provides footage, giving the agency considerable oversight of content. Further details of the agreement and financial arrangements are not publicly available.



*Dunia Wiki Hii* 7th October 2023



*The collaboration is announced at the start of the programme but is also visible on the top left of the screengrab where a Xinhua digital on-screen graphic is inserted. (Source: YouTube<sup>359</sup>)*

To explore the content of the production, we sampled four episodes that ran in July 2023. The episodes cover diverse international affairs, over the month the stories included Russian President Vladimir Putin praising the country's military for restoring stability and avoiding civil war during a mutiny by Wagner. Some of the reports cover events that are related to the PRC, such as opposition to Japan's plan to release treated wastewater from the Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean, and a meeting between African and Chinese scientists advocating for climate-resilient food production to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the joint China-UNEP ecosystem management programme.

Across the period, newsflashes of other Chinese news such as Kenyan coastal fishermen being happy about new market opportunities to sell seafood in China; a Chinese companies' exhibition in Kenya; a forum held in Lusaka for Chinese and Zambian energy investors; a China-led food security project in Barbados; and China's donation of foodstuffs to poor households in Afghanistan.

In an episode that aired on 15 July, the presenter introduced the roundup of news about China as 'China continued to develop mutually beneficial relationships with various countries, as it provides donations across the world'<sup>360</sup>. The piece included reports about a donation made by China to a youth sports team in Tanzania; a donation of solar powered laptops by a Chinese firm to school children in rural Kenya; a two-day meeting of 52 Kenyan scholars who had applied for scholarships to China; Zimbabwe President Emerson Mnangagwa opening a Chinese-built lithium factory; Chinese government-sponsored Nigerian students returning home; Ethiopia congratulating Chinese contractors for their contribution to the country's economic growth and new markets opening in China for

<sup>359</sup> [Dunia Wiki Hii](#), YouTube, accessed 8 January 2024

<sup>360</sup> [Dunia Wiki Hii](#), 15 July 2023, KBC Channel 1, accessed 22 November 2023



Ethiopian coffee producers. The items broadcast in this segment showed that they were all targeted at showcasing China in a positive light.

Xinhua makes it possible to produce *Dunia Wiki Hii*, providing Kenyans with international news in Kiswahili by providing resources, particularly footage. In exchange, the PRC gets eyes on its activities in Kenya and further abroad.

### **Namibian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Radio and Television Administration of China promote bilateral relations**

NBC cooperated with China's National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) to produce and broadcast a four-part docu-series about China and Namibia's relationship. The series, *Glamorous Namibia*, provides a synopsis of China-Namibia relations, offering historical context and highlighting cooperation milestones since the 1960s.<sup>361</sup> Namibians benefit through getting access to a historical documentary series, while China can showcase diplomatic relations to both Chinese and Namibian audiences.

The series also shows diverse aspects of Namibia, including history, customs, socio-economic progression, cultural diversity, tourism, and landscape, as well as the experiences of both Namibian and Chinese people in Namibia. Yang Jun, the Chinese embassy political counsellor in Namibia, said at the launch the series would hopefully promote Chinese tourism to Namibia, which had slumped after COVID-19. The series results from a November 2019 agreement between NBC and NRTA, the organisation managing the radio and television industries in the PRC.<sup>362 363</sup> It was broadcast on CCTV China in December 2020 and then premiered on NBC's prime national television channel in Namibia to coincide with the 31st anniversary of the establishment of China-Namibia diplomatic relations<sup>364</sup> on 22 March 2021.

The Kenyan international relations television series offers the opportunity to provide positive coverage of China, while the Namibia miniseries allowed for the celebration of China-Namibia bilateral relationships. Both were achieved in partnership between sponsor state media entities and African public or state media.

#### **c. Content agreement approaches**

Our research identified two broad approaches in content-sharing agreements: co-production and syndication. Some inter-institutional relationships may involve one or both. Each type of content partnership approach is extracted as examples. The first case, Kenya's public broadcaster KBC partnering with Russian state media Sputnik shows straight content syndication of Russian state content in Kenyan media. Though KBC claimed Sputnik would simply offer 'alternative perspectives,' the broadcaster preempted concerns about the nature of the agreement. Also, failure to consistently attribute the source of stories obscures external influence. A jointly-produced documentary series by the SABC and CMG, serves as an example of a second content approach, co-production. More tailored content may serve to foster cultural understanding and the public broadcaster potentially gains access to quality programming cheaply or at no cost.

In both cases, trojan horse messages can be inserted by foreign state media into African media environments.

<sup>361</sup> [Feature: China and Namibia premiere television series to promote bilateral relations](#), Xinhua, 23 March 2021

<sup>362</sup> [China, Namibia ink agreement to further exchange in radio, broadcasting](#), Xinhua, 26 November 2019

<sup>363</sup> [Practical Law UK](#), Thomson Reuters, accessed 8 January 2023

<sup>364</sup> [ibid](#)

### **Content syndication**

KBC has signed a partnership with Russian state news agency Sputnik to exchange content. The media organisation signed the agreement with Sputnik on 29 March 2021.<sup>365</sup> The deal was signed by Vasily Pushkov, the Director of International Cooperation for Sputnik News Agency and Mikhail Konrad, the director of special projects at the agency.

KBC's article announcing the agreement defended it, arguing that Sputnik News Agency would only serve as an alternative source of content, providing a different view of events and occurrences to mainstream media narratives rather than republishing state propaganda.

KBC's Sputnik content is attributed, but there have been instances where it has not been. For example, a May 2023 news report announcing the commencement of Swahili lessons at a Russian school, and another in July on the readoption of the name Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University of Russia to honour the Congolese hero were attributed.<sup>366 367</sup> While a report about a meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Microsoft's co-founder Bill Gates in June 2023 was not.<sup>368 369</sup>

Content syndication of international news from wire services may provide African news outlets with international news, but should it come from foreign state media entities, it may be created to further diplomatic ends.

### **Co-production**

On 23 August 2023, SABC and the China Media Group (CMG), the holding company of Chinese media such as CCTV, China National Radio, and China Radio International announced their collaboration to produce a documentary about Chinese-South African cooperation.<sup>370</sup>

The documentary series, titled, '25 Years on – Documenting China-South Africa Friendship and Cooperation,' was broadcast in December 2023 in both Chinese and English languages to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Africa. The series consists of three 30-minute episodes and depicts ties between the two countries. It shares accounts of mutual benefit, people-to-people exchanges, and mutual learning between the two countries, as well as the achievements of China-South Africa cooperation in diplomatic, economic and cultural exchanges.<sup>371 372</sup>

This co-production provides the SABC with a documentary series and the Chinese state a channel to tell the South African and Chinese publics how the partnership has benefitted the countries

## **4. Recommendations**

Several key recommendations have been identified to enhance transparency and editorial integrity in the wake of content partnerships. These recommendations span four areas:

### **Disclosure standards**

- i. **Partnership disclosure:** Media organisations should have clear partnership declaration sections on their websites or in broadcasts disclosing any content agreements. Further, outlets need to be transparent about what resources they receive from a sponsor government in

<sup>365</sup> [KBC, Sputnik News Agency eager to strengthen media partnership](#), KBC, 29 March 2021

<sup>366</sup> [Teaching Swahili in Moscow schools to start September - KBC](#), 25 May 2023

<sup>367</sup> [Peoples' Friendship University of Russia again has the name of Patrice Lumumba](#), KBC, 13 July 2023

<sup>368</sup> [Xi-Gates Meeting: US Billionaire 'Will Continue to Be Friend to China'](#), KBC, 17 June 2023

<sup>369</sup> [Xi-Gates Meeting: US Billionaire 'Will Continue to Be Friend to China'](#), Sputnik, 17 June 2023

<sup>370</sup> [China, South Africa announce documentary series on 'brotherly' friendship, cooperation](#), CGTN, 24 August 2023

<sup>371</sup> [China, South Africa unveil "25 Years On" documentary on diplomatic relations](#) - CGTN, 31 December 2023

<sup>372</sup> [CMG's documentary on China-South Africa friendship and cooperation coming soon](#), KBC, 28 December 2023

collaborative content production, including equipment, financial support, and production assistance.

- ii. **Attribution:** media outlets need to clearly show when they use third-party content, when the content is state-produced, this should include the name of the source and its relationship with the sponsoring government.

#### **Editorial systems**

- i. **Independence:** media companies should establish editorial independence policies requiring careful selection of supplied free content to reduce state control and ensure that they meet public interest standards. Ideally, state-supplied content should not be used in its entirety but quoted together with other sources.
- ii. **Verification desk:** newsrooms should have mandated fact-checking and balancing of perspectives on political issues.
- iii. **Sourcing:** editorial standards should mandate diverse sourcing on political/international affairs - ensuring local civil society voices are represented not just foreign governments.
- iv. **Industry reporting standards:** African journalism guilds could collaborate on developing standards for reporting on foreign countries and international affairs, to encourage contextual, multi-perspective coverage over reproducing external framings. Standards would help reinforce quality, evidence-based reporting grounded in African civic values rather than imported state priorities.
- v. **Audits:** newsrooms should regularly audit syndicated content to ensure compliance with disclosure and other editorial policies. The audits should include retrospective content analysis, to identify any patterns in previously published material suggesting poor content, and corrective action should be taken as needed. Newsrooms should periodically confirm the current affiliations of wire agencies to ensure they do not have undisclosed conflicts of interest.

#### **Media sustainability**

- i. **Content sharing:** editor guilds should facilitate local and regional content sharing networks for outlets to consolidate resources without sacrificing editorial control. This would have to be shaped by industry consultation and consensus-building. Media outlets should pursue innovative partnerships grounded in ethical journalism, aligned to their public service mission.
- ii. **Succession planning:** develop talent pipelines and training programmes focused on financial resilience, media management and emerging business models, and support next generation leaders.
- iii. **Funding:** lobby governments and other interest groups to develop tax incentives, fair compensation for content use, philanthropic funding structures, and policies supporting independent public interest journalism models.

#### **Regional cooperation**

- iv. **African wire services:** develop African alternatives to state-sponsored wire services: The report indicates that foreign state-backed wire services like Xinhua and Sputnik may degrade outlet credibility. African journalism associations could explore creating a non-profit, public interest African wire service focused on serving local information needs. This could provide a more independent news source with quality information.
- v. **Co-productions:** increased collaboration on coverage of international affairs through sharing materials, and co-producing multi-perspective stories.
- vi. **Dialogue:** African media professionals can exchange best practices for dealing with external influence, in the wake of the actions of powerful foreign state media actors.

## **5. Conclusion**

The research showed how external influence peddlers may use content-sharing agreements to reach their own diplomatic ends, at the cost of the interests of African publics. Employing a multifaceted methodology grounded in the DISARM approach, this analysis set out to map patterns in content partnerships across the continent - assessing potential strategies for inserting propagandistic content into the African media ecosystem. The ‘Trojan horses’ were seen in the shapes of horses used (content syndication or co-production), as well as the potential entry points (African agencies and African public or state media). Once content is inside the African media ecosystem it may proliferate, changing the character of African media. Free content may incline outlets toward risky bargains – trading editorial control for external content alignment with sponsor state priorities, over local public interests and possibly domestic credibility. Lasting resilience requires African-rooted journalism that serves community values first – not imported state agendas masked as gifts. Recommendations arising from these findings spotlight the urgency for African media to pursue financial sustainability models anchored in serving constituent information needs. Disclosure standards, editorial safeguards, fostering regional collaborations and rethinking commodified models offer helpful starting points. But lasting solutions require networks rooted in local values and realities – community-powered and self-determined. Passive acceptance of state-produced content threatens not just the news agenda, but Africa's public interest journalism.

## **6. Methodology**

This report relies on a combination of desktop literature reviews and primary research to surface new evidence. The literature review was designed to help the authors to understand existing academic research and industry views on the topic, as well as to identify gaps in industry knowledge as avenues for further research. The framing for the report was workshopped with editor guilds in the target countries at in-person stakeholder roundtable meetings. The new primary research was led by full-time researchers, who combined key informant interviews with digital research that draws on both open source intelligence (OSINT) and social media intelligence (SOCMINT) techniques to identify pundits who originally publish in state-affiliated media outside Africa before republishing the same content on the content.

The OSINT and SOCMINT research methodology made extensive use of specialised analysis frameworks, including the ABCDE and DISARM frameworks.

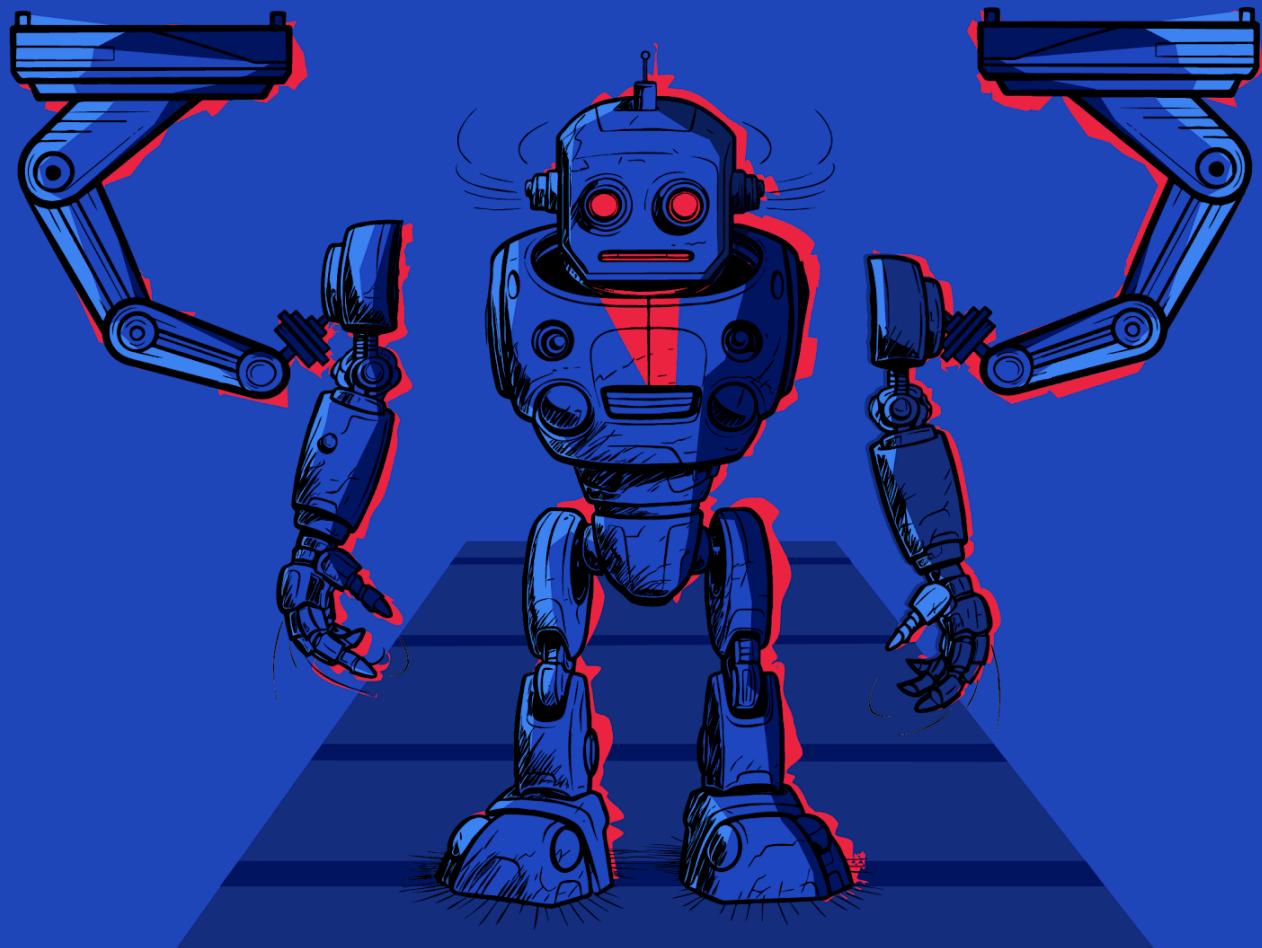
The resulting report was written by a principal researcher, supported by assistant researchers/analysts, working under the supervision of the report editor. The draft report was validated by in-house fact-checkers, and then reviewed by representatives from the editor guilds, who contributed to context and helped to shape the recommendations

A full explanation of the methodology, including an explanation of the tools and digital techniques used, can be found in annexure A.

# Grooming:

## How foreign states capture journalists & newsrooms with 'free' resources

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*Cite this report as: Code for Africa and CivicSignal (2024) ‘Media Capture’. African Data and Democracy Observatory.*

## 1. Executive Summary

### a. Context

This report is part of a wider examination into how African media independence is systematically undermined, and ‘captured’, by external influence-peddlers. The study uses political scientist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi’s 2013 definition of the concept, where external powerful interest groups with vested interests subvert or sway the media for their own interests.<sup>373</sup>

The **Media Capture** series is co-produced with African editor guilds, to ensure the research reflects everyday realities facing local newsrooms. The resulting reports are intended to give local media managers and development strategists a clearer understanding of exactly how newsrooms are subverted, while also offering suggestions for how media defenders might improve their resilience against capture.

This report, ‘**Media Grooming**’, is one of four published in 2024. It questions whether free journalism training, sponsored media trips and gifts of newsroom equipment or other resources make media vulnerable to external influence. This follows the first report ‘**The Cuckoos**’, which looked at how lobbyists and propagandists hijack the opinion and analysis sections in news media. The second ‘**Gift Horse**’ report examined how ‘free’ content and collaboration agreements offered by lobbyists and propagandists further dilute editorial independence. A fourth report, **Guardrails**, explores how media elsewhere have developed effective policy guidelines and newsroom strategies to defend against subversion.

### b. Introduction

Journalists and newsrooms often face skill shortages in digital technologies. Clear strategies for skills development are necessary on organisational and sector levels to fill these gaps. Professional newsrooms increasingly need numbers of staff with wider range of skills,<sup>374</sup> and the shortfall is filled through post-graduate training and short courses. Without these, newsrooms don’t innovate as rapidly as the profession does, which affects business and curb journalists in their ability to compete globally.

It’s global best practice for media development organisations, NPOs and industry bodies to offer specialised training to newsrooms and journalists. This would also include sponsored journalism exchange programmes in foreign newsrooms and fellowships. Governments often subsidise training programmes, but create firewalls by funding intermediate training experts.

However, this also creates a vulnerability for foreign states to offer training, travel and sponsorships with covert intentions to influence media workers to produce favourable content. In this report, we focus on the ‘grooming’ of journalists by organisations that intend to sideline objective reporting fundamentals, while preparing them to be the voice of the bad actor.

Where some newsrooms continue to lack fundamental journalism skills, objective reporting is jeopardised through ‘groomed’ journalists with better packaged content that is oblique public relations content.

This covert media manipulation threatens governance, and undermines watchdog journalism, creating room for media capture.

<sup>373</sup> In Schiffrin, A. (2017) ‘Introduction’, in [In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy](#), Center for International Media Assistance, p 2.

<sup>374</sup> Satchwell, K., Mkhondo, R. and Bikitsha, N. (2021) [Media Ethics and Credibility Inquiry](#), SANEF, p. 9.

This report used news articles announcing or reporting on training or sponsorships attended by journalists and newsrooms. Between 2017 and 2023, we found 60 such announcements relating to training offered directly by foreign countries or by development bodies. We used CivicSignal MediaCloud to track reporting on topics related to the training to map any sentiment change from the published articles.

### c. Key Findings

From the tracking of activities during training, and the monitoring of participants' subsequent content, some patterns were noted after training by Chinese, Russian and Türkiye sponsored journalism training. These expose vulnerabilities for media capture.

#### Journalism training activities as influence

- i. Some direct state sponsors expose African journalists to messaging on politics, culture, and foreign policy during journalism training. Training sponsored by China, Russia and Türkiye all included messages about these countries being partners to Africa, and in the case of Russia, providing alternatives to the dominant western narratives.
- ii. Tours serve to build the state's reputation, for example, Russia's training can include tours of Moscow and Saint Petersburg.
- iii. Participants gain access to high-level political events during the training, for example, previous Chinese trainees have reported on national and high-level diplomatic events.
- iv. Facilitating access to, and placements within, state media for example, Türkiye's African Media Representatives Training Programme (AFMED) accommodates African journalists in AA or TRT newsrooms, while Russia offers internship programmes organised by SputnikPro.

#### Content influence

- i. Content is produced during the training for state media of the sponsor state and the host outlet, for example, during the CAPC fellowship participants publish articles in their own media and in Chinese media.
- ii. Some participants continue to write biased and unbalanced content of the host country, in fact one participant, Ikenna Emewu, has produced three books about China's achievements.
- iii. A few alumni continue to write unbalanced op-eds for the sponsor country's media, for example a 2017 Kenyan alumnus, Eric Biegon, a journalist at KBC, has continued to produce op-eds for China Daily.

## 2. The problem

Journalism training is essential for updating competencies, acquiring new techniques and tools, and staying competitive. This applies to both newsrooms and individual journalists. Such training is typically offered by development agencies and is often funded by governments.<sup>375</sup> Certain journalism training programmes, have a high degree of direct government involvement that goes beyond typical media development assistance. Such government influence attempts to shape reporting in favour of the sponsor state.

This report defines 'grooming' as covert training programs, scholarships, and fellowships targeting journalists to elicit positive coverage or bolster certain narratives. Grooming is accomplished through training or 'the transfer of defined and measurable knowledge or skills ... training is best supplemented with practical, hands-on experience'.<sup>376</sup> To get these practical skills, training

<sup>375</sup> Higgins, D. and Foley, M. (2012) '[Journalism Training and Media Development](#)', Africa-UK Journalism Education Exchange Network, University of Bedfordshire, Luton, England

<sup>376</sup> Masadeh, M. (2012) '[Training, Education, Development and Learning: What Is the Difference?](#)', *European Scientific Institute, ESI*, 8(10).

programmes are often accompanied by work experience. This report includes practical activities together with workshops, longer training programmes, as well as bursaries covering these.

In fact, an overview of media assistance funding<sup>377</sup>, found a move from short-term isolated workshops, 'to a model of longer term 'news labs' and in-situ trainings, distance learning' often supported by mentoring and tied to programmes and specific content. . Funders also focus on organisational development, including capacity-building in managerial, technical, and financial aspects. Content production often also requires funding - together with providing infrastructure, technology and equipment support. Additionally, support extends to broader environments, such as supporting good regulatory environments, effective planning and evaluation of interventions and promoting media literacy.

Journalism training funded by various countries appears similar on the surface. Funding, even if it is part of some kind of foreign aid originating with a government, is separated from implementation, which is often done by non-profit organisations. But important differences emerge when examining these programmes more closely, especially the degree of state control and sponsor ties to implementers.

#### a. Funders of Journalism Training

Numerous governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental entities provide funding for journalism training. Governmental support include France, Germany and Sweden, with state-affiliated funders such as the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the European Union (EU), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), as well as international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, various other agencies and programmes under the UN, and the World Bank. Monies regularly get routed through intermediary organisations to further disperse or to implement programmes.<sup>378</sup>

The United States (USA) was the biggest funder of media assistance in 2016. It has since prioritised media support in the 2022-2026 Department of State and USAID Joint Strategic Plan under Goal 3: 'strengthen democratic institutions, uphold universal values, and promote human dignity'.<sup>379</sup> A study that included US training found that it 'involved the training of the participants in a university environment... [and] participants indicated that they were later assigned to work with reputable media houses within the US for four out of the five weeks of training'.<sup>380</sup>

The second biggest funder is the EU Commission, who prioritised journalism training with 22% of all media assistance funds going to Africa.<sup>381</sup>

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), was the third biggest funder of media assistance, with a priority on journalism training, under 'media development is primarily either a small part of the wider concept of Freedom of Expression at Sida, or of the wider area of democratic governance and rule of law'. One of the implementing bodies for funding from Sweden is FOJO Media Institute, which is funded largely by the Swedish Institute and the Swedish government's Ministry of Education.<sup>382</sup> Another institution, International Media Support (IMS), an non-profit

<sup>377</sup> Myers, M., Harford, N. and Bartholomew, K. (2017) *Media Assistance: Review of the Recent Literature and Other Donors' Approaches*. iMedia Associates.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> The Department of State (2022) *The Department of State and USAID Joint Strategic Plan FY 2022-2026*. The Department of State.

<sup>380</sup> Gondwe, G. (2022) 'African Journalists at Crossroads: Examining the Impact of China, US, and the UK's Short-Journalism Training Programs Offered to African Journalists', *Journalism Studies*, 23(13), pp. 1654–1668.

<sup>381</sup> Sullivan, M. (2018) Donor Profile: European Commission. Center for International Media Assistance

<sup>382</sup> Fojo Media Institute (2023) *Impact Report 2022*. Kalmar: Fojo Media Institute.

headquartered in Denmark also implements projects on behalf of Sida and other European funders.<sup>383</sup> The FOJO Institute and IMS both formulate independent strategies that define their priorities while receiving state funding.

The UK, under Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office (FCDO), is a majority funder of BBC Media Action.<sup>384</sup> BBC Media Action aims to use ‘media and communication to reduce poverty and promote human rights, thereby enabling people to build better lives’. They say ‘the heart of our work is mentoring and training journalists and media workers, and work with media organisations on business planning, marketing and economic viability’<sup>385</sup> both media development and media for communication.

A study of UK, US and Chinese-funded journalism programmes in sub-Saharan Africa found that UK and US training did not require interaction with government officials from the participants. The US was mentioned as the sponsor only, and in the case of the UK, the ‘BBC’ was understood to be the sponsor.<sup>386</sup>

China is a significant funder of journalism training and media development. In 2006, China and 48 African countries agreed on the Beijing Action Plan (2006-2009), which included focussing on three main categories of intervention: African media institutions, the practice of journalism, and African journalists. This action plan was further broken down into five categories, namely: ‘increased contact between news media … to encourage mutual understanding; multi-level exchanges … including international visits and exchanges between media groups’; filing news reports from ‘both sides’ by local and non-local residents; workshops for African journalists in China ‘and expanded cooperation in radio and television broadcast’; and lastly, China committing to the improvement of telecommunications infrastructure in Africa.

At the 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), China committed to train 1,000 African media professionals each year.<sup>387</sup> The 2019 plan outline included the establishment of ‘a China-Africa media cooperation network’.<sup>388</sup> This is in line with the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s desire to ‘tell China’s story’ through people-to-people ties; and exchanges ‘between politicians, parliamentarians, academic and media organisations’ as part of the country’s diplomatic strategy.<sup>389 390</sup>

Training, sponsorships and fellowships are regularly provided for state media and big media companies, and considered part of foreign aid.<sup>391</sup> Often including travel to China,<sup>392</sup> these provide cultural exposure to the country and intend to make journalists understand how Chinese journalism operates, and emulate it.<sup>393</sup> Journalists have been expected to produce positive content about the country during their training.<sup>394</sup> In a study of journalists trained in sub-Saharan Africa, participants

<sup>383</sup> International Media Support (2023) [‘Financial overview 2022’, IMS Annual Report](#), BBC Media Action, 2023, accessed 28 January 2024

<sup>384</sup> [Annual Report](#), BBC Media Action, 2023, accessed 28 January 2024, p. 4.

<sup>385</sup> Gondwe, G. (2022) [‘African Journalists at Crossroads: Examining the Impact of China, US, and the UK’s Short-Journalism Training Programs Offered to African Journalists’](#), *Journalism Studies*, 23(13), p. 9

<sup>387</sup> [‘The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Johannesburg Action Plan \(2016-2018\)’](#) (2015), accessed: 8 December 2023.

<sup>388</sup> [‘Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan \(2019-2021\)’](#), accessed 7 December 2023.

<sup>389</sup> [‘People-to-people diplomacy key to tell China’s story’](#), Chinadaily, 31 December 2019.

<sup>390</sup> [‘China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035’](#), FOCAC, accessed 7 December 2023.

<sup>391</sup> Jákup Emil Hansen (2016) [‘Media Training for Africa: Is China Exporting its Journalism?’](#) SAIS-CARI Policy Briefs. Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), China Africa Research Initiative (CARI).

<sup>392</sup> Jákup Emil Hansen (2016) [‘Media Training for Africa: Is China Exporting its Journalism?’](#) SAIS-CARI Policy Briefs. Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), China Africa Research Initiative (CARI).

<sup>393</sup> Gondwe, G. (2022) [‘African Journalists at Crossroads: Examining the Impact of China, US, and the UK’s Short-Journalism Training Programs Offered to African Journalists’](#), *Journalism Studies*, 23(13), p. 9.

<sup>394</sup> Jákup Emil Hansen (2016) [‘Media Training for Africa: Is China Exporting its Journalism?’](#) SAIS-CARI Policy Briefs. Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), China Africa Research Initiative (CARI), p. 3.

trained in China were closely monitored for reporting after their training and that ‘stories were closely monitored so that the journalist reported what China wanted.’<sup>395</sup>

Research in Uganda of Chinese training programmes suggested that training media practitioners focused on the cultural aspects of China as well as historical and economic ties between China and Africa.<sup>396</sup> This is in line with observations from other past participants.<sup>397</sup> Training for state media tended to be longer than that of private (one to two months compared to 10 to 14 days). The research found little evidence of overt influence, but that ‘it is clear that the courses are intended to indirectly influence participants by promoting the Chinese vision of the media’s role in society.’ And at the end ‘African journalists were expected to report China in a way that China considered accurate.’<sup>398</sup>

Chinese journalism training has non-profit implementers. For example, the China Africa Press Centre trainings are implemented by the China Public Diplomacy Association.<sup>399</sup> Unlike implementing agencies like BBC Media Action (UK funding) and Fojo Institute and IMS (Swedish funding), this non-profit explicitly ‘strives to advance the development of China’s public diplomacy’.<sup>400</sup>

The inaugural Russia-Africa Summit in 2019 marked a significant moment in Russia’s reengagement with the continent. Organised to encourage Russian-African collaboration, it says they commit to ‘encourage further exchanges, joint training, and cooperation in the academic field, as well as in culture, education, technology, sports, health care, tourism and mass media.’<sup>401</sup> Since then, Russia has actively strengthened its connections with African media outlets<sup>402</sup>.

Russia launched the InteRussia fellowships for various professions in 2021, including journalism.<sup>403</sup> The RT Academy also offers online journalism training on their website specifically aimed at an international audience. The course outline says it facilitates direct communication with local journalists and RT International’s newsroom and social media editors, as well as television skills. The InterRussia fellowships are funded by the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, an institution established by presidential decree. In line with heavy state involvement, training is undertaken by state media outlets. For example, in the case of InterRussia, SputnikPro, the journalism training arm of Rossiya Segodnya International Media Group, a Russian state-owned media conglomerate performs training.<sup>404</sup>

Türkiye has also grown its media initiatives with Africa. The state’s public broadcaster, Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), took a significant step in April 2023 by introducing TRT Afrika.<sup>405</sup> In May 2022, the first Türkiye-Africa Media Summit was held,<sup>406</sup> with media practitioners from 48 African countries.<sup>407</sup> The Anadolu Agency (AA) News Academy, targeting a local and international audience, started operating in 2012.<sup>408</sup> It said it had 14 African graduates from a class of 22 in July

<sup>395</sup> Gondwe, G. (2022) ‘[African Journalists at Crossroads: Examining the Impact of China, US, and the UK’s Short-Journalism Training Programs Offered to African Journalists](#)’, *Journalism Studies*, 23(13), p. 10.

<sup>396</sup> Jakup Emir Hansen (2016) [Media Training for Africa: Is China Exporting its Journalism?](#) SAIS-CARI Policy Briefs. Johns Hopkins University, School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), China Africa Research Initiative (CARI), p. 4.

<sup>397</sup> Madrid-Morales, D. et al. (2021) [It Is About Their Story: How China, Turkey, and Russia Influence the Media in Africa](#). KASMedia Africa, p. 51.

<sup>398</sup> Gondwe, G. (2022) ‘[African Journalists at Crossroads: Examining the Impact of China, US, and the UK’s Short-Journalism Training Programs Offered to African Journalists](#)’, *Journalism Studies*, 23(13), p. 10.

<sup>399</sup> 2018 CAPC & CAPP programme opens in Beijing, The Business & Financial Times, 28 March 2018

<sup>400</sup> About CPDA, accessed 28 January 2024

<sup>401</sup> [Declaration of the First Russia–Africa Summit](#), accessed 21 November 2023

<sup>402</sup> Clifford, C. and Gruzd, S. (2022) [Russian and African Media: Exercising Soft Power](#). SAIIA Policy Insights, 125.

<sup>403</sup> [InteRussia](#), Gorchakov Fund, accessed 7 December 2023.

<sup>404</sup> State Media Giant Rossiya Segodnya to Launch New Agency in 45 Languages – Report, The Moscow Times, 5 November 2014

<sup>405</sup> [Breaking News From Africa and Around the World](#), TRT Afrika, accessed 22 November 2023

<sup>406</sup> [Scramble to be Africa's window on the world](#), Le Monde Diplomatique, 1 December 2022

<sup>407</sup> [Türkiye-Africa Media Summit kicks off](#), Iletisim, 25 May 2022

<sup>408</sup> [About us](#), Anadolu Agency, accessed 7 December 2023

2022. Participants in Türkiye's training interventions expressed positive views of the country after the training.<sup>409</sup>

### b. Impacts of journalism training

'Media capture' refers to powerful groups trying to influence the media for their own interests. Journalism training is 'not value-neutral; it also carries with it the cultural and political values associated with the acquisition of those skills'.<sup>410</sup> It does not occur in a vacuum - participants may be exposed to training by different sponsors, as well as influences in the journalist's immediate environment.<sup>411</sup> So, training is not considered a direct form of influence, unlike ownership, financial dependence/investment and the explicit funding of content.<sup>412 413</sup> The line is blurred when training when courses centre around government-directed experiences and contact with only state media and implemented by state-linked entities. Levels of government presence at Chinese journalism courses is of concern, as is the monitoring of content after the training has finished.<sup>414</sup> Media institutions need a firewall between the services they accept for their own development and the content that they produce, which can be covertly undermined.<sup>415</sup>

## 3. State-sponsored journalism training practices

Some foreign countries have employed training programmes to covertly groom African journalists, aiming to cultivate a favourable perception of their country within the audiences covered by these journalists.

The case studies below highlight the tactics, techniques and processes through which state actors from Russia, China and Türkiye use journalism training programmes for their propaganda objectives.

In each case, African journalists were chosen to participate in state sponsored all-expense paid trips to these countries to attend programmes ranging from workshops, week-long seminars and junkets, to months-long fellowships.

In these examples, the foreign governments do not facilitate the training themselves but do so through media development agencies or state-linked media with funding from sponsors. The programmes are supported by foundations or think tanks and implemented with the participation of state media. For instance, China's flagship training for African journalists is funded by the China Public Diplomacy Association, Russia's is financed by Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund, while Türkiye's trainings are implemented with support from the Association of African Researchers (AFAM) and African Coordination and Training Centre (AKEM). These organisations are involved in promoting diplomatic relations with partner countries.

The participants are required to produce stories of their experiences in the foreign country and publish them in their own media.

The trainings coincided with key events taking place in the cities the journalists were visiting, and as a result, provided guaranteed news coverage in Africa. These include the Russia-Africa Economic and

<sup>409</sup> Madrid-Morales, D. et al. (2021) [It Is About Their Story: How China, Turkey, and Russia Influence the Media in Africa](#). KASMedia Africa, p. 96.

<sup>410</sup> Leslie, M. (2016) '[The Dragon Shapes Its Image: A Study of Chinese Media Influence Strategies in Africa](#)', *African Studies Quarterly*, 16, p. 164

<sup>411</sup> Gondwe, G. (2022) '[African Journalists at Crossroads: Examining the Impact of China, US, and the UK's Short-Journalism Training Programs Offered to African Journalists](#)', *Journalism Studies*, 23(13)

<sup>412</sup> Atal, M.R. (2017) '[Competing forms of media capture in developing democracies](#)', in *In the Service of Power: Media Capture and the Threat to Democracy*.

<sup>413</sup> Schiffrin, A. (2017) '[Same Beds, Different Dreams: Charitable Foundations and Newsroom Independence in the Global South](#)', Washington DC: CIMA. Tilgået, 6.

<sup>414</sup> Gondwe, G. (2022) '[African Journalists at Crossroads: Examining the Impact of China, US, and the UK's Short-Journalism Training Programs Offered to African Journalists](#)', *Journalism Studies*, 23(13), p. 10.

<sup>415</sup> Schiffrin, A. (2017) '[Same Beds, Different Dreams: Charitable Foundations and Newsroom Independence in the Global South](#)', Washington DC: CIMA. Tilgået, 6, p. 20.

Humanitarian Forum, Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and National People's Congress (NPC) and TRT World Forum.

Aside from journalism, the trainings aimed to shape the perceptions of the attendees about the sponsor country. They emphasise bilateral relationships, cultural exposure, politics, economy and promoting positive coverage and securing backing of the journalists in their foreign policy goals.

Once the training was completed, some journalists became ‘ambassadors’ of their trainers and key ‘correspondents’ within their newsrooms or are employed in state media organisations, or establish their own newsrooms. This is especially true for China. Some of the journalists wrote op-eds that pushed back against criticism of the countries that sponsored their training, or published articles which promoted the country’s narratives.

#### a. Junkets with the China Africa Press Centre

The PRC engages in various training initiatives under the China Africa Press Centre (CAPC) fellowship. The fellowship includes trips to China to attend workshops and visit newsrooms and results in news stories published in both local Chinese media<sup>416</sup> and in the fellows’ home countries<sup>417</sup>.

Initiated in 2014, the CAPC fellowship is an annual 10-month-long programme (now offered in a biannual four-month format) under the China Public Diplomacy Association (CPDA), a non-profit organisation established in 2013 to promote the development of China’s public diplomacy.<sup>418</sup> The programme sponsors between 15 and 30 African journalists annually who are hosted by the CAPC in Beijing<sup>419</sup> for programmes facilitated by the School of Journalism and Communication of Renmin University of China.<sup>420</sup>

In PRC, media freedom is extremely limited, ranking near the bottom of the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2023 media freedom index<sup>421</sup> at 179 out of 180 countries. China maintains strict control over major media entities such as Xinhua News Agency, China Global Television Network (CGTN), and CCTV, utilising them as conduits for government propaganda. The index research says independent journalists operating in China encounter surveillance, harassment, detention, and torture. Despite constitutional assurances, the government routinely infringes upon the right to information, exploiting legal frameworks to stifle journalistic expression. China is the world’s largest incarcerator of journalists.

Media programmes form part of China’s Africa Policy<sup>422</sup> to promote exchanges and visits between media professionals from Africa and the PRC. Engagement with African journalists has been substantial. Between 2014 to 2020, 136 African journalists were trained in China under the CAPC programme. The programme began with eight journalists in its inaugural fellowship in 2014<sup>423</sup> and witnessed subsequent growth, with 10 participants in 2015,<sup>424</sup> 28 in 2016,<sup>425</sup> 27 in 2017,<sup>426</sup> 29 in 2018<sup>427</sup>, and 34 in 2019<sup>428</sup>. As a consequence of Covid-19 travel restrictions, the 2020 and 2021

<sup>416</sup> [Fascinating Transformation](#), ChinaAfrica, 20 October 2022

<sup>417</sup> [Chinese provinces endorse Jinping's five-year ambitious plan](#), New Vision, 21 October 2022

<sup>418</sup> [About CPDA](#), accessed 28 January 2024

<sup>419</sup> [China Launches Studies Exchange Program For African Journalists](#), FrontPageAfrica, 28 February 2017

<sup>420</sup> [Opening ceremony for the 2019 "China Development Research and Media Exchange" program](#)

<sup>421</sup> [China](#), RSF, accessed 22 November 2023.

<sup>422</sup> [The Interpretations of the Johannesburg Summit of the FOCAC and the Sixth Ministerial Conference on the 10 Major China-Africa Cooperation Plans in Economic and Trade Domains](#), Ministry Of Commerce People's Republic Of China, 16 December 2015

<sup>423</sup> Morales, D.M. et al. (2021) [It is about their story How China, Turkey and Russia influence the media in Africa](#) *Is About Their Story: How China, Turkey, and Russia Influence the Media in Africa*, KASMedia Africa.

<sup>424</sup> *ibid*

<sup>425</sup> [28 African Journalists Complete 10-Month Media Fellowship in China](#), People's Daily Online, 2 December 2016

<sup>426</sup> [But we found a completely different China!](#), People's Daily Online, 5 December 2017

<sup>427</sup> [New era for China-Africa media links](#), China Daily, 5 July 2018

<sup>428</sup> [China: 50 African-Asian journalists begin 10-month media fellowship - Daily Trust](#), Daily Trust, 27 February 2019

iterations were held virtually.<sup>429</sup> The fellowship resumed in 2022 in an expanded format to include more countries from the Caribbean and Central Eastern Europe.<sup>430</sup> The same year, the programme ran over a four-month period, and a second cohort was introduced.<sup>431</sup>

Renmin University reported in 2022 that more than 296 foreign journalists from Africa and the Asia-Pacific region participated in the extended programme in Beijing.<sup>432</sup>

Past participants come from countries such as Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo (Brazzaville), Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. (*A year-by-year breakdown is included as Appendix II*).

The CAPC fellowship comprises training on China's political, cultural, media and economic activities, basic Chinese language lessons, tours across the country, and internships at state media outlets. Some of the major activities in the itinerary include the coverage of key events happening in China and reporting on these occasions for their home publications.<sup>433</sup><sup>434</sup> Participants have previously attended and reported on the two sessions of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and National People's Congress (NPC), Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Media Cooperation Forum on Belt and Road, BRICS summit, China-Arab States Expo and the 19th National Congress of Communist Party of China.

During the fellowship, the participants publish articles in their own media and in Chinese media. In 2017, one participant said the fellowship resulted in the publication of close to 1,500 stories in 27 African countries over the 10-month period of the programme.<sup>435</sup>

Kimeng Hilton Ndukong, a sub-editor at *Cameroon Tribune* and part of the 2017 cohort, reported on his experience in China and countering claims of censorship. Ndukong wrote in a December 2017 edition of the *People's Daily*, 'Never did they at any time try to influence the choice of angles of our stories, insist on reading through our articles before we filed them home, nor instruct us on what to write on and what not to write on. We carried out our work without any "eagle eye" peeping from behind at our laptops to see what we were writing. The subjects we wrote on were therefore purely our own choices.'<sup>436</sup>

He said, 'We will share stories of our stay in China when we return home and continuously sensitise colleagues on websites that report the true China.'

Another participant from Liberia in 2016, Fredrick P. W. Gaye, who worked as a news editor of *In Profile Daily*, continued to publish in People's Daily Online after completing the fellowship.<sup>437</sup><sup>438</sup>

Some graduates often return as prominent pro-China advocates in their home countries. One example is Ikenna Emewu, from the 2016 cohort while he was senior editor of Nigeria's *The Sun* newspaper.<sup>439</sup>

<sup>429</sup> [Almost 100 foreign journalists take part in a training programme in China](#), KPL, 14 August 2022.

<sup>430</sup> [Grenada hosted by China International Press Communication Centre](#), Now Granada, 3 March 2023

<sup>431</sup> [Second cohort of China's media exchange program starts](#), Star Kenya, 4 August 2023

<sup>432</sup> [The 2022 graduation ceremony for foreign journalists training program for China Development Research and Media Communication held successfully](#), School of Journalism And Communication Renmin University of China, ~ 31 October 2022

<sup>433</sup> [China's Innovation-Driven Development](#), KBC, 12 March 2017

<sup>434</sup> [CPC congress upholds Jinping's supreme position in the party](#), New Vision, 22 October 2022

<sup>435</sup> [But we found a completely different China](#), People's Daily Online, 5 December 2017

<sup>436</sup> *ibid*

<sup>437</sup> [China donates to Liberian artists](#) - People's Daily Online, 15 August 2017

<sup>438</sup> ['Another Milestone of China-Liberia Relations': Chinese Amb. ZHANG](#) - People's Daily Online, 2 May 2017

<sup>439</sup> [A Year to Remember Upgrading of Sino-African relations in all aspects was a hallmark of 2016](#), China Africa, 4 March 2016.

After his fellowship, Emewu started africachinapresscenter.org where he published his general news stories about China. The oldest story on the website dates to 19 June 2017.<sup>440</sup>

He also published his first book ‘*The Great Wall Climb: Incredible China’s Journey to Emancipation*’<sup>441</sup> in 2017. During this time, Emewu was still employed at *The Sun* as investigations editor and he left the role in March 2018.<sup>442</sup> He founded Afri-China Media Centre Limited, which publishes *Africa China Economy Magazine*. His LinkedIn profile indicates that worked there full time from January 2018.<sup>443</sup>

In 2018, Afri-China Media Centre also signed a content sharing agreement with Xinhua<sup>444</sup> and renewed it a year later. The media organisation indicates it has ‘over 70% of its editorial content on China and Africa and the largest pool of China reports among all media organisations in West Africa’.<sup>445</sup>

He went on to author two more books about China: ‘*China: Rise and Global Influence in the 21st Century*’<sup>446</sup> in 2021, and ‘*Chinese in the Nigerian Economy*’ in January 2024.<sup>447</sup>

Emewu now writes pro-Chinese content and opinion pieces that hit back at criticism against China. For example on 26 July 2021, CGTN published an op-ed by Emewu titled ‘Xi’s Tibet visit endorses Chinese pluralism, religious rights’<sup>448</sup> about Jinping’s first official presidential visit to Tibet, saying that the visit affirmed China’s commitment to religious freedom. The op-ed was then republished in the Nigerian media by *Africa China Economy Magazine* on 12 August 2021<sup>449</sup>. The op-ed echoed Chinese state media, including claims of social and economic improvements in Tibet.

Fellows were also selected from public broadcasters, including Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). A 2017 Kenyan alumnus, Eric Biegon, a journalist at KBC, has also written articles for Chinese state media and op-eds<sup>450</sup> that defend controversial Chinese policies. He is also quoted in a Xinhua article ‘Experts worldwide oppose politicising Covid-19 origins, urge impartial scientific research’ on 11 August 2021<sup>451</sup> where he says scientists should look beyond China for the potential origin of the pandemic. *China Daily*<sup>452</sup> republished the story retitled as ‘Covid-19 origin study should be conducted in multiple countries: Kenyan journalist’ on the same day.

Studies investigating Chinese influence on journalists in Africa have previously identified Biegon as a Chinese mouthpiece in Kenya. He was interviewed for a study<sup>453</sup> where he argues that the ‘media such as BBC is spreading Western perspectives’ and China had a right to counter them. He has also been featured in a 2021 report<sup>454</sup> examining Chinese influence among journalists in Kenya.

Since 18 September 2022, Biegon has published 160 stories on the KBC website, of which 58 are explicitly centred around China. The articles published range from reportage of diplomatic collaborations and events to cultural exchange, infrastructure development, and Chinese education

<sup>440</sup> [Home | Page 1959 of 1959 | AFRICA CHINA ECONOMY](#)

<sup>441</sup> [Understanding China, The Sun Nigeria](#), 24 June 2017

<sup>442</sup> [Sun Deputy MD, Sunday editor, others sacked](#), Media Career Services, 2 March 2018

<sup>443</sup> [Ikenna Emewu - Editor-in-Chief, AFRICA CHINA ECONOMY MAGAZINE and ONLINE - Self-employed | LinkedIn](#)

<sup>444</sup> [Afri-China, Xinhua sign content partnership](#), 27 September 2019

<sup>445</sup> *ibid*

<sup>446</sup> [CHINA-Rise and Global Influence in the 21st Century](#), Ikenna Emewu, March 2021

<sup>447</sup> [Emewu, Nigerian editor's new book on Chinese investments in Nigeria debuts | Africa China Economy](#)

<sup>448</sup> [Xi's Tibet visit endorses Chinese pluralism, religious rights](#), CGTN, 26 July 2021

<sup>449</sup> [Xi's Tibet visit endorsed Chinese pluralism, religious rights](#), Africa China Press Centre, 12 August 2021

<sup>450</sup> [Eric Biegon - China plus](#), accessed 28 January 2024

<sup>451</sup> [Experts worldwide oppose politicising COVID-19 origins, urge impartial scientific research](#), Xinhua, 11 August 2021

<sup>452</sup> [COVID-19 origin study should be conducted in multiple countries: Kenyan journalist](#), China Daily, 11 August 2021

<sup>453</sup> Li, H. (2023) [‘Understanding African journalistic agency in China–Africa media interactions: The case of Kenya](#), *International Communication Gazette*, 85(1).

<sup>454</sup> Tinatin Khidasheli et al. (2021) [A World Safe for the Party: China’s Authoritarian Influence and the Democratic Response: Country Case Studies from Nepal, Kenya, Montenegro, Panama, Georgia and Greece](#), International Republican Institute.

initiatives such as the Huawei ICT Competition and the Chinese language proficiency contest for Kenyan students. All present a positive perspective, emphasising mutual cooperation, economic support, and shared cultural understanding.

### b. SputnikPro/ InteRussia Fellowship

In 2023, Russia pledged closer media ties at a summit and within months, state entities acted on commitments to sponsor workshops, forums and exchanges for reporters. Our case study indicates that participating African journalists adopt more narratives that follow Russia's. Strategic recruitment of journalists from key outlets ensures insertion of counter-narratives back home. Under state bodies a Russian-African journalism association has been created and more conferences and training are slated to follow. These include internships facilitated by state entities, the creation of a Russia-Africa journalism association, and plans for future conferences and training workshops. This section provides some context and then delves into the SputnikPro fellowship and the strategic placement of reporting that emerges.

Russia's press freedom is poor – it is rated 164th out of 180 countries by RSF's press freedom index.<sup>455</sup> Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was followed by a severe crackdown on media independence, with many independent news organisations facing bans. Privately-owned independent television channels that deliver news content in Russia are prohibited from broadcasting, and major Western media outlets like Euronews, France 24, and the BBC are no longer accessible. Meanwhile, the state media share their news and journalism training abroad in countries they can still access.<sup>456</sup> Sputnik was launched in 2014, while RT dates back to 2005 when it was founded by the Russian government to promote Russia's perspective globally. Both serve as state-sponsored news outlets that further Russian foreign policy aims.<sup>457</sup>

In 2018, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) published the ‘Concept of the Russian Federation on Cooperation with African Media,’ about collaboration in various fields, including education, culture, art, media, and sport. This included a training programme for senior editors in sub-Saharan African state media organisations.<sup>458</sup> This plan ran from 2018 to 2020. The goal of the training for senior editors ‘would be at the forefront to highlight post-Soviet economic and cultural reality and shape the African perception of Russia’. The report said that, ‘Frequent exchanges of visits by Russian and African journalists as well as regular publications of economic and business reports could help create public business awareness and raise … the level of understanding of the relationship between Russia and Africa.’

On World Press Freedom Day (3 May 2023) the Russian-African Club,<sup>459</sup> whose aim is to strengthen friendly relations and comprehensive ties between African countries and Russia, established the Association of Journalists of Russia and Africa. The goal of the association is to ‘coordinate the development of Russian-African relations in disseminating objective and reliable information’, and to hold an annual Forum of Journalists of Russia and Africa, supplemented by working meetings, conferences, seminars, and training sessions. The association said that training of journalists is key in the areas of cooperation, along with information exchange, legal framework strengthening, and mutual inclusion of media in national networks.<sup>460</sup>

<sup>455</sup> [Russia](#), RSF, accessed 22 November 2023.

<sup>456</sup> Duursma, A. and Masuhr, N. (2022) ‘[Russia's return to Africa in a historical and global context: Anti-imperialism, patronage, and opportunism](#)’, *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 29(4), pp. 407–423.

<sup>457</sup> Clifford, C. and Gruzd, S. (2022) ‘[Russian and African Media: Exercising Soft Power](#)’ , SAIIA Policy Insights, 125

<sup>458</sup> [Russia to organize training for senior journalists in Africa](#), GhanaWeb, 10 July 2018

<sup>459</sup> [О нас — Российско-Африканский клуб](#), accessed: 8 December 2023

<sup>460</sup> [Меморандум журналистов Россия Африка — Российско-Африканский клуб](#), accessed: 8 December 2023.

The Forum of Journalists of Russia and Africa was also announced during the July 2023 Russia-Africa Summit, and further training pledged for African journalists in Russia.

Since the summit, Russian ministries, state-owned media, and universities from Russia have increased the training of journalists. These trainings are supported by entities such as Russian African Club and Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund<sup>461</sup> which although seemingly independent get their mandate from the State. The Rossotrudnichestvo Agency<sup>462</sup> an international relations state agency is also involved in organising and funding the trainings.

Training programmes include workshops, webinars, junkets, and internships.<sup>463</sup> SputnikPro, the training arm of Sputnik has trained journalists in more than 50 countries in Africa.<sup>464</sup> The training agency provides seminars, lectures, and workshops (both in-person and online) to people other than journalists, including media and communication practitioners, press secretaries, bloggers, and journalism students. Training is provided in multiple languages including Russian, English, Spanish, Chinese, French, and Persian. The topics covered range from multimedia content creation to effective use of social media platforms and strategies for enhancing website traffic.<sup>465</sup>

Furthermore, cooperation agreements with local media outlets exist in several African countries, including Algeria, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Eritrea, Morocco, South Africa, and Zimbabwe<sup>466</sup>.

The InteRussia Fellowship Programme for International Journalists includes training at Russian state-owned media. In July 2023, 10 African journalists participated in a month-long internship arranged by SputnikPro, under the InteRussia programme, jointly conducted by the Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Fund<sup>467</sup> and the Rossotrudnichestvo Agency<sup>468</sup>. Three of these journalists represented media houses that had signed content-sharing Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with Russian state-owned media outlets.<sup>469 470</sup> The training programme covered cultural aspects, training on geopolitical issues from a Russian perspective, and visits to significant locations in Moscow and Saint Petersburg. Participants had travel expenses, accommodation, meals, visa support, and a stipend covered entirely by the programme.<sup>471</sup>

During the training, a special SputnikPro session, titled 'Russia and Africa: What remains, what changes, what is new,' was held at the Sputnik's headquarters that covered insights into Russia's history, architecture, public transport system, and cultural heritage.<sup>472</sup> Journalists in this programme also attended the second Russia-Africa Economic and Humanitarian Forum in St. Petersburg on 27-28 July 2023.<sup>473</sup>

One participant, Nqobile Tshili from *Zimbabwe Chronicle*, wrote an article titled 'Journey into Russia: Unveiling architectural marvels, efficient transport lessons for Zimbabwe', which was published on 5 August 2023.<sup>474</sup> In the article, he applauds the transport system and the architecture of the city, while emphasising the complexity of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. He writes:

<sup>461</sup> [Journalists from Africa take part in SputnikPro face-to-face internship](#), Rossiya Segodnya Press Service, 4 July 2023

<sup>462</sup> Ibid.

<sup>463</sup> [Behind the scenes of the preparation of the Russia-Africa summit](#), The Africa Report, 20 February 2023

<sup>464</sup> [Zim media headed for exciting times](#), The Herald, 29 July 2023

<sup>465</sup> [SputnikPro - Rossiya Segodnya](#), accessed 10 December 2023

<sup>466</sup> [TASS leading Zimbabwean news agency sign memorandum on cooperation](#), TASS, 27 July 2023

<sup>467</sup> [Journalists from Africa take part in SputnikPro face-to-face internship](#), Rossiya Segodnya Press Service, 4 July 2023

<sup>468</sup> Ibid.

<sup>469</sup> [Ethiopian, Russian News Agencies Sign Memorandum of Understanding](#), Ethiopian News Agency, June 2022

<sup>470</sup> [TASS signs cooperation memorandums with news agencies from Republic of Congo, Senegal](#), Russian News Agency, 28 July 2023

<sup>471</sup> [InteRussia fellowship programme for foreign journalists as part of the "New Generation"](#), International Youth Edu-Skills Foundation, 21 April 2023

<sup>472</sup> [Des journalistes africains font un stage en présentiel chez SputnikPro](#), Sputnik Afrique, 4 July 2023

<sup>473</sup> [Journalists from Africa take part in SputnikPro face-to-face internship](#), Rossiya Segodnya, 4 July 2023

<sup>474</sup> [Journey into Russia: Unveiling architectural marvels, efficient transport lessons for Zimbabwe](#), Chronicle, 5 August 2023

‘Contrary to the Western portrayal of Russia as an aggressor in the Ukrainian conflict [...] Issues like the banning of the Russian language in certain Ukrainian regions were unreported in the media, but experiencing it first-hand allowed us to see beyond the headlines.’

Participants of the programme learn news production, photo and video content creation, infographics, radio production, and design.<sup>475</sup> It has drawn participants from Botswana<sup>476</sup>, Cameroon<sup>477</sup>, Ethiopia<sup>478</sup>, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.<sup>479</sup>

### c. Türkiye's and Anadolu Agency

Türkiye expanded its presence into sub-Saharan Africa from its initial North African footprint, and Türkiye's perspective through state media training is filtering into African media. While the core focus of the workshops has been war reporting and regional geo-politics through the African Media Representatives Training Program (AFMED), evidence suggests that some participants emerge from training as promoters of Türkiye's ties with their country.

Türkiye has poor media freedom and constitutes an oppressive environment for independent journalism. In 2023, it ranked 165th out of 180 countries on RSF's Press Freedom Index. The vast majority of media (90%) are now under government control and independent journalists increasingly face violence.<sup>480</sup> The government has two main state media bodies: state news agency Anadolu Agency (AA), and the public broadcaster, Turkish Radio and Television (TRT). Key personnel within these entities are appointed on the basis of party lines.<sup>481</sup> TRT was placed under the Presidency's Directorate of Communications published in a July 2018 issue of the official gazette.<sup>482 483</sup>

In May 2022, the first Türkiye-Africa Media Summit<sup>484</sup> was held with media practitioners from 48 African countries.<sup>485</sup> TRT has been active in Africa since 2014, broadcasting in Hausa (a language mostly spoken in northern Nigeria and parts of the Sahel region) and Swahili (mostly prominent in East Africa), broadcasting terrestrially. AA also has offices in Addis Ababa, Abuja, Khartoum, Tripoli, Tunis, and correspondents in Kenya.<sup>486</sup>

The AA News Academy (AA Akademi), offers training programmes each year for journalists from several countries, both as physical events and webinars. The curricula covers topics such as social media and digital journalism, recognising disinformation, basic videography and photography, news writing, interviewing techniques, and Turkish politics and culture. Some courses include field activities such as skills for working in war and related emergency situations.<sup>487</sup>

Türkiye's engagement with African journalists is also pursued by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and related communities (Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı, YTB), Turkish Agency for Cooperation and Coordination (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, TİKA) and Directorate of Communications under Republic of Türkiye's Presidency. TİKA has run workshops for journalists from Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya,

<sup>475</sup> [SputnikPro](#), Rossiya Segodnya, accessed 3 December 2023.

<sup>476</sup> [Journalists From Botswana Join SputnikPro for the First Time](#), Sputnik Africa, 9 June 2023

<sup>477</sup> [African Journalists in Moscow for Training](#), This Day Live, 21 October 2022

<sup>478</sup> [SputnikPro Provides Training for Ethiopian Journalists](#), ENA English, 21 April 2021

<sup>479</sup> [African Journalists in Moscow for Training](#), This Day Live, 21 October 2022

<sup>480</sup> [Türkiye](#), RSF, accessed 24 November 2023.

<sup>481</sup> [Freedom of Expression and the Press in Turkey](#), Platform24, accessed: 8 December 2023.

<sup>482</sup> [TRT Cumhurbaşkanlığı ilgili kurum oldu](#), TRT, 24 July 2018.

<sup>483</sup> Tunç, A. (2015) [Media integrity report: Media ownership and financing in Turkey](#), Media Observatory

<sup>484</sup> [Scramble to be Africa's window on the world](#), Le Monde diplomatique, 1 December 2023.

<sup>485</sup> [Türkiye-Africa Media Summit kicks off](#), İletişim, 25 May 2022.

<sup>486</sup> [International Offices](#), Anadolu Agency, accessed 24 November 2023.

<sup>487</sup> [Anadolu Agency's war journalism training hosts 14 African journalists](#), Anadolu Agency

Mauritania, Namibia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, and Zambia.<sup>488</sup> The agency has also donated equipment to media in Ethiopia<sup>489</sup> and Gambia.<sup>490</sup>

### The African Media Representatives Training Programme (AFMED)

The African Media Representatives Training Programme (AFMED), ran for the first time in 2019 as a three-week course. It is facilitated by AA with support from the Presidency for YTB, and Turkish state bodies – the Association of African Researchers (AFAM) and African Coordination and Training Centre (AKEM). In 2019, 20 journalists from 13 countries including Chad, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Libya, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Somalia, Tanzania and Tunisia participated. The programme took a hiatus in 2020 and resumed in 2021 in the form of a week-long webinar from 24-31 May 2021.<sup>491</sup>

AFMED aims to train journalists in the start of or mid-career - specifically under the age of 40. The training happens in Istanbul and Ankara and is offered in English, with participants working in the AA or TRT newsrooms. Aside from visa costs, which the participants have to pay, the programme covers flight tickets, meals, accommodation, city tours and other cultural events.<sup>492</sup> Participants went on a cultural tour in Istanbul, and then to Ankara to the AA headquarters, Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, and Maarif Foundation to see Türkiye's educational initiatives.

While news reports announcing the training said it covered digital and data journalism, crisis reporting and interview techniques,<sup>493</sup> statements from participants indicate a change in views on the country after the training. One participant from Nigeria, Fatima Daura, said in an interview with AA that it had helped shift her perspective on events. She said that ‘unlike European countries, Türkiye’s relationship with African countries has always been built on a win-win basis.<sup>494</sup> Türkiye has done a lot of work for Africa and most Africans do not know this. If a country does a good job for Africa, I think it should be shown to people. Because Türkiye is not like other European countries, Turks are not coming to Africa to exploit us.’

Another Nigerian journalist Linus Unah said that Türkiye and Africa needed to tell each other’s story. ‘Thanks to this programme, journalists in Africa are informed about Türkiye’s economy, politics and culture. After the programme, we returned to our countries as ambassadors. When someone says something bad about Türkiye in our country, we defend. I think Africa needs to learn a lot from Türkiye,’ he said.

A programme coordinator at AKEM, an organising partner, said, ‘We know that the selected journalists are important people in their country and they are effective people in their field.’ He also said the journalists will be influential in introducing Türkiye to their countries and in establishing commercial and cultural relationships.<sup>495</sup>

Some of the participants<sup>496</sup> had existing links with Turkish state media. Unah is a freelancer and has written analyses about Nigeria which were published by TRT World in 2018 and 2019.<sup>497 498 499</sup>

<sup>488</sup> Morales, D.M. et al. (2021) [It is about their story. How China, Turkey and Russia influence the media in Africa](#), KASMedia Africa.

<sup>489</sup> [Turkey donates media equipment to Ethiopian News Agency](#), Anadolu Agency, 23 June 2017

<sup>490</sup> [Turkish aid agency donates technical media equipment to Gambia](#), Anadolu Agency, 20 December 2023

<sup>491</sup> [Africa Rise With Turkey](#), Africa News Channel, 24 October 2019

<sup>492</sup> [Afrikali medya temsilcilerine Türkiye'de eğitim](#), Anadolu Agency, 15 October 2019

<sup>493</sup> [Afrikali gazeteciler Türkiye'deki medya eğitiminden övgüyle bahsetti](#), Anadolu Agency, 13 December 2019

<sup>494</sup> ibid

<sup>495</sup> [Training for African journalists to boost ties with continent](#), Daily Sabah, 27 October 2019

<sup>496</sup> AA Akademi, Twitter, 6 November 2019

<sup>497</sup> [Is the US making moves to counter Chinese and Russian influence in Africa?](#) TRT World, 10 January, 2019

<sup>498</sup> [Can Africa's free trade agreement transform the continent?](#) TRT World, 7 July, 2019

<sup>499</sup> [Nigerians await dawn of a new era after presidential election](#), TRT World, 27 February 2019

Minasse Wondimu, another participant of the 2019 training, works as a photojournalist at the Anadolu Agency regional bureau in Addis Ababa.<sup>500</sup>

One of the participants of the training, Ayele Addis Ambelu, an Ethiopian journalist, went on to write six articles for Africa News Channel, two during the period of the training, which echo Turkish state narratives.

Addis served as a director of the news department at Africa News Channel, a news channel that provides only a few contact details on the ‘About us’ page<sup>501</sup>. The sentiments expressed in the articles he has written about Türkiye present a narrative that positions it as an active and positive player in the international arena, especially in its engagements with Africa. The pieces express views that align with Türkiye's efforts to leverage economic, educational, and cultural connections to build strong and mutually beneficial relationships.

For instance, an article<sup>502</sup> titled ‘Türkiye’s Role In Ethiopian And Horn Of Africa Politics’ published on 17 August 2021, covers a meeting between Ethiopian Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu. The article says that leaders discussed the 125th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Ethiopia and Sudan, highlighting Ethiopia's plans to strengthen ties with Türkiye. The piece includes the historical and cultural ties between Ethiopia and Türkiye and Türkiye’s investment in Ethiopia, amounting to USD2.5 billion in manufacturing sectors. Military partnerships are also included in the discussion in light of Türkiye’s proximity, military base in Mogadishu, and drone technology advancements.

Another article, published on 17 October 2021 with the headline ‘Türkiye Government Impactful Efforts in Africa: Alternative Power Balance of Africa’<sup>503</sup>, covers the Türkiye president’s four-day tour of Angola, Togo, and Nigeria, including Turkish investments and development partnerships.

War reporting training is a vital skill for journalists' survival, and Türkiye's commendable contributions in this field deserve recognition. However, alumni demonstrate influence resulting from the training, adopting pro-Türkiye stances subsequently.

## 4. Recommendations

### a. Disclosure standards

- i. **Attribution:** Any content that is created through training programmes or on the basis of story grants should include a disclosure statement about the funder.

### b. Industry initiatives

- i. **Needs-based training:** Local news media, potentially through editorial guilds, should identify what skills are lacking and build forms of capacity building that have legitimate value, and uphold international journalism standards and best practice designed to safeguard against undue editorial interference and other forms of media capture. Ideally, this has to include

<sup>500</sup> [15th Ethiopia Marathon](#), Anadolu Ajansi, 22 November 2015

<sup>501</sup> [ABOUT US Archives](#), Africa News Channel, accessed 11 December 2023.

<sup>502</sup> [Turkey's role in Ethiopian and Horn of Africa politics](#), Africa News Channel, 17 August 2021.

<sup>503</sup> [Turkey Government Impactful Efforts in Africa : Alternative Power Balance of Africa](#), Africa News Channel, 17 October 2021

- roll-outs to smaller centres within a country to ensure a more fair market place for journalists.
- ii. **Funding for training:** Newsrooms should work with editorial guilds and industry experts to identify skill sets to ‘future proof’ journalists and newsrooms. This would aid in setting standards for accepting funding for training.
  - iii. **Ethics inquiries:** Newsrooms, in partnership with editorial guilds, should hold periodic ethics inquiries to examine the national patterns around coverage of foreign affairs and identify practices that go against international journalism best practice while supporting the goals of foreign states over the interests of the public.

#### c. Editorial Systems

- i. **Protections:** Media companies and journalists should thoroughly examine training opportunities before participating. This includes co-designing, reviewing the curriculum, courseware, publication expectations, funder identities and programme impacts on graduates.
- ii. **Refusal of deleterious ‘support’:** Newsrooms, with support from editorial guilds, must determine what forms of exchanges primarily serve funder interests and/or undermine editorial independence, over local needs, and refuse such support if it’s not within newsroom or public interest
- iii. **Author register:** Newsrooms accepting content from freelance journalists must request and check their affiliations before publishing.
- iv. **Guidelines for training programmes:** Newsrooms should publish (and create if they do not already exist) clear editorial guidelines that outlines what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable contributions to training programmes, including guidelines on disclosure of conflicts of interest.
- v. **Audits:** Conduct regular audits of supplied training programmes to ensure compliance with ethical standards and ensure alignment with the needs of the media outlet. The audits should include assessments from editors about the improvement of journalistic skills after training, historical curriculum analysis, documentation of any patterns in previous training programmes that have led to compromised reporting, and take corrective action as needed.
- vi. **Training:** Newsrooms should regularly train editorial staff and contributors on ethical training practices, including what a journalist or editor should do if a ‘bribe’ is offered. Newsrooms should update editorial policies when deemed necessary, bearing in mind the potential impact of new media platforms.

#### d. Ombuds mechanisms:

- i. **Ethics Hotline:** establish an ethics hotline where staff and the public can report concerns about potential ethical violations, including concerns about op-ed contributors.
- ii. **Collaboration:** create mechanisms for newsrooms to collaborate or share information about questionable training programmes, and work together to improve industry standards around home-grown training programmes.

## 5. Conclusion

This report exposed how foreign states exploit journalism training to covertly groom African journalists. While skills development for journalists is essential, the packaging of political

perspectives and formation of partnerships found in these training programmes primarily serves geopolitical aims over empowering public interest journalism.

State-sponsored training programmes to promote foreign propaganda harms public debate and trust in the media. The inclusion of a variety of incentives to encourage journalists to attend may seed the ground for future ethical lapses, while the training programmes themselves foster partnerships between the state and participants that can be the basis of later paid-for content.

There are legitimate concerns around the potential for undue influence from some foreign governments and actors through sponsorship of journalism training programmes in Africa. Any media interventions offered require transparency around funding, and intentions for training. African media should retain agency in determining skills gaps and training needs. Support for homegrown journalism schools and professional bodies to deliver context-appropriate training could mitigate risks of media capture down the line. Urgent action is needed to reassert ethical standards, enact reforms, and empower journalists to recognise and resist illegitimate attempts to shape narratives. By illuminating techniques that have previously operated undetected, this report aims to spur collective efforts to reclaim African media environments and shape skills development to serve democratic progress and continental sovereignty.

## 6. Methodology

This report relies on a combination of desktop literature reviews and primary research to surface new evidence. The literature review was designed to help the authors to understand existing academic research and industry views on the topic, as well as to identify gaps in industry knowledge as avenues for further research. The framing for the report was workshopped with editor guilds in the target countries at in-person stakeholder roundtable meetings. The new primary research was led by full-time researchers, who combined key informant interviews with digital research that draws on both open source intelligence (OSINT) and social media intelligence (SOCMINT) techniques to identify pundits who originally publish in state-affiliated media outside Africa before republishing the same content on the content.

The OSINT and SOCMINT research methodology made extensive use of specialised analysis frameworks, including the ABCDE and DISARM frameworks.

The resulting report was written by a principal researcher, supported by assistant researchers/analysts, working under the supervision of the report editor. The draft report was validated by in-house fact-checkers, and then reviewed by representatives from the editor guilds, who contributed to context and helped to shape the recommendations

**A full explanation of the methodology, including an explanation of the tools and digital techniques used, can be found in annexure A.**

## Appendix I: Known Content Sharing Agreements

### a. Content Agreements with African News Agencies

Sponsor Country	Sponsor Media Agency	African Country	African Media Agency
China	China Global TV Network (CGTN)	Nigeria	<a href="#">News Agency of Nigeria</a>
China	China Global TV Network (CGTN)	South Africa	<a href="#">Independent Media Group</a>
China	China Daily	South Africa	<a href="#">African News Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Ethiopia	<a href="#">Ethiopian News Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Gabon	<a href="#">Gabonese Press Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Kenya	<a href="#">Kenya News Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Nigeria	<a href="#">News Agency of Nigeria</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Senegal	<a href="#">Senegalese Press Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Namibia	<a href="#">The Namibia Press Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Ghana	<a href="#">Ghana News Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Zambia	<a href="#">Zambia News and Information Services (ZANIS)</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	South Africa	<a href="#">Government Communication and Information System</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Ethiopia	<a href="#">Ethiopian News Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	South Africa	<a href="#">African News Agency</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Morocco	<a href="#">Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP)</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Algeria	<a href="#">Algeria Press Service</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Côte d'Ivoire	<a href="#">Agence Ivoirienne de Presse</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Congo	<a href="#">ACI news agency</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Ethiopia	<a href="#">Ethiopian News Agency</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	South Africa	<a href="#">South African Government</a>

			<u>News Agency</u>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Tunisia	<a href="#">Tunis Afrique Presse</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Algeria	<a href="#">Algerian Press Service</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	South Africa	<a href="#">South African news</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Morocco	<a href="#">Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP)</a>
Russia	TASS (Russian News Agency)	Congo-Brazzaville	<a href="#">ACI news agency</a>
Russia	TASS (Russian News Agency)	Algeria	<a href="#">Algeria Press Service</a>
Russia	TASS (Russian News Agency)	DRC	<a href="#">Republic of Congo's Central African News Agency's (ADIAC)</a>
Russia	TASS (Russian News Agency)	Namibia	<a href="#">Namibia Press Agency</a>
Russia	TASS (Russian News Agency)	Zimbabwe	<a href="#">New Ziana</a>
Russia	TASS (Russian News Agency)	Senegal	<a href="#">Senegalese Press Agency</a>
Türkiye	Anadolu Agency	Ethiopia	<a href="#">Ethiopian News Agency</a>
Türkiye	Anadolu Agency	Ethiopia	<a href="#">Ethiopian Press Agency</a>

**b. Content Agreements with Public or State Broadcaster**

<b>Sponsor Country</b>	<b>Sponsor Media</b>	<b>African Country</b>	<b>African Media Agency</b>
China	China Global TV Network (CGTN)	Kenya	<a href="#">Kenya Broadcasting Corporation</a>
China	China Global TV Network (CGTN)	Nigeria	<a href="#">Nigerian Television Authority</a>
China	China Global TV Network (CGTN)	South Africa	<a href="#">South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)</a>
China	China Global TV Network (CGTN)	Uganda	<a href="#">Uganda Broadcasting Corporation (UBC)</a>
China	China Daily	Nigeria	<a href="#">Nigerian Television Authority</a>
China	Chinese Central TV (CCTV)	Zimbabwe	<a href="#">Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)</a>
China	China National Radio (CNR)	Kenya	<a href="#">Kenya Broadcasting Corporation</a>
China	China Radio International (CRI)	Kenya	<a href="#">Kenya Broadcasting Corporation</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News	Senegal	<a href="#">Radiodiffusion Television</a>

	Agency)		<a href="#">Senegalaise</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Kenya	<a href="#">Kenya Broadcasting Corporation</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Tanzania	Tanzania's Information Services Department
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Mozambique	<a href="#">Television of Mozambique</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Zambia	<a href="#">Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC)</a>
China	China News Service (CNS)	Eritrea	<a href="#">Eri-TV</a>
China	China Global TV Network (CGTN)	Burundi	<a href="#">Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi</a>
China	Chinese Central TV (CCTV)	Namibia	<a href="#">Namibia Broadcasting Corporation</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Nigeria	<a href="#">Nigerian Television Authority (NTA)</a>
China	Xinhua (New China News Agency)	Zambia	<a href="#">Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation</a>
France	Radio France Internationale (RFI)	Burundi	<a href="#">Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Egypt	<a href="#">Akbar Al-Youm</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Egypt	<a href="#">Al-Ahram</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Ethiopia	<a href="#">Fana Broadcasting Corporate S.C</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	DRC	<a href="#">Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Zimbabwe	<a href="#">Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Egypt	Various
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	DRC	<a href="#">Radio-Television Nationale Congolaise</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Eritrea	<a href="#">Eri-TV</a>
Russia	Sputnik News Agency	Côte D'Ivoire	<a href="#">Cote D'Ivoire's Agence Ivoirienne de Presse (AIP)</a>
Türkiye	Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)	Ethiopia	<a href="#">Ethiopian Broadcasting Corporation</a>
Türkiye	Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT)	Niger	<a href="#">Radio and Television of Niger</a>

### c. Other agreements

In addition to specific content relationships between news organisations, we have mapped and counted commitments from Russia and China with African countries.

#### China

Chinese state media content-sharing agreements with media organisations in Benin<sup>504</sup>, Burundi<sup>505</sup>, Chad<sup>506</sup>, Central African Republic<sup>507</sup>, DR Congo, Egypt<sup>508</sup>, Ethiopia<sup>509</sup>, Gabon<sup>510</sup>, Ghana<sup>511</sup>, Kenya<sup>512</sup>, Liberia<sup>513</sup>, Madagascar<sup>514</sup>, Mali, Morocco<sup>515</sup>, Mozambique<sup>516</sup>, Namibia<sup>517</sup>, Niger, Nigeria<sup>518</sup>, Rwanda<sup>519</sup>, Senegal<sup>520</sup>, Sierra Leone<sup>521</sup>, South Africa<sup>522</sup>, South Sudan<sup>523</sup>, Sudan<sup>524</sup>, Tanzania<sup>525</sup>, Tunisia<sup>526</sup>, Uganda<sup>527</sup>, Zambia<sup>528</sup> and Zimbabwe<sup>529</sup>.

#### Russia

Russia state media content-sharing agreements with media organisations in Algeria<sup>530</sup>, DR Congo<sup>531</sup>, Egypt<sup>532</sup>, Ethiopia<sup>533</sup>, Namibia<sup>534</sup>, Senegal<sup>535</sup>, South Africa<sup>536</sup>, Tunisia<sup>537</sup>, Zimbabwe<sup>538</sup>

<sup>504</sup> [Coopération sino-béninoise: L'axe Cotonou-Pékin renforcé par 13 accords bilatéraux](#), La Nation, 4 September, 2023

<sup>505</sup> [News exchange partnership between Xinhua News and Renewal](#), Radio Television Nationale de Burundi, 4 January 2018

<sup>506</sup> [China Media Group, African media expand cooperation](#), CGTN, 21 August 2023

<sup>507</sup> [Centrafrlique/Communication : Bientôt un accord d'échange d'informations entre l'Agence Chine Nouvelle et l'Agence Centrafrlique Presse](#), Agence Centrafricaine de Presse, 17 December 2007

<sup>508</sup> [Daily News Egypt signs content images sharing agreement with Xinhua](#), Daily News Egypt, 19 October 2019

<sup>509</sup> [Ethiopian, Russian News Agencies Sign Memorandum of Understanding](#), ENA, 6 October 2022

<sup>510</sup> [Ali Bongo Ondimba-Xi Jinping: A New Vision](#) [Ali Bongo Ondimba-Xi Jinping: A New Vision - World Today News](#), 20 April 2023

<sup>511</sup> [GNA-Xinhua To Exchange News](#), Ghana Web, 10 November 2023

<sup>512</sup> [Kenya-China news ready to counter fake news](#), Kenya News Agency, 3 October 2023

<sup>513</sup> [China News Agency seeks Liberian media, investment collaborations](#), Journal de Cameroun, 6 February 2018

<sup>514</sup> [China Media Group, African media expand cooperation](#), CGTN, 21 August 2023

<sup>515</sup> [Signature d'un accord de coopération entre la MAP et l'Agence Chine nouvelle - Le Matin.ma](#), Le Matin, 16 June 2017

<sup>516</sup> [COM O "NOTICIAS": Xinhua com intención de consolidar parceria](#), Noticias Online, 25 November 2022

<sup>517</sup> [China, Namibia ink agreement to further exchange in radio, broadcasting](#), Xinhua, 29 November, 2019

<sup>518</sup> [Afri-China, Xinhua sign content partnership](#), Africa China Press Centre, 27 September 2019

<sup>519</sup> [New Times, Xinhua to strengthen ties](#), New Times, 30 June 2011

<sup>520</sup> [Partenariat: Seneweb signe une convention avec l'agence de presse Xinhua](#), Seneweb News, 15 June 2016

<sup>521</sup> [China, Sierra Leone Sign News Agency Pact](#), All Africa14 April 2001

<sup>522</sup> [SA China relations strengthened | Government Communication and Information System \(GCIS\)](#), GCIS, 9 July 2004

<sup>523</sup> [China to enhance media exchanges, cooperation with South Sudan: envoy - Xinhua | English.news.cn](#), Xinhua, 25 May 2019

<sup>524</sup> [Sudan and China Discuss Ways of Strengthening Media and Press Cooperation](#), Sudan Ministry of Information, 29 October 2021

<sup>525</sup> [Xinhua signs MOU with Tanzanian information services department on media cooperation - Xinhua | English.news.cn](#), Xinhua, 22 July 2019

<sup>526</sup> [Tunisian media eyes deepening of cooperation with Xinhua](#), New China, 21 July 2021

<sup>527</sup> Ibid

<sup>528</sup> [Zambian media outlets want stronger cooperation with Xinhua](#), Xinhua, 27 August 2023

<sup>529</sup> [Xinhua visits Zimpapers](#), The Herald, 7 August 2012

<sup>530</sup> [RT moves its pawns in Africa, opening a bureau in Algeria](#), Reporters Without Borders, 4 April 2023

<sup>531</sup> [TASS, Central African News Agency signs memorandum on cooperation](#), Russia-Africa

<sup>532</sup> [Sputnik Expands Cooperation With Egypt](#), Sputnik International, Accessed 28 November 2023

<sup>533</sup> [Ethiopian, Russian News Agencies Sign Memorandum of Understanding](#), ENA, 6 October 2022

<sup>534</sup> [TASS has signed a memorandum of cooperation with Namibia's leading news agency NAMPA](#), Summit Africa, undated

<sup>535</sup> [TASS signs cooperation memorandums with news agencies from Republic of Congo, Senegal](#), TASS, 28 November 2023

<sup>536</sup> [SAnews, Sputnik ink cooperation pact](#), SAnews, 7 March 2017

<sup>537</sup> [TAP and Sputnik news agencies sign cooperation agreement](#), Zawya by LSEG, 30 September 2023

<sup>538</sup> [Zimbabwe, Russia Strengthen Media Cooperation to Tackle West's Disinformation](#), Sputnik Africa

## **Appendix II: Training attendees**

### **African attendees of CAPC fellowship in China**

2015-2010: including Philip Etyang (The Standard, Kenya), Abduel Elinaza (Tanzania), Paul Ntambara, Yunus Kemp (South Africa), Zekarias Woldemariam (Ethiopia),

2016: 28 journalists from 27 African countries including Fredrick P. W. Gaye (news editor of In Profile Daily Newspaper in Liberia), Taddeo Bwambale (New Vision newspaper in Uganda), Ikenna Emewu (The Sun Newspaper in Nigeria),

2017: 27 journalists from 27 African countries including Alpha Daffae Senkpeni (reporter and editor at FrontPage Africa, Liberia), Yvonne Akonda Sundu (Nation Publications Limited, Malawi), Edmund Smith-Asante (Daily Graphic, Ghana), Thierry Ramaswamy (Mauritius Broadcasting Corp), Melanie Peters (Independent Media Group, South Africa), Rohey Bittaye (Gambian Radio and Television Services), Ronald Kato (Vision Group, Uganda), Blandine Niyongere (Le Renouveau, Burundi), Theopista Nsanzugwanko (Tanzania)

2018: 29 media professionals from 28 African countries, including Solomon Elusoji (Nigeria), Trix Ingado (Kenya).

2019: 34 African journalists, including Francis Pelenah (Liberia), Mugabo Mubarak (Uganda), Frederic Byumvuhore (The New Times Rwanda), Victor Onyango (Daily Nation, Kenya), Chris Nhlane (The Nation newspaper, Malawi), Wendyl Martin (IOL, South Africa),

2020: Online training

2021: Online training

2022: Bryan Morris Ochieng Otieno (Kenya), Nelson Kiva (Uganda), Ephrahim Bahemu (Tanzania), Bereket Sisay (Ethiopia)

2023: Francis Mtalaki (Kenya, Citizen TV) Talibeh Hydara (Standard Newspaper, Gambia) and Momodou Lamin Choi (QTV, Gambia)

## Annexure A: Methodology

### a. Summary

This research investigates foreign states' techniques for running influence campaigns targeting media outlets across Africa. Our methodology integrates elements from existing approaches through a desktop literature review and primary evidence, providing an understanding of three media influence attempts on the continent.

We applied this methodology to investigate three topics - sponsored punditry, content-sharing agreements and sponsored training. These tactics are used by foreign state-linked entities to get their narratives into African media covertly.

The study focused initially on Kenya, South Africa, and Zambia, but broadened to include other countries in Africa. It aims to prompt deeper discussions within African countries' editor guilds and media industry bodies. The goal is to explore suggested remedial measures to enhance op-ed credibility and strengthen newsroom systems.

### b. Data collection

We collected data from public online sources and social media to identify foreign state-linked individuals within African media, using open-source intelligence (OSINT) and social media to do this (SOCMINT) served as a primary data collection strategy. In this way, we identified and traced potential foreign state-linked individuals. Primarily, we used CivicSignal's MediaCloud (a database of 54 country collections of African media stories that allows for searching, analysis and visualisations of media content), search engines and social media to do this.

Data was obtained from publicly available online records, including calls for applications, news coverage, and academic reports. The methodology for the three reports was cyclic and iterative, involving three broad steps:

- i. Develop resources
- ii. Collect data
- iii. Analyse content

### c. Develop resources

To begin our analysis, we collected data from public online sources and social media to identify foreign state-linked individuals within African media.

First, we built actor watchlists. We documented information about known foreign-aligned individuals and institutional actors using secondary sources and compiled their information in a dossier created specifically for this research. We looked for other participants who showed the same patterns of links with the foreign power, eg. attended the same programmes.

We also identified institutional actors such as foreign state-aligned news agencies and African media outlets previously linked to foreign influence operations that were documented, together with content-sharing agreements.

We created lexicons of keywords, phrases, and themes to monitor. For example, previous research exposed anti-French influence campaigns on social media. Individuals who were prominently associated with similar lines were scrutinised for possible foreign ties. MediaCloud has search functionality to allow for the assessment of trends in topics over time, which may provide evidence of

foreign influence efforts. Individuals mentioned in, or writing about, trending topics linked with foreign governments can be identified in this way.

#### **d. Collect data**

With resources in place, we moved to data collection using tailored tools and techniques. For digital media, Facebook, and Twitter, we scanned content using the built queries and watchlists to identify posts matching our investigation criteria. Relevant content was flagged and documented by archiving links. Specifically, we:

- a) Monitored actors based on our watchlists and other resources
- b) Noted behaviours
- c) Collected engagement metrics and narrative patterns
- d) Monitored content, closely examining trending topics and content across platforms
- e) Mapped interconnected networks spreading foreign state narratives to identify amplification

Within this Actor-Behavior-Content framing, we also utilised specialised resources and techniques aligned with established frameworks for studying Information Manipulation and Interference (IMI) campaigns.

We identified potential case studies, in this way, to explore further.

#### **e. Analyse content**

With resources in place, we moved to data collection using tailored tools and techniques. For digital media and social media (largely LinkedIn and Twitter) we scanned content with our resources to identify pages and posts matching our investigation criteria. Relevant content was flagged and documented. Timelines were analysed to identify significant spikes potentially triggered by offline or online events.

Key narratives and messaging around foreign countries were closely examined by reviewing public communications across platforms. Specific quotes and claims were documented, such as 'people-to-people' or 'alternatives to western ...'. This analysis allowed us to identify the main narratives being pushed related to compromising African media independence.

Foreign state media ties were a central focus. An in-depth analysis of affiliations between influential African media figures and state entities was conducted, such as writing op-eds on China Global Television Network (CGTN).

#### **f. Conclusion**

The methodology is designed to be flexible, allowing for iterative data analysis based on thematic principles. This iterative approach enables the identification of emerging patterns and themes across different contexts and actors, leading to the formulation of accurate case studies.

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