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China's Growing Discourse Power and Resurgent Authoritarianism

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CHINA'S GROWING DISCOURSE POWER AND RESURGENT AUTHORITARIANISM

David L. Sloss

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INTRODUCTION

The Chinese term *huayuquan* is translated as “discourse power.”¹ Discourse power is the “national capability to influence global values, governance, and even day-to-day discussions on the world stage.”² One commentator notes that “the Chinese Communist Party’s quest to dominate thought and narrative has always been central to its pursuit of power. To this end, every supreme party leader since Mao has reaffirmed the strategic and

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1. Toni Friedman, *Lexicon: ‘Discourse Power’ or the ‘Right to Speak’* (话语权, *Huàyǔ Quán*), STAN. UNIV. (Mar. 17, 2022), <https://digichina.stanford.edu/work/lexicon-discourse-power-or-the-right-to-speak-huayu-quan/> [<https://perma.cc/4B2N-4ABY>].
 2. Elsa Kania, *The Right to Speak: Discourse and Chinese Power*, CTR. FOR ADVANCED CHINA RSCH. (Nov. 27, 2018), <https://www.ccpwatch.org/single-post/2018/11/27/The-Right-to-Speak-Discourse-and-Chinese-Power> [<https://perma.cc/4B2N-4ABY>].

national security importance of the party's control of media, culture, and narrative."³

A large body of anecdotal evidence suggests that China's discourse power has grown substantially over the past ten or fifteen years.⁴ There is currently no agreed social science methodology for measuring either discourse power or the effects of discourse power. Even so, there are reasons to believe that the growth in Chinese discourse power may be correlated with another important trend in international affairs: the increasing autocratization of formerly democratic states.⁵

This conference is entitled "International Law and the New Cold War." Regardless of one's view about the "Cold War" label, it is clear that the United States and its allies will be engaged in ongoing geopolitical competition with China and Russia for the foreseeable future.⁶ The Biden Administration correctly frames that battle as a "competition between democracies and autocracies."⁷ President Biden's National Security Strategy contends that "the need for American leadership is as great as it has ever been."⁸ That document sets forth a strategic vision involving U.S. collaboration with allies to promote and preserve democracy in the face of rising authoritarianism.

Some question whether the United States has the moral authority to lead an alliance of liberal democracies in a competition between democracies and autocracies. Clearly, the quality of democratic governance in the United States has declined in recent years. *The Economist* downgraded the United

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3. MATT SCHRADER, FRIENDS AND ENEMIES: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING CHINESE POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES 7 (2020), <https://securingdemocracy.gmf.us.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Friends-and-Enemies-A-Framework-for-Understanding-Chinese-Political-Interference-in-Democratic-Countries.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/84HA-LC72>].
 4. *See infra* Part II.
 5. See V-DEM INST., AUTOCRATIZATION TURNS VIRAL: DEMOCRACY REPORT (2021), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/12/dr_2021.pdf [<https://perma.cc/J7PA-H3VL>].
 6. *See* WHITE HOUSE, NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY 3 (2022), www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf [<https://perma.cc/5V7C-EMKD>].
 7. *Id.* at 8.
 8. *Id.* at 2.

States from a “full democracy” to a “flawed democracy” in 2016.⁹ Between 2015 and 2020, the U.S. score on V-Dem’s “liberal democracy” index declined from 852 to 723, a drop of 129 points on a thousand-point scale.¹⁰ Therefore, as others have argued, the project of saving liberal democracy must begin at home.¹¹

Even so, in V-Dem’s fourfold classification of states as “liberal democracies,” “electoral democracies,” “electoral autocracies,” and “closed autocracies,”¹² the United States is one of only 34 countries in the world that qualifies as a liberal democracy: the highest ranking in that fourfold system.¹³ Moreover, as President Biden notes, “the United States remains the world’s leading power.”¹⁴ Therefore, if liberal democracies are going to collaborate to promote and preserve democracy in the face of rising authoritarianism and growing Chinese power, U.S. leadership is essential, because no other liberal democracy has the necessary combination of military, economic, and discourse power to compete effectively with China.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that the United States should attempt to spread democracy to places like China and Russia. Both China and Russia will remain autocracies for the foreseeable future; a realistic foreign policy must accept that fact. In my view, the future battle between autocracy and democracy will be waged primarily in the global South. Of course, states in the global South are not mere pawns in a geopolitical competition between major powers. U.S. foreign policy aims to promote democracy in the global South “because democratic governance consistently

9. THE ECONOMIST INTEL. UNIT, DEMOCRACY INDEX 2016: REVENGE OF THE “DEPLORABLES” 44 (2017).

10. These figures are taken from the V-Dem dataset. The most recent version of the dataset, version 12, is available for download at <https://v-dem.net/vdemds.html>. The Codebook associated with that dataset is available at <https://v-dem.net/static/website/img/refs/codebookv12.pdf>.

11. See Richard Haass, *Foreign Policy by Example: Crisis at Home Makes the United States Vulnerable Abroad*, FOREIGN AFFS. (June 5, 2020), www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-06-05/protests-pandemic-world-watching [<https://perma.cc/8JR9-CWSR>].

12. See *infra* notes 9-11 and accompanying text for an explanation of the fourfold classification system.

13. See V-Dem dataset, version 12, *supra* note 10.

14. WHITE HOUSE, *supra* note 6, at 7.

outperforms authoritarianism in protecting human dignity, leads to more prosperous and resilient societies . . . and encourages a peaceful world order.”¹⁵ Chinese efforts to export autocracy support autocratic rulers. In contrast, efforts by the U.S. and its allies to export democracy support citizens who seek freedom from autocratic rulers.

Part One of this essay presents data on the recent rise of autocracy and the corresponding decline of democracy in world affairs. Part One also explains why discourse power is likely to be an important tool in any serious, sustained U.S. effort to combat increasing autocratization. Part Two presents a range of anecdotal evidence documenting the growth of Chinese discourse power since about 2009. Where possible, I present some comparative data about U.S. discourse power to provide important context. Part Three sketches the outlines of a future research program that could provide better information about the scope and effects of Chinese discourse power. Part Three also recommends a few specific, concrete policy solutions that can and should be implemented now, without waiting for the results of that research.

I. AUTOCRATIZATION AND DEMOCRATIC DECLINE

For many years, political scientists have debated how best to classify countries into regime types. One very helpful classification system—the “regimes of the world,” or RoW system—divides countries into four groups: liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, and closed autocracies.¹⁶ “In *closed autocracies*, the chief executive is either not subjected to elections or there is no meaningful, *de-facto* competition in elections.”¹⁷ In contrast, “*electoral autocracies* hold *de-facto* multiparty elections . . . but they fall short of democratic standards due to significant irregularities, limitations on party competition or other violations of . . . institutional

15. *Id.* at 8.

16. *See generally* Anna Lührmann, Marcus Tannenbergh & Staffan I. Lindberg, *Regimes of the World (RoW): Opening New Avenues for the Comparative Study of Political Regimes*, 6 POL. & GOVERNANCE 60 (2018).

17. *Id.* at 61.

requisites for democracies.”¹⁸ *Electoral democracies* are countries that not only “hold *de-facto* free and fair multiparty elections, but also . . . achieve a sufficient level of institutional guarantees of democracy such as freedom of association, suffrage, clean elections, an elected executive, and freedom of expression.”¹⁹ Finally, under the RoW system, “a *liberal democracy* is, in addition, characterized by its having effective legislative and judicial oversight of the executive as well as protection of individual liberties and the rule of law.”²⁰

The Varieties of Democracy Institute—V-Dem—maintains a comprehensive database that enables scholars to monitor historical trends related to democratization and autocratization.²¹ The *v2x_regime* variable in the V-Dem database tracks the division of countries into the four regime types: closed autocracies, electoral autocracies, electoral democracies, and liberal democracies.²² Figure One shows historical trends involving classification of countries under the regimes of the world system.²³ The line representing “total democracies” includes both electoral democracies and liberal democracies. The line representing “total autocracies” includes both closed autocracies and electoral autocracies. The chart presents data points at three-year intervals from 1973 to 2021, the most recent year for which data is available.

Several points bear emphasis. First, the percentage of states in the world that qualify as closed autocracies declined steadily from 54 percent in 1973 to about 11 percent in 2012, with a fairly steep decline between 1988 and 1997. The percentage of closed autocracies hit bottom in 2012, then rose to about 17 percent in 2021.

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

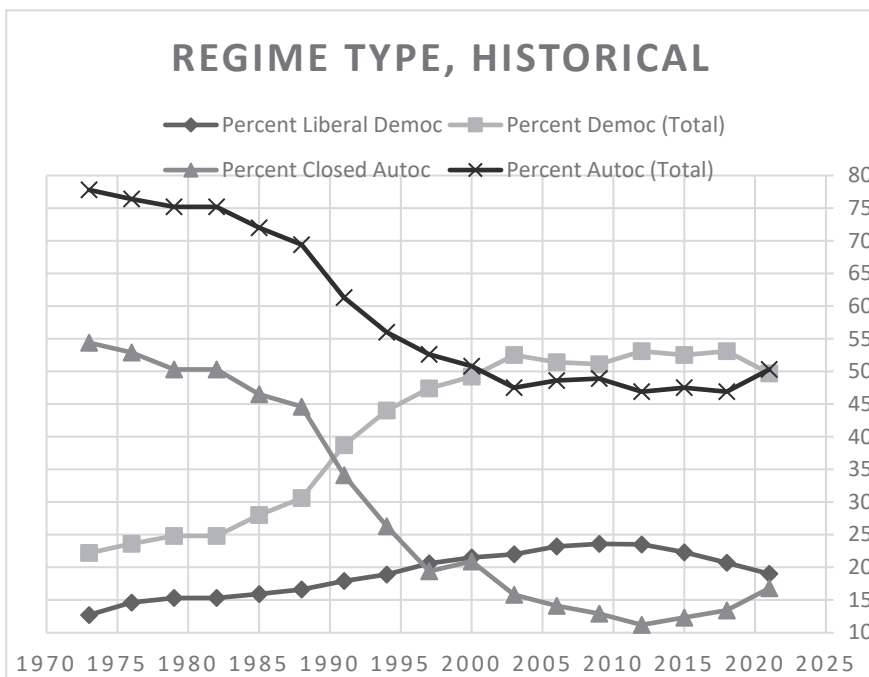
20. *Id.*

21. See V-Dem database, *supra* note 10.

22. *Id.*

23. Although the United Nations currently has 193 member states, the most recent V-Dem database has data for only 179 “countries.” Moreover, those 179 “countries” include several that are not UN member states, such as Gaza and Taiwan. In the aggregate, 21 UN member states are excluded from the V-Dem database. All 21 are small states, with populations of less than half-a-million people. See *The V-Dem Dataset*, V-DEM, <https://v-dem.net/vdemds.html>.

Figure One



Meanwhile, the percentage of total autocracies declined steadily from 78 percent in 1973 to 47.5 percent in 2003, with a fairly steep drop between 1988 and 1997. The line for total autocracies remained relatively flat between 2003 and 2018. During that period, the percentage of democracies in the world fluctuated between 51 and 54 percent, while the percentage of autocracies fluctuated between 46 and 49 percent. However, between 2018 and 2021, there was a sharp increase in the percentage of autocracies such that, in 2021, the number of autocracies exceeded the number of democracies for the first time since 2000.

Note, also, the trend for liberal democracies. The percentage of states in the world that qualify as liberal democracies increased steadily from 13 percent in 1973 to 23.6 percent in 2009. However, that figure has since dropped to just 19 percent in 2021.

I use the term “autocratization” to refer both to the increasing percentage of closed autocracies since 2012, and the increasing percentage of total autocracies since 2018. I assume that China has a national interest in promoting autocratization,

whereas the United States has a strong national interest in halting or reversing that trend.²⁴ To be clear, I am not suggesting that China wants to promote autocratization in established liberal democracies. To the contrary, as stated previously, the battle between democratization and autocratization will be fought primarily in the global South. According to one leading China expert, “Chinese policymakers are attempting to create a sphere of influence comprising not just their country’s immediately contiguous region but also the entire emerging, non-Western, and largely nondemocratic world—the global South.”²⁵

Military power is not a very useful instrument for promoting democracy and combatting autocratization. Economic power could be a useful instrument for that purpose, but China is deploying its economic power much more aggressively than the United States in much of the global South.²⁶ For example, “[t]rade between China and the [African] continent topped \$250 billion in 2021, compared with \$64.33 billion for the United States.”²⁷ Discourse power could also potentially be an effective tool for winning the “new Cold War” with China. Referring to the previous Cold War with the Soviet Union, one commentator asked “[w]hy did the West win the cold war? Not by use of arms. Weapons did not breach the Iron Curtain. The Western invasion was by radio, which was mightier than the sword.”²⁸ As Part II

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24. See generally Hauke Hartmann, *Autocratization and the Decline of International Cooperation*, BERTELSMANN FOUND. (Mar. 10, 2022), <https://www.bfna.org/democracy/autocratization-and-the-decline-of-international-cooperation-y5eyin93zf/> [<https://perma.cc/L5MW-L28V>] (arguing that autocracies such as China actively promote autocracy as an efficient alternative to democracy, and that this push to autocracy erodes democratic norms in younger democracies, which effectively contributes to the erosion of international cooperation).
 25. Nadège Rolland, *China's Southern Strategy: Beijing Is Using the Global South to Constrain America*, FOREIGN AFFS. (June 9, 2022), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-06-09/chinas-southern-strategy> [<https://perma.cc/97N9-AFY8>].
 26. See *id.*
 27. Jane Perlez, *Where China Is Changing Its Diplomatic Ways (At Least a Little)*, N.Y. TIMES (July 25, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/25/world/asia/china-diplomacy-africa.html?searchResultPosition=1> [<https://perma.cc/HRL3-PHF7>].
 28. Monroe Price, *Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of International Broadcasting*, 21 CARDOZO ARTS & ENT. L.J. 51, 54 (2003) (quoting MICHAEL NELSON, WAR OF THE BLACK HEAVENS:

demonstrates, China has been aggressively expanding its discourse power for the past 10-15 years to increase Chinese influence and counter U.S. influence in the global South.

II. CHINA'S GROWING DISCOURSE POWER

“Since 2003, when revisions were made to an official document outlining the political goals of the People’s Liberation Army, so-called ‘media warfare’ has been an explicit part of Beijing’s military strategy. The aim is to influence public opinion overseas in order to nudge foreign governments into making policies favourable towards China’s Communist party.”²⁹ Part II presents information about China’s efforts to shape the media and information environment around the world. The analysis is divided into three sections. The first section addresses Chinese state media companies. The next section discusses China’s efforts to influence foreign media. The final section discusses Chinese exports of surveillance technology.³⁰

A. Chinese State Media Companies

China has by far the largest network of state-run media organizations of any country in the world.³¹ In 2009, then-President Hu Jintao made a commitment to spend 45 billion yuan, or \$9.3 billion, on a major media expansion campaign.³²

THE BATTLES OF WESTERN BROADCASTING IN THE COLD WAR (1997)).

29. Louisa Lim & Julia Bergin, *Inside China’s Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign*, THE GUARDIAN (Dec. 7, 2018, 1:00 PM), <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping> [<https://perma.cc/9P76-FWZH>].
30. The analysis in Part Two borrows liberally from Chapter 4 of my recent book. See generally DAVID L. SLOSS, TYRANTS ON TWITTER: PROTECTING DEMOCRACIES FROM INFORMATION WARFARE (2022).
31. See Sean Mantesso & Christina Zhou, *China’s Multi-Billion Dollar Media Campaign “A Major Threat for Democracies” Around the World*, AUSTL. BROAD. CORP., www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-08/chinas-foreign-media-push-a-major-threat-to-democracies/10733068 (Feb. 7, 2019, 7:00 PM) [<https://perma.cc/8P6C-8TC5>]. CGTN purportedly broadcasts “to 1.2 billion people,” making “it the world’s largest television network[.]”.
32. *Id.*

Since that time, the Chinese government and the Chinese Communist Party have expanded several global media organizations that they control, including the China Global Television Network, China Daily, People's Daily (which publishes the *Global Times* and other newspapers), China Radio International, and Xinhua News Agency. All five organizations are charged with spreading propaganda that casts China in a favorable light and countering narratives disseminated by China's critics.³³ All these global media organizations ultimately answer to the CCP.³⁴ Since the CCP is hostile to liberal, democratic values, the overall messaging of China's state-run media organizations is also hostile to liberal, democratic values.³⁵ Commentators describe a "vanishingly thin line between China's journalism, propaganda work, influence projection and intelligence gathering."³⁶

Major Chinese media organizations have cultivated a large number of followers on Facebook, Twitter, and other U.S. social media platforms. "As of December 2019 . . . three of the 10 media accounts on Facebook with the largest number of followers were Chinese state media."³⁷ As shown in Table One, five leading Chinese media organizations have more likes on Facebook than CNN, the top-rated U.S. media organization on Facebook. The fact that Facebook and Twitter are both banned in China means that the data for Chinese state media organizations displayed in Table One is based almost entirely on people who reside outside of China.³⁸

CGTN operates TV channels in English, Spanish, French, Arabic, and Russian that are available in more than 170

33. See SARAH COOK, BEIJING'S GLOBAL MEGAPHONE: THE EXPANSION OF CHINESE COMMUNIST PARTY MEDIA INFLUENCE SINCE 2017 6 (2020).

34. See *id.* at 5-6.

35. See Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.

36. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

37. COOK, *supra* note 33.

38. The data on likes and followers may include a small number of people inside China who are using virtual private networks (VPNs) to circumvent the "great firewall" to access Facebook and/or Twitter. See Justinas Mazūra, *Facebook Is Blocked in China: 3 Ways to Access It*, CYBERNEWS, <https://cybernews.com/how-to-use-vpn/facebook-in-china/> (Mar. 14, 2022) [<https://perma.cc/337U-RP6V>].

countries.³⁹ CGTN also operates several digital platforms with more than 150 million followers outside of China.⁴⁰ CGTN “claims to be broadcasting to 1.2 billion people . . . including 30 million households in the U.S.—which would make it the world’s largest television network.”⁴¹ In comparison, CNN, the largest American cable news organization, reaches only about 362 million households worldwide, including 78 million households in the United States.⁴² CNN Digital routinely registers “more than 200 million unique visitors globally each month.”⁴³ In contrast to CGTN, CNN publishes almost exclusively in English.⁴⁴ The decision not to publish in other languages clearly limits CNN’s reach compared to CGTN.

*Table One*⁴⁵

Media Organizations on Facebook and Twitter

	Facebook	Twitter
<i>Chinese State Media Companies</i>		
CGTN	105 million likes	13.9 million followers
China Daily	94 million likes	4.3 million followers
People’s Daily	84 million likes	7.1 million followers

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39. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 5; *About Us*, CHINA GLOB. TV. NETWORK, <https://www.cgtn.com/about-us> [<https://perma.cc/Y34C-G2TP>].
40. *About Us*, *supra* note 39.
41. Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.
42. *CNN Worldwide Fact Sheet*, CNN PRESS ROOM (July 2022), <https://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/cnn-fact-sheet/> [<https://perma.cc/V6T7-22VS>].
43. *Id.*
44. *Id.*
45. Data about the number of likes on Facebook is taken from each organization’s Facebook page. Data about the number of Twitter followers is taken from each organization’s Twitter profile. All data was current as of June 22, 2020.

Xinhua News	80 million likes	12.6 million followers
Global Times	57 million likes	1.7 million followers
China Plus News (CRI)	21 million likes	772,000 followers
<i>Selected U.S. Media Companies</i>		
CNN	33.5 million likes	49.5 million followers
Fox News	18.6 million likes	19.5 million followers
New York Times	17.4 million likes	47.1 million followers
Wall Street Journal	6.5 million likes	17.9 million followers

China Daily is an English language newspaper owned by the CCP.⁴⁶ The China Daily Group publishes a total of 16 newspapers in China, Hong Kong, North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, with a total circulation of 900,000 daily newspapers.⁴⁷ *People's Daily* describes itself as “the most influential and authoritative newspaper in China.”⁴⁸ Others describe it as the official “mouthpiece” of the CCP.⁴⁹ *People's Daily* publishes a total of ten newspapers, several of which are targeted to foreign audiences.⁵⁰ The *Xinhua News Agency* is “the official press agency of the People's Republic of China Xinhua employs more than 10,000 people [It] owns more

46. See Chuck Ross, *Chinese Propaganda Outlet Paid Millions to American Newspapers and Magazines, Records Show*, WASH. FREE BEACON (May 25, 2021, 2:30 PM), <https://freebeacon.com/media/chinese-propaganda-outlet-paid-millions-to-american-newspapers-and-magazines/> [https://perma.cc/DVH6-P7G5].

47. *China Daily's Print Media*, CHINA DAILY, www.chinadaily.com.cn/static_e/printmedia.html [https://perma.cc/42WZ-5SX7].

48. *Introduction to People's Daily*, PEOPLE'S DAILY ONLINE, <http://en.people.cn/other/about.shtml> [https://perma.cc/MV4A-GQB2].

49. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 5.

50. *Introduction to People's Daily*, *supra* note 48.

than 20 newspapers and a dozen magazines, and it prints in eight languages: Chinese, English, Spanish, French, Russian, Portuguese, Arabic and Japanese.”⁵¹ *Xinhua* “launched 40 new foreign bureaus between 2009 and 2011 alone.”⁵² The number of foreign bureaus “jumped to 162 in 2017.”⁵³

The *International Herald Tribune*, a joint publication of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, ceased operations in 2013.⁵⁴ Since that time, no U.S.-based newspaper has come close to reaching the combined global audience of the three-dozen newspapers published by *China Daily*, *People's Daily*, and *Xinhua*.⁵⁵ The *New York Times* has about 5 million digital subscribers.⁵⁶ Roughly 16 percent of those subscribers—about 800,000 people—live outside the United States.⁵⁷ In comparison, one former *Xinhua* employee claimed: “My stories were not seen by 1 million people. They were seen by 100 million people.”⁵⁸ Even if that statement is a gross exaggeration, it suggests that *Xinhua* is probably reaching a much larger global audience than the *New York Times*.

CRI “has nearly 70 overseas, dedicated affiliate radio stations and 18 global internet radio services . . . [It] has six overseas main regional bureaus and 32 overseas correspondent bureaus.”⁵⁹ CRI

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51. *Xinhua News Agency*, BEIJING TOURISM (Jan. 16, 2013), <https://english.visitbeijing.com.cn/article/47OMnoKyKJF> [<https://perma.cc/6EDP-D4KL>].
 52. Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.
 53. *Id.*
 54. Serge Schmemmann, *The Life of a Newspaper*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 13, 2013), <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/14/business/media/the-life-of-a-newspaper.html> [<https://perma.cc/ZQK5-683T>].
 55. *See generally Top 10 Newspapers in the World 2020*, BizVibe, <https://blog.bizvibe.com/blog/top-newspapers-world> [<https://perma.cc/N2WJ-KSYD>].
 56. Maria Pengue, *25 Insightful New York Times Readership Statistics [The 2022 Edition]*, LETTER.LY (Mar. 14, 2021), <https://letter.ly/new-york-times-readership-statistics/> (reflecting the number of New York Times digital subscribers as of 2020) [<https://perma.cc/2QXJ-UJR9>].
 57. *Id.*
 58. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.
 59. *Who We Are*, CHINA PLUS (Feb. 16, 2017), <http://chinaplus.cri.cn/aboutus/aboutcri/62/20170216/393.html> [<https://perma.cc/367H-9743>].

“uses 44 languages in its overseas reporting work and broadcasts a daily total of 2,700-plus programming hours.”⁶⁰ “China Plus is CRI’s overseas all-in-one English-language media brand, combining such entities as the China Plus app and website, China Plus Radio and China Plus News.”⁶¹

The U.S. Agency for Global Media is a federal agency funded by Congress;⁶² it provides financial and other support to five distinct media organizations that disseminate news and information on a global basis: Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Office of Cuba Broadcasting, Radio Free Asia, and the Middle East Broadcasting Network.⁶³ Table Two presents summary information about the five media organizations funded by AGM.⁶⁴

The information in Table Two demonstrates that AGM-funded entities are reaching a large global audience. Comparable data for Chinese state media companies is not available. However, a few comparative data points are instructive. *Xinhua* alone employs more than 10,000 people,⁶⁵ roughly four times as many as the total number employed by all five AGM-funded entities.

60. *Id.*

61. *China Plus*, CHINA PLUS (Feb. 16, 2017, 6:09 PM), <https://chinaplus.cri.cn/chinaplus/aboutus/abouttheenglishservice/61/20170216/389.html> [https://perma.cc/THT3-A2MY].

62. *See Who We Are*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA, <https://www.usagm.gov/who-we-are/> [https://perma.cc/ZQ7C-2XY8].

63. *See Voice of America*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA, <https://www.usagm.gov/networks/voa/> [https://perma.cc/ULX4-RXT]; U.S. Agency for Glob. Media, *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, <https://www.usagm.gov/networks/rferl/> [https://perma.cc/F9FG-7K7L]; *Office of Cuba Broadcasting*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA, <https://www.usagm.gov/networks/ocb/> [https://perma.cc/C44Z-VUGC]; *Radio Free Asia*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA, <https://www.usagm.gov/networks/rfa/> [https://perma.cc/Z9XS-VWE8]; *Middle East Broadcasting Networks*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA, <https://www.usagm.gov/networks/mbn/> [https://perma.cc/Q69B-GN4R].

64. AGM also funds the Open Technology Fund. *Id.* However, that fund is not a media organization. *See About*, OPEN TECH. FUND, <https://www.opentech.fund/about/> [https://perma.cc/ES9V-XCNA].

65. *Xinhua News Agency*, *supra* note 51.

CGTN claims that it broadcasts to 1.2 billion people globally.⁶⁶ If that number is accurate, then CGTN's audience is almost three times the total audience for AGM-funded entities. Current budget figures for China's state media companies are not available, but President Hu Jintao's \$9.3 billion commitment in 2009 far exceeds the total annual spending for all AGM-funded entities.⁶⁷

Table Two

Media Organizations Funded by the Agency for Global Media

	Annual Budget	Employees	Languages Supported	Audience Estimate
Voice of America	\$252 million	961	48	311.8 million
Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty	\$117.4 million	623	27	37.2 million
Office of Cuba Broadcasting	\$28.1 million	117	Spanish	1 million
Radio Free Asia	\$43.1 million	253	9	59.8 million
Middle East Broadcasting Network	\$112.6 million	869	Arabic	31.1 million

66. Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.

67. *Id.*

Total	\$553.2 million	2823	???	440.9 million
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B. Influencing Foreign Media

The previous section showed that China has developed the most extensive global network of state-run media organizations of any country in the world. However, the CCP is not content to rely exclusively on state media organizations to disseminate its preferred narratives. Chinese officials have also developed a set of “opaque methods to exploit foreign media outlets.”⁶⁸ They use the phrase “borrowing the boat to reach the sea” to describe those methods.⁶⁹ “In its simplest form, this involves paying for Chinese propaganda supplements to appear in dozens of respected international publications The strategy can also take more insidious forms, such as planting content from the state-run radio station, China Radio International, on to the airwaves of ostensibly independent broadcasters across the world, from Australia to Turkey.”⁷⁰

Media organizations linked to the CCP have made content sharing arrangements with local news media in “Spain, the United Kingdom, Australia, Argentina, Peru, Senegal, and India.”⁷¹ “These ‘content sharing agreements’ are commercial arrangements that allow China to publish its own coverage in newspapers around the world in the form of handouts or inserts. Newspapers adorned with full-page spreads and glowing assessments of China’s President can now be found from Europe, to Africa, to Latin America.”⁷² Unfortunately, “the surreptitious nature in which these inserts are included means many readers are unlikely to be aware that they’re consuming content sponsored by the Chinese government.”⁷³

68. COOK, *supra* note 33 at 8; *see also* SLOSS, *supra* note 30, at 154.

69. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 8.

70. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

71. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 8.

72. Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.

73. *Id.*

China Daily, “an English-language newspaper controlled by the Chinese Communist Party,” has deployed this strategy to influence news coverage in the United States.⁷⁴ Information filed with the Justice Department in June 2020 revealed that *China Daily* had “paid more than \$4.6 million to the Washington Post and nearly \$6 million to the Wall Street Journal since November 2016.”⁷⁵ That money pays for supplements, or inserts, that “are designed to look like real news articles, though they often contain a pro-Beijing spin on contemporary news events.”⁷⁶ These types of content-sharing deals explain *China Daily*’s remarkable expenditures in the United States.⁷⁷ In 2017-18, the paper reportedly “spent \$20.8m on US influence [operations] . . . making it the highest registered spender that is not a foreign government.”⁷⁸

In addition, China has been engaged in an “opaque campaign of buying up broadcast space on foreign airwaves and inside newspapers Beijing has been able to infiltrate local media across the world by using overseas airwaves to disseminate its message.”⁷⁹ For example, Reuters reported in 2015 that Global CAMG, a media company owned indirectly by CRI, “was one of three companies running a covert network of 33 radio stations broadcasting CRI content in 14 countries.”⁸⁰ By 2018, they were

74. Chuck Ross, *Washington Post and Wall Street Journal Took Millions from Chinese Communist Party Newspaper*, NAT’L INT. (June 10, 2020), <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/washing-ton-post-and-wall-street-journal-took-millions-chinese-communist-party-newspaper> [https://perma.cc/9G3E-74GU].

75. *Id.* (citing U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., OMB No. 1124-0003, AMENDMENT TO REGISTRATION STATEMENT PURSUANT TO THE FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT OF 1938, AS AMENDED (2020), <https://efile.far a.gov/docs/3457-Amendment-20200601-2.pdf> [https://perma.cc/8 VLT-VY6U]).

76. *Id.*

77. U.S. DEP’T OF JUST., OMB No. 1124-0003, AMENDMENT TO REGISTRATION STATEMENT PURSUANT TO THE FOREIGN AGENTS REGISTRATION ACT OF 1938, AS AMENDED (2020), <https://efile.far a.gov/docs/3457-Amendment-20200601-2.pdf> [https://perma.cc/8 VLT-VY6U].

78. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

79. Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.

80. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29 (citing Koh Gui Qing & John Shiffman, *Beijing’s Covert Radio Network Airs China-Friendly News Across Washington, and the World*, REUTERS (Nov. 2, 2015,

operating “58 stations in 35 countries.”⁸¹ Similarly, *Xinhua* “has signed exchange agreements with local counterparts” in many countries, including Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Egypt, Thailand, Vietnam, Belarus, and Laos.⁸² *Xinhua* concluded an agreement with the Thai News Network allowing Xinhua to broadcast its “*China Report* program in Thailand on a daily basis.”⁸³ In South America, “TV Peru’s Channel 7 broadcast 12 documentaries about China . . . in 2016, nearly all of which were produced by CGTN and aired during prime time.”⁸⁴

China has also used its money to gain effective control over Chinese-language media around the world.⁸⁵ CRI has bought media companies throughout Australia.⁸⁶ “A 2016 report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted Australian Chinese media sources saying that the majority of the Chinese language media in the country was owned or controlled by the Chinese state or its affiliates.”⁸⁷ Similarly, “a November 2018 investigation by the *Financial Times* found that party-affiliated outlets were reprinting or broadcasting their content in at least 200 nominally independent Chinese-language publications around the world In most cases, the content appears to have been provided for free and published under the masthead of the overseas news organizations, making it appear native to the independent publication.”⁸⁸ Thus, people outside of China who

1:40 PM), <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-radio/>[_<https://perma.cc/ZNQ2-Q3HK>].

81. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

82. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 8.

83. *Id.*

84. *Id.*

85. *In the West, China Holds Growing Sway over Chinese-Language Media*, THE ECONOMIST (Sept. 23, 2021), <https://www.economist.com/china/2021/09/23/in-the-west-china-holds-growing-sway-over-chinese-language-media> [<https://perma.cc/2GZX-JBS2>].

86. Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.

87. *Id.* (citing Kelsey Munro & Philip Wen, *Chinese Language Newspapers in Australia: Beijing Controls Messaging, Propaganda in Press*, SYDNEY MORNING HERALD (July 8, 2016, 3:04 PM), <https://www.smh.com.au/national/chinese-language-newspapers-in-australia-beijing-controls-messaging-propaganda-in-press-20160610-gpg0s3.html> [<https://perma.cc/77S8-HDX>]).

88. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 8 (quoting Emily Feng, Opinion, *China and the World: How Beijing Spreads the Message*, FIN. TIMES (July

read newspapers in Chinese, or listen to television or radio programs in Chinese, are probably receiving content approved by the CCP, even when they are getting their news from nominally independent sources.

China's attempt to control the information environment in the global South appears to be gaining substantial traction in Africa.⁸⁹ One report suggests that “audiences in the West may prove a challenge to win over—but there is concern that Africa is more vulnerable to China’s creeping media buy-ups With a less robust media environment and countless cash-strapped local networks, China has been more active in infiltrating and controlling African media.”⁹⁰ A 2019 Pew Research study found that “[m]ajorities or pluralities in almost all the Middle Eastern, Latin American and sub-Saharan African countries surveyed have a favorable view of China, including 70% who have a favorable opinion in Nigeria.”⁹¹ In contrast, views about China in Western democracies are much less favorable.⁹²

A 2018 article in *The Guardian* said: “Over the past six years, CGTN has steadily increased its reach across Africa. It is displayed on televisions in the corridors of power at the African Union, in Addis Ababa, and beamed for free to thousands of rural villages in a number of African countries, including Rwanda and Ghana, courtesy of StarTimes.”⁹³ StarTimes is a privately owned Chinese television distribution company with close ties to the Chinese government; it is effectively the Comcast of Africa. StarTimes is “the leading digital-TV operator in Africa,” with subsidiaries in more than 30 African countries.⁹⁴ The Chinese company “has been a key player in the transition from analog to

12, 2018), <https://www.ft.com/content/f5d00a86-3296-11e8-b5bf-23cb17fd1498> [<https://perma.cc/SMQ2-AU4F>].

89. See Mantesso & Zhou, *supra* note 31.

90. *Id.*

91. Laura Silver et al., *People Around the Globe Are Divided in Their Opinions of China*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (Dec. 5, 2019), <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/12/05/people-around-the-globe-are-divided-in-their-opinions-of-china/> [<https://perma.cc/Z6WZ-UHCW>].

92. *See id.*

93. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

94. *About Us*, STARTIMES, <https://m.startimestv.com/browser/aboutus> [<https://perma.cc/QH7L-NT8R>].

digital transmission [in Africa], accruing over 10 million subscribers in 30 countries.”⁹⁵ By controlling digital distribution channels, StarTimes determines “which stations those viewers are able to access.”⁹⁶

StarTimes claims that it “makes pay-TV affordable for normal families” in Africa.⁹⁷ That may well be true, but affordability comes with a significant catch.⁹⁸ Its “cheapest packages bundle together Chinese and African channels, whereas access to the BBC or al-Jazeera costs more, putting it beyond the means of most viewers. In this way, their impact is to expand access to Chinese propaganda to their audience, which they claim accounts for 10m of Africa’s 24m pay-TV subscribers.”⁹⁹

Some observers are concerned that “StarTimes is edging local companies out of some African media markets.”¹⁰⁰ StarTimes entered into a joint venture with the state broadcaster in Zambia.¹⁰¹ The deal allegedly “paves the way for a Chinese company to control Zambia’s national broadcasting service.”¹⁰² Similarly, in September 2018, “the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association warned that if StarTimes is allowed to control Ghana’s digital transmission infrastructure and the satellite space . . . Ghana would have virtually submitted its broadcast space to Chinese control and content.”¹⁰³

C. Exporting Surveillance Technology

Digital authoritarianism can be defined as “the use of digital information technology by authoritarian regimes to surveil,

95. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 17; see also SLOSS, *supra* note 30, at 162.

96. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 17.

97. *About Us*, *supra* note 94.

98. See generally Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

99. *Id.* (citing *China Is Broadening Its Efforts to Win over African Audiences*, THE ECONOMIST (Oct. 20, 2018), <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/10/20/china-is-broadening-its-efforts-to-win-over-african-audiences> [<https://perma.cc/2ZBQ-26TD>]).

100. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

101. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 17.

102. *Id.*

103. Lim & Bergin, *supra* note 29.

repress, and manipulate domestic and foreign populations.”¹⁰⁴ The technology includes “high-resolution cameras, facial recognition, spying malware, automated text analysis, and big-data processing,”¹⁰⁵ all supported by sophisticated artificial intelligence to facilitate mass surveillance of ordinary citizens.¹⁰⁶ “The Chinese Communist Party is forging a future of mass surveillance . . . and rapidly exporting those tools to other parts of the world.”¹⁰⁷

China’s large internet, telecommunications and technology companies are major players in the global information technology landscape.¹⁰⁸ Although most of the major companies are nominally private, “the CCP’s influence and reach into private companies has increased sharply over the past decade. In 2006, 178,000 party committees had been established in private firms. By 2016, that number had increased sevenfold to approximately 1.3 million.”¹⁰⁹ Article 33 of the CCP’s constitution states that party committees are expected to “ensure the implementation of party policies and principles, and discuss and decide on major issues of their enterprise.”¹¹⁰ “Internet and technology companies are believed to have the highest proportion of CCP party

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104. Steven Feldstein, Commentary, *When It Comes to Digital Authoritarianism, China Is a Challenge—but Not the Only Challenge*, WAR ON THE ROCKS (Feb. 12, 2020), <https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/when-it-comes-to-digital-authoritarianism-china-is-a-challenge-but-not-the-only-challenge/> [<https://perma.cc/6GW9-CD8T>].
105. Andrea Kendall-Taylor et al., *The Digital Dictators: How Technology Strengthens Autocracy*, FOREIGN AFFS., Mar.-Apr. 2020, at 103, 109.
106. *Id.*
107. Naazneen Barma et al., Commentary, *Digital Authoritarianism: Finding Our Way Out of the Darkness*, WAR ON THE ROCKS (Feb. 10, 2020), <https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/when-it-comes-to-digital-authoritarianism-china-is-a-challenge-but-not-the-only-challenge/> [<https://perma.cc/P9A5-UQHC>].
108. DANIELLE CAVE ET AL., MAPPING CHINA’S TECHNOLOGY GIANTS 4 (2019), https://ad-aspi.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2019-05/Mapping%20China%27s%20technology%20giants.pdf?VersionId=EINwiNpste_FojtgOPriHtlfSD2OD2tL [<https://perma.cc/AA7P-6KQ9>].
109. *Id.* at 7.
110. *Id.* (quoting COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA CONST. art. 33).

committees in the private sector.”¹¹¹ An independent study conducted in 2017 “identified 288 companies listed in China that changed their articles of association to ensure management policy that reflects the party’s will.”¹¹² In short, China’s large technology companies, although nominally private, operate, to a large extent, as agents of the CCP.

A report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute shows that twelve key Chinese technology companies, in the aggregate, are involved in “52 5G initiatives, across 34 countries . . . 56 undersea cables, 31 leased cables and 17 terrestrial cables; 202 data centres and 305 telecommunications & ICT projects spread across the world.”¹¹³ A 2018 Freedom House report notes that Chinese companies have “installed internet and mobile network equipment in at least 38 countries.”¹¹⁴ China can potentially use its control over information pipelines to engage in both surveillance and censorship. “As more of the world’s critical telecommunications infrastructure is built by China, global data may become more accessible to Chinese intelligence agencies.”¹¹⁵ Indeed, according to one source, “there is already evidence of Chinese companies using their control over dissemination channels . . . to suppress information deemed undesirable by Beijing. But even where this potential has not yet been activated, the foundations are being laid to facilitate future manipulation.”¹¹⁶

Chinese officials have stated publicly that they seek “to develop controls so that the party’s ideas always become the strongest voice in cyberspace. This includes enhancing the global influence of internet companies like Alibaba, Tencent, Baidu and Huawei and striving to push China’s proposition of internet governance toward becoming an international consensus.”¹¹⁷ In keeping with this strategy, Chinese “companies have supplied

111. CAVE ET AL., *supra* note 108, at 7.

112. *Id.*

113. *Id.*

114. ADRIAN SHAHBAZ, FREEDOM ON THE NET 2018: THE RISE OF DIGITAL AUTHORITARIANISM 8 (Tyler Roylance ed., 2018), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FOTN_2018_Final.pdf [<https://perma.cc/5PK4-QET9>].

115. *Id.* at 10.

116. COOK, *supra* note 33, at 16-17.

117. CAVE ET AL., *supra* note 108, at 3.

telecommunications hardware, advanced facial-recognition technology, and data analytics tools to a variety of governments with poor human rights records Digital authoritarianism is being promoted as a way for governments to control their citizens through technology, inverting the concept of the internet as an engine of human liberation.”¹¹⁸ Aided by Chinese tech companies, authoritarian states around the world are increasingly using Chinese technology “for repression, censorship, internet shutdowns and the targeting of bloggers, journalists and human rights activists.”¹¹⁹

For example, Huawei has become a world leader in the development of so-called “smart city” technologies.¹²⁰ Smart city projects “include the provision of surveillance cameras, command and control centers, facial and license plate recognition technologies, data labs, intelligence fusion capabilities and portable rapid deployment systems for use in emergencies.”¹²¹ “In 2017, Huawei listed 40 countries where its smart-city technologies had been introduced; in 2018, that reach had reportedly more than doubled to 90 countries (including 230 cities).”¹²² Smart city technologies can provide significant benefits for citizens if government use of the technology is regulated by laws designed to protect individual privacy. However, China imposes no such legal requirements when Huawei exports its technology to authoritarian governments.¹²³ Moreover, that technology provides powerful surveillance tools that help authoritarian governments tighten state control over citizens who present actual or potential challenges to autocratic rulers.¹²⁴

Private Chinese companies are exporting the technology of digital authoritarianism, but they are not alone.¹²⁵ “Firms based

118. Shahbaz, *supra* note 135, at 1-2.

119. CAVE ET AL., *supra* note 108, at 9.

120. *Id.* at 10.

121. *Id.*

122. *Id.*

123. *See generally id.* at 11.

124. *See* Kendall-Taylor et al., *supra* note 105, at 106, 112-13.

125. Jessica Chen Weiss, *Understanding and Rolling Back Digital Authoritarianism*, WAR ON THE ROCKS (Feb. 17, 2020), <https://warontherocks.com/2020/02/understanding-and-rolling-back-digital-authoritarianism/> [https://perma.cc/2Y27-7PV8].

in the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, and Israel are also key suppliers.”¹²⁶ The technologies that support digital authoritarianism are not inherently evil. With appropriate laws and regulations in place, democratic countries can ensure that governments employ the technology to enhance public welfare in a manner that is consistent with liberal, democratic ideals. Unfortunately, when Chinese companies export the technology to authoritarian countries, neither the exporting nor the importing country is likely to insist on regulations to promote liberal, democratic ideals.¹²⁷ Absent such regulations, the tools of digital authoritarianism enable autocratic rulers to conduct mass surveillance and identify political opponents. All too often, identification of opponents leads to arbitrary arrest, torture, and/or extrajudicial killing.¹²⁸ A 2019 Freedom House report stated “that 47 of the 65 countries assessed featured arrests of [social media] users for political, social, or religious speech—a record high.”¹²⁹

The tools of digital authoritarianism strengthen autocratic rule. “Between 1946 and 2000—the year digital tools began to proliferate—the typical dictator ruled for around ten years. Since 2000, this number has more than doubled, to nearly 25 years.”¹³⁰ Moreover, “those authoritarian regimes that rely more heavily on digital repression are among the most durable.”¹³¹ Hence, commentators legitimately fear “the emergence of an AI-powered authoritarian bloc led by China . . . [that] could prevent billions of people, across large swaths of the globe, from ever securing any measure of political freedom.”¹³² China doves contend that

126. Feldstein, *supra* note 104.

127. *See id.*

128. ADRIAN SHAHBAZ & ALLIE FUNK, FREEDOM ON THE NET 2019: THE CRISIS OF SOCIAL MEDIA 17 (Tyler Roylance, Shannon O’Toole & Chris Brandt eds., 2019), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/11042019_Report_FH_FOTN_2019_final_Public_Download.pdf [<https://perma.cc/CG92-9UYR>].

129. *Id.* at 18

130. *See* Kendall-Taylor et al., *supra* note 105, at 112.

131. *Id.*

132. Ross Andersen, *The Panopticon Is Already Here*, THE ATLANTIC (Sept. 15, 2020), <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/china-ai-surveillance/614197/> [<https://perma.cc/59RC-VDLA>].

“material interests, not a universalist mission of promoting autocracy abroad, are the key drivers of China’s global strategy.”¹³³ Assuming the doves are correct, their analysis should not be construed as an argument for complacency. Chinese companies driven by the profit motive will likely help autocratic rulers entrench their control unless there is countervailing pressure to regulate surveillance technologies. Notably, the Chinese government is not applying any such pressure.

In the United States and other liberal democracies, governments do not generally conduct surveillance on social media platforms because laws enacted by democratic legislatures restrict government surveillance.¹³⁴ However, authoritarian governments are increasingly exploiting U.S. social media platforms for surveillance purposes.¹³⁵ According to a 2019 Freedom House report, “[a]t least 40 of the 65 countries covered by this report have instituted advanced social media monitoring programs.”¹³⁶ Moreover, “of the 15 countries in Asia assessed by this report, 13 have social media surveillance programs under development or in use.”¹³⁷ The report notes that “China is a leader

133. Weiss, *supra* note 125.

134. U.S. tech companies do conduct extensive corporate surveillance. See generally SHOSHANA ZUBOFF, *THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM* (2019). Compared to the United States, European countries have enacted stronger regulations to shield individual privacy from corporate surveillance. Moreover, U.S. government agencies have fairly broad leeway to conduct electronic surveillance on foreigners, an issue that has been an ongoing source of contention between the U.S. and Europe for several years. See Daniel Solove, *Schrems II: Reflections on the Decision and Next Steps*, TEACHPRIVACY (July 23, 2020), <https://teachprivacy.com/schrems-ii-reflections-on-the-decision-and-next-steps> [<https://perma.cc/H7MS-6TJA>]. Even so, U.S. government surveillance of U.S. citizens is tightly circumscribed, compared to China, as evidenced by the U.S. and Chinese scores on Freedom House’s “Freedom on the Net” index. In the 2022 edition, the U.S. scored 76 out of 100, whereas China scored 10 out of 100. See *Freedom of the Net Report: Countries*, FREEDOM HOUSE, <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-net/scores> [<https://perma.cc/4FZP-QT6M>].

135. See SHAHBAZ & FUNK, *supra* note 128, at 13-20.

136. *Id.* at 12.

137. *Id.* at 16.

in developing, employing, and exporting social media surveillance tools.”¹³⁸

For example, the Chinese company Semptian has developed the Aegis surveillance system.¹³⁹ The Aegis system “is designed to be installed inside phone and internet networks, where it is used to secretly collect people’s email records, phone calls, text messages, cellphone locations, and web browsing histories.”¹⁴⁰ The company’s equipment is helping the CCP “covertly monitor the internet and cellphone activity of up to 200 million people” in China.¹⁴¹ More recently, Semptian “has supplied the equipment to authoritarian governments in the Middle East and North Africa.”¹⁴² Although a company spokesman refused to identify those countries, an investigative journalist suggests that Semptian may have sold Aegis to “Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Morocco, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Sudan, and Egypt.”¹⁴³

Knowlesys is a Chinese company described as “an award-winning surveillance industry veteran.”¹⁴⁴ Knowlesys “sells social media and open source internet monitoring and analysis tools to . . . private sector giants from both the East and West.”¹⁴⁵ The Knowlesys Intelligence System “is available in almost a dozen languages including Arabic, English, Chinese and Uighur.” Governments use it “to effectively monitor and analyze social media.”¹⁴⁶ In August 2020, a group of hackers “obtained internal files from three Chinese social media monitoring companies,”

138. *Id.* at 13

139. See generally Ryan Gallagher, *Middle East Dictators Buy Spy Tech from Company Linked to IBM and Google*, THE INTERCEPT (July 12, 2019, 5:00 AM), <https://theintercept.com/2019/07/12/semptian-surveillance-mena-openpower/> [<https://perma.cc/F4L7-HX4T>].

140. *Id.*

141. *Id.*

142. *Id.*

143. *Id.*

144. Patrick Howell O’Neill, *Chinese Surveillance Giant Knowlesys Pushes Further into International Market*, CYBERSCOOP (Apr. 6, 2017), <https://www.cyberscoop.com/chinese-surveillance-giant-pushes-further-into-the-international-market-tk/> [<https://perma.cc/M5PD-FUYK>].

145. *Id.*

146. *Id.*

including Knowlesys.¹⁴⁷ The hackers offered journalists “a large dump of files” that allegedly exposed “social media monitoring and disinformation campaigns conducted by [Knowlesys and two other] companies at the behest of the Chinese government.”¹⁴⁸

In sum, Chinese companies are strengthening autocratic rule in the global South by exporting surveillance technology to authoritarian governments, including technology that helps those governments exploit U.S. social media platforms to conduct surveillance of their own citizens.

III. LOOKING AHEAD

Part Two demonstrated that China has made substantial progress in its effort to shape the information environment in the global South by disseminating its preferred narratives to a large audience and by helping autocratic governments develop information technology systems that privilege surveillance and censorship over privacy and free expression. However, we do not know the degree to which China’s growing discourse power actually influences public opinion in the global South, or the degree to which that discourse power influences state behavior.

Part Three consists of two sections. The first section sets forth a research program designed to measure the influence of Chinese media on public opinion in the global South. The final section presents three policy recommendations that can and should be implemented soon, without waiting for the results of that research.

A. *A Proposed Research Program*

There is no single, agreed definition of the states that comprise the “global South.” For present purposes, I define the global South to include all states other than China, members of the Council of Europe, members of the former Soviet Union, and states classified by the World Bank as high income states.¹⁴⁹

147. Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai, *Hackers Leak Alleged Internal Files of Chinese Social Media Monitoring Firms*, VICE (Aug. 21, 2020, 12:36 PM), <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dyzewz/hackers-leak-alleged-internal-files-of-chinese-social-media-monitoring-firms> [<https://perma.cc/5BRV-M4HF>].

148. *Id.*

149. The World Bank divides all states into four categories by income levels: high income, upper middle income, lower middle income, and low income. See *World Bank Country and Lending Groups*, THE

Based on these criteria, the global South includes 115 UN member states.¹⁵⁰ Those 115 states include 20 closed autocracies, 44 electoral autocracies, 36 electoral democracies, and 3 liberal democracies.¹⁵¹ Twelve states that are part of the global South are not included in the V-Dem database and are therefore not classified under the regimes of the world system. All twelve are very small states, with populations less than 500,000 people.¹⁵²

Assuming that the United States and China will both utilize discourse power to compete for influence in the global South, that competition will likely focus on states that qualify as either electoral autocracies or electoral democracies. In closed autocracies, governments control the information environment to such a degree that it is difficult for foreign media to influence public opinion.¹⁵³ In liberal democracies, attitudes towards China are sufficiently negative that China is unlikely to have much success in influencing public opinion.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, a study designed to measure the influence of Chinese media on public opinion in the global South should focus on the 80 states in the

WORLD BANK, <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups> [<https://perma.cc/H3YD-6352>].

150. Data for this section was compiled by author in an Excel database (on file with author). The database classifies all states by income level using World Bank data. It classifies all states as either liberal democracies, electoral democracies, electoral autocracies, or closed autocracies, using V-Dem data. Population data is based on 2020 population figures, taken from <https://worldpopulationreview.com>
151. *See id.*
152. These twelve states are: Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau, Samoa, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Tonga, and Tuvalu. *See Smallest Countries 2022*, WORLD POPULATION REV., <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/smallest-countries> [<https://perma.cc/EK7K-HHGX>].
153. *See* SARAH REPUCCI & AMY SLIPOWITZ, FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2022: THE GLOBAL EXPANSION OF AUTHORITARIAN RULE 3-5, 8 (Elisha Aaron et al. eds., 2022), https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/FIW_2022_PDF_Booklet_Digital_Final_Web.pdf [<https://perma.cc/M4QK-AMFL>].
154. *See* Laura Silver, Christine Huang & Laura Clancy, *Negative Views of China Tied to Critical Views of Its Policies on Human Rights*, PEW RSCH. CTR. (June 29, 2022), <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/06/29/negative-views-of-china-tied-to-critical-views-of-its-policies-on-human-rights/> [<https://perma.cc/BA4J-DKQC>].

global South that qualify as either electoral autocracies or electoral democracies.

However, 80 is an unmanageably large number of states to include in the proposed study. To reduce the number of states to a more manageable size, I set a threshold of states with a population of more than 30 million people. Based on that threshold, I developed a list of 24 states to serve as target countries for the proposed research project. Those 24 countries include seven in Asia—Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Philippines; five in Latin America—Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru; and twelve in Africa—Algeria, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda.¹⁵⁵ All 24 states are either electoral autocracies or electoral democracies.¹⁵⁶ The World Bank classifies most of them as either upper middle income or lower middle income, but Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Uganda are all low-income countries.¹⁵⁷

The proposed research project should collect data—on a country-by-country basis for each of the 24 target countries—regarding the size of the audience reached by China's five largest state media companies: CGTN, China Daily, People's Daily, CRI, and Xinhua. Insofar as possible, it would also be helpful to collect data on: the level of audience engagement with those news and information sources; the languages supported in each country; and budget and staffing figures for each country. For comparative purposes, it would also be helpful to collect similar data for CNN, the British Broadcasting Corporation, France Médias Monde, Voice of America, the Middle East Broadcasting Network, and Radio Free Asia.

The research project should also collect survey data from a representative sample of citizens in all of the 24 target countries. The survey should ask a series of questions designed to ascertain where people get news and information about world affairs and how they assess the reliability of various information sources. In addition, survey participants should be asked whether they have

155. *Id.* I excluded Iran from this list despite it satisfying all relevant criteria because I am working under the assumption that U.S. media companies have very little ability to influence public opinion in Iran.

156. *See* Excel database, *supra* note 150.

157. *World Bank Country and Lending Groups*, *supra* note 149.

a favorable or unfavorable view of China and whether they have a favorable or unfavorable view of the United States. The survey should include specific questions designed to elicit opinions about current events for which Chinese media present a very different “spin” than western media; such questions would shed light on the extent to which the opinions of survey participants align with Chinese or western views.

Overall, the central goal of the research project would be to assess the relative influence of Chinese media and western media on public opinion and public attitudes in key states in the global South. If implemented successfully, the project would produce valuable information that could help U.S. policy makers design better strategies and tactics for countering Chinese influence.

B. Three Policy Recommendations

U.S. policy makers clearly need better information about Chinese discourse power and the effects of Chinese discourse power to design and implement more effective policies. However, the U.S. government can and should take certain steps now, based on the admittedly limited information that is available.

First, Congress should enact legislation to ban Chinese state media companies from major social media platforms.¹⁵⁸ Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter are effectively subsidizing Chinese propaganda by granting CGTN, China Daily and other Chinese state media companies free, unrestricted access to social media platforms.¹⁵⁹ The United States government has made a major strategic blunder by looking the other way while some of this nation’s most powerful corporations provide electronic megaphones to amplify Chinese propaganda.¹⁶⁰ It is time to end this misguided policy—a policy that creates substantial foreign policy costs without any meaningful offsetting benefits.

Second, Congress should substantially increase the budget for the U.S. Agency for Global Media. The President requested a

158. See David L. Sloss, *The US Should Ban China's State Media from Social Platforms*, THE DIPLOMAT (May 19, 2022), <https://thediplomat.com/2022/05/the-us-should-ban-chinas-state-media-from-social-platforms/> [https://perma.cc/7U2X-NYAK].

159. See *id.*

160. See *id.*

budget of \$840 million for FY 2023.¹⁶¹ In contrast, one commentator estimates that “China’s ‘soft power’ budget comes to roughly \$10 billion a year, with much of that devoted to broadcasting.”¹⁶² Perhaps more importantly, though, AGM should re-think how that money is spent. A substantial portion of the AGM budget is spent on broadcasting to people in closed autocracies. For example, Radio Free Asia delivers news and information to people in six countries: Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, North Korea, and Vietnam.¹⁶³ Five of those six countries are closed autocracies; Cambodia is an electoral autocracy.¹⁶⁴ The Middle East Broadcasting Networks delivers programs in 22 countries,¹⁶⁵ including 14 closed autocracies and eight electoral autocracies.¹⁶⁶

Although there is clearly some value in delivering accurate news and information to the citizens of closed autocracies, those people have almost no capacity to influence government policies, precisely because they are living in closed autocracies. In contrast, the citizens of electoral autocracies and electoral democracies have at least a limited ability to influence their governments. If China is bombarding the citizens of electoral autocracies and electoral democracies with Chinese propaganda, then AGM should respond by devoting more of its resources to reaching audiences in those countries.

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161. *See Budget Submissions*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA, <https://www.usagm.gov/our-work/strategy-and-results/strategic-priorities/budget-submissions/> [https://perma.cc/9X9M-QRF3].
162. Dan Southerland, *With China Expanding Media Controls, Congress Must Fully Fund Radio Free Asia*, THE HILL (July 17, 2017, 3:00 PM), <https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/342371-with-china-expanding-media-controls-congress-must-fully-fund/> [https://perma.cc/4TGG-7J9X].
163. *See generally Radio Free Asia*, U.S. AGENCY FOR GLOB. MEDIA, <https://www.usagm.gov/networks/rfa/> [https://perma.cc/YV62-J5XW].
164. *See* Excel file, *supra* note 150.
165. *See generally* U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-06-762, U.S. INTERNATIONAL BROADCASTING: MANAGEMENT OF MIDDLE EAST BROADCASTING SERVICES COULD BE IMPROVED 10 n.8-9, 11-12 (2006). For these purposes, Palestine/Gaza and Palestine/West Bank count as two countries.
166. The classification of countries as closed autocracies and electoral autocracies is based on V-Dem data. *See* Excel file, *supra* note 150.

Finally, the Biden administration should launch a new program, backed by congressional funding, to subsidize exports of key digital technologies to countries in the global South that qualify as electoral democracies or electoral autocracies. In the modern digital age, there is a powerful linkage between technology and democracy. Chinese tech companies are actively promoting digital authoritarianism in the global South by exporting information and communications technologies that are optimized for surveillance and censorship. The U.S. government can and should subsidize U.S. exports of digital technologies to provide incentives for U.S. technology companies to offer an economically viable alternative to Chinese information and communications technology exports. However, any such subsidies should be contingent upon legally binding commitments from recipient governments to enact and implement laws and regulations that provide strong protection for individual privacy, data security, and freedom of expression.

