

CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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IMAGE OF THE MONTH

Censored US Debate

This photo shows the signal disruption in China of [CNN's broadcast](#) of the US Vice Presidential debate, held on October 7, between Vice President Mike Pence and Senator Kamala Harris. The striped screen appeared as Pence was criticizing the Chinese government's initial cover-up of the coronavirus outbreak. A tweet bearing the photo posted by *Global and Mail* correspondent Nathan Vanderklippe garnered over 67,000 likes and 32,000 retweets within less than 24 hours.

Credit: [@nvanderklippe](#)



ANALYSIS

Behind Xi Jinping's Steely Façade, a Leadership Crisis Is Smoldering in China

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](#).

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Recent party purges suggest ebbing confidence in the all-powerful chairman.

Even after years of intensifying authoritarian rule under Communist Party chief Xi Jinping, the 18-year prison term handed down in late September to real-estate mogul and social media commentator Ren Zhiqiang—a de facto death sentence for the 69-year-old man—came as a shock to many inside and outside China.

Although Ren's penalty was unusually harsh for a party insider with no political power or ambitions of his own, it fit a recent pattern in which the regime has lashed out with greater intensity against Xi's perceived enemies within the ruling elite. The punitive actions and targets—particularly those in the party's propaganda, education, and security systems—indicate that the party chief's grip on power may not be as firm as it appears.

Purging a vocal internal critic

Ren Zhiqiang, an influential tycoon and veteran Chinese Communist Party (CCP) member, is hardly a typical dissident. He first gained international attention in [February 2016](#), when he criticized a now infamous speech by Xi Jinping on tightening party control over the media. Within days, the tech company Sina—at the direction of the Cyber Administration of China—shuttered Ren's Weibo microblogging account, wiping out in an instant his ability to speak to 37 million followers. Since then Ren has largely kept a low profile, only periodically speaking out about Xi's leadership. But his comments often echo critiques believed to be bubbling beneath the surface among [many party cadres and officials](#).

In an [essay](#) published online in March 2020, Ren criticized a Xi speech from the previous month that CCP members were instructed to study. The essay referred back to the 2016 speech and pointed out that the party's restrictions on expression, including the silencing of whistleblowers, had exacerbated the coronavirus crisis. But what likely sealed his fate was an irreverent reference to Xi as an [emperor with no clothes](#) and a [clown](#)." Within days, Ren disappeared into detention and was placed under investigation. On July 23, authorities stripped him of his party membership and seized his assets for "serious violations of discipline and law." And on [September 22](#), a Beijing court announced that Ren had been sentenced to 18 years in prison and fined 4.2 million yuan (\$620,000). Compared with prosecutions of rights activists that often feature years of pretrial detention, Ren's investigation, judgment, and punishment were surprisingly swift.

A rising tide of criticism and reprisals

The regime is clearly aware that Ren is not alone in his doubts about Xi's leadership, and it has sought to punish any other insiders who dare to speak out. Cai Xia, an expa-

triate former law professor from the Central Party School, which trains up-and-coming cadres, gave a talk in May that was recorded and leaked online the following month. In the [recording](#), she sharply criticizes Xi, calling the party a “political zombie” under his leadership, arguing that the 2018 constitutional amendments that removed presidential term limits violated internal party rules, and urging the members of the Politburo Standing Committee to pass a resolution and “change the person in power.” On [August 17](#), the Central Party School announced that her comments had “serious political problems,” and that she was being expelled from the party, with her retirement benefits canceled. The notice also cited [two other offenses](#): an article in which she criticized the imposition of a National Security Law on Hong Kong and her signature on a petition urging political reform and freedom of speech in honor of the late whistleblowing doctor Li Wenliang. Had she still been in China, Cai’s punishment would likely have been much worse.

The party also appears to be facing internal challenges to its authority at the grassroots level, prompting repressive action against its own members. In early September, the Associated Press reported that 23 people had been detained in Inner Mongolia in relation to widespread protests that erupted in August over efforts to replace Mongolian-language textbooks with Chinese versions. Among those targeted were [several CCP members](#), including teachers, who were suspended without pay or turned over for investigation because they refused to carry out the new policy.

Scholars speak out

Prominent academics from top universities are among those speaking out, and in some cases facing punishment. Law professor [Xu Zhangrun](#), whose eloquent [essays](#) criticizing Xi’s leadership have gone viral online, was detained for six days in July. His employer, the prestigious Tsinghua University, [fired him](#) upon his release.

In September, a letter written by another well-known intellectual—[Leng Jiefu](#), a retired dean of the Politics Department at Renmin University—began circulating widely online. Leng explained in a [media](#) interview that he had actually written the letter, addressed to Politburo Standing Committee member Wang Yang, in April and was uncertain why it only emerged now. The [letter](#) echoes many of the same points raised by the other prominent critics, voicing concerns about China’s mounting internal crises and international isolation, and recommending several steps to help extract the country from its predicament, including calls for Xi Jinping to retire honorably from all his positions in the party, state, and military and for China to adopt a federal model of government that grants greater autonomy to regions like Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong. While observers have expressed concern over Leng’s safety now that his letter has been publicized, he told [Radio Free Asia](#) last month that he is just a public intellectual doing his duty and reiterated his belief that “it would be great if the ‘federal system’ and democracy were implemented in China.”

Preemptive controls

In addition to individual punishments, the party leadership has initiated several actions meant to shore up loyalty to the CCP, but especially to Xi Jinping personally,

and to preempt future outbursts of criticism. On the day that Cai Xia's expulsion was announced, managers at the Central Party School reportedly [convened a meeting](#) of 60 department heads and senior officials, urging them to meticulously ensure that current, former, and retired staff remain loyal to the party, while increasing scrutiny of foreign travel to curb future defections.

In August, central leaders close to Xi announced an almost unprecedented "[rectification](#)" campaign aimed at [the political-legal apparatus](#)—covering judges, prosecutors, police, prisons, and other parts of the criminal justice system. The campaign will begin in full next year and run through 2022, but several "pilot programs" have already begun in select locales. As Chinese political expert [Ling Li](#) notes, the entire endeavor is highly unusual, even in the context of the rough-and-tumble reality of CCP politics.

In a more mysterious case, China-born Australian citizen [Cheng Lei](#), an anchor for the state-run China Global Television Network (CGTN), was abruptly detained in mid-August in Beijing. The charges against her and the impetus for her detention remain unclear, but CGTN has apparently scrubbed all mention of her from the station's site and past posts to social media.

A crisis of faith

Despite the bold and impressive image that Xi Jinping and the party-state's media apparatus seek to display at home and abroad, these developments point to a deeply insecure regime that perceives a threat even from its own members. Harsh punishments for people like Ren are intended not only to silence the individual, but also to send a signal that other party members should keep criticism of Xi to themselves. The cases against people like Cheng Lei similarly serve as a warning to the foot soldiers of the party's apparatus for media control and repression that the system can be turned on them too.

It is not entirely uncommon for waves of internal criticism or factional fighting to peek through the cracks of the CCP's opaque armor, but the thoughtful nature of the recent critiques and the profile of those voicing them should give pause to anyone inside or outside China who is attempting to assess the country's direction. The fact that professors from top academic institutions—including the party's own national training center—are calling Xi's leadership a failure, urging his removal from power, and explicitly envisioning a [transition to a more democratic](#) and federally structured political system is simply stunning. It indicates that Xi is facing a serious crisis of faith within the party, even if [no one has the power to act on it](#) at present. It also underscores the reality that Xi and his enforcers do not speak for all Chinese. There are many, many people who would like to see China change course.

Amid a global pandemic, political leaders and governments around the world—democratic and authoritarian alike—are facing unprecedented challenges to their authority even as they seek to expand it. Xi's bluster notwithstanding, it would appear that China is no exception.

IN THE NEWS

Surveillance updates: Urban surveillance, campus monitoring, Zoom usage change, European exports

- 18 of 20 most monitored cities are in China:** According to a July 22 report by [Comparitech](#), 18 of the 20 most surveilled cities in the world are in China. The study by the British technology website examined the number of public closed-circuit television cameras in operation per capita in [150 cities worldwide](#). Taiyuan in Shanxi Province topped the list, with more than 465,000 cameras, or 119.57 per 1,000 people. Urumqi, the capital of the heavily policed region of Xinjiang, ranked 13th, with 160,000 cameras, or 36.62 per 1,000 people (this relatively low figure may reflect more limited transparency on the number of cameras compared to other parts of China). Increasingly, cameras are equipped with sophisticated surveillance capabilities like facial recognition. While public surveillance cameras have been justified as a crime-fighting measure, Comparitech researchers examined the number of cameras per city against reported crime rates and concluded that “broadly speaking, more cameras doesn’t necessarily reduce crime rates.”
- Zoom moves to partner-only use in China:** Since August 23, Zoom users in China can only procure the company’s conferencing services through authorized [third-party retailers](#) in the country. The end of direct sales to users in China is seen as an effort by the company to [pull back](#) from its China operations following criticism of its move to shut down, at the behest of the Chinese government, the account of US-based Chinese activists using the service to commemorate the anniversary of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. However, the new policy does not eliminate the risk of surveillance and censorship for users in China—and in fact may increase it, due to the substantial leverage that the Chinese government retains over local partners.
- Chinese universities open, with heightened surveillance:** As schools in China reopen for the fall semester, the country’s 20 million university students are subject to new [pandemic control measures](#). An investigation by [Reuters](#) found government procurement documents indicating that higher education institutes have purchased “epidemic control” surveillance systems that include facial-recognition, contact-tracing, and temperature-checking systems, including in dormitory spaces, and that some link collected data to students’ national ID numbers. Several universities have also requested that students apply for permission to leave campus. Some students have expressed concern on social media that surveillance measures instituted to control the spread of COVID-19 are overly intrusive, and wonder which may remain following the pandemic or how long their data will be stored.
- Risks for American universities and their China- and Hong Kong-based students:** Instructors of Chinese politics at universities outside China are increasingly concerned that in-class discussions—particularly online—of politically sensitive material may put them at risk of prosecution under Chinese and Hong Kong law. A

[National Security Law](#) passed in Hong Kong in June gives Chinese authorities the power to prosecute individuals for antistate offenses, regardless of the individual's nationality or where they committed the offense. In response, instructors have come up with a range of [safety measures](#). At [Dartmouth College](#), students remotely participating in online classes are allowed to opt out of classroom discussions, while at the [University of Oxford](#), students can submit papers anonymously. The effect of state surveillance has already been felt at [Emory University](#), where in one class students based in China reportedly withdrew from online discussions when discussion moved to politics. More broadly, some professors have expressed concern that adding “[warning labels](#)” on syllabuses of topics that might be deemed sensitive to Beijing has the effect of discouraging academic debate.

- **Amnesty International: European Union firms selling surveillance tools to China:** A [report](#) released on September 21 by Amnesty International found that numerous European companies have sold digital surveillance equipment to Chinese state security actors and other state-linked entities, including universities in Xinjiang. Material sold by the French, Swedish, and Dutch companies to Chinese police [included](#) facial-recognition technology and behavioral analytics software. The group warned that such products could be used to further human rights abuses in China. The report feeds into a broader conversation, policy discussion, and legislative initiatives about the need to better regulate the [export of surveillance equipment](#) and institute stronger corporate human rights due-diligence obligations.

Censorship updates: “Self-media” crackdown, entertainment, US Embassy posts targeted

- **Latest internet “rectification” censors “self-media” among other targets:** Chinese regulators and technology firms have engaged in new rounds of “[online rectification](#)”—periodic clean-up campaigns to remove unwanted content from the Chinese internet—targeting tens of thousands of websites and personal accounts. On July 18, the Cyberspace Administration of China [announced](#) that in the second quarter of 2020, 1,100 websites were issued warnings, 281 websites were suspended, and 2,686 illegal websites and 31,000 accounts were shut down. Along with the closure of various gambling, gaming, and pornographic sites, websites containing “[harmful political content](#)” were also targeted. In a significant escalation, a further 179,000 social media accounts [were closed](#) in August. “Self-media” accounts—which share unofficial news and commentary on current events and have long been a focus of [online censorship](#)—were of particular concern to censors. According to [China Digital Times](#), on Tencent’s WeChat and Sina Weibo, “virtually all accounts discussing news or current affairs were taken down.” Another focus of the purge were 13,600 “[mukbang](#)” live-streaming channels of people eating, part of a Chinese government campaign against [food waste](#).
- **Culture and entertainment censorship:** Government censorship of China’s entertainment industry is intensifying. On September 14, the Ministry of Culture and

Tourism issued a [notice](#) calling for stricter control over small-scale theatrical, crosstalk, and musical performances. Organizers will now need to [obtain approval](#) for performances, and state agents are required to be present at live shows to monitor for undesirable content. State censorship has also targeted particular cultural products. On September 10, Reuters reported that Chinese authorities had ordered major media outlets to [limit coverage](#) of the new Disney film *Mulan* after the filmmakers faced strong international criticism for their links with Xinjiang's security services. Earlier, on July 18, the musical game Cytus II was [removed](#) from Chinese app stores following the discovery by Chinese netizens that a song the game's musical director had published on Soundcloud contained an oblique reference to the Hong Kong protest movement.

- **US and other diplomats censored in China:** On September 9, an article published on the US Embassy in China's Weibo and WeChat accounts criticizing Chinese government propaganda was [removed](#) by censors. That same day, an op-ed written by US Ambassador Terry Branstad on declining Sino-US relations was [refused publication](#) by *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece read widely by political and economic elites. According to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, the incidents are not isolated. Researchers found 11 US embassy posts that were censored on WeChat between April and August 2020, on topics such as repression of ethnic minority groups, Hong Kong protests, and Chinese officials' mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic; by contrast, no instances of such censorship were evident from June 2019 to April 2020. Posts by [British](#) and [Indian](#) foreign missions in China have also encountered WeChat censorship.
- **Report documents thousands of censored keywords related to COVID-19:** A [report](#) released by Citizen Lab on August 25 found that more than 2,100 keywords related to COVID-19 were censored on WeChat between January and May of 2020, affecting tens of millions of posts and conversations. [Banned keywords](#) related to the virus itself, international criticism of the Chinese government response to the pandemic, conspiracy theories concerning the origin of the virus, and US domestic politics.

Cracks in the censorship system: Floods, Belarus protests, COVID-19 awards, podcasts

- **Flood propaganda effort backfiring:** Over the summer, various parts of China experienced the country's worst flooding in decades. Netizens and media outlets [pushed back](#) in July against efforts by a local government in Jiangxi Province to generate "positivity," after dam failures released [devastating floodwaters](#). A July 22 WeChat post made by the government of Poyang attempted to encourage people to think of positive dimensions of the flooding, the heroism of the "anti-flood spirit," and to even express thanks. The post provoked sarcastic remarks from netizens on several platforms outraged by officials' tone-deafness. The *Beijing Evening News* also [criticized](#) the later-deleted post for not considering the feelings of victims and first responders.

- **Belarus:** Chinese state media has [downplayed](#) large-scale protests in Belarus held in the wake of a contested August 9 national election marred by allegations of extensive vote rigging. While coverage in much of the world focused on the massive antigovernment demonstrations, Chinese state media coverage concentrated instead on much smaller public displays of support for Belarusian President Alyksandr Lukashenka. In one case, a provincial [television](#) station mislabeled images of a large opposition protest as supporting Lukashenka instead. However, the financial magazine [Caixin](#) did report on opposition demonstrations, and a social media [commentator](#) analyzed the problematic state coverage on WeChat. [Other netizens](#) expressed support for the opposition protests and criticized state media for its skewed coverage of an unfolding prodemocracy movement in the Eastern European country.
- **Anger at Li Wenliang's omission from COVID-19 citizenship awards:** Chinese internet users [criticized](#) a ceremony held in Beijing on September 1 to honor those who contributed to the fight against the coronavirus for failing to recognize the late whistleblower Dr. Li Wenliang. President Xi Jinping awarded medals to dozens of individuals, including several posthumous awards. Absent from this list, however, was Dr. Li, who in January had been silenced by local authorities in Wuhan after trying to warn others about the virus and himself died in February from COVID-19. Netizens took to the late doctor's Weibo page to leave comments of support and issue veiled criticisms of the state.
- **Podcasts:** As state censorship deepens, the *Economist* reports that [podcasts](#) offer a source of alternative views and in-depth reporting in China. Podcasts covering feminism, office working culture, and living abroad have become popular with a predominantly young, urban audience, although many poorer Chinese and migrant workers report listening too. The medium also offers former journalists who left traditional media amid a tightening press freedom environment an opportunity to connect with audiences, including on topics like the coronavirus pandemic or one-child policy, though censors occasionally step in. Creators admit to self-censoring and avoid clearly politically sensitive topics like ongoing repression in Xinjiang or the prodemocracy movement Hong Kong. Nevertheless, podcasts could draw further attention from censors as technological advancements enable more automated scanning of audio content.

HONG KONG

Press Freedom Suffocates under National Security Law

October 8 marks 100 days since the new National Security Law—abruptly imposed on Hong Kong by the Chinese government in Beijing—came into effect. In that interval, electoral opportunity, freedoms of expression and assembly, and the rule of law have all deteriorated dramatically in the territory. But one of the most dramatic arenas of decline has been the media landscape. The following developments in Hong Kong’s media sector represent an unprecedented shift away from an open environment, and signal increasing risks for independent journalists:

- **A crackdown on *Apple Daily*:** On August 9, *Apple Daily* owner Jimmy Lai—along with four executives from its parent company, Next Digital, and two of [Lai’s sons](#)—was [arrested](#) under suspicion of violating Article 29 of the National Security Law, which bans collusion with foreign powers. More than 200 police officers [raided](#) the newspaper’s offices after the [arrests](#). Both the paper and Lai himself have [long been](#) thorns in Beijing’s side, and since the National Security Law came into effect, pressure by the authorities on *Apple Daily* and Next Digital have escalated. In late August, a network of 40 [convenience stores](#) owned by a company with strong business ties to mainland China announced that it would stop selling *Apple Daily*.
- **Self-censorship and fears for personal safety:** News outlets are increasingly being forced to self-censor due to threats posed by the National Security Law. On July 6, noted writer Koo Tak Ming [ended](#) his column in *Apple Daily* after more than 30 years, out of concern that its political content could run afoul of the law. Similarly, on July 22, a popular cartoonist announced that his column in *Ming Pao* had been [canceled](#) over its explicit political content following warnings that his work could violate the new security law. There have also been retroactive acts of censorship. On August 13, [Ming Pao](#) reported that public broadcaster Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) had removed from their website an interview with Nathan Law after charges were leveled against the activist and former legislator, now in exile, for violations of the national security legislation.
- **Police abruptly redefine “media representative”:** Hong Kong police announced on September 22 that the designation of “media representative” would be [limited](#) to government-registered and “well-known” international agencies, an attempt to replace a system that was based on membership in journalist unions. The implications of a government-issued “media representative” designation are unclear, but the move, which critics claim lacks a [basis in law](#), is expected to sharply constrain the ability of certain journalists to report on current events. Some of the most dramatic images from Hong Kong’s prodemocracy protests—including those of police attacks on protesters—were captured by [freelancers](#) who under the new policy will not be recognized by police as journalists.

- **Visa denials for foreign journalists:** Foreign reporters have also been subject to new restrictions under the National Security Law. In August, immigration authorities [refused](#) to issue a visa to an Irish editor of the *Hong Kong Free Press*, an English-language online outlet that has been an important source of independent reporting for locals and international observers. In July, *New York Times* correspondent Chris Buckley was [denied a visa](#). Also that month, the *Times* [announced](#) that it would shift its Hong Kong–based digital news operations to South Korea. The number of recent visa delays experienced by journalists has been described by the Foreign Correspondents’ Club as “[highly unusual](#).” In response to such assessments, the representative of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Hong Kong [warned](#) the Foreign Correspondents’ Club on September 23 to stop interfering in Hong Kong’s affairs.

Signs of resilience: Despite these restrictions, Hong Kong media, including [Apple Daily](#), have continued to engage in independent journalism and commentary that is critical of the government. Indeed, many of the recent developments noted above and other cases of National Security Law enforcement have come to light through courageous reporting by local media. News consumers have also shown their support, with *Apple Daily* selling [hundreds of thousands of copies](#) the morning after its offices were raided. Shares in Next Digital also [rose](#) following Jimmy Lai’s arrest, with many purchasing stock in order to show support for *Apple Daily*, though police later [arrested](#) fifteen people for manipulating share prices.

BEYOND CHINA

Surveillance, hacking revelations, and pushback

Since July, numerous revelations of how the CCP and its proxies influence information spaces outside China have emerged. The following are several key developments, followed by select government responses:

- **Foreigner database:** Research [released in September](#) showed that Chinese company Zhenhua Data created a database of [2.4 million foreigners](#), including prominent political and military figures, and released the data to Chinese state and intelligence agencies. The database, examined by [Prof. Christopher Balding](#) in a September 13 report, contains information mostly drawn from [publicly available](#) sources, but appears to be used to “support Chinese intelligence, military, security, and state operations in information warfare and influence targeting.” According to Balding, the database “covers a broad array of public and non-public data with classifications and rankings on individuals and institutions designed to assist Chinese analysts.” The company describes its own work as “[hybrid warfare](#),” but some experts say the database contains [little sensitive information](#), and that its existence is [unsurprising](#).
- **Hacking:** A July 29 report by the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future found that beginning in May, China-linked actors [began hacking](#) Vatican computers in the lead-

up to bilateral diplomatic talks. On August 19, [Taiwanese authorities](#) claimed that government agencies and email accounts were attacked by Chinese hackers, while on September 3 the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that a Chinese [hacker group](#) had used fake World Health Organization and Australian Medical Association email accounts to target foreign political and economic organizations. On September 16, the US Department of Justice announced that Chinese hackers had used so-called [supply-chain attacks](#), which embed malicious code in software in order to infiltrate computer systems, against over 100 overseas organizations.

- **Disinformation:** On August 6, Google [announced](#) that between April and June, 2,500 China-linked YouTube accounts had been removed for spreading disinformation. Russia-affiliated outlets have also been accused of amplifying [false Chinese claims](#) that the coronavirus was a US military bioweapon. Separately, a July 30 [ProPublica investigation](#) found that US broadcast journalist Larry King had unwittingly spread false propaganda about exiled billionaire Guo Wengui in an interview with a Russian journalist, the result of an apparent CCP disinformation scheme.
- **Hollywood:** An comprehensive August 5 [report](#) by PEN America offers a detailed examination of Hollywood studios' compliance with Chinese government censorship restrictions in order to gain access to the Chinese market—including by rewriting or deleting content as requested by censors. In an already restricted environment, state control over the Chinese film sector has intensified since the CCP's Central Propaganda Department took over regulation of all Chinese media in 2018.
- **Xinjiang:** A July 2020 [report](#) by the Uyghur Human Rights Project examines how the Chinese government has utilized online platforms to propagate positive images of the detention facilities in Xinjiang that officials claim are “vocational training centers.” The report notes that journalists from majority-Muslim countries have been invited to tour Xinjiang, in an effort to counter negative reporting on the crack-down in the Muslim world.

Responses:

- **US moves to ban TikTok and WeChat:** The Trump administration is seeking to ban the Chinese social media apps TikTok and WeChat in the United States. On July 23, a US Senate committee [approved a prohibition](#) on the installation of TikTok on government-issued devices. On August 3, President Trump issued an executive order giving TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, [45 days](#) to negotiate the sale of TikTok to a US firm in order to retain access to US markets; an initial deal with Microsoft ultimately [fell through](#). In response, TikTok attempted [to sue](#) the US government on August 24, while on August 28 Chinese authorities laid out [new restrictions](#) requiring state approval for all tech exports. News on September 19 that President Trump had [approved](#) a partial sale of TikTok to US entities Oracle and Walmart was followed the next day by a US judge blocking the ban on WeChat on grounds that the block could violate US Constitution's [first amendment](#), which guarantees free speech.

- **Chinese apps under pressure in Asia:** Chinese social media apps have also come under scrutiny outside the United States. An August 13 [Reuters](#) report found that ByteDance had until mid-2020 censored material critical of the Chinese government on its Indonesian news aggregator, BaBe. The news followed the June 29 [banning](#) of 59 Chinese apps by the Indian government following [clashes](#) between Indian and Chinese military forces. China pushed back against the moves at a closed-door meeting of the World Trade Organization on October 2, [arguing](#) that the Indian and US bans on Chinese apps violated global trade rules—an ironic claim given the hundreds of US-based and other foreign apps that are blocked in China.
- **Huawei:** Since early July, numerous countries have joined the United States in moving to exclude Huawei from the construction of 5G networks, including the [United Kingdom](#), [Italy](#), [Portugal](#), [France](#), [Germany](#), and [Slovenia](#). With the June 3 [decision](#) of Canadian telecom companies to not use Huawei in their 5G networks, all members of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance have now blocked Huawei from future 5G networks. These moves were followed by the US government announcing on August 17 the [addition](#) of 38 Huawei affiliates to a Commerce Department entity list.

FEATURED PUSHBACK

Increased transparency, accountability for Chinese state-media abroad

In recent months, Chinese state media have faced increasing efforts from governments, media organizations, and technology firms to increase transparency and accountability for their coverage and activities outside of China. The enhanced pushback appears to be a combination of both greater awareness and attention to the challenges posed by problematic Chinese state-media behavior, as well as more aggressive, biased, and blatantly false content being disseminated to international audiences.



In the United Kingdom, media regulator [Ofcom](#) determined in July that the China Global Television Network (CGTN), the international arm of state broadcaster China Central Television, breached regulations by airing the [forced confession](#) of a British citizen. It also found in late May that CGTN had failed to provide [balanced coverage](#) of the Hong Kong prodemocracy protests. Resulting penalties—which can range from high fines to license [revocation](#)—have not yet been determined. Additional [complaints](#) filed by other victims of forced televised confessions, including Simon Cheung, a former employee

of the British Consulate in Hong Kong, are still pending Ofcom review. Earlier, in June, the US government designated the US operations of four Chinese state media organizations as [foreign missions](#): China Central Television, China News Service, the *People's Daily*, and *Global Times*. Five additional state-run outlets were similarly designated in February.

The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* in early 2020 stopped publishing paid advertorials from the English-language *China Daily*, according to reporting that [emerged](#) in August. The change occurred after *China Daily* [filings](#) under the Foreign Agents Registration Act included greater detail on the amount of funds being paid to particular outlets, including \$12 million paid to major papers like the *Times*, *Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*. Separately, on August 6, [Twitter](#) announced it would label government media accounts, including Chinese state press, though some debate emerged regarding whether nonstate outlets that face pressure to promote state narratives, like the Chinese outlet like [Caixin](#), should also be labeled “state affiliated.” Both [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) also label accounts and individual posts by Chinese state media in [multiple languages](#) as state controlled or state funded, respectively.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- **New critiques of Xi, harsh punishments:** Following on the uptick of internal party-state criticisms of Xi Jinping and even calls for his retirement that have emerged in recent months, watch for more leaked commentary voicing similar points, action by top officials to move against Xi, and reprisals against relevant individuals, like professor Leng Jiefu.
- **Restrictions on Hong Kong's media:** Watch for the ongoing impact of the National Security Law and other restrictions on independent or critical news outlets and journalists in Hong Kong. This includes developments in the legal case against Jimmy Lai, how police implement revised “media representative” designations, whether other journalists or media personalities are charged under the new security law, whether any news outlets are forcibly shut down, and other effects the law's implementation has on news and information available to local Hong Kongers.
- **China-linked disinformation ahead of US elections:** As the United States heads into the final weeks before hotly contested presidential and congressional elections, watch for any evidence of China-linked actors engaging in disinformation or social media manipulation campaigns ahead of—or in the immediate aftermath of—the polls, especially if there is any delay in final results. In addition to any activity that might indicate a preference for one presidential candidate over the other, watch for inauthentic activity or hack-and-leak attempts that could affect close congressional races involving CCP critics, amplification of divisive hashtags and posts, or piggybacking on Russian and Iranian disinformation campaigns.

TAKE ACTION

- **Subscribe to the *China Media Bulletin*:** Have the bulletin's updates and insights delivered directly to your inbox each month, free of charge. Visit [here](#) or e-mail cmb@freedomhouse.org.
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- **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.

1850 M Street NW, 11th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

111 John Street, Floor 8
New York, NY 10005

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