THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA SOFT POWER ENGAGEMENT, ICT ENGAGEMENT, AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN AFRICA: INFLUENCE ON DEMOCRATIC NORMS AND VALUES

May 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DRG LEARNING, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH (DRG-LER) II ACTIVITY

PRC SOFT POWER ENGAGEMENT, ICT ENGAGEMENT, AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS IN AFRICA: INFLUENCE ON DEMOCRATIC NORMS AND VALUES

MAY 2022

Submitted by:
Jonas Bunte (Senior Evaluation Expert)
Susan Abbott (Senior Evaluation Expert)
Robert Wekesa (Senior Evaluation Expert)
Steven Binns, Miao Fung, Yoonsang Kim (Senior Evaluation Experts)
Nicodemus Minde (Subject Matter Expert)
Nchimunya Hamankolo (Subject Matter Expert)
Emeka Umejei (Subject Matter Expert)
Lucy Kaaria (Subject Matter Expert)
Francis Sowa (Subject Matter Expert)
Abu Turay (Research Assistant)
Solomon Elusoji (Research Assistant)
Camille Smith (Research Assistant)
Audra K. Grant (Senior Evaluation Expert)
Carl Levan (Senior Evaluation Expert)

Contractor:
NORC at the University of Chicago
4350 East West Highway, 8th Floor
Bethesda, MD 20814
Attention: Matthew Parry
Telephone: (301) 634-5444; Email: Parry-Matthew@norc.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACRONYMS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
APC	All People's Congress (Sierra Leone)
AU	African Union
AVIC	Aviation Industry Corporation of China
AVY	Africa Yong Voters
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CARI	China Africa Research Initiative
CCECC	China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation
CCTV	Closed-circuit television
CGTN	China Global Television Network
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COVID	Coronavirus disease
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
CRCC	China Railway Construction Corporation
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DoS	U.S. Department of State
DRG-LER	DRG Learning, Evaluation, and Research
DTH	Direct-to-Home
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECZ	Environmental Council of Zambia
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GoZ	Government of Zambia
ICANN	Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICU	Information and Communications University
IDI	In-depth interview
IRI	International Republican Institute

ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KBA	Kenya Bankers Association
KCM	Konkola Copper Mines
MCM	Mopani Copper Mines
MSD	Mines Safety Department
NAPSA	National Pension Scheme Authority
NCC	National Communications Commission
NFCA	Nonferrous China Africa
NIMC	National Identity Management Commission
NITDA	National Information Technology Development Agency
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NORC	National Opinion Research Center
PEACE	Pakistan East Africa Cable Express
PPE	Personal Protective Equipment
PRC	People's Republic of China
PRIMED	BBC's Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development
RDA	Road Development Agency
SACF	Sino-African Cooperation Forum
SADC	Southern Africa Development Community
SLAJ	Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLBC	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USG	U.S. Government
WTO	World Trade Organization
ZESC	Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

At USAID's request and with their guidance, the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago implemented a study to explore the political and social impact of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) engagement and investment in sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically, the study asks: **To what extent and how does PRC investment and engagement in Africa influence democratic norms and values on the continent?** Values refer to widely shared beliefs about how institutions and societies should be organized and function, while norms are informal rules or conventions about what is or is not acceptable behavior (Azari 2018). In the context of the current project, rule of law, freedom of expression, individual privacy, economic equality, fair labor practices, media objectivity, and government accountability materialized as salient values. Key norms included the government fulfilling its role to uphold regulatory regimes, provide access to economic opportunities, and prevent human rights violations, including the right to privacy, and the media reporting in an unbiased manner. However, in designing this study, we did not set out to assess the PRC influence on "norms" versus "values" as distinct analytic categories, but rather, we sought to locate identifiable patterns and behaviors that may be suggestive of PRC influence on norms and values as a whole.

Research for this study was conducted against the backdrop of global democratic decline across several regions, including Africa. We address the question of PRC influence in broader perspective to explore the relationship between the PRC's increasing engagement in sub-Saharan Africa and changes in attitudes and practices that may reflect shifts in democratic norms and values on the continent (e.g., patterns that align with rising authoritarianism and democratic backsliding) with the aim of informing recommendations for USAID programming and policy.

This study offers compelling evidence that the PRC's activities can weaken norms relating to regulatory regimes, economic opportunity, independent media reporting, and human rights, including the right to privacy. The adverse impact of the PRC's public diplomacy efforts on democratic norms and values are especially pronounced in the media and in ICT investments. However, resilient democratic norms and values held by Africans often counter the negative effects of PRC influence, an outcome apparent in the difference between elite and popular perspectives, and in the pockets of resistance to the PRC's soft power efforts.

With this in mind, the current report – using Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia as case study countries – focuses on four broad themes structured around specific questions related to elite social media narratives about the PRC's engagement; the impact of large infrastructure projects on local inclusion and governance dynamics; structural shifts in information and communications technology (ICTs) investment and surveillance; and media training and reporting. Three recurrent themes were consistent throughout the findings and provide an analytic framework for the study.

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

1 - *The effects of the PRC's soft power tactics are indirect, yet widespread.* Our evidence did not find overt authoritarian impacts of the PRC's influence on African institutions and actors, but instead revealed an uneven playing field between the PRC and African partners, which influenced human rights, including the right to privacy, and the context of business actors' transactions. This was most evident with regard to contract negotiation, the regulation of conduct, and the enforcement of legal frameworks. The PRC's

influence on illiberal practices in Africa was found to be a by-product of engagement rather than an intentional effort to subvert democracy on the continent.

2 - The resiliency of democratic norms and values on the continent. Postcolonial norms supportive of individual and state sovereignty appear to persevere. For example, in countries such as Zambia, where there is a backlash against the PRC, expectations of fair labor practices and access to economic opportunities for Zambian contractors signal the endurance of the democratic norm of equity.[1] Moreover, Zambians hold government officials accountable for failing to adequately uphold the legal and regulatory frameworks protecting the social contract between citizens and the state. In the ICT sector, activists and observers alike lament the lack of privacy rights, a circumstance enabled by poor enforcement of laws. Results from this research show resentment among Africans towards government dismissiveness of their privacy; this also speaks to Africans' democratic resilience. There is less evidence of the PRC contributing to the erosion of democratic norms and values on African social media, however, journalists in traditional media express far more criticism of the PRC's engagement in their countries, and importantly, point to the staying power of Western-influenced media institutions, which have been entrenched in Africa's media landscape for decades and serve as a bulwark against non-democratic influences. This is not to imply that Western media is always democratic.

3 - The PRC influences democratic norms and values in Africa in unexpected and sometimes contradictory ways. In attempts to understand the PRC's engagement, academic literature often examines the PRC's plans to expand to new markets, increase its access to resources, and enhance its political legitimacy. We found that these engagements may not be an overt attempt to undermine democratic norms and values, but instead, may result in unintended outcomes that sometimes erode and sometimes bolster democratic norms and values. As an example of the latter, the availability of cheap Chinese-made smartphones in Africa has increased the capacity of independent civil society. The findings also suggest that the PRC (i.e, the Chinese state) must be disaggregated analytically from other Chinese actors; indeed, the diversity of Chinese actors and interests suggests that activities may not constitute a single coherent foreign policy towards the African continent.

WHY PRC ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA MATTERS

Endowed with some of the world's fastest growing economies, Africa has captured the attention of the international community and the PRC in particular.[2] Economic, cultural, and political ties between Africa and the PRC have expanded rapidly, as trade volume alone increased from just $11 billion in 2000 to $185 billion in 2018.[3] According to the Johns Hopkins University SAIS China-Africa Research Initiative (SAIS-CARI), the PRC has invested over $340 billion in sub-Saharan Africa since 2003. The PRC's rapid economic growth domestically, along with a burgeoning middle class, drives their need for resources.[4] Africa has emerged as a center of gravity for the PRC's strategy of securing the long-term energy, resources, and export markets needed to sustain its growth. This is evident in unprecedented investment in Africa that has boosted key sectors in African countries (e.g. oil and mining) through

---

[1] This study was conducted before elections in Zambia in August 2021, which resulted in a change of presidential administration. Opposition leader Hakainde Hichilema defeated incumbent Edgar Lungu in a bitterly contested election. Hichilema's victory assuages concerns of democratic decline, but economic challenges are formidable.

[2] See Sanny and Selormey (2020)

[3] See Sanny and Selormey (2020)

[4] See Albert (2017)

lucrative trade arrangements. Chinese business diversification is also on the rise, as a growing number of firms capitalize on the PRC's incentives and subsidies and boldly venture into infrastructure, manufacturing, telecommunications, and agriculture. Due to this trend, PRC-Africa economic relations have expanded and deepened. In 2009, the PRC surpassed the U.S. as Africa's largest trade partner and is a critical source of foreign direct investment for African countries.[5]

The PRC's economic success is accompanied by a robust diplomatic push to create, in the shorter term, friendly relations with African governments and gain support in international forums for the PRC's worldview and goals and, in the longer term, generate continued markets for the PRC's goods and services.[6] For example, PRC President Xi Jinping chose the East African country of Tanzania as the site of his first overseas visit after assuming the presidency in March 2013. In a speech that invoked the strong historical relationship between the two nations, Xi also extolled Africa as a "continent of hope and promise" that "has become one of the fastest growing regions and is forging ahead like a galloping African lion." Since this time, the PRC has established friendly relations with multiple African governments by hosting political party trainings and cultivating one-on-one relationships with political figures. The PRC has also attempted to curry favor with African publics by offering an increasing number of subsidized cultural and educational exchange programs,[7] which bring approximately 80,000 African students to PRC every year for curated cultural immersion experiences (by comparison, the U.S. hosts approximately 40,000 African students per year). Further, the PRC offers free Chinese language instruction and internet access points at its 62 Confucius Centers, which are educational and cultural hubs housed at university campuses across the continent. The PRC has also become an increasingly significant player in the media sector of African countries.[8] PRC efforts to gain support and wield influence extend to international forums such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).[9]

Against the backdrop of these developments, debates are vigorous regarding the consequences of the PRC's strategy.[10] On the one hand, African governments and publics seem to welcome PRC investment in transportation infrastructure, ICTs, and media, due to the much-needed influx of capital and enhanced public service such investment provides. On the other hand, African sectoral actors are critical of investment terms that are perceived to infringe on African sovereignty and bring deficiencies to the quality of goods and services; they rebuke the PRC for their perceived disregard for African laws and human rights, specifically the exploitation of African labor and environmental standards.

KEY FINDINGS

The study occurred during August 2020-July 2021, with data collection implemented from December 2020-April 2021. The study – based on analysis of 1.2 million social media posts, 86 in-depth interviews, 13 focus group discussions and a review of 77 projects region-wide – finds that the effects of PRC investment and engagement on African democratic norms and values vary significantly. Specifically:

---

[5] See Albert (2017)

[6] See Cooke (2009)

[7] See Albert (2018)

[8] See Gagliardone et al (2014)

[9] See U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission (2021)

[10] See Cooke (2009)

- Reactions to PRC engagement are nuanced and complex across Africa. Engagement with the PRC is not seen as zero sum vis-à-vis the U.S. and few Africans feel compelled to choose one over the other. At the same time, our findings reinforce existing research indicating that the U.S. carries advantages over the PRC in certain areas, such as product availability and quality and information about democracy.

- There is divergence between elite discussions of PRC and local attitudes or experiences. For example, elites embrace the growing number of corporate responsibility activities in Africa, but impacted communities are often excluded from design of projects targeted for their communities or are unaware of PRC promises to mitigate adverse effects of projects. Exclusion does not mean silence, however. African communities are vocal in their expectations of government accountability and acknowledge that governments fail to enforce laws intended to uphold labor rights and extend opportunity to local economic actors.

- PRC engagement may provide African governments with some degree of legitimacy. For African perspectives, their support of visible PRC infrastructure projects and technology gives the impression that governments are moving their countries forward. In effect, "performance legitimacy," which is sometimes used by African leaders to rationalize democratic backsliding, is being outsourced.

- PRC soft power engagement in the media sectors of African countries is growing, with engagements making modest inroads in shaping the behavior of traditional media journalists. Journalists participating in PRC trainings demonstrated a notable shift in more positive reporting towards issues related to the PRC's image in Africa. But reporting of democracy and human rights concerns remains unchanged. Despite journalists' claims of being uninfluenced by PRC soft power efforts, our evidence suggests the PRC's investment in its media sector strategy may be providing at least some dividends for the PRC's image in Africa – an outcome that may inspire the PRC to export the model to other regions.

- Beyond explicit exercises of "sharp power," such as investments in surveillance capacity, Africans often see the PRC's illiberal influence as a by-product of engagement, rather than a purposeful effort to subvert democracy. This has important implications for whether U.S. foreign policy should view PRC-related activities as part of a coherent strategy or whether "Chinese" implies a diversity of interests, goals, and actors.

- A PRC shift towards digital diplomacy and other dimensions of soft power in Africa appears to correspond with ongoing reductions in infrastructure investment. There is also some evidence that these new activities are PRC reactions to recent U.S. disengagement from the continent.

- In the area of social media, the PRC's leaders do not appear to use social media platforms for public diplomacy messaging, nor does social media play a significant role in shaping the opinion of African elites towards the PRC and PRC-led development. It is through traditional media outlets where views are more likely to be shared about the PRC. Otherwise, commentary addressing the PRC is very limited on social media, as is the number of influencers discussing the PRC. This presents an opportunity for the U.S., as it appears that it would only require identification of a few influencers to disseminate messages regarding U.S.-supported development efforts in Africa.

These key findings enable specific strategy and programming recommendations in each of the study's themes, as follows:

AFRICAN GOVERNMENT AND ELITE SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES ON THE PRC

- Only a small portion of content from Twitter and Facebook was related to the PRC and the number of influencers talking about PRC issues on Facebook and Twitter was also minimal Although an unexpected finding, it points to a potential opportunity for USAID's approach to public engagement: working closely with the relatively small number of vocal journalists and thought leaders would likely have a disproportionate impact on public discourse on social media about the PRC.

- USAID should consider expanded and robust public diplomacy engagement through social media.

- Additional research that explores on which forums elites discuss PRC and what issues are of interest would also be valuable, as would comparison of elite views versus those of mass publics.

LOCAL INCLUSION AND GOVERNANCE AROUND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS AND GOVERNANCE

- Efforts might focus on addressing the dependency of governments on PRC actors.

- USAID interventions could focus more on revising legal frameworks, increasing citizen awareness around labor laws and rights, and establishing grievance mechanisms to address externalities of foreign infrastructure projects.

INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND SURVEILLANCE

- It is important that USAID work with governments, legislatures, and civil society to revise old policies, create new regulations, and enact new legislation to seal loopholes related to new technologies, particularly surveillance technologies.

- USAID should also support civil society organizations to advocate for more openness in terms of Africa-PRC ICT engagements, promote public awareness of privacy rights and the importance of internet security, and monitor government response to privacy violations and censorship.

- The U.S. government (USG) should invest in digital diplomacy activities, particularly provision of training in the use of ICTs to government officials. American ICT companies should also be encouraged not only to invest in corporate social responsibility but to step up publicity of such initiatives.

- USAID should assess ways and means of encouraging American financiers to invest in African ICT sectors. One interesting approach could be engaging U.S. diaspora communities and leaders.

- Pay attention to technologies that create barriers to participation in political processes, and support programs aimed at ensuring accessibility to the internet, including in periods of intense contestation.

MEDIA

- Continued and more funding for media and civil society programming in Africa is vital. Models of journalism, professional development and collaborations for newsrooms and content-sharing platforms should be considered. News and media operations in low internet penetration areas cannot be left behind.

- Leveraging programs like the Young African Leaders Initiative to have a civil society, media or digital focus should be explored and involve other underrepresented population segments.

- Map start-up hubs and innovation zones as important centers of creativity, opportunities for investment, and possible partners or locations of activities and programming.

- Leveraging existing and cultivating new partnerships with big tech and social media companies is important, as is supporting efforts for African representation at key technology forums.

This research brings several important research, policy, and program contributions. First, the study offers an alternative lens through which to understand PRC engagement in Africa. We go beyond numeric investment data to understand the consequences of PRC engagement by examining attitudes and practices, which enables evidence-based development strategies as well as alternative paths for research approaches. Second, we identify areas in which USAID and other USG actors can most effectively expand their own engagements in Africa to strengthen democratic norms and values on the continent and advance U.S. interests. Third, the research suggests potential interventions that can bolster the capacity and resilience of communities negatively affected by the influence of PRC investment and identifies ways USAID can help strengthen regulatory and enforcement environments in areas where the PRC is exploiting weak laws and regulations. Fourth, the findings inform the development of strategies to identify and counter state surveillance practices; and suggest strategies to support civil society and media in their efforts to hold governments accountable, provide accurate information to the public, and foster public discourse. Finally, the study identifies directions for future examination of this topic through additional research, data collection, analysis, and collaboration with African partners.

The report begins below with an overview of the PRC's investment and engagement strategy in Africa, which includes a description of the study questions. The second section includes the study's methodology, and the third discusses the study's findings for each of the four focus areas and conclusions. In the fourth and final section we share recommendations.

I. OVERVIEW

Economic, political, and cultural ties, as well as security cooperation and public diplomacy efforts have expanded significantly between African countries and the PRC in recent years. Trade volume alone increased from just $11 billion in 2000 to $185 billion in 2018.[11] Africa, with some of the world's fastest growing economies, has emerged as a center of gravity for the PRC's strategy of securing the long-term energy, resources, and export markets needed to sustain its growth. This is evident in unprecedented investment in Africa that has boosted key sectors in African countries, such as oil and mining. Chinese business diversification is also on the rise, as a growing number of firms capitalize on PRC incentives and subsidies and boldly venture into infrastructure, manufacturing, telecommunications, and agriculture. Due to this trend, PRC-Africa economic relations have expanded and deepened. In 2009, PRC surpassed the U.S. as Africa's largest trade partner and is a critical source of foreign direct investment for African countries.[12]

There are differing characterizations of the PRCs strategy in Africa. While observers that emphasize the PRC's economic engagement argue that the PRC's strategy reflects their goal of accessing natural resources – particularly oil and gas – and markets to meet the needs of the Chinese population at home,[13] others assert that the PRC's economic strategy is an extension of a broader security strategy. Devermont,[14] for instance, argues that the PRC uses security engagement to advance economic engagements, blending trade and investment deals with cultural exchange, arms sales, military training, provision of medical equipment, and other efforts, such as peacekeeping missions and counterpiracy programs.[15] From this perspective, the PRC's security strategy is a launch pad for its engagement in the economic and public diplomacy spheres. Characterization of the PRC's strategy also emphasizes its goal of rebranding its image. The PRC's strategy reflects its goal to be perceived as a country that promotes the principle of non-interference and establishes ties with countries based on mutual respect and mutual benefit.[16] Responding to criticism that the PRC seeks to support authoritarianism and erodes human rights in African countries, PRC officials counter that food, security, and equity are human rights that can be promoted through PRC-supported economic development and trade.[17] Hanauer and Morris[18] highlight the political factors that also shape the PRC's Africa strategy. In international platforms, the PRC seeks legitimacy and "PRC-Africa ties present diplomatic, strategic, and geopolitical opportunities for operationalization of PRC's core principles of equality, non-interference, and promote South-South solidarity among developing nations." Relations help raise the PRCs international influence and cause of building a more "just international order."[19] China's "success in Africa," reinforces its superpower status. African countries, meanwhile, have an opportunity to boost trade and investment, improve human

---

[11] See Sanny and Selormey (2020)

[12] See Albert (2017)

[13] See Albert (2017)

[14] See Devermont (2020)

[15] See Devermont (2020), p. 5.

[16] See Hanauer and Morris (2014)

[17] See RAND (2014)

[18] See Hanauer and Morris (2014), p. 6.

[19] See Hanauer and Morris (2014), p. 7.

development of their populations, access security assistance, and thus improve their political status domestically – all without conditions.[20]

While there is substantial data on the amount of Chinese investment and activity, empirical evidence addressing the influence of these investments and engagements on the democracy, human rights, governance, and transparency issues important to USAID, and some U.S. investors, is still limited. Findings from our study, however, suggest there are consequences of PRC investment and engagement for democratic norms and values in African countries. In Zambia, for example, PRC-based companies involved in infrastructure projects appear to have violated the rights of laborers, while in Kenya and Nigeria, the study notes concern around citizens' digital privacy and internet censorship. PRC public diplomacy engagement in the form of journalism training programs seem to have influenced journalist reporting on key topics, resulting in more favorable reporting on the PRC since journalist participation in PRC-sponsored programs.

Opinion of the PRC among African publics is equally telling, and suggest Africans are reassessing the merits of PRC involvement in their respective countries and perhaps see mismatched norms and values between their countries and the PRC. Recent Afrobarometer surveys from 2019/2020 in 18 countries show positive appraisals of the PRC are waning. Asked whether they view countries' economic and political influence as mostly positive or mostly negative, fewer in Africa now see the PRC's influence as positive compared to 2014/2015, including in regional powers, Kenya and Nigeria, and also in Sierra Leone, where positive assessments have notably declined.

---

[20] See RAND (2014), p. 9-16.

Figure 1.   Perceived positive influence of China, 18 countries 2014/2015 - 2019/2020
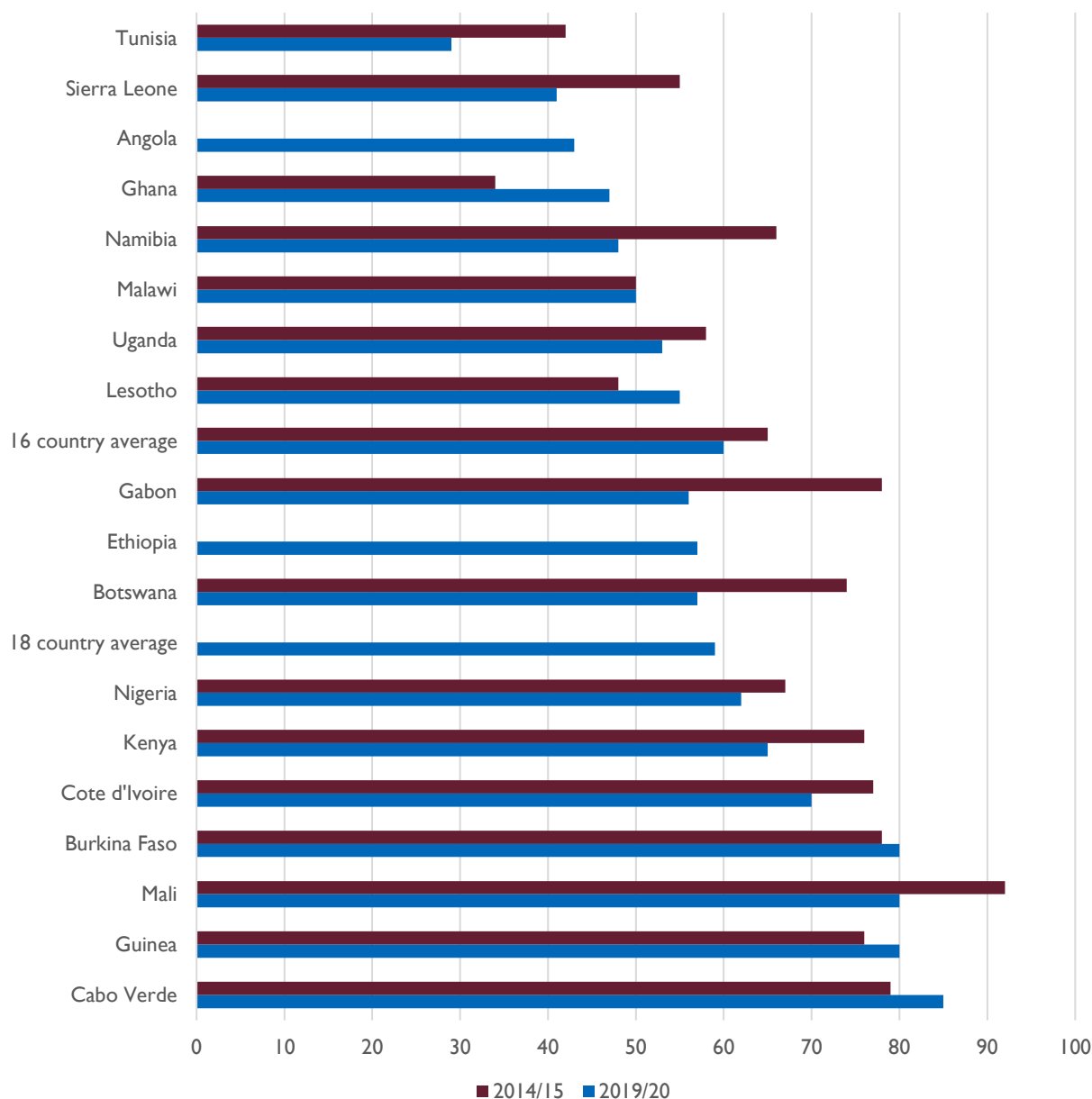
The question, then, is whether or not the PRC's presence and influence on the continent is contributing to a shift away from democratic norms and values and towards those that are more authoritarian. If so, to what extent, through what means, and in what domains?

As the PRC's influence in Africa is not monolithic, it is important to understand the sources, amounts, and purposes of investment and engagements and how they may enable or hinder USAID's development objectives. It is with these issues in mind that USAID developed a set of questions around the PRC's engagement, including but not limited to soft power, in Africa. Focusing on five countries – Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia – the study is organized along four lines of inquiry whose

questions are summarized below. The detailed research questions are described in Section 3, which includes sub-questions that were used to gather evidence related to the main research question.

Focus Area 1: African Government and Elite Social Media Narratives on the PRC

- What are African government and African elites' and influencers' social media narratives about PRC?

Focus Area 2: Local Inclusion and Governance around Infrastructure Projects

- In implementing infrastructure projects, to what extent do PRC companies adhere to host-country laws, for example, in areas of labor regulations, local content requirements, and payment of local taxes and levies?

- In what ways, if any, do PRC companies attempt to subvert host-country legal frameworks?

- What kinds of actions are taken by national governments when PRC companies are non-compliant with local laws?

- How are community voices integrated into infrastructure projects, if at all?

- How are the stakeholders positively or negatively affected by PRC infrastructure projects?

Focus Area 3: Information, Technology and Surveillance

- In which sectors of African societies and economies are PRC government entities and Chinese private sector organizations investing in and donating ICT hardware and software?

- What are the consequences of these Africa-PRC "sharp power" engagements on human rights and democracy?

- Are there legal and regulatory mechanisms and frameworks in place to manage the use of this ICT hardware and software? If so, what is the degree of public engagement, knowledge, and understanding of these mechanisms and to what extent are they enforced?

Focus Area 4 – Media

- How have African journalists experienced PRC-sponsored training programs?

- What are the implications of African journalist participation in PRC-sponsored journalist programs on the direction of journalists' reporting?

- What does research on prominent African media outlets (print and radio, including local languages) – particularly those in which PRC has a stake – and social media outlets tell us about emerging African narratives about the PRC?

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

COUNTRY SELECTION

We explore these critical questions in five countries: Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia. Covering west, east, and southern Africa, the countries bring geographic diversity to the study. We note that the countries are all Anglophone. This selection bias reflects: (1) USAID Mission priorities and interest and (2) the linguistic limitations, both in terms of social-media scraping and the language capabilities of our research team.

However, the Anglophone focus does not prevent us from drawing general conclusions regarding PRC influence on democratic norms and values. The countries vary in their degree of democratic freedom. For example, while 2021 Freedom House indices describe all five countries as "partly free", Kenya and Sierra Leone have held steady in their democratic development over the last few years. By contrast, scores for Zambia and Nigeria marginally decreased and Tanzania's decline is more significant.

More importantly, each of the countries selected reflect different levels of PRC engagement and type of polity (more or less democratic) to the extent possible. Specifically, the PRC has an outsized presence in Kenya's media sector and significant investment in the ICT sector of Nigeria. Sierra Leone, meanwhile, is the smallest country of all those selected, and one where the PRC has a smaller footprint in the country at present, while in Zambia the PRC has been implementing infrastructure projects in Zambia for over a decade. The PRC's ties with Zambia are among the oldest in Africa dating back to the 1960s, and development projects have generated criticism amid complaints of labor exploitation and livelihood disruption from Zambian workers. Like Zambia, the PRC's engagement in Tanzania also dates back to the 1960s near the country's independence, and both countries once lauded from their advancement of democracy, have also seen democratic decline.[21] Though Tanzania's pattern is described as more gradual than that of Zambia, in each country, citizens and civil society face intimidation when criticizing the government, and opposition is arrested. The media is also heavily censored or shut down.[22] Table 1 illustrates the countries addressed under each research focus area. For Focus Areas 2-4, we include secondary case study countries for comparison.

Table 1.   Country Case Selection by Research Focus Area

Research Focus Area	Country Cases
(1) Elite social media narratives on the PRC	Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia
(2) Local inclusion and governance	Zambia
(3) Technology, information and surveillance	Primary: Kenya and Nigeria
	Secondary: Tanzania
(4) Media	Primary: Sierra Leone and Nigeria
	Secondary: Kenya

---

[21] See ACSS (2019)

[22] See ACSS (2019)

Development of the methodological design for the study and country selection process was a collaborative exercise involving the study team, as well as the USAID Africa Bureau and USAID Missions. The study occurred during August 2020-July 2021, with data collection implemented from December 2020-April 2021. Detailed descriptions of the methodologies and justification for countries chosen for each research theme, and overall study limitations can be found in Annexes B-E.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

LITERATURE REVIEW

As part of the study's qualitative approach, we began with a literature review to acquire an understanding of what is known about the points of inquiry and to help us shape the research questions and countries selected for the study. Literature included articles from peer reviewed scholarly journals, papers, briefs, and reports from research institutions and international organizations, and U.S. government documents. To triangulate suppositions in the literature with the study results, the study team repeatedly returned to the literature throughout the course of the project.

SCOPING STUDY

Similar to a literature review, we also include a scoping study of PRC investments and engagements in Africa in order to examine patterns over time. This study reviewed competing academic perspectives, and then conducted a search of open sources to categorize different types of engagement and where possible, level of investment. The "scoping study" used keyword searches of news items, industry publications, quasi-academic publications, and policy papers. Keywords included:

Chinese ICTs in (Africa / Kenya / Nigeria); Chinese broadband, Chinese 5G technologies in Africa; Chinese tech in Africa, Didi Chuxing in Africa, Huawei, Transsion, Chinese ICTs, Chinese ICT infrastructure, Chinese undersea cables, Chinese submarine cables, China and internet shutdowns, Chinese surveillance companies, Chinese tech surveillance, Chinese facial recognition technologies, Chinese blockchain, Chinese cryptocurrency, Chinese digital data, Boomplay, Huawei, Huawei and Safaricom, Huawei and smart cities, Huawei and safer/safe cities, Chinese fintech, WeChat entry into Africa, Tencent, TikTok, etc.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In-depth interviews (IDIs), exploring views in a more intimate, isolated setting, were based on semi-structured, open-ended interview guides that were tailored for each category of respondents in each country. Interviewees represented a diverse range of categories, ranging from subject matter experts and academics to civil society actors and government officials. Interviews were approximately one hour. The methodology used to conduct the IDIs involved a process of identifying categories of stakeholders and outlining key questions for each unique category. Discussion during each interview was documented by a note taker, and the notes were transcribed within roughly one day. Respondents were offered anonymity and the option of speaking off the record. The semi-structured interview guide included main questions followed by probes to explore issues more deeply. Analysis of IDIs included a summary of themes that emerged for each topic, in addition to outliers, highlighting the range of responses and experiences, which was supported by respondent quotes. IDIs were conducted in-person or using remote technologies. In-person interviews were conducted if COVID-19 restrictions allowed in-person contact and internal movement.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Focus group discussions (FGDs) are small-group interviews held among people who may be demographically similar. FGDs, based on interaction among participants, provided more concrete examples illustrative of various attitudes, such as views of the PRC, awareness of the PRC's engagement, and potential implications for democracy. The team implemented in-person and remote FGDs that lasted approximately 90-120 minutes. As with IDIs, the decision to hold in-person or remote groups was based on the level of COVID-19 restrictions in countries. In countries where in-person contact with non-family members and movement was prohibited by country regulations, the team conducted remote FGDs. Regardless of the mode, each FGD was facilitated by a moderator, who took notes during each discussion. Select FGDs were also observed by another team member for analytic purposes and data quality assurance.

FGDs and IDIs were conducted during a three- to four-week period in each country during December 2020 to March 2021. Respondent samples were based on purposive and respondent-driven sampling. Respondents were first recommended to the team by individuals known by team experts or through known networks. Once the interview was conducted, the team asked the respondent if they could recommend others for an interview, and so on. Respondent-driven sampling was useful because the sample populations were small, difficult to identify, and possibly reluctant to participate in research.

Data collection included both face-to-face and remote applications (Zoom and mobile phone). The initial FGDs and IDIs served as pilots, during which the team assessed the discussions and application of the protocols and made adjustments accordingly as subsequent interviews occurred. The study team debriefed after three to four IDIs and after each FGD to review key themes that emerged, whether there were any problems, and whether adjustments or follow-up conversations with respondents were necessary. Table 2 summarizes the IDIs and FGDs (IDI and FGDs protocols can be found in Annex F).

Table 2.   Number of Interviews and FGDs Conducted

Country	In-Depth Interviews	Focus Group Discussions
Kenya	24	n/a
Nigeria	29	2
Sierra Leone	22	3
Zambia	12	6
Tanzania	9	n/a
Global	n/a	2
Total	**86**	**13**

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The study also applied content analysis to analyze African journalists' articles in order to determine the potential influence of PRC-sponsored journalism training programs. The researchers collected and

analyzed articles penned by journalists before their participation in the training programs and compared them with articles penned after. Two coders in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, trained by the study team, conducted the content analysis under the supervision of a NORC study team researcher. The details of this approach, used to assess differences in journalists reporting pre- and post- their visit, can be found in Annex D.

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

The study team also collected quantitative data to explore PRC investments in the ICT sectors of African countries. Data on PRC investments in the ICT sector were difficult to acquire; they were not readily available from government or individual company sources. Data may be too sensitive to share and the team did not have any opportunity to engage with companies directly in-country. In the absence of having access to primary data from firms or governments, the team relied mostly on figures from online sources. To verify the data, we checked other online sources that might support the figures identified by the team, such as data from trade publications, research institutions, and news reports. While we found no sources contradicting our findings, we did not identify sources that confirmed them. The study team also considered how specific data sources might inform the veracity, reliability, and scope of the data, which then fed into our analysis. In addition, we sought review by other academic peers working in the field.

SOCIAL MEDIA DATA SCRAPING

To understand African government and elite narratives on the PRC, the study examined social media posts by political leaders, civil society actors, businesspersons, religious leaders, and culturally influential figures. In-country researchers developed a curated list of accounts, and then NORC's Social Media Data Collaboratory scraped data from Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Zambia, as well as posts from regional organizations such as the African Union. These accounts were then cross-referenced with suggestions of social media accounts offered by the USAID Mission in each of the five case studies.[23] The team ultimately collected over one million data points from Twitter and public-facing Facebook pages from the different types of elites.

SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS

After we identified individuals and organizations with accounts and hashtags, the team undertook a pilot study to determine initial patterns that could inform deeper analysis. The pilot, which did not include Facebook or material from Tanzania, helped assess the visibility and general frequency of conversations about the PRC. It also helped determine whether the team needed to extend the time period or deepen analysis of engagement. We also estimated structural topic models (STMs) to identify the themes discussed within a set of texts and then to measure the statistical relationship between the topics discussed with covariates of interest (e.g., country).[24]

When our analysis of 349,957 tweets from 298 accounts across four of our five case studies revealed that less than 1% of the content discussed China, the team amended protocols for the study's exploration of PRC investment in the ICT sector and media, so that interviews and FGDs would query

---

[23] The cross-referencing served as a validity check to make sure the study was choosing appropriate elites and influencers for the social media analysis. The lists received from the Missions were shorter than the team's but overlapped substantially: the process added 3 more accounts for Nigeria, 6 for Zambia, 14 for Sierra Leone, and 7 for Kenya.

[24] We estimated the STMs using the STM package in R.

elites about views of the PRC. If elites were not sharing their views about the PRC on social media very often, we wanted to get a sense of where such conversations take place and how elite views are formed. Finally, in-country researchers expanded the list of elites and influencers. Table 3 groups them by type and country.[25]

Table 3.   Elites with a Facebook page, a Twitter handle, or both

	Nigeria	Tanzania	Zambia	Sierra Leone	Kenya
Ruling party	27	37	23	25	50**
Opposition party	8	11	33	9	13
Legislative committees	15	17	0*	1	1
Business elites	10	24	10	7	26
Civil society organizations and individuals	15	21	4	20	25
Journalists, bloggers	50	49	17	22	65
Total	**125**	**159**	**87**	**84**	**180**

*Zambia researchers were not able to identify committee assignments for legislators or social media sites for committees.

**Includes five government organizations with relevant jurisdiction but that might not be led by political appointees.

The relatively small number of elites and influencers with social media accounts in Zambia was unexpected: although in-country researchers identified 164 individuals and organizations for inclusion in the study, only 24 had identifiable Twitter handles; Facebook was a somewhat more popular tool for elites. The in-country researchers also reviewed and interpreted top terms and terminology in social media messaging to advance the analysis and interpretation of the results.

Since the software is unable to include multiple languages within a single routine, and additional computational analysis was beyond the project's budget, we mitigated the potential impact of language bias in several ways. First, we conducted additional keyword searches for the local or vernacular names for PRC projects and companies, as identified by the in-country experts. (This was a particular concern in Tanzania, where Swahili remains the official and dominantly used language.) This assessment produced only about one hundred more hits out of the 349,957 tweets, constituting a marginal increase in capture. Next, we incorporated some popular hashtags such as #SemaUkeili ("tell the truth") and #TekelezaKatiba ("implement the constitution"). Finally, a review of existing research indicated that

---

[25] "Ruling party" includes senior party officials, incumbent politicians, and cabinet officials. "Legislative committees" refers to committees with jurisdiction over foreign loans, investment, trade, and related activities; it includes the chair and influential members from different parties as identified by the in-country researchers. "Business elites" includes trade associations as well as "deal brokers," who in some countries serve as intermediaries for business deals but who are not affiliated with a specific business. "Civil society" includes individual and/or organizational accounts for labor leaders, activists, and religious leaders. "Journalists and influencers" includes bloggers and cultural figures.

English dominates social media in East Africa. For example, Swahili appears in only 5% of all tweets in Kenya, a country with high literacy rates and the highest rate of internet penetration in Africa.[26]

Another limitation involved the technical and practical barriers to including data from closed messaging platforms, such as WhatsApp, which have become increasingly popular across Africa. These apps are specifically designed to protect privacy and therefore do not offer software interface tools for analyzing content. Potential workarounds, such as subscribing to private groups, would introduce new problems related to sampling bias as well as significant data management challenges that were outside the scope of this work. Assessing the level of influence would present another problem, since each message can only be forwarded 256 times and the number of previous "forwards" is not disclosed by the platforms.[27] By contrast, the influence of any single Tweet or Facebook post is easily quantified. Our research design captures a representative sample of public social media discourse that can be publicly accessed and quantified due to the following features of the study:

- **Comprehensiveness:** The amount of coverage provided by the public data sources that were accessible and utilized.

- **Volume:** The large number of posts from and engagement with accounts of interest over the period of observation.

- **Content:** Analysis of key topics, themes, and valence of posts and engagement (such as "likes" or re-tweets) with the posts.

The final sample included 575 Twitter accounts and 437 Facebook pages. All the accounts were manually identified and examined by researchers to ensure that no "bots" were included. Since bots have few followers, only active accounts with large number of followers for each account were chosen. The study then used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to interpret the content of posts collected. We measured trends in the amount of content about the emergent prominent topics by country, compared these trends to the amount of content about specific themes of interest, and analyzed the relationships between the information sources (account types) and types of content in each corpus.

Twitter

Using Twitter's public Application Programming Interface (API), we collected data from 475 of the 575 Twitter accounts that were identified by the in-country researchers. These accounts returned a total of 424,021 tweets, although the Twitter public API limited the returns to roughly 3,000 per account, which were delivered retrospectively from the point of collection in mid-November of 2020. We identified 70 accounts that posted so frequently during the past year that they hit the rate limit before a two-year retrospective collection was completed. Due to this limitation in data collection, the timeline of raw posts shows an increase in the recent period. This increase is an artifact of data collection rather than a representation of increased Twitter activity across all accounts.

---

[26] Nyabola, Nanjala. *Digital Democracy, Analogue Politics*. London: Zed Books, 2018.

[27] The team also considered platforms such as YouTube channels, which are sometimes used by artists and video journalists, but all the in-country experts agreed that Facebook and Twitter were the primary outlets, even if one was more popular than the other in a particular country.

Regarding which country's leaders were most active on Twitter, findings identified the largest number of accounts from Tanzania with 144, followed by Nigeria with 109. However, by a wide margin, we collected the most tweets from Nigeria. Table 4 shows the number of accounts from each country, along with the total number of tweets (not limited to PRC-related content).

Table 4. Accounts with Data and Tweets Posted: November 2018 through October 2020

Country	Accounts Collected	Tweets Posted from Nov. 1, 2018 through Oct. 31, 2020
Nigeria	109	155,070
Kenya	94	125,838
Tanzania	144	44,041
Zambia	22	18,391
Sierra Leone	53	16,281
Regional organizations	53	64,400
Total	**475**	**424,021**

Facebook

Using CrowdTangle, a tool developed by Facebook to facilitate social media content research, the study collected content from 275 pages out of the 437 identified by the in-country researchers. The top-posting pages with data provided by CrowdTangle were pages belonging to news and media companies as opposed to individual elites. Together the 275 pages captured on CrowdTangle posted over 761,000 Facebook posts between November 1, 2018 and October 31, 2020.[28]

In the next section, we discuss the study results for each theme followed by conclusions. The final section outlines recommendations for USAID programming and suggested directions for future researchers.

---

[28] Unfortunately, the CrowdTangle platform would not provide information about the content on some Facebook pages. NORC re-checked the URL addresses for all pages submitted to confirm that the pages were still active, eliminating the possibility of error in the pages' address lines. The reduction in sample size is therefore attributed to the fact that CrowdTangle is limited to pages that are public fan pages or public group pages. Many of the Facebook pages representing elite leadership identified by the in-country researchers appear to have instead been personal pages only accessible to individual users logged into Facebook. In some cases, for example, a viewer might have to be a "friend" of that person. Due to the limited recall of pages submitted to the CrowdTangle platform, this constrains the representativeness of the sample of elite leadership within each country. However, the large volume of page content does increase our confidence in the overall assessment of elite sentiment.

3. STUDY FINDINGS

FOCUS AREA 1 – AFRICAN GOVERNMENT AND ELITE SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES ON THE PRC

PRC-RELATED VOLUME

A central question for this project was how frequently elites in select African countries discuss PRC-supported projects, Chinese private sector investment, and China more broadly, within their countries. Elites are understood here as people who have power and influence over public opinion. The study thus focuses on opinion shapers and thought leaders rather than audiences represented by ordinary citizens or the public at large to understand the extent to which PRC engagement in the select African countries evoked commentary from elites on social media regarding PRC influence on democratic norms and values. Critical commentary might reflect concerns over potential influence on authoritarian trends, whereas positive commentary might reflect more supportive perspectives.

The study team used multiple approaches to identify China-related content within over a million posts, reviewed the most frequently occurring words and word pairs seeking China-related terms, performed topic modeling on the full collection of tweets seeking any subtopics forming on the topic, and followed up with in-country researchers to identify local terms referring to PRC-backed projects within their countries. The examination of both Facebook and Twitter helped reduce sampling problems arising from the popularity of one platform over another at the country level. For example, the analysis suggests that the political salience of Twitter grew in Nigeria – which incidentally precedes the ban on Twitter announced by President Buhari in 2021. By contrast, Facebook is preferred by elites in Zambia and posts from Kenya account for nearly three-quarters of the Facebook page content gathered. Both platforms were used widely in Tanzania and Sierra Leone. Even though some political discourse has moved into private messaging apps, the huge number of followers and the volume of activity on the accounts studied suggest that these social media platforms remain highly relevant venues for political discourse.

Results found very little China-related language posted by these accounts from November 1, 2018 through October 31, 2020. Reviewing top-occurring terms did not broaden our keyword list. A topic modeling approach formed 20 topics but yielded none clearly PRC-related and the project-specific local terms tested did not yield additional results in the data.

After seeking additional terms, we used simple text-search to apply a list of PRC-related terms to create a subset of tweets and posts with content about the PRC. We used a filter including the strings "China," "Chinese," "Jack Ma," "Alibaba," "Belt and Road," "Sino-Africa," "Huawei," and "Greatwall." We used string match instead of standalone words, meaning that the texts matched if the string appeared in the text, even if it was embedded within a hashtag such as "#Chinamustpay."

Applying these filters revealed very little content about the PRC. Our total collection of 424,021 tweets contained only 3,461 tweets matching any of our PRC-related terms (0.8%), posted from a total of 278 accounts. Table 5 shows the number of accounts and tweets from the PRC-related subset of data identified using the search terms for Twitter and Facebook.[29]

---

[29] The low number of accounts and limited data preclude extensive analysis of findings from Sierra Leone and Zambia.

Despite a greater number of Twitter accounts identified from Tanzania, we found that, within the PRC-relevant subset, **Kenya and Nigeria had the largest share of accounts and posts tweeting about the PRC.** Kenya and Nigeria posted over 1,000 tweets in two years, even after accounting for rate limits affecting the completeness of retrospective data collection. Sierra Leone and Zambia had the fewest accounts and tweets covering the topic, with only 252 tweets (7.3%) referencing the PRC from both countries in two years.

Table 5.   PRC-Related Social Media Activity

Country	Twitter		Facebook	
	Accounts Collected	**Tweets Nov. 1, 2018 – Oct. 31, 2020**	**Unique Pages**	**Posts Nov. 1, 2018 – Oct. 31, 2020**
Kenya	75	1,059	62	6,470
Nigeria	74	1,052	20	1,556
Tanzania	60	643	32	358
Zambia	13	135	16	200
Sierra Leone	17	117	16	150
Regional Organizations	39	455	-	-
Total	**278**	**3,461**	**146**	**8,734**

For Facebook, using these filters we found posts about the PRC from 147 pages out of the 275 that were matched in CrowdTangle. The total number of PRC-related posts was only 8,734 out of more than 761,000, or 1.1% of the content. Pages matched through CrowdTangle and providing relevant data were especially skewed toward Kenya. Facebook posts from Kenya made up 74% of all PRC-related posts collected.

MOST VOCAL SOURCES

Results show that some countries, namely Tanzania and Nigeria, posted a great deal more about the PRC than others. A small number of accounts within Tanzania and Nigeria accounted for the skew. For Twitter, the top 10 most vocal accounts about the PRC posted 25% of the content from all 278 accounts. Table 6 below shows these accounts and the PRC-related posts collected.

Table 6. Most Vocal Twitter Accounts about the PRC from Nov. 2018 through Oct. 2020

Rank	Twitter Handle	Tweets about the PRC	Country	Category
1	@PWegesa	166	Tanzania	Journalists, Bloggers, Thought Leaders
2	@TheAfricaReport	117	Regional orgs	Business and trade interests, non-governmental

Rank	Twitter Handle	Tweets about the PRC	Country	Category
3	@obyezeks	100	Nigeria	Journalists, Bloggers, Thought Leaders
4	@cchukudebelu	91	Nigeria	Journalists, Bloggers, Thought Leaders
5	@ForeignOfficeKE	75	Kenya	Political Elites from Ruling Party
6	@AmbMKamau	73	Kenya	Political Elites from Ruling Party
7	@BBoason	64	Nigeria	Journalists, Bloggers, Thought Leaders
8	@theelephantinfo	62	Kenya	Media
9	@IEAKwame	61	Kenya	Journalists, Bloggers, Thought Leaders
10	@foreigntanzania	54	Tanzania	Political Elites from Ruling Party

Exhibit 1.   Example Tweets from Most Vocal Twitter Accounts about the PRC

The most vocal account, @PWegesa, is a consultant who often tweets about dialogue between Tanzania and the PRC and what there is to gain from cross-cultural collaboration and education. Their posts include commentary about fruitful opportunities as well as event notifications. Exhibit 1 includes an example tweet from @PWegesa where the PRC is mentioned. Many of the most vocal Twitter accounts are from media-related accounts and bloggers/thought leaders as opposed to political or business elites. Journalists appear much more inclined than political elites to discuss the PRC on Twitter. This may be because journalists by virtue of their mandate to investigate, analyze, and report are more likely to comment on the PRC's activities. There may also be a tendency for journalists, who may use social media formats more frequently, to feel more comfortable using those forums. Exhibit 1 also includes example posts from @TheAfricaReport and @PWesega, the second-, third-, and fourth-most vocal accounts on Twitter about the PRC identified by our in-country researchers.

These accounts post about a variety of topics, including historical context, developments within the PRC, global political events, and the relationship between Africa and the PRC, although the latter is a subset within the larger conversation. For analytic purposes, discussions on Twitter between political elites on these topics are not robust in these countries.

Regarding Facebook, the most vocal accounts define the content trends. The top 10 most vocal pages made up 68% of the total posts and largely represent news media as opposed to political or business elites. Table 7 includes the ten most vocal Facebook pages after filtering for PRC-relevant content.

Because many of these top pages are media organizations, they tended to post multiple times about the same story and covered many different topics related to the PRC, including developments within that country (e.g., Hong Kong protests, COVID-19), global political topics, and occasionally PRC-backed projects within Africa. COVID-19 content made up 29% of all posts and mostly included straightforward coverage as the news broke globally. Facebook posts captured generally did not represent the perspectives from elite leaders about the PRC's activities in Africa. **However, the high level of activity by Kenyan media organizations suggests that Kenyan media outlets effectively leverage social media to promote traditional journalist reporting. This is potentially important in light of the study's findings that journalists overall were more willing to discuss (or critique) the PRC compared to other categories of elites.** Given the limitations in data collection from Facebook and the lack of elite leadership represented in the data, more in-depth content analysis was reserved for the Twitter content.

Table 7. Most Vocal Facebook Pages about the PRC: Nov. 2018 through Oct. 2020

Rank	Page Name	Posts about the PRC	Country	Category
1	Capital FM Kenya	1,169	Kenya	Media
2	Nation	1,104	Kenya	Media
3	NTV Kenya	749	Kenya	Media
4	Standard Digital	738	Kenya	Media
5	Kenyans.co.ke	588	Kenya	Media
6	The Citizen	450	Tanzania	Journalists, Bloggers, Thought Leaders
7	The Star, Kenya	435	Kenya	Media
8	JamiiForums	259	Tanzania	Civil Society Orgs & Individuals
9	Business Daily Africa	249	Kenya	Media
10	The East African	236	Kenya	Media

EMERGENT THEMES

In analyzing emergent themes among tweets, the team looked at the most frequent words and word pairs in the PRC-relevant subset and also used topic modeling algorithms. The first theme encompassed trade, business, and e-commerce; it included terms such as Jack Ma, Alibaba, and Expo and discussed general business trends while occasionally remarking on PRC development in Africa. The second theme focused on global diplomatic news, including coverage of the PRC on the international stage for the African audience, but did not comment as much on PRC investment within Africa. The third theme focused on COVID-19 and public health, including tweets about COVID-19's emergence in the PRC as well as Africa's response.

After estimating the first STM on all posts (n = 421,483 after preprocessing), **out of the 20 most discussed topics identified by this open-ended search, two mentioned energy and development in passing, but** no topic was explicitly devoted to the PRC and/or PRC soft power. This reinforces our earlier findings indicating that **there is little discourse on social media about PRC engagement**. Moreover, it validates our selection of the search terms: if we had been using the wrong terms, the STM would have yielded more topics or subtopics discussing the PRC.

The second STM was estimated with 6 topics on the subset of tweets that were flagged as being relevant to the PRC (n = 3,450 after preprocessing). The topics were:

- Topic 1: Government obligations

- Topic 2: COVID-19 international response

- Topic 3: COVID-19 and the PRC

- Topic 4: Chinese investment

- Topic 5: Political officials

- Topic 6: Current events/news[30]

For each of these topics, we estimated models to predict the proportion of each document devoted to the topic based upon the country; we used regional organizations as the reference category. The output from these estimates helps us comment on which topics are discussed more often by users from certain countries compared to accounts representing the region more broadly.

Topic 1 (Government Obligations) was more likely to be discussed by accounts from each individual country, except for Sierra Leone which was less likely to discuss this topic at all. This small collection of tweets, including terms like "loan," (81 tweets) "debt," (76 tweets) and "contract" (51 tweets), included the most informative content regarding our original research question. However, so few elite accounts were represented in these data that they are not representative of

---

[30] Topics 1 and 4 fit within the first overall theme we identified in our prior approach about trade, business, and e-commerce. Topics 2 and 3 matched the overall theme of coronavirus and public health while topics 5 and 6 matched the theme of global diplomatic news, validating the findings from our prior approach.

leaders' views generally. Exhibit 2 includes posts from multiple accounts discussing loans, debt, and infrastructure. Accounts from regional organizations engaged in scarcely any discussion.

Exhibit 2. Example Tweet on Loans, Debt, and Infrastructure from PRC-relevant Subset

Regarding the COVID-19-related topics, **Nigeria was more likely than regional organizations to engage with both COVID-19-related topics (COVID-19 and international response and COVID-19 and the PRC) and Tanzania was more likely to engage with only the second COVID-19-related topic (COVID-19 and the PRC).** Kenya and Sierra Leone engaged less often than regional organizations with both of these topics. COVID-19 content was largely news-oriented as opposed to opinion-oriented, aside from some calls for the PRC to specifically provide aid in response to the pandemic. The hashtag #Chinamustpay,[31] related to this topic, was found in 41 tweets, 39 of which were from @obyezeks, a former Minister of Education in Nigeria.

Regarding the general news and political topics, Kenya was more likely than regional organizations to engage in Topic 5 while less likely to engage in Topic 6. We found the inverse in Nigeria, Zambia, and Tanzania in that they were less likely to engage in Topic 5 and more likely to engage in Topic 6. Sierra Leone was more likely to engage only in Topic 6. Topic 5, labeled political officials, may be partially formed from possible coordination of Kenyan diplomatic offices, which appeared to tweet similarly about any state engagements with Kenyan and Chinese ambassadors. **The most common negative comments pertained to mistreatment of Africans (in the PRC) and debt in the context of broader discussions about trade and commerce.**

CONCLUSIONS

Findings suggest Twitter and Facebook offer limited insights into African elite attitudes about the PRC and Chinese development in Africa. One factor influencing this result is that some elites simply do not have, or do not regularly use, social media accounts. This was especially pronounced in Zambia, suggesting a far less robust digital dialogue about politics in general, compared to other case studies. Another factor is that Facebook collection is limited to a subset of public pages largely representing media outlets as opposed to political, business, and cultural elites. Only a small portion of content from

---

[31] Chinamustpay is a twitter account calling for the PRC to pay the costs to populations negatively affected by COVID-19.

Twitter and Facebook was related to the PRC and the number of influencers talking about PRC issues on Facebook and Twitter was also minimal. **Although this was an unexpected finding, it points to a potential opportunity for USAID's approach to public engagement: working closely with the relatively small number of vocal journalists and thought leaders would likely have a disproportionate impact on public discourse on social media about the PRC.**

Given the scarcity of views from elites and influencers discovered on public Twitter and Facebook pages, the question remains open as to how political, business, and cultural elites regard Chinese initiatives and relations in Africa and how they prefer to frame their views to constituents and admirers. Since this finding was already apparent in the social media pilot study, the team amended the research protocols for FGDs and interviews to ask about elite views of the PRC, and some of these findings appear in themes 3 and 4 below.

Notably, **while less than 1% of data collected were relevant to the PRC, these platforms do still provide a large source of text data demonstrating how these elites are messaging and setting their priorities.** Our results indicate, for most accounts, the PRC was simply not one of them. Evidence suggests that elite conversations about the PRC often take place in traditional media such as newspapers and radio, or possibly in less visible forums such as private meetings; this inference is supported by information about journalist recruitment discussed in the examination of the PRC's ICT investment and engagement in Africa. But that component of our study generated data represented in different units of analysis, complicating any comparison to other elite categories here such as civil society activists or legislators. To that end, **a future study could actually interview or survey social media influencers alongside these other elites, in order to generate information about where and how elite attitudes about the PRC take shape.**

Finally, **the data from the study could form the basis for an investigation into elite attitudes about the PRC,** and not just volume of or priorities found in content. Such an analysis, using machine learning supplemented by manual coding (which is feasible given the relatively small volume of information), could generate quantifiable information about sentiment, meaning the actual *tone* of posts and tweets – positive or negative – about the PRC's activities in Africa.

FOCUS AREA 2 – LOCAL INCLUSION AND GOVERNANCE AROUND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

BACKGROUND

Zambia has a broad and long-standing relationship with the PRC. The first PRC-funded infrastructure project dates back to the 1970s with the construction of the Tanzania-Zambia Railway. PRC companies have also been active in the mining sector, as Zambia is one of the largest producers of copper. In recent years, the PRC has stepped up its engagement in the country, loaning Zambia billions of U.S. dollars to fund infrastructure projects, including roads, airports, and energy projects. The precise estimates of the total loan value vary, but range from $4 billion,[32] $6.4 billion,[33] to $9 billion.[34]

---

[32] See South China Morning Post (2019)

[33] See Laterza and Mususa (2018)

[34] See Donnelly (2018)

These loans are used to fund several infrastructure projects. For example, in 2015, China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) was contracted by the Zambian government to construct two railway lines connecting Mpika to Chipata and Nseluka to Mpulungu at a cost of $1.9 billion and $668 million, respectively. In 2020, Zambia signed a contract of more than $824 million with a subsidiary of China Railway Construction Corporation (CRCC) to upgrade a 648.26-km section of railway in the southern part of the country. Further, the PRC is funding the construction of several hydroelectric power dams to increase electricity generation. For example, in 2019 it was reported that PowerChina and GE would jointly build the Batoka Gorge Hydroelectric Power Station, with construction costs estimated at $4 billion.

In light of these numbers, it is not surprising that Zambia's debt stock has increased significantly in recent years. According to the Brookings Institution, Zambia's external debt in 2017 was equivalent to 65.8% of the country's gross national income (GNI).[35] More recent reports anticipate the country's sovereign debt will reach 96% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021.[36] Some estimates indicate that the PRC owns between one-fourth[37] and one-third[38] of Zambia's external debt.

It appears that Zambia is struggling to repay these loans, particularly in light of declining copper prices. In March 2019, the Export-Import Bank of China threatened that contractors would suspend work on infrastructure projects in Zambia if arrears were not paid – a threat that several companies made good on later in the year. In October 2019, Zambia's Housing and Infrastructure Development Minister Vincent Mwale denied allegations that China's Export-Import Bank had halted funding for the $360 million expansion and modernization of the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in Lusaka.[39] These events have increased concerns that Lusaka may transfer assets to the PRC in exchange for debt relief. One such asset rumored to be under consideration[40] is the state-owned Zambia Electricity Supply Corporation (ZESCO), Zambia's largest power company and producer of roughly 80% of the electricity consumed in the country.

The presence of PRC companies in Zambia has not been without controversy. Local groups, including labor organizations have criticized the practices of PRC-related companies in the country.[41] In 2012, Zambia's PRC-owned Collum Coal Mine was temporarily closed[42] and seized by the Zambian government[43] following violent riots. This followed an incident in 2010 in which Chinese managers shot and injured over a dozen striking workers at the mine. More recently, in December 2019, Secretary General of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions Cosmas Mukuka told the media that some private companies hailing from the PRC operating in Zambia "are not following the recommendations of the International Labor Organization."[44] Nor do PRC companies adhere to health and safety regulations.

---

[35] See Dollar (2019)

[36] See Smith (2020)

[37] See South China Morning Post (2019)

[38] See Laterza and Mususa (2018)

[39] See Lusaka Times (2019)

[40] See Chutel (2018)

[41] See Human Rights Watch (2011)

[42] See Bariyo (2015)

[43] See Ghosh (2013)

[44] See The Guardian (2019)

Production workers have been exploited through unsafe working environments.[45] Existing literature confirms that outdated Zambian legislation fails to incentivize firms to be compliant. The Zambian government can issue on-the-spot fines, but these equate to just ZMW 144,000 ($37), and proposed revisions to environmental regulations envisage only a doubling of this.[46]

Given these dynamics, this research examined the local inclusion and governance dynamics surrounding two infrastructure projects in Zambia. The first infrastructure project is the Kafue Gorge Lower Power Station, a 750-megawatt hydroelectric dam currently under construction. It is located along the Kafue River, approximately 90km south of Lusaka.[47]

The second infrastructure project is the so-called 'Lusaka L400' Project in Lusaka Province. Built by Aviation Industry Corp of China (AVIC), the project involves upgrading and improving roads in and around Lusaka, Zambia's capital.[48]

We selected three locations in proximity to each project to conduct FGDs. The number of participants in the FGDs ranged from 8 to 10 individuals. The sample of FGDs in Kafue Gorge was primarily male and mostly older (between 40 and 50 years of age). Participants were primarily fishers and peasant farmers with little formal education. In contrast, the sample in Lusaka Province was balanced between men and women, with younger participants (between 20 and 30 years of age). Participants were primarily vendors, taxi drivers, electricians, and hairdressers. However, despite the geographical, gender, and age differences, the insights gained were consistent across the various FGDs. We complemented the FGDs with insights from interviews with key decision-makers. This included representatives of the Ministries of Energy, Infrastructure, Transport, and Labor, which are the ministries responsible for planning and financing infrastructure projects. Representatives from the Zambia Revenue Authority as well as the city councils in which the projects were located were interviewed. In addition, representatives of the ZESCO as well as the Road Development Agency (RDA), which were responsible for implementing energy and transportation projects, respectively, were interviewed.

PREVIEW OF FINDINGS

Consistent with the first analytic theme outlined in *A Framework for Analysis* section, above, the research did not uncover any direct, premeditated efforts by PRC actors to undermine democratic norms in Zambia, though respondents were clearly concerned about illiberal practices. While respondents did not specifically mention the usurpation of democratic norms and values by the PRC, they spoke of being excluded from decision-making related to PRC-funded projects, PRC neglect of worker safety and fair wages, as well as poor product quality due to corruption – views which speak to the prevalence of democratic norms and values. In another illustrative example, FGDs in Zambia pointed to a larger

---

[45] See Brooks (2010)

[46] See Haglund (2008)

[47] In terms of financing, 85% of the $2 billion total investment volume was borrowed from the Exim Bank of China as well as the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China. The government of Zambia contributes the remaining 15%. The dam is constructed by Sinohydro, a PRC company. The final inspection and tests of the dam are currently ongoing, which also involves a partial filling of the reservoir. The dam is expected to become fully operational later in 2021.

[48] The total investment volume is about $400 million. In terms of financing, $241 million has been borrowed from the PRC, of which 85% ($205 million) will be provided by the Export-Import Bank of China while 15% ($36 million) will be provided by the Industrial Commercial Bank of China. As of February 2022, about 80% of roads have been completed. However, following reports about the deplorable state of the two roads just a few months after construction, the government was forced to recall the contractor to redo the roads. In 2020, AVIC offered to re-do some roads in Lusaka at no cost to the government.

dilemma when asked why Zambian authorities typically do not take action when PRC actors are found to violate local laws and regulations. Because the Zambian government obtains both financing and construction from PRC sources[49], FGD participants asserted that such an arrangement gives PRC actors undue power in Zambia and makes it difficult for residents to hold their government accountable. If funding or contracting services for the project came from a source other than the PRC, the government would not be as vulnerable in their negotiations and in their ability to apply local laws and statutes.

Our research uncovered mixed opinions when asked whether the project funded and implemented by the PRC companies was "worth it" and if they would "benefit" from it. Specifically, respondents supporting the Zambian government were more likely to identify positive consequences, such as increased power generation and less congestion. However, those supporting the opposition were more likely to emphasize the negative consequences and were more likely to feel elites have benefitted at the expense of the general population. As a result, PRC infrastructure projects appeared to provide what was an increasingly authoritarian Zambian government with some legitimacy, at least in the eyes of co-partisans, who were less excluded from the benefits of the infrastructure project. Against the backdrop of these trends, viewpoints on these issues underscore the importance of democratic norms and values to Zambian respondents.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

To what extent do PRC companies adhere to host-country laws (for example in areas of labor laws, local content requirements, and payment of local taxes and levies)? If they do not adhere to them, how do they subvert existing legal frameworks?

Our research suggests that Zambians generally perceive that PRC companies do not adhere to labor regulations. Historical evidence from Zambia suggests PRC companies have not paid minimum wages.[50] For example, economist Alastair Fraser and historian Miles Larmer reported, in a study of mining companies operating in the Copperbelt in Zambia in the 1990s and early 2000s, that all persons interviewed, including residents, workers, commuters, government officials, trade unionists, and even the other mining companies, complained PRC investors were paying very low wages.[51] Economist Inyambo Mwanawina[52] notes,

> *"The only way labor can be cheap in Zambia is not to obey labor laws. Labor laws have to be ignored. Booklets on labor laws are supposed to be bought but are ignored. If the government stipulates a minimum wage of K276,000 ($75) per month, the contractor is free to negotiate with the workers about his ability to pay and the worker is free to take up the offer or leave it."*

In 2008, 500 workers at Chambeshi Copper Smelter rioted over poor wages (Leslie 2016). Reports stated the workers were earning as little as K291,000 ($78) per month and Chinese management was allegedly not following Zambian labor laws. After two days of strikes resulting in two Zambians and one Chinese worker being injured, the Chinese management fired hundreds of workers (BBC 2008).

---

[49] This differs from deals with other nations where funding and construction services are typically obtained using separate channels and supplied by different providers, which allows governments to have a stronger negotiation position.

[50] See Alden (2005)

[51] See Fraser and Larmer (2010)

[52] See Inyambo Mwanawina (2008)

According to FGDs in Zambia – both at the dam as well as the road project sites – PRC companies are not adhering to Zambian labor laws. The research encountered many complaints about low wages. For example, a male participant in a rural location close to the dam said, "The Chinese are exploitative. Their wages are nothing close to being fair," while another female participant added, "The workers are underpaid. It is very hard to get by and afford basic needs." We learned the current average wage is between ZMW1, 000,000 ($48) and ZMW3, 000,000 ($143) per month. Against this background, one male participant in an urban location remarked:

> "[PRC companies] have negatively impacted the Zambian economy as they pay their workers below the standard minimum wage which is both exploitative and theft from the national income."

Besides low pay, research participants also pointed to a phenomenon they termed "exploitation." This involves receiving the same pay but working longer hours than previously agreed upon. One male participant noted, "The Chinese exploit workers, they have very low wages with long working hours. No proper rest on weekends, or holidays." Others added, "Chinese investors have also introduced an unethical work culture, there are no fixed working hours, leave days, and they are not respectful." For example, one participant recounted his experience working under a PRC company as follows: "When I worked with them the working hours [were] awkward because we report[ed] as early as 7 a.m. with no fixed knocking off time."

Contrary to reports in Western newspapers, however, our research encountered fewer than expected complaints about imported workers from the PRC. To be sure, some voices did lament the use of Chinese workers on the construction sites. One worker noted,

> "We are fine with the Chinese handling the project, but we just feel our expectations were not being met. We expected to have a number of jobs in the community. But instead, the Chinese come with their own workers and only give a few locals low [paying] jobs."

Others point to imported labor from other regions within Zambia. A participant close to Kafue Gorge noted, "The Chinese do not really empower the community they are in. For instance, with this current project, they brought people from the Copperbelt to come and work from here when they [could] have used the local people." Yet others acknowledge the local labor markets may have benefitted from the infrastructure projects after all: "We are benefitting through employment right now. Many people have gotten jobs from the Chinese. They've even been equipped with some construction skills." However, differences in the types of jobs remain, as managerial and technical jobs (supervisory work, plant operations, vehicles, etc.) are given primarily to Chinese workers, while manual work is primarily given to Zambians.

Government officials indicate that PRC companies are technically in compliance with existing labor laws. Regarding the claims that minimum wage laws were violated, all government interviewees stated they have no evidence of PRC companies systematically undermining the law. A representative of the Ministry of Labor noted PRC companies adhere to the most important Zambian laws, such as The Minimum Wage Act, Industrial Labor and Relations Act, National Pension Scheme Authority Act, and Workers' Compensation Act.[53] A representative of the Ministry of Energy

---

[53] The Minimum Wages Act defines minimum wages and working conditions, though standards differ depending on the type of employment (such as employment in factories vs. shops vs. domestic employment). Crucially, independent workers are not

expressed, "The Ministry is in charge through ZESCO. They monitor [PRC companies] through phases and intervals of the year and report back to government." Interviews with representatives of ZESCO revealed they believe PRC companies are unfairly judged: "The Chinese are judged because they are perceived as stingy and unfair as employers. Even if they adhere to the law."

However, government officials acknowledge that PRC companies utilize loopholes in Zambian labor laws. Interviewees noted that while PRC companies might not technically break the law, they do find loopholes. A representative of the Ministry of Labor expressed, "[PRC companies] adhere mostly to minimum wage. However, their use of casual employment[54] instead of contracts makes minimum wage invalid." Describing the difference between casual and formal employees, geographer Andrew Brooks[55] notes a large difference between the monthly pay of casual (ZMW60,000-ZMW120,000, or $16-$33)[56] and permanent (ZMW180,000-ZMW350,000, or $50-$97) workers; most permanent employees were also provided with substantial modern housing. The casual conditions of employment neglected the social wage; casual workers would lose money for days taken off for illness; they could be fired without notice for not reporting for work or for getting pregnant. A ZESCO representative added, "The law allows for companies to hire workers for casual work, but only for a certain period of time. If a worker is employed for more than six months, the law states that they have to be offered a formal contract." However, converting a worker increases costs for the company significantly, which is why firms have incentive to fire workers just before they reach the six-month mark. The FGDs confirmed this perspective; one male participant close to the Kafue Gorge dam stated, "I am not comfortable with the fact that the Chinese people never give Zambian workers permanent jobs but instead leave them as casual workers."

This division between casual and formal workers has been documented in the literature. For example, in a study focusing on the PRC's public infrastructure financing in Angola, scholar Lucy Corkin[57] shows PRC companies prefer to hire Angolan workers on a casual weekly basis to avoid regulations that would make it necessary for them to give workers local labor holidays and allowances. However, it needs to be pointed out that PRC companies are not the only firms making use of this loophole concerning hiring (and firing) of casual workers: "Such processes began on the Zambian Copperbelt before Chinese investment arrived."

---

covered by this law. The Industrial and Labor Relations Act of 2011 provides rights to employees who are members of trade unions and other collective bargaining schemes. The National Pension Scheme Authority (NAPSA) was established in February 2000 by the National Pension Scheme Act to provide rudimentary pensions to the elderly. The Workers' Compensation Act of 1999 of the Laws of Zambia provides for compensation of workers for disabilities suffered or diseases contracted during the course of employment. Given their social intentions, the passage of these laws did not generate major dissent among the population. However, there has been some grumbling about the loopholes in the Minimum Wage Act. For example, in 2005, the Secretary General of the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions, Sylvester Tembo, criticized that the minimum wage set by the Act was too low and did not cover a sufficient number of workers (The Post, 2005). Similarly, Labor and Social Services Deputy Minister Ronald Chitotela acknowledged that employers appear to demand extended work hours despite the Minimum Wage Act prohibiting such demands (The Times of Zambia, 2013).

[54] Casual worker is the common expression used in Zambia for a temporary worker without a formal employment contract. The report uses the local expression throughout.

[55] See Brooks (2010), p. 121

[56] 2010 nominal values, unadjusted for inflation.

[57] See Corkin (2012)

The use of casual labor is not unique to PRC companies. Hairong and Sautman,[58] social scientists who study PRC-Africa relations, document similar (or, in some instances, even higher) rates of casual to permanent employees in UK-Indian owned Konkola Copper Mines and Swiss-owned Mopani Copper Mines. For instance, they report that only 47% of workers in the Konkola Copper Mines are permanent workers, while the number is 50% for the Mopani Copper Mines. This would suggest that PRC actors are not *directly* influencing democratic norms around labor, at least not to a larger degree than Western actors.

Zambians suggest that poor working conditions persist, and they are unhappy with the lack of attention from their government. These views, expressed in FGDs, underscore the importance of democratic values of workers' rights to safety and norms of government accountability. One participant noted, "They [PRC companies] have pathetic working conditions, no job security, and do not adhere to occupational health and safety guidelines," while another added, "Not only have we been affected materially but our health is at risk too. They do not have proper sanitation services for their workers." Specifically, this respondent noted the lack of toilets at pick up points, which is why workers relieve themselves in the maize fields, causing grievance for local farmers. **Importantly, participants do perceive a difference between PRC companies and firms from other investor countries.** "Their working conditions are unfair. Conditions are better with other investors." Another noted, "What I have come to observe is that the Chinese do not care about the safety of their workers as long as the job is done." They lament their government not dealing with issues of exploitation, saying, "The working conditions are quite pathetic with these people. We are not happy that they [PRC companies] are the ones in charge." Academic literature also documents that PRC firms did not adhere to health and safety regulations (e.g. Brooks 2010; Wells 2011; Leslie 2016).

Government officials do acknowledge problems exist. A representative of the Ministry of Labor admitted, "They [the PRC] are culprits of not adhering to occupation health and safety policy. No proper sanitation and they do not provide protective clothing." Nonetheless, it appears the situation is improving, albeit slowly, perhaps owing to more government attention to safety concerns. Official data suggests industrial accidents and fatalities in mining companies have declined since 2006: the number of accidents recorded by the Mines Safety Department fell from 350 in 2005 to 123 in 2014, while the number of fatal accidents fell from 80 in 2005 to 12 in 2014.[59]

PRC companies tend to not subcontract to Zambian companies despite contractual obligations to do so; language barriers are an issue. According to the contracts signed by PRC companies, firms are required to subcontract some of the work to Zambian firms. This ensures infrastructure projects have positive spillovers into the local economy. For example, a city council member stated, "I just know that 20% should be subcontracted to local constructors." However, FGD participants noted, "Local people are complaining that Chinese are not including local people. They [PRC companies] want to subcontract, but only to other Chinese companies, not to Zambian companies." Zambian officials, however, disagree. A representative from the RDA admitted "…there were hiccups in subcontracting which has been sorted out. The Chinese at the beginning were not subcontracting the locals, now they do." Asked why these issues were resolved, a representative of the Ministry of Labor pointed to improved communication: "The challenge over the years with adherence has been the

---

[58] See Hairong and Sautman (2013)
[59] See Dynamic (2017)

language barrier. The issues of translating the laws and all. There is an improvement with adherence of late because foreign contractors are run through local laws before commencing work."[60] For instance, the Ministry of Labor commissioned the translation of local laws pertaining to business regulation into Chinese. These documents were subsequently provided to PRC companies. Interviewees noted that the number of complaints appear to have been reduced after such translated documents were distributed. The fact that multiple interviewees mentioned the translations suggests that this did occur. While it is impossible to assess the causal effect of such documents on PRC actor behavior, it should be noted that government officials interviewed seemed to make this link.

Officials and residents both criticize the quality of PRC infrastructure projects. Interestingly, government officials and FGDs did not always disagree with one another. This is the case concerning the quality of work by PRC companies: both groups a thought the life span of the resulting infrastructure was unusually short. Specifically, a representative of the RDA pointed to, "premature damages of the road, for instance the Mungwi and Lumumba roads." Other officials noted PRC companies have their own standards which are not quite compatible with Zambian standards. "They transplant the type of road that works in China and hope that it also works in Zambia, despite the different climatic and physical environment." FGD participants agreed with this assessment, with a female participant in an urban setting noting, "We have not been impressed with the previous projects handled by the Chinese like the roads. The life span of their work is very questionable." **This convergence of findings among elite and everyday citizens' suggests encroachment of ani-democratic norms of corruption around payment for products that are of poor quality and that are harmful to the environment.**

Information seems opaque on the PRC's payment of taxes and adherence to local tax laws. This study was interested in learning more about whether firms pay both national and local taxes. However, it was impossible to obtain much information. Among the FGDs, none had much information about taxes paid by PRC companies. Government officials did not have much knowledge either. A representative of the Ministry of Labor noted, "We simply do not know." The only information the study team was able to obtain was a survey of PRC companies conducted by a student at the Information and Communications University (ICU) in Lusaka in which all nine PRC companies surveyed paid taxes to local authorities and the Zambian government.[61]

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What kinds of actions are taken by national governments when PRC companies are non-compliant? Is there a consistent pattern with respect to the reaction by the Zambian government to instances of non-compliance?

The second set of research questions examined the kinds of actions taken by Zambian authorities when PRC companies are non-compliant. Specifically, the research endeavored to find out if there is a consistent pattern with respect to the reaction by the Zambian government to instances of non-compliance with local rules and regulations. Investigations revealed, overall, **Zambian authorities**

---

[60] The same references to issues regarding communication have been found in Kenya. Farooq, Yuan, Zhu and Feroze (2018) write, "Unfortunately, Chinese companies do not always have the patience to familiarize themselves and understand the legislation before starting business. In this sense, ineffective communication is a major hurdle for future progress of the Maritime Silk Road."

[61] See Chanda (2020)

take little action when non-compliance occurs. The data points to two reasons for this state of affairs.

Government authorities lack policy instruments to sanction non-compliance, but this does not seem uniquely applied to PRC companies. The first reason for the lack of action lies in the fact that government authorities appear to have few instruments at hand to effectively penalize non-compliance. With respect to violations of labor laws, several government representatives noted routine inspections happen and, at times, violations are identified. In these instances, authorities have imposed fines on PRC operators. However, the monetary value of these fines is so small it does not act as a deterrent against future violations. Existing literature confirms outdated legislation fails to incentivize firms to be compliant. Political economist Dan Haglund[62] reports, "…the Environmental Council of Zambia (ECZ) has the right to issue on-the-spot fines, but these equate to just ZMW144,000 ($37), and proposed revisions to environmental regulations envisage only a doubling of this. Similarly, the Mines Safety Department (MSD) also recognizes the weak deterrence of fines, with a senior inspector commenting on Chinese mining investors that 'we are fining them all the time'."

Officials face a similar situation with respect to the quality of products delivered by PRC companies. A representative of the RDA noted, "We have the central materials lab that does routine tests to assess the quality. We also have RDA equipment such as Ground Penetrating Radar that test the quality of the roads." However, their ability to hold the contractor accountable are limited. "We have a Retention Money Policy. This refers to the withholding of 10% of the money to be paid to constructors until a year elapses and we are sure that project was legit [and] there were no premature failures." However, 10% of the contract value does not seem to be a sufficiently large deterrent.

Importantly, the lack of policy instruments to effectively sanction non-compliance suggests that Zambian authorities are unable to penalize companies irrespective of their identity. From this point of view, it appears unlikely that the lack of action on part of Zambian officials is unique to PRC companies.

PRC companies may have undue influence due to the fact that they provide both financing and construction services. FGDs identified a larger underlying issue related to the fact the Zambian government obtains *both* financing and construction from PRC sources. This differs from deals with other nations where funding and construction services are typically obtained using separate channels and supplied by different providers, which allows governments to have a stronger negotiation position. Participants in FGDs were well aware of these arrangements and were critical of the Zambian government obtaining both financing and construction services from the same source because they viewed this arrangement of giving PRC actors undue power over Zambia. Research participants claimed this explains why violations of local laws are not pursued by Zambian officials. "[The government] cannot do anything about it because they owe them. They have some understanding." As a result, "The Chinese get away with everything." One FGD female participant living close to the Kafue Gorge dam said, "…we no longer feel that this is our country."[63] **This point is, indeed, unique to PRC companies and does not apply to Western counterparts.**

---

[62] Haglund (2008)

[63] This corresponds to anecdotes from a decade ago. For example, the New York Times wrote on November 20, 2010 "…many Zambians complain that the powerful foreign companies are permitted to play by their own rules, plunder the country and abuse workers."

This is an important finding given the context of the ever-increasing debt burden Zambia owes to the PRC. According to the Brookings Institution, Zambia's external debt in 2017 was equivalent to 65.8% of the country's GNI.[64] Reporting in 2020 anticipated that the country's sovereign debt would reach 96% of its GDP in 2021.[65] Some estimates indicate that the PRC owns between one-fourth[66] and one-third[67] of Zambia's external debt.

Moreover, it appears that Zambia is struggling to repay these loans, particularly in light of declining copper prices. In March 2019, the Export-Import Bank of China threatened that contractors would suspend work on infrastructure projects in Zambia if arrears were not paid—a threat that several companies made good on later in the year. In October 2019, Zambia's Housing and Infrastructure Development Minister Vincent Mwale denied allegations that China's Export-Import Bank had halted funding for the $360 million expansion and modernization of the Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in Lusaka.[68] These events have increased concerns that Lusaka may transfer assets to the PRC in exchange for debt relief. One such asset rumored to be under consideration[69] is the state-owned ZESCO, Zambia's largest power company and producer of roughly 80% of the electricity consumed in the country.

These are clear indications that providing both financing and construction services from the same source provides PRC actors with a large degree of influence. For this reason, it is not surprising that FGDs pointed to the power imbalance that comes with such arrangements. Furthermore, against this background, it is not surprising that Zambian authorities feel that their hands are tied when it comes to sanctioning transgressions by PRC actors. In sum, our research suggests that the actions by PRC actors do undermine – albeit indirectly – the Zambian government's accountability to its citizens.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What experiences did local communities have with infrastructure projects funded and constructed by PRC actors? Specifically, how were community voices integrated into the design and implementation of these projects? Further, how do communities benefit from these projects either through the provision of public goods, such as schools and hospitals, or private goods, such as compensation for relocation?

Local communities were not consulted or included in the decision-making process leading to the approval of the project in their locale. FGD participants in both urban and rural settings expressed, "We were not called for any meeting. When the project started we had no idea over what was happening," while another added, "As taxi drivers, we are frequent road users as you can imagine, and we have ideas that we can bring to the table. But the authorities do not engage us through meetings or anything." Even if they were in favor of the project, local communities would have appreciated having

---

[64] See Dollar (2019)

[65] See Smith (2020

[66] See South China Morning Post (2019)

[67] See Laterza and Mususa (2018)

[68] See Lusaka Times (2019)

[69] See Chutel (2018)

a voice in the process. One male participant in Lusaka stated, "The project was a good idea but in future we would appreciate it more if they informed us on their plans."

Importantly, there was some disagreement on whether local leaders had been consulted, with some respondents doubting they were included in decisions and meetings, and others believing they were. However, the meetings appeared to have had the primary purpose of informing local leaders the project was coming, rather than requesting their input: "There was a meeting that was held at the beginning to discuss the project. … Nonetheless, we have no influence over who wins a government tender, because that's for the elite to decide." This was confirmed also when interviewing government representatives. For example, a spokesperson for the RDA said, "…we work with the local councils that *write to notify the citizens* in the respective areas over the development."

As a result, local preferences were not considered at the two project sites. **For example, religious issues at Kafue Gorge dam were not considered.** FGDs noted, "Our gods were disturbed. It was our treasured place." Others stated, "…that area had our shrine, our worship place. The shrine was destroyed which has caused rainfall abnormalities of late." In the same vein, one male participant who used to live close to the area where the dam is now being built exclaimed, "It was a shrine area. They made us lose on rains because they provoked the ancestors. They made our rain creatures run away." Government authorities acknowledged such difficulties. When asking a representative of ZESCO about the religious site close to the dam, he noted local communities had been asked to take their spirits with them during the relocation process. "We understand that there are emotional sites. However, how do you locate representatives of the gods? We don't know. However, we don't want the machines to be stopped by the gods either."[70]

Unsurprisingly, this process resulted in communities losing confidence in the government. "We feel left out in this whole project process," remarked one participant. Another said, "The relationship with [the] government has actually worsened; we have lost faith in them," while another added, "We have no confidence in government. Even the little we had is gone."

Local government officials provided public goods to compensate Zambian residents for economic losses or inconveniences in affected communities. One way for decision-makers to address potential grievances is to provide public goods in return for the disruption of their livelihoods. Such promises were made to residents in some of the locations visited. For example, in Chileleka – a location close to Kafue Gorge dam – citizens would lose access to the river's water after the completion of the dam. In return, citizens were promised the construction of a small dam as a water reservoir for local people as well as installing electricity in local schools and clinics. One male participant in a rural location noted:

---

[70] The State Department's 2020 Report on International Religious Freedom notes that the Zambian constitution declares the country a Christian nation but also has provisions that guarantee religious freedom and uphold the country's multireligious composition. It also prohibits religious discrimination and provides for freedom of conscience and belief. Generally speaking, there is little reason to question the level of religious tolerance in the Zambian population. However, concerns have emerged about the Zambian government's increasing attempts to regulate religious affairs. For example, starting in 2020, the government Implemented rules that require religious groups to register, mandate formal theological training for clergy, and stipulate that only religious organizations affiliated with recognized umbrella bodies may be registered to operate in the country. Religious groups expressed concern that this regulatory framework will interfere with their internal governance. The lack of concern for the sacred site described in this report may be an additional expression of increasing government nonchalance with respect to religious freedom.

"A meeting was held with our local leaders before the project commenced. There were conditions that were agreed upon by the government and the local leaders. One of them being the construction of small dams as water reservoirs for the local people since the dam area is no longer ours. Furthermore, the installing of electricity in the local schools and clinics. Up to date none of those conditions has been fulfilled by government."

However, promises of compensation were not kept. A FGD conducted in Daga noted no meetings with local leaders happened and no public goods were promised. "Construction of the dam is fine, but maybe if there was some form of social responsibility from the project, like empowering the locals in some way. Even just connecting electricity in schools and clinics. That would have been enough."

The government authorities interviewed, however, were not aware of any broken promises. This is clearly at odds with the narrative presented by the FDGs. One possibility for resolving these seemingly inconsistent accounts might be that clinics were constructed, but the majority of the local population had no access to these facilities. A study in 2012 found hospitals built for mining workers in the Zambian Chambishi belt were not open for the general public to use.[71] The Sino-Zambian Friendship hospital, for example, provided free healthcare only for Nonferrous Africa Mining Corporation (NFCA) employees, which is a PRC company. This might explain why government officials perceive that promises were fulfilled, while the general population does not experience a significant expansion of the health care resources available to them.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

How are the stakeholders (positively or negatively) affected by PRC infrastructure projects? How do they perceive these projects? Have projects caused any tension within communities, and if so, have there been any efforts to resolve this tension?

FGD participants exhibited mixed opinions when asked whether the project funded and implemented by the PRC companies was "worth it" and if they would "benefit" from it, though for most participants the negative consequences outweigh the positive. We identified three broad categories of reactions.

First, individuals said that they had no use for the project itself. With respect to Kafue Gorge Hydroelectric Dam, for example, one male participant noted, "Honestly, the dam does not reflect the needs of the local people. We have pressing issues such as diseases that we need to fight [rather] than concentrating on electricity that does not benefit most of rural areas." Another added, "…we do not see any relevance of this project because we will not benefit in any way. The government should have channeled the money to the rehabilitation of schools, clinics, and other amenities."

Further, FGD participants remarked they had lost income due to the projects. In locations close to Kafue Gorge, fishers commented on their inability to pursue their jobs. "We were serious fishermen who would fish for both consumption and selling to raise money. But now we can no longer go fishing there," while another added, "We are also facing challenges in raising school fees because we cannot go fishing around that area." Farmers were removed from the area upstream from the dam to make space for the reservoir. This affected both cattle farmers and other occupations. One male participant who

---

[71] See Carmody, Hampwaye and Sakala (2012)

used to live close to the dam noted, "We can no longer take our cattle for grazing anywhere near the site because it is prohibited. This has led to poor feeding for our livestock. And consequently, this led to reduced milk production, which is no longer sufficient for both consumption and selling." Another said, "For some of us, charcoal burning was our livelihood. But we cannot go anywhere near that area because it is prohibited. And here where we are, the type of trees are not appropriate for charcoal burning." A third added, "The dam area was our source of food. We would dig roots for relish at home; we would pick mushrooms, especially in the rainy season like now. Life has become expensive for us because almost everything now has to be bought." The study also discovered the situation in Lusaka Province is similar, particularly for vendors. One female FGD participant who used to operate a food stall selling snacks to travelers said, "They have created roads where we had our markets. We feel we have lost out. Our businesses are now slow," while another added, "Our markets have been disturbed. We just stand in the road now to market our products. It is very risky because a moving vehicle can run into you."

However, there were also positive voices acknowledging the benefits of the infrastructure projects. This applied more to the road project than the dam, as the dam is not yet completed. Also, the benefits of increased electricity production are less easily tied to a specific project while the road is newly completed, and its benefits are both visible and tangible. FGD participants in all three urban locations noted increased traffic speed and security. Table 8 illustrates the breakdown of perspectives by key demographics.

Table 8. Perspectives on PRC Infrastructure Projects by FGD Participants

		Ideology of Respondent	
		Pro Government	**Against Government**
Occupation	Skills specific to previous situation (fishers, street vendors, etc.)	Intermediate	Negative view of PRC project
	Transferable skills (taxi drivers, etc.)	Positive view of PRC project	Intermediate

Occupation, level of education, and political ideology tended to shape Zambian perceptions of PRC project benefits. Respondents whose skills were specific to the situation before the project was implemented were frequently negatively affected. For example, fishers who lost access to their fishing grounds due to the construction of the dam were more likely to be negatively affected by the construction of the dam. Similarly, street vendors who relied on slow through-traffic to sell their goods lacked a customer base once the roads had been improved, speeds increased, and traffic did not need to stop as frequently. In contrast, workers with transferable skills were more adaptable to the new situation after the completion of the project. For instance, taxi drivers could adapt to a newly constructed road more easily by offering longer distance journeys at higher speeds, which were possible given the improved road network. With regard to level of education, FGD participants with higher levels of education were more likely to acknowledge the potential long-term benefits of increased electricity generation due to the Kafue Gorge dam, while those with less formal education tended to focus on the immediate consequences of the project.

With regard to political ideology, those supporting the government were more likely to identify positive consequences such as increased power generation and less congestion. This subset of participants made statements, such as, "We appreciate their efforts to improve the infrastructure through such projects," "We are thankful to the government for the project as it enables us to move faster," or "We do not condemn the authorities for their decisions; we actually appreciate what they do." In other words, supporters of the Zambian government recognized that the benefits from the projects are not entirely due to PRC actors, but that the government played an active role in realizing these projects. Among supporters of the government, therefore, there appears to exist a sense of gratitude towards the government. However, those supporting the opposition were more likely to emphasize the negative consequences and were more likely to feel elites had benefitted at the expense of the general population. Here we heard statements such as, "We have lost our land because other than just the dam area being robbed from us even the area around has been gotten by the elite and we are left without land." It appears, therefore, that infrastructure projects provide the then increasingly authoritarian Zambian government with some legitimacy, at least in the eyes of co-partisans.

Officials acknowledge some grievances exist. On this point, interview findings were consistent with the literature.[72] However, **there appears to be no explicit nor credible process in place through which local residents can express their voices.** One FGD participant noted, "There is nothing the people can do about it. Government has the power, authority, they own the country; they don't have to care."

Against this background, the research investigated if residents pursued different avenues of political action. For example, one option might be to work within the system from the bottom up by engaging with the local city councils. Most FGD participants did not pursue this course of action, for different reasons. Some expected no positive outcome in part because the local government represented a different political party than they supported. Others lacked confidence in this approach. Similarly, FGDs noted organizing collective action outside of the system was not an option, given the political polarization in Zambia, which mutes the expression of criticism. Directly engaging PRC companies was not an alternative either since PRC investors expect the Zambian government to broker their relationships with local actors.[73] In sum, little political action that might address the grievances experienced by residents was found.

Asked who was to blame for this state of affairs, FGDs respondents' insights were perceptive, discerning, and sharp. Interestingly, FGD participants had positive things to say about PRC actors. These positive statements can be classified in four categories.

First, they acknowledged **PRC actors have the capital and expertise Zambia lacks**. Second, respondents viewed **PRC actors as more responsible with financial resources compared to their Zambian counterparts.** One noted, "Zambian contractors are not sustainable with the way they use the money for the project unlike the Chinese. The thing about Zambian contractors is too much luxury. They can misuse the money given to them for implementation, spoiling their wives and girlfriends. So, the Chinese are just fine." Third, **PRC actors, despite shortcomings, provide jobs and skills to local workers**, and finally, **Chinese workers also do their part**. One male participant

---

[72] ZiroMwatela and Changfeng (2016)

[73] Haglund (2009)

noted, "They [the imported Chinese workers] do the work even if there is a lot of hard labor involved," and a Zambian official remarked, "[The Chinese] demand workers to put in the full 8 hours [and] the Chinese workers are putting in 100%."

The study frequently encountered statements assigning at least partial responsibility to the Zambian government. For example, when talking about the quality concerns noted above, FGDs pointed out PRC actors work according to a budget. They pointed to the small budgets PRC companies obtain to conduct the work, which may have been reduced even further by officials taking their cut. As a consequence, residents do not appear to blame PRC contractors, but instead view the lack in quality as a logical consequence.

CONCLUSIONS

The involvement of PRC actors in large infrastructure projects in Zambia and elsewhere on the African continent has generated much interest, praise, and criticism. Strong narratives exist about what might be going on and what it might mean. The purpose of this research project was not to focus on the discourse surrounding PRC-funded projects. Instead, the task was to obtain an accurate picture of on-the-ground dynamics in order to understand how various PRC-supported activities and interactions, and Zambian perceptions of them, were shaping democratic norms and values. The intention was to trace how the PRC's modes of engagement and operation impacted Zambian communities and to understand how different stakeholders in Zambia experienced their interactions with the PRC.

Against this backdrop, the findings suggest the following: First, **the PRC's circumvention of labor laws and minimum wage laws, as well as health and safety standards, indicate an erosion of norms around fair labor practices and right to worker safety.** Results also encountered complaints about the quality of work and the lack of subcontracting to Zambian firms. Two problems may be at the root of these issues. First, officials have insufficient policy instruments at hand (e.g., low monetary value of fines) to effectively sanction non-compliance. Second, the fact that both financing and construction services are obtained from the same provider gives PRC actors much power and influence and consequently may prevent Zambian authorities from effectively responding to non-compliance of PRC firms. These issues speak to **weak government accountability** and consequently make the Zambian government more responsive to PRC interests than those of their own citizens.

With respect to the experience of residents with such infrastructure projects, **the research also revealed a lack of inclusion**, as local communities were not integrated in the design phase of PRC projects and received few public goods and uneven private compensation schemes in return. The perceived consequences of these projects are primarily negative, though some positive side effects were identified. Nonetheless, no formal grievance process was discovered. Further, most individuals thought collective action or political resistance was not feasible given the polarized political landscape. Interestingly, **local communities did not place all blame on PCR actors. Instead, residents recognized PRC actors offer positive influences – such as jobs, skills, capital, and superior capacities when compared to their Zambian counterparts – and that instead the Zambian government has partial responsibility for the sub-optimal outcomes.**

Second, PRC infrastructure projects appear to provide the then increasingly authoritarian Zambian government with some legitimacy, at least in the eyes of co-partisans. Our research uncovered that respondents supporting the Zambian government were more likely to identify

positive consequences of PRC infrastructure projects, such as increased power generation and less congestion. However, those supporting the opposition were more likely to emphasize the negative consequences and were more likely to feel elites have benefitted at the expense of the general population.

PRC impact on Zambian norms and values does not appear to be direct or premeditated. Issues of labor exploitation are not unique to PRC companies, as Western companies appear to exploit the same loopholes in the Zambian legal framework governing labor and business. Furthermore, Zambian officials have few and ineffective policy instruments available to sanction non-compliance. As a consequence, little action is to be expected by Zambian authorities when confronted with non-compliance, whether the transgression comes from the PRC or Western companies. Third, the fact that local communities were effectively ignored during the process of designing and construction of the infrastructure projects was not unique to the PRC. The Zambian government does not appear to have processes in place to incorporate community voices in decision-making, irrespective of the particular project under consideration. Consequently, respondents placed blame on the Zambian government for a lack of implementing appropriate processes.

FOCUS AREA 3 – INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND SURVEILLANCE

This section details trends and patterns of PRC state and corporate investments and engagements in Africa's ICT sector. We define PRC investments as monetary transactions (e.g. financial investments) and engagements as relationship-building or the existence of partnerships. The discussion includes a "scoping study" of over 300 open sources relating to PRC ICTs in Africa and explores financial investments and engagements through the lens of democracy, human rights, and governance. We first identify a persistent theme in existing academic literature, then discuss the PRC's attempts to engage in what we call "digital diplomacy". We then group PRC financial investments and engagements into categories. In assessing these investments and engagements, we include both state actors and non-state corporate actors. Due to various limitations – e.g. challenges with data collection and accessing interview subjects – it was difficult to analyze the democracy and human rights implications of the data that we categorized. It was also difficult to determine the degree to which the data we were able to access is representative of the scope of data germane to our research questions. This Focus Area's conclusions are thus very preliminary and provide a jumping-off point for more rigorous and in-depth research and analysis.

BACKGROUND

There are two distinct schools of thought on the PRC's ICT engagement in Africa. One sees the PRC as an economically self-interested and politically neutral partner helping African countries expand internet access by financing projects and offering affordable ICT technologies. Such views embrace "techno-optimism,"[74] which is the hopeful and aspirational view that the PRC's investment and engagements is a necessary ingredient for the development of Africa's ICT infrastructure[75] enabling Africa's participation in modern information societies."[76] This perspective holds that to worry about the negative effects of PRC investment on African democracy is to deny African sovereignty, the right of African governments,

---

[74] See S. Avle (2020), p. 237-254

[75] See G. Sen and L. Bingqin (2019)

[76] See A. Tong (2021), available at: http://yris.yira.org/essays/4702

whether authoritarian (e.g., Rwanda and Ethiopia) or democratic (e.g., Kenya and Ghana), to decide what they want from China.[77] Generally, Chinese researchers and scholars from the PRC, as well as some of their African counterparts, fall in this camp.

The second school of thought characterizes the PRC's involvement in the ICT sector as authoritarian,[78] and identifies its exportation of illiberal practices[79] as a form of digital colonialism. This group, comprised mainly of Western scholars, researchers and journalists, emphasizes the PRC's engagement in surveillance, data privacy and security breaches, internet shutdowns, and censorship as threats to democracy and development. This "techno-pessimist" perspective holds that the PRC uses ICT investments and engagements to undermine independent institutions and shapes the information environment through censorship and manipulation.[80] From this perspective, African governments and other ICT actors are not simply attracted to Chinese innovation or cultural exchanges of "soft power" but are being lured and targeted by PRC actors. The conclusion is that PRC financial and corporate investments and non-monetary engagements have consequences for democratic norms and values. For example, African leaders may use internet control mechanisms to target opposition groups or expose African citizens to risks such as mining of personal data and fraud. Moreover, this perspective suggests that the PRC's engagement in the ICT sector negatively impacts socio-economic development since it leads to political instability when citizens rise against autocratic regimes. African researchers, journalists and civil society activists do not clearly align either one school of thought over the other.

PREVIEW OF FINDINGS

Patterns of illiberal practices and weakened democratic norms and values are prevalent in findings from the case study countries. Weak ICT policy frameworks and safeguards create vulnerabilities for Africans as evidenced in concerns expressed around PRC privacy violations and PRC-influenced internet censorship. According to study interviewees African governments face an uneven playing field and are taken advantage of in their business dealings with PRC companies in the ICT sector. At the same time, the research case studies suggest that Africans see benefits from PRC engagement: ICTs enable access to information that can actually promote democratic norms and values, which may bode well for their perseverance on the continent. However, though Chinese ICTs may be less expensive and thus more accessible, respondents appreciated the quality of Western ICTs, which was seen as superior.

One surprising research finding was that African civil society organizations have little information about the PRC's influence in the ICT space, despite widespread debates and reporting on instances of illiberal ICT practices on the continent. Another finding is that "digital diplomacy" is a cross-cutting area of PRC engagement. "Digital diplomacy" is a phrase borrowed from scholarship on public diplomacy and is defined as a means by which state and corporate or non-state actors persuade foreign elites and publics that the values, policies, and actions of one country deserve support.[81] In this case, African leaders, elites, and citizens are influenced through strategies such as crisis management, public events, corporate social responsibility activities, and trainings. Research documenting PRC engagement suggests that digital diplomacy is used to improve relations between the PRC and African countries. This is particularly the

---

[77] See I. Gagliardone (2019)

[78] See I. Gagliardone (2019)

[79] See R. Gravett (2020), p. 125-146

[80] See C. Walker (2018)

[81] See D.B. Mor (2006), p. 157-176

case during times of crisis, waning engagements, or when angling to close deals in the ICT sector. During difficult times or when economic interests are a pressing concern for African countries, the PRC deploys diplomatic strategies to smooth over relations, rebuild its reputation, and resume previously close ties. This study also found that surveillance infrastructures and business practices undermined freedom of association and political expression. They also created a subtle enabling environment for international cybercrime that undermines privacy, domestic policies that contribute to democratic backsliding, and operating contracts that put African partners at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their PRC counterparts.

Sophisticated bundling of services and products – creating super apps – across ICT fields introduces problems with transparency and accountability of PRC ICT firms in Africa, as well as challenges with the protection of citizen's data and privacy. We find that data-cooption technologies are being deployed faster than the policy and regulatory mechanisms that could protect citizens' data and privacy rights.[82] When regulatory policy does catch up with the pace of ICT investment, African countries then sometimes enact ICT laws and regulations that emulate authoritarian aspects of the PRC's model.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

In which sectors of African society and economy are Chinese state and private organizations investing and donating ICT hardware and software?

Digital Diplomacy: A Cross-Cutting Strategy

Research documenting PRC engagement in the digital space suggests that the PRC is turning more frequently to digital technologies and PRC tech companies in the pursuit of influencing African publics and elites on what has been referred to as public diplomacy in the digital age, digital public diplomacy,[83] or simply, digital diplomacy.[84] In other words, digital diplomacy is a means of shoring up support among Africa government elites and shaping African publics' hearts and minds, with tech companies being used as a conduit for the PRC's strategy. Illustrating the often-ambiguous lines between the PRC and a country's private sector, corporations are often deployed by the PRC for digital diplomacy alongside high-level state-led missions involving officials. Indeed, scholars have long acknowledged that companies such as Huawei play a corporate diplomacy-led role for the PRC.[85] Overall, it appears digital diplomacy is being used strategically to implement the 2018 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation action plans, which state that:

> *"The two sides will, in recognition of the strategic and far-reaching impact of ICT on economic and social development, enhance exchanges and cooperation between competent authorities, share good practice in each other's ICT development, seize the opportunity presented by the digital economy, and encourage companies to carry out cooperation in ICT infrastructure, the internet and the digital economy."*[86]

---

[82] See Privacy International (2017)

[83] See J. Marinho (2020), available at: https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/blog/china-africa-2019-facebook-twitter-part-public-diplomacy

[84] See I. Manor (2017), available at: https://digdipblog.com/2017/03/28/the-digitalization-of-diplomacy/

[85] See L. Tang and H. Li (2011)

[86] See Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021), available at: http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1594297.htm

With this conceptual understanding of digital diplomacy in mind, the scoping study identified 8,627 instances of digital diplomacy, including using corporate social responsibility; public relations events; donations; training and competition programs for African government officials and students; diplomatic engagements between PRC officials and African counterparts via diplomatic missions; government-to-government "cyber diplomacy"[87]; and finally, crisis management. All these forms of digital diplomacy are embedded within the broader discourse of positive developmental outcomes of PRC-based investments and engagements in Africa's ICT sector.

Crisis Management

The study found that digital diplomacy is used to improve relations between PRC and African countries during times of crisis, waning engagements, or when angling to close deals in the ICT sector. At such difficult times or when economic interests are paramount, the PRC deploys diplomatic strategies to smooth over relations, rebuild its reputation, and resume previously close ties. For example, the PRC's digital diplomacy with Tanzania arose in response to a recent cooling off period in bilateral relations that were sometimes tense. [88] For instance, former President John Magufuli openly accused Chinese interests of short-changing Tanzania in the Bagamoyo port construction, which was worth an estimated $10 billion. This was especially problematic for the PRC since the Bagamoyo port was projected to form an African hub in the Belt and Road Initiative (discussed below). The January 2021 visit by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, however, symbolized a dramatic change in Tanzania-PRC relations with the Magufuli administration seemingly changing its tune to reset relations. For instance, during a joint press conference with Tanzanian Prime Minister Kassim Majaliwa, Yi was effusive about the role of Chinese ICTs in Tanzania's development. As we shall see below, Tanzania and the PRC found common ground on the basis of the latter's need to control information flow during the 2020 elections.

Throughout his presidency, Magufuli took a nationalistic, personality-cult posture[89] leading to substantial backsliding in terms of human rights and democracy generally and with regards to press and information freedoms specifically. Incidences of human rights abuses were widely reported by Human Rights Watch, Committee to Protect Journalists, and Article 19, some of which involved the use of digital technologies as we shall see in the analysis on surveillance technologies below. However, as the 2020 elections drew closer, ties with the PRC were re-established and coincidentally, there was a rise in information control mechanisms including internet shutdowns. Coincidentally, the targeting of journalists and activists happened at the same time a rapprochement with the PRC was taking shape. This suggests that an illiberal Tanzania could repair relations with the PRC in circumstances when Tanzania's ruling party, CCM, needed to control information flows to manage the outcome of the 2020 elections.

It is not only in Tanzania that digital diplomacy has been used to smooth over problems during periods of crisis. In Kenya, digital diplomacy was used when PRC nationals were arrested for their involvement in a massive cybercrime in 2014. To undertake damage control over the incident, the PRC negotiated

---

[87] See A. Segal (Undated), available at:
https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/segal_chinese_cyber_diplomacy.pdf

[88] Some commentators place the disputes with the PRC in a broader foreign policy context, as Tanzania turned inward and neglected engagement with Kenya and Western nations too during this period. See N. Minde (2019), available at:
https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2019/03/26/the-waning-foreign-policy-influence-of-tanzania-under-president-magufuli/

[89] N. Minde (2019) available at: https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2019/03/26/the-waning-foreign-policy-influence-of-tanzania-under-president-magufuli/

for the repatriation of the PRC hackers. In early 2015, the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, made an official tour to Kenya – as part of the tradition where selected African countries are the first ports of call for Chinese foreign ministers annually – during which a formal request for the repatriation was made.[90] The Kenyan government's abandonment of legal proceedings is a case of shifting norms to accommodate Beijing. Further, following the case, Kenya and the PRC concluded negotiations in 2016 on a treaty for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters including the extradition of criminals. Here, China influenced the Kenyan legal and regulatory systems. The key Chinese actors involved in the final negotiations in Nairobi were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Ministry of Public Security, and the Ministry of Justice. On the Kenyan side were the State Law Office and Department of Justice, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the judiciary, and the Directorate of Criminal Investigations. Overall, developments over this case show the weakness in Kenya's legal and political institutions to withstand the PRC's diplomatic machinery even in cases where PRC nationals were clearly implicated in and should be held accountable for ICT-related breaches.

Public Relations Events

PRC ICT entities have become adept at convening feel-good public events as a means of building public support for their products and services. For example, Alibaba e-commerce platform was launched in Kenya, Rwanda, and South Africa between 2017 and 2018 through a series of events that included courtesy calls on presidents Uhuru Kenyatta (Kenya), Paul Kagame (Rwanda) and Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa). The strategy also included Alibaba founder, Jack Ma's public lectures in these three countries, where he emphasized that African countries could emulate China by using ICTs to overcome poverty.[91] The heavy media publicity around Jack Ma made him the face of PRC soft power in Africa.[92] Jack Ma's philanthropic posture was soon followed by Alibaba's entry into the African ICT market. In 2019, an event in Dar es Salaam on "Cyber-Culture and Digital Life" offers another vivid example of how high-level events were aimed at influencing African governments. The event, organized by China Federation of Internet Societies (CFIS), PRC digital broadcasting company StarTimes, and the Tanzania Information and Tourism bureau, sought to "strengthen dialogue and communication" in cyberculture and promote understanding between Chinese and African Internet companies to realize mutual cooperation and benefit.[93] Such spectacles may have the effect of blindsiding African officials about the regulatory mechanisms necessary for the introduction of new technologies.

Cultivating Relations with Industry Lobby Groups

The PRC cultivates relationships with industry lobby groups to build support for PRC ICT firms. Three examples involving WeChat and Huawei in Kenya illustrate this point. WeChat Pay entered into the Kenyan financial services sector in 2018 with business lobby groups such as Kenya National Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KNNCI) rooting for the use of its technologies. Similar strategies of using industry lobbies by Chinese ICT firms can be seen in the 2020 signing of a partnership agreement between the Kenya Bankers Association (KBA) and Huawei. As a result of this, KNNCI

---

[90] T. Odula. (2015), available at: https://apnews.com/article/0454313b3ec84ae09c5ead23d34ee257

[91] See the Africa Report (2020), available at: https://www.theafricareport.com/22056/jack-ma-todays-africa-is-the-china-of-20-years-ago/

[92] C. E. Olander (2019), available at: https://chinaafricaproject.com/analysis/jack-ma-is-the-new-face-of-chinese-soft-power-in-africa/

[93] See China Federation of Internet Societies (2019), available at: http://www.en.cfis.cn/2019-12/16/c_1125352587.htm

started promoting WeChat Pay as an affordable and convenient transaction platform for Kenya-PRC trade.[94] Agreements were also inked between WeChat Pay and Kenyan financial institutions such as Equity and Family banks, and Safaricom, the telecommunication company which does mobile money transfers. These partnerships facilitated the use of WeChat Pay's platforms for international transactions.

Corporate Social Responsibility, Donations, and Training

PRC ICT firms have set up philanthropic mechanisms through which companies direct corporate social responsibility and donations to Africa. COVID-19 presented an opportunity for charity missions infused with sentiments of fealty. PRC ICT firms were on the forefront of COVID-19 medical equipment and supplies to Africa throughout 2020. In April 2020, the Jack Ma Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the e-commerce company Alibaba Group, made a large donation to the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at the African Union headquarters. In the first incident of foreign donations after the declaration of the pandemic in March, donations by the Jack Ma Foundation included 4.6 million masks, 500,000 swabs and test kits, 300 ventilators, 200,000 sets of protective clothing, 200,000 face shields, 2,000 temperature guns, 100 body temperature scanners, and 500,000 pairs of gloves.[95] In June 2020, The Tecno Foundation, linked to the mobile handset maker Transsion, donated 100,000 medical masks, 10,000 medical gloves, 1,000 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the Nigerian ministry of health.[96] Announcements of donations were made almost every week in early 2020.

Donations by the Jack Ma Foundation were coordinated via PRC diplomatic missions, which shows the link between state and private strategies. While Jack Ma was active in humanitarian activities towards Africa in the first half of 2020, these donations dried up from the latter part of 2020 as Jack Ma came under criticism from the PRC government. This suggests that private PRC firms that fall out with the state also lose their capability to engage internationally. **Cultural activities and donations are a critical way the PRC attempts to build support for its ICT investments and engagements.** The PRC social media-cum-online payments firm, WeChat provides a case in point. In 2017 for instance, its parent company, Tencent Holdings, the owner of the online payment platform, WeChat Pay, launched a project for the digitization of the National Museums of Kenya's cultural heritage artifacts in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Several months later, Tencent's subsidiary, WeChat Pay started closing deals in the Kenyan financial sector; it launched an online payment system in partnership with the leading financial institutions.

PRC firms started publishing corporate social responsibility reports to smooth over relations, address issues of mistrust, and build support. In 2018, the Kenya-China Economic and Trade Association released a "Chinese Enterprises in Kenya Social Responsibility"[97] report aimed at among other things addressing mistrust about Chinese engagements. A Huawei report entitled *Huawei Investment & Holding Co., Ltd. 2019 Sustainability*[98] released to coincide with the annual United Nations

---

[94] See Xinhua (2019), available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-11/20/c_138570477.htm

[95] See Xinua (2020), available at: https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/watch-jack-ma-alibaba-send-third-massive-donation-of-COVID-19-medical-supplies-to-africa-47325493

[96] See The Guardian (2020), available at: https://guardian.ng/technology/tecno-supports-health-workers-fight-against-covi-19-donates-supplies-to-ncdc/

[97] See Kenya China Economic and Trade Association (2018), available at: http://ke2.mofcom.gov.cn/18en.pdf

[98] Available at: https://www-file.huawei.com/-/media/corp2020/pdf/sustainability/2019-sustainability-report-en-v2.pdf

General Assembly in 2020, frames the company as helping Kenya achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through activities such as contributions to the Kenyan economy and society. These include training 5,000 people in digital skills and donating to communities in rural parts of northern Kenya to the tune ofKshs300 million ($2.8 million).[99] The corporate social responsibility reports aimed at bolstering Huawei's image in the public and among elites. With regard to training and programs for youth, Huawei established an East Africa Training Center, the Seeds for the Future, and the Presidential Digital Talent programs, which conduct talent searches and competitions while offering ICT skills, academies, and digital literacy programs. Alibaba also launched the Africa Netpreneur. These soft power strategies give PRC actors a competitive advantage by creating a positive image of China.

For each act of digital diplomacy discussed above, diplomats from PRC embassies reinforce the positive image of the country's companies and government. For instance, PRC in-country diplomats are always on hand during events choreographed to garner publicity such as the launch of corporate social responsibility reports or the arrival of leading tech personalities such as Jack Ma.

Training as a major activity implies that the skills development programs also socialize recipients not only in technical knowledge but China's vision of ICTs. However, these trainings and competitions are typically short-term activities rather than in-depth and rigorous forms of knowledge transfer and thus fall short of their promise to increase the expertise of African youth. Some have pointed out that Huawei business practices have weak technology transfer processes between the company and its local business partners, which limits technical skills.[100]

We now consider patterns of financial investment among PRC and Chinese companies. Our analysis includes private and public firms, with the formers' interests aligned with that of the PRC government.

Patterns of PRC Investment

In capturing PRC investment patterns, the scoping study identified at least 77 new ICT investments and engagements across Africa: 42 in 2018, 92 in 2019, and 93 in 2020. That the level of PRC engagement did not subside in 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic shows the resilience of the PRC's ICT presence. The continuation of PRC ICT investments is welcomed and supported by African leaders[101]. As we shall see below, fintech, e-commerce, and surveillance now outpace PRC ICT investments and engagements in telecommunications infrastructure in terms of activities.

Telecommunications and ICT Infrastructure

The study shows that there were 21 notable investments and engagements relating to infrastructure developments building on infrastructures constructed and supplied since the turn of the millennium. Before 2018 and going back to the late 1990s, PRC investments were prominent in telecommunication infrastructure development with the major actors being Huawei (linked to the Chinese military and intelligence systems), ZTE (a state-owned enterprise), China Telecom, and China International

---

[99] Huawei (2020), available at: https://www.huawei.com/ke/news/ke/2019/huawei-kenya-launches-first-sustainability-report

[100] See A. Craner (2019), available at: https://www.democracyspeaks.org/blog/huawei%E2%80%99s-presence-africa-grows-privacy-concerns-rise

[101] See S. Mkhwanazi (2019), available at: https://www.iol.co.za/news/politics/cyril-ramaphosa-correct-to-back-china-in-trade-war-with-us-says-sacp-28819454

Telecommunication Construction Corporation (CITCC),[102] among others. These entities are either linked to the PRC, for example, Huawei has close ties with state military and intelligence systems, or are wholly state-owned, such as ZTE. Huawei, the PRC company with up to 70% of the continent's 4G infrastructure,[103] became the first major Chinese company to enter the ICT field when it was launched in Kenya in 1998.[104] It was soon followed by other PRC companies that invested mainly in mobile telecommunication and fiber optic cables.[105] Over the years, sanctions have been imposed on Huawei and ZTE for doing espionage for the PRC by installing backdoors used to collect data on governments, businesses, and citizens. The opposite has happened in Africa; these companies have been embraced even amidst accusations that it had been involved in hacking. In 2017 for instance, Huawei was found to have hacked the African Union headquarters. Despite this, African leaders such as Paul Kagame of Rwanda and Cyril Ramaphosa continued to offer support.

Data from the scoping study shows that while ICT infrastructure remains important, there is a shift towards new ICTs such as fintech and surveillance software, which operate on the same infrastructure built by PRC entities. Due to these new entrants, the PRC ICT landscape is expanding and diversifying. The overall picture is that PRC ICT investments and engagements are likely to maintain an upward trajectory in the coming months and years. The overarching PRC ICT strategy propelling investments and engagements is stated in the Forum on Africa-China Cooperation (FOCAC) 2019-2021 action plan as follows:

> *"Both sides encourage and support their companies to participate and partner in the building of ICT infrastructure of African countries, including optical fiber cable backbone networks, cross-border connectivity, international undersea cables, new-generation mobile networks, and data centers and cooperate in a mutually beneficial way in the construction, operation and service of relevant infrastructures."[106]*

It will be important to monitor developments leading to and during the 2021 FOCAC conference to be held in Dakar, Senegal in the last quarter of 202,[107] which will likely focus on COVID-19 responses.

Digital Silk Road

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a PRC geostrategic plan under implementation since 2013 aimed at building infrastructure across the world to support the PRC's economic, political and security ambitions goals. The Digital Silk Road is the ICT component of BRI. It features infrastructure such as 5G cloud services and entails laying submarine and terrestrial internet cables. A key Digital Silk Road project is the Pakistan East Africa Cable Express (PEACE), funded by the Export-Import Bank of China and contracted to the "marine" division of Huawei. It will link eastern and southern Africa to Asia and parts of Europe. The approximately 25 African countries that have signed on to the BRI are at risk of becoming beholden

---

[102] See Executive Research Associates (2009), p. 50-67, available at: https://www.ide.go.jp/English/Data/Africa_file/Manualreport/cia_09.html

[103] See S. Woodhams (2020), available at: https://qz.com/africa/1822312/huaweis-surveillance-tech-in-africa-worries-activists/

[104] See Fransman, F. (2019), available at: https://mg.co.za/article/2019-03-06-china-wins-the-tech-war-in-africa/

[105] New Security Learning (2014)

[106] Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021), available at: http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1594297.htm

[107] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2021), available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1877527.shtml

to the PRC, denying these countries the opportunity to partner with other countries and make independent decisions, based on their national plans, about ICTs.

Mobile Hardware

Mobile hardware devices manufactured and distributed by Transsion, the leading distributor of mobile handsets, have become by far the most popular in Africa because they are affordable. In 2020, the anti-fraud firm Upstream reported that Transsion's Tecno devices, which come with pre-installed software, had been found to have malware installed on thousands of mobiles sold in Ethiopia, Cameroon, Ghana and South.[108] The phrase "cheap is expensive" here becomes instructive because Transsion's supposedly affordable handsets end up illegally subscribing customers to services and therefore defrauding them of airtime.

Huawei mobile handsets are also popular in Africa, and the company is reportedly developing its own operating system, Harmony OS, after it became unable to use Google's Android system after it was banned in the U.S.[109] Huawei is known to work closely with African governments pursuing surveillance strategies for political ends.

Financial Technology, e-Commerce, and Video Streaming

Most of the actors in fintech, e-commerce, and music and video streaming are private firms that may be seeking African markets after their success at home in a now saturated Asian market.[110] The PRC influences ICT investments and actions particularly through financing projects. Private PRC firms have an impact on democratic norms and values because they are regulated by the PRC state and must adhere to PRC audits. For instance, top private PRC ICT executives were compelled to publicly swear allegiance to the party-state in April 2021 as part of a crackdown after a fallout between Alibaba founder Jack Ma and the state.[111] This same influence can be seen in the fact that PRC diplomatic delegations to African countries usually include corporate executives who are thus introduced to top level African officials. This approach raises concerns about potential corruption and the exclusion of local companies in bidding for projects.

As pointed out above, PRC companies that deploy fiber optic and telecommunications infrastructures on which the PRC deploy software for fintech and e-commerce transactions have been barred in countries with strong regulatory mechanisms such as the U.S., Australia, and the United Kingdom after having been found to have engaged in several breaches. African countries that are embracing these companies are exposing themselves to data security and privacy issues. Infrastructure developers such as Huawei typically build surveillance technologies into fiber optic and telecommunications infrastructure, which could be used to enable PRC fintech platforms to mine data..

Investments and activities in fintech include technologies for financial services such as blockchain and cryptocurrencies. A good example is the diversification of the PRC mobile internet browser, Opera (whose subsidiaries in Kenya and Nigeria are called Opay) into digital financial services in partnership

---

[108] BBC (2020), available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53903436

[109] See H. Tugendhat (2021), available at: https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/05/evolving-us-china-tech-rivalry-africa

[110] See W. Wang and D. Dollar (2018), available at: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/02/08/whats-happening-with-chinas-fintech-industry/

[111] See C. Campbell (2021), available at: https://time.com/6048539/china-tech-giants-regulations/

with the Beijing-based cryptocurrency firm Bitmain Technologies. Those who support cryptocurrencies say they can help advance payments beyond the currently popular mobile banking and mobile money transfers. PRC-led cryptocurrencies are also seen as an avenue for redressing the challenge of there being many national currencies on the continent, which makes trade difficult.[112] As African governments generally do not regulate the digital currency space, and have challenges securing internet networks, they are likely not yet able to protect citizens' assets adequately.

Fintech, e-commerce and music and video streaming are becoming more inter-linked. For example, Alibaba, the e-commerce firm, supplies and distributes goods and services via its fintech apps, Alipay and AliExpress; it is therefore both a fintech and e-commerce firm. In another example, Tencent, started its company with WeChat, an instant messaging app, and then branched out to online payments via WeChat Pay; it also runs a music streaming service called Joox.[113] Thus, Tencent is a social media, fintech, and music streaming firm all at once. **This sophisticated bundling of services and products – creating super apps – across ICT fields makes it easier to collect large amounts of citizen data**[114]**, and makes it difficult to hold the companies accountable.** These investments and engagements in the fintech, e-commerce and music and video streaming fields collectively constitute a major and new area of PRC activity in Africa. These investments and engagements lead to Africans' inclusion in the global digital economy. On the other hand, these data-cooption technologies are being deployed without the requisite policies and regulatory mechanisms, posing threats to citizens' data and privacy rights.[115] PRC cryptocurrencies could also expose African citizens to risks such as mining of their personal data, which also increases their exposure to potential fraud. This is because actors such as Opera/Opay often have deals for pre-installing their browsers as default apps with PRC smartphones such as Tecno, Itel, Infinix, and Huawei.

Start-Ups and Venture Capital

Start-ups in venture capital partnerships have also been on the rise with capital flows into Africa notable in the scoping study. News reporting on the many venture capital investments have been positive, with one enthusiastic analyst writing at the end of 2019 that out of "the $441.4 million raised by 45 start-ups on the continent by August [2019], more than a quarter came from Chinese investors."[116] An explanation has roots in foreign policy shifts: PRC entities moved quickly into Africa after being barred from the U.S. and other Western markets.[117] **African countries do not have stringent regulations making it easier for Chinese firms to enter and do business. This implies that PRC venture capital pouring into Africa may have found loopholes – such as transparency and accountability in reporting profits – to exploit.**

---

[112] See M. Kimani, available at: https://kenyanwallstreet.com/how-the-chinese-opera-browser-a-bitcoin-mining-company-are-about-to-change-african-payments/

[113] See S. Mzekandaba (2020), available at: https://www.itweb.co.za/content/KWEBb7yZzm5MmRjO

[114] See W. Olayinka (2020), available at: https://africanarguments.org/2020/05/opera-nigeria-ready-superapp/

[115] See Privacy International (2017)

[116] See S. Zoo (2019), available at: https://www.scmp.com/tech/article/3041975/2019-has-been-big-year-chinese-vcs-africa-they-branch-out-tech-logistics-and-e

[117] The market share of PRC venture capital in Africa over the past couple can help ascertain their market share vis-à-vis other foreign investors

Surveillance

In the scoping study, PRC ICTs associated with surveillance technologies were described more negatively than positively. Most of the positive narratives are promoted by government officials and leaders particularly in autocratic countries such as Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and Ethiopia.[118] PRC firms promote the narrative of surveillance technologies as "smart solutions" for combating cybercrime, terrorism, corruption, and data management.

Several news stories in the scoping study characterize PRC activities – including spying – as "digital colonialism"[119] **The entities are not only increasing capabilities for surveillance but are also re-shaping the technological and regulatory vulnerabilities associated with hacking, cybercrime, data protection/privacy, cyberespionage, censorship, and internet restrictions and shutdowns.** The investments and engagements included biometrics, facial recognition, video monitoring, closed-circuit television (CCTV), and other technologies that potentially threaten civil and political rights. They provide hardware and software for Robotics, 5G technologies, and artificial intelligence (AI), particularly in Kenya and Zimbabwe. PRC ICT companies deploying surveillance technologies in Africa include the private biometrics research and development firm ZKTeco which has a regional hub based at University of Lagos and a presence in South Africa; Huawei, which has a presence across the continent; the state-owned ZTE, which has projects in Zambia and Ethiopia; and newer companies such as the PRC state-owned Hikvision, which has been sanctioned in the U.S., and the private firm CloudWalk whose projects in Zimbabwe have raised serious concerns.

Surveillance technologies threaten civil and political rights. **However, our scoping study shows that some technologies have a higher degree of impact on civil and political rights than others. Based on our analysis, the technologies that affect large numbers of citizens are those deployed for internet restrictions, censorship, and shutdowns. These technologies are used for political control during periods of elections and protests.**

The second category of technologies that have a high impact on democracy and human rights are those that enable video monitoring, identity, and facial recognition via CCTV, biometric equipment, AI, and the interception of mobile phone communication. These technologies are used for nefarious activities such as monitoring opponents of African leaders, including journalists and civil society activists.

In the third category are technologies that have a consumer interface or target governments. These include technologies used for hacking, cybercrimes, and cyberespionage. These discreet technologies are used for harvesting data from African business and government servers.

Smart and Safe Cities

The surveillance technologies discussed above are being deployed under the rubric of "smart and safe cities." Investments in "smart and safe cities" are meant to combat crime and curb terrorist attacks. From a policy perspective, the rise of smart cities arises out of the FOCAC action plan for 2019-2021 which states that "China will support African countries in building smart cities and enhancing the role of ICT in safeguarding public security, counter terrorism and fighting crime and work with the African side

---

[118] See I. Gagliardone (2019)
[119] See W. Gravett (2020), p. 125-146

to uphold information security."[120] The development of these cities is meant to attract business process outsourcing, software development, data centers, disaster recovery centers, call centers and light assembly manufacturing industries, building university campuses focused on research and technology as well as hotels, residential areas, schools and hospitals. This is a concept endorsed by United Nations agencies such as UN-Habitat and the International Telecommunication Union. An example of a smart city being built with a PRC loan is the Konza Technopolis near Nairobi and with Huawei as the contractor. In 2019 the PRC provided a loan of $172.7 million for the development of the city from the ground, envisioned as a "Silicon Savannah" and with Huawei as the contractor. Although the development has been slow, it was revealed in February 2021, that phase one of the development had achieved 40% occupancy.[121] Other examples of these include PRC state-owned Ehang and Huawei projects in Lagos, Hikvision's investment in Mutare in Zimbabwe, ZTE's project in Lusaka under the "Smart Zambia" banner, and Huawei's projects in Kampala (Uganda) (see Annex C for more smart city projects). Advocates for democracy and human rights point out that the surveillance capabilities of smart and safe cities threaten personal privacy and have been abused by repressive regimes and. In Uganda for instance, the $126 million smart city project developed by Huawei was used by President Yoweri Museveni administration to surveil and arrest the supporters of his youthful opponent, Bobi Wine, throughout 2021 and 2021.

Fintech and E-commerce in Kenya and Nigeria

Fintech and e-commerce are the biggest areas of PRC engagement in case study countries. In Nigeria and Kenya in 2018 and 2019, each country saw at least nine new ICT projects, conservatively estimated at $1.27 billion.[122] Interviewees in both countries argued that U.S. trade tensions with the PRC had significantly contributed to the rise in ICT investment. A Nigerian expert, for example, said, "the relationship between Asia (China) and America hasn't been smooth generally." The American market is "hard to penetrate" so "targeting" Nigeria is an easy alternative (IDI, Nigeria, Academic).

In Nigeria, PRC investors are prioritizing the country's fledgling fintech and e-commerce ICT field, with at least $180 million of new capital in 2019 alone. The heavy investment in this area constituted the largest proportion of new PRC engagements over the last three years. In one investment, the study data shows, PRC venture capital entities, Sequoia Capital, Source Code Capital, Meituan-Dianping and IDG Capital invested $120 million in the Nigerian subsidiary of the private PRC-owned e-payment company Opay. Opay is a significant PRC fintech company because it has raised a lot of cash in a short time, bringing into the fold many hitherto unknown venture capital firms and introducing numerous fintech

---

[120] Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021), available at: http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1594297.htm

[121] P. Vidija (2021), available at: https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/big-read/2021-02-02-smart-city-development-at-konza-takes-shape-as-40-sold-off/

[122] In Nigeria, this included investments by Sequoia Capital China, Source Code Capital, Meituan-Dianpin, IDG Capital, Transsnet/Transsion, NetEase, Maison Capital, and Seas Capital. The African partners included OPay, PalmPay, Lori Capital Systems, and Boomplay. Meanwhile, loans to the Nigerian Government as well as private actors such as Galaxy Backbone Ltd. originated from the China Great Wall Industry Corporation, China Ex-Im Bank, and Huawei Technologies. In Kenya, investments came from Hillhouse Capital, Crystal Stream Capital, Transsnet/Transsion, NetEast, Maison Capital and StarTimes; African partners included Lori Capital Systems and Boomplay. The PRC government and Huawei provided a $172.7 million loan for a smart city project; StarTimes and the Ex-Im offered an additional grant of $8.43 million to the Kenyan government.

and e-commerce applications.[123] Its investments are also purportedly a threat to citizens' rights; news and information about the likelihood of Opera being used for Chinese spying purposes and Opay engaging in predatory lending in places such as Africa and India have emerged since 2017.[124]

In the second deal, Transsnet, a Chinese venture capital firm owned by two private internet companies, NetEase Group and Transsion Holdings, invested $40 million in PalmPay, a mobile money start-up. In the third deal Transsnet, Transsion, NetEase, Maison Capital, and Seas Capital, all Chinese players, invested $20 million in Boomplay, a music and video streaming start-up. Payments for Boomplay services can be paid via pre-installed Transsion PalmPay apps, and via Boomplay's Boomcoin Gift Card. This provides a link between three parts of Transsion/Transsnet business: content via music and video streaming, fintech via PalmPay and Boomcoin Gift Card, and handsets via Transsion's pre-installed mobile phone devices. This complex convergence poses problems for regulation and potentially puts users at risk given the aforementioned instances of Transsion's data breaches.

In Kenya, similar to Nigeria, fintech and e-commerce has rapidly emerged as the largest share of new PRC engagements. The beginnings of PRC-Kenya fintech and e-commerce engagements can be traced to 2017 when Opay introduced a web payment solution in Kenya. The $120 million that Opay raised in 2019 targeted venture capital infusions into Kenyan start-ups. In 2017, Alibaba announced the launch of the Alipay mobile payment services. In 2018, SimbaPay, a UK-based mobile money and e-banking company with strong presence in Kenya partnered with WeChat Pay to launch Kenya-China payment services. Kenyan banks such as Family, Equity, Barclay's, and Safaricom – by far the leading mobile services provider in Kenya – have all adopted WeChat Pay services. In 2019, Safaricom inked a deal for the use of mobile payment system (M-pesa) on the Alibaba online platform, AliExpress.com. In the same year, 2019, Lori Systems, a transport logistics firm, raised an estimated $29 million from Chinese venture capital firms, Hillhouse Capital and Crystal Stream Capital.

In reference to the fact that the mobile phone handset maker has used the popularity of its brands to branch out into online payments, one interviewee said, "the biggest one is Transsion" while the managing editor of a large Nigerian tech media group said, "they are everywhere." As discussed above, Transsion brands such as Tecno that are used for PalmPay payments have been found to have malware and the fact that they are being used for online payments could endanger users.

ICT transactions often have an apparent convergence of interests that favor PRC actors. Opay and Boomplay are owned by Chinese nationals and attract capital from their parent companies and other Chinese venture capital firms, fostering unequal partnerships with their Nigerian counterparts. A PRC e-commerce firm such as Alibaba also has an online payment solution, Alipay. In 2020, Alibaba's logistics arm, Cainiao, launched a cold chain freight service in partnership with Ethiopian Airlines for the delivery of COVID-19 vaccines. This convergence poses challenges for those authorities trying to track what PRC firms are doing across different parts of the digital economy.

---

[123] These are ORide and Ocar for (ride-hailing), OExpress (logistics), OMall and OTrade (e-commerce), OFood (food delivery services). Opay experienced a setback in 2020 when it paused some of its non-payment services due to COVID-19 restrictions. It indicated it would resume all services after COVID-19 restrictions had been lifted.

[124] See Hindenburg Research. 2020. "Opera: Phantom of the Turnaround – 70% Downside." Opay is owned by the internet browser service Opera Software ASA, which is originally Norwegian but was acquired by the Chinese consortium of investors, Golden Brick Capital Private Equity in 2016.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

Are the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks in place to effectively manage the deployment and use of ICT hardware and software? How are they enforced and/or circumvented? To what extent is the public aware of these frameworks?

There is evidence that private Chinese ICT interests and the PRC exploit fundamental flaws in legal and regulatory frameworks in Africa. Flaws include gaps in policy coverage, poor enforcement, a lack of transparency that contributes to corruption, and weak or outdated legal statutes in the face of new technologies. PRC influence on policy and regulatory environments follows the declaration at the 2018 FOCAC summit that "Both sides are ready to cooperate on strategic consultations on ICT policy-making and development …".[125] From an international norms and values setting perspective, the FOCAC action plan states that "the two sides will enhance cooperation at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and other international organizations, and step-up coordination on training, Internet connectivity and the building of innovation centers". In other words, United Nations agencies provide the justification for investments and engagements, particularly in the smart and safe cities arena.

Almost all interviewees in Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania shared the perception that national laws and regulations governing ICTs exist but governments either lack the political will to enforce them, or corruption enables manipulation by PRC-based corporations. Said one Nigerian interviewee, "There are rules and regulations but just like what happens in all the sectors, enforcement remains weak. So, it boils down to corruption with the system even when there are policies to regulate." Another respondent shared a telling anecdote:

> *"I recently got into conversation with a Chinese business company staff and one of the things I got to know is that in their business plan they have set aside money to bribe and pave their way through. It is in their official expenditure. I was shocked when I saw it." (IDI, Nigeria, ICT Analyst)*

In Kenya, most of the 12 interviewees also described regulatory authority as adequate but enforcement as lacking. Half of the respondents thought PRC actors generally follow regulations, while the other half expressed grave concerns about large contracts obtained through corruption.

Findings suggest that a separate challenge may arise for African regulatory frameworks that are not necessarily weak but have merely failed to keep up with the sudden influx of new ICT technologies. This weakness in regulation can be seen when Nigerian traders use WeChat to bypass cryptocurrency regulations and pay their Chinese counterparts. This is a breach in Nigerian regulation as the Central Bank issued a statement in 2017, reiterated in 2018, that barred businesses from using cryptocurrencies because they are not regulated. Here is a case in which WeChat could be flouting Nigerian regulation and yet it has not attracted penalties or disciplinary action. This shows that the norms and values that the Nigerian government issues are not adhered to.

A recent report on Kenya and South Africa argues "one of the biggest constraints to effective legal safeguards in the technology sphere is the disconnect between the pace of innovation and the legal and

---

[125] Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021), available at:
http://www.focac.org/eng/zywx_1/zywj/t1594297.htm

regulatory process."[126] Similarly, observing the rise in fintech and e-commerce in Africa, a World Bank report recommends the "need to address the perennial race between fast-moving innovation and the slower pace of regulation."[127] Speaking specifically to Nigeria's regulatory framework, one interviewee concluded, it is "not at all" adequate.

Across the African continent, the study found that PRC companies are expanding into diverse parts of the ICT field. This makes it easier for the companies to circumvent regulations and laws. We noted the multiple operations of Alibaba-Alipay-AliExpress and WeChat-WeChat Pay in the fintech and e-commerce areas of investment. Further examples include Transsion, the leading supplier of affordable smartphone brands – Tecno, Itel and Infinix – which is also a venture capital firm through its shareholding in Transsnet. Yet they are both classified as telecommunications and financial companies, creating blurred interests that complicate regulation. Both Opay and Boomplay are Chinese owned even as they intriguingly attract capital from their mother companies and other Chinese venture capital firms, raising the question of whether they are truly Nigerian or mere extensions of their Chinese operations. The absence of a holistic policy approach to fintech and e-commerce means authorities are not fully conversant in what the companies are doing in their digital market. With these companies amassing power, African countries could consider instituting new antitrust and data protection regulations.

Regulations governing privacy protections for people using fintech and e-commerce platforms are weak, due to outdated regulations and lack of expertise and resources for enforcement.[128]

When regulatory policy does catch up with the pace of ICT investment, African countries then sometimes enact ICT laws and regulations that emulate authoritarian aspects of the PRC's model.[129] For example, when Nigeria faced its biggest social uprising in nearly a decade, calling for police reform, the Minister for Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, called for regulating social media, citing the PRC as a model in testimony before the House of Representatives Committee on Information, National Orientation, Ethics, and Values.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What are the consequences of PRC ICT engagements on human rights and democracy?

African governments have begun to embrace the norms and values of the PRC when it comes to ICTs. In various African countries, officials are beginning to emulate the PRC's legal and policy norms under the pretext of controlling the use of ICTs – particularly social media – as a justification for repressive actions that run counter to human rights and democracy. For instance, while Nigeria has faced an insurgency from Boko Haram and its spinoff the Islamic State West Africa for over a decade now, steps to clamp down on freedom of expression, particularly in social media, which resemble those of the PRC, are more recent. As noted earlier, Nigeria's Minister for Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, called for regulating political speech on social media in response to protests calling for police accountability and reform that spread across Nigeria in 2020. In 2019, the Nigerian government sought to introduce the "Protection from Internet

---

[126] See K. Allen and I. van Zyl (2020)

[127] See R.N.A Sy et al. (2019)

[128] See F. Ololuo (2020), available at: https://www.mondaq.com/nigeria/privacy-protection/895320/data-privacy-and-protection-under-the-nigerian-law

[129] See W. Gravett (2020) p. 125-146

Falsehoods, Manipulation and Other Related Matters Bill". The bill was eventually defeated in the senate. Observers, however, surmised that the similarity between this bill and the PRC's Cybersecurity Law indicated Nigeria was emulating a repressive PRC regulation.[130] At a 2017 "China-Tanzania New Media Roundtable" in Dar es Salaam, Tanzanian minister, Edwin Ngonyani wanted to "acquire advanced technological skills and capability [to track] cyber criminals," reportedly saying, "Our Chinese friends have managed to block such media (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, WhatsApp) in their country and replaced them with their home grown sites that are safe, constructive and popular … While we are still using these platforms, we should guard against their misuse."[131] Here, we see a convergence of interest among what were two illiberal states.

The unprofitability of arrangements with private PRC investors is generating some demand for improved regulatory frameworks by government officials. A case in point is the reported probe of the terms of engagement between StarTimes – a company involved in digital broadcasting – and the Nigerian Television Authority by the Nigerian senate after the realization that the joint venture had yielded zero profits in 11 years.[132] Similarly, in Tanzania, StarTimes faced legal action in 2019 from the Tanzania Communications Regulatory Authority (TCRA) for failure to comply with the terms of its partnership with the state-owned Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation. For failure to meet its free-to-air obligations, TCRA had slapped a fine on StarTimes and was considering the suspension of its services as the fine remained unpaid. These two examples, among others, indicate that policies guiding Chinese investments may be wanting. As one interviewee put it, "[the] Nigerian government is complacent; the government does not think about how it benefits the citizens of the country; how does it benefit the country; how does it affect us in any way? We need to look at it critically before agreeing to any Chinese technology or facility" (IDI Kenya, Civil Society Activist).

Kenya and Nigeria faced internal security threats that governments used to rationalize the expansion of surveillance infrastructures. Ongoing attacks by the terrorist groups Al Shabaab and Boko Haram since the early 2010s inspired Kenyan and Nigerian officials to deploy ICT technologies from the PRC as part of a broader security strategy. In Kenya, the Prevention of Terrorism Act in 2012, the creation in 2014 of an Integrated Public Safety Communications and Surveillance System, and the launch of the National Cybersecurity Strategy demonstrated this. There was a confluence of interest between Huawei and the Kenyan authorities. The Kenyan authorities needed the technologies to implement the anti-terrorism laws and Huawei could supply the Kenyan police with training equipment including biometric and facial recognition equipment such as street-level CCTV cameras, the establishment of operational centers, and Global Positioning Systems.

Among Kenyan interviewees in this study, surveillance systems have been praised for helping security officers curb crime through foiling terrorist attacks and other crimes. However, "surveillance systems limit a lot of freedom of expression" (IDI, Kenya, Civil Society Member), and in the weak regulatory environment, citizens' data can be discreetly harvested and used by the government to target critics.[133]

---

[130] See W. Gravett (2020) p. 125-146

[131] See A. Banzi (2017), available at: https://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/tea/news/east-africa/tanzania-seeks-chinese-help-in-social-media--1370738

[132] See D. Akinloye (2020), available at: https://businesselitesafrica.com/2020/08/25/nta-startimes-venture-fails-to-record-profit-in-11-years/

[133] See Africa Times (2019), available at: https://africatimes.com/2019/12/18/huaweis-surveillance-tech-in-kenya-a-safe-bet/

Interviewees in Kenya and Nigeria noted that digital PRC investment sometimes has unintended positive consequences. A Nigerian interviewee said, "Social media is playing an important role in terms of promoting democracy and raising awareness." Interviewees in both countries noted that inexpensive access to smart phone technology has expanded access to information, which is essential for democratic participation. For instance, the digital activism witnessed in Kenya and Nigeria would not be possible without access to Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp via the affordable PRC handsets connected through infrastructure built by the PRC firms. The mobile telecommunications revolution in Africa has given citizens a digital public sphere and interestingly the PRC is itself a subject of intense debates over issues such as debt trap diplomacy. Even so, "we can't say these are deliberate efforts to improve democracy in Nigeria," explained one interviewee.

For Tanzania, steep reversals in democracy correspond with the incumbent party's PRC engagement, and renewed efforts to attract PRC technologies. Democratic backsliding in Tanzania has long been in motion, but the contentious presidential nomination process within President Magufuli's party in 2015 provided a new impetus to consolidate power.[134] Developments in Tanzania correspond with PRC ICT engagements. Even when government-to-government engagements between Tanzania and the PRC dwindled, noted above, exchanges between Tanzania's ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi party (CCM – revolutionary party) and the Communist Party of China (CPC) continued a long tradition of solidarity, marked for instance, by a March 2018 CCM-CPC delegation meeting in Shanghai[135].

The TCRA shut down several print and electronic media and arrested journalists just before the 2020 election.[136] There is no direct evidence that the PRC had a role in ordering the near-total internet shutdown.[137] However, patterns in other African countries and other factors suggest the PRC could have had a role. For example, news reports implicate Huawei in recent internet shutdowns in Zimbabwe, Uganda, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.[138] Additionally, in 2015 Huawei was appointed to serve as a technical advisor to the government, suggesting that it could have been called upon to assist the ruling elite during the election. Even so, it is difficult to establish a clear conclusion.

CONCLUSIONS

Building on earlier investments in infrastructure and investments, PRC actors have diversified and extended their reach into Africa, increasingly becoming the partners of choice at the governmental level particularly because their engagements come with few conditions. As discussed earlier, **an interesting feature in these dynamics is that Chinese entities are diversifying as in the case of WeChat, initially only a social media platform, becoming an e-transaction platform, or Transsion,**

---

[134] See D. Kweka (2021), available at: https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/news/-how-magufuli-altered-tanzania-s-foreign-policy-3337184

[135] See Shanghai Party (CPC) Institute (2018), available at: http://www.sdx.sh.cn/html/home/news/120091.html

[136] See M. Mumo (2020), available at: https://ifex.org/tanzanias-media-regulatory-body-used-to-threaten-media-into-submission/

[137] See NetBlocks (2020), available at: https://netblocks.org/reports/internet-disrupted-in-tanzania-on-eve-of-presidential-elections-oy9abny3

[138] See J. Marks (2019), available at: https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-cybersecurity-202/2019/08/15/the-cybersecurity-202-how-huawei-helped-extend-china-s-repressive-view-of-internet-freedom-to-african-nations/5d547a72602ff15f906576c3/

initially only a mobile phone distributor moving into the online entertainment streaming and fintech space.

In many African countries – and certainly in the case study countries, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania – national policy, regulatory and legal frameworks are not robust enough in the face of new PRC-supported ICTs, creating gaps that may be exploited by PRC entities. Additionally, the opaqueness and secrecy of the engagements suggest that knowledge and information on the extent of PRC involvement in African countries is not comprehensive.

FOCUS AREA 4 – MEDIA

Results from IDI and FGDs indicate that an outcome of PRC soft power efforts to counter the West's framing of the PRC through educational and cultural exchange programs for journalists may have modest influence on journalists' reporting. Evidence shows that shifts in trained journalists' reporting is more favorable towards the PRC on some PRC-related issues, which may speak to the potential efficacy of PRC soft power engagement and approaches. At the same time, however, journalists in this study remained committed to freedom of speech and the press, and reporting on democracy and human rights concerns is unchanged. Moreover, journalists observe that although the PRC is expanding and deepening its relationships with media sectors in African countries, the longer tradition of Western media may serve as a bulwark against PRC influence, pointing to the endurance of democratic norms and values.

It is well-documented that the PRC has increased and sustained its investments in Africa over the last decades. This has often met with criticism around its transparency and objectives on the continent. The impacts and ends of the media component of the PRC's strategy have raised some concerns, for example, those expressed by Hruby in this *Foreign Policy* opinion article:

> *In just over a decade, China has dramatically expanded its media presence in Africa, urging not just African publics to "tell China's story well" but also influencing the continent's underlying telecommunications, data, and information standards. Given that the United States has historically held a competitive advantage in communications and media, it should pay attention.*[139]

The expansion of the PRC's media into Africa has elicited widespread concerns about its impact on journalist professionalization on the African continent. Such concerns stem from the fact that democracy is still taking root in Africa, and the PRC's authoritarian media could influence the fragile democratic processes and institutions on the continent. The majority of academic research on the PRC's media expansion into Africa has sought to answer this question by focusing on how PRC media may alter the global media ecology on the continent,[140] African audiences' perceptions of PRC media,[141] and how it may impact the autonomy of African journalists working in PRC-owned media organizations.[142]

However, there has been limited academic research on PRC-sponsored journalism and media training programs for African journalists. One of the priorities of the FOCAC Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021) is to offer training for African journalists. The Beijing Action plan (2019-2021) illustrates the significance of

---

[139] See A. Hruby (2019)

[140] See Wu (2012), Marsh (2016), and Zhang and Matingwina (2016)

[141] See Wasserman (2014, 2015) and Wasserman and Madrid-Morales (2018)

[142] See Gagliardone (2013), Lefkowitz (2017), and Umejei (2020)

media training for Africa journalists with emphasis that the "two sides will establish a China-Africa media cooperation network, and China will continue the China-Africa Press Exchange Center program". The PRC seeks to establish media cooperation between it and Africa by "continuing to hold training and capacity-building seminars for African countries' media officials and journalists, promote more exchanges and mutual visits between Chinese and African media personnel and support more exchange of correspondents by media houses." Journalistic exchanges have been described as the most widely reported form of Chinese outreach with a majority of journalists from around the world participating in exchanges or training in China.[143] This is an indication of the strategic objective of media training for African journalists in China's media assistance to African countries. However, the West's idea of media assistance differs significantly from China's. While the West hinges its media assistance on democratization and the evolution of independent liberal media, the PRC sees media assistance as a "forms of collaboration and exchange aimed at counterbalancing the negative reporting of both China and Africa in Western media."[144]

BACKGROUND: PRC INFLUENCE ON MEDIA IN AFRICA

The PRC is strategically influencing African media in an effort to build soft power and challenge Western influence in the media. Lui Guanguyuang, the PRC's ambassador to Kenya, expressed these sentiments in a public statement saying, "Many media do not give Africans a correct image of China, its culture, and its plans in the continent." PRC media strategy in Africa has not only been to influence perceptions of the PRC, but also to promote their style of journalism. The PRC has done this through the expansion of its own media outlets in Africa and by seeking ownership of some African media outlets.

The PRC's media strategy has been focused on the creation of jobs, technical assistance, and journalist training through initiatives such as the China-Africa Press Exchange Center Program where African journalists participate in fully-funded exchanges to the PRC. A large portion of PRC investment in African media and telecommunication has been in African information infrastructure. The PRC has played a large role in updating African media from analog to digital technology through StarTimes in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zambia. Consequently, this has allowed the PRC to manage which stations viewers can access.

While Chinese media has had a presence in Africa since the Cold War, we can see the PRC's efforts to shape media in Africa increase around 2006 when PRC media house Xinhua News Agency moved its regional office from Paris to Nairobi. Now, Xinhua has almost 30 bureaus, 60 journalists, and 400 employees across Africa. In 2012, the PRC launched China Central Television (now CGTN) in East Africa, via Nairobi and now broadcasts in 25 African countries. Several other PRC media outlets have used Kenya as their launching pad as well. Also headquartered in Nairobi are China Global Television Network, China Radio International, and Star Times.

In South Africa, PRC companies have a 20% stake in the Independent Newspapers Group, which is the second-largest media group in the country. It is difficult to find clear figures on the PRC's other investments in African media, however. Most PRC activities have been media partnerships rather than direct investments. Throughout Africa, the PRC subsidizes its own content in media outlets by providing it for free or at a low cost. Moreover, in Kenya, Xinhua has a news exchange agreement with Nation

---

[143] Lim and Bergen (2020)
[144] Gagliardone, Repnikova, and Stremlau (2014), p. 2

Media Group, which is East and Central Africa's largest media house. Xinhua also has similar agreements with state broadcasting corporations in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Nigeria. Additionally, China Radio International has an agreement with the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation to broadcast in Kenya and has offices in Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Senegal, and Niger.

The question of exactly how much PRC is investing in African media should be further investigated, but the current discussion is more focused on journalism and participation in programs than investment and business arrangements.

NORC and USAID chose Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone from those countries of particular interest to USAID missions in Africa to provide a sample with a reasonable distribution in terms of size, geography, and evidence of media development assistance programs and other types of investment into journalism and media sectors.

The role of the PRC in the media has also been studied relatively recently in each of these countries. The sample choice also had to consider the feasibility of carrying out robust qualitative research with a relatively rapid turnaround time during the 2020/2021 global COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Kenya** - Kenya hosts the headquarters of the PRC's Xinhua news. It is the subject of a robust literature on the effects and influence of PRC-sponsored training programs, the impact of PRC-sponsored training on reporting and the PRC's soft power influence.[145] It is a strategic country for the PRC: "[The PRC] has several key strategic interests in Kenya that include seeking inroads into East African markets, targeting Kenya as a base for regional expansion due to the country's political stability and strong economy, as well as its geographic location."[146] It is important geopolitically for African and other countries and, thus, has some influence over journalistic trends in East Africa.

- **Nigeria** - With over 200 million people, the largest population on the continent, Nigeria has an overall influence and stature in both West Africa and the continent. It is an important center of PRC investment: "[PRC] state-owned engineering firms and policy banks have established a significant presence in the country, with a 2015 report in the New York Times ranking Nigeria as the largest overseas customer of [PRC] construction companies."[147] The country's experience with PRC-supported programs provides a useful lens to understand how the training impacts a focal point of PRC investment. Local research expertise to support this case study is well-qualified and there is an evolving academic literature studying media from the PRC in Nigeria.

- **Sierra Leone** – In addition to interests in PRC investments in its natural resources, the PRC has an "activist presence in Sierra Leone's domestic politics."[148] Its "support included funding the construction of a new headquarters for the All People's Congress (APC), prompting the party's supporters to chant "We are all Chinese!" during the 2018 presidential election campaign."[149] Sierra Leone has been undergoing a significant media transition over the last decade. The NORC team included it in the study to consider in-depth how smaller African countries are experiencing PRC

---

[145] See Wasserman and Madrid-Morales, available at: https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/7809/2355

[146] See USAID, Clear Choice, Kenya, available at: https://sites.google.com/a/usaid.gov/clear-choice/analysis/kenya

[147] See USAID, Clear Choice, Nigeria, available at: https://sites.google.com/a/usaid.gov/clear-choice/

[148] See USAID, Clear Choice, Sierra Leone, available at: https://sites.google.com/a/usaid.gov/clear-choice/analysis/sierra-leone

[149] See USAID, Clear Choice, Sierra Leone, available at: https://sites.google.com/a/usaid.gov/clear-choice/analysis/sierra-leone

media engagement. Although its media is under-resourced and largely focused on radio programming, it represents a model of how smaller and poor countries can be impacted by an influx of media training opportunities.

Media Landscapes

Media landscapes in all three countries have been undergoing a transition toward more open media but also have a history of state repression or dominance of media outlets. The rise of non-violent resistance to authoritarian rule in many African countries (including Kenya and Nigeria) in the 1990s was accompanied by an increasingly courageous and vibrant media.[150] The trend toward more open media could slow down or reverse, especially if journalists themselves practice greater self-censorship or laws are promulgated to restrict what they can report about. Similarities among the countries include:

- They have all been through significant transitions towards greater press freedom.

- They all rely strongly on radio and supplement this with television and print media. Both Kenya and Nigeria have also transitioned significantly into digital media. Sierra Leone lags behind in this transition because of low internet penetration.

- Journalism tends to be a risky and underpaid job, while the profession also tends to receive strong respect, especially relative to other institutions.

In all three countries, PRC-Africa media cooperation largely takes the form of journalism training leading to the establishment of "a China-Africa media cooperation network" through the China-Africa Press Exchange Center program of FOCAC.[151] These priorities are expressed in FOCAC's Beijing Action Plan (2019-2021) in which media cooperation is to be achieved through "training and capacity-building seminars for African countries' media officials and journalists, promote more exchanges and mutual visits between Chinese and African media personnel and support more exchange of correspondents by media houses."[152]

These journalistic exchanges have been a widely reported form of PRC outreach with most journalists participating in exchanges or training within the PRC itself.[153] This is an indication of the importance of direct exposure for African journalists in the PRC's strategy of media assistance to African countries. This differs from American and European assistance programs that tend to link media assistance to democratization and the evolution of independent liberal media. The PRC sees media assistance, on the other hand, as "forms of collaboration and exchange aimed at counterbalancing the negative reporting of both China and Africa in Western media."[154]

---

[150] See A. Olokotun (2000), p. 91–122

[151] See https://www.focac.org/eng/zfgx_4/zzjw/t1594399.htm

[152] See https://www.focac.org/eng/zfgx_4/zzjw/t1594399.htm

[153] See L. Lim and J. Bergin (2020)

[154] See I. Gagliardone, M. Repnikova, and N. Stremlau (2010), available at:
http://global.asc.upenn.edu/fileLibrary/PDFs/chinainafrica.pdf.

Kenyan Media Landscape

The 2010 Constitution guarantees freedom of the press. Kenya has become one of the most vibrant and developed media industries in Africa but also, at the same time, one of the most dangerous environments for journalists amidst a government propensity for backsliding on Press Freedom Issues.

While the media was initially a highly controlled tool of the state used for "nation building," it now has an even higher level of trust than the Parliament or the courts.[155] Various observers have noted, however, that media freedom has been declining since Uhuru Kenyatta was reelected in 2018. And state intervention has increased with new laws and incidents in which journalists report harassment.[156, 157] Freedom House finds that the risk of harassment and impunity for attacks against journalists are common,[158] a factor that may indicate some move in the opposite direction to the recent media opening. Reporters without Borders notes that the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic saw the loss of 300 journalist jobs and many news stations switched to music programming.[159] Also in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, all newspapers started selling their online editions for as low as two U.S. dollars and local newspapers of choice were mostly online as well.

The overall media makeup shows a significant diversity of choice for news consumers as the table below shows:

Table 9.   Overview of Media in Kenya

Print	Most major and even local newspapers now have an online presence. Prominent newspapers include: Daily Nation, Standard Media, The Star, Business Daily, and Kenyan Daily Post
TV	In 2015, all TV stations migrated from analog to digital broadcast. The most prominent stations are: Citizen TV, KTN, NTV, K24, QV, KBC. Kiss TV and Family TV, and other vernacular TV stations such as Inooro TV.
Radio	Nearly all Kenyans have access to radio. Radio stations include Kameme FM, 1 FM, Capital FM, Classic, Radio citizens, Hope FM, among others.
Digital	Public internet access has increased over the last five years. Active mobile penetration is at 106.2% and nearly a third of Kenyans have more than one sim card (KNBS 2018). The prominent digital media outlets are Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Twitter usage is increasing while Facebook use is decreasing in Kenya.

The PRC has a significant media presence in Kenya through PRC-owned local media–CGTN, Xinhua, China Radio International (three local FM stations broadcasting in English, Mandarin, and Swahili, and with AM channel coverage across the country), and a China Daily African Edition.

---

[155] See G. Ogola (2011)

[156] Internews report on Kenya's media landscape.

[157] Kenyan Union of Journalists 2019 report.

[158] See Freedom House. *Kenya Freedom in the World 2020 Report*, available at: https://freedomhouse.org/country/kenya/freedom-world/2020

[159] See Kenya, Media undermined by Coronavirus, available at: https://rsf.org/en/kenya

Nigeria Media Landscape

The relationship between the Nigerian media and politics has an origin in the historical orientation of the Nigerian press. The early newspapers that championed the quest for independence were owned by politicians, who also deployed the press to advance partisan interests and objectives. This has since become the norm in the Nigerian media space resulting in a "politics-journalism alliance" resulting in certain ethical challenges to journalism practice in Nigeria.[160] This has led to allegations of corruption against top government functionaries being treated with levity.[161] Because of this, highly placed public officials are deliberately shielded from embarrassing questions by the media in return for favors.[162] In other words, the press in Nigeria is selective in their investigation of allegations of corrupt practices which results in journalism of adulation.[163] This manifests in the form of regional parallelism in the coverage of corrupt practices in the Nigerian media[164] routed through the two major centers of newspaper production in the country: the Lagos-Ibadan axis and Abuja-Kaduna.

The Lagos-Ibadan axis represents the south and Abuja-Kaduna the north.[165] The ethnicity that underpins the Nigerian state is also very visible in the Nigerian press and breeds divergent perspectives on the coverage of national issues following the North-South dichotomy.[166] When the Nigerian Press exposes corruption, they are usually divisive in its coverage to the extent that "when a national issue enters the public domain for debate, the Nigerian media often, though not all the time, take a North-versus-South position on it."[167] Hence, the media in post-independence Nigeria became "logically partisan in its reportage, agitation and agenda-setting that it was easier to associate the role of the press with objective or positive nationalism in the context of the struggle against colonial rule."[168]

With a media scene that is considered one of the liveliest in Africa, the media's economic, social, and political influence is powerful. According to BBC's Nigeria Media Profile:

- There are more than 100 national and local press titles, some of them state-owned. They include well-respected dailies, tabloids, and publications that champion ethnic interests.

- By July 2019, there were 122.7 million active internet users, according to the Nigerian Communications Commission. Mobile phones are often used to access the web. Most internet users are young, educated, and urban.

- Around 24 million Nigerians were active on social media by January 2019, comprising 12% of the population (We Are Social/Hootsuite). WhatsApp is used by 85% of social media users, followed by Facebook (78%).

---

[160] See S. Kolawole (2018), available at: https://medialandscapes.org/country/nigeria
[161] See M. Jibo and A.T. Okoosi-Simbine (2003), p.193
[162] See M. Jibo (2003), p. 182
[163] See M. Ibelema (2002), p. 162-209
[164] See M.J. Yusha'u (2010), p. 353-369
[165] See W. Adebanwi (2002)
[166] See M. Jibo and A.T. Okoosi-Simbine, A.T. (2003), p. 180–195, Adebanwi (2002) and M.J. Yusha'u (2010)
[167] See M. Jibo and A.T. Okoosi-Simbine (2003), p. 83
[168] See S. Oyovbaire (2001), p. 4

The overall media in Nigeria is large with significant diversity across the regions as Table 10 below shows.

One of the biggest challenges facing the media in Nigeria is the timely payment of salaries. The situation has been complicated by COVID-19, which crashed advertising revenues leading to mass sacks in several media establishments in Nigeria. Nigerian journalists suffer the untold hardship of not being given their salaries at the end of the month; it is possible for journalists to be owed for upward of one year and they continue to work hoping to thrive through unethical practices such as brown envelope syndrome and other corrupt practices.[169]

Table 10.   Overview of Media in Nigeria

Print	Until the 1990s most publications were government-owned, but private papers such as the Nigerian Tribune, The Punch, Vanguard, and the Guardian operate today.
TV	Over 15 television stations, including: Africa Independent Television, Arise News, Galaxy TV, Lagos TV, the Nigerian Television Authority and TVC News. BBC, Voice of America, and Deutsche Welle are all viewed in the country.
Radio	Multiple stations (over 75) across the country, many that are also accessible through internet radio.
Digital	Virtually all newspapers have digital editions. Over 122 million internet users (7th in the world) with a wide variety of online and social media content.

Sierra Leone Media Landscape

Throughout most of its post-independence period, the government in Sierra Leone struggled to muzzle the press's ability to report on corruption and government activities.[170] While freedom of speech and freedom of the press are guaranteed in Sierra Leone's constitution, the government has historically maintained strong control through regulation particularly during the civil war (1991-2002) and the Ebola Crisis (2014-2016). Media organizations and journalists also face considerable problems in news production including distribution challenges, lack of electricity and other infrastructure, and a tiny revenue base.[171]

Sierra Leone passed a Freedom of Information Act in 2013 and the country has been moving up the World Press Freedom Index and is in 75th place in 2021 up from 85th in 2020.[172] Legislation such as the Seditious Libel Law of 1965, which criminalized some journalistic activities was repealed in August 2020 under President Julius Maada Bio.[173] This was largely viewed as a critical step towards press freedom, as the former head of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalism wrote, "I am pleased to live to see this

---

[169] See M. Jibo and A.T. Okoosi-Simbine (2003), p. 83 and Ibelema (2002). The brown envelope syndrome refers to journalist taking a bribe or other forms of reward in exchange for covering certain stories or events that lead to stories.

[170] See V. Bau (2010)

[171] See K. Wahl-Jorgensen and B. Cole (2008), p. 1-20

[172] See World Press Freedom Index (2021), available at: https://rsf.org/en/2021-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-vaccine-against-disinformation-blocked-more-130-countries

[173] See Sierra Leone, Reporters without Borders (2021), available at: https://rsf.org/en/sierra-leone

day. I feel like I have been born again."[174] However, the new Independent Commission Act of 2020 was criticized for potentially restricting competition in the country and making it possible for the government to "shut down media houses and ban journalists from practicing their professions."[175] The country needs civic education to build a stronger culture of news analysis and media literacy.[176]

Newspapers have a small circulation, especially outside Freetown, but have been gradually growing in strength since the end of the civil war. Most people get their news through radio; 81% of the population compared to 45% who have access to television. However, radio is becoming increasingly fragmented, and no station reaches a national audience.[177]

The overall media in Sierra Leone is still focused on radio but has an opportunity to grow, particularly in audio reports on digital media as well as print media as literacy in the country expands (see Table 11).

Table 11.   Overview of Media in Sierra Leone

Print	Sierra Leone, a small West African country, has over two hundred registered newspapers and magazines.
TV	Over 200 licensed radio and television stations and Direct-To-Home (DTH) Services. The most prominent television stations are the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) Television and Africa Young Voices (AYV) Television.
Radio	Prominent radio stations include Radio Democracy, FM 98.1 while the newspapers are Awoko, Politico, Standard Times, and Concord Times.
Digital	Internet penetration is low, 13.1% in 2020 according to the Internet World Stats. Facebook has 693,400. Mobile phone ownership has grown but adoption of digital media is slow.

Both low literacy and dependence on radio slows the growth of written forms of media either through print or digital forms. People tend to trust the information published in newspapers less than that found on the radio.[178]

The country's media have benefitted from several projects supported by Fondation Hirondelle, Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio, and the BBC Media Action, which is currently implementing the Protecting Independent Media for Effective Development (PRIMED) project working in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone.[179]

---

[174] See Media Foundation for West Africa (2021), available at: https://ifex.org/sierra-leones-parliament-repeals-criminal-libel-law-that-threatens-free-speech/

[175] See L. Williams (2020)

[176] See P. Svärd (2017)

[177] See BBC Media Action (2018)

[178] See BBC World Service Trust & Search for Common Ground (2007), available at: http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/trust/pdf/media_report_2007.pdf.

[179] See Protecting Independent Media For Effective Development (PRIMED), available at: https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/our-work/media-development/PRIMED-project

PREVIEW OF FINDINGS

- To explore media and citizen perceptions of and media experiences with the PRC, we draw on evidence gathered through FGDs and IDIs. Overall findings from our research indicate:

- There is a growing number of journalists who have benefitted from the PRC's sponsored media training programs spanning from graduate program fellowships to short courses (mostly three weeks). There are a growing number of journalists who have benefitted from PRC-sponsored media training programs in Nigeria, including Master's programs, 10-month journalism reporting fellowships, and short-term courses (ranging from one to three weeks).

- Journalists who took part in PRC-sponsored programs said they gained a wider understanding of China as a country, especially in terms of culture, politics, trade, and digital media. In this regard, training is not perceived as specific, tailored, or skills-oriented; it's more about exposure to China and the Chinese experience.

- In Kenya, respondents also said the PRC-sponsored training made them more competitive among their peers. A common theme amongst respondents is that they felt they were able to "demystify" China for their peers and that the China they experienced is different than what is portrayed by Western media or what they find in books.

- The research team did not notice any unified or centralized approach to the recruitment of journalists for media training programs in the PRC. In terms of trying to understand patterns of recruitment, there was a noticeable pattern that journalists were selected based on being nominated or selected from organizations with pre-existing relationships with the PRC (the local Chinese Embassy or the National Ministry of Information). In Nigeria, however, journalists participating in the 10-month fellowship were likely to be nominated by an editor, editorial board chair, or media owners while short-term media exchanges (1-3 Weeks) were coordinated by the local Chinese embassy to curry favor with journalists who had either been reporting positively about the Chinese government or others that had provided critical reporting on PRC activities in Nigeria. Many of the respondents interviewed said they were nominated because their media houses were reporting positively on the PRC and doing "promotional stories" for them.

- There was a noticeable gender gap or disparity amongst the respondents interviewed. Most of the interviewees that represented the views of journalists who took part in PRC-sponsored programs were male. Overall, there appears to be a lower number of women taking part in the programs overall – inclusive of both short-term and long-term.

- Transparency and trust were a major factor in carrying out the research. The willingness of potential respondents to take part in interviews was challenging. Developing a clear roster of potential respondents was also a challenge, as there is not a publicly accessible way of knowing who takes part in the programs. Some senior media practitioners, think-tanks, and heads of leading civil society organizations declined to be interviewed on the basis that they were not familiar and "not competent" to talk on the matter, or that they would not like to carry out an interview if not in-person, or that due to the subject matter being on China they would as a matter of security considerations not be able to take part in such a study.

- There was a noticeable knowledge gap related to how many African scholars and journalists and media professionals that the research team reached out to who did not know about or have an awareness of PRC-sponsored programs. Many potential respondents declined to be interviewed because of lack of knowledge. This finding was interesting because it suggests that the overall dynamic of the PRC's influence in Africa and African media development remains somewhat of a niche and misunderstood topic, even at the local level.

Findings by country are summarized in Table 12 below.

Table 12. Summary Findings by Country

	Sierra Leone	Kenya	Nigeria
Research Question 1: How have African journalists experienced PRC-sponsored training programs and what are their perceptions of these programs' content? How have PRC-supported programs influenced the African media landscape and environment (e.g. freedom of the press, disinformation, etc.) and media partnerships in Africa?			
Experience of journalists	- Positive perceptions of China. - Low bureaucracy. - Sightseeing opportunities. - Gained skills. - Learned new technology.	- Gained wider understanding of China – culture, politics, trade, digital media. - More competitive than peers on China issues – sophisticated system. - Demystified books and Western media on China.	- No journalism training – more "education about China." - Helped gain context about China and China and Africa. - Informed views about China and debunked some Western media.
Influence on journalism	- Soft Power, intended for more journalists reporting on China. - Many said not influenced by them politically – but said influence might build over time. - More positive reporting on China - attempts at direct control of media narrative.	- Unstructured journalism training – not to solve a problem - perceptions of no change in journalism quality after training. - Tour to sell Chinese culture – brand it in Africa - Soft power. - More sympathetic to developing countries vs U.S./West. - Idea of agenda for profit gain – a new colonization, worrying because debt rising. - Influence through Confucius Institutes and workshops.	- More aware of PRC sources like CGTN – mixed about whether these are actually used. - More aware of how they should report on China – aware of difference between state and private media.

	Sierra Leone	Kenya	Nigeria

Research Question 2: What are the implications of African journalist participation in PRC-sponsored journalist programs on the possible direction of reporting? How have PRC-led training programs shaped participating journalists' reporting in terms of content and approach?

Implications on direction of reporting	- More positive content on China. - Danger of relinquishing watchdog role. - Links to technology and ownership of media, provision of content.	- Increase of Chinese content in the media – cashing on free media and social media. - Increased ability for consumers to evaluate positive and negatives about the PRC vs Western systems – audience for nuance. - More positive lens stories about the PRC linked to economic development and megadevelopment projects.	- Few implications for reporting from short- to medium-term participants. - Impact more profound for longer-term participants. - Notable increase in positive reporting on China-Africa cooperation. - Perspective that PRC is not as the West makes it appear. - Participants more likely to show bias in reporting on China.

Research Question 3: What does research on prominent African media outlets (print and radio, including local languages), and on discussions on popular social media outlets tell us about emerging African narratives about China? Do African audiences articulate a link between China and authoritarianism in their countries, and to what extent is China invoked in discussions that juxtapose or cohere economic development against – or in support of – democratic values?

Emerging narratives	The China narrative is perceived as slowly changing into something that is more positive: Media professionals and journalists are a focus of the PRC's in-country influence: The PRC pushes its own agenda: African narratives about China are shaped by the PRC and the PRC pays for and shares content that is run on its African services: - China Central TV Africa, China Daily Africa Weekly, Beijing Review along with Xinhua News Agency, China Radio International (CRI). - StarTimes, a privately-owned pay TV provider with a significant presence across sub-Saharan Africa. - China's media – both state and private – is much more visible in Africa in recent years (Zhang, 2014). After the 1990s, PRC soft power shifted from "opening up" to "going out." (Li & Ronning, 2013) "Despite the increasing presence in the continent, Chinese media are yet to decisively convince audiences in terms of their independence and their level of trustworthiness because a majority of the respondents perceived their contents as being biased, and government propaganda." (Guyo & Yu, 2019)

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

How have African journalists experienced PRC-sponsored training programs and what are their perceptions of these programs' content? How have PRC-supported programs influenced the African media landscape and environment (e.g., freedom of the press, disinformation, etc.) and media partnerships in Africa?

Zhengrong, Editor-in-Chief at the PRC Education Television, estimates more than 1,000 foreign journalists (mostly from Africa, Asia and Europe) are trained in the PRC each year in new and innovative techniques such as media convergence, big data, smart solutions, and next-generation network technology.[180] He notes the PRC is the world's second-largest economy and a significant stakeholder in global affairs, but its soft power manifests through people-to-people dialogues. Training of foreign journalists in the PRC allows them to experience the country's full complexity, thus ensuring more objectivity and consideration when they portray the PRC to their audience.[181]

IDIs conducted by the study team in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Kenya found the above position is consistent with the experiences of those who have taken part in PRC-sponsored journalism training programs. According to IDIs and FGDs with journalists and media professionals the top ways in which journalists have experienced the programs and its impacts on their reporting are:

- **Encouraged friendship between the PRC and Africa:** PRC-sponsored programs are used as a tool of soft power[182] that has led to improving their overall understanding and awareness about the PRC. "If you are the U.S., you are shooting yourself in the foot if you're going to build soft power. PRC has a huge lead ahead of you" (IDI, Kenya, TV media outlet).

  There is also the sentiment that relationships were established to assert control of the narrative regarding PRC engagement in Africa: "My assessment or perception of the program is basically that the PRC is trying to reach out to third world countries. They are trying to create alliances, trying to help people to understand the country better." (IDI, Nigeria, 10-month media training fellow)

- **Exposed journalists to China and Chinese culture, rather than a theory or practice of journalism:** Many participants said their programs largely focused on learning about China. The journalism training they did receive was not perceived as high quality or very useful for the craft and practice of journalism: "Objectively, it was basically not a tailored training; they used it to try and sell their culture to their advantage." (IDI, Kenya, TV media outlet)

- **Changed some reporting content and practices:** A few journalist interviewees who attended academic courses said the experience shaped their reporting in terms of content and approach. They said they were now engaged in the PRC's 'development journalism' model in which "people do not discuss politics in the PRC. It is more about development."[183] "If China continues to offer goodies to the Nigerian journalists, and knowing the nature of our journalists, people will even begin to write about China as the second heaven. So, it is not unlikely that if China continues to romanticize the Nigerian journalists, they will begin to get some very favorable appraisal in the media." (IDI, Nigeria, Journalist)

- **Stimulated some awareness of the importance of media to democracy:** One by-product of PRC-sponsored programs was that many participants reported greater awareness of the PRC's

---

[180] See https://www.PRCdaily.com.cn/PRC/2016-10/17/content_27077588.htm

[181] See https://www.PRCdaily.com.cn/PRC/2016-10/17/content_27077588.htm

[182] As traditionally understood, in politics, soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt, rather than coerce. In other words, soft power involves shaping the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. A defining feature of soft power is that it is non-coercive; the currency of soft power includes culture, political values, and foreign policies.

[183] See D. Zheng

media model – and the lack of democracy and human rights in the PRC. They felt this was not a model they would wish to bring back to their country.

- **Left some feeling skeptical and critical of the West:** "They [Nigerians] link the PRC with authoritarianism, because the Western media make it so. The perspective about the PRC is essentially Western media influenced, no more no less." (IDI, Nigeria, Journalist)

- **Increased number of African journalists who specialize in PRC issues:** In terms of expertise about the PRC, some journalists reported having an "air of authority" and some even felt they became *de facto* promoters of the PRC. One Kenyan respondent said, "Trained journalists act like Chinese government spokespersons immediately after the training, but this will fade with time." (IDI, Kenya, Former Editor)

As described by respondents for Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone, PRC-sponsored training programs varied widely from under three weeks to over a year for Master's level courses. Programs tended to include significant cultural and historical training, visits to important Chinese sites, and some form of practical exposure, such as being assigned to a media outlet (see Table 13 below).

Table 13.   PRC Training Programs

Duration	What the Experience Includes	Who Takes Part
Short-term 2-3 weeks trips	• Cultural orientation • Site visits • Introductory/ basic topics in journalism and the media profession • Visits and discussions with other media professionals	• Government officials • Facilitators • Media professionals • Academics
Medium-term 6-9 months	All of the above and practical internships. A few participants also said they had intensive courses on Chinese history.	Media supervisors, media professionals, and academics.
Long-term 1 year or longer	MA or PhD program sponsored by PRC	University staff, supplemented by some other media professionals

All of these training programs occurred within the last decade and, as the table above shows, can be divided into short-, medium-, or long-term exchange visits that included study or practical, working exposure to Chinese culture and journalism. All of these exchanges were underwritten by the Chinese government with the participation of its embassies in Africa.

For the most part, interview respondents said their programs were led by government officials.[184] Content focused largely on learning about China and the "Chinese perspective": the New China, New

---

[184] These officials were mainly staff from state-run press, radio, television and new media contracted by the Ministry of Commerce in PRC to conduct trainings.

Media Development, and "China in My Eyes"[185] – the main idea is that by bringing Africans to the PRC they will see the "real China" and through meeting with people, sightseeing, and having authentic experiences any negative perceptions or bad connotations of the PRC will diminish and visitors will be able to witness and understand the PRC as a great power and force for positive political, economic, and social development. As another journalist respondent reported, he learned about "infotainment," the news genre of journalism, the daily show, opinion journalism, and the functions of political programs and terrorism.

As one Sierra Leonean respondent said, "This is 'The Chinese Way'."[186] While many said the courses did not change their perspectives on their own country or their profession in general, some said they now felt closer to the PRC's perspective: "From the Chinese school, which I'm part of now, it is their own way of doing things. Even their own mathematics. When they say 'one plus one,' it is not 'two', but something different." (IDI, Sierra Leone, journalist)

Asked to reflect on their recruitment, respondents among journalists in Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone revealed some common experiences with the African journalist training programs, especially in terms of how journalists were recruited and the key role of the Chinese embassies in African countries. Most of the recruitment appears to be very *ad hoc*, beginning with embassy contacts in the country of reporting. Similar views related to recruitment were mentioned in a May 20201 Wilson Center talk.[187]

In a few cases, journalists are part of media outlets regularly reporting on PRC issues and their work is followed by Chinese embassy staff:

> *"Our office has a relationship with the PRC because of a column we are doing called the 'China Daily.' I was covering a political story immediately after the election in 2012 when the ruling party stormed the opposition party's head office. I covered that story and it was after that story that I received a call from the embassy, expressing interest in what was going on. So, I had a chat with one of the press officers who I updated on the incident. After our discussion he asked me if I'm interested in a program to study in China and I said yes. That was how I got involved in the Chinese program"* (IDI, Sierra Leone, Journalist).

Compared to the U.S. or Europe, there is less bureaucracy required for PRC trainings. Interestingly, interview respondents that also participated in journalist training programs sponsored by the U.S. and European countries said they were surprised with the low level of bureaucracy associated with being chosen for and participating in PRC programs. The implication is, compared to other foreign-sponsored journalism training or fellowship programs, the PRC's approach required less effort on journalists' part.

On the whole, journalists from Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya gained a wider understanding and more positive impression of the PRC. Many interviewees from all three countries said they experienced a large part of the training as cultural exchange that included sightseeing

---

[185] See for example China Daily, available at: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/inmyeyes/index.html

[186] Referring to how the Chinese approached PRC's branding efforts.

[187] China's Soft Power Projection in Africa: Wilson Center (2021), available at: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/chinas-soft-power-projection-africa

visits to key places and historical perspectives on Chinese and world history, including American history. They felt their already positive perceptions of the PRC increased and they saw first-hand that the PRC is different from what they had read about in books and the Western press.

Journalists saw improvement in their reporting, particularly around technology use and reporting on the PRC. Most interviewees from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Kenya said their visit somewhat informed their reporting, especially around technology and being able to write about the PRC. However, interviewees reported little improvement in professional journalism skills and said there was little or no actual journalism training on their visit. Even where they did receive direct training in journalism, they did not perceive it to be different from the "Western" training they had learned professionally. It was "more about education about China" (IDI, Kenya). One Sierra Leonean journalist found "even the books we were using were written by American authors" and a Kenyan journalist noticed, "Some of the professors are from America and Australia. In fact, now, more than 70% of the universities in China are being taught in English because so many [Chinese] professors have returned after spending 20-30 years in the West."

Visits enabled journalists to gain more authoritative knowledge about PRC issues. A few respondents said they felt the trip made them more competitive among their peers in this area.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What are the implications of African journalist participation in PRC-sponsored journalist programs on the possible direction of reporting in general?

In assessing the implications of journalist participation, interview respondents from Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Kenya who took part in the short courses stated more often than not that PRC-sponsored trainings had little influence on their worldview. One reason may be rooted in the belief that African and PRC polities are too different from one another. Said one Sierra Leonean journalist, "They are a communist state, and we are [a] democracy." Respondents from longer-term exchanges said they had learned good journalism skills but were often taught from Western textbooks and by expatriate professors at Chinese universities. Most interviewees felt PRC training would not influence journalistic practices since journalists in Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone are trained in Western methods and values.

However, some journalists expressed concern nevertheless. Several commented that journalists who have participated in PRC-sponsored journalism programs (mainly the academic programs) may gradually relinquish their watchdog and monitoring roles. Those who have participated in the PRC's programs tend to "act as if the PRC is not as bad as the West makes it appear." (IDI, Kenya, Journalist)[188]

On the other hand, a PRC model of "constructive," "positive," or "developmental" journalism appears resonant with the goals of many journalists. Nearly half of interview respondents said they learned practical techniques for this "development journalism" (a focus on problem-solving for national development, not challenging power or promoting accountability) in the PRC that they can use to report on some government issues and to avoid critical articles, although many

---

[188] The NORC team interviewed journalists, media professionals and media experts who are aware of the PRC's involvement in funding African journalists in PRC-sponsored fellowship programs as well as journalists who traveled to China PRC for their fellowships. The quote here is from someone who was familiar with PRC fellowship programs but did not go to the PRC.

respondents also stressed they would continue to also perform journalistic watchdog functions to report critically on government policy.

Other impacts of African journalist participation in PRC-sponsored trainings drawn from interviews in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Kenya include:

- Stronger preference for non-political, entertainment, and cultural reporting

- Changing understanding about the PRC and willingness to use Chinese news sources

- Possible increase in use of journalistic technologies and social media learned in the PRC.

Western media fosters liberal standards supportive of democracy; the PRC aims to focus on image and branding. Most interview respondents in all three countries agreed there is a "whole world of difference" between PRC and Western media training. While Western media training is focused on particular journalism skills, those of the PRC are not tailored this way. All IDI respondents assert PRC training and curricula lack journalistic content (standards, methods, etc.). The West uses its media training to inculcate the liberal standards of journalism that can potentially safeguard democracy, while PRC trainings resemble a public relations exercise aimed at rebranding its image in Africa.[189]

This, according to respondents, is what makes it difficult for PRC media training to make much impact on reporting practices for African journalists. An IDI respondent in Nigeria, who also participated in the U.S. International Visitors Leadership Program, noted the U.S. training is more robust than PRC-sponsored media training:

> *"We visited several organizations; private, public, a couple of universities, several media organizations and, let me say [the U.S.-sponsored training] was more open than that of the PRC, because in the PRC program, we were only taken to a couple of places they wanted us to visit." (IDI Nigeria, Journalist).*

Journalists note a preference for non-political reporting and development journalism but see little impact on democracy in the short-term. Interview respondents from Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya said they were now engaged in "development journalism," because "people do not discuss politics in the PRC. It is more about development. The media follow the trend." (IDI Sierra Leone, Journalist)

While respondents acknowledged the debate over developmental journalism has gained currency in Africa, some assert it is a trend that would not last in their countries. Others also pointed out development journalism has long been a guiding principle of state-run media in their countries, and it was therefore not new at all, but another attempt to rationalize and undermine the journalistic enterprise.

In the long-term, several respondents worried journalists might abandon their watchdog mode because of the exposure to the PRC model. But others felt that this exposure can even make some more critical: "It has a greater impact in helping to remove the 'us versus them' world view from Africans. I know that journalists are critical in their thinking and in making the right judgments from

---

189 See Gagliardone, Repnikova and Stremlau (2014), p. 2

the trainings in terms of what are facts and what is public relations and to be able to digest those facts for themselves to form opinions for the world as it is." (IDI, Kenya, International Media Broadcaster)

Another possible impact of journalist participation is increased collaboration with PRC news media. This is a clear trend in Kenya where some media have increased their use of Chinese content as a trend in reporting. The Xinhua News Agency offers news for free to any media in Kenya willing to use Xinhua stories. "We have CGTN [China Global Television Network] in collaboration with many media houses who can use information generated by CGTN" (IDI, Kenya, Journalist).

In Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya, interview respondents felt PRC-sponsored training would increase media coverage about the PRC overall. A respondent who has colleagues that have participated in PRC-sponsored media trainings observed participants tend to "act as if the PRC is not as bad as the West makes it appear." And another said, "If the PRC continues to offer goodies to Nigerian journalists… people will even begin to write about the PRC as the second heaven." A journalist interviewed for this study, who studied for a Master's degree in the PRC, contends the training will "generate media interest in what is happening in the PRC."

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

How have PRC training programs shaped participating journalists' reporting in terms of content and approach?

Journalist respondents in Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya report little change in the content of their reporting or their approach as a result of their participation in PRC-led training programs. As one interviewee said, "I'm following all media in Sierra Leone and I know there is not much impact when it comes to the way they [other journalists] will translate those trainings into their practical work back home" (IDI, Sierra Leone, Journalist).

However, **content analysis of 242 Sierra Leonean and Nigerian journalists' reporting does show PRC-led training programs impacted certain aspects of their coverage;** the content analysis offers insights into PRC training influences on reporting.[190] In Nigeria, coders considered 100 stories from eight journalists who participated in PRC media training. Twelve stories relevant to the themes were written before their PRC training and 24 after their return from the PRC, for a total of 36 relevant stories. In Sierra Leone, coders considered 141 stories from 14 journalists who participated in PRC media training. Five stories relevant to the themes were written before their training and 26 after their return for a total of 31 relevant stories. A summary of their findings is contained in Table 14, below.

As results indicate, **there was little significant change noted in reporting about the PRC before and after the training among Nigerian and Sierra Leonean journalists in most categories**. Two categories that showed significant change in reporting, however, were **on PRC-Africa ties and positive approaches towards PRC-Africa cooperation**. With regard to the latter, there was an increase of 40% in articles containing positive reporting content after journalists

---

[190] The analysis was performed by two coders in each country who reviewed the articles for nine areas of content. As a first step, articles that did not discuss the PRC in any way were excluded in order to create a set of articles with relevant content.

returned from their visits. While this is not generalizable against the whole population of journalists, it suggests the PRC may be making headway in achieving its objective to tell this type of story.

Table 14. Content Analysis – Nigeria and Sierra Leone

Messages in Media: Journalist Narratives on the PRC	Before PRC Training			After PRC Training			% Change
	Nigeria n=12	Sierra Leone n=5	Both Countries n=17	Nigeria n=24	Sierra Leone n=26	Both Countries n=50	Before & After Training
1. The story demonizes or critiques human rights protesters and activists	0%	0%	0%	4%	0%	2%	2%
2. The story includes supportive statements about autocratic behavior/authoritarian regimes	0%	0%	0%	4%	4%	4%	4%
3. The story mentions or alludes to national development goals as more important than democratic principles/norms	0%	0%	0%	13%	4%	8%	8%
4. The story mentions the U.S. as a failing democracy, mentions weakness in American society, or implies that the U.S. is not a good partner	8%	0%	6%	13%	4%	8%	2%
5. The story includes positive reporting on PRC attitudes towards Africa or PRC-Africa cooperation	17%	40%	24%	63%	65%	64%	40%
6. The story includes positive reporting on policies/legislation that clearly benefit Chinese investors and local Chinese business interests	8%	0%	6%	25%	4%	14%	8%
7. The story highlights positive engagements with the PRC (PRC-sponsored trainings, trips, exchanges for members of the media, business or government).	17%	20%	18%	29%	27%	28%	10%
8. The story sets up a PRC vs. the West comparison (PRC positive; the West negative)	8%	0%	6%	8%	27%	18%	12%
9. The story discusses the high cost of PRC assistance and possible problems with PRC influence	8%	40%	18%	17%	0%	8%	-10%

While coders found very few examples of praise for authoritarianism either before or after the visits to the PRC, many stories reported about journalists' visits or about local priorities for PRC investment.

Content analysis found a gap in reporting about the cost of PRC assistance and problems with its influence. Though there were not many to begin with, examples declined by 12% after journalists returned. It is possible, at least in the short term, the PRC's program is succeeding to quiet the few voices of critique in Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Stories juxtaposing "West versus East" increased. Another area showing significant gain was in those stories that set up a "West versus East" comparison (Category 8), which increased by 12% overall after journalists returned from their trips. This finding correlates with some interviews where respondents were asked about comparisons and pointed out that the PRC seemed to "care more about Africans" or seemed to have "fewer strings attached" to its assistance. Still, as shown by the lack of content found in other categories, the journalists did not change their own analysis of human rights and authoritarian governments in their countries.

Overall, comparisons between Nigeria and Sierra Leone article content showed some consistency, although it should be remembered the relatively small sample size is not generalizable. Nigerian articles had more positive content on policies promoting PRC investment after the training (8% beforehand and 24% afterwards), while the content found in Sierra Leone was negligible (0% beforehand and 4% afterwards). This may reflect the more diverse and large number of opportunities in Nigeria.

While codes found very few examples of praise for autocracy either before or after the visits to China, this meme in African journalism does seem to persist as the narrative of one story showed:

> *"The fact that African leaders have been able to effectively transcend the values of democracy to enhance development suggests that the system of economic and political governance does not transcend domestic development which should be [the] prime focus of many African countries." (Article).*

Many of these stories reported about journalists' visits or about local priorities for PRC investment. A set of illustrative examples are provided below:

> China should "…*continue serving as a stabilizing force in a fast-changing world and inject positive energy for the evolution of international order…. China pursues a foreign policy of upholding international fairness and justice. China does not affiliate itself with any country, nor seeks control of any country or form of confrontational alliance against other countries" (Article).*

> *"I am back from China with stories…. The oriental experience has made me whole, in so many ways; It has changed my perception about many things; and I can now see more clearly like a line between two dots" (Article).*

> *"As a good friend of Sierra Leone, China fully supports His Excellency's New Direction Agenda and will contribute to its success" (Article).*

> *"The Chinese soft power, which encapsulates love for all, with mutual respect, has occasioned a speedy transformation of the most populous country in the world within a shorter period of time." (Article Sierra Leone).*

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What does research on prominent African media outlets (print and radio, including local languages), and on discussions on popular social media outlets tell us about emerging African narratives about the PRC?

Findings suggest the developing media narrative regarding the PRC is moving in the direction of creating public good will for the special relationships between African countries and the PRC. The PRC appears to downplay and avoid negative press in the areas of trade policy and corruption and attempts to leave the public with an overall impression that the PRC does not have hidden agendas and is open for business.

African academics who actively study the PRC's influence in Africa were skeptical of the PRC's influence in Africa so far, citing local content and former colonial powers' media as being more preferred. During IDIs and FGDs, respondents shared their views on emerging themes and narratives:

- **PRC-Africa trade is good for African countries;** ties also improve infrastructure without the strings attached by Western governments or the World Bank and IMF.

- **The PRC, like many African countries, is voiceless in the global media** and can be a significant partner in achieving a better balance.

    "From my experience, the PRC is fighting to build recognition in the world. They never understood in the last forty years that the media is very important in building such recognition. People never knew about the PRC except the negative side. So, they too need to come out to educate people about the PRC. They have tried to open up so that people will understand" (IDI, Sierra Leone, Editor).

- **The PRC is authoritarian, but also open for business.** Journalists in IDIs said their PRC visits showed them that the global media gets it wrong about the PRC – it is not a closed society and is hungry for new ideas, partnerships, and innovation. This narrative about the PRC suggests it has few geopolitical aspirations to engage in colonization of Africa or control the direction of African countries. It just wants to "help out" and make good investments.

    "…The Chinese understood that they too have to expand through the media. They are now making sure that they give many opportunities to [help] people to get a first-hand information about the PRC" (IDI, Nigeria, Journalist)

RESEARCH QUESTION 5

Do African audiences articulate a link between the PRC and authoritarianism in their countries, and to what extent is the PRC invoked in discussions that juxtapose or cohere economic development against – or in support of – democratic values?

Journalists in IDIs revealed strong awareness about authoritarianism in the PRC. In their view of impacts on African audiences, **PRC media engagement reinforces the belief among audiences that African bilateral cooperation with the PRC is a good deal for Africans with few strings attached.** They felt the PRC is largely crafting the narrative that it can be an open country and still have an undemocratic government. Respondents also suggested audiences were not exposed to much critical

reporting on the PRC's human rights issues (e.g., Hong Kong, Uighurs, and COVID-19 response). One British academic who has looked at the impact of public consumption of PRC media said her research has not found much impact on the perceptions of the public.

In recent years, the PRC's media has become much more visible across Africa, not only state-owned media like CCTV Africa, PRC Daily Africa Weekly, Beijing Review, Xinhua News Agency, and PRC Radio International (CRI), but also private media companies, like Star Times, the private Chinese digital pay TV operator.[191] While the PRC has transformed the global media ecology in Africa, the literature stresses its media's influence on African audiences has remained, at best, modest. Guyo and Yu pointed out, "Despite the increasing presence in the continent, PRC media are yet to decisively convince their audiences in terms of their independence and their level of trustworthiness because a majority of the respondents perceived their contents as being biased, and government propaganda."[192]

Studies examining journalism practice in PRC media in Africa have also focused on the professional autonomy of African journalists working in Chinese media, the impact of "positive reporting" on journalistic practices in Chinese media, and sociological factors underpinning work in CGTN. Umejei's study of journalistic practices in Chinese media suggests there is an African and a Chinese level of gatekeeping and journalistic agency in Chinese media organizations in Africa.[193] In Nairobi for example, stories touching on arts, culture, and tourism are left to African editors located in African countries, while those touching on the PRC's economic and political interests in Africa are filtered by Chinese officials in the PRC.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the findings suggest that **the major impact of PRC media training is to build good will and networks with African journalists and media organizations**. Interview respondents reported little immediate impact on the quality or form of reporting on PRC-Africa issues due to training in the three focus countries, a finding that was in part belied by data analyzed through the content analysis. Media training could shift the focus of journalists' reporting away from hard political issues since PRC training reinforces a focus on entertainment or other news and away from accountability reporting that is a hallmark of journalism's fourth estate role. However, this is not dissimilar from market forces around the world creating a constant tension within the profession and largely underfunding hard news reporting.

---

[191] See Zhang (2014)
[192] See A. G. Guyo and H. Yu (2019), p. 79
[193] See E. Umejei (2020)

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from this study suggest that the PRC influences democratic norms and values in several ways; these are illustrated in three common themes that are consistent throughout the findings. First, results from research on social media, ICTs, infrastructure and governance, and traditional media show that the effects of the PRC's soft power are indirect but widespread, as there appears to be an uneven playing field between the PRC and African partners, which impacts African human rights, including the right to privacy, and the context of business transactions, such as contract negotiation and regulation of conduct. African engagement with the PRC is not seen as zero sum vis-à-vis the U.S. – American engagement remains welcome and carries advantages related to certain areas, such as product quality and information about democracy. We also note a divergence between elite discussions of the PRC and local attitudes and experiences. Corporate responsibility promises also seem to be expanding in Africa, but impacted communities are often excluded. Second, the evidence across each topic speaks to the endurance of democratic norms and values amidst encroachment of illiberal practices. Third, it is through an understanding of attitudes, practices, and PRC relationships with African institutions and actors that nuances around these seemingly contradictory findings become apparent. Research approaches that rely solely on quantitative data mask these important complexities related to the PRC's engagement and investments in Africa. From these insights, we draw the following recommendations.

FOCUS AREA 1 – AFRICAN GOVERNMENT AND ELITE SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES ON THE PRC

Engage in robust public diplomacy through social media. This might include messages around USAID interventions, organizations USAID partners with, beneficiary experiences, and USAID events. USAID could identify a small number of influencers to disseminate messages, as findings suggest only a few dominate social media discourse about the PRC. Facebook and Twitter may be useful platforms, as well as those that are more specific to African countries.

Additional research that explores the forums on which elites discuss the PRC and what issues are of interest would also be valuable, as would comparison of elite views versus those of mass publics.

FOCUS AREA 2 – LOCAL INCLUSION AND GOVERNANCE AROUND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Address the dependency of the African Governments on PRC actors. Specifically, obtaining financing and construction services from the same provider significantly increases dependency and limits room to maneuver.

Focus on supporting African Governments to revise legal frameworks, such as labor laws concerning casual workers or formal grievance processes for affected citizens.

Increase citizen awareness around labor laws and rights and establish grievance mechanisms to address the externalities of the PRC and other foreign governments' infrastructure projects. Mechanisms might include formal courts or traditional courts and actors or some combination of these. Mechanisms should include or establish links to PRC actors affiliated with development projects to ensure enforcement of decisions where necessary.

FOCUS AREA 3 – INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND SURVEILLANCE

Work with governments, legislatures, and civil society to revise existing policies, regulations, and laws – or develop new ones – to seal loopholes related to new technologies, particularly surveillance technologies.

Support civil society organizations working in the ICT sector to advocate for more openness in terms of Africa-PRC ICT engagements; promote public awareness of privacy rights and the importance of internet security; and monitor government responses to privacy violations and censorship. Invest in digital diplomacy activities, particularly by providing ICT training to government officials to counter the PRC's offerings. American ICT companies should also be encouraged not only to invest in corporate social responsibility but also to publicize such initiatives.

Assess ways and means of encouraging American financiers to invest in African ICT sectors. One interesting approach could be engaging U.S. diaspora communities and leaders to invest in ICT sectors. The African-American diaspora is an untapped resource that can be leveraged to expand U.S. financial engagement in Africa.

Prioritize and pay attention to the surveillance technologies that create barriers to participation in political processes, particularly elections, and the rights to expression and protest. Programs and initiatives aimed at always ensuring accessibility to the internet, including in periods of intense contestation should be top of the agenda. This is because internet restrictions, censorship and shutdown directly subvert democracy and human rights and entrench autocrats in power.

FOCUS AREA 4 – MEDIA

Expose Africans to opportunities with U.S. partners, universities and media industry and social media and technology companies.

Continue support for legal enabling environment and rule of law programming that reinforces a human rights-based approach to democratic institutions.

Consider models of journalism, professional development, and collaborations for newsrooms and content-sharing platforms, making sure to not leave behind news and media operations that are in low internet penetration areas, given the high demand for digitalization.

Map out and partner with the wide network of centers and researchers working in Africa, Europe and North America devoted to the issues of PRC's influence on journalism, media development, and broader issues of interest to USAID in the area of democracy and governance. The South Africa Institute for International Affairs and London School of Economics, for example, each conduct research on PRC media engagement in Africa. Leveraging this network could be useful to capture different perspectives and viewpoints regarding PRC influence.

Leverage programs like the Young African Leaders Initiative to have a civil society, media, or internet freedom / digital rights focus. Efforts should include youth and involve other

underrepresented population segments, such as women and persons with disabilities to move beyond an emphasis on old guard voices.

Map, partner with, and program in Africa's many start-up hubs and innovation zones. These are important centers of creativity and spaces that welcome new ideas and opportunities for investment. Nairobi Kitchen is one type of such space. JamLab in South Africa is another. Code for Africa is a nice network that has done a lot with journalism and newsrooms.

Cultivate new and leverage existing partnerships with big tech and social media companies. For example, Ghana is now home to Twitter's first Africa-based operation. It is important to support efforts for African representation at key technology forums and ensure that Africa is represented. Standard setting bodies like ICANN for instance need to include African technology and internet governance leaders.

Roadmap an ambitious three-year, five-year, and 10-year research and development programming agenda together with a representative grouping of African civil society and independent media groups and academics. High on the list could be media development priorities and opportunities, digital rights, and internet governance as a whole. For many stakeholders in Africa the issue of how to respond to threats posed by closing civic spaces and the backsliding of democracy overall is considered one of the biggest threats.

5. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings above provide only an initial exploration of PRC influence on democratic norms and values, as budget constraints, and COVID-19 restrictions limited the scope of the research. The findings offer a point of departure for future research that can expand upon the results of this study, which are outlined below.

There's a need for a continuing and strong research agenda on PRC influence on African countries' media sectors and shaping of democratic norms and values. The U.S. should leverage existing relationships with research institutions and develop partnerships with PRC research centers and civil society. Efforts involving institutions that already publish papers and reports would be both strategic and useful.

Also important is the use of comparative approaches that explicitly compare the consequences of PRC projects versus those of other countries to ask, "what aspects of the negative effects are unique to the PRC?" Research could also explore intended and unintended consequences, i.e., whether the PRC is actively pursuing an anti-democratic agenda or not.

Given that fintech/e-commerce and surveillance impact citizens' privacy, more focused study is needed. Because it is difficult to ascertain the PRC's investments in Africa, dedicated data collection on the PRC's monetary investments would be valuable.

In the area of social media, it may be valuable to examine social media surrounding certain events (for example, a PRC investment made public, a PRC visit, or perhaps a corruption or digital privacy controversy) rather than posts over a two-year period. Chatter may fluctuate, however; it is useful to

know how much elites feel it is necessary to "make a case" on social media when these issues arise rather than just general mentions over a time period.

Finally, research that seeks to understand elite reactions to the PRC on social media and comparisons with mass publics would also contribute to learning on PRC issues, as would study of audiences and PRC sharp power targeting to assess the efficacy of PRC efforts in shaping public opinion to get at "how do people change their minds?"

ANNEX A: REFERENCES

Adebanwi, W. (2002). "The Nigerian Press and the National Question." Momoh and Adejumobi (Eds.) *The National Question in Nigeria: Comparative Perspectives.* Ashgate.

Afrobarometer Surveys. Round 7, 2016/2018 and Round 8, 2019/2020. https://afrobarometer.org/

Albert, E. "China's Big Bet on Soft Power." Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-big-bet-soft-power

_____ "China in Africa." Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-africa

Allen, K. & van Zyl, I. (2020). "Who's Watching Who? Biometric Surveillance in Kenya and South Africa." https://enact-africa.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/2020-11-11-biometrics-research-paper.pdf

Alden, C. (2005). "China in Africa." *Survival,* 47(3), 147–164.

Banda, F. (2009). "PRC in the African mediascape: a critical injection." *Journal of African Media Studies*, 1(3), 343-361.

Bariyo, N. (2015, April 17). "Zambia Reopens Chinese-owned Collum Coal Mine." *The Wall Street Journal.*

BBC. (2008, March 6). "Zambians sacked over China attack." British Broadcasting Corporation. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/7280782.stm

Brooks, A. (2010). "Spinning and weaving discontent: labour relations and the production of meaning at Zambia-China Mulungushi Textiles." *Journal of Southern African Studies,* 36(1), 113– 132.

Carmody, P, Hampwaye G. & Sakala, E. (2012). "Globalisation and the rise of the state? Chinese geo-governance in Zambia." *New Political Economy,* 17(2), 209–229.

Chanda, M. (2020). "Investigating Chinese Investment in Contributing to the Zambian Economy: a Case Study of Chinese Investments in Ndola Zambia." *The International Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Research.* http://www.multiresearch.net/cms/publications/CFP15772020.pdf

Chun, Z. (2014, December 15). "China-Zimbabwe relations: A model of China-Africa relations?" https://saiia.org.za/research/china-zimbabwe-relations-a-model-of-china-africa-relations/

Chutel, L. (2018, April 27). "No, China is not taking over Zambia's national electricity supplier. Not yet, anyway." *Quartz Africa* https://qz.com/africa/1391111/zambia-china-debt-crisis-tests-china-in-africa-relationship/

Cooke, J. (2009). "China's Soft Power in Africa." *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States.* Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Corkin, L. (2012). "Chinese construction companies in Angola: A local linkages perspective." *Resources Policy,* 37(4), 475–483.

China's Strategic Aims in Africa. U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 116th Congress (2020) (testimony of Judd Devermont). https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/congressional_testimony/ts200508_JDevermont.pdf

Dollar, D. (2019). "Understanding China's Belt and Road Infrastructure Projects in Africa." Brookings Institute.

Donnelly, L. (2018, September 14). "Africa's debt to China is complicated." *The Mail & Guardian*.

Dynamic, B. (2017). "Fighting the Race to the Bottom: Regulating Chinese Investment in Zambian Mines." *Disturbances in Heaven* (Eds). I. Franceschini, K. Lin and N. Loubere, 1–7. ANU Press.

EXX Africa Insight. (2019). The Cost of Internet Shutdowns in Africa. https://bondsloans.com/news/special-report-the-cost-of-internet-shutdowns-in-africa

Farooq, S., Yuan, T., Zhu, J., and Feroze, N. (2018). "Kenya and the 21st century Maritime silk road: implications for China-Africa relations." *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 4(03), 401–418.

Fraser, A. and Larmer, M. (2010). *Zambia, Mining, and Neoliberalism: Boom and Bust on the Globalized Copperbelt*. Springer.

Freedom House. (2019). Country Profiles. https://freedomhouse.org/country/kenya/freedom-world/2019

Gagliardone, I. (2013). "PRC as a persuader: CCTV Africa's first steps in the African mediasphere." *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 34:3, 25-40.

Gagliardone, I., M. Repnikova, & N. Stremlau. (2010). *PRC in Africa: a new approach to media development?* University of Oxford.

Ghosh, P. (2013, February 21). "Zambia Seizes Chinese-Owned Mine Over Poor Safety Record: The Fraying Relations between Beijing And Africa." *International Business Times*.

Gravett, W. (2020). "Digital neo-colonialism: The Chinese model of internet sovereignty in Africa." *African Human Rights Law Journal,* 21:1, 125-146.

Guyo, A. G., and Yu, H. (2019). "How Is the Performance of Chinese News Media in Kenya? An Analysis of Perceived Audience Reception and Motivation." *New Media and Mass Communication*, 79, 54-67.

Haglund, D. (2008). "Regulating FDI in weak African states: a case study of Chinese copper mining in Zambia." *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46(4), 547–575.

_____.(2009). "In It for the Long Term: Governance and Learning among Chinese Investors in Zambia's Copper Sector." *The China Quarterly*, 199, 627-643.

Hairong, Y. and Sautman, B. (2013). "'The beginning of a world empire?' Contesting the discourse of Chinese copper mining in Zambia." *Modern China,* 39(2), 131–164.

Hanuaer, L, and Morris, L. (2014). Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reaction and Implication for U.S. Policy. RAND Corporation.

Human Rights Watch. (2011). "You'll Be Fired if You Refuse" Labor Abuses in Zambia's Chinese State-owned Copper Mines." 1-30. Human Rights Watch.

Ibelema, M. (2002). "The Nigerian press and June 12: Pressure and performance during a political crisis." *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, 4(4), 162-209.

International Republican Institute. (2019). *Chinese Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy*. International Republican Institute.

Jibo, M, and Okoosi-Simbine, A.T. (2003). "The Nigerian Media: An Assessment of its Roles in Achieving Transparent and Accountable Government in the Fourth Republic." *Nordic Journal of African Studies,* 12(2), 180–195.

Kolawole, S. (2018). Nigeria media Landscape: Overview. https://medialandscapes.org/country/nigeria

Laterza, V. and Mususa, P. (2018, October 11). "Is China really to blame for Zambia's debt problems?" *Al Jazeera.*

Lefkowitz, M. (2017). "Chinese media, Kenyan lives: An ethnographic inquiry into CCTV Africa's head offices." https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5652847de4b033f56d2bdc29/t/5890c864ebbd1a33c539387 d/1485883493360/kenya+v4.pdf

Leslie, N. (2016). "Zambia and China: Workers' Protest, Civil Society and the Role of Opposition Politics in Elevating State Engagement." *African Studies Quarterly*, 16(3-4), 89-106.

Lim, L and Bergin, J. (2020). *Telling PRC's story: Reshaping the World's Media.* International Federation of Journalists.

Lusaka Times. (2019, October 2). "Zambia: China's EXIM bank has not halted funding for Kenneth Kaunda International Airport." *Lusaka Times.*

Marsh, V. (2016). "Mixed messages, partial pictures? Discourses under construction in CCTV's Africa Live compared with the BBC." *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 9(1), 56–70.

Mohan, G. and Lampert, B. (2013). "Negotiating China: reinserting African agency into China– Africa relations." *African Affairs,* 112(446), 92–110.

Moonga, C. (2021, February 2). "Lungu fires 6 permanent secretaries." *The Mast.*

Mwanawina, I. (2008). "China-Africa economic relations: the case of Zambia." African Economic Research Consortium.

Nassanga, G., and Sabiti, M. (2014, September 10-11). "Perceptions of Chinese Presence in Africa as Reflected in the African Media: Case study of Uganda," [Paper presentation] PRC and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy Conference, Beijing, PRC.

Nyirongo, M. 2020. "From Watchdog to Lapdog: Political Influence of PRC on News Reporting in Malawi." *Afrika Focus*, 33(2), 27-48.

Obi, V.U. (2020). Data Privacy and Protection Regulations in Nigeria. https://inplp.com/latest-news/article/challenges-confronting-implementation-of-data-privacy-and-protection-regulations-in-nigeria/

Ololuo, F. (2020). Nigeria: Data Privacy and Protection under the Nigerian Law. https://www.mondaq.com/nigeria/privacy-protection/895320/data-privacy-and-protection-under-the-nigerian-law

Oyovbaire, S. (2001). The media and democratic process in Nigeria. Lecture at the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, 7.

Pan, Z., and Chan, J. M. (2003). "Shifting journalistic paradigms: How PRC's journalists assess "media exemplars." *Communication Research*, 30(6), 649-682.

Sanny, J. and Selormey, E. (2020). "Africans view China's influence and significant and positive, but slipping." https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ad407-chinas_perceived_influence_in_africa_decreases-afrobarometer_dispatch-14nov20.pdf

Shi, A. (2015). "Re-orienting the 'charm offensive' to the 'charm defensive': A critical review of Chinese media development in Africa." *African Journalism Studies*, 36(1), 135-140.

Smith, E. (2020). "Zambia's spiraling debt offers glimpse into the future of Chinese loan financing in Africa." *CNBC*.

South China Morning Post. (2019). "Is a split coming for Zambia and long-time business partner, China?" *South China Morning Post*.

Sy, R.N.A, et al. (2019). *FinTech in Sub-Saharan African Countries: A Game Changer?* International Monetary Fund.

Servant, J. (2019). "China steps in as Zambia runs out of loan options." *The Guardian*.

Umejei, E. (2020). *Chinese Media in Africa: Perception, Performance, and Paradox*. Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield.

Wasserman, H., and Madrid-Morales, D. (2018). How Influential Are Chinese Media in Africa? An Audience Analysis in Kenya and South Africa. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 20.

_____. (2015). Chinese Media in South Africa: Attitudes and Awareness amongst Media Practitioners. http://www.saPRCmedia.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BeijingCUC_Presentation.pdf

Wasserman, H. (2016). "Chinese soft power in Africa: Findings, perspectives and more questions." Zhang, X., Wasserman, H., Mano, W. (Eds.) *Chinese Media and Soft Power in Africa: Promotion and Perceptions*. pp. 195-203. Palgrave Macmillan.

_____. (2014, September 10-11). "PRC's Soft Power and Its Influence on Editorial Agendas in South Africa." [Paper presentation] PRC and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy, Beijing, PRC.

Wekesa, B. (2014). "No need to fear Chinese media in Africa." http://PRC-africa-reporting.co.za/2014/03/no-need-to-fear-chinese-media-in-africa/

_____. and Yanqiu, S. (2014). "Live, talk, faces: An analysis of CCTVs adaption to the African media market." Stellenbosch University, Centre for Chinese Studies. http://www.sun.ac.za/ccs

Wells, M. (2011). "'You'll be Fired If You Refuse': Labor Abuses in Zambia's Chinese State-owned Copper Mines." Human Rights Watch.

Wu, Y. S. (2014). China's Media Public Diplomacy: Illustrations from South Africa. Chr. Michelsen Institute. https://www.cmi.no/file/2921-.pdf

Yanqiu, Z. and Matingwina, S. (2016) "Constructive Journalism: A New Journalistic Paradigm of Chinese Media in Africa." Zhang, X, Wasserman, H. and Mano, W. (Eds.) *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Yanqiu, Z. (2014, September 10-11). "Understanding PRC's Media in Africa from the Perspective of Constructive Journalism." [Paper presentation] PRC and Africa Media, Communications and Public Diplomacy, Beijing, PRC.

Yusha'u, M. J. (2010). "Regional parallelism and the reporting of corruption in the Nigerian press." *Journal of African Media Studies*, 2(3), 353-369.

Ziro Mwatela, R. and Changfeng, Z. (2016) "Africa in China's 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative: A Critical Analysis." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Scien*ce, 21(12), 10– 21.

ANNEX B. FOCUS AREA 2 METHODOLOGY – LOCAL INCLUSION AND GOVERNANCE AROUND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

COUNTRY SELECTION

Zambia was chosen for the study of local inclusion and governance dynamics due to its broad and long-standing relationship with the PRC, its multitude of infrastructure projects, and its known PRC-related controversies.

DATA COLLECTION

SELECTION OF STUDY LOCATIONS

Several criteria were used to select two infrastructure projects in Zambia. First, only projects funded directly by the PRC government were considered. Secondly, construction on the infrastructure projects should have begun but not yet be completed. Third, the research considered projects that were sufficiently high profile, important to national development, and politically salient as a government priority in times of tight budgets.

Given the current financial difficulties, the government has prioritized both the energy and transportation sectors over others. The government appears to continue repaying loans in these sectors, even if it needs to default on other loans. The reasons for this focus on energy and transport sectors are two-fold. With respect to energy, the Zambian government has announced a policy of rural electrification to facilitate economic development as well as for political purposes. ZESCO is government-owned and is charged with the responsibility of the generation, transmission, and distribution of electrical energy in Zambia. Increasing the capacity for generating electricity is therefore of paramount importance. With respect to the transport sector, the reasons for government prioritization are somewhat more problematic. It appears that the government is prioritizing paying arrears to road contractors, because these are linked to illicit campaign finance (e.g. subcontractors are owned by government officials). After identifying the full set of PRC-funded and constructed projects in Zambia, we applied the selection criteria outlined above to arrive at the two projects on which to base this study.

The first infrastructure project is the Kafue Gorge Lower Power Station. Not to be confused with the already existing Kafue Gorge Upper Power Station (an operational 900-megawatt hydro power plant constructed in the early 1970s), the Kafue Gorge Lower Power Station is a 750-megawatt dam currently under construction. It is located along the Kafue River, between the Kafue Gorge Upper Power Station upstream and the confluence of the Kafue River with the Zambezi River downstream. The power station is located approximately 90km south of Lusaka. In terms of financing, 85% of the $2 billion total investment volume was borrowed from the Exim Bank of China as well as the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China. The government of Zambia contributes the remaining 15%. The dam is constructed by Sinohydro, a PRC company. According to interviews conducted with ZESCO, the construction is to be completed in mid-2021. The final inspection and tests of the dam are currently ongoing, which also involves a partial filling of the reservoir. The dam is expected to become fully operational later in 2021.

We selected three locations in proximity to the dam to conduct FGDs. However, the precise location of the FGDs needed to be adjusted on-site for two reasons. The first reason is that the area around the dam has been closed for visitors to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmissions to workers. And the second reason is that most residents living close to the dam had been relocated. For this reason, the new locations of these residents were identified and FGDs were conducted in Siamikobo, Daga, and Chileleka.

Figure B-1. Location of FGDs in proximity to Kafue Gorge Hydroelectric Power Dam

The second infrastructure project is the so-called 'Lusaka L400' Project in Lusaka Province. It involves upgrading and improving roads in and around Lusaka, Zambia's capital. The total investment volume is about $400 million. In terms of financing, $241 million has been borrowed from the PRC, of which 85% ($205 million) will be provided by the Export-Import Bank of China while 15% ($36 million) will be provided by the Industrial Commercial Bank of China. The contractor is the PRC company AVIC. Currently, about 80% of roads have been completed. However, following reports about the deplorable state in which the two roads had become a few months after construction, the government had been forced to recall the contractor to re-do the roads. In 2020, AVIC offered to re-do some roads in Lusaka at no cost to the government

As with Kafue Gorge, three locations were selected to conduct FGDs. Unlike Kafue Gorge, no difficulties were faced in conducting the FGDs at the three locations that had been selected initially. FGDs were conducted in Kalinga Linga, Gwerere, and Mungwi.

Figure B-2. Location of FGDs in proximity of L400 Road Project
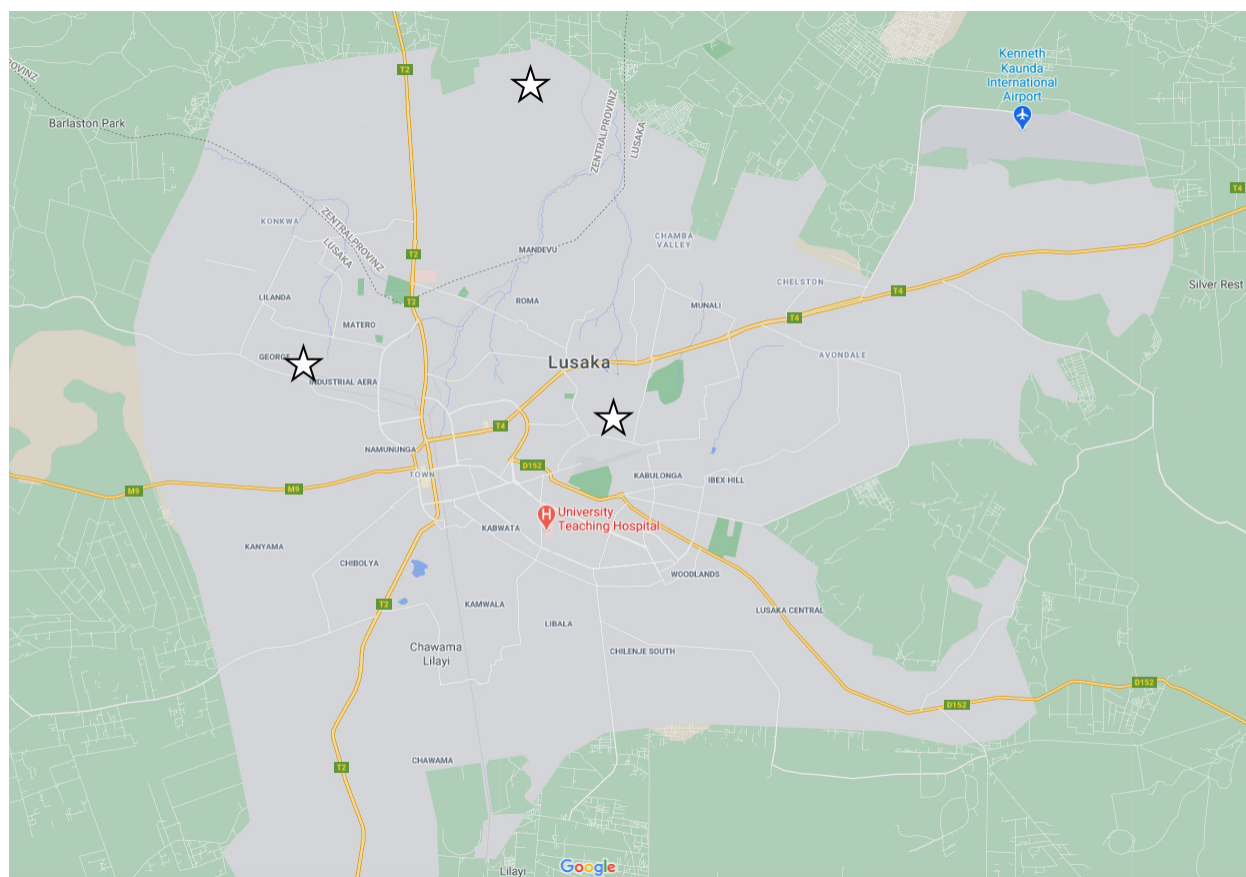

COMPARATIVE DESIGN

This project pursued a comparative research design. Data was collected in two different locations exposed to two different types of PRC-funded infrastructure projects. Analyzing two locations, instead of a single location, allowed the findings to have several desirable properties. Foremost, it guarded against the possibility of drawing possibly imprecise conclusions if only one project was selected, and that project was, for whatever reason, an unusual outlier. Also, analyzing two sites allowed for comparing and contrasting insights into different dimensions and how they might differ across sectors. By identifying what is similar about the PRC's engagement in energy and transportation sectors, for example, it is more likely that one would be able to accurately identify the core of the PRC's approach.

Data collection focused on obtaining information on the four sets of research questions outlined above. This was accomplished using qualitative approaches, such as FGDs with relevant stakeholders and desk research. Three locations were identified in proximity to the infrastructure projects and FGDs were conducted there. The FGDs were complemented by IDIs with selected key informants representing the various government authorities involved in the design and implementation of infrastructure projects.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Participants for FGDs were recruited by first talking to the headsman and traditional authorities for permission. They were also asked to provide assistance with contacts for individuals to be included in

the FGDs. However, in order to avoid selection bias, the research did not exclusively rely on these contacts. Researchers also went into the communities for recruitment and to invite participants. The number of participants in the FGDs ranged from 8 to 10 individuals. The sample of FGDs in Kafue Gorge was primarily male and mostly older (between 40 and 50 years of age). Participants were primarily fishers and peasant farmers with little formal education. In contrast, the sample in Lusaka Province was balanced between men and women, with younger participants (between 20 and 30 years of age). Participants were primarily vendors, taxi drivers, electricians, and hairdressers.

The FGDs began with COVID-19 precautions, for example by sanitizing all rooms and facilities, ensuring adequate distance between seated participants, and providing participants with free masks. Thereafter, the purpose of the study was explained, and informed consent obtained. Each FGD lasted about 90 minutes. A semi-structured, open-ended interview method was used to allow for participants to drive the conversation, rather than the researchers. Participants did receive a transportation refund sufficient to reimburse participants, but low enough to not attract attention due to its monetary value.

Figure B-3. Photo of FGD

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Recruitment of Zambian officials representing the various government institutions involved in infrastructure projects proved challenging for several reasons. Shortly before conducting several interviews, several key politicians were removed from their positions (Moonga 2021). The resulting

political uncertainty made potential interviewees hesitant to agree to interview requests. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic presented a challenge to in-person interviews. For example, two potential interviewees cancelled previously arranged interview appointments stating that they were currently in the hospital suffering from COVID-19. Consequently, this required the researchers to adjust the interview strategy and rely primarily on virtual meetings via Zoom, MS Teams, or Skype. However, given this online format, it was difficult to hold interviewees accountable to specific meeting times and dates.

Despite these challenges, interviews with representatives of all relevant government ministries and authorities responsible for infrastructure projects were secured. Specifically, this included representatives of the Ministries of Energy, Infrastructure, Transport, and Labor, which are the ministries responsible for planning and financing infrastructure projects. Representatives from the Zambian Revenue Authority as well as the city councils in which the projects were located were interviewed. In addition, representatives of the ZESCO as well as the RDA, responsible for implementing energy and transportation projects, respectively, were interviewed. Lastly, representatives of the Association of Building and Construction and the National Council of Construction were interviewed.

ANNEX C. FOCUS AREA 3 METHODOLOGY – ICT INVESTMENTS IN AFRICA

SCOPING STUDY

Although PRC investment in transportation and other areas has attracted significant interest in recent years, little information is available about the ICT sector across the continent. This study reviewed competing academic perspectives, and then conducted a search of open sources to categorize different types of engagement and where possible, level of investment. The "scoping study" used keyword searches of news items, industry publications, quasi-academic publications, and policy papers. Keywords included:

> Chinese ICTs in (Africa / Kenya / Nigeria); Chinese broadband, Chinese 5G technologies in Africa; Chinese tech in Africa, Didi Chuxing in Africa, Huawei, Transsion, Chinese ICTs, Chinese ICT infrastructure, Chinese undersea cables, Chinese submarine cables, China and internet shutdowns, Chinese surveillance companies, Chinese tech surveillance, Chinese facial recognition technologies, Chinese blockchain, Chinese cryptocurrency, Chinese digital data, Boomplay, Huawei, Huawei and Safaricom, Huawei and smart cities, Huawei and safer/safe cities, Chinese fintech, WeChat entry into Africa, Tencent, TikTok, etc.

This process yielded 296 items (plus seven undated items) from 2011 through 2020. We identified the following patterns of ICT investments and engagement: 1) infrastructure; 2) 2) telecommunications 3) digital and social media; 4) fintech and e-commerce; and 5) surveillance. Digital diplomacy emerged as a key cross-cutting activity. Table C-1 illustrates patterns across countries.

Table C-1. Sample of PRC ICT Investments

Country	Year	Chinese Actor	African Actor	Amount	Nature of Deal/Activity
Angola	2020	Huawei	Government	$60M	Partnership (training)
Nigeria	2020	Exim Bank	Government	$325M	ICT infrastructure loan
Kenya	2019	Huawei, Chinese Government	Konza Techno City	$666M	Loan (smart city project)
Kenya	2019	StarTimes	Rembo TV	About $2M	Investment
Kenya	2019	Hillhouse Capital; Crystal Stream Capital	Lori Systems	$29M estimated	Investment
Kenya	2019	Transsion	Wapi Capital	$100k	Equity Investment
Transsion	2019	Transsion	PalmPay	$40M	Investment

Country	Year	Chinese Actor	African Actor	Amount	Nature of Deal/Activity
Kenya	2019	Huawei	Government	$172.7M	Concessional Loan (smart city project)
Botswana	2019	Huawei	Donation to Botswana University	$138k	Donation (ICT Training Center)
Botswana	2019	Huawei	Government	Approximately $43M	Contract (Smart City Project Francistown)
Nigeria	2019	Opera	Opay	$120M	Investment
Kenya	2018	StarTimes, Exim Bank	Government	$8.43M	Grant
South Africa	2018	Lun Partners Group	Pan-African Fintech Venture/MFS Africa	$4.5M	Investment
Zambia	2017	Chinese government, Huawei	Government	$282M	Infrastructure loan
Zimbabwe	2017	China Exim Bank, Huawei	TelOne, Government	$98M	Loan
Nigeria	2016	Huawei	University of Lagos	$6M	Donation
Zambia	2016	Star Times, Exim Bank	Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation	$232M	Joint venture investment
Nigeria	2016	Huawei	University of Lagos	$6M	Donation
Uganda	2016	Huawei	Government	$126M	ICT infrastructure (smart cities)
Kenya	2015	Huawei	Government	$107M	ICT infrastructure loan
Botswana	2015	Huawei	Botswana embassy in South Africa	$2.8M	Donation
Zambia	2015	ZTE	Government	$210M	Infrastructure (smart city)
Zimbabwe	2015	China Development Bank, ZTE	Econet Wireless Zimbabwe	$300M	Loan

Country	Year	Chinese Actor	African Actor	Amount	Nature of Deal/Activity
Kenya	2014	Chinese Government	Government	$23.57M	Infrastructure loan
Nigeria	2012	Exim Bank, China Development Bank	Government	$100M	Infrastructure loan
Kenya	2010	Chinese government	Kenyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs	$150k	Infrastructure loan
Lesotho	2007	ZTE	Econet Telecom Lesotho	$66M	Loan and contract
Kenya	2006	ZTE, Chinese Government	Government	$42Mm	Infrastructure loan
Zimbabwe	2006	StarTimes, China Development Bank	Transmedia, Government	$63M	Equipment loan
Nigeria	2006	Huawei	Government	$100Mm	ICT infrastructure contract
Nigeria	2005	China Great Wall Industry Corporation, Chinese Government	NigComSat, Government	$340Mm	Infrastructure loan
Zimbabwe	2004	China Putian	National Defence College	$35M	Equipment loan

Much of the analysis focuses on engagements rather than investment figures since some data could not be verified by multiple sources, and many transactions lacked transparency or adequate government reporting. Africa-based researchers then conducted 12 KIIs in Kenya and ten in Nigeria. Respondents included government officials, academics, cyber experts, journalists and media practitioners, corporate executives, civil society activists, and politicians.

COUNTRY CASE STUDY SELECTION

Nigeria and Kenya are both regional economic anchors and diplomatic hubs in their respective regions of eastern and western Africa, ranked first and sixth of the 55 African nations in GDP terms. Both have close official ties with the PRC across political, economic, and cultural spheres as well as a range of attitudes towards the PRC. As important coastal countries, they are regional entry points for the Chinese private sector, as the locations of regional headquarters of firms such as Huawei Technologies

and StarTimes Communications attest. Both countries are democracies but have experienced backsliding in areas relevant to ICT. In 2020 Freedom House ranked Nigeria and Kenya as "partly free," with Nigeria flagged as a country with a notable decline in political and civil liberties. Finally, both countries are beset by rampant corruption. The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranks Nigeria at 149 and Kenya at 124 out of 179 countries worldwide.

Though it receives less emphasis here, Tanzania serves as an important "secondary" case study for several reasons. Tanzania has historically close ties with the PRC, forged in socialist ideological solidarity[194] Under the presidency of the late John Magufuli (2015-2021), it lurched towards authoritarianism with repressive laws and state-sanctioned attacks on opposition politicians and journalists.[195] Despite this democratic backsliding, and its historical ties to the PRC, bilateral relations slowed down during President Magufuli's tenure for the first time since the 1960s. A trigger was the cancellation of the $10 billion contract for the construction of the Bagamoyo port on the Indian Ocean coast, initially considered a key project of the PRC's BRI. The pivot away from the PRC thus makes Tanzania a good case since the context makes it more difficult to implicate ICT engagements in the country's democratic backsliding.

DATA COLLECTION

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Focus Area three research also drew on IDIs conducted among interviewees in Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania. Interviews were conducted remotely due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The team conducted 12 IDIs in Kenya, 10 in Nigeria, and nine in Tanzania during February-March 2021, for a total of 31 interviews. We drew from a diverse set of stakeholders, including journalists, cyber experts and analysts, government officials, security experts, academics, civil society activists, and members of the private sector. Interviews were based on semi-structured interview protocols tailored for each category.

---

[194] See J Barnett (2020)

[195] See D. Paget, p. 61–76

ANNEX D. FOCUS AREA 4 METHODOLOGY – MEDIA

COUNTRY SELECTION

As mentioned in the narrative section of the report, NORC chose Kenya, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone from those countries of particular interest to USAID missions in Africa to provide a sample with a reasonable distribution in terms of size, geography, and evidence of media development assistance programs and other types of investment into journalism and media sectors.

The role of the PRC in the media has also been studied relatively recently in each of these countries. The sample choice also had to consider the feasibility of carrying out robust qualitative research with a relatively rapid turnaround time during the 2020/2021 COVID-19 pandemic. More details can be found in the body of the report.

DATA COLLECTION

This study combines qualitative interviews, FGDs, and content analysis to study the influence of PRC media training and exchanges on the orientation of African journalists. The study team selected a mixed-methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative data to capture both the measurable outcomes and impacts of the PRC-sponsored training and fellowship programs, and to describe the impact of the PRC-sponsored programs on beneficiaries. The data collection included both a desk component and a field component.

A fundamental challenge of this project relates to the problem in comparative studies of "many outcomes, many variables." Local motivations, values, and contexts all influence journalistic practice, making it difficult to separate the many factors that influence media practice and democratic values. The specific impact of PRC-sponsored training is best explored through a qualitative methodology that builds from the first-hand perspectives of those who were most closely involved. Qualitative research can delineate the borders of complex phenomena. In this way, it can build an understanding from the perspectives of the local population and challenge stereotypes or misperceptions.

Research questions for the study were framed with feedback from the entire NORC study team and USAID staff. Building from these questions, the study team for Focus Area 4 – African Media – developed a mixed methods methodology that maximized input from a variety of media stakeholders and conducted research from December 2020 – April 2021.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1: How have African journalists experienced PRC-sponsored training programs and what are their perceptions of these programs' content? How have PRC-supported programs influenced the African media landscape and environment (e.g., freedom of the press, disinformation, etc.) and media partnerships in Africa?

Research Question 2: What are the implications of African journalist participation in PRC-sponsored journalist programs on the possible direction of reporting?

Research Question 3: How have PRC-led training programs shaped participating journalists' reporting in terms of content and approach?

Research Question 4: What does research on prominent African media outlets (print and radio, including local languages), and discussions on popular social media outlets tell us about emerging African narratives about PRC?

Research Question 5: Do African audiences articulate a link between PRC and authoritarianism in their countries, and to what extent is PRC invoked in discussions that juxtapose or cohere economic development against – or in support of – democratic values?

In addition to the literature review, Focus Area 4, draws on other qualitative methods to include content analysis, IDIs, and FGDs.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Interviews were held with PRC-sponsored African media professionals and academics as well as in-country based media professionals – journalists, think tank and media experts, academics, journalism students, civil society, media house executives, donor organizations, and media development NGOs familiar with the media landscapes and the PRC's investment; and external country experts with a specific focus on Kenya, Sierra Leone, or Nigeria and/or specialist knowledge on the research topics. Interviews were also held with academics who focus on the issue of the PRC's influence on African media development, journalism, and the ICT space writ large.

The qualitative data gathered from these interviews provided rich descriptions of the perceived impact of the PRC programs and the tangible outcomes for beneficiaries. IDIs were selected from a convenience sample based on local researchers' networks, accessibility, and availability of the interviewees. Interviewees were chosen based on their involvement in PRC programs as well as their understanding and familiarity with the PRC and PRC-owned media in Africa.

Table D-4. Number of Interviews and FGDs

In-Depth Interviews			
Country	**Media Training Participants**	**Other Media Professionals**	**FGD**
Kenya	6	6	n/a
Nigeria	16	3	2 (Lagos)
Sierra Leone	11	11	3 (Bombali; Kenema/Bo/Moyamba District; Freetown)
Global (Media Professionals)			2

The assessment team held a total of 53 interviews with media training participants and media practitioners. The interviews lasted upward of one hour thirty minutes and were guided by semi-structured interview guides. Interviews were done in Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and with a variety of

experts based in Canada, Europe, the U.S., and elsewhere around Africa, and were conducted both in-person and via Zoom, WhatsApp and Google Meets, and telephone.

CONTENT ANALYSIS AND EXPERT PANELS

For the content analysis, the study team convened two expert panels to look at the impact of the PRC programs on participants' stories about the PRC. These panels were composed of academics based in various countries who focus on the PRC's influence on media and journalism in Africa. The expert panels provided an opportunity to provide a window into the type of research currently underway in the area and the perceptions of the academics and thinkers on the research questions.

Media research coders evaluated content in articles produced before and after attending PRC-sponsored journalism training. In order to consider changes in type of content over time, we used content analysis panels composed of local media researchers to assess journalistic content. The coders were asked to keep in mind the scope and goal of the USAID study. To assess changes in the type of content that could be attributed to PRC programs, the coders reviewed the content with ten considerations/criteria in mind, which are listed in table D-5 below.

Table D-5. Content Analysis: Scoring Criteria

1	The story demonizes or critiques human rights protesters and activists
2	The story includes supportive statements about autocratic behavior/authoritarian regimes
3	The story mentions or alludes to national development goals as more important than democratic principles/norms
4	The story mentions the U.S. as a failing democracy, mentions weakness in American society, or implies that the U.S. is not a good partner
5	The story includes positive reporting on Chinese attitudes towards Africa or PRC-Africa cooperation
6	The story includes positive reporting on policies/legislation that clearly benefit Chinese investors and local Chinese business interests
7	The story highlights positive engagements with the PRC (PRC-sponsored trainings, trips, exchanges for members of the media, business or government)
8	The story sets up a PRC vs. the West comparison (PRC positive; the West negative)
9	The story raises the high cost of PRC assistance and possible problems with PRC influence
10	The article quotes a Chinese source or mentions the PRC

In addition to the local study teams already in place in Nigeria and Sierra Leone, the NORC study team used two additional coders, who were selected based on their background in media, journalism, and social change, and who were aware of the overall media landscape and issues pertaining to the PRC's influence in Africa. The coders on the panels were given a one-day training session that offered them a chance to work with the coding tool that the consultant team developed, and to test out the tool by

reviewing and coding actual media content from Nigeria or Sierra Leone that dealt with articles that had been selected for the study.

Following testing of the tool and practice, coding feedback was obtained from the global evaluation team and USAID. The ten content analysis scoring areas are presented in Table D-5 above. Coders analyzed journalistic content from PRC-sponsored journalism fellows from before and after they went to the PRC with these categories in mind. If the story contained information related to the category it received a 1, if it did not it received a 0.

Content analysis panels analyzed 242 articles, 83 written before participation in media training and 159 written after media training. The content analysis was carried out in Nigeria and Sierra Leone by panels composed of two media research coders.

Table D-6. Number of Articles

Country	Articles Before PRC Training		Articles After PRC Training	
	Related to PRC	**Not Related to PRC**	**Related to PRC**	**Not Related to PRC**
Nigeria	12	29	24	36
Sierra Leone	5	37	26	73

In Nigeria, two sets of FGDs were held with two sets of journalists: those who have participated in PRC-sponsored media trainings and others who have colleagues that have participated in such trainings. The FGDs lasted for about one hour 30 minutes. In addition, two FGDs with academics were held with participants working on the issue across SSA.

ANNEX E. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS AND MITIGATION STRATEGY

As with any research, we note the following limitations to this study. None of the limitations, however, prevent production of reliable and evidence-based findings.

ATTRIBUTION AND CAUSALITY

- Since the post-independence period, 1960 onward, many African countries have endured coups, practiced one-party rule, and experienced long periods of undemocratic governance in the form of military dictatorships or civilian "strongmen" who limited political competition and freedom. This makes it difficult to attribute recent democratic backsliding specifically to the PRC. Similarly, some research argues that the PRC's presence in Africa is hardly new, and its nefarious intentions are overstated.[196] Relatedly, attributing causation is further complicated by temporal variation in the phenomena of interest for this current study. For example, while a backlash against the PRC on social media could theoretically be observable almost instantaneously, an actual change in values would unfold more slowly and would entail some element of socialization of the stabilization of state narratives about the PRC.

Also, the study considers different themes and different contexts, presenting the problem of "many variables, many outcomes," making it difficult to isolate the causal variables.

FOCUS AREA 1 – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICIES AND DATA COLLECTION

- Every social media company sets limits on the accessibility of its platforms. Some platforms, like Twitter, are relatively open while others, like Snapchat, are closed to automated collection. While Twitter allows the viewing of any public tweet, and even provides tools for the automated collection of tweets retrospectively, the company still places rate limits on the volume that can be collected. Since the team hoped to cover data over a two-year period, the rate limits reduced comprehensiveness over time across a number of accounts. Similarly, Facebook's privacy standards prevented even its own research platform, CrowdTangle, from matching all the page URLs that our in-country researchers identified. However, even given these limitations, we were able to collect hundreds of thousands of posts.

FOCUS AREA 2 – LOCAL INCLUSION AND GOVERNANCE AROUND INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

- COVID-19

- The topic of the PRC in Zambia is very sensitive, due to the deeply polarized political climate in Zambia. This may have inhibited some responses, but the team nevertheless approached qualitative data collection with the utmost care.

- The team did not have access to records and documentation that may have supplemented findings, such as data on funding for public goods such as hospitals and schools. However, the study team

---

[196] See D. Brautigam (2010)

received a multitude of strong and consistent statements by both focus group participants as well as key interviewees.

FOCUS AREA 3 – INFORMATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND SURVEILLANCE

- Project-level data on PRC investments was very difficult to acquire. The study team had difficulty acquiring data from government and civil society actors. The team therefore conducted a thorough online search to identify funding patterns. As noted in the report, we made every effort to verify the results.

FOCUS AREA 4 – MEDIA

- Data collection was influenced by an inability to conduct in-person FGDs and interviews, particularly in Nigeria. Recruitment was more difficult, particularly among government officials and elites. However, the team persisted with recruitment to ensure there were sufficient interviews to address the research questions.

For Focus Areas 2, 3, and 4, data collection was limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in a smaller sample of IDI and FGDs than expected. The team repeatedly sought contacts and the assistance of the USAID Mission as a last resort to ensure the study was informed by interviewees. The pandemic also necessitated the use of remote technologies rather than in-person fieldwork, which may have affected responses, but only to a limited degree.

ANNEX F. FGD AND IDI PROTOCOLS

Focus Area 4

Focus Group Discussion Guide – Academics

(December 2020)

I.   **Introduction and Consent (**~5 minutes)

Welcome, thank you so much for being here today! My name is [_____]. As I mentioned in my email / phone call, I am part of a team conducting a USAID study of China's relationship with African countries. I am working with a research institution called the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, which has been contracted by USAID to provide unbiased research for this study. NORC does not have a stake in the conclusions of this research one way or the other. The goal of the study is to learn more about China's engagement in various sectors, namely media, technology, and infrastructure. We are exploring this relationship in five countries including Zambia, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya, and we are talking to a variety of stakeholders and individuals knowledgeable about this or who have unique experiences or views to share like yourself.

This discussion should last about two hours. Your participation is completely voluntary and nothing you say to me will be directly attributed to you. We will not include your name in any of our reports. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. However, you do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with and you may leave at any time without penalty. We are taking notes of this discussion so that we can summarize what you are saying. This is for purposes of analysis only and will not be shared with anyone outside of the study. The notes will be password encrypted so no one will have access to them. After a period of one year the notes will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions, you may contact research coordinators, Ms. Audra Grant (grant-audra@norc.org; +001 301-634-9383) or Ms. Renee Hendley (hendley-renee@norc.org; +001-301-634-9489).

If you agree to participate in this focus group, we can proceed. Do you agree?

[AFTER OBTAINING ORAL CONSENT, CONTINUE] Before we get started, I would like to clarify how this discussion will proceed. As the facilitator, I will be guiding the discussion by asking questions that each of you can respond to. Remember, there are no right or wrong responses to these questions. You may also respond to each other's answers like you would in a normal conversation. It is also my responsibility to maintain our focus, move the discussion along appropriately and ensure that everyone is heard.

As participants, we ask you to share your personal experiences and opinions, both positive and negative, on the subject matter. We also ask that only one person speak at a time, and do not interrupt each other. We are interested in what everyone has to say, so please participate equally in the discussion and also be respectful of differing opinions and perspectives.

There will be designated breaks for additional refreshments and using the toilet. At this time, please silence your mobile devices if you have not already.

Before we begin, are there any questions?

Let's begin with some introductions:

1. OPENING QUESTION: Please share your name and how long you've been researching, teaching, or writing about media. Please share where in Africa your research focuses (country, regions). When we ask a general question about Africa in this discussion, please feel free to focus on this area that you know the most about.

2. TRANSITION QUESTION: What makes someone a good journalist in your country?

Probe: If journalism training or education is not mentioned: What about training?

II. **Perceptions on PRC-sponsored training programs (~30-40 min)**

3. KEY QUESTION: Are you aware of PRC-sponsored media training programs in Africa?

4. FOLLOW-UP: Thinking back to these programs, have you done any research on the impact of these types of programs?

5. FOLLOW-UP: What have you seen as the major impacts of these programs on journalism types or quality?

Probe: How have these impacts changed the profession of journalism?

6. FOLLOW-UP: What did you think about the content of these training programs?

Probe: To your knowledge, do they provide relevant information or skills?

7. KEY QUESTION: In your opinion, do you think the PRC has influenced the media environment in Africa?

Probe: How has it influenced the media environment? Or not?

Probe: Would you consider it to be a positive or negative influence?

Probe: To your knowledge, have any new media partnerships or collaborations emerged as a result of PRC-sponsored training programs?

8. FOLLOW-UP: Have you perceived new media partnerships or collaborations between African and Chinese media organizations?

Probe: What are these partnerships?

Probe: What will be the result of these partnerships and collaborations?

Before continuing on, let's take a five-minute break to use the toilet, grab a drink and rest.

BREAK (5 minutes)

III.   Influences on the Direction of Reporting, Content, & Approach (~25-30min)

9. KEY QUESTION: Are you aware of new practices, techniques or technology that have come from these PRC-sponsored training programs in Africa?

Probe: Have these new practices, techniques or technologies changed how journalism is conducted in Africa?

10. KEY QUESTION: Can you identify types of news stories or reporting that these trainings encouraged or inspired?

Probe: Are there any themes or topics for news stories that trainings encouraged or inspired journalists to focus on?

11. KEY QUESTION: Did the trainings change journalistic values or standards? How so?

Probe: Have these trainings changed the direction of reporting, be it in approach to the profession or to content?

Before continuing on, let's take another five-minute break to use the toilet, grab a drink and rest.

BREAK (5 minutes)

IV.   Links Between PRC Political Values, Economic Development, and Africa (~30-40min)

For this next section, I am going to pass around summaries of articles or research you have shared with us. Please take a moment to become familiar with the breadth of these topics.

12. KEY QUESTION: Looking at the research we and others have produced on the impact of the PRC on media, where are the strengths and gaps in the research, particularly in terms of studying narratives, structures, and values?

Probe: Do we have some common perspectives on the topic? If so, in what ways?

Probe: What are our significant differences?

Probe: In your opinion, do popular social media outlets echo the findings of current research, or do they differ from academia?

13. KEY QUESTION: Have we found that the PRC is seeking to or has influenced the strength of democracy or governance in Africa through the media? If so, in what ways?

14. <u>KEY QUESTION</u>: Is the PRC's influence on media in Africa different from Western countries? If so, in what ways?

Probe: What is the significance of the differences between PRC and Western influences? (Could also be phrased as: What is the impact of the trainings' host being in China rather than a Western nation?)

15. <u>KEY QUESTION</u>: What would be elements of a research agenda to further understand the PRC's impact on the media in Africa?

V.   Closing

16. Is there anything else that's important to know about PRC-sponsored trainings for African journalists? Or are there any additional comments for any of the topics we have covered today?

That concludes our discussion today. Thank you again for your participation. Take care and enjoy the rest of your day.

Focus Area 3

Semi-Structured In-depth Interview Guide

(Experts, Government Officials, Politicians, CSOs, CSO Activists, Journalists)

The National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, an academic research institute affiliated with the University of Chicago, has been asked to conduct a study of the PRC's influence in Africa. NORC implements research throughout the world. I am working with NORC for this study and interviewing people like you to better understand the PRC's investment in the ICT sectors of Africa and implications for governance. We are conducting the study in Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania. The information from the interview is for research purposes only and will contribute to a research report. Of course, taking part in this interview is completely voluntary; you are free to choose to participate or not to participate. There are no right or wrong answers.

We expect the interview to last about one hour or maybe a little longer, and it will be anonymous; your name and organization will not be identified in any report, nor will you or your organization be associated with any response that is shared in the report. Participation in this effort by people like you is essential to the success of the study, so your time and cooperation is very much appreciated. If you have any questions, please email Dr. Audra Grant, International Programs, NORC: Grant-Audra@norc.org.

Do you confirm your consent to participate in this interview?   ◯ Yes   ◯ No

Interview Date: _____ Interviewer(s): _____

Name(s): _____

Gender: ◯ Female   ◯ Male

Affiliation: _____

Location: _____

Introduction

1) To get us started, tell me something about yourself – your job, organization, and professional work?

2) How would you describe your experience, encounter and understanding of PRC ICTs?

   Probe: What comes to mind when PRC ICTs are mentioned?

   - *Probe: Are you familiar with the PRC's presence in the ICT sector?*

Policy, Regulatory and Legal Frameworks

3) To what extent are there sufficient and up-to-date policies, regulations, and legal parameters to guide the procurement, use and general presence of PRC technologies?

   Probe: Which are some of the relevant policies, regulations, and laws?

   Probe: To what extent are there established best practices in the procurement and use of PRC technologies at the government and corporate levels?

   Probe: To what extent are there sufficient legal safeguards in the laws and regulations relating to ICTs and are they being enforced?

   Probe: Specifically, are there sufficient policies to guide the acquisition and use of emerging technologies such as surveillance technologies? If so, which laws and regulations are these?

4) Which national government entities are responsible for ICT policies, regulations, and laws and how do they relate with PRC ICT entities?

   Probe: In what ways, if any, do these entities negatively or positively impact citizens' rights such as privacy and freedom of expression?

   Probe: What do we learn from the experience of government agencies such as monitoring and oversight reports in regulating the ICT sector with regards to PRC ICTs?

   Probe: To what extent do government agencies have the technical capacity to undertake their regulatory work and to enforce regulations? Where are weaknesses and what are the strengths in capacity?

5) What is the level of transparency, accountability, and openness in the acquisition and use of the technologies?

   Probe: To what extent are the procedures for the acquisition of the technologies accessible to the public?

   Probe: How robust are policies, regulations, and laws that protect citizens' rights such as privacy and freedom of expression?

   Probe: To what extent are there opportunities for public involvement in decisions around the acquisition and deployment of the technologies, especially public-facing surveillance technologies?

   Probe: What feedback mechanisms exist, if any, for getting feedback from the public or communities on the deployment and operationalization of the technologies?

   Probe: What are avenues for redress when citizens' rights are affected in any way by ICTs?

6) To what extent has the entry and presence of PRC ICT entities influenced changes in policies and regulatory mechanisms in the country?

7) How widespread are concerns of PRC ICT entities adhering to national laws and regulations?

   Probe: Have there been any breaches impacting citizens' privacy and freedom of expression involving ICT companies?

   Probe: If PRC ICT entities breach or fail to comply with laws and regulations, how has the government responded?

Human Rights and Democracy Implications

8) What has been the impact of the specific PRC presence on human rights and democracy in the country?

   Probe: To what extent does the PRC presence in the ICT sector affect human rights and democracy standards and norms? Is the effect positive or negative? Can you provide examples?

   Probe: To what extent does the PR presence adhere to the constitution and laws relevant for democracy and human rights? Can you provide examples?

   Probe: How widespread are concerns about the PRC's practices being transferred or emulated in Africa via PRC ICT entry onto the continent?

   Probe: Are the technologies being used in any way to target citizens impacting privacy rights? If so, in what way? Can you provide examples?

9) In what ways, if any, does the PRC presence support democracy and human rights?

   Probe: What ICT-driven cultural changes have occurred because of the PRC's ICT presence? What are the positive aspects that are noteworthy in your view?

10) Has the PRC ICT presence reached a level where the government or a section of the corporate sector are over-reliant or over-dependent on them?
    Probe: [If yes, or no] Why do you feel this way?

    Probe: To what extent are the PRC entities using their presence to influence the national or county governments?

    Probe: In what ways might government and private sector operations run smoothly without the involvement of PRC entities?

11) What specific segments of the population, if any, might be impacted by PRC ICTs?

    Probe: How are opposition figures and activists affected?

    Probe: To what extent have there been complaints or advocacy campaigns about the PRC ICT presence? What are the complaints?

Probe: Have PRC technologies affected the participation of publics in information acquisition and sharing?

12) Is the Government specifically acquiring PRC ICTs to help increase its surveillance capabilities?

Probe: To what extent does the government justify the deployment of PRC technologies on issues such as public security, countering terrorism, fighting crime, etc.

Probe: In what ways have citizens' rights been impacted due to PRC surveillance technologies? Would you say the impact is positive or negative? Do provide examples.

13) In what ways, if any, have PRC ICTs been used in competitive political campaigns? Can you provide examples?

Probe: What examples are there of cases in which political parties close to the PRC use PRC technologies in competing with the opposing side?

PRC ICT Presence

14) Describe the PRC ICT entities and the sectors of the economy in which they operate?

Probe: Which are Chinese government and Chinese private sector entities?

Probe: If they are Chinese government entities, is it a Chinese government ministry, provincial government, or municipality?

Probe: If they are Chinese companies/private sector, which specific ICT company?

Probe: Are they in the education, telecommunications, security, finance, commerce, etc. sectors?

Probe: Which are government entities involved with the PRC ICT entities?

15) What is the nature of the relationship between the PRC ICT entity and the government entity or local company?

Probe: Is the relationship business-to-business (investment), a donation, a grant, or a loan, etc.? Probe: How do PRC ICT entities you are familiar with enter the market and set up operations? Is it through acquisitions, partnership, or as independent companies?

16) In your estimation, which are the most prominent PRC ICT entities operating in the country and in which sectors are they operating?

Probe: Is this or are these recent entrants or those that have been in the market for some time?

Probe: What are the factors that make these entities the most prominent?

17) What are the motivations or the pull factors that lead to PRC ICTs entering the country?

Probe: To what extent is the PRC ICT presence a result of Government or private sector initiatives or projects? (e. g. national development plan, internet connectivity initiatives, seeking investments, etc.)

Probe: To what extent is the PRC ICT presence a result of continental, regional or global initiatives? (e.g., UN SDGs, Agenda 2063, UN Smart Cities, Counterterrorism, etc.)

Probe: To what extent is the PRC presence a result of the Chinese Government's or companies initiatives (Belt and Road Initiative, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC))

18) What are some of the strategies that have been employed by PRC ICT entities to enter the ICT sector?

Probe: To what extent are local partners or contacts used as entry strategies?

Probe: Are there any instances in which PRC ICT entities have entered the country illegally?

Probe: Is Corporate Social Responsibility or Corporate Social Investment used as a strategy?

Probe: If there is PRC CSR/CSI in the ICT sector, in which sectors is this?

19) Compared to the past, what are the recent trends and dynamics in PRC ICT entry and presence?

Probe: What are some of the more recent technologies that are being deployed by PRC ICT entities?

Probe: To what extent are technologies such as street cameras, biometrics, 5G technologies, facial recognition technologies, artificial intelligence, machine learning, etc. being deployed?

Probe: With whom are the PRC ICT entities deploying the more recent technologies (private companies, national government, county government, etc.)?

20) How has the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity for PRC ICT entry?

Probe: In what ways, if any, are PRC technologies being used for containment measures such as contact tracing?

Probe: In what ways, if any, are PRC technologies being deployed for tele and videoconferencing or virtual meetings?

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today.

Focus Area 4

Focus Group Discussion Guide – Media Professionals and Journalists

(December 2020)

[NOTE TO FACILITATOR]: Prior to the focus group, a collection of news stories from a range of local public, private, state, alternative, and community media sources should be compiled into a content reel or clippings package around three themes: 1) COVID-19, 2) PRC infrastructure development projects and 3) PRC diplomacy. Although the sources should vary, the news story should be consistent for each of the three themes and should be related to the PRC.

1. **Introduction (**~5 minutes)

Hello, thank you so much for being here today! My name is [_____]. As I mentioned in my email / phone call, I am part of a team conducting a USAID study of the PRC's relationship with African countries. I am working with a research institution called the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, which has been contracted by USAID to provide unbiased research for this study. NORC does not have a stake in the conclusions of this research one way or the other. The goal of the study is to learn more about the PRC's engagement in various sectors, namely media, technology, and infrastructure. We are exploring this relationship in five countries including Zambia, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya, and we are talking to a variety of stakeholders and individuals knowledgeable about this or who have unique experiences or views to share like yourself.

This discussion should last about two hours. Your participation is completely voluntary and nothing you say to me will be directly attributed to you. We will not include your name in any of our reports. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. However, you do not have to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with and you may leave at any time without penalty. We are taking notes of this discussion so that we can summarize what you are saying. This is for purposes of analysis only and will not be shared with anyone outside of the study. The notes will be password encrypted so no one will have access to them. After a period of one year the notes will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions, you may contact research coordinators, Ms. Audra Grant (grant-audra@norc.org; +001 301-634-9383) or Ms. Renee Hendley (hendley-renee@norc.org; +001-301-634-9489).

If you agree to participate in this focus group, we can proceed. Do you agree?

[AFTER OBTAINING ORAL CONSENT, CONTINUE] Before we get started, I would like to clarify how this discussion will proceed. As the facilitator, I will be guiding the discussion by asking questions that each of you can respond to. Remember, there are no right or wrong responses to these questions. You may also respond to each other's answers like you would in a normal conversation. It is also my responsibility to maintain our focus, move the discussion along appropriately and ensure that everyone is heard.

As participants, we ask you to share your personal experiences and opinions, both positive and negative, on the subject matter. We also ask that only one person speak at a time, and do not interrupt each other. We are interested in what everyone has to say, so please participate equally in the discussion and also be respectful of differing opinions and perspectives.

There will be designated breaks for additional refreshments and using the toilet. At this time, please silence your mobile devices if you have not already.

Before we begin, are there any questions?

Let's begin with some introductions:

1. OPENING QUESTION: Please share your name and how long you've been involved in journalism.

2. TRANSITION QUESTION: What makes someone a good journalist?

Probe: If journalism training or education is not mentioned: What about training?

II. **Perceptions on PRC-sponsored training programs (~30-40 min)**

3. KEY QUESTION: What training programs have you participated in that were hosted in or sponsored by the PRC?

Probe: What were these programs like?

4. FOLLOW-UP: Thinking back to these programs, what were your first impressions?

5. FOLLOW-UP: Did your impression of the training program change over time, either during the program or when you returned home?

Probe: Why or why didn't your impression change?

6. KEY QUESTION: What did you think about the content of these training programs?

Probe: Was the content relevant to your work?

Probe: Were any topics new or unfamiliar to you?

7. FOLLOW-UP: For those who had participated in training programs hosted or sponsored by other countries, did the PRC programs feature different content or cover different types of topics?

8. KEY QUESTION: In your opinion, do you think these types of PRC-sponsored training programs have influenced the African media environment?

Probe: How have they influenced the African media environment? Or how have they not?

Probe: Would you consider it to be a positive or negative influence?

9. <u>FOLLOW-UP:</u> Have these training programs resulted in any new partnerships or collaborations between African and PRC media organizations?

Probe: What are these partnerships?

Probe: What will be the result of these partnerships and collaborations?

Before continuing on, let's take a five-minute break to use the toilet, grab a drink and rest.

BREAK (5 minutes)

III. Influences on the Direction of Reporting, Content & Approach (~25-30min)

10. <u>KEY QUESTION</u>: How have you personally incorporated the experience from the training into your professional life back in Nigeria\Sierra Leone?

Probe: Have you or your organization adopted any new practices, techniques or technologies?

Probe: What types of new perspectives about journalism did you gain?

11. <u>KEY QUESTION</u>: What types of news stories or reporting did the trainings encourage or inspire you or fellow journalists to pursue?

12. <u>KEY QUESTION</u>: How did the trainings encourage journalists to approach reporting as a profession?

Probe: Did trainings discuss journalism values or ethics? If so, what were they?

13. <u>FOLLOW-UP:</u> In what ways has attending the training programs affected your future as a journalist or your colleagues' futures as journalists?

Probe: Do you think the direction of your or your organization's reporting has or will change?

Before continuing on, let's take another five-minute break to use the toilet, grab a drink and rest.

BREAK (5 minutes)

IV. Links Between PRC Political Values, Economic Development and Africa (~30-40min)

For this next section, I am going to pass around copies of different articles from a variety of local sources. Please take a moment to become familiar with a select range of media and stories.

14. <u>KEY QUESTION:</u> How is China portrayed in these selected texts? Would you consider the portrayal of China to be optimistic, pessimistic, neutral, positive, negative, or something else?

Probe: Do different sources portray China differently? If so, in what ways?

15. <u>FOLLOW-UP:</u> Why is China portrayed the way that it is in certain articles?

16. <u>FOLLOW-UP:</u> What impact could China's portrayal in these texts have on their audiences?

17. <u>KEY QUESTION:</u> How is China portrayed with regard to the governance of your country?

Probe: Are any political values articulated?

Probe: Do the articles favor certain types of governance?

18. <u>KEY QUESTION:</u> How is China portrayed in relation to economic development?

Probe: Are any economic values or systems articulated?

Probe: Do the articles favor certain types of economic values or systems?

V. Closing

19. Is there anything else that's important to know about PRC-sponsored trainings for African journalists? Or are there any additional comments for any of the topics we have covered today?

That concludes our discussion today. Thank you again for your participation. Take care and enjoy the rest of your day.

Focus Area 4

Semi-Structured In-depth Interview Guide: Media Professionals & Journalists

(December 2020)

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [_____]. As I mentioned in my email / phone call, I am part of a team conducting a USAID study of the PRC's relationship with African countries. I am working with a research institution called the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, which has been contracted by USAID to provide unbiased research for this study. NORC does not have a stake in the conclusions of this research one way or the other.

The goal of the study is to learn more about the PRC's engagement in various sectors, namely media, technology, and infrastructure. We are exploring this relationship in five countries including Zambia, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya, and we are talking to a variety of stakeholders and individuals knowledgeable about this or who have unique experiences or views to share like yourself.

My discussion with you should last about 1 hour. Your participation is completely voluntary and nothing you say to me will be directly attributed to you. We will not include your name in any of our reports, unless you would like to be listed in the acknowledgements section. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We are taking notes of this discussion so that we can summarize what you are saying. This is for purposes of analysis only and will not be shared with anyone outside of the study. The notes will be password encrypted so no one will have access to them. After a period of 1 year the notes will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions, you may contact research coordinators, Ms. Audra Grant (grant-audra@norc.org; +001 301-634-9383) or Ms. Renee Hendley (hendley-renee@norc.org; +001-301-634-9489).

If you agree to participate in this interview, I'll proceed. Do you agree?　　　◯ Yes　　　◯ No

Interview Date:_____ Interviewer(s): _____

Name(s):_____

Sex: ◯ Female　　◯ Male

Affiliation:_____

Location: _____

LINES OF INQUIRY:

Topic: Introduction

1) To get us started, can you tell me something about yourself – your job, organization and professional work?

2) How would you describe your work as a journalist or media practitioner prior to attending any of the PRC-sponsored media training programs?

Probe: What are some examples of stories or other work you produced prior to the trainings?

3) How did you become involved with PRC-sponsored media training programs? Why were you interested in receiving this training?

Probe: What were you hoping to gain by participating in this training?

4) What were your expectations going into the program?

Probe: Were you familiar with PRC media outlets or media practices prior to your involvement in this program?

Topic: Training Programming

5) Describe the media training program that you attended. What did you do for the program?

Probe: What was the length of the program? Was it short-term, medium-term or long-term?

Probe: What types of activities did you do?

Probe: Who led the trainings?

Probe: What were the subjects of training modules or lessons?

6) What did you take away or learn from the media training?

Probe: What types of skills or new knowledge did you acquire?

Probe: What types of new technologies or media practices did you learn about?

7) If you were to give the training program a "grade" would you rate the program you took part in as poor, average/okay, good, or excellent?

    a. Why did you give it that score?

Probe: Did the content and activities suit your needs and interests?

Probe: Where did the training excel?

Probe: Where did the training fall short?

8) Have you taken part in other media training programs sponsored by different countries?

    a.   How do these programs compare and contrast to each other?

    b.   Which programs were more beneficial to you? What made them more helpful?

    c.   Did you observe any differences between programs because of their host nations, such differences between programs from Western countries versus Eastern countries?

Topic: Training Impacts

9) After returning to ____(home country)____, how did you apply the media training to your work?

Probe: Do you have any examples of new practices implemented into your work?

10) To what extent has the media training impacted your work? What difference did the training make to your work, if any?

Probe: Did the training impact your approach to reporting or the types of stories you cover?

Probe: Have you written any stories inspired by your media training or experiences in China?

11) Have you shared any aspects of the training or skills acquired with your co-workers or colleagues in your home country?

12) Did the trainings expand your professional network?

    a.   Are you still connected with Chinese journalists or media outlets?

    b.   What is the future for these new connections? Do you foresee any future collaborations or partnerships?

Topic: Awareness and Perception of the PRC

13) As an African journalist, what did you think of the training being hosted by the PRC?

Probe: Should their trainings continue for African journalists?

14) Did you observe any differences in journalistic roles or media practices from your country and the PRC? If so, what were they?

15) Did participating in the media training impact or change the way you view being a journalist? If so, how?

Probe: Did the training impact your view towards the role of journalism?

16) Did participating in media training in China impact or change the way you view China as a nation? If so, how?

Topic: Future Implications

17) Having completed the training, will you do anything differently as a journalist now or in the future?

18) At the beginning of the interview, I asked you to describe your journalism or media work prior to attending one of the PRC-sponsored training programs. Now, how would you describe your work after having completed the training program?

19) If the PRC-sponsored programs continue, do you see these trainings having long-term impacts on journalism in your country? If so, what could these be?

Probe: Could you see more media partnerships?

Probe: Would there be changes to how the PRC is covered in local stories, such as more or fewer stories about the PRC or more or fewer critical stories about the PRC?

Wrap Up

Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not talked about?

Thank you very much for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have anything else to include or would like to clarify any of your remarks.

Focus Area 4

Semi-Structured Interview Guide – Media Professionals, Research Institutions, and Civil Society Affiliates and Regulators

(December 2020)

Thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us today. My name is [_____]. As I mentioned in my email / phone call, I am part of a team conducting a USAID study of the PRC's relationship with African countries. I am working with a research institution called the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, which has been contracted by USAID to provide unbiased research for this study. NORC does not have a stake in the conclusions of this research one way or the other.

The goal of the study is to learn more about the PRC's engagement in various sectors, namely media, technology, and infrastructure. We are exploring this relationship in five countries including Zambia, Tanzania, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Kenya, and we are talking to a variety of stakeholders and individuals knowledgeable about this or who have unique experiences or views to share like yourself.

My discussion with you should last about 1 hour. Your participation is completely voluntary and nothing you say to me will be directly attributed to you. We will not include your name in any of our reports, unless you would like to be listed in the acknowledgements section. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We are taking notes of this discussion so that we can summarize what you are saying. This is for purposes of analysis only and will not be shared with anyone outside of the study. The notes will be password encrypted so no one will have access to them. After a period of 1 year the notes will be destroyed.

Should you have any questions, you may contact research coordinators, Ms. Audra Grant (grant-audra@norc.org; +001 301-634-9383) or Ms. Renee Hendley (hendley-renee@norc.org; +001-301-634-9489).

If you agree to participate in this interview, I'll proceed. Do you agree?　　　◯ Yes　　　◯ No

Interview Date:_____ Interviewer(s): _____

Name(s):_____

Sex:　◯ Female　　　◯ Male

Affiliation:_____

Location: _____

LINES OF INQUIRY:

Topic: Introduction

1) To get us started, can you tell me something about yourself – your job, organization and professional work?

2) Are you aware of PRC-sponsored media training programs in Africa/your country?

Probe: Have you done any research on the impact of these types of programs?

Probe: What have been some significant research findings of your research?

Probe: Have you written up this research in an article, report or monograph you would be willing to share with us?

Topic: Training Programming

3) To your knowledge, how have journalists in Africa/your country experienced PRC-sponsored training programs, and what are their perceptions of these programs' content?

4) How have PRC-supported programs influenced the media landscape in Africa your country? Are you aware of any partnerships between media organizations from your country and the PRC that have emerged from these programs?

5) How have PRC-sponsored training programs differed from those sponsored by other countries?

Probe: Have you observed any differences between programs because of their host nations, such differences between programs from Western countries versus Eastern countries?

Topic: Training Impacts

6) To your knowledge, do journalists in Africa/your country who have received PRC-sponsored training approach reporting differently than those who have not, in terms of content and approach?

Probe: What are some examples of different approaches?

Probe: Are there some news issues in which PRC-sponsored journalists under-report or others in which they tend to focus more?

7) Could you point us to two examples of journalism that provide examples? You can send them or links to them to my email address: (for Sierra Leone – send to Dr. Francis Sowa. For Nigeria, send to Dr. Emeka Umejei – researcher to give the interviewees the email address).

Topic: Awareness and Perception of the PRC

8) What kind of narratives about the PRC are emerging in the news in Africa/your country? Can you point us to recent articles or research on these narratives?

9) In your opinion, to what extent do news consumers in Africa/your country link the PRC with authoritarianism in their countries?

10) In your opinion, to what extent do news consumers in Africa/your country link the PRC with economic development in their countries?

11) In your opinion, to what extent do news consumers in Africa/your country link the PRC with the struggle for democracy and/or accountability in their countries?

Topic: Future Implications

12) If the PRC-sponsored programs continue, do you see these trainings having long-term impacts on journalism in your country? If so, what would these be?

Probe: Could you see more media partnerships?

Probe: Would there be changes to how the PRC is covered in local stories, such as more or fewer stories about the PRC or more or fewer critical stories about the PRC?

Wrap Up

Is there anything else you would like to add that we have not talked about?

Thank you very much for your time. Please feel free to contact me if you have anything else to include or would like to clarify any of your remarks.

U.S. Agency for International Development

1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20523