



HOW DOES THE CCP UNDERMINE DEMOCRACY?



The Chinese government undermines democratic processes in vulnerable countries by exploiting governance gaps and ensuring a lack of local awareness of the risks of engagement with Beijing. China's authoritarian influence depends on opacity and manipulation. While Chinese entities conclude infrastructure investment deals that bring financial leverage and corrupt benefits to elites, the CCP uses various means to simultaneously shape the information space and influence domestic political decision-making in its favor. China employs these "sharp power" tools more aggressively as democracies begin to push back against its malign behavior.

IRI's Approach

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

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

1. **Researching** foreign authoritarian influence and its impact on vulnerable democracies;
2. **Sharing** that research through tailored engagements with IRI's global network of partners; and
3. **Equipping** stakeholders with tools and resources to strengthen democratic resilience and proactively counter foreign authoritarian influence.

IRI has enlisted researchers in 37 democracies around the world to document China's varied influence tactics and the sources of democratic resilience to them. This research forms the foundation for BRIDGE programming that builds the capacity of local IRI partners to identify, expose, and counteract authoritarian interference in their country's democratic processes and institutions, including through subgrants for innovative initiatives that mobilize change at official levels.

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

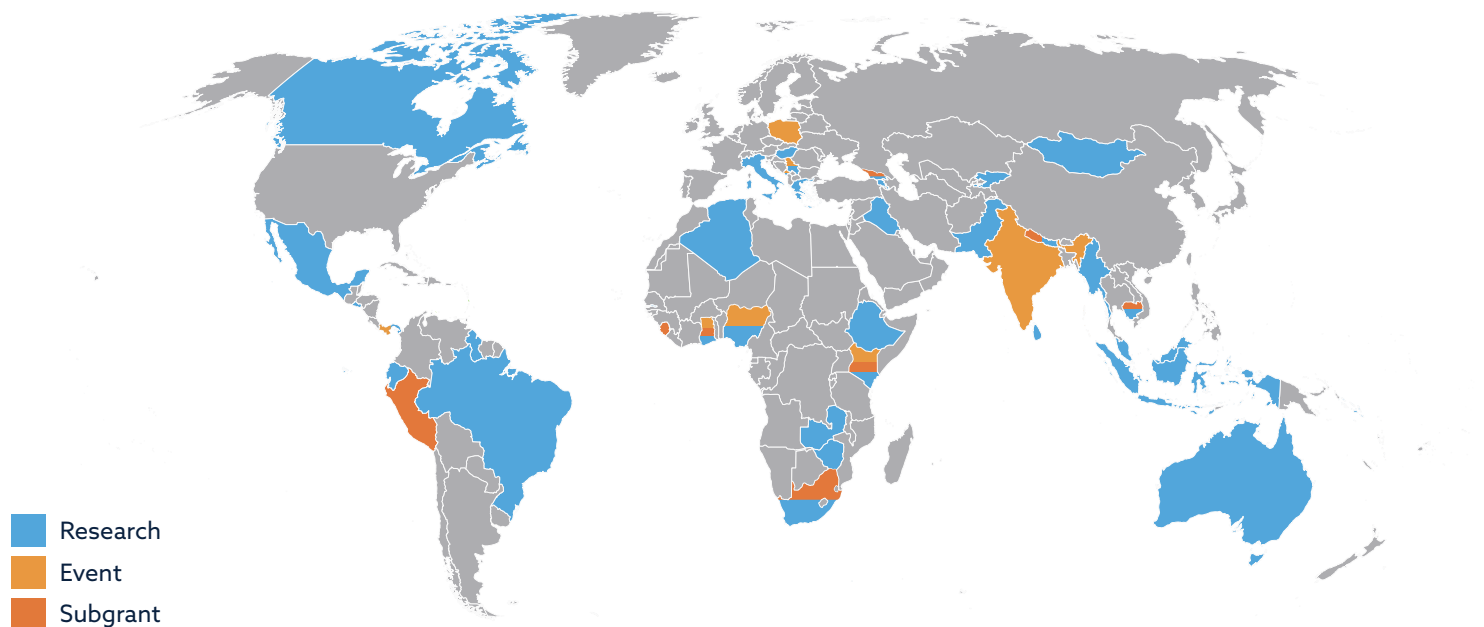
- Public opinion research of CCP influence in Latin America and the Caribbean;
- Countering CCP information operations in Africa; and
- Strengthening policy responses to CCP tactics among political parties in Central and Eastern Europe.

China

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

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

Snapshot of IRI's work to counter CCP Malign Influence



Examples of BRIDGE building democratic resilience:

- In 2020, the BRIDGE project held its inaugural Global Influencers Forum in India, convening over 40 individuals from 17 countries to build a global network of the world's leading activists in the effort to expose and rollback China's malign authoritarian influence.
- Since its inception, BRIDGE has directly engaged over 310 individuals from more than 50 countries, expanding the circle of global democratic actors that are aware of CCP influence tactics and best-practices to combat their spread.
- IRI provides material and technical support to grassroots activists in every region of the world to pilot initiatives that draw attention to the CCP's anti-democratic activities and develop the capacity to mitigate their negative effects. Examples include an art activist in Ghana, an investigative journalist in Kenya, an indigenous rights group in the Amazon region, and a Georgian good governance civil society organization.
- In response to the global pandemic and an associated uptick in global disinformation operations from the CCP, the BRIDGE team, in coordination with IRI's Digital Democracy and Taiwan-based partner Doublethink Lab, held a training for nearly 100 global democratic activists on methods to identify online disinformation and best-practices for digital hygiene.

INTERNATIONAL REPUBLICAN INSTITUTE

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David Shullman, Senior Advisor for Countering Foreign Authoritarian Influence, dshullman@iri.org