

CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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IMAGE OF THE MONTH

A Heroic Husband's Return

This was one of [many photos and videos](#) circulating online after Chinese human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang was finally reunited with his wife and seven-year-old son on April 27, almost five years after being taken away by police. Wang was jailed over his work defending religious prisoners and political activists in China, and held incommunicado for much of his time in detention. After his release from prison in Shandong Province in early April, police prevented him from returning to his family in Beijing, but relented after his wife Li Wenzu—an outspoken advocate on his behalf—fell suddenly ill. Although censored in China, the family's long-awaited reunion was widely reported by international and diaspora Chinese media. A [short video](#) of the couple embracing was itself viewed nearly half a million times on YouTube.



ANALYSIS

Welcome to the New Era of Chinese Disinformation

By Sarah Cook

Sarah Cook is a senior research analyst for China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan at Freedom House, as well as director of its [China Media Bulletin](#).

The coronavirus fallout is hastening Beijing's shift toward covert, Russian-style tactics.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has long sought to influence the media and information space in other countries, and the effort has intensified over the [past decade](#). Much of the activity is overt—diplomats publishing op-eds or state-run news outlets generating propaganda. While some covert tactics were also documented, for many years there was no significant evidence that Chinese actors were engaging in aggressive disinformation campaigns like the one pursued by Russia on global social media platforms ahead of the 2016 US elections. That has now changed.

Over the past month alone, a series of exposés demonstrated that pro-Beijing actors are carrying out a whole range of covert activities in multiple countries and languages. The campaigns aim to spread proven falsehoods, sow societal discord and panic, manipulate perceptions of public opinion, or undermine the democratic process.

Evidence revealed [last year](#) indicated that some Chinese-language campaigns had begun on platforms like Twitter as early as April 2017, but the latest round of incidents and investigations points to a more definitive shift in Chinese influence operations. It remains to be seen how foreign governments, technology companies, global internet users, and even the CCP's own propaganda apparatus will adapt to the challenges presented by this change. Whatever their response, it is clear that a new era of disinformation has dawned.

Sowing local divisions on a global scale

Since March, coordinated and covert attempts by China-linked actors to manipulate information—[particularly regarding COVID-19](#)—have been detected in countries including the United States, Argentina, Serbia, Italy, and Taiwan, with the relevant content often delivered in local languages.

Moreover, in a departure from Beijing's more traditional censorship and propaganda campaigns, the narratives being promoted are not necessarily focused on advancing positive views and suppressing negative views of China.

For example, in an analysis of China-related Twitter posts disseminated in Serbia between March 9 and April 9 by automated “bot” accounts, the [Digital Forensics Center](#) found that the messages praised China for supplying aid during the coronavirus pandemic (much like a similar effort in [Italy](#)). But the posts also amplified criticism of the European Union for supposedly failing to do the same, despite the fact that the bloc actually provided millions of euros in assistance.

Elsewhere, disinformation attempts have tried to sow discord within other countries.

In Argentina, a Chinese agent hired a local intermediary to approach editors from at least three news outlets in early April, according to the [Falun Dafa Information Center](#). The broker allegedly offered to pay approximately \$300 if they published a prewritten article in Spanish that smeared the [Falun Gong](#) spiritual group, which is persecuted in China, including by suggesting local citizens who practice Falun Gong could pose a threat to public health in Argentina. All of the approached outlets reportedly rejected the offer.



The first tweet in a campaign to impersonate Taiwanese users and apologize to WHO director Tedros for alleged racist attacks, using the hashtag #saysrytoTedros. Credit: [ASPI](#)

In other cases, the manipulated content shared had no connection to China at all. In a campaign in the United States reported by the [New York Times](#), text and social media messages amplified by China-linked accounts in mid-March carried false warnings about a nationwide lockdown and troop deployments to prevent looting and rioting. The campaign was an apparent attempt to incite public panic and increase distrust in the U.S. government.

The [Australian Strategic Policy Institute](#) documented another recent example in which coordinated campaigns by nationalistic Chinese netizens—whose precise links to the Chinese state remain uncertain—attempted to harm Taiwan’s international reputation and its relationship with the United States. A network of 65 Twitter accounts that had previously posted in mainland-style Simplified Chinese abruptly switched to Traditional Chinese characters, thereby impersonating Taiwanese citizens. They then posted messages expressing apologies to the Ethiopian-born director general of the World Health Organization, lending false credence to [allegations](#) he voiced that racist slurs were directed against him from Taiwan. In [April](#), some of the accounts also jumped on an existing Iranian-linked Twitter campaign calling for California’s secession from the United States, trying to give the impression that Taiwanese users supported California’s independence. (This effort was likely undermined by their referring to the island as “Taiwan (CHN).”)

Evolving tactics and new platforms

The March campaign in the United States underscored some of the evolving tactics of China-linked disinformation campaigns. While platforms like Facebook and Twitter remain important battlegrounds, recent investigations indicate a shift toward text messages and encrypted messaging applications. Due to their more atomized structures, monitoring and countering disinformation on these channels is more difficult than on Facebook and Twitter.

A recent report by [Recorded Future](#) found that, ahead of the January 2020 general elections in Taiwan, Chinese content farms used artificial intelligence “to generate massive volumes of content” that was then spread to Taiwanese users in an attempt to under-

mine the electoral prospects of incumbent president Tsai Ing-wen and her Democratic Progressive Party. The research group also cited evidence that China-based actors had deployed a tool developed by a Chinese company that enables batch posting and sharing of content across multiple platforms. Analysts believe the tool was deployed in Taiwan “because these technologies can ease the spread of weaponized content at scale, especially on closed messaging platforms such as LINE, where Taiwanese users frequently reshare content.”

But low-tech tactics are also being used. Over the past year, numerous reports have emerged of China-linked actors seeking out Chinese-speaking social media influencers with international followings, offering to [purchase their accounts](#) or [pay them to post certain information](#). Other reports indicate that this practice is not limited to Chinese speakers, but also extends to individuals like an [English-speaking Canadian YouTuber](#).

Prospects for growth and potential risks

Much about China-linked overseas disinformation campaigns remains unknown. Indeed, the examples above are likely just the tip of the iceberg. Given the visible efforts by Chinese diplomats and state media to shore up the government’s reputation and downplay its responsibility for repressive measures in Wuhan that contributed to the global coronavirus outbreak, it seems reasonable to assume that covert Twitter bot campaigns have occurred in additional countries, particularly in Europe. There also appears to be some evidence of cross-fertilization among Russian, Iranian, and Chinese disinformation networks, although the degree of actual premeditated coordination is unclear.

The [WeChat social media platform](#), owned by the Chinese company Tencent, is a potentially influential channel for political disinformation and content manipulation, with more than 100 million users outside China. A study published this week by Toronto’s [Citizen Lab](#) found systematic surveillance of posts by users registered abroad, with evidence of scanning for politically sensitive terms. The researchers found no evidence of systematic deletions, but the monitoring and collection of such data opens the door to manipulation, including on topics of electoral consequence in democracies.

The Chinese government is not the only actor currently experimenting with Russian-style disinformation campaigns. The latest edition of Freedom House’s [Freedom on the Net](#) report found evidence of malign digital electoral interference by various government, nongovernmental, and partisan forces in 26 countries, though most acted within their borders rather than trying to influence other countries. But the CCP presides over one of the world’s most repressive regimes and an economy second only to that of the United States. If it invests heavily in this new approach to international influence, it will pose enormous challenges to democratic governments, technology firms, and internet users.

This sphere of activity also poses a challenge for the CCP itself. Once exposed, disinformation campaigns that spread falsehoods and sow divisions in other societies undermine a key dimension of Beijing’s foreign propaganda narrative, one that it has

invested heavily in promoting over the past three decades: that China's rise is peaceful, that the regime is benign, and that political, economic, and media engagement with a CCP-led China is a win-win prospect for all involved. It is difficult to predict whether and how the party will try to reconcile this contradiction. For the time being, the global disinformation campaigns show no sign of abating.

IN THE NEWS

State propaganda, content manipulation, and a global pandemic reinforce nationalism, xenophobia, and information isolation

With the spread of the pandemic in China slowly coming under control—even as the crisis worsens in other countries—Chinese state media has drawn on [long-standing nationalist narratives](#) to defend the Communist Party's response to COVID-19 and highlight the failures of democratic governments.

But with public fears growing in China of a second wave of infections, suspicion has been cast upon a new target: foreigners. In cities across China, businesses have cited the risk of COVID-19 as grounds for [denying service](#) to non-Chinese customers. Others have described [a growing climate of xenophobia](#). This trend has been driven in part by distorted media coverage: despite the Foreign Affairs Ministry's announcement that [90 percent of new infections](#) imported from abroad are from Chinese passport holders, Chinese media reports often [imply](#) that new cases are tied to foreign residents and travelers.

This combination of coronavirus-related panic and xenophobia has been most apparent in Guangzhou, in Guangdong Province. In April, municipal authorities there came under intense scrutiny in the wake of widespread discrimination against the city's African residents. A Chinese media report on April 7 of [five Nigerians breaking quarantine](#) led to unfounded rumors of a second wave of COVID-19 infections among African residents. Videos and photos soon emerged of African residents [sleeping on the streets](#) after being thrown out of their homes and denied access to hotel rooms. In one case, a local McDonald's even posted a [sign](#) stating that black people were barred from entering. Numerous African nations [condemned](#) the treatment of their citizens, while the US State Department [warned](#) African Americans from visiting the city. In response, on May 2, Guangdong Province [announced](#) measures aimed at preventing service providers from discriminating against people on the basis of nationality, race, gender, or skin color.

Foreign residents have not been the only targets of popular and official nationalist anger. In early January, noted Wuhan-based author Fang Fang began [publishing](#) a popular online diary recounting life under lockdown, in often critical terms. Despite censorship, her writings were accessible through a variety of workaround methods, and became popular among many Chinese. Yet the announcement that her diary would be pub-

lished in an English translation led to an [outpouring](#) of online nationalist anger against the author for her supposed willingness to criticize China to foreign audiences. Supporters of Fang Fang have also been targeted: on April 26, Hubei University announced that it was [investigating](#) Liang Yanping, a professor, after she used her social media account to express support for Fang Fang. Even ordinary Wuhan residents who have wondered if the outbreak was avoidable [have been threatened online](#). Fang Fang, however, has not been silent. After a poster denouncing Fang Fang was [posted](#) at sites across Wuhan—its format generating comparisons to the Cultural Revolution—she took to her Weibo account to note that if the poster’s author had written about “‘democracy and freedom’ or ‘asset declaration for government officials,’ he would probably already be at the police station.”

The combination of intense censorship of information portraying the Chinese government negatively, alongside coverage highlighting the virus spread elsewhere and claims it originated outside China, has created an information bubble separating many Chinese news consumers from the rest of the world. New policy measures are also extending restrictions to video-game enthusiasts. Chinese authorities banned the popular online game [Animal Crossing](#) after prodemocracy activists from Hong Kong used it to post satirical content about Chinese and Hong Kong officials, and there are reports that some local governments are drafting rules to [prevent gamers from chatting with players outside China](#); these will only reinforce the separation. In this context, Professor Haifeng Huang told [Politico](#) many Chinese “may not be aware” that the COVID-19 crisis “has actually worsened international opinion toward China.”

Bad news and good for China’s activists: harsh sentences, new arrests, long-awaited releases

As Wuhan and other parts of China have emerged from coronavirus-triggered lockdowns, the country’s judicial system and police and security forces have continued to detain and punish journalists, activists, and ordinary citizens for sharing uncensored information regarding the virus and other topics. At the same time, several high-profile individuals have resurfaced after being held in police custody or prison.

Harsh sentences, death from abuse: In one of the longest terms meted out to an ethnic Han professional journalist in China in recent memory, a court in Hunan Province sentenced [journalist Chen Jieren](#) to 15 years in prison on April 30 for publishing articles critical of the Chinese government on his social media accounts. Chen, a former reporter for *Southern Weekend*, *China Youth Daily*, *Beijing Daily*, and *People’s Daily*, has been detained since mid-2018 after he uncovered [corruption within the Communist Party in Hunan](#). Earlier, on April 17, a court in Fujian Province sentenced [three Fuzhou residents](#) for setting off firecrackers when they welcomed rights activist Yan Xingsheng’s release from prison in 2018. In Qinghai, on April 18, [Tibetan monk Gendun Sherab died](#) from health complications related to torture he suffered while detained for three months in 2017, after sharing information related to the Dalai Lama through WeChat.

Detentions: In late April, [three Chinese citizens](#) were detained by police in Beijing for sharing censored material concerning COVID-19 on the code-sharing site Github, which is unblocked in China. Among the articles archived through the project—titled Terminus2049—were [pieces on Ai Fen](#), one of the doctors in Wuhan who first raised concerns about cases of a novel coronavirus in late December 2019. In Qinghai, in late March, three Tibetans were detained and fined for [spreading “rumors” about COVID-19](#). Meanwhile, Chinese police throughout the country have escalated repression of Falun Gong practitioners, with 747 practitioners [detained or harassed by police across China](#) in March alone, according to the Falun Dafa Information Center. Many of those detained were reportedly targeted due to their [sharing of information about the spiritual practice, or tips for how to circumvent](#) online censorship.

The good news: On April 5, human rights lawyer Wang Quanzhang [was released from prison](#), and on [April 27](#) was finally reunited with his wife and son after spending nearly five years in detention and several weeks in quarantine. One of hundreds arrested during a nationwide crackdown on lawyers that began in July 2015, Wang remains under [close police supervision](#). One of the Wuhan doctors who first brought attention to the outbreak of the novel coronavirus in late 2019 [confirmed in an April 14 interview with Radio Free Asia that she is safe](#). Ai Fen was feared missing after giving an interview to China’s *People* magazine on how she had alerted her colleagues to the outbreak of the virus. Li Zehua, one of three citizen journalists who went missing after traveling to Wuhan to investigate the COVID-19 outbreak, has also been released. [In an April 22 video message posted online](#), Li stated that since late February he had been living under quarantine, first in Wuhan and later in his hometown. Two other activists were released from long-term detention: on April 7, [political activist and poet Li Bifeng](#) was released from prison after serving 10 years on charges of “contractual fraud” believed by [rights groups](#) to be trumped up. On March 30, [Sonam Dhargyal, a Tibetan man in Qinghai Province](#), was released from prison after serving a five-year sentence for his public support of the Dalai Lama.

Censorship updates: medical research, early cover-ups, ongoing controls

- **Daily diary from Wuhan: TMedical research restrictions:** The Chinese government has imposed new restrictions on publishing academic research related to COVID-19. According to [now-deleted posts](#) on the websites of Fudan University and Wuhan’s China University of Geoscience, all studies on COVID-19 are to be strictly vetted prior to publication, with research on the origins of the virus requiring approval by the [central government](#). Medical staff around China also continue to face pressure to adhere to official narratives about the virus. In an interview with the religious freedom magazine [Bitter Winter](#) on April 26, a doctor in Wenzhou claimed that at the height of the COVID-19 outbreak in the city in February and March, staff at his hospital were instructed to cover up coronavirus cases in order to artificially lower the official death count. In late April, the deputy director of a hospital in

Hubei [was also punished](#) for using his social media account to criticize the Chinese government's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

- **New revelations regarding early coronavirus cover-ups:** Further evidence has emerged that Chinese authorities were aware of the severity of the viral outbreak in Wuhan days before informing the public on January 20. Leaked documents obtained by the [Associated Press](#) show that by January 14, the central government was aware of an epidemic situation in Wuhan. Meanwhile, as the virus spread in January, [propaganda directives](#) were handed down to media platforms, warning them to adhere to official narratives while avoiding quoting foreign press sources or linking the unknown pneumonia to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS).
- **Ongoing censorship as country opens up:** Chinese authorities continue to take aim at critical examinations of China's response to the pandemic. In one of his last reports prior to his expulsion from China, [Paul Mozur](#) of the *New York Times* recounts being followed by undercover police in Hefei, in Anhui Province, while trying to report on China's emergence from the COVID-19 lockdown. Censorship efforts have also been directed at online targets. In another interview published by [Bitter Winter](#) on April 10, an anonymous employee of a Chinese internet platform claims that in a single day, he deleted thousands of posts that criticized the Chinese government's response to the pandemic or praised Western countries. In other cases, offline repression has had a chilling effect on efforts to preserve censored content. On April 27 a GitHub-based archive project documenting material on the coronavirus outbreak in China, [nCoVMemory](#), was set to private following the detention by police in Beijing of three members of a [similar project](#) which posted otherwise censored material related to COVID-19.

Even online pastimes have not been spared. A [video game](#) released on April 23 in which players fight zombies carrying the coronavirus, and which contains references to speculations that COVID-19 leaked from a Chinese laboratory, was quickly banned by Chinese censors. Even seemingly apolitical content has been targeted. A leaked state [censorship directive](#) indicates that online video platforms were prohibited from airing without prior approval the April 19 "One World: Together at Home" benefit concert for frontline healthcare workers.

HONG KONG

Amid arrests and Beijing assertions, new fears for autonomy and press freedom

Recent actions taken by Hong Kong authorities and Beijing's representatives in the territory have exacerbated concerns that people's right to free expression is being further eroded. Even as the global pandemic has [halted](#) large-scale protests in the Special Administrative Region (SAR), relations between Carrie Lam's government and ordinary Hong Kongers continue to deteriorate.

On National Security Education Day on April 15, Beijing's senior official in Hong Kong urged the SAR government to introduce [new national security legislation as soon as possible](#). Luo Huining, chief of the Liaison Office, said that the legislation was necessary to [combat "external forces"](#) which he alleged had contributed to Hong Kong's instability. If passed, such legislation could further penalize antigovernment criticism and protests, and have a chilling impact on free speech. (Such legislation was put forward in 2003 but shelved after a mass protest.) In a further sign of Beijing's increasing willingness to intervene in Hong Kong, on April 17, the Liaison Office declared that it was [not bound by Article 22 of the Basic Law](#), which states that mainland Chinese government offices cannot interfere in the affairs of the SAR.

Despite a pause on large-scale protests, repression of high-profile activists has continued. [On April 18, police arrested 15 prominent prodemocracy figures](#) in an unprecedented crackdown. The fifteen activists, including Democratic Party founder Martin Lee and media tycoon Jimmy Lai, were accused of [taking part in unapproved protests](#) in August and October of last year. Some observers have warned that the arrests may represent [the beginning of a larger crackdown](#) on government critics and civic activists.

Police have also continued to target journalists, with Hong Kong's police chief accusing Jimmy Lai's *Apple Daily* on May 5 of [running a targeted campaign against him](#). In late April, the Hong Kong Journalists Association condemned [the arrest of two of the paper's journalists](#), who were detained while investigating claims that a prominent police officer was illegally living in a home in the Clear Water Bay area. The journalists, who were arrested for loitering outside of the officer's property [despite wearing identifying press badges](#), were later released.

Such moves are motivating Hong Kongers, despite the pandemic, to find [novel ways of publicly expressing discontent](#). Some have decided to financially support restaurants seen as associated with the prodemocracy movement, while others have gathered in small groups in malls to hold signs and sing "Glory to Hong Kong," an anthem of the protest movement. As with earlier protests last year, police have responded harshly: on May 1, [police used pepper spray](#) to disperse over a hundred people who had gathered at a mall in the New Territories, although many tried to observe social distancing rules.

BEYOND CHINA

Global hacking attempts, video app privacy, US radio, Eastern Europe influence

- **Chinese hackers exploit COVID-19 and other vulnerabilities to launch malware attacks in multiple countries:** Analysts at [Check Point Research](#) found that Chinese hackers had attempted to use Mongolian-language, malware-laced documents against targets in that country's public sector. The March 12 report said that if opened, the documents, which purportedly concerned the COVID-19 pandemic, would give hackers the [ability](#) to remotely edit or delete files, take screenshots, and execute

procedures on the target's computer. The report's release coincided with a warning made by cybersecurity firm [FireEye](#) of a spike in activity since January by APT41, a Chinese cyberespionage group believed to have links to the Chinese government, against Fireeye's clients in more than a dozen countries, including the United States, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico. The targeted clients were from the manufacturing, media, healthcare, nonprofit and other sectors.

- Zoom and Tencent video chat privacy scrutinized over China links:** The United Nations has walked back plans to [partner with Tencent Holdings](#), a company with extensive links to China's state surveillance apparatus, for [video conferencing services](#) at an upcoming summit after coming under criticism from US government officials, technical experts, and human rights groups. Concerns about Tencent's international surveillance capabilities will likely grow in light of a May 7 report from Toronto's Citizen Lab showing that [non-China registered WeChat accounts are being surveilled](#), scanned for politically sensitive terms, and their messages used to train the firm's political censorship system within China. US-based [Zoom has also come under scrutiny](#), with Citizen Lab noting in an April 3 report that the company's use of servers in China can render even encrypted calls vulnerable to third-party interception. In response, [Zoom announced](#) that it would take steps to [improve geofencing](#) to ensure that non-China calls were not routed through China.
- Chinese influence over radio stations reaching US listeners:** Two radio stations broadcasting in the United States have been found to have ties to Chinese state-linked actors. On April 27, the [Washington Free Beacon](#) reported that the FM radio station Las Vegas Public Radio is registered to lobby for Chinese tech giant Huawei, and that it had "scheduled programming to push back against mounting concerns that the company could serve as a conduit for Chinese espionage." A [radio station](#) owned by Phoenix TV, a Hong Kong-based pro-Beijing media outlet, has begun broadcasting Chinese-language programming into Southern California via a broadcast tower in Mexico under a temporary license. In response, Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) announced his intention to introduce legislation that would prevent the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) from granting licenses to anyone seeking to change the language of a station they purchase, a provision that would likely cause the station's pending permanent broadcast license application to be rejected.
- Growing Chinese media and technology influence in Central and Eastern Europe:** A new report from Freedom House has found evidence of [Chinese media influence campaigns in](#) 11 countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The report, [Nations in Transit 2020](#), published May 7, also found China's surveillance footprint growing in Central and Eastern Europe, reaching 11 countries in the region, of which ten have "[Safe City Agreements](#)" with Huawei.
- Last remaining Confucius Classroom in Sweden closed:** In April, Sweden [closed](#) the last of its Confucius Classrooms, a K-12 educational program funded by the Chinese government. This rendered it the first European country to shutter all of its Confucius Institutes and classrooms. The move, along with the end of Gothenburg's

[twin city agreement with Shanghai](#), marks the further deterioration in bilateral relations following the abduction and jailing of Swedish citizen [Gui Minhai](#), and threats against the country made by [China's ambassador](#) to Sweden.

FEATURED PUSHBACK

Bookseller who fled Hong Kong reopens in Taiwan

On April 25, Lam Wing-kee [opened](#) a new bookstore, [Causeway Bay Books](#), in Taipei that among other selections will carry [Chinese-language titles](#) banned in China. Lam is one of five booksellers from Hong Kong who were abducted to or detained on the mainland in late 2015, in apparent reprisal for publishing and selling politically sensitive books, including sometimes-salacious titles about the personal lives of Communist Party leaders. His colleague [Gui Minhai](#), who was secretly abducted from Thailand to China, was [sentenced](#) by a Chinese court in February to 10 years in prison.



Credit: [Amber Wang](#)

Lam moved to Taiwan one year ago, and was able to crowd fund over \$200,000 toward opening a store on the democratically governed island. The small shop's opening was well covered by local media, earned a [basket of flowers](#) from President Tsai Ing-Wen, and drew a small crowd, with [attendees](#) expressing pride, hope, and defiance for the occasion. Lam moved forward with the unveiling despite an attack earlier in the week when a masked man threw red paint on him as he was sitting in a Taipei coffee shop. Three men were arrested in connection with the assault, then released on bail.

As Beijing's political controls have tightened in Hong Kong, the number of stores selling politically sensitive books about China in the territory has dwindled significantly. Lam's store reopening in Taipei is one of the ways that Taiwan is emerging as an alternative to Hong Kong for those seeking greater freedom of expression and operating space. In the coming years, this trend is likely to continue, as rights groups, international news outlets, and even some corporations shift offices, activities, or regional headquarters to Taiwan.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- **Heightened censorship surrounding annual political meetings in Beijing:** The Chinese government announced on [April 27](#) that the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference will occur in Beijing beginning May 22, after a two-month delay due to the coronavirus outbreak. Watch for whether the sessions are indeed held, [intensified censorship](#) during the meeting period, directives issued to media and websites barring coverage of certain topics, and any attempt by delegates to urge media-freedom reforms.
- **Reprisals against journalists, outlets over coronavirus coverage:** Since late January, several news outlets and journalists have skirted or [defied Chinese government censorship](#) to investigate, expose, or criticize various aspects of the coronavirus outbreak in China and its handling by officials. Among them are the financial news outlet *Caixin*, the Chinese *People* magazine, and the *Economic Observer*. Watch for legal and administrative reprisals—such as fines, firings, and journalists' arrests—against these outlets and others in China for past reporting or emerging coverage, including on the problems facing the Chinese economy due to the pandemic.
- **US regulatory decisions involving Chinese tech companies, media influence:** Following [new evidence](#) of Tencent's WeChat application conducting systematic content surveillance and scanning for use of political keywords by international users, watch for greater scrutiny of the company's activities in the United States and elsewhere. Also watch for the outcome of two licensing decisions by the FCC: on a [Mexican radio station](#) purchased by Phoenix TV now broadcasting pro-Beijing Chinese-language programming to southern California, and on four Chinese state-owned telecom firms. [In late April](#), the FCC gave the firms 30 days to “demonstrate that they are not subject to the influence and control of the Chinese government,” lest they risk having their operating license in the United States revoked due to national security concerns.

TAKE ACTION

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- **Share the *China Media Bulletin*:** Help friends and colleagues better understand China's changing media and censorship landscape.
- **Access uncensored content:** Find an overview comparing popular circumvention tools and information on how to access them via GreatFire.org, [here](#) or [here](#). Learn more about how to reach uncensored content and enhance digital security [here](#).
- **Support a prisoner:** Learn how to take action to help journalists and free expression activists, including those featured in passed issues of the *China Media Bulletin*, [here](#).
- **Visit the *China Media Bulletin Resources* section:** Learn more about how policy-makers, media outlets, educators and donors can help advance free expression in China and beyond via a [new resource section](#) on the Freedom House website.

For more information

- For archives, go to: www.freedomhouse.org/China-media
- For additional information on human rights and free expression in China, see: *Freedom in the World 2018*, *Freedom of the Press 2017*, *Freedom on the Net 2018*, and *The Battle for China's Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression, and Resistance under Xi Jinping*



Freedom House is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that supports democratic change, monitors freedom, and advocates for democracy and human rights.

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