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CHINESE INFLUENCE IN AFRICA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON DEMOCRACY AND
AFRICAN PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the effect of Chinese investments on African democracies and the general public's perceptions on Chinese aid. While Chinese investments have been praised for contributing to economic development and growth, they have also provided technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence and surveillance systems) that make it easier for governments to suppress political opposition. In this project, I argue that the increased reliance and frequency of Chinese investments and infrastructure projects has not led to the erosion of democracy in Africa and that the general African public does not favor the "Chinese model" of governance over democracy despite Chinese-funded economic developments. To test this argument, I will collect data analyzing public perceptions of Chinese influence in Africa and compare it to data on democratic participation perceptions in Eswatini (a country without Chinese investments) and Uganda (a country with significant Chinese investment along with public official corruption data). My goal is to show that despite increased Chinese influence in the continent, Africans remain supporters of democracy and perceptions of democratic ideals and norms remain constant. The majority of Africans live near or below the poverty line and while they may have a desire to improve their country, their focus is on the more salient issue of providing food and shelter for themselves and their families. Policymakers should take note of the mindset of the general public in Africa when considering economic and aid policies aimed at supporting and enabling the local population to thrive.

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INTRODUCTION

My motivation behind writing this paper came from an initial interest in African politics that was bolstered by a desire to further understand the effects of foreign aid in developing countries. From my point of view, Africa stands to become the site of the next major economic boom with vast opportunities for growth that can propel any nation or entity that sees it as such. I also have an interest in Chinese foreign relations which is what ultimately brought my attention to this topic.

This paper aims to provide policy makers, specifically those responsible for providing foreign aid to Africa, a better understanding of African views towards foreign aid and democracy. Decision makers should be aware of the fact that the majority of the population in Africa simply do not see democracy or democratic ideals as the salient issue in their lives as poverty and malnourishment take center stage. While democratic practices do remain favorable among the majority of Africans, my research focuses on highlighting the fact that direct, quality of life improvement efforts towards Africans have the most impact on their perceptions towards foreign countries.

Existing research has compiled qualitative data on both the perceptions of foreign aid and democracy by Africans. Quantitative data on corruption and Freedom House data on democratic backsliding trends also help paint a complete picture of the situation. Most of the research done on Africa and the effects of foreign aid, specifically Chinese foreign aid, have been focused on explaining how it can potentially affect democratic ideals and political stability in Africa. While increases in government surveillance powers can be a catalyst for a breakdown of democratic

norms, my research shows that these practices remain constant and unaffected by Chinese influence.

(Background) The relationship between China and Africa goes back decades, with China-Africa trade transactions doubling every three to four years in the early 2000's and reaching over 160 billion dollars in 2011 (Brian O'Donnell, 2012). China has continued to increase its trade presence in Africa and has kept its position as the number one trading partner for the continent since 2009. A record high trade value of \$254 billion was recorded last year in 2021 as Chinese exports to the African continent rose despite supply chain constraints and shortages due to the COVID-19 pandemic (*Country (Region) Total Value Table of Import and Export Commodities in December 2021 (US Dollar Value)*, 2022).

This relationship has been built on the foundation of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (or FOCAC) that held its first meeting in 2000 and has held one every three years since. African heads of state and Chinese officials attend these meetings to facilitate trade deals, address poverty issues, coordinate cultural exchanges, and promote peace and security on the African continent (*FOCAC: Background and 2015 Focus Priorities - SAIIA*, 2015). For the Chinese, the forum provides an opportunity to promote their economic interests in the region and introduce proposals that safeguard those interests. For the African continent, this forum provides a chance to seek opportunities for more industrialization and improve the infrastructure on the continent.

China, with its willingness to invest capital and first-hand experience in industrializing rural areas, is well-equipped to provide Africa with their needs. It is a common perception that they have the tools to provide such assistance. Wu Jia Huang, a People's Republic of China

official that worked on World Trade Organization affairs, spoke to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization on the Chinese model of success for developing countries (Sautman & Hairong, 2007). Wu stressed the importance of China's low-tariff and low-subsidy policies that provide developing countries equal chances to compete with China on the global market. Essentially, Wu was calling out Western officials by saying that China had more consistent practices when it comes to supporting developing countries and not obstructing their growth. The rough history between the West and imperialism in Africa combined with this distinctively supportive and generous link from China makes Chinese aid stand out in the minds of Africans.

It is not just China that is contributing to this narrative. The West, in particular the United States, has been vocal about its affairs in Africa by stressing that interests are what drives its involvement not friendship. A dialogue between a Rwandan human rights activist and a congressional staffer summed up the attitude the United States has perfectly: "The United States has no friends. The United States has interests. And in the United States, there is no interest in Rwanda. And we are not interested in sending young American Marines to bring them back in coffins. We have no incentive" (*Transcript / Ghosts Of Rwanda / FRONTLINE / PBS*, 2004). Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State of the United States, once said himself that the United States has no permanent friends or enemies, only interests. This narrative plays into the relationship the United States has with China as well, specifically the opening of relations with the People's Republic of China in the Nixon era. President Nixon and Kissinger saw past the anti-communist stance to see a more profitable and beneficial future for American interests in Asia. This practice of realpolitik, policies based on the practical rather than the moral, is what Africa has come to expect from the United States in its dealings.

One of the most prominent examples of Chinese influence in Africa has been the Belt and Road initiative that China launched in 2013. The Belt and Road initiative aims to expand Chinese political and economic power by providing a variety of development and investment opportunities for countries from Central Asia all the way to Africa. The BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) consists of two aspects: the economic land belt and the maritime silk road (Andrew Chatzky & James McBride, 2020). Some notable examples of infrastructure projects currently undertaken under the BRI include the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway in Ethiopia and Djibouti along with the Isimba Hydroelectric Power Station in Uganda. The Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway connects Ethiopia to the seaport in Djibouti where over 95% of Ethiopia's trade passes through (*Ethiopia's New Coastal Rail Link Runs through Restive Region*, 2016). China's Export-Import Bank lent over three billion US dollars for Ethiopia and Djibouti to complete their respective sections of the railway project. The reliance that African countries have started to show for Chinese investment is evident in this case, with this project's success and completion contingent on Chinese investment and vital to the national economies of Ethiopia and Djibouti. The Isimba Hydroelectric Power Station in Uganda is another example of Chinese reliance. Core infrastructure projects that bring critical services to the populace in African countries are being mostly funded by Chinese money. As African countries seek to build and improve their infrastructure and bring their economies to global markets, they find themselves stuck with only one choice when it comes to funding these projects: China.

Although reliance on any foreign power for critical infrastructure needs is never ideal, the trend towards increased Chinese involvement comes as a result of necessity for African nations as they look for sources of funding and help. This does not necessarily mean that African nations

have fully embraced the “China model.” Public opinion towards Chinese involvement in Africa is positive, but opinions towards China’s political model tend to stay fairly negative in Africa. Corruption of African government officials do not seem to be affected as well. Data from Afrobarometer shows that corruption of public officials has stayed relatively constant throughout China’s involvement in Africa and have in some cases actually decreased.

Western ideals of democracy still hold merit in the heart and minds of the African populace despite increased Chinese presence and the association of it with economic growth. Democratic participation trends in countries where there are heavy amounts of Chinese investments remain high. In Uganda, where the Isimba Hydroelectric Power Plant is located, participation in democracy has remained stable with no significant changes in either direction. Data from the V-Dem database shows that both corruption and democratic participation trends have remained stable for the past fourteen years, well before China’s initial Belt and Road Initiative push in 2013-14. As a result, it is logical to conclude that while Chinese investments have made Africans more stable economically that is certainly not the case when it comes to African political preferences.

A key reason for this type of behavior is the idea of scarcity and the salient issue on the minds of the African population. Scarcity at the essential food and sustenance level causes the mind to tunnel or focus exclusively on managing the scarcity at hand. This focus on obtaining enough food and water affects other thoughts by effectively blocking them out from consideration since they are not related to the goal: obtaining enough food. 34% of Africans live below the world poverty line at \$1.90 in wages per day while 80% of Africans earn under \$5.50 per day (*Facts and Figures* / UNCTAD, 2021). While the situation in Africa has improved over

the years, there is still a significant portion of the population living near or at the poverty line. Therefore, the massive amount of Chinese investment dollars that come in to fund the mega infrastructure projects do not have as much of an influence on the population. The salient issue for the majority of the African population is to get enough food and essentials to go about their day. Massive railway networks and brand-new seaports do not hold the same importance as those essentials.

Policy makers should take note of the African population's mindset when making key decisions in Africa. African political leaders should see that while major infrastructure projects signal progress and economic strength for the country, it's citizens may prefer to fund initiatives more related to their everyday predicaments. Foreign countries that are looking to provide aid to Africa can take note of this mindset as well. As foreign countries invest more of their resources to help the African population, they might consider funding more projects related to ensuring that those in poverty have access to necessities.

Difference in Perceptions

While the West views Africa as a source of instability, China sees it as a source of opportunity and raw materials. This is evidenced through bias that leaders of the West and China have expressed. While China maintains an official stance that they celebrate Africa and its unique cultural differences, the West have referred to Africa as the "cradle for HIV/AIDS" and a haven for terrorists (Sautman & Hairong, 2007). This is reflected in the type of deals that the West makes to Africa as well. The Western world comes into negotiations with the mindset of changing or improving Africa's current situation through their deals. The West typically ties

certain human rights benchmarks or agreements to have election monitors to their dealings in Africa. While this is an effective way to ensure issues are addressed, they are simply too complicated, and the efforts needed to achieve these goals in Africa can last many years.

For the government, these deals are not as beneficial as money deals would be. While help is welcomed, these deals present more obstacles that these countries prefer to have much simpler deals that only deal with one issue at hand.

China is the one that can provide these services. China is a one stop shop when it comes to providing anything the African continent needs and the Chinese are happy to invest. China has no obligation or need to balance multiple interests or considerations; they simply make deals.

There have been questions as to why the United States has lost a lot of its “soft power” in Africa, and that question can be answered by comparing the United States and China. Although the United States has long been regarded as the one global superpower, the United States does not have any effective and efficient processes for developing nations, especially when it comes to infrastructure. The current state of infrastructure in the United States tells the story. Crumbling bridges, 150-year-old essential tunnels, and lack of a strong railroad network domestically does not present the image or show that the United States has the expertise to guide developing countries on how to build up (The B1M, 2021).

China on the other hand has been on a domestic building binge since the beginning of the millennium and continue to do so. Their expertise in building railways and other economic infrastructure is exactly what Africa needs right now (The B1M, 2021). Simple deals combined with expertise knowledge on how to build critical infrastructure is their selling point. In fact,

China has publicly stated that their “China model” of economic growth should be copied by developing countries and they are happy to help (Sautman & Hairong, 2007).

African perceptions towards education in foreign countries is different between Western nations and China as well. The perceptions towards the West trend more negatively as Africans who train and get educated in the West tend to stay in the West. This phenomenon is called a brain drain, where highly skilled workers of a country leave to go work in another country, depriving their home country’s economy of a skilled worker. Meanwhile, Africans who train and get educated in China do not have the same stigmas (Sautman & Hairong, 2007). Africans welcome the idea of an education in China because they are designed for short stints that don’t encourage Africans to stay in China. Once the education and skills are received, they move back to Africa and can apply the skills they learned there.

History also plays a role here as Africans see the West as former colonizers. This mindset has Africans seeing the West’s education programs as “taking away” or stealing the talent in Africa for the advancement of the West (Zezeza, 2008). Due to China’s history of also being controlled by foreign powers at one point, Africans do not have the same perceptions towards China as they do the West.

So, What’s the Catch?

As China builds and funds more construction projects in Africa, what are some of the negative effects? It is evident that there are certainly a multitude of positives that come from the projects themselves and the economic impact they will have, but what is the cost to these countries?

The answer lies in the loans and quid pro quo of the deals that make these projects possible. Let's take the Nairobi-Mombasa Railway link in Kenya as an example. 90% of the total construction cost, or 4.5 billion dollars, was funded by China's Exim Bank to build this project. For developing countries, this is a staggering amount of debt to pay back and will take decades. This sort of payment requires consistent economic growth to ensure that these payments can be met, but countries still struggle. Kenya has struggled to pay back its loans as its monthly payments are currently around one million dollars each month (Yusuf, 2020). Kenyan media reports also state that overcompensation of certain employees who helped build the railway line were also present. Over 1.3 million US dollars was paid out to five engineers in charge of the construction of the railway. Okiya Omtata, an activist fighting the government on overspending for the railway, argues that the cost of construction for the entire railway was inflated due to instances such as this (Yusuf, 2020).

Another issue with railways deals in particular is the conformity to railway standards. China builds on a standard that only China uses; the rest of the world uses the standard gauge system. This difference means that while China can provide crucial assistance in quickly building a railway, Kenya is tied to China for any future parts or repairs they may need to do on the project (Yusuf, 2020). This essentially binds Kenya to China for decades to come and is a concerning situation for both its citizens and the Western world. While the project has no doubt improved the lives of Kenyans by slashing travel times in half, the short-term outlook is bleak for Kenya's money reserves (The BIM, 2021). However, large infrastructure projects such as railways do take time to express their full potential.

One thing to note in correction of a common misconception is that Chinese companies only employ or prefer to employ Chinese workers. Research has been done into this to prove that Chinese companies employ just as many workers as non-Chinese companies in country and in fact usually pay more (Kartik Jayaram et al., 2017). Chinese companies, and therefore investments, do not deprive local Africans of jobs and opportunities as critics have claimed. While certain skill sets such as railway parts production may not be given to African nations, the front end of these deals are straightforward and do provide opportunities for Africans.

There is also the issue of quid pro quo in building infrastructure projects. In Djibouti, the Chinese government has built its first overseas naval base as a part of China's effort to modernize its military and gain capabilities of launching operations from beyond its borders (*China Formally Opens First Overseas Military Base in Djibouti / Reuters, 2017*). A year later, the Chinese government announced plans to run a potable water pipeline along the route of the Addis Ababa – Djibouti Railway, transporting groundwater from Ethiopia into Djibouti. These types of relationships also play out onto the international stage as well. Djibouti was part of a group of 50 countries in 2019 that sent a letter to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights voicing support for China's platform on the alleged ethnic cleansing claims of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang province (Bruce Sterling, 2019).

Case Example 1: Uganda

Uganda-China relations have been on good terms since the beginning of their relationship. After Uganda's independence in 1962, diplomatic relations were established between the two countries, and both have supported each other on the world stage. Uganda was

one of the countries that voted for the UN resolution that restored the People's Republic of China's membership back into the UN. China has supported Uganda when other nations have abandoned it, most notably when Western nations withdrew support from Uganda following the passage of an Anti-Homosexuality Act that sought to prohibit sexual relations between the same sex. This relationship continues in large part due to the policy of non-interference in political affairs that the two countries share (Obwona et al., 2007). This allows both countries to uphold cooperation agreements and exchange student programs without the interference of conflicting interests.

However, Chinese Multi-National Corporations (MNC's) have recently supplied the Ugandan government with facial recognition technology that can and have been used to bolster certain political interests for those in power. In 2019, Chinese telecom company Huawei began to supply the Ugandan government with its own facial recognition technology systems (Stephen Kafeero, 2020). In November of 2020, amid anti-government protests, the Ugandan government authorized the use of these facial recognition systems to track and identify over 836 dissidents suspected of being supporters of opposition leader Bobi Wine. Although such technology was sold in the name of improving law enforcement capabilities in the African country, they have been inevitably used for political purposes. These same facial recognition systems have also been sold to other African countries namely Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, and Zambia. Through Huawei's "Safe City" program of providing products essential for security and policing in a modern world, the concern is that authoritarianism is being exported out of China and into Africa.

Major projects funded by China through the Belt and Road Initiative are in Uganda as well. Notably, the Isimba Hydropower Plant and the newly constructed Kampala-Entebbe Expressway that connects the capital city to the country’s biggest airport. The expressway cuts travel time from the capital to the airport from a little over two hours to just under 30 minutes. The project was primarily funded by China’s Exis Bank to the tune of 350 million U.S. dollars through a loan (Stephen Kafeero, 2012).

Perceptions of corruption, however, have remained relatively stable throughout Africa and Uganda. V-Dem data in Figure 2 shows the overall trend from China’s first BRI announcement to 2020. Corruption trends have remained steady and show that increased Chinese influence has not changed the perception of the integrity of public officials.

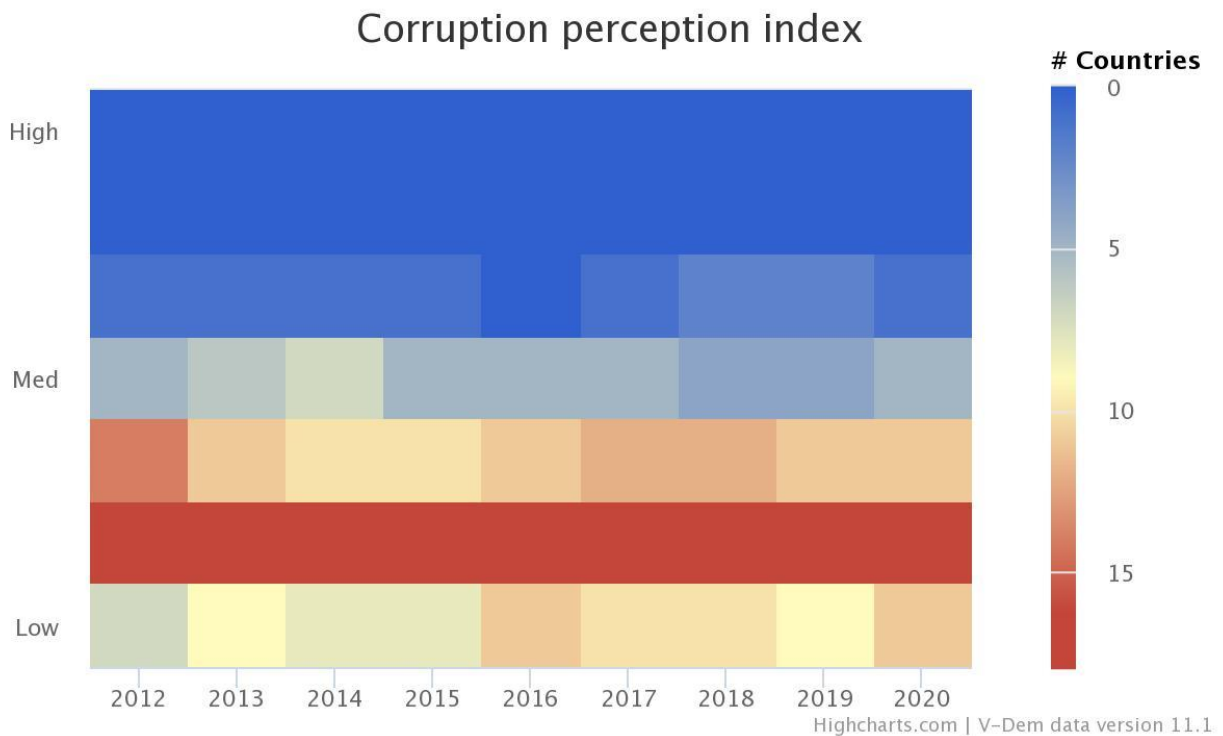


Figure 2. Corruption perception index V-Dem data.

Although Uganda is rated as “Not free” by Freedom House due to its corrupt and scripted elections, Uganda still enjoys a vibrant and free press with the exception of a few incidents of legal harassment and violence. While it is by no means a fully-fledged democracy, democratic processes are in place, they are just dominated and controlled by the ruling party and president since 1986. With the investments from China and the new facial recognition systems however, corruption remains steady in Uganda. According to the Uganda Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, there has been no significant change in corruption practices for the past decade (Figure 3). From 2012 to 2021, the score had a standard deviation of 1.2, indicating that scores have remained stable.

Score changes 2012 - 2021

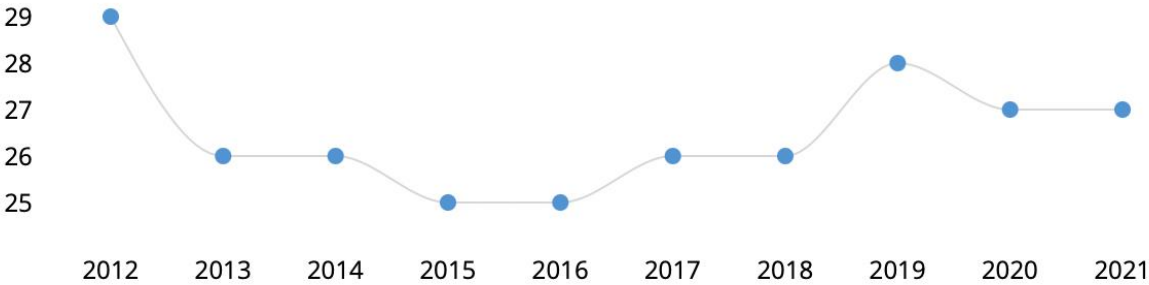


Figure 3: Uganda Corruption Perceptions Index – Transparency International.

The data above shows that Chinese influence in Uganda has not influenced significant changes in harm towards the integrity of government officials in the country (*2021 Corruption Perceptions Index - Explore Uganda’s Results*, n.d.). While corruption is still present, the

argument that increased Chinese influence in Africa erodes the country's last remnants of a democracy is unproven.

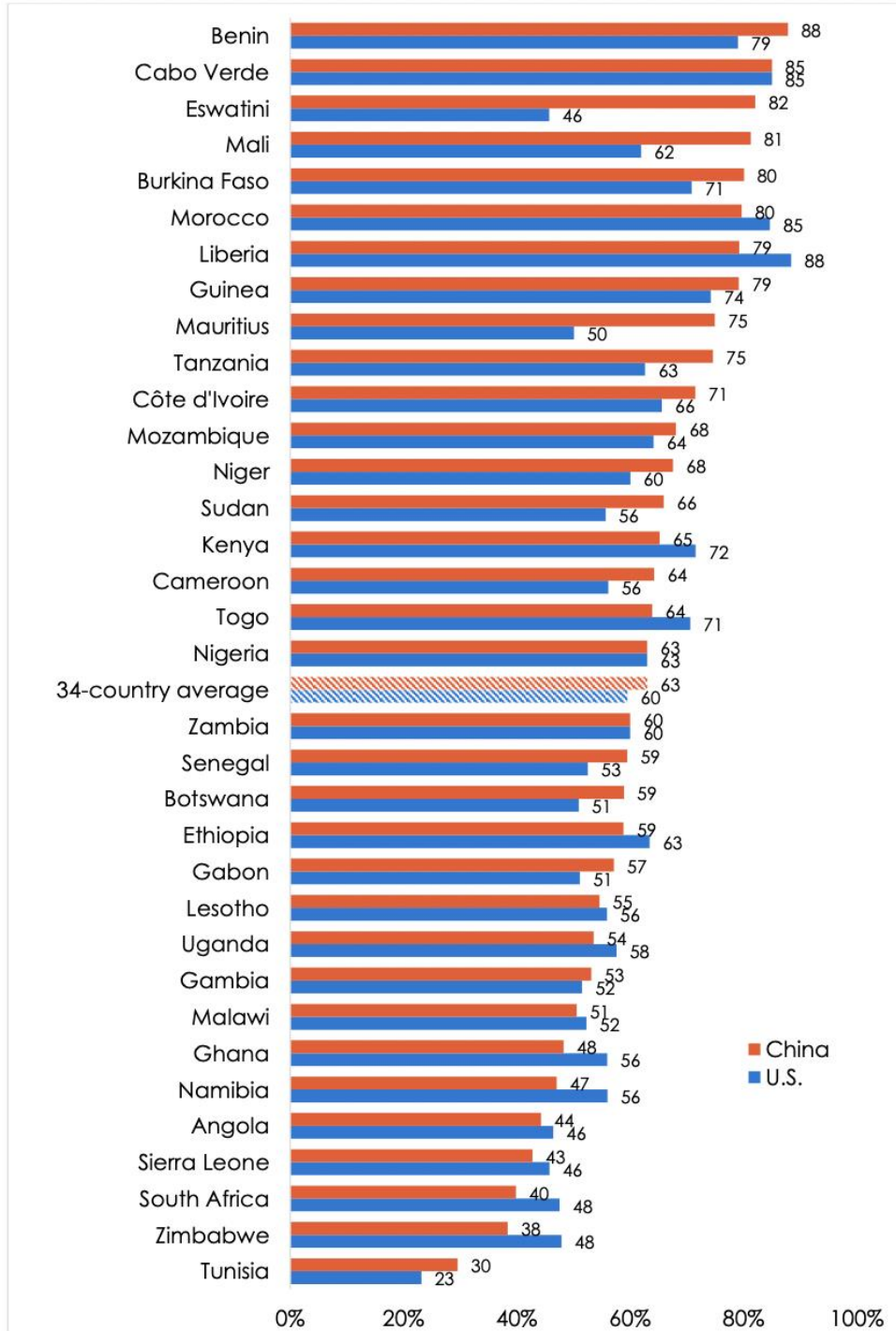
Case Example 2: Eswatini

Eswatini, a landlocked country located in South Africa, is a unique case in that it is the only African country that does not diplomatically recognize the People's Republic of China and instead recognizes the Republic of China (Taiwan). China, who has long regarded Taiwan as a runaway province, has implemented a strategy of isolating the ROC's ever-dwindling roster of countries it shares formal diplomatic relations with. As a result, Chinese aid and investments do not enter the country as per this global strategy. This makes Eswatini an interesting case for comparison to Uganda. On one hand, we have a country that embraces its relationship with China and goes the extra mile at times to keep that relationship as pristine as possible. On the other hand, we have a country that does not even formally interact with Chinese officials and instead accepts aid and cooperation agreements from a country China claims as its own. Both sides have autocratic governments and pro-democracy movements that in recent years, have grown in size and relevancy in each respective country's political landscapes.

Although Eswatini has been pro-Taiwan in its diplomatic efforts with presidential visits and regular cross-cultural exchanges, data collected from on the ground interviews in Eswatini reveals an interesting discovery. Afrobarometer, one of the top research networks in Africa, asked respondents in Eswatini for their thoughts on the economic and political influence of China and the United States and whether or not it is a positive outlook or a negative one. The results of the study found that while 82% of respondents believed China was a positive force in

Africa, a mere 46% found the US to be a positive influence (*Perception of China's Influence in Africa by Country 2021, n.d.*).

Figure 4: Positive Influence: China vs. U.S. | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: Do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following countries on [your country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")

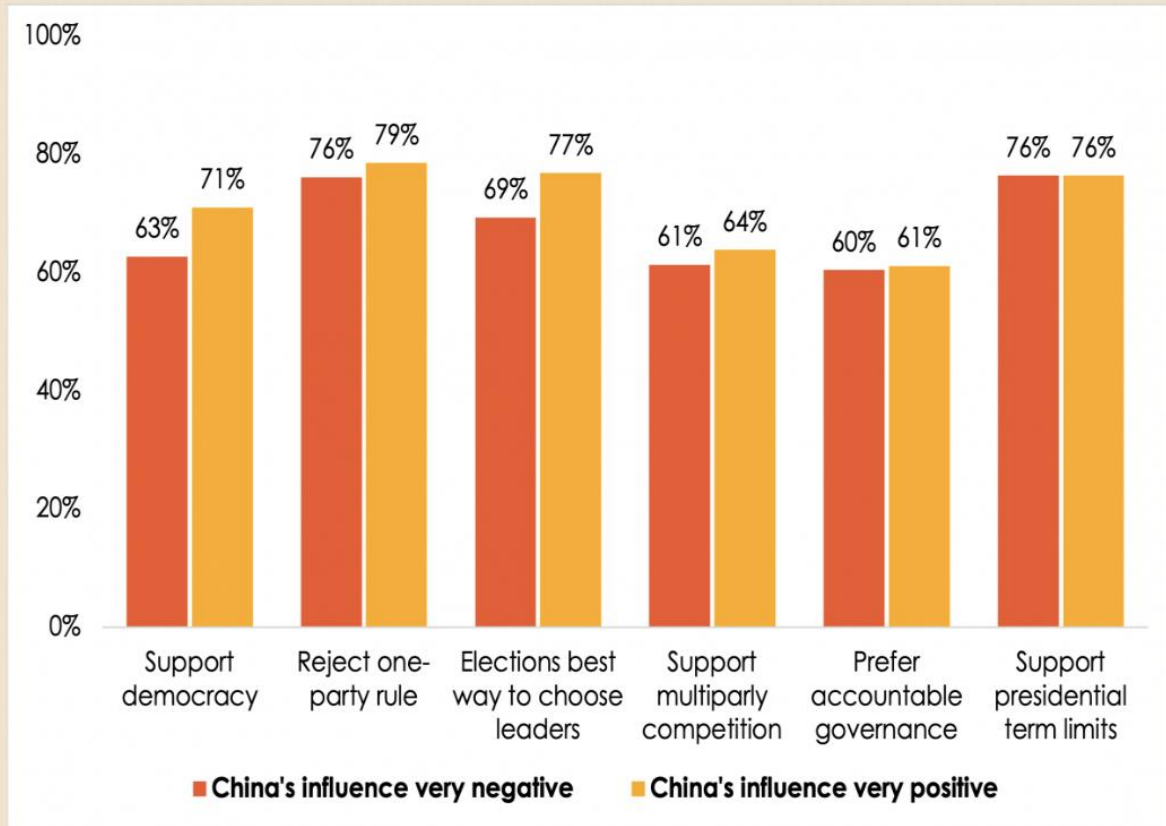
It is important to note that while the Eswatini government is pro-Taiwan, they are not pro-democracy. The autocratic government's fight against pro-democracy protestors plays a role in establishing that the results of this study reflect the case that African perceptions on democracy are not affected by China's growing positive influence in Africa. While the general population of Eswatini are in strong support of democratic systems for their country, they are also the same population that view China as a positive force in their lives.

This viewpoint is held despite the lack of aid or investments from China to Eswatini. Formal trade and relations are not in place and are used as a carrot for Eswatini to switch allegiances to the PRC. Without the economic aid that comes with PRC recognition, it is curious to see that Eswatini citizens still see China in this positive light since their exposure to China is fairly limited. It is possible however that such influences come from the surrounding region where China's investments have been prominent.

General African Perceptions

These trends in support for democratic norms and institutions hold true throughout Africa as well. While Chinese influence may be increasing, Africans remain committed to democracy regardless of Chinese influence. In Figure 4, we see that both those who support Chinese influence and those who don't have equal perceptions towards democracy (*China Has Invested Deeply in Africa. We Checked to See Whether That Is Undermining Democracy. / Afrobarometer, n.d.*).

Figure 2: Support for democratic norms and institutions, by perceptions of China's influence | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Case Study Selection Justification

When selecting these case studies, I wanted to have a balanced comparison that weighed both autocratic regimes and democracies along with ones that have Chinese investments and ones that do not. As the only “untouched” example of an African country by Chinese investments, Eswatini was a natural choice among the other African nations as a control.

Uganda on the other hand was due to its extreme ties with China, more so than any other African nation. It’s consistent intake of Chinese investments and unique history with China made

it the perfect candidate to test for any influence Chinese investments may have had on the Ugandan population.

Results

It is clear from the data presented that Africans still hold democracy in high regard, whether as an ideal or in practice. However, Africans are also looking for the most expedient process to growing their economy and providing enough critical resources for all their citizens and families. Simply put, China remains the go-to option for African needs because of its ability to provide economic aid without strings attached. The Western world can provide the same aid but adds on human rights or corruption benchmarks as a condition of accepting these aid packages, sometimes even delaying the packages until the desired results are met.

Food is a daily need that needs to be filled as soon as possible when supplies start to run low. Power, water, and sewage systems are needed today to help bring Africans out of poverty and into a healthier, cleaner world.

I believe that based on the data we have on hand right now, presently there is no implications on democracy in Africa. Corruption trends prove to be steady and public perception of the Chinese model of governance polls significantly lower than democracy/ the Western model (Figure 3). As Chinese investments increase in African countries, many are still conducting business as usual except for a new debt owed to China.

Public perception of democracy also remains high throughout Africa as a whole. Although data on individual countries is not present nor available, we can infer based on the overall democratic participation index and the public perception towards corruption that African

democracy is not put at more risk than it already is at currently. African countries continue to accept Chinese investments for economic purposes rather than political purposes. Chinese deals represent a politically and economically expedient process that can provide these countries with resources they need to build with today. The allure of Chinese efficiency and expertise in building up developing nations is unparalleled and their own success is enough of a reputation to convince anyone that China is the premier force for nation building in this decade.

Analysis

The data we collected has been comprehensive in telling us a snapshot of the current situation in Africa and its effects on the people there. However, the road to loan repayment is measured in decades not years. This means that Chinese influence and power will remain in these African countries far longer than what we even currently have in data on democratic trends.

One of the most concerning issues in the “exporting authoritarianism” aspect is the introduction of the facial recognition systems into the hands of African governments. Although many of these countries with the facial recognition technology are already fairly autocratic and rated as “Not free” on Freedom House (Uganda, Eswatini), there are more democratic countries on the list of those receiving this kind of technology. Some of these are the strongest democracies in Africa, with South Africa, Botswana, and Ghana all leading in Freedom House’s Freedom index but also all involved in purchases of the new facial recognition technology. It will be interesting to see how these democracies use this technology in a way that is not abusive towards the ideals of civil liberties that are a core part of a democratic society. Although it is

possible that such technology can be solely used for police enforcement, the lengths to which enforcement is conducted can change over time and may start to include political arrests.

Such practices are already prevalent in autocratic countries that have adopted such systems. In Uganda, the arrest of hundreds of dissidents in anti-government protests raises the question of is this the beginning of a potential shift towards full on authoritarianism?

Worrying trends have already started in the shift towards authoritarianism. As part of the negotiation process for an adjusted payment plan on loans, Zambia voiced support for the Chinese crackdown on Hong Kong to stay on China's good side. This evidence of soft power playing onto the world stage would seem to indicate that future relations will tend to stray this way (Lawler, 2020). If debts towards China continue to pile up in Africa, African nations will be more inclined to side with Chinese interests in times of hardship (like the coronavirus).

It is notable to address the connection between China's use of facial recognition technology and the country's that have made statements supporting China's position on the ethnic cleansing in the Xinjiang province and the clamp down on protesters in Hong Kong. Protesters in Hong Kong can be compared to the Ugandan anti-government protesters that were rounded up in the first use of the facial recognition technology. Both groups were anti-government protesters and both groups fell victim to facial recognition systems. Curiously, Uganda was the first African nation to come out in support of the Chinese government in Hong Kong and the only one to do it so intensely. Uganda's Foreign Ministry released a statement in October of 2019 reiterating the "One China" policy and that "Hong Kong's affairs are China's domestic affairs" (Athumani, 2019). Although statements do not always translate to action, it is concerning the trend/precedent that this might set for African countries with debts to China.

Governments may feel pressured to fall in line behind China's interests in order to protect their economy or ensure that they are still in contention for more infrastructure loans. This "debt trap" has been well documented, but the addition of democratic backsliding and a leaning towards authoritarianism through the export of authoritative tools is a new concern and aspect that should have more attention brought to it.

The Xinjiang province in China and its ethnic cleansing allegations are also concerning. With the growing ties between China and Africa, the concern is that such practices may be exported to countries with susceptible minorities that have faced violence and harassment in the past. Africa's history of being divided up by its colonial overlords in the 1800's by convenience means that the border lines of the African country's drawn today have little relevance to the location of ethnic groups and their peoples. Borders were drawn to determine separation of land, and in doing so has created minority populations all over Africa that are vulnerable to abuse and harassment.

In the Central African Republic in 2014, Muslim rebels took control of government but were forced to stand down as Christian militias committed ethnic cleansing practices towards the civilian Muslim population (Tim Whewell, 2014). There is also the more recent Tigray conflict that boiled over in the fall of 2020 in Ethiopia where there have been atrocities committed by Ethiopian soldiers against civilian populations (Mackintosh, 2021). Both are just examples of potential conflicts that can be exacerbated by the introduction of facial recognition technology. Enemies could be more easily identified and the group in power can keep track of the entire country's movements.

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