

# Social Justice Watch 0813

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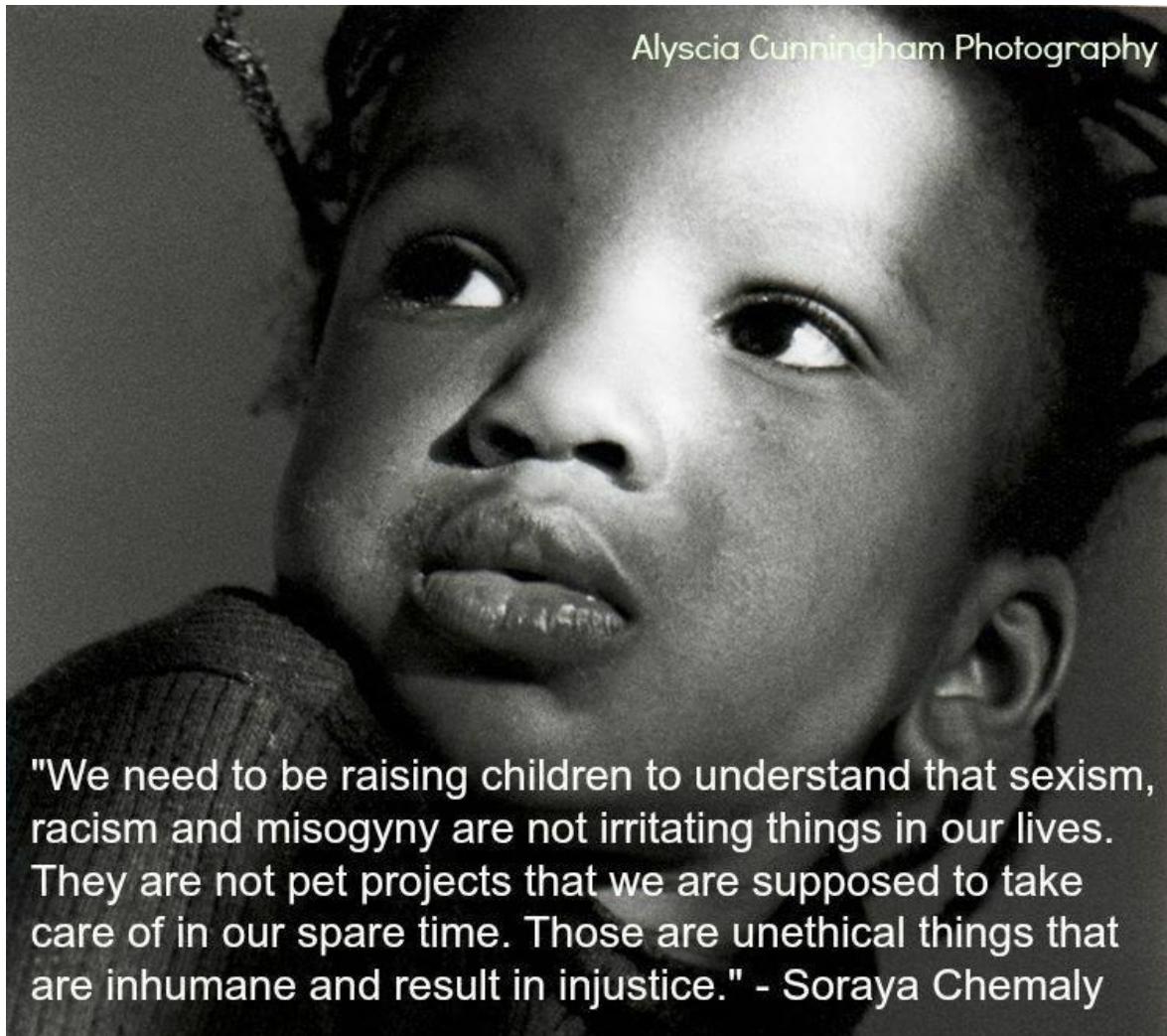
[Why Belarus Is Not Ukraine](#)

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**One Hot Mess AK**  
@libbybakalar

I realize this is a controversial take but maybe being one blown tire, one broken bone, or one paycheck away from homelessness & financial ruin at all times isn't actually "freedom" the way we were raised to believe it is.



**Shannon Hale**   
@haleshannon

When a guy says, "You're not like other girls," he's admitting that he has a generally low regard for your entire gender but is willing to make an exception for you. This is not a compliment. Girl, run.

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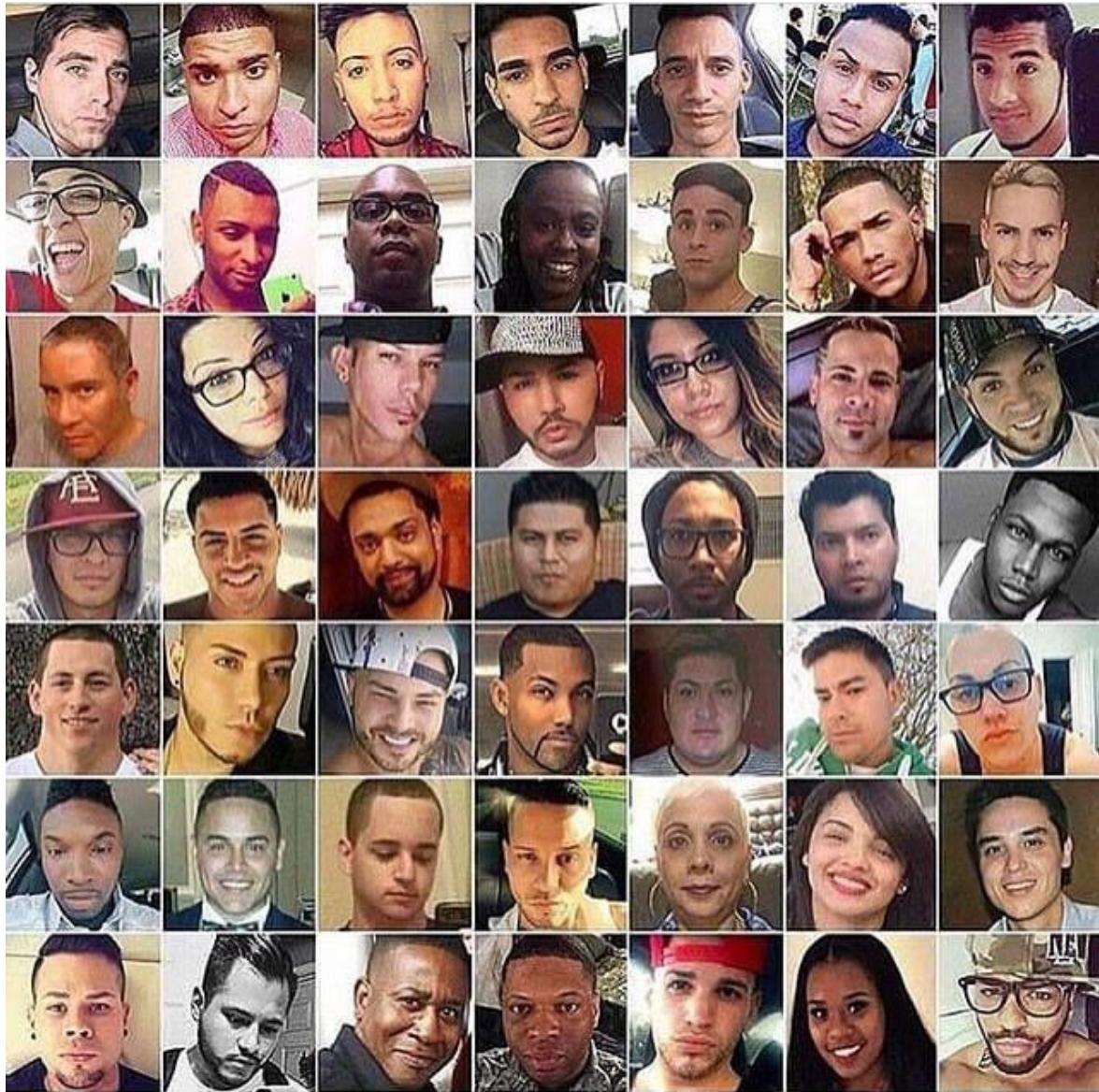
When a guy says, "You're not like other girls," he's admitting that he has a generally low regard for your entire gender but is willing to make an exception for you. This is not a compliment. Girl, run. [source](#)

**In loving memory of the  
victims of the Pulse nightclub  
shooting on June 12, 2016.**



Stanley Almodovar III  
Amanda Alvear  
Oscar A Aracena-Montero  
Rodolfo Ayala-Ayala  
Antonio Davon Brown  
Darryl Roman Burt II  
Angel L. Candelario-Padro  
Juan Chavez-Martinez  
Luis Daniel Conde  
Cory James Connell  
Tevin Eugene Crosby  
Deonka Deidra Drayton  
Simon Adrian Carrillo Fernandez  
Leroy Valentin Fernandez  
Mercedez Marisol Flores  
Peter O. Gonzalez-Cruz  
Juan Ramon Guerrero  
Paul Terrell Henry  
Frank Hernandez  
Miguel Angel Honorato  
Javier Jorge-Reyes  
Jason Benjamin Josaphat  
Eddie Jamoldroy Justice  
Anthony Luis Laureanodisla  
Christopher Andrew Leinonen  
Alejandro Barrios Martinez  
Brenda Lee Marquez McCool  
Gilberto Ramon Silva Menendez  
Kimberly Morris  
Akyra Monet Murray  
Luis Omar Ocasio-Capo  
Geraldo A. Ortiz-Jimenez  
Eric Ivan Ortiz-Rivera  
Joel Rayon Paniagua  
Jean Carlos Mendez Perez  
Enrique L. Rios, Jr.  
Jean C. Nieves Rodriguez  
Xavier Emmanuel Serrano Rosado  
Christopher Joseph Sanfeliz  
Yilmary Rodriguez Solivan  
Edward Sotomayor Jr.  
Shane Evan Tomlinson  
Martin Benitez Torres  
Jonathan Antonio Camuy Vega  
Juan P. Rivera Velazquez  
Luis S. Vielma  
Franky Jimmy Dejesus Velazquez  
Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon  
Jerald Arthur Wright





4 years ago, 49 people were shot & killed inside the [#PulseNightclub](#)

Never stop fighting for your LGBT+ friends, families, siblings, & strangers for their every right to love who they want, freely be who they are, have the safety they need, & the opportunities & life they deserve [source](#)

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## 本报记者暗访某餐馆：4人点了8份菜 没有一盘全吃光

重庆日报 今天

8月11日晚，重庆日报记者兵分四路，走访我市部分餐馆，发现餐饮浪费现象仍很常见。

Following President Xi's urge of not wasting food, journalists of Chongqing Daily went undercover in a restaurant, reporting that "four diners ordered eight dishes and finished none of it:" [bit.ly/3gPiX4T](https://bit.ly/3gPiX4T)

This is the investigative journalism we have today. [source](#)

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# 消息精选

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<https://shityoushouldcareabout.com/home/2020/7/22/who-was-to-blame>

shit you should care about

Who was to blame? — shit you should care about

For a few years now, I've been blaming myself for how it happened. Running through every scenario trying to figure out how I got to that certain point of time. Was it my low self-esteem? Or how I went with the flow of things to be accepted?

I have finally...

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<https://shityoushouldcareabout.com/home/2020/7/10/my-journey-to-self-acceptance>

shit you should care about

My journey to self acceptance — shit you should care about

Trigger Warning : This piece discusses sexual assault. If you do not have the mental capacity to read this right now, please don't, or if you think this may trigger you, be mindful while you're reading and stop when necessary. If you or someone you...

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Birtherism was supposed to be some dumb shit that only the dumb fringe believed in, and next thing you know, 50% of the Republicans believed Obama was not born in the US. [link source telegra.ph/QAnon-groups-have-millions-of-members-on-Facebook-documents-show-08-10](https://link source telegra.ph/QAnon-groups-have-millions-of-members-on-Facebook-documents-show-08-10)

Twitter

Brandy Zadrozny

EXCLUSIVE: Documents from an internal Facebook investigation into Qanon show, for the first time, the massive scale of the conspiracy theory's community on the platform. We're talking thousands of groups, millions of members. From

me and @ArijitDSen http...

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[telegra.ph/The-Post-Truth-Publication-Where-Chinese-Students-in-America-Get-Their-News-08-10-2](https://telegra.ph/The-Post-Truth-Publication-Where-Chinese-Students-in-America-Get-Their-News-08-10-2)

Telegraph

The “Post-Truth” Publication Where Chinese Students in America Get Their News

On a Monday morning in February, members of the staff of College Daily, an online Chinese-language publication for Chinese students living in North America, gathered in their office, in Times Square, for an editorial meeting. Guan Tong, the editorial director...

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How did New Zealand go 100 days without any new cases of COVID-19?

- 1) They put a woman in charge of their country.
  - 2) She followed the science. [source](#)
- 

No paywalls, superb quality, and put together by some of the most innovative thinkers in China studies. Can't stress enough what a brilliant resource this is:  
<https://madeinchinajournal.com/made-in-china-syllabi/> [link source](#)

Made in China Journal

Made in China Syllabi

Made in China Syllabi In the five years that have passed since we first established the Made in China Journal, we have published over three hundred essays on different facets of Chinese politics and society. This represents the collective expertise of hundreds...

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“Nobody could have ever predicted a pandemic of this proportion.” [source](#)

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[www.the-american-interest.com/2020/08/06/getting-from-november-to-january/](http://www.the-american-interest.com/2020/08/06/getting-from-november-to-january/)

The American Interest

Getting from November to January - The American Interest

Wargaming shows that, short of a landslide victory for Joe Biden in the upcoming elections, we may be headed for a severe constitutional crisis. Here are six strategies for averting the worst outcomes.

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VUbsFtLkGN8>

YouTube

Road signs suck. What if we got rid of them all?

Shared space designs, explained with 99% Invisible. Check them out here:

<https://99percentinvisible.org/> Subscribe to our channel! <http://goo.gl/0bsAjO>

Some ...

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[telegra.ph/Former-Jehovahs-Witness-elders-call-for-mandatory-reporting-of-child-sexual-abuse--World-news--The-Guardian-08-12](http://telegra.ph/Former-Jehovahs-Witness-elders-call-for-mandatory-reporting-of-child-sexual-abuse--World-news--The-Guardian-08-12) | source

Telegraph

Former Jehovah's Witness elders call for mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse

Two former Jehovah's Witness elders have called for mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, saying the organisation believes it is "answerable only to God". Duncan Corbett, who was an elder for 18 years, told the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse...

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[telegra.ph/Why-Belarus-Is-Not-Ukraine-08-12](http://telegra.ph/Why-Belarus-Is-Not-Ukraine-08-12) | source

Telegraph

Why Belarus Is Not Ukraine

Yes, there are surprisingly big protests—like those that rocked Kyiv six years ago—being met with brutal crackdowns. But Belarus is a whole different story. | August 12, 2020, 3:16 PM Scenes in Belarus of protesters erecting crude barricades while fending...

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The reality is, for all our misgivings about WeChat, there is no reasonable alternative that can sustain the same level of grass-roots communication flows between people in China and people outside of it. Thus, the net effect of a “ban” would be to reduce such communications, which benefits only those who prefer ignorance to knowledge. [telegra.ph/A-WeChat-ban-will-hurt-ordinary-citizens-There-are-better-ways-to-hold-China-accountable-08-12](https://telegra.ph/A-WeChat-ban-will-hurt-ordinary-citizens-There-are-better-ways-to-hold-China-accountable-08-12)

Telegraph

A WeChat ban will hurt ordinary citizens. There are better ways to hold China accountable.

Opinion by Times Wang and Jianli YangAugust 12, 2020 at 1:04 PM EDT  
Times Wang is the founder of North River Law PLLC, a law firm focused on litigation related to human rights. Dr. Jianli Yang, a former political prisoner of China, is founder and president...

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[telegra.ph/What-happens-to-protests-now-that-federal-agents-have-left-Portland-08-13](https://telegra.ph/What-happens-to-protests-now-that-federal-agents-have-left-Portland-08-13) | source

Telegraph

What happens to protests now that federal agents have left Portland?  
For three weeks this summer, a coalition of activists and establishment local politicians united against the presence of federal agents in Portland. Federal officers have left, and the tensions between the state and local officials and activists are reemerging...

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[telegra.ph/Don-Jr-Ted-Cruz-shared-Russian-misinformation-on-Black-Lives-Matter-08-13](https://telegra.ph/Don-Jr-Ted-Cruz-shared-Russian-misinformation-on-Black-Lives-Matter-08-13) | source

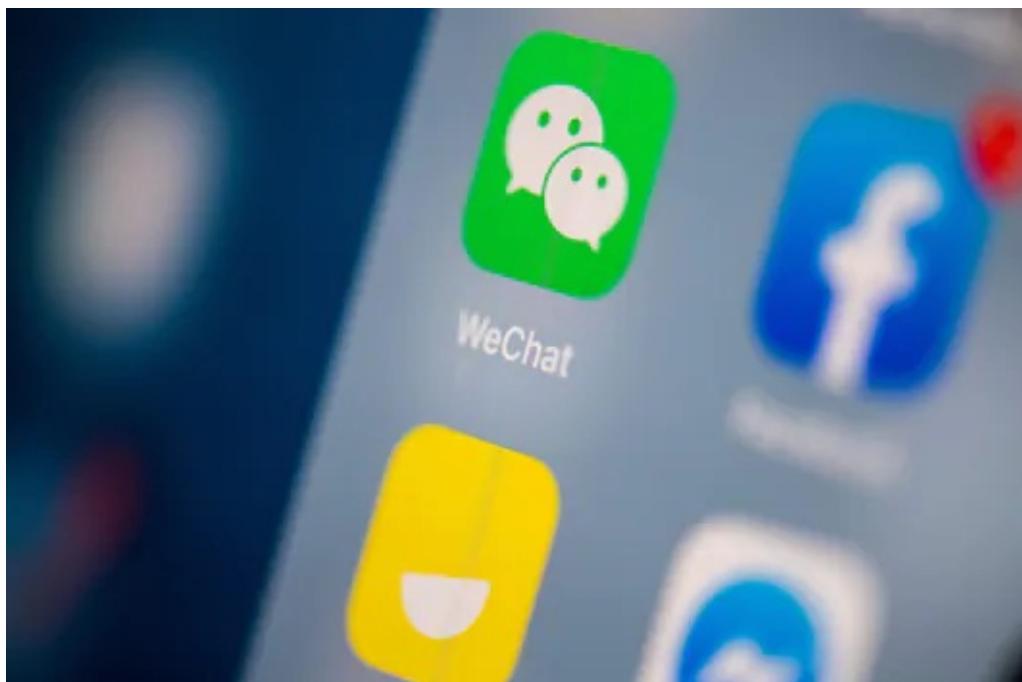
Telegraph

Don Jr., Ted Cruz shared Russian misinformation on Black Lives Matter  
Donald Trump Jr., Sen. Ted Cruz, and other high-profile Republicans shared a viral news story in early August about Black Lives Matter protesters burning "a stack of Bibles" in front of a courthouse in Portland. According to The New York Times, the story...

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# A WeChat ban will hurt ordinary citizens. There are better ways to hold China accountable.

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The Chinese app WeChat on the screen of a tablet. (Martin Bureau/AFP/Getty Images)

Opinion by Times Wang and Jianli Yang August 12, 2020 at 1:04 PM EDT

*Times Wang is the founder of North River Law PLLC, a law firm focused on litigation related to human rights. Dr. Jianli Yang, a former political prisoner of China, is founder and president of Citizen Power Initiatives for China.*

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When news broke about President Trump's executive order targeting WeChat, the Chinese social media and e-commerce app, we were deeply ambivalent. We've been working on a series of lawsuits on behalf of U.S. users against the

company over its censorship and surveillance practices for months now, so we certainly understood the impulse. But we fear the executive order risks going too far, because it will reduce the exchange of grass-roots information between people inside China and people outside of it, and because it threatens to bring the United States down to China's level when it comes to free expression.

Neither of us can be described as sympathizers of the Chinese Communist Party. One of us, Yang Jianli, was a survivor of the Tiananmen Square massacre. The other, Times Wang, is the son of one of China's most prominent political prisoners, Wang Bingzhang.

Nor can we be said to be naive about WeChat. Indeed, we probably know better than the government the nature and reality of how WeChat's practices undermine free speech in the United States. The cases we've uncovered, all involving ethnically Chinese people, both citizens and non-citizens, share one thing in common: The users made postings perceived as critical of the Chinese government. The consequences have included the blocking and deletion of accounts, resulting in the erasure of cherished photos and memories, as well as the distressing inability to communicate with family members in China in the middle of a pandemic.

They've also included business opportunities lost. WeChat encourages its users to do business over its platform, and indeed, countless conversations about potential transactions are held on WeChat daily. But we've heard from people who were in the middle of discussing deals potentially worth thousands or even millions of dollars when they decided to have the temerity to say something vaguely critical of the Chinese government. Suddenly, their accounts were blocked, and they lost business as a result.

In at least one case, they also include harrowing consequences for family members back in China. One user who has been in the United States since 2017, and who hasn't returned to China since, posted critical comments about the Chinese government from the United States. Then, in late 2019, his family in China messaged him to ask whether he'd been posting such comments on WeChat, because security agents had visited their home and taken pictures.

And yet, we have deep concerns that the administration's announcement might lead to policies that go too far. Any measures that resemble China's Great Firewall would be anathema to the First Amendment, and thus unconstitutional.

But even lesser policies might undermine the government's stated interest in "engaging and empowering" ordinary Chinese people. The reality is, for all our misgivings about WeChat, there is no reasonable alternative that can sustain the same level of grass-roots communication flows between people in China and people outside of it. Thus, the net effect of a "ban" would be to reduce such communications, which benefits only those who prefer ignorance to knowledge.

Given all this, we hope that whatever the administration does next, it considers the following.

First, the administration has an array of legal options that we, as private parties, don't have, including, for example, a Federal Trade Commission investigation and lawsuit. If, with our relatively puny resources, we can put together enough facts to bring a lawsuit in less than a year, surely the federal government could do so even more quickly.

Second, we agree that using WeChat on official devices poses a potential security risk, and neither of us has WeChat on our own devices. Thus, policies tailored to address that security risk in official settings seem appropriate.

Third, the ultimate goal should be to undermine censorship and enhance transparency and freedom of expression — not to simply mirror the Chinese government's behavior, unbound by any principle other than an eye for an eye. Indeed, the ultimate goal (which should be woven into all aspects of the government's China policy, and not just as it relates to WeChat) should be to tear down the Great Firewall someday and hopefully someday soon.

The world is watching these events unfold with bated breath, including in China, where lamentations about the possibility of the United States copying China's policies are not uncommon. If the U.S. government truly cares about free speech, about its ethnically Chinese citizens and, as it claims, about people living in China, it would do well to keep such concerns in mind.

Meanwhile, our private efforts to hold WeChat accountable are proceeding apace, and if the government is interested in learning about our efforts, our law firm and nonprofit are both in D.C., and we are just down the street.

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# Don Jr., Ted Cruz shared Russian misinformation on Black Lives Matter

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A screenshot of Ruptly's video showing someone burning a Bible.

- Donald Trump Jr., Sen. Ted Cruz, and other high-profile Republicans shared a viral news story in early August about Black Lives Matter protesters burning "a stack of Bibles" in front of a courthouse in Portland.
- According to The New York Times, the story was seeded by a Russian news agency called Ruptly, and the highly edited footage shows only a few people burning one or two Bibles.

- The Times described this as one of Russia's first successful big disinformation hits ahead of the presidential election.
- In his tweet sharing the story, Trump Jr. implied that "book burning" was common among activists. Cruz wrote, "This is who they are."

Russia looks to have succeeded in seeding one of its first viral misinformation hits in the run-up to the presidential election.

On August 1, Donald Trump Jr., Sen. Ted Cruz, Newt Gingrich, and other high-profile right-wing and Republican figures shared the news, based on a video, that Black Lives Matter protesters had burned "a stack of Bibles" in front of a courthouse in Portland.

However, The New York Times found that the video originated from a Kremlin-affiliated news agency and had been heavily edited to present the Bible-burning as widespread when in reality a small group away from the main protests burned only one or two Bibles.

Trump Jr. shared a tweet from Ian Miles Cheong, a right-wing provocateur, that said, "Left-wing activists bring a stack of Bibles to burn in front of the federal courthouse in Portland."



Ian Miles Cheong   
@stillgray

Left-wing activists bring a stack of Bibles to burn in front of the federal courthouse in Portland. [twitter.com/Shelldrayk/sta...](https://twitter.com/Shelldrayk/status/1290811531000000000)

11:46 AM · Aug 1, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

26.3K Retweets and comments 19.2K Likes



Ian Miles Cheong  @stillgray · Aug 1

Replying to @stillgray

I don't know what burning the Bible has to do with protesting against police brutality.

Do not be under the illusion that these protests and riots are anything but an attempt to dismantle all of Western Civilization and upend centuries of tradition and freedom of religion.



1.1K



8.7K



26.1K



Cheong's tweet linked to another tweet by a user who appears to have been suspended. The deleted tweet had a video from a Russian news agency called Ruptly, which you can still watch here, showing a small group of protesters burning a Bible and other materials.

Trump Jr. wrote: "Now we move to the book burning phase. I'm pretty sure Antifa doesn't actually stand for what they say it stands for. Maybe just remove the anti part of them name and it's perfect."

Cruz simply wrote: "This is who they are."

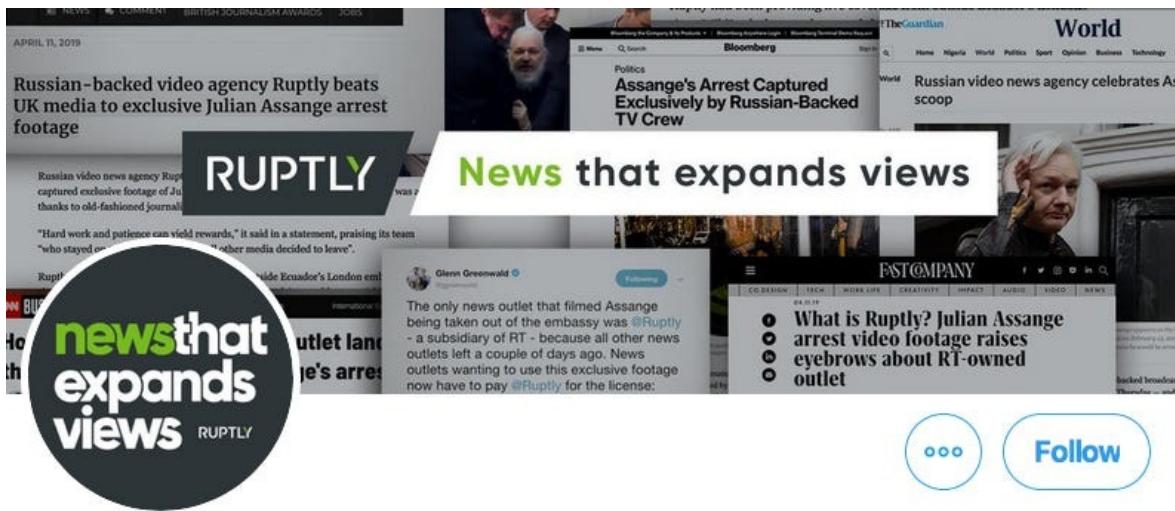
And Gingrich, the former House speaker, wrote: "Leftwing barbarians in Portland throwing Bibles into a fire reminds me of Indiana Jones and the Lost Crusade scene in Nazi Germany where Hitler's followers are burning Bibles and other books. We need an honest conversation about the barbarians and

totalitarians among us."

They implied that this is widespread behavior by Black Lives Matters protesters and indicative of illiberal attitudes.

But The Times' analysis shows that the truth is more complex.

The Times noted that the clip that was widely shared on social media originated from Ruptly, a division of the propaganda outfit RT. On Twitter, Ruptly is listed as a state-affiliated news agency.



Ruptly

@Ruptly

thumb-up Russia state-affiliated media

International video news agency. [Ruptly.tv](#)

location Berlin, Germany joined November 2012

Ruptly is owned by RT, a Kremlin propaganda outfit.

The Times said the video was edited to appear incendiary, presenting the Bible-burning as a central event in the protests.

Though a few protesters did burn one or two Bibles, it has gained outsize attention.

Ruptly pushed the story on its site and in tweets. It was also covered by RT, The Times reported.

A local news outlet that also covered the protest included a single sentence about the burning Bible in a longer report, adding that a group of protesters arrived to put out the flames.

Trump Jr.'s tweet was retweeted 19,000 times, while Cheong's tweet was retweeted more than 20,000 times.

Cruz was defensive in a follow-up tweet on Tuesday, writing: "NYT, in full ANTIFA-defense mode: 'The truth was far more mundane. A few protesters among many thousands appear to have burned a single Bible—& possibly a second—for kindling to start a bigger fire.' Yes, they burned Bibles, but not that many. OK, then."

—Ted Cruz (@tedcruz) August 11, 2020

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# **Former Jehovah's Witness elders call for mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse**

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Two former Jehovah's Witness elders have called for mandatory reporting of child sexual abuse, saying the organisation believes it is “answerable only to God”.

Duncan Corbett, who was an elder for 18 years, told the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse that the protection of minors and the handling of abuse claims must be taken out of the church’s hands. “Let them deal with the sin and the authorities handle the crime,” he told a hearing in London.

Lloyd Evans, another former elder who now campaigns against religious fundamentalism, said: “This is a group that feels they are answerable only to God ... They don’t feel as though they need to yield to any regulations that are imposed on them.”

The pair, along with another former Jehovah's Witness and a survivor of abuse, Sarah Davies, painted a picture in evidence to the inquiry of an organisation that demanded that its leaders be unquestioningly respected and obeyed, and that shunned members who failed to comply with its strict codes.

Davies, whose father was an elder and whose childhood was dominated by

religious meetings and Bible study, said she was taught that “we were God’s chosen people” and that everyone outside the faith was “controlled by Satan”. “The congregation is your life … I knew no different,” she said.

Evans, who rarely met people outside the faith as a child, said there was “no room for deviation” within the Jehovah’s Witnesses. “It can’t be overstated, the authority and influence that elders have,” he said.

According to Corbett, elders are told that their appointment has been “approved by the Holy Spirit”. It was “drilled into the congregation that they must be submissive,” he said.

Prospective elders were not subject to background checks but were asked a “one-off, once-in-a-lifetime” verbal question about sexual abuse. None of the three had any knowledge of child protection or safeguarding officials being employed or consulted.

A guidebook for elders, Shepherd the Flock of God, suggests that church leaders “endeavour to comply with secular laws” on abuse, the inquiry heard.

An anonymous witness had earlier said she had been sexually abused by a “ministerial servant” – the rung below an elder – who led study groups in her congregation and told her repeatedly that she would die in the coming armageddon. The abuse stopped when she was about nine, when the perpetrator, Peter Stewart, went to prison.

The abuse “changed who I became,” she told the hearing. “It took over everything … It literally decimated my life.” She also backed mandatory reporting, saying, “They are not going to change. They are who they are and anything imposed is going to have loopholes, so there has to be some external protection.”

Paul Gillies of the Christian Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses said elders were given internal training on how to deal with abuse allegations. Asked about the structure of the organisation, he said: “We view the Bible as our constitution.”

A Guardian investigation in 2018, based on allegations from more than 100 people, revealed a “culture of cover-up and lies”.

Earlier this month, an open letter on behalf of all UK survivors of abuse at the hands of Jehovah's Witnesses demanded a public apology, saying the organisation should substantiate its claim to abhor child abuse.

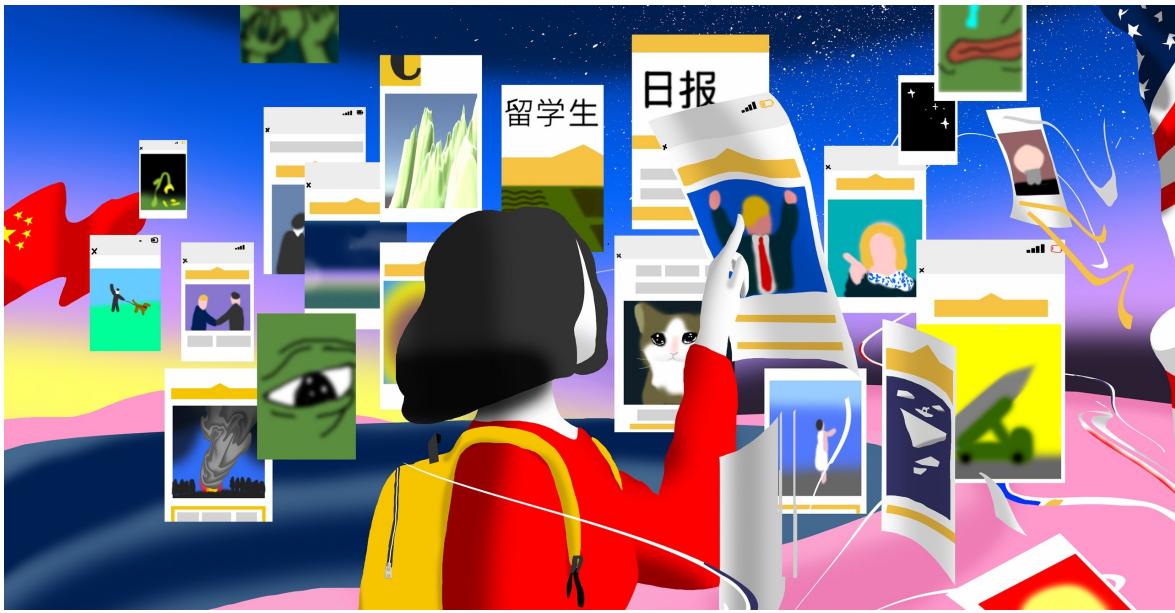
The organisation, noted for its door-to-door and street evangelising, claims 8.6m members globally, and has 1,500 congregations in England and Wales.

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# **The “Post-Truth” Publication Where Chinese Students in America Get Their News**

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The online publication College Daily brings Chinese students living in the U.S. news with nationalistic undertones, delivered in a stream of memes and Internet-speak. Illustration by Jon Han

On a Monday morning in February, members of the staff of College Daily, an online Chinese-language publication for Chinese students living in North America, gathered in their office, in Times Square, for an editorial meeting. Guan Tong, the editorial director of the New York bureau, reviewed traffic numbers from the previous week. Staring at her MacBook, she seemed satisfied with what she saw. A piece by College Daily's founder, Lin Guoyu, about the blockbuster Chinese movie "The Wandering Earth," had garnered more than a million page views; its headline was "Of Course, Only Chinese People Can Save Planet Earth." The healthy numbers came as a surprise: it was Lunar New Year, which tends to be a slow week for College Daily. "No need to worry about low traffic during Lunar New Year anymore," Guan said cheerily.

A writer—who, like the other staff members, appeared to be in her twenties—pitched another post on "The Wandering Earth," which had topped the global box office the previous weekend. (College Daily had already published a dozen posts on the film.) "The Wandering Earth" was proof, the writer said, that "we Chinese don't emphasize individual heroism—we concentrate our energy to tackle major tasks. . . . Unlike American individualism, collectivism is a Chinese sentiment." Guan approved the idea.

Guan shifted her focus to a staff writer named Deng He, who was known for

authoring *baokuan*, or “explosive-style” posts—articles that get hundreds of thousands of clicks and shares. College Daily’s office was adorned with photos of Deng, who is twenty-six and nicknamed He-he: He-he flipping his hair and gazing into the camera like a pop star; He-he in a swivel chair, holding a giant container of popcorn. On the same office wall was a list of banned words and phrases (“Falun Gong,” “Dalai Lama,” “Panama Papers”), guidelines for image selection (“Please do not use photos of national leaders. If you have to, please discuss with the person in charge of the article”), and a list of cash awards that writers could earn for writing pieces that brought in clicks; an article that got a million page views could win its author more than a thousand dollars.

“Everyone has been studying He-he’s style,” Guan told the group. “They ask themselves, What would He-he do with this topic? Why are He-he’s articles all big hits?” She turned to address Deng directly. “Tell us how you write,” she said. “Let everyone learn from you.”

Deng, wearing a black hoodie and staring at the table, deflected the question. His latest piece, headlined “I Showed My Syrian Friend a Video of Fireworks from Lunar New Year’s Eve. He Broke Into Tears,” was the second most popular post of the week, with more than seven hundred thousand page views in five days. It was written under the byline He, in the first person. In the post, Deng and his friend, Yousef, bond over being the only international students at an American high school. When Deng shows Yousef a video of fireworks at a Lunar New Year celebration—which Deng portrays as a happy occasion in peaceful, abundant China—Yousef breaks down crying. The explosions, it seems, remind him of the war back home, which killed multiple members of his family, including his younger brother, Aziz, who, Deng writes, was “bombed into two halves.”

“We need to combine facts and feelings,” Guan told the group, citing the post as an exemplar. “In our posts, there should be things from reality, but also things from one’s mind. Otherwise, the emotional appeal will be lacking.”

College Daily, which now has more than thirty staffers in Beijing and fifteen in New York, launched at the beginning of 2014, as a one-man operation in Lin Guoyu’s apartment, in Beijing. In its early days, it was a bare-bones survival guide for American campus life, with vaporous posts about boosting your G.P.A. and planning for finals week. Over time, and especially after the 2016 U.S. election, it transitioned to the kinds of stories it features today: Chinese news

delivered with nationalistic overtones; tabloid tales of Chinese students living overseas (sex, drugs, murders, and missing women appear frequently); and news from the U.S. and the celebrity world.

A headline posted during the 2016 U.S. Presidential campaign read “Using a Double? Changing Leaders? Might Not Have Long to Live? Hillary’s Campaign May End Early.” More recently, a headline proclaimed, “Trump Dodged a Bullet! ‘Russian Collusion’ Investigation Over, and He’s Safe. . . .” Others have ranged from “Farewell, isis! The Last isis Group Will Be Exterminated, and They Beg the World to Forgive” to “Hollywood Sexy Asian Goddess, First Love Was Daniel Wu, Bewitched Hot Men All Over the World” (about the actress Maggie Q). When College Daily, after weeks of silence, finally weighed in on the protests in Hong Kong, in August, it toed the government line, uncritically publishing a headline that used the phrase “I Support the Hong Kong Police”—a saying that has been popularized by the *People’s Daily*, an official organ of the Chinese Communist Party.

With about 1.6 million followers on the social-media platform WeChat and more than a million active readers a day, College Daily is one of an increasing number of Chinese “self-media” outlets, sometimes called “new media,” which have no official government affiliation and reach their subscribers exclusively via social media, mostly WeChat. Today, it would be hard to find a Chinese student in America who doesn’t regularly encounter College Daily content, intentionally or not. Even if you don’t subscribe, chances are that your friends on WeChat are sharing its stories to private or group chats or to their time lines. Chinese state media outlets often repost or aggregate College Daily content, too, which helps it reach a wider audience.

College Daily’s potential readership—Chinese students who are studying abroad and those who aspire to do so—is growing rapidly. In 2018 alone, there were more than three hundred and sixty thousand Chinese students enrolled in higher-education programs in the U.S., a fourfold rise from a decade ago. Students from mainland China make up one-third of all international students in the U.S. and outnumber those from the second and third most represented countries (India and South Korea) combined. For the most part, these students don’t watch U.S. election returns on CNN or get word of the latest viral moment via Twitter. They get such news on their phones, often from College Daily, in a stream of memes and Internet-speak. A College Daily article titled “It’s true! 1% of Rich Americans Own 40% of the Wealth—The Gap Is Worse Than a Hundred Years

Ago” is essentially an aggregation of a Washington Post article on Elizabeth Warren’s plan for a wealth tax, but dotted with images and gifs, including three cats, two ducks, and one Teletubby.

College Daily sometimes casts its heat and light on unsuspecting private citizens. In 2017, after a Chinese student named Yang Shuping delivered a commencement speech at the University of Maryland, in which she praised “the fresh air of free speech” that she had found in America, College Daily published an article called “Maryland University Chinese Student Suspected of Shaming China in Her Graduation Speech,” which was widely aggregated by Chinese media. Yang became the target of Internet bullying and deleted her personal Web site and social-media accounts. (“Shaming China” is something of a buzz phrase at College Daily: as of February, it had appeared on the site more than a hundred and forty-five times.)

“Yup, there is air pollution in China,” the College Daily riposte to Yang’s speech said. “But is air in America really so good? Are you compelled to take a deep breath of the piss-infused air in New York City every day?” (The post was issued from the New York bureau.) Another post from 2017, “Girls Studying Abroad—Please Stay Away from These Foreign Man-Dregs,” was illustrated with several photographs of a white man in a Maoist Red Guard uniform. The photographs were of a British man living in China, who had nothing to do with the story. The man, shocked to see his image go viral, asked, “What have I done?,” on his WeChat time line, adding a crying emoji.

College Daily’s success can be partly attributed to its lack of direct competitors. Mainstream Chinese media tend to see Chinese students abroad as an élite class of spoiled children, and sometimes question their allegiances; Chinese-language papers based in America, such as *China Press* or *Epoch Times* (which has links to the Falun Gong and is vocally opposed to the Chinese Communist Party), traditionally serve an older, less affluent generation of immigrants. Chinese students will find little that resonates with their daily lives or sensibilities in these publications, and the vast majority of them likely find English-language news inaccessible.

In April, 2012, Qu Ming and Wu Ying, both twenty-three-year-old graduate students in engineering at the University of Southern California, were shot to death while sitting in Qu’s car, which was parked not far from the school’s campus. In coverage of the double murder, Chinese-language outlets often led

with the same detail: the car they died in was a BMW, a signifier of wealth and class, carrying a hint, somehow, of a luxurious life caught up in crime. An *Epoch Times* headline read “Calamity by BMW—Two Chinese Students Murdered in L.A.” English-language outlets, such as the *Daily Mail*, picked up this thread: “‘They were showing off their wealth’: Unsympathetic Chinese media says two USC students murdered in luxury BMW were killed because of their car.” The coverage eventually sparked a backlash. CCTV, the primary state broadcaster in China, interviewed Qu’s roommate, who pointed out that the car was secondhand and, through a Webcam, showed the audience around the apartment where he and Qu had lived, where they shared a single desk and slept on bare mattresses on the floor.

Lin Guoyu has since said that the murders of Qu and Wu defined his mission when he started College Daily. Chinese students needed media that better reflected their interests and showed them warmth and sympathy, he said. “We are devoted to providing overseas students and the community around them with valuable reporting and compassionate stories,” he said, in a 2015 interview.

Lin, who holds the title of C.E.O., founder, and editor-in-chief of College Daily, is thirty years old, and he joked that he has reached “old age” for the industry. “This is a world for those born after 1990, or 1995, really,” he told me. I’ve only ever talked to Lin on the phone, but his Internet presence is a crossover of Wall Street bro and central-casting Chinese C.E.O.: black-framed glasses, dress shirts, ramrod posture, intense gaze. He doesn’t talk about himself much, and his biography is patchy. He was born and raised in the northeastern Chinese city of Dalian, in Liaoning province, which borders North Korea. He studied accounting at Miami University, in Ohio, he told me, where he pledged a fraternity, though he stressed that he joined for the networking opportunities, not for the “mindless drinking.” “The occasions that were purely for play were not so attractive to Chinese students or Chinese-Americans,” he said.

After graduating, in 2012, he worked in Silicon Valley as an auditor at PricewaterhouseCoopers, but he wanted to return to China. “I had a strong sense of missing out, and I wondered if I was just wasting time,” he said. China in the early twenty-tens was a sea of startups. Meituan, which is similar to Groupon, started in 2010. So did Xiaomi, which has become a main competitor of Huawei and iPhone in China. The car-hailing service Didi launched in 2012; it has since bought Uber China and is now targeting Uber’s South American market. The video platform Kuaishou, launched in 2011, has hundreds of millions of monthly

active users. And there was WeChat, a chat app that didn't seem so different from its predecessors when it launched, in 2011, but soon became central to Chinese social life, with a billion daily active users. (Facebook has 1.6 billion globally.)

In 2015, Lin received an investment of a million yuan, or roughly a hundred and fifty thousand U.S. dollars, from Xu Xiaoping. Xu is a founder of New Oriental, the largest language-school chain in China, which, since 1993, has prepared students to take the ielts and toefl tests in English proficiency—the first step toward studying abroad. By late 2017, College Daily had finished an investment round that brought in just less than three million dollars. One of the major investors was Tencent, the parent company of WeChat.

"Investors see new media as low-maintenance and high-return," Lin said. "The key is being able to monetize data, and advertising on WeChat became more and more important." College Daily's current advertisers include New Oriental and other language-education services; banking services, such as UnionPay; China Telecom; and the e-commerce giant tmall.com.

The advertising bounty is proof of "Chinese netizens' extreme reliance on WeChat," Xiao Qiang, who teaches at the U.C. Berkeley School of Information and runs a bilingual Web site called China Digital Times, said. Google, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are all blocked in China, so students in America largely rely on WeChat to stay in touch with family and friends back home and keep up with the news in China. "If they used to spend five, six hours a day on WeChat back home," Xiao said, "they are still spending five, six hours a day here. There isn't any big difference before and after their move to America."

Xiao said that online censorship in China plays a large role in determining College Daily's coverage areas and editorial standards. Like all Internet-based businesses in China, College Daily must take extreme care to avoid certain words and politically sensitive topics. "It leaves room only for entertainment and pro-government coverage," he said. The mix of tabloid headlines and soft propaganda, Xiao told me, appeals to a broad readership, investors, and the government all at the same time. Searches of the name of China's President, Xi Jinping, and of "President Xi" yield no results in College Daily's WeChat interface, but "Trump" appears in headlines almost four hundred times. One reason for College Daily's heavy coverage of U.S. politics is that Chinese

politics is much trickier to cover.

College Daily sometimes aggregates content sourced from Infowars and RT, the Russian government-backed news outlet. One article reproduced on College Daily, sourced from the Russian propaganda outlet Sputnik News, concluded that the White Helmets, a group of volunteer rescue workers in Syria, were “more evil than isis.” Shortly after the U.S. election, College Daily published a piece headlined “American Media: During the Election We Were No Longer Journalists. We Became Hillary’s Cheerleaders.” One of the sources cited in the post was a letter from Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., then the publisher of the *Times*, to his newsroom, written immediately following the 2016 election; but there was nothing in his letter that resembled College Daily’s characterization of it.

Lin said that College Daily’s stories accurately reflect its readership’s disillusionment with America, particularly when they compare the U.S. with China. “Especially after the 2016 election, our readers see how divided a society America is,” he said. “They see the chaos that’s brought about by its freedom. At the same time, China appears to be orderly, positive, and continuously advancing. This changes how an overseas Chinese student feels. It means that if we write things that are critical of China, or if we’re singing the praises of America, we will be less popular with our readers.” Following the mass shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, in August, College Daily ran an explainer on why many Americans own semi-automatic guns, which said, “The reason is that in America, the police do not have the duty to protect you when your life is in danger.”

After the staff meeting, I caught up with Deng He on his lunch break. (Deng recently left College Daily and now works at an advertising agency in China.) He was somewhat less reserved outside the office, and appeared energized by talking about his work. He’s a graduate of the University of Texas at Dallas, with a master’s degree in marketing, and he previously interned at P.R. companies in China. He landed at College Daily last year. “Our account carries the voice of our boss, Lin Guoyu—we go with his style,” he said. “Since I started, I’ve always followed the lead of the boss and write whatever he likes and asks me to write. Mostly, we follow whatever is trending.”

On a day off, he got a call from Lin, who described an idea he’d had while browsing viral videos online. Lin asked Deng to write about a Syrian friend who thought of the war in his country after seeing fireworks in China. Deng came up

with the details: their high-school bond, the Syrian man’s dead brother. (Lin at first declined to comment on the genesis of Deng’s piece; reached a second time, he denied that it had been entirely made up, claiming that it was based on events from his own life. Susanna Niu, whose title is partner and general manager at College Daily, said that the story was real in all its particulars.)

I asked Deng why he thought the piece had resonated with such a large audience. “It’s purely made up, to be honest with you,” Deng replied. “It’s all made up. I’m not sure if I did the right thing. My boss asked me to write it. I think, if a new-media outlet wants to move people, you have to make them feel that it’s real.” He rattled off the official government outlets that reposted the piece: *People’s Daily*; *Global Times*, the tabloid affiliate of *People’s Daily*; the state-run news agency Xinhua; the Chinese Communist Youth League. “I got them all!” he said, with a laugh.

“No matter what you write, there are people who are going to curse at you,” Deng said. “You are nonetheless making money off them. It’s like charging them an intelligence tax.”

I spoke with a former employee of College Daily who was taken aback that the publication would make up a story wholesale. But she acknowledged that it wasn’t entirely surprising in the landscape of Chinese new media, which she described as low-stakes and transitory. “They are all just telling stories,” she said. “Most people just read to kill time. Who is going to investigate? No one will. It only passes your eyes—there’s no need to pin down if it’s real or fake.”

One of the difficulties in fully understanding College Daily is that, as former employees told me, it lacks a clear editorial mission or a coherent set of editorial standards. (A couple of former employees told me that standards vary widely from editor to editor.) Niu said that College Daily is a news agency. Deng calls College Daily “new media,” a format in which young writers like him can “make things happen”—create a trend, go viral, conjure a story that readers think is real. When I asked Lin if it was more accurate to call College Daily’s posts “journalism” or “content,” he replied, annoyed, “What’s the difference?”

Pressed to articulate the identity of his publication, Lin used the phrase “post-truth,” which he attributed to the *New York Times*, to express his belief that the true essence of things is fundamentally unknowable and that the meaning of the news of the day depends on the spin one chooses to put on it. To illustrate his

point, he offered a hypothetical about a graduate student who moonlights as a prostitute.

“How do you cover this?” he asked me. “The headline could be ‘Shocking! Morally Bankrupt! Graduate Student at Élite School Goes for Prostitution!’ Or it could be positive, like, ‘Inspiring! Call Girl Got Into Top School!’ ”

“Correctness doesn’t exist, because it’s always relative,” Lin said. “When we refer to ‘the correct values,’ what that really means is ‘the values that are exactly like one’s own.’ ”

Fang Kecheng, a communications professor at Chinese University of Hong Kong, runs a WeChat account called News Lab, which is focussed on media literacy. (As a counter to College Daily, he translated the Sulzberger letter in its entirety and published it on his account.) Fang was a reporter at a major Chinese paper, *Southern Weekly*, and covered politics before he transitioned to academia, in 2013. He was inspired to become a journalist as a high-school student, in the early two-thousands, which was a time when government control on journalism was relatively relaxed. In 2003, news reports forced the government to acknowledge a sars outbreak. That same year, China abolished its internal custody and repatriation system after intensive news coverage of a migrant worker in Guangzhou who was detained for not carrying his I.D. and subsequently beaten to death in custody.

Journalism in China is different now, Fang said, with a sigh. Low pay and heavy-handed censorship have been driving reporters out of the business. Fang invoked the relatively relaxed “Hu-Wen Era,” referring to Xi’s predecessors, President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. Since taking power, in 2013, Xi has tightened central control with aggressive propaganda campaigns. (The media “must bear the surname of the Party,” he declared, during a visit to the CCTV newsroom, in 2016.) “Politics in China is largely behind the scenes,” Fang said. “When there is low transparency, people tend to believe in conspiracy theories and fake news.”

In a recent post, Fang wrote, “The weirder the conspiracy theory, the more widely it circulates. Many WeChat public accounts are becoming mills for conspiracy theories. It is not necessarily that they hate American politicians so much; it’s just that such articles are likely to reach the threshold of a hundred thousand clicks.”

Lin, for his part, has been open about his contempt for traditional journalism. He once wrote on his WeChat account that “the worst mistake I ever made was to pin hopes on people who hold onto journalism ideals.” In 2016, he said in an interview, “This gang of people only have their ideals, and produce no news.” He said, “Journalism majors tend to spend lots of time on one piece, but in the age of new media, we want reporting and editing to work seamlessly and emphasize our appeal to our readers—we can’t just wait for news to happen to do stories.”

When I asked Lin about these past comments, he became agitated. He said that reporting that aims “to change the world” results in sloppy journalism. When I replied that sloppy journalism is the opposite of “holding onto journalism ideals,” his irritation turned into anger; he told me that it was inappropriate to quote someone back to them in an interview. “Can’t I just tell you that I was being a fucking idiot?” he asked, eager to end the discussion.

It appears that Lin doesn’t think of published words as a matter of public record. In the course of reporting this piece, I tried to look up all the College Daily pieces with the word “Trump” in the headline that the site had posted between the beginning of 2016 and Election Day, and discovered that, of sixty-three articles, only fourteen remained on their WeChat account. I asked Lin if College Daily deletes stories. He replied, “It almost never happens.” When I mentioned the many election-related articles that appeared to have been deleted, he said, without missing a beat, “We voluntarily deleted all the articles from 2015 and 2016.”

Lin said that his critics, including Fang and News Lab, were upset that Hillary Clinton had lost the election, and they were taking it out on him because he had predicted that Trump would win. “A certain circle of people, namely American-trained journalism majors, have this resentment that they are not the people who get to deliver information to overseas Chinese students,” Lin said. “They are not the mainstream. The gap of traffic and audience between mine and theirs is so big, but the masses’ eyes are clear and bright. What I hate is a group of arrogant people saying that the readers are all deplorables. It’s anti-democracy and anti-freedom.” (At other times during our conversations, he compared himself to Theresa May and Martin Luther King, Jr.)

I’ve spoken with a number of people who are critical of College Daily, and I’ve never heard anyone call its readership deplorable. In fact, they all show great

sympathy toward current Chinese students. What they find disturbing is that many Chinese people are conditioned to see speaking the truth as trouble-making, and to see journalism as synonymous with government propaganda. The result is a kind of dissociation from truth. A saying popular among young people online goes, “I’m just one of the melon-eating masses.” It means that a person is only a passive onlooker, with neither the means nor the interest to know what’s truly going on.

Huang Yijie is a twenty-year-old rising sophomore at N.Y.U. and a regular reader of College Daily. Sporting a crew cut and wearing black-and-blue-framed glasses, which matched the blue jersey pullover he was wearing when we met, he was polite and hopeful. He has close to three thousand friends on WeChat, more than seven hundred of whom are College Daily subscribers. The son of a well-to-do family in a small coastal town in China, Huang arrived in America at the age of fifteen to attend a high school in Maryland. “Back home, I was a middling student, very quiet,” he said. “After coming to America, there are so many opportunities to join various activities, such as school elections—things I wouldn’t have imagined before.” In high school, he started going by the name Frank and became class president.

We sat and chatted in a basement common room in his dorm, and he scrolled through the chat history on his iPhone XR and explained the purpose of various WeChat groups: secondhand selling, dinner gatherings, a writing class, house hunting for people who wanted to move out of N.Y.U. dorms next semester. One group offered newcomers advice on getting vaccinations, buying health insurance, and acquiring a driver’s license. It was six months before the first day of the coming school year, but a group for incoming N.Y.U. students, from the class of 2023, had more than five hundred members.

Huang has an active social life, but he noted that the city could be a lonely place. “One feature of New York City is that everyone on the street is wearing headphones. Walking or eating alone can be lonely.” He fills stretches of solitude with podcasts and online reading. He reads College Daily about twice a day, and he told me that he admires it particularly for the attention that it brings to prejudice against Chinese students on American campuses, such as high-profile incidents of faculty forcing students to speak English in common areas. “I like finding out about things happening all over the world,” he said.

I asked him about posts that seem to be poorly sourced, like the one about the

Syrian friend. His response reminded me of Schrödinger's cat. "In my heart," Huang said, "they are simply not real and not fake."

When I asked Huang if he considered journalism important, he paused. Then he noted that, last summer, he travelled to North Korea, where he didn't consume news at all. "I really like reading news," he said. "But I suppose nothing will happen if I don't."

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# What happens to protests now that federal agents have left Portland?

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A crowd of about 1,500 protester gather at the Multnomah County Justice center for a Black Lives Matter march on July 20, 2020 in Portland, Ore. Monday night marked 54 days of protests in Portland following the police killing of George Floyd.

- For three weeks this summer, a coalition of activists and establishment local politicians united against the presence of federal agents in Portland.
- Federal officers have left, and the tensions between the state and local officials and activists are reemerging as activists push policymakers to reexamine local law enforcement policy with the same critical lens they viewed federal authorities through.
- Protests have continued. Behind the scenes, though, local policymakers have been working on changes to policing.

PORLAND, Ore. – For three weeks this summer, a coalition of activists and establishment local politicians united against the presence of federal agents in the city.

Now that agents from the US Department of Homeland Security, US Marshalls Service, and Federal Protective Services are no longer clashing with protesters nightly, the tensions between the state and local officials and activists are reemerging as activists push policymakers to reexamine local law enforcement policy with the same critical lens they viewed federal authorities through.

Even as the national spotlight that arrived with the controversial deployment of federal agents to Portland drew a wave of citizens to oppose police brutality, some activists say it partially distracted attention from the underlying movement to address the local police failures and other racial justice issues in the wake of George Floyd's death in Minneapolis police custody, after an officer knelt on his neck for nearly nine minutes.

"It created a distraction that drew away from our focus on making sure that our own police were not harming us," said Candace Avalos, who chairs a citizen review board of Portland police. "Obviously, the whole federal occupation needed to be addressed. It created an escalation of an already tense situation, but it distracted us from talking about the problems that we have in our own backyard. So I hope we can get back to talking about that."

Still, she added, activists and political leaders continued conversations about how best to reform local law enforcement.



PreviousNext Police respond to protesters during a demonstration, Friday, July 17, 2020 in Portland, Ore.

**In the daylight hours between the protests near the federal courthouse downtown, city and state officials enacted several policies meant to curb police misbehavior.**

The City Council cut the police bureau's budget and passed a resolution that created a ballot measure allowing voters to approve a new police accountability system. The state legislature passed six laws aiming to restrict the use of tear gas and chokeholds, creating a database of police misconduct, and other measures.

The protests, including those responding to the federal presence, created a political environment that motivated state and local leaders to act.

The conduct of federal officials – which included documented cases of seemingly unprovoked violence and legally dubious practice of detaining protesters in unmarked vehicles – galvanized support for the larger movement. Many of the newcomers were not Black, but their participation was important in

a city that's more than three-quarters white.

"That brought more people in," Avalos said. "I'm glad that many, many people showed up and spoke up against it. We've got to make room for people in this movement... The fact that they have come out, I think it does send a message."

But the new supporters often became the story themselves, drawing attention away from the underlying problems.

Teressa Raiford, a police accountability activist in Portland, said news media and outside observers paid more attention to the largely white demonstrators protesting the federal involvement than the issues for which she's long been advocating.

Even when members of the Wall of Moms – a protest group Raiford was briefly involved with and whose members were easily identifiable at protests because of their bright-yellow shirts – tried to draw attention to the killing of 18-year-old Shai'India Harris on the city's east side, the group itself became the focus.

"We're saying, 'Black lives matter, my kid just got shot, Black lives matter, my daughter just got murdered,'" Raiford said. "No one was listening to that. The world is like, 'Hey look, there's moms.' And the moms are like, 'Hey look there's Shai'India.' And the media is like, 'Hey look at you guys, you're wearing yellow shirts.' And that shit is weird to me."



Mothers form the front line of a protest in Portland, Oregon on July 20, 2020.

**Behind the scenes, though, local policymakers have been working on changes to policing.**

"It didn't shift my agenda," state Rep. Janelle Bynum, a Democrat and co-chair of a new joint committee on policing, said. "I think it shifted a lot of people who were comfortable sitting at home, busy throwing darts, that they realized that they, too, could have their rights stripped away."

City Commissioner Jo Ann Hardesty, who sponsored the resolution to advance a ballot measure, said the demonstrations against federal agents didn't distract from the goals of Black Lives Matter supporters.

"I would not agree that the focus has changed, only that it has expanded to meet the demand of the moment," she said in an email. "Fighting for the dignity of Black lives and fighting for our democracy are not mutually exclusive. ... What we are seeing in this moment right now is an evolution in a continuum of calls

for justice for Black lives. Those calls can expand and contract to include fights like the overreach of the Federal government invading our spaces to protest."

Mayor Ted Wheeler, who is also the commissioner of the Portland Police Bureau, joined protesters one night in July and was among those whom federal agents teargassed.

When federal authorities and Gov. Kate Brown, a Democrat, announced the federal agents would reduce their role, it was seen as a victory for the state and local Democratic officials, but didn't meaningfully improve policing in the city, Avalos said.

"It gave an opportunity to have a seeming win without truly holding ourselves accountable," she said.

At a news conference a week after federal agents said they'd step back from engaging with protesters, Wheeler criticized some protesters who started fires near a city police station, saying they were providing footage for President Donald Trump's reelection campaign.



Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler is tear gassed while visiting protesters demonstrating against the presence of federal agents on July 22, 2020.

While Wheeler, who has never been popular with the city's police critics, and Hardesty, who has long called for more police accountability measures and led the local NAACP chapter before joining the council, voted together on the police budget cut and ballot measure resolution, they're somewhat regularly at odds with each other.

At the state level, Democrats created a joint legislative committee on police reform and got six bills through the legislature in their first special session this summer.

Oregon Senate President Peter Courtney, a Democrat, has said the year's second session, which opened Monday, will only address the budget issues. Republicans say they support that approach and want to wait until the next regular session in January to consider any further bills on police accountability.

Sen. James Manning Jr., a Democrat and Bynum's counterpart on the joint

committee, said he would seek to refine the bills passed in the first special session.

Republicans have already taken issue with the idea of more police reform measures in the next special session.

"I agree with Sen. Peter Courtney that this should be a budget-only session," House Republican Leader Christine Drazan said. Her Senate counterpart, Fred Girod, said "policy bills should be off the table."

Republicans, who are a minority in both chambers of the legislature, are open to some reform measures, Justin Brecht, a policy analyst with Senate Republicans, said. But the protests created such urgency that the bills passed in their aftermath were rushed through that could create unintended consequences, he said.

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# Why Belarus Is Not Ukraine

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**Yes, there are surprisingly big protests—like those that rocked Kyiv six years ago—being met with brutal crackdowns. But Belarus is a whole different story.**

| August 12, 2020, 3:16 PM



Scenes in Belarus of protesters erecting crude barricades while fending off the attacks of heavily armored riot police have evoked memories of another uprising in the borderlands between Russia and the European Union: the 2014 Ukrainian revolution that erupted in Kyiv’s Maidan square, an uprising that drove out the country’s kleptocrat president and ushered in a new, if complicated, era in Ukraine.

The similarities certainly have not escaped Belarus’s authoritarian leader,

Aleksandr Lukashenko, who claimed a sixth presidential term Sunday in an election nearly universally condemned as a farce. “As I have warned, there will be no Maidan, no matter how much anyone wants one,” he said on Monday, just as the protests began picking up steam.

But despite the similar, gruesome optics, the differences between the two uprisings far outweigh their similarities, though the two countries may both be neighbors and former Soviet Republics. Those differences make it harder to look to Ukraine as a potential road map for how the events in Belarus may unfold.

### **For starters, Belarus is a lot more authoritarian than Ukraine was or is.**

In his quarter-century in power, Lukashenko has built a machine of repression that is a lot bigger, more pervasive, and nastier than anything in post-Soviet Ukraine—making the risks faced by protesters in Minsk and other cities a lot higher than they were six years ago in Ukraine.

In the three days since the presidential elections, deemed neither free nor fair by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the European Union’s Foreign Minister Josep Borrell, 6,000 people have been arrested, 250 injured, and one person is confirmed to have been killed. While the Ukrainian revolution ultimately claimed around 100 lives (not including over 13,000 people who died in years of low-intensity armed conflict in the eastern part of the country), the first deaths in Ukraine didn’t come until after protesters had been on the street for two months. Lukashenko didn’t wait two nights.

That highlights just how determined the Belarus authorities are to crush the incipient protests before they gain momentum—and the courage of protesters who are braving batons, rubber bullets, tear gas, and flash grenades. On Wednesday, the police in Belarus confirmed that they had used live ammunition against protesters in the city of Brest and that one person was injured.

“I didn’t expect such resilience from Belarusians, they’re amazing, simply amazing. Going and knowing they’re risking their lives, it’s simply beautiful,” said Andrei Sannikov, who ran against Lukashenko in the presidential election in 2010 and was later imprisoned for 16 months for organizing an anti-government protest following the sham vote. “You watch it with pride and tears in your eyes,” he said.

On Wednesday, protesters gathered outside a detention center in Minsk, where

they could hear the screams of detainees being beaten inside. “Hang in there,” the protesters chanted, according to the independent Russian media outlet *MediaZona*.

During his 26 years in power, Lukashenko has in many ways replicated the brute-force, centralized system of his Soviet predecessors. (Lukashenko was the manager of a collective pig farm in Soviet days). The country’s security services still go by their Soviet-era name, the KGB, whose elite Alpha Unit was deployed on the streets of Minsk amid the unrest.

Despite the risks, independent media outlets and civil society groups do operate in Belarus, but they face routine harassment by the authorities, stifling red tape, and the threat of arbitrary arrest. The main opposition candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, had to flee the country after the vote, following an apparent threat against her children.

### **For another, Ukraine was actually sort of democratic when the Maidan protests broke out.**

In 2014, Ukraine was rated as partly free by Freedom House. It was a problematic, backsliding democracy where corruption was endemic and violence against journalists was on the rise, but dissent was possible—and politics was not a one-man show.

“In 2013 [in Ukraine], you had a relatively vibrant civil society. You had a government which was a very soft authoritarian government,” said John Herbst, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine. “Belarus does not have a history of such civic resistance.”

Crucially, elections were largely free and fair in a way they have never been in Lukashenko’s Belarus. While the parliament was stacked with supporters of then-President Viktor Yanukovych, there was a lively opposition that quickly threw its support behind the protests. Even the downside of Ukrainian politics offered more space for maneuver. Ukraine’s oligarchs, who have long had an outsized and often troublesome role in the country’s politics, nevertheless served as an alternative base of power as they jockeyed for influence. Belarus’s wealthy business leaders have negligible political clout.

### **On the other hand, independent Ukraine was built on a ready-made fault line. Belarus isn’t.**

The Ukrainian revolution strained historic and linguistic divides, which were only exacerbated by Russian disinformation and military support as the Kremlin helped foment war in eastern Ukraine, dispatching troops in unmarked uniforms as well as tanks and artillery. Western Ukraine, once part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, usually looked to the West—as evidenced in the strong support for an association agreement with the European Union in that part of the country, the very agreement that sparked the Maidan protests and crackdown in the first place. In contrast, the eastern part of the country, never gobbled up by the Habsburgs, has almost always been Russian-speaking and oriented toward Moscow. After the uprisings in 2014 that forced Yanukovych to flee to Russia, pro-Russian separatists in eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk staged independence referendums, going on to form proto-states highly dependent on Moscow’s muscle and financial backing.

Belarus, in contrast, has little in the way of linguistic, religious, or ethnic divides for foreign actors like Russia to exploit. “Belarus almost never was split in terms of being part of different countries,” said Artyom Shraibman, a founder of the Minsk-based political consultancy Sense Analytics, save for the period after World War I when the country was split between Poland and the Soviet Union. “Before that, for centuries, Belarus was always part of one single nation,” he said, creating a fairly homogeneous population with a long-shared history.

### **Ukraine’s protesters had a clear goal. All that Belarusians have right now is anger and outrage.**

The Ukrainian protesters had a clear aim: to steer the country in the direction of Europe and, by extension, toward a more democratic and prosperous future. The EU Association Agreement that caused the whole uproar would have made Ukraine, if not an EU member state, a trading partner with Western-style rules and regulations. In consequence, leaders of the protest movement quickly emerged.

A key distinction in Belarus is that the protests have no clear leader, Shraibman said. “This is more a protest of anger, than a conscious attempt at toppling the regime,” he said.

What coordination there is has largely centered around the secure messaging app Telegram, where popular channels share messages that warn protesters of police movements, guide demonstrators to certain neighborhoods, and encourage them

to use their cars to deliver supplies and block police vehicles. This diffuse coordination could actually make it harder for the security services to quash, said Katsiaryna Shmatsina, a political analyst with the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies.

“If we had one clear leader, especially if this leader was in Belarus, we don’t know how long he or she would have lasted,” Shmatsina said.

For all the differences between the two dramatic upheavals, there are some constants. Should Moscow decide to wade in, it has plenty of points of leverage —many of the same ones it has used against Ukraine—whether cutting off energy supplies, launching cyberattacks, or exploiting Russian-language media in a place where the Russian language still predominates.

“There’s a lot of pressure points there,” said Ben Hodges, who served from 2014 to 2017 as the commanding general of U.S. military forces in Europe.

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