

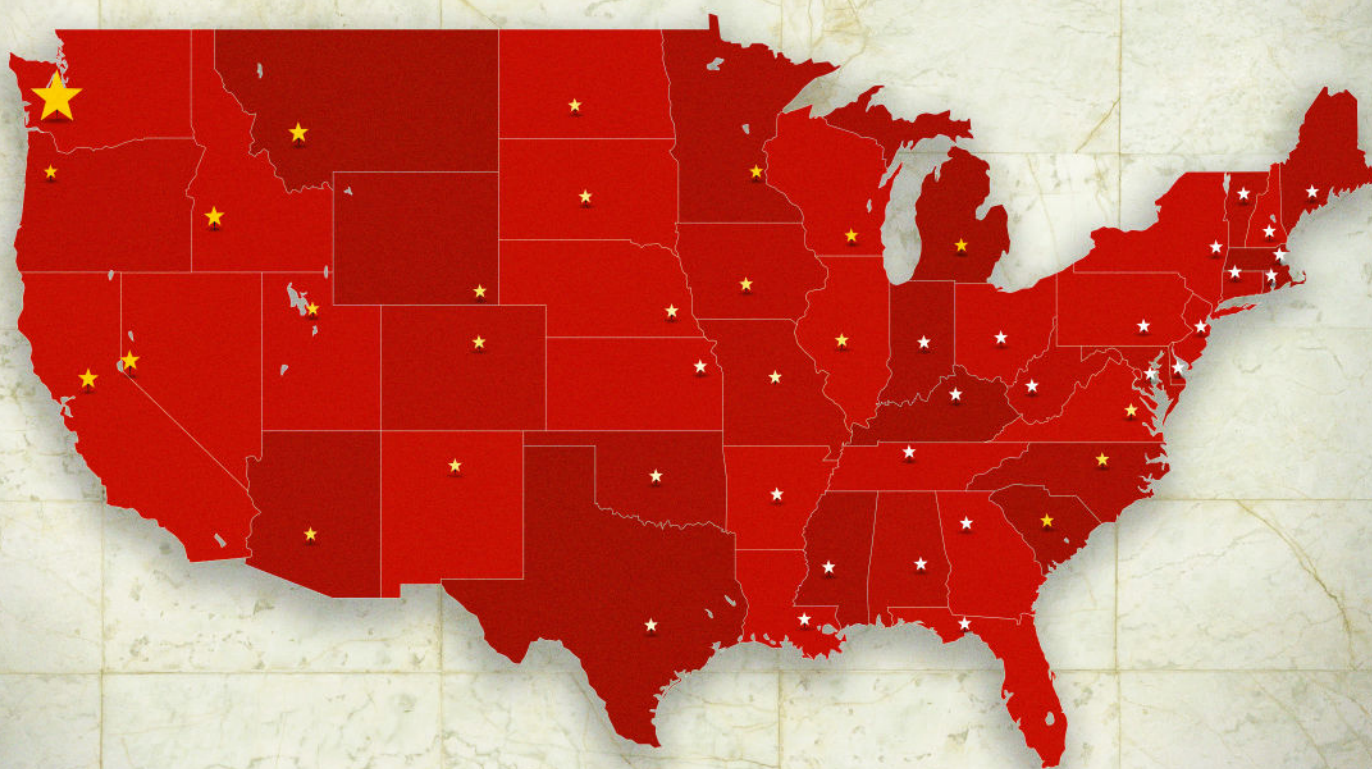


All Over the Map

The Chinese Communist Party's Subnational Interests in the United States

Emily de La Bruyère and Nathan Picarsic

November 2021



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Introduction

Across the political spectrum, Americans are moving toward a consensus that China's authoritarian regime poses the foremost threat to U.S. national security. Under the firm control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the People's Republic of China presents a challenge that goes well beyond the military, or even the technological, domain. Beijing seeks to shape global architectures, and through them to assert global control. Beijing's ambitions are evident in its efforts to set global technical standards and control emerging infrastructure, to convert foreign dependence on Chinese resources and manufacturing capabilities into market-making power, and to influence international opinion through disinformation and propaganda.

These efforts target the public and private sectors. And in its efforts to influence governments, including the U.S. government, Beijing does not limit itself to the national level. Beijing also runs systematic campaigns to influence subnational — that is, state and local — governments.

Beijing understands that subnational political leaders respond to different incentives than do federal officials and authorities — and that those incentives may create favorable conditions for China's influence campaigns. States and localities often prioritize the creation of jobs and economic growth, with less concern for national security risks. Beijing appeals to such economic interests to shift attitudes, open doors for China and Chinese entities, and foster relationships that can offset growing resistance in Washington to Beijing's global

agenda. Success on this score brings strategic and security returns for the CCP. It also obscures the extent to which short-term boons from economic cooperation may lead to long-term losses for the United States by hollowing out key industrial sectors and gradually offshoring jobs and economic growth.

In June 2019, the Minzhi International Research Institute, a Chinese think tank,¹ and Tsinghua University's Center of Globalization Studies published a survey of U.S. governors' attitudes toward China. The report clearly articulates the logic of cultivating state and local officials as a counterweight to Washington's increasing concern about China's national security threat:

In Washington, voices advocating a tough stance on China seem to have become mainstream and have growing momentum. [However,] in American politics, in addition to the White House and Congress, there is another type of decisive actor: the governors. Because of the federal system in the United States, governors can ignore the White House's orders... And each federal member enjoys a certain degree of diplomatic independence... Therefore, as Washington's overall attitude towards China toughens, the attitudes of the states are crucial.²

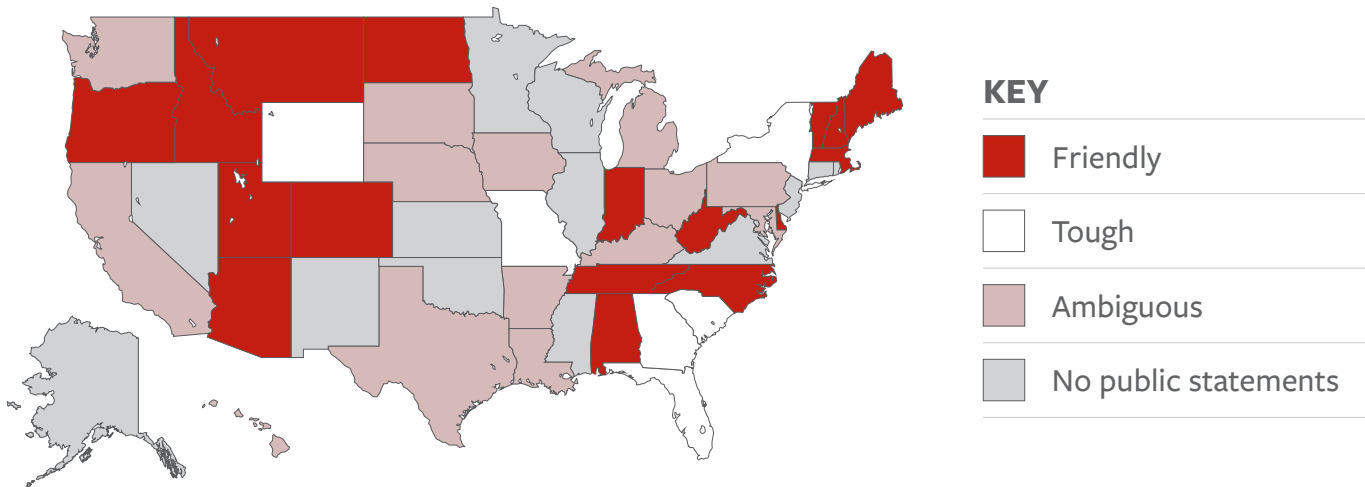
Based on public statements, the Minzhi-Tsinghua survey finds that “among the 50 governors, 17 are friendly to China, 14 have ambiguous attitudes toward China, six are tough on China, and 14 have made no clear or public statement on China.” The report argues that “hardline” stances among U.S. governors are overwhelmingly human rights-related “and rarely involve economic and trade issues.”³

1. Minzhi focuses on globalization and free trade, the U.S.-China balance of power, and global economic rules. Its founder, Chen Mingjian, described its purpose in 2017: “The United Front is the new force of non-governmental diplomacy. Think tanks are an important form of expression in the process of the United Front's globalization. The establishment of think tanks in China needs to have think tank platforms to communicate with the RAND Corporation, the Hoover Institution, and the Brookings Institution.” “陈明键：‘全球化大统战’的纵横家 [Chen Mingjian: A Strategist of the ‘Global United Front’],” *International Student Magazine* (China), March 13, 2017.

2. “美国对华态度全景 - 州长篇 [A Panoramic View of U.S. Attitudes Toward China-Governor's Article],” *Minzhi International Research Institute and Center of Globalization Studies*, June 22, 2019. This report was the first in a larger series called “Overview of U.S. Attitudes toward China.” For more information on Minzhi and Tsinghua, see the appendix.

3. Ibid. Then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo cited the Minzhi-Tsinghua report at the 2020 U.S. National Governors Association's winter meeting. Anna Gronewold, “Pompeo to governors: China is watching you,” *Politico*, February 8, 2020. (<https://www.politico.com/news/2020/02/08/mike-pompeo-governors-china-112539>)

2019 Minzhi-Tsinghua Ranking of Governor Friendliness to China, by State



U.S. Governors With “Friendly” Attitudes Toward China, According to the Minzhi-Tsinghua Study⁴

State	Governor
Alabama	Kay Ivey
Arizona	Doug Ducey
Colorado	Jared Polis
Delaware	John Carney
Idaho	Brad Little
Indiana	Eric Holcomb
Maine	Janet Mills
Massachusetts	Charlie Baker
Montana	Steve Bullock
New Hampshire	Chris Sununu
North Carolina	Roy Cooper
North Dakota	Doug Burgum
Oregon	Kate Brown
Tennessee	Bill Lee
Utah	Gary Herbert
Vermont	Phil Scott
West Virginia	Jim Justice

The findings of the Minzhi-Tsinghua report themselves must be taken with a grain of salt: Its methodology is simplistic, based entirely on public statements, with little rigor or comprehensiveness. However, the report *is* indicative of the ambitions behind China’s subnational diplomacy. Beijing uses subnational relationships to influence U.S. economic, technological, and other ecosystems. Beijing also sees subnational relationships as potential tools for leverage over Washington. In the immediate term, state and local governments can exert pressure on the federal government. In the longer term, Beijing views subnational officials as future national leaders.⁵ This is not wrong; governors have a history of success in U.S. presidential elections. Other local leaders often aspire to federal office.

The Chinese subnational influence campaigns, and the apparatus implementing them, are longstanding. Yet until recently, China’s efforts mostly flew under the radar of U.S. federal policymakers — or were mistaken for a benign effort to promote greater cooperation with individual states. As a result, the federal government supported some of the most direct manifestations of China’s influence.

4. For full lists, see the appendix.

5. To an extent, this may be a function of mirror-imaging the Chinese system: Chinese provinces play a core economic role; the People’s Republic of China assumes that U.S. states do as well. Moreover, in China, political leaders follow a direct path from subnational-level to national-level posts.

This report does not provide an exhaustive inventory of Beijing's initiatives to shape state and local opinion. Rather, it emphasizes mechanisms under the direction of the CCP that present themselves as apolitical means of promoting dialogue, coordination, and understanding. As such, this report does not examine the role of Chinese consulates, which openly advertise themselves as official Foreign Ministry vehicles, or commercial mechanisms of influence that might be influenced by government policy, such as foreign investment or tourism. Nor does this report seek to measure the impact of Chinese subnational influence initiatives or to compare China's approach to those of other foreign governments. Instead, it aims to elucidate the strategic goals guiding Beijing's subnational influence operations, as well as the tools and mechanisms Beijing employs. This report also suggests indicators for assessing where those operations are likely to have the greatest effect in the United States.

Not all features of PRC engagement in the United States are malign or manipulative. Not all mechanisms of cooperation, dialogue, and understanding between the United States and China constitute fronts for government influence campaigns. However, understanding the range of mechanisms for subnational partnerships that the CCP deploys is a necessary precursor to identifying where and when threats may exist.

This monograph begins with a brief survey of Chinese discourse on subnational influence efforts, as well as the bureaucracy guiding them. The report first documents Chinese leader Xi Jinping's 2015 visit to Seattle as an example of the strategic orientation, sprawling objectives, and diverse tools that define Beijing's influence campaigns within the United States. It then examines the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and its activities in the United States, including the China-U.S. Governors Forum. Afterward, it turns to non-CPAFFC

mechanisms of subnational influence guided by the CCP. Finally, the monograph presents a notional set of indicators for assessing state-level vulnerability to China's influence efforts.

Xi Goes to Seattle

In 2015, Xi Jinping visited the United States for the first time since becoming general secretary of the CCP. During his trip, Xi visited the White House and attended the 70th anniversary of the United Nations in New York. But he began his visit in neither Washington, DC, nor New York. Rather, on the morning of September 22, he landed in Seattle, where he attended the third China-U.S. Governors Forum.⁶

Xi's Seattle visit reflects the sprawling objectives and mechanisms that define Beijing's influence campaigns within the United States. Both entail close, transactional relationships with key players in the business, industrial, and technology sectors; courting of state and local officials; a prominent role for American non-governmental associations (whether commercially oriented, such as the U.S.-China Business Council, or with a more thematic mandate, such as the National Committee on United States-China Relations); and an emphasis on sister cities and other government-to-government programming.

China-U.S. Governors Forum

Xi spent most of his first day in Seattle at the third China-U.S. Governors Forum, attended also by Governors Jay Inslee of Washington, Jerry Brown of California, Terry Branstad of Iowa, Rick Snyder of Michigan, and Kate Brown of Oregon.⁷ In his address to the forum, Xi explained: "Without successful cooperation at the sub-national level, it would be very difficult to achieve practical results for cooperation at the national level. That is why I place great importance on China-U.S. sub-national

6. Jane Perlez, "Xi Jinping's U.S. Visit," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2015. (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/reporters-notebook/xi-jinping-visit>)

7. "习近平在中美省州长论坛上的讲话 [Speech by Xi Jinping at the China-U.S. Provincial Governors Forum]," *Xinhua News Agency* (China), September 23, 2019.

cooperation.”⁸ Xi also pointed to the growth of sister-city and sister-state relationships as evidence of strengthening China-U.S. subnational ties: “Thirty-one Chinese provinces/regions/cities have established 43 sister province/state relations and 200 sister-city relations with 50 American states.” Xi then advertised the economic value of such ties to the governors in attendance:

Over the past 10 years, 42 American states have achieved triple-digit increases in their exports to China. According to statistics of the American side, Chinese investment to the U.S. over the past five years has expanded by over eight billion dollars on average every year and the pace is still getting faster. For the five American states represented here, China is among your top four export markets and a major source of international students.⁹

Xi proceeded to outline opportunities for further development of U.S.-China subnational relations. The United States was “welcome to actively participate in the ‘Belt and Road’ Initiative,” he said. The United States could also match its “technology and expertise” with “China’s market demand” in everything from industrialization and information technology (IT) development to urbanization and agricultural modernization. Xi offered concrete examples:

Iowa is known as the “granary of the U.S.” and Oregon is also a major agricultural producer. These two states can strengthen their cooperation with big agricultural producers like Shaanxi, Hebei and Heilongjiang provinces. California’s HP has set up a global computer production center in Chongqing, where further cooperation in the IT industry can be expected. Michigan, as the largest motor vehicles producer of the U.S., can also explore cooperation with China. In fact, Michigan may start with the six Chinese provinces and cities present today, as they all have a booming car industry. And the two sides can explore cooperation in a third market.¹⁰

Xi emphasized that increased economic ties to China would deliver what American voters want most: jobs. “I know as governors, you are most concerned about employment. Cooperation in the above-mentioned areas will promote growth and create jobs, thus bringing benefits to our peoples.”¹¹

How the governors at the forum responded to Xi’s pitch is unclear. Media coverage of the forum was pooled; participants met privately with Xi after the event.¹² However, there are indications that Xi’s message resonated. For example, just days after a meeting at the forum between Xi and Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, a Chinese delegation traveled to Iowa to sign over a dozen contracts for soybean and health

8. “Address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the China-U.S. Governors Forum,” *China Daily* (China), September 24, 2015. (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015xivisit/2015-09/24/content_21966923.htm). Xi acknowledged in his speech that this was not a new approach. During a visit to the United States in 2012, he and then-Vice President Joe Biden attended a meeting of seven Chinese and six American governors in Los Angeles. In attendance were the governors of California, Vermont, Montana, Illinois, Hawaii, and the Northern Mariana Islands. PRC Embassy in the United States of America, Press Release, “Xi Jinping and Joe Biden Jointly Meet the Governors of Chinese Provinces and American States,” February 18, 2012. Xi also met with delegates to the second China-U.S. Governors Forum in Beijing in 2013. “Xi meets 2nd China-US governors’ forum attendees,” *China.org.cn* (China), April 15, 2013. (http://www.china.org.cn/world/2013-04/15/content_28549659.htm)

9. “Address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the China-U.S. Governors Forum,” *China Daily* (China), September 24, 2015. (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015xivisit/2015-09/24/content_21966923.htm)

10. Ibid.

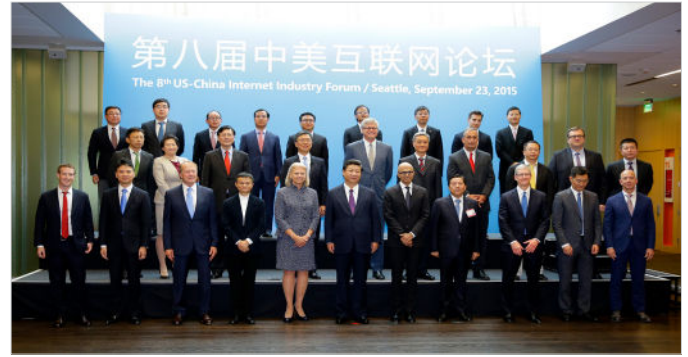
11. Ibid.

12. California Office of the Governor, Press Release, “Governor Brown to Co-Chair U.S.-China Governors Forum, Meet with President Xi of the People’s Republic of China on Tuesday in Seattle,” September 18, 2015. (<https://www.ca.gov/archive/gov39/2015/09/18/news19114/index.html>)

products.¹³ That trip and those contracts were likely planned before the forum. But Branstad's enthusiasm was notable. "This," Branstad said in an interview about the contracts, "builds upon a long line of experience that we have had together."¹⁴ Referencing the growing U.S.-China tensions over the South China Sea, cybersecurity, trade issues, and human rights, Branstad further noted that he respected "the fact that those issues have to be resolved at a national level. My role as a governor is to build those relationships, increase trade, and create more jobs in Iowa, those kinds of things."¹⁵ Branstad's comments reflect U.S. state and local leaders' tendency to focus on economic growth at the expense of long-term development and security. Beijing's influence efforts take advantage of this myopic perspective.

“Branstad’s comments reflect U.S. state and local leaders’ tendency to focus on economic growth at the expense of long-term development and security. Beijing’s influence efforts take advantage of this myopic perspective.”

Admittedly, Branstad's language and attitude are not reflective of all governors, nor are they a result of his participation in the China-U.S. Governors Forum. Named ambassador to China in 2017, Branstad has known Xi for some 35 years and has described Xi as an "old friend." They met while Xi was visiting Iowa for an agricultural tour as a local party leader.¹⁶ Still, Branstad's approach tracks with China's political agenda and amplifies CCP influence.



Xi attends the Microsoft-hosted Eighth U.S.-China Internet Industry Forum during his 2015 visit — or, as The New York Times put it, “\$2.5 trillion of American corporate power pay[s] homage to the Chinese president.” (Photo by Ted S. Warren via Getty Images)

Xi Means Business

Following the governors forum, Xi spent the evening of his first day in Seattle at an 800-person dinner for business executives, co-hosted by the U.S.-China Business Council, the National Committee on United States-China Relations, and the Washington State Welcoming Committee. Participants paid about \$30,000 per table. Governor Jay Inslee delivered welcoming remarks, followed by a bipartisan cast of political and commercial heavyweights: the chair of the U.S.-China Business Council and Ford Motor Company's CEO; then-U.S. Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker; the chair of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, Carla Hills, who served as U.S. trade representative under President George H.W. Bush; and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who introduced Xi. Xi's remarks that night constituted his only policy-focused speech during his state visit to the United States. The co-chairs

13. William Petroski, "Branstad talks with Chinese leader; soybean deals eyed," *Des Moines Register*, September 23, 2015. (<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/2015/09/23/branstad-talks-chinese-leader-soybean-deals-eyed/72687488>); "Iowa, Chinese commercial delegation to sign purchasing contract Thursday," *Iowa Gazette*, September 23, 2015. (https://wfcourier.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/iowa-chinese-commercial-delegation-to-sign-purchasing-contract-thursday/article_09c103a4-6ed5-53de-a979-80c4ad146bd9.html)

14. William Petroski, "Branstad talks with Chinese leader; Soybean deals eyed," *Des Moines Register*, September 23, 2015. (<https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/2015/09/23/branstad-talks-chinese-leader-soybean-deals-eyed/72687488>)

15. Ibid.

16. Anthony Kuhn, "How the U.S. Ambassador To China May Have Xi Jinping's Ear," *NPR*, February 18, 2018. (<https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2018/02/18/586371119/how-the-u-s-ambassador-to-china-may-have-xi-jinpings-ear>); James Lynch, "Xi still an 'old friend,' but Branstad worried by China's authoritarian drift," *The Gazette*, October 26, 2020. (<https://www.thegazette.com/government-politics/xi-still-an-old-friend-but-branstad-worried-by-chinas-authoritarian-drift>)

of the Washington State Welcoming Committee, Seattle Mayor Ed Murray and Gary Locke — the latter of whom previously served as Washington state governor (1997–2005), U.S. secretary of commerce (2009–2011), and ambassador to China (2011–2014) — closed out the night.¹⁷

“During Xi’s visit, Boeing Chief Executive Dennis Muilenburg trumpeted China’s commitments to order 300 jets. Muilenburg did not mention that Boeing had recently agreed to move a 737 jet completion and delivery center as well as more parts work to China.”

Xi dedicated much of the next day to the business community. He attended talks hosted by the Paulson Institute, where U.S. and Chinese business leaders discussed market access. Xi stopped by the Microsoft-hosted U.S.-China Internet Industry Forum and visited Boeing’s local assembly line.¹⁸ During Xi’s visit, Boeing Chief Executive Dennis Muilenburg trumpeted China’s commitments to order 300 jets.

Muilenburg did not mention that Boeing had recently agreed to move a 737 jet completion and delivery center as well as more parts work to China.¹⁹ Also during Xi’s visit, Boeing announced commitments to long-term strategic cooperation with China’s National Development and Reform Commission as well as the Aviation Industry Corp of China (AVIC).²⁰ The U.S. Department of Defense has since found that AVIC is linked to China’s military.²¹

Xi also made less explicitly commercial stops in Washington state. He held a private gathering with members of the West Coast’s Chinese American community and visited Lincoln High School in Tacoma, the sister city of Fuzhou, Fujian.²² The two cities formed their relationship when Xi was party chief of Fujian in 1984. On the morning of the 24th, Xi flew to Washington, DC.²³

“We will look back on [Xi’s visit] as a major milestone in relations between our two great countries, with Washington state once again playing a central role in fostering positive ties,” said Kristi Heim, executive director of the Washington State China Relations Council, after Xi’s departure.²⁴

17. Jane Perlez, “Xi Jinping’s U.S. Visit,” *The New York Times*, September 25, 2015. (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/cp/reporters-notebook/xi-jinping-visit>); “Dinner Honoring President Xi Jinping,” *U.S.-China Business Council*, accessed October 26, 2021. (<https://www.uschina.org/events/dinner-honoring-president-xi-jinping>)

18. Washington Office of the Governor, Press Release, “President Xi visit helped showcase Washington state as ‘world-class center of innovation,’” September 25, 2015. (<https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/president-xi-visit-helped-showcase-washington-state-%E2%80%9Cworld-class-center-innovation>)

19. Dominic Gates, “Boeing chief defends China 737 center, unveils 300 jet orders,” *Seattle Times*, September 23, 2015. (<https://www.seattletimes.com/business/boeing-aerospace/boeing-agrees-to-open-737-center-in-china-inks-300-new-jet-orders>)

20. Boeing, Press Release, “Boeing Hosts China President Xi Jinping, Announces Airplane Sales, Expanded Collaboration with China’s Aviation Industry,” September 23, 2015. (<https://boeing.mediaroom.com/2015-09-23-Boeing-Hosts-China-President-Xi-Jinping-Announces-Airplane-Sales-Expanded-Collaboration-with-Chinas-Aviation-Industry>)

21. U.S. Department of Defense, “Qualifying Entities Prepared in Response to Section 1237 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999 (Public Law 105-261),” June 12, 2020. (https://media.defense.gov/2020/Aug/28/2002486659/-1/-1/1/LINK_2_1237_TRANCHE_1_QUALIFYING_ENTITIES.PDF)

22. The phrase “sister cities” refers to agreements between cities — or boroughs, towns, prefectures, regions, et cetera — designed to promote cultural and commercial ties.

23. Nectar Gan and Cedric Sam, “Xi Jinping’s US visit: itinerary, issues, and delegation,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), September 30, 2015. (<https://multimedia.scmp.com/xi-jinping-us-visit>)

24. Washington Office of the Governor, Press Release, “President Xi visit helped showcase Washington state as ‘world-class center of innovation,’” September 25, 2015. (<https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/president-xi-visit-helped-showcase-washington-state-%E2%80%9Cworld-class-center-innovation>)

All Politics Is Local

“There is a saying in American politics,” wrote Jia Zhongzheng of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in 2017, “that all politics is local.” He suggested that state and local governments were particularly amenable to China’s overtures. Chinese companies might circumvent federally imposed barriers to sensitive trade and foreign investment by working at the subnational level.²⁵

Jia’s logic is widespread across Chinese academic discourse, and increasingly so as national-level tensions between Washington and Beijing escalate. Beijing sees subnational relationships first as means to influence U.S. economic, technological, and narrative environments, and second as means to increase China’s national-level influence in the United States. In the short term, subnational governments can exert pressure on the federal government. In the longer term, Beijing views subnational officials as future national leaders to be cultivated so they become favorably predisposed toward China.

In 2017, State Council Counselor Wang Huiyao and two of his colleagues at the Center for China and Globalization, a Beijing-based research organization that Wang founded, explained that U.S. state and local officials are more malleable and readily influenced than their national counterparts. “In some economically underdeveloped areas of the United States, some local officials have never even traveled abroad,” they wrote. Beijing can shape their attitudes through “track-two

diplomatic platforms” —that is, exchanges that nominally involve only private individuals and organizations.²⁶

In 2018, Liu Danning of the Party School of the CCP’s Jiangsu Provincial Committee published an article on China’s relationship with Jerry Brown, the governor of California from 2011 to 2018. Liu treated the Brown-China relationship as a case study reflecting the value of China’s subnational influence campaign. “More and more scholars have turned their attention to the international activities of subnational governments, and a parallel diplomacy has emerged from this,” Liu wrote. “The theory of parallel diplomacy ... highlights the autonomy of regional, subnational governments as international actors.” Liu added that during Brown’s tenure as governor, he “had frequent interactions with Chinese national leaders. The two sides established a close relationship of friendship and mutual trust... Therefore, California became one of the states with the friendliest relations with China.”²⁷

Chinese state media promote a similar view. An August 2019 headline from Xinhua News, the official PRC news agency and China’s biggest media outlet, reads: “Going against the wind: U.S. local governments actively seek cooperation with China.”²⁸ The article states:

In mid-to-late August, the Kentucky Economic Development Agency will lead American entrepreneurs to China on a week-long business development trip. This is a microcosm of the fact that U.S. local governments are actively seeking cooperation opportunities and maintaining the

25. Jia Zhongzheng, “中美经贸关系新变化及中国对策 [New Changes in Sino-U.S. Economic and Trade Relations and China’s Countermeasures],” *International Trade* (China), 2017.

26. Li Junqiang and Zang Zhenrui, “基础设施建设是中美合作的关键点 [Infrastructure Construction Is a Key Point of Sino-US Cooperation],” *Motherland* (China), 2017. In addition to serving as president of the Center for China and Globalization (CCG), Wang’s other titles include honorable vice chairman of the China Association for International Economic Cooperation under the Ministry of Commerce, and vice chairman of the Western Returned Scholars Association under the UFDW. In the cited interview, his comments are recorded alongside those of Miao Lu and Tang Beijie, CCG’s co-founder and deputy secretary-general, respectively.

27. Liu Danning, “美国加州杰瑞·布朗时期对华外交研究 (2011-2018)” [Research on the Diplomacy of California during the Jerry Brown Period (2011-2018)], *Jiangsu Provincial Party School of the Jiangsu Provincial Committee of the CCP*, June 2020. This friendship was evident, for example, in “groundbreaking” cooperation between California and China’s Ministry of Science and Technology and China’s National Development and Reform Commission, among others, as well as in “the first Sino-U.S. joint working group on trade and investment cooperation between provinces and states.”

28. “通讯：逆风前行——美地方政府积极寻求对华合作 [Correspondence: Going Against the Wind: U.S. Local Governments Actively Seek Cooperation with China],” *Xinhua News Agency* (China), August 19, 2019.

long-term development of bilateral relations despite the escalating Sino-U.S. economic and trade friction.²⁹

Why? The article explains that state and local governments are “pragmatic” and “value the driving role of U.S.-China relations on local employment and economic development.”³⁰

The Xinhua News article does not cover Beijing’s deliberate efforts to encourage those “pragmatic” attitudes and develop subnational influence. Yet such efforts are part of China’s larger “United Front,” which is both a strategy and an ecosystem of CCP-guided or CCP-controlled groups charged with advancing both the government’s domestic control and its international influence.

The Central United Front Work Department (Central UFWD) is the CCP department that manages most, but not all, of the United Front’s work at home and abroad, including its international influence operations.³¹ The Central UFWD reports directly to the Central Committee of the CCP. The State Department has described the United Front Work Department as “an organ tasked with co-opting and neutralizing threats to the party’s rule and spreading its influence and propaganda overseas.”³² Accordingly, the Central UFWD

reportedly oversees so-called “re-education” programs in Xinjiang and Tibet, technology transfer programs with foreign counterparts, and efforts to influence the Chinese diaspora.³³ In addition to working through the Central UFWD, the CCP also supports provincial and local-level UFWDs.

The UFWD system guides and supports a broad network of bureaucracies and institutions designed to execute its mission. These include the Foreign Ministry and the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, and Confucius Institutes.³⁴ In 2018, the Central UFWD absorbed the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, an administrative office previously subordinate to the State Council and charged with engaging overseas and returning Chinese people.³⁵

Much of Beijing’s United Front work at the state and local level in the United States takes place through the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the lead organization for relations with foreign local governments.³⁶ Its role is to advance China’s international ambitions through channels other than formal diplomacy, focusing on subnational foreign governments, political figures, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).³⁷

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. See: Alexander Bowe, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, “China’s Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States,” August 24, 2018. (<https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-overseas-united-front-work-background-and-implications-united-states>)

32. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo, U.S. Department of State, Press Statement, “Designation of the National Association for China’s Peaceful Unification (NACPU) as a Foreign Mission of the PRC,” October 28, 2020. (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-national-association-for-chinas-peaceful-unification-nacpu-as-a-foreign-mission-of-the-prc/index.html>)

33. For additional discussion of the Central UFWD, regional UFWDs, and the network of entities to which they are connected, see: Ryan Fedasiuk, “Putting Money in the Party’s Mouth: How China Mobilizes Funding for United Front Work,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, September 16, 2020, Volume 20, Issue 16. (<https://jamestown.org/program/putting-money-in-the-partys-mouth-how-china-mobilizes-funding-for-united-front-work>)

34. Ibid.

35. See: Alex Joske, “Reorganizing the United Front Work Department: New Structures for a New Era of Diaspora and Religious Affairs Work,” *Jamestown Foundation China Brief*, May 9, 2019, Volume 19, Issue 9. (<https://jamestown.org/program/reorganizing-the-united-front-work-department-new-structures-for-a-new-era-of-diaspora-and-religious-affairs-work>)

36. John Dotson, “CPAFFC and the United Front Strategy: ‘Sub-National Engagement,’” *Jamestown Foundation*, October 15, 2019. (https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Dotson_Presentation.pdf?x30101). CPAFFC professes to engage in “non-governmental diplomacy across the world” but is supported and overseen by the Chinese government. “Association Introduction,” *The Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries*, accessed October 26, 2021. (<https://www.cpaffc.org.cn>)

37. Jichang Lulu, “Repurposing democracy: The European Parliament China friendship cluster,” *Sinopsis*, November 26, 2019. (<https://sinopsis.cz/en/ep>)

Established in 1954, CPAFFC presents itself as a “people’s organization.” Its English-language website describes it as an NGO. That label belies CPAFFC’s oversight and management by China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and staffing by foreign-affairs cadres.³⁸ The organization is fully a part of the CCP party-state.³⁹ In 2019, Larry Diamond of the Hoover Institution and Orville Schell of the Asia Society described CPAFFC as the “public face of the CCP’s UFW.”⁴⁰ As Australian scholar Clive Hamilton put it in 2018 testimony before the Australian Parliament, CPAFFC is “an official organization masquerading as an NGO. CPAFFC forms an integral part of the CCP’s United Front network of covert overseas influence agencies. Its task is to win friends under the banner of people-to-people diplomacy, as the CCP calls it.” Regarding the situation in Australia, Hamilton testified, “Most municipal governments lack even a rudimentary understanding of the CCP’s political goals in these arrangements.”⁴¹

Who’s the Boss: CPAFFC’s Institutionalized Influence Campaign

In the United States, CPAFFC serves as the coordinating force behind China’s most prominent mechanisms of state and local influence. Together with the U.S. National Governors Association (NGA), CPAFFC co-convenes the China-U.S. Governors Forum, attended by Xi in 2015. CPAFFC also runs the China-U.S. Sub-National Legislators Cooperation Forum and sister-city relationships as well as more targeted dialogues, platforms, and exchanges.



*Delegates to the 2013 China-U.S. Governors Forum meet with Xi.
(Photo via the PRC Embassy in the United States of America)*

China-U.S. Governors Forum

In January 2011, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then-Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi signed a memorandum of understanding to establish the China-U.S. Governors Forum to serve as “a platform of communication for sub-national leaders of the two countries and advance pragmatic cooperation in trade, investment, energy, environment, culture, and other fields.”⁴² The forum would be co-convened by the NGA and CPAFFC. Clinton explained:

The Obama administration has made it a priority to strengthen the bonds between the United States and China... Individual U.S. governors have been reaching out to China for years, including at least eight who led trade delegations there in 2010. Chinese provincial leaders have made over 100 visits to America last year alone. There are already 36 sister provinces and states. Each has potential to bring significant benefits to people on both sides... That is why we support the National Governors Association and

38. Ibid.

39. CPAFFC has been described as an organ of the United Front Work Department. See: Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, “Our twisted sister cities,” *The Daily Telegraph* (Australia), April 22, 2020. (Accessed via Lexis Nexis)

40. *China’s Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, Eds. Larry Diamond and Orville Schell (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2019), page 187. (https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/00_diamond-schell-chinas-influence-and-american-interests_REVISED.pdf)

41. Clive Hamilton, *Testimony Before the Australian Parliament*, October 12, 2020. (https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=committees/commsen/8d638ff5-2861-4257-bf92-469caf9a203c/&sid=0002)

42. PRC Embassy in the United States of America, Press Release, “Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton Sign the Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Establishment of a China-U.S. Governors’ Forum to Promote Sub-National Cooperation,” January 20, 2011. (https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/hjtzxdmgfw_665768/t788646.shtml)

the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries in creating the Governor's Forum [*sic*], which is designed to help states build their own successful partnerships. Governors will share ideas, connect people and businesses, and then sustain and deepen these connections through regular meetings.⁴³

The vice president of CPAFFC and then-Washington state Governor Christine Gregoire signed a formal agreement on the governors forum one month later, in February 2011, at an NGA meeting.⁴⁴

The first forum took place in Salt Lake City in July 2011, followed by a dialogue in Beijing in October 2011.⁴⁵ A governors roundtable was held in Los Angeles during an official visit by then-Vice President Xi Jinping in February 2012.⁴⁶ The China-U.S. Governors Forum convened again in April 2013 in Tianjin, China;⁴⁷ September 2015 in Seattle, Washington;⁴⁸ May 2018 in Chengdu, China;⁴⁹ and May 2019 in Lexington,

Kentucky.⁵⁰ The Department of State discontinued U.S. participation in October 2020. It declared that CPAFFC had “sought to directly and malignly influence” U.S. state and local leaders in pursuit of China's global interests.⁵¹

In his 2018 article on China's “parallel diplomacy” with California's governor, Liu Danning of the Party School of the Jiangsu Provincial Committee of the CCP described the China-U.S. Governors Forum “as a multilateral platform which has achieved rapid expansion in the scale of exchanges.”⁵² Covering the 2019 forum meeting in Lexington, Xinhua News explained: “In the context of the complex relationship between the two countries, it is particularly important to strengthen exchanges and cooperation at the local level.”⁵³ An advertisement for that 2019 forum meeting on the website of the China General Chamber of Commerce, one of the

43. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Department of State, Press Statement, “Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the Establishment of the U.S.-China Governors Forum to Promote Sub-National Cooperation,” January 19, 2011. (<https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2011/01/155075.htm>)

44. “Kerry, Governors in Beijing to Strengthen U.S.-China Relations,” *The U.S.-China Policy Foundation*, April 18, 2013. (<https://uscpl.org/v3/2013/04/18/5578>)

45. Matt Canham, “Utah to host first U.S.-China Governors Forum,” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, February 26, 2011. (<https://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=51319780&citytype=CMSID>); “Kerry, Governors in Beijing to Strengthen U.S.-China Relations,” *The U.S.-China Policy Foundation*, April 18, 2013. (<https://uscpl.org/v3/2013/04/18/5578>)

46. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, Media Note, “Joint Statement on the U.S.-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue Outcomes of the Strategic Track May 3-4, 2012,” May 4, 2012. (<https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/05/189287.htm>)

47. “第二届中美省州长论坛在天津举行 [The 2nd China-US Governors' Forum Was Held in Tianjin],” *China News* (China), April 2016.

48. “Address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the China-US Governors' Forum,” *China Daily* (China), September 24, 2015. (https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015xixivisit/2015-09/24/content_21966923_2.htm)

49. Huang Zhiling and Zhang Xia, “NPC official calls China, US ‘inseparable,’” *China Daily* (China), May 23, 2018. (<https://www.chinadailyhk.com/articles/82/194/217/1527058272310.html>)

50. Ambassador Cui Tiankai, PRC Embassy in the United States of America, “崔天凯大使在第五届中美省州长论坛开幕式上的致辞 [Remarks by Ambassador Cui Tiankai at the Opening Ceremony of the Fifth China-US Governors' Forum],” May 24, 2019.

51. “U.S. Designates Chinese Body a Foreign Mission, Quits Local Cooperation Agreement,” *Reuters*, October 28, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-pompeo/u-s-designates-chinese-body-a-foreign-mission-quits-local-cooperation-agreement-idUSKBN27D305>)

52. Liu Danning, “美国加州杰瑞·布朗时期对华外交研究 (2011-2018) [Research on the Diplomacy of California during the Jerry Brown Period (2011-2018)],” *Jiangsu Provincial Party School of the Jiangsu Provincial Committee of the CCP*, June 2020.

53. “第五届中美省州长论坛在美国肯塔基州开幕 [The 5th China-U.S. Governors Forum opens in Kentucky, U.S.],” *Xinhua News Agency* (China), May 23, 2019. A March 2018 article in the Chinese journal *Contemporary American Review*, titled “China-U.S. Governors' Forum and Local Cooperation: Theory and Thinking,” was also pointed: “It is necessary to grasp the importance of U.S. states in U.S. domestic politics and enhance the strategic nature of the [governors] forum... We should pay attention to the study of various regions in the United States, understand Sino-U.S. local cooperation better, [and] take innovative measures to effectively deepen China-U.S. provincial-state local cooperation.” Wang Yong, “中美省州长论坛与地方合作:理论与思考 [Governors Forum and Local Cooperation: Theory and Thinking],” *Contemporary American Review*, March 2018.

conference's sponsors,⁵⁴ described it as an “exclusive deal-making opportunity.”⁵⁵

Documentation of the forum is inconsistent. There is no official website or list of attendees. C-SPAN covered the inaugural 2011 event but no others.⁵⁶ An agenda for the 2019 edition is available on the website of the China General Chamber of Commerce. No equivalent appears to exist for earlier years.⁵⁷

What press coverage does exist makes it clear that the forum prioritizes economic concerns and ties. Governor Christine Gregoire of Washington state, chair of the NGA, launched the inaugural 2011 forum on the subject of trade and investment. “Our economies have become interdependent,” she explained. A Xinhua News account of the 2019 forum in Kentucky stated in a headline, “Governors compete for investment at China-U.S. Governors’ Forum.” The article quotes a speech from Cyrus Habib, lieutenant governor of Washington state, in

which he said that “the key [to Washington state’s success] is international relationships... We are the number one source of U.S. imports to China. Our relationship with China is therefore absolutely central to the success that we have had economically.”⁵⁸ The 2019 forum led to a series of commercial agreements, including the launch of a joint venture engaged in magnesium trade.⁵⁹

“When one side wins, the other side wins,” said then-Kentucky Governor Matthew Bevin in his concluding remarks at the 2019 forum. “When China is strong, it is good for America. When America is strong, it is good for China.”⁶⁰

Ten years of precedent have provided some metrics for assessing Bevin’s claim. Roundups in *China Daily* of deals signed at the inaugural 2011 forum in Salt Lake City focus, in particular, on a series of agreements relevant to the solar supply chain. The Wuhu Economic and Technological Development Zone in Anhui

54. The China General Chamber of Commerce (CGCC) also works directly with the NGA, including by co-hosting a regular International Cooperation Forum. See: China General Chamber of Commerce, Press Release, “International Cooperation Forum at 2018 NGA Summer Meeting in New Mexico,” July 24, 2018. (<https://www.cgccusa.org/en/international-cooperation-forum-at-2018-nga-summer-meeting-in-new-mexico>). Inaugurated in 2017 and held during the NGA’s summer meeting, the International Cooperation Forum brings together Chinese CEOs and investors, U.S. governors, and other business executives to, as the CGCC puts it, “discuss international cooperation at the sub-national level.” Then-Utah Governor Gary Herbert and then-Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper spoke at the 2018 event, as did executives from CGCC member companies Bank of China USA and China Investment Corporation. North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum and Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson attended. In his keynote address at the event, Zhang Ping, the consul general from the PRC Consulate General in Los Angeles, urged the attendees to use subnational cooperation to return stability to U.S.-China economic ties: “We need to promote the awareness of the importance of maintaining a sound China-U.S. relationship. China is not a threat, but a partner of cooperation.” The event featured a panel on “Rebuilding a Silk Road to Economic Development,” moderated by Mike Walter of CGTN-America, Qi Bin of China Investment Corporation, and Raymond Qiao of the Bank of China New York. Hickenlooper and Herbert spoke on a separate panel focused on “U.S-China Economic Ties, Growth, Strategies, and Investment Opportunities.”

55. “U.S.-China Governors’ Collaboration Summit,” *China General Chamber of Commerce – USA*, accessed October 26, 2021. (Archived version available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210417061407/https://www.cgccusa.org/en/us-china-governors-collab-summit>)

56. “U.S.-China Governors Forum,” *C-SPAN*, July 15, 2011. (<https://www.c-span.org/video/?300540-2/us-china-governors-forum>)

57. “U.S.-China Governors’ Collaboration Summit,” *China General Chamber of Commerce – USA*, accessed October 26, 2021. (Archived version available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210417061407/https://www.cgccusa.org/en/us-china-governors-collab-summit>)

58. Xu Jing, Xu Xingtang, and Miao Zhuang, “Feature: Governors compete for investment at China-U.S. Governors Forum,” *Xinhua News Agency* (China), May 25, 2019. (http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/25/c_138088615.htm). The piece also quotes Colorado Lieutenant Governor Dianne Primavera (“Colorado welcomes the opportunity to do business with China”) and then-Kentucky Governor Matt Bevin (“We want you here, we want your investment here”).

59. “China-U.S. magnesium joint venture launched at Governors Summit in Kentucky,” *Xinhua News Agency* (China), May 25, 2019. (http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-05/25/c_138087299.htm)

60. National Governors Association, Press Release, “400 Representatives of U.S., China Attend Collaboration Summit in Kentucky,” May 24, 2019. (<https://www.nga.org/news/press-releases/400-representatives-of-u-s-china-attend-collaboration-summit-in-kentucky>)



Event promotion for the Governors' Collaboration Summit from the China General Chamber of Commerce – USA.

Province reportedly reached a deal with California-based NuvoSun for a thin-film solar cells project; Asia Silicon (Qinghai) and New Hampshire-based GT Solar agreed to work together; and the chairman of China's CHINT Group Corporation, a member of the Zhejiang Province delegation,⁶¹ announced plans to “write a billion-dollar check” as part of a partnership with a Missouri-based firm focused on semiconductor- and solar-related wafer products.⁶²

The precise details of those agreements are unclear.⁶³ What is clear is that the next year, the U.S. Commerce Department found that both Asia Silicon and the CHINT Group, among other Chinese players, were dumping solar products into the U.S. market.⁶⁴ Over the decade since, China has come to monopolize the international solar supply chain, which the United States once led. China has done so in large part thanks to acquisition of expertise and technology from U.S. players, as well as domestic subsidies and preferential policies.

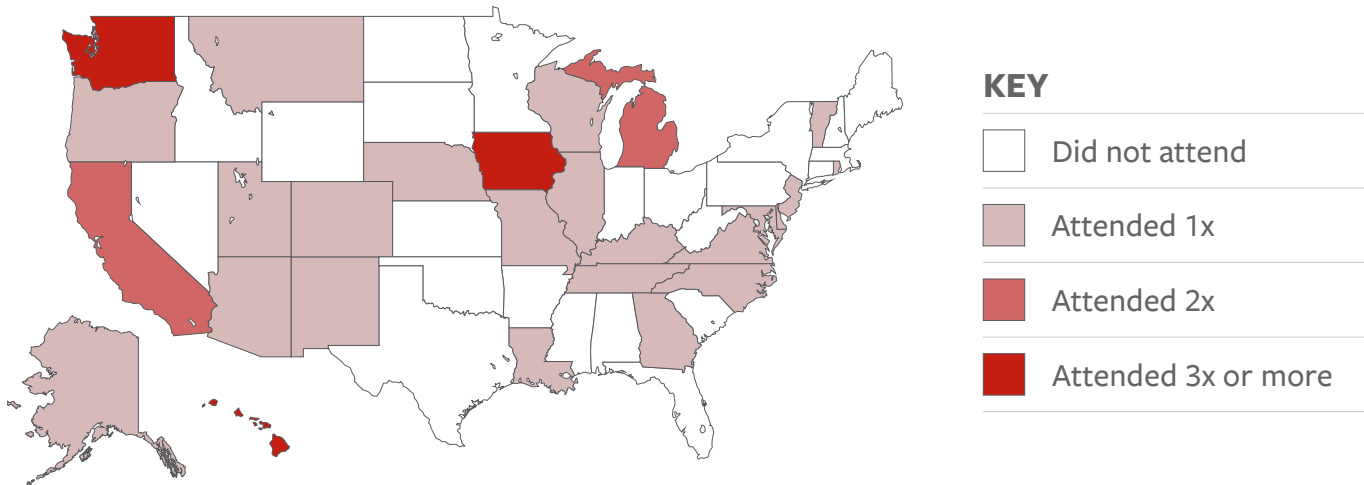
61. Some three months later, in October 2011, then-Missouri Governor Jay Nixon met with the CHINT Group in Hongzhou as part of a trade delegation to China, during which time he signed a \$200 million agreement with Hebei provincial officials. Kelsey Volkmann, “Nixon Signs \$200 Million Chinese Trade Deal,” *St. Louis Business Journal*, October 26, 2011. (<https://www.bizjournals.com/stlouis/news/2011/10/26/nixon-signs-200m-chinese-trade-deal.html>)

62. Tan Yingzi, “Provincial Governors Sign Deals in U.S.,” *China Daily* (China), July 15, 2011. (https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/us/2011-07/15/content_12910791.htm); Xie Songxin and Zhang Jianming, “Sub-national forum a hit with provinces,” *China Daily* (China), July 15, 2011. (https://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2011-07/15/content_12910881.htm)

63. The GT Solar-Asia Silicon agreement likely referred to GT Solar's provision of polysilicon production equipment to Asia Silicon.

64. U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration, Fact Sheet, “Commerce Finds Dumping and Subsidization of Crystalline Silicon Photovoltaic Cells, Whether or Not Assembled into Modules from the People's Republic of China,” October 10, 2012. (https://enforcement.trade.gov/download/factsheets/factsheet_prc-solar-cells-ad-cvd-finals-20121010.pdf)

Attendance Record at the China-U.S. Governors Forum and Related Dialogues, by State⁶⁵



China-U.S. Sub-National Legislatures Cooperation Forum

The China-U.S. Governors Forum is not the only CPAFFC forum to target U.S. subnational governments. Xi's 2015 visit to the United States led to the establishment of the China-U.S. Sub-National Legislatures Cooperation Forum, officially launched in 2016.⁶⁶ Co-convened by CPAFFC and the State Legislative Leaders Foundation (SLFF), the forum met annually every year from 2016 to 2019 in Honolulu, Wuhan, Las Vegas, and Shijiazhuang, respectively, as well as in March 2021 in a virtual format. State

and provincial officials, as well as private-sector representatives, attended. The November 2019 forum featured speeches by then-U.S. Ambassador to China Terry Branstad; California State Senate Majority Leader Robert Hertzberg; and Alabama Speaker of the House Mac McCutcheon.⁶⁷

Documentation of the Sub-National Legislatures Cooperation Forum is even more sparse than that of the governors forum. However, Xinhua News coverage of the March 2021 virtual event stressed that it “was the first institutional activity of exchanges and cooperation between China and the United States to have resumed after the new U.S. administration

⁶⁵. The Governors Forum does not publish official attendance lists. This tally is collected from press and official documentation of the events, covering the five official fora as well as the 2011 and 2012 dialogues. The authors believe that this tally is comprehensive for every iteration of the forum and dialogues except the inaugural one, in February 2011. Held during the NGA meeting, that forum reportedly was attended by approximately 20 U.S. governors. See: Special Representative for Global Intergovernmental Affairs Reta Jo Lewis, U.S. Department of State, “Outcome of U.S.-China Governors Forum,” *Remarks to the Press*, July 19, 2011. (<https://2009-2017-fpc.state.gov/168721.htm>). Subsequent fora and dialogues featured an average attendance of four U.S. governors or lieutenant governors, with higher attendance at the U.S.-based events than at the China-based ones. Attendance is defined as participation by a state's governor or lieutenant governor. While not reflected on this map, the Puerto Rico governor participated in February 2011; Guam in October 2011; and the Northern Mariana Islands in October 2011 and February 2012. The U.S. official with the best-known attendance record is Terry Branstad of Iowa, who attended three times as a governor and again in 2018 as U.S. ambassador to China.

⁶⁶. The Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, Department of American and Oceanian Affairs, Press Release, “The Third U.S.-China Subnational Legislatures Cooperation Forum Held in the United States,” November 29, 2018. (<https://cpaffc.org.cn/index/news/detail/id/6468/lang/2.html>)

⁶⁷. You Siyuan, “China, U.S. vow to push cooperation in sub-national legislation,” *CGTN* (China), November 13, 2019. (<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-11-13/China-U-S-vow-to-push-cooperation-in-sub-national-legislation-LA1eh9yp20/index.html>)

took office.”⁶⁸ Representatives from seven Chinese provinces and legislators from seven U.S. states attended.⁶⁹ According to Xinhua News, Steven Lakis, the president of the SLFF, declared that “the SLFF will continue to cooperate with the CPAFFC to enhance the dynamic relationship between the U.S. and Chinese people.”⁷⁰

Sister Cities

The phrase “sister cities” refers to agreements between cities — or boroughs, towns, prefectures, or regions — designed to promote cultural and commercial ties. The sister-city program began in 1956 and was a brainchild of President Dwight Eisenhower.⁷¹

Pairings can, in some cases, mean as little as a sign on the side of the road. However, Beijing has used sister cities as a tool in its international diplomatic efforts.⁷² Xi’s visit to Lincoln High School in Tacoma is emblematic of this. CPAFFC organizes and oversees China’s sister-city relationships: Institutionally speaking, they exist under the umbrella of Beijing’s subnational influence campaign. Today, there are over 250 sister-city partnerships between the United States and China.⁷³

The ramifications of China’s emphasis on sister-cities are difficult to evaluate precisely. The relationships create channels for dialogue, investment, and exchange, which are not necessarily harmful. Yet they open up avenues for Beijing’s political, economic, and scientific and technological influence. Chinese discussions point to this potential: A 2018 headline in the *South China Morning Post* reads, “Sister cities in the West a bulwark for China against worsening U.S. ties.” The article’s sub-headline reads, “Sister-city relationships have their roots in mutual understanding, but offer economic spin-offs too.”⁷⁴

These are indications, albeit indirect ones, of the political and economic value Beijing may derive from sister-city relationships. The Hoover Institution’s Larry Diamond and the Asia Society’s Orville Schell reported in 2019 that China insists on inserting into sister-city agreements a clause stipulating that corresponding activities be implemented “in accordance with the principles on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China.” This clause appears to be a veiled reference to the “One China” principle, which bars diplomatic recognition of Taiwan as a second Chinese state alongside the People’s Republic of China. The clause could be used to limit states’ and cities’ exchanges with Taiwan.⁷⁵

68. “Chinese, U.S. local legislators vow to enhance cooperation,” *Xinhua News Agency* (China), March 2, 2021. (http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/02/c_139778470.htm)

69. The Chinese provinces represented were Beijing, Hebei, Shanxi, Jiangsu, Hubei, Guangdong, and Yunnan. The U.S. states were Alabama, California, Delaware, Hawaii, Iowa, Michigan, and Tennessee. See: PRC Embassy in the United States of America, Press Release, “Ambassador Cui Tiankai Congratulates on the Opening of the 5th China-U.S. Sub-national Legislatures Cooperation Forum,” March 4, 2021. (<http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zmgxss/t1858421.htm>)

70. “Chinese, U.S. local legislators vow to enhance cooperation,” *Xinhua News Agency* (China), March 2, 2021. (http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-03/02/c_139778470.htm); You Siyuan, “China, U.S. vow to push cooperation in sub-national legislation,” *CGTN* (China), November 13, 2019. (<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-11-13/China-U-S-vow-to-push-cooperation-in-sub-national-legislation-LA1eh9yp20/index.html>)

71. “History of Sister Cities International,” *Fort Worth Sister Cities International*, accessed October 26, 2021. (<https://www.fwsistercities.org>)

72. The first U.S. city to pair with a Chinese city was St. Louis, Missouri, which partnered with Nanjing in 1979.

73. As aggregated from Chinese- and English-language lists, press releases, and media coverage.

74. Tim Pile, “Sister cities in the West a bulwark for China against worsening US ties,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), December 19, 2018. (<https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/travel/article/2178679/sister-cities-west-bulwark-china-against-worsening-us>). See also: Hao Xiaosong, “扩容城市‘朋友圈’ [Expanding the City’s ‘Friend Circle’],” *China Pictorial* (China), November 5, 2019.

75. *China’s Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance*, Eds. Larry Diamond and Orville Schell (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2019), pages 29–30. (https://asiasociety.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/00_diamond-schell-chinas-influence-and-american-interests_REVISED.pdf)

Building on Chicago's sister-city partnerships with both Shanghai and Shenyang, then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel and then-PRC Vice Minister of Commerce Wang Chao signed a Gateway Cities Agreement in 2013. That agreement tethered Chicago to Chinese cities — Beijing, Chengdu, Hangzhou, Qingdao, Shanghai, Shenyang, Tianjing, and Wuhan — to facilitate and expand their trade, investment, and communication. The press release covering that agreement noted that it led the Chicago government to establish the position of director for China strategic initiatives to “further develop the City's relationship with China.”⁷⁶ Detroit, Michigan, has a sister-city relationship with Chongqing, the site of Ford Motor Company's largest manufacturing base outside of Detroit.⁷⁷

“Building on Chicago's sister-city partnerships with both Shanghai and Shenyang, then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel and then-Vice Minister of Commerce of then-PRC Vice Minister of Commerce Wang Chao signed a Gateway Cities Agreement in 2013.”

In May 2018, the state of Massachusetts and province of Guangdong held an event in Boston to celebrate their sister-city relationship. “We are pleased in Massachusetts to have your companies like the China Railroad Rolling Stock Corp (CRRC) building our

train cars at this moment,” declared Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito, according to *China Daily*.⁷⁸ The next year, ties between CRRC and China's military and government prompted the United States to pass a law barring use of federal funds to purchase the company's buses and rail cars.⁷⁹ In June 2020, the Department of Defense identified CRRC Corporation Limited as a Communist Chinese military company, in accordance with requirements of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999.⁸⁰



Chinese President Xi Jinping talks with students during his visit to the Lincoln High School in Tacoma, Washington on September 23, 2015. (Photo by Xinhua/Lan Hongguang via Getty Images)

76. Chicago Sister Cities International, Press Release, “Chicago Builds Ties with China,” June 23, 2014. (<http://www.chicagosistercities.com/news/chicago-builds-ties-china>)

77. “State by State: China and Michigan Trade,” *China Briefing*, June 17, 2015. (<https://www.china-briefing.com/news/state-by-state-china-and-michigan-trade>)

78. Zhang Ruinan, “Guangdong ties to Massachusetts bolstered in Boston,” *China Daily* (China), May 14, 2018. (<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201805/14/WS5af94e6ca3103f6866ee8421.html>). Polito also cited Qilu Pharmaceuticals, WuXi AppTec, and the Shanghai (Zhangjiang Boston) Enterprise Park.

79. Rebecca Fannin, “China's EV Maker BYD Gets Bad News From DC And Punches Back,” *Forbes*, December 14, 2019. (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/rebeccafannin/2019/12/14/chinas-ev-maker-byd-gets-bad-news-from-dc-and-punches-back/?sh=1d7971872513>)

80. See the State Department's tracking of Communist Chinese military companies: U.S. Department of State, Under Secretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment, Fact Sheet, “Communist Chinese Military Companies Listed Under E.O. 13959 Have More Than 1,100 Subsidiaries,” January 14, 2021. (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/communist-chinese-military-companies-listed-under-e-o-13959-have-more-than-1100-subsidiaries/index.html>)

Other Players

The State Department has described the United Front Work Department as “an organ tasked with co-opting and neutralizing threats to the party’s rule and spreading its influence and propaganda overseas.”⁸¹ United Front subnational influence efforts in the United States extend beyond CPAFFC programming. The UFWD also oversees China’s much-discussed international network of Confucius Institutes, though they are ostensibly funded and organized by China’s Ministry of Education.⁸² Confucius Institutes run educational exchanges and programming designed to disseminate favorable narratives about China and are generally housed at colleges and universities.⁸³

Beyond the Confucius Institutes, there are also subtler, less discussed, and potentially more widespread networks of United Front influence in the United States. Media is a major focus.

Specifically, Beijing wields an ecosystem of Chinese-language media outlets with close ties to the CCP. Every two years since 2001, the People’s Republic of China’s state-owned China News Service has hosted the World



Photographers outside the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing on May 15, 2017. (Photo by Thomas Peter/AFP via Getty Images)

Chinese Media Forum in China.⁸⁴ China News Service belongs to the UFWD. As China News Service puts it, the World Chinese Media Forum is the “top summit” for overseas Chinese media, a chance for them to “come home.”⁸⁵ Delegates take guided visits around China, meet with government officials, and hold structured discussions. Past themes have included “The Belt and Road Initiative and the New Development of Chinese Media to Integrating the World” and “Witnessing the Times: Chinese Media’s ‘China Story.’” More than 400 overseas media representatives, including more than 60 from outlets based in the United States, attended the last forum in 2019.⁸⁶

81. Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo, U.S. Department of State, Press Statement, “Designation of the National Association for China’s Peaceful Unification (NACPU) as a Foreign Mission of the PRC,” October 28, 2020. (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/designation-of-the-national-association-for-chinas-peaceful-unification-nacpu-as-a-foreign-mission-of-the-prc/index.html>)

82. For context on connections between Confucius Institutes and the CCP’s United Front Work Department, see: Alex Joske, “The party speaks for you: Foreign interference and the Chinese Communist Party’s united front system,” *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, June 9, 2020. (<https://www.aspi.org.au/report/party-speaks-you>)

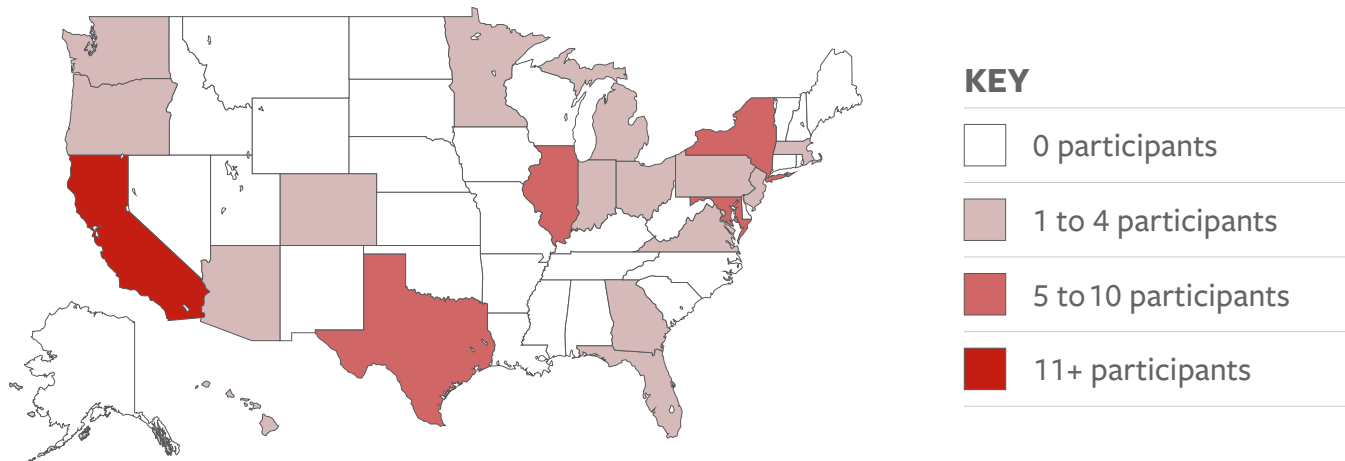
83. For a more in-depth treatment of Confucius Institutes, see the forthcoming analysis by FDD China expert Craig Singleton. See also: Billy Kenber, “China is using UK universities to lobby officials,” *The Sunday Times* (UK), August 24, 2019. (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/china-is-using-uk-universities-to-lobby-officials-rbxv5vcbn>); Peter Varghese, “Australian universities and China: we need clear-eyed engagement,” *The Strategist*, August 23, 2019. (<https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australian-universities-and-china-we-need-clear-eyed-engagement>); U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, Fact Sheet, “‘Confucius Institute U.S. Center’ Designation as a Foreign Mission,” August 13, 2020. (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/confucius-institute-u-s-center-designation-as-a-foreign-mission/index.html>)

84. “第十届世界华文传媒论坛 [The 10th World Chinese Media Forum],” *China News Network* (China), October 13, 2019.

85. “背景资料：世界华文传媒论坛 [Background Information: World Media Summit],” *China News* (China), August 23, 2007. At the sixth meeting, those present published a “Chongqing Declaration” on overseas Chinese media in the international narrative system. They declared that “the global Chinese media are working together” to build a new international discourse, and that “Chinese-language media across the five continents are not only an indispensable part of local multiculturalism, but also inseparable from the rare development opportunities of Chinese culture.” See: “世界华文传媒论坛发表《重庆宣言》 [World Chinese Media Forum Publishes ‘Chongqing Declaration’],” *China News Network* (China), September 18, 2011.

86. “世界华文传媒论坛：一路耕耘一路收获 [World Chinese Media Forum: Hard Work All the Way to Harvest],” *China News Network* (China), October 9, 2019.

Outlets That Participated In 2019 World Chinese Media Forum, by State⁸⁷



States With the Greatest Concentration of 2019 World Chinese Media Forum Participants

State	Outlets
California	16
New York	10
Texas	10
Maryland	6
Illinois	5
Washington, DC	4
Virginia	4
Washington	3

Some of these U.S.-based outlets are simply foreign affiliates of Chinese state media.⁸⁸ For example, the U.S. Overseas Chinese Network is a branch of the Overseas Chinese Network sponsored by Huasheng News, a

propaganda agency under the authority of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office under the UFWD.⁸⁹ The budget of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office notes that it is in charge of propaganda related to the Chinese diaspora.⁹⁰

⁸⁷. This analysis defines “outlets” as U.S.-based media outlets that sent delegates to the World Chinese Media Forum in 2019. It does not include non-U.S.-headquartered outlets that might operate in the United States. State affiliation is determined by the location of the outlet’s stations for radio and television operations, and by outlet headquarters for print and online operations. The one exception is print operations serving the Washington, DC-Maryland-Virginia area. These operations are coded as present in all three.

⁸⁸. That said, these outlets are willing to participate in a conference backed by the United Front, oriented clearly around China’s creation of a global media network, and featuring visits by government officials. This suggests a certain proclivity. That proclivity is also evident in their reporting, which features a heavy bias toward Beijing.

⁸⁹. “黄燕媚：文明与毒素的当代碰撞 [Huang Yanmei: Contemporary Collision of Civilization and Toxins],” *Chinese Overseas Network* (China), September 7, 2019; “Home,” *Chinese Overseas Network* (China), accessed October 26, 2021; PRC State Council, Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, “国务院侨务办公室-侨办介绍 [Introduction to Overseas Chinese Affairs Office],” accessed October 26, 2021. (<https://www.gov.cn/fuwu/bumendifangdang/bumendating/qiaoban/index.html>)

⁹⁰. PRC State Council, Overseas Chinese Affairs Office, “国务院侨务办公室2017年度部门预算[2017 Annual Budget of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council],” April 2017, Translated by Georgetown University’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology, August 17, 2020. (https://cset.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/t0192_OCAO_budget_2017_EN.pdf)

Other outlets, such as the Phoenix Media Group, have less overt ties to the Chinese government. Multiple Phoenix representatives attended the 2019 World Chinese Media Forum, including the CEO of Hong Kong-based Phoenix Television and the chief editor of one of its U.S. outlets, the *Phoenix Times*. The People's Republic of China partially owns Phoenix Television.⁹¹ A former director of Phoenix Television testified in a 2019 U.S. Federal Communications Commission filing that the station's programming was "subject to the dictates of the leadership of the Central Communist Propaganda Department, Central Communist Overseas Propaganda Office, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs."⁹²

In addition to hosting its biennial forum, China News Service works directly with many of the organizations in attendance as well as with other Chinese-language outlets operating in the United States. As early as 2006, the service reported it had "deepened or established cooperative relations with dozens of Chinese-language media in the United States." The outlets it listed included the *American Chinese Business Daily*, the *New World Times*, *Meilong.com*, *Washington News*, and *Asian American News* in Washington, DC; the China Star Media Group, the *China Times*, the *Chicago Chinese Tribune*, *Chicago Guangzhou Net*, and *Chicago Healthy Life* in Chicago; *U.S.-China Evening News*, *Dallas News*, and the Southern Newspaper Communication Group in

Dallas; and *China Times*, the *U.S.-China Messenger*, and *Mingqiao Sports* in Houston.⁹³

In addition to promoting Beijing-friendly narratives, the outlets that attend the biennial forum may seek to cultivate ties with American elected officials via endorsements or favorable coverage. These are typical activities for U.S. media outlets but may present a concern if Beijing helps set the agenda. For example, the Colorado-based *Chinese American Post* supported former Representative Mike Coffman (R-CO) from the time he was state treasurer through to his election to Congress. In 2017, the paper published a feature story on Coffman's visit to a Confucius Institute classroom.⁹⁴

The activities of the *U.S.-China Times*, whose editor-in-chief attended the 2019 World Chinese Media Forum, illustrate the potential for cooperation with PRC entities that seek to influence the private sector. The *U.S.-China Times* signed a strategic cooperation agreement with both the People's Republic of China's investment promotion association, the America-China Investment Promotion Association (ACIP), and the American Chinese Expert Association in November 2018 to host a joint summit on exchanges with the United States.⁹⁵

ACIP is a Los Angeles-headquartered nonprofit with branches in China as well as in Europe. ACIP describes itself as "the most influential platform for promoting

91. Keoni Everington, "CCP Reporter who told Trump he was from Taiwan faces stiff fine," *Taiwan News* (Taiwan), April 17, 2020. (<https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3917938>)

92. U.S. Federal Communications Commission, "Reply to Opposition to Petition to Deny," Filing Before the Federal Communications Commission," File No. 325-NEW-20180614-00001, September 10, 2019. (<https://ecfsapi.fcc.gov/file/106062671205148/19-144%2013.pdf>)

93. "中新社与美国数十家华文媒体深化或建立合作关系 [China News Service Has Deepened or Established Cooperative Relations with Dozens of Chinese-language Media in the United States]," *China News* (China), October 24, 2006. That concentration of outlets in or near Houston — also reflected in the attendees of the World Chinese Media Forum — is worth emphasizing. In July 2020, the United States announced that it would close the Chinese Consulate in Houston, Texas, based on findings regarding its engagement in espionage and influence activities. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "Briefing with Senior U.S. Government Officials on the Closure of the Chinese Consulate in Houston, Texas," *Remarks to the Press*, July 24, 2020. (<https://2017-2021.state.gov/briefing-with-senior-u-s-government-officials-on-the-closure-of-the-chinese-consulate-in-houston-texas/index.html>)

94. "联邦众议员马克考夫曼先生 访问和嘉勉中美邮报、丹佛孔子课堂 [Representative Mike Coffman Visited and Encouraged China-US Post and Confucius Classroom in Denver]," *Chinese-American Post* (China), August 21, 2017.

95. "美中时报与美中投资促进会、美国华人专家会签署战略合作协议 [The America-China Times Signed a Strategic Cooperation Agreement with the U.S.-China Investment Promotion Association and the American Chinese Expert Association]," *Sino-US Times* (China), November 22, 2018.

the exchange and interaction of financial capital, industrial innovation, education, science, culture and health, and tourism across Europe, the United States, and China.”⁹⁶ Its mission is “global integration and sharing; calmly grasping the right to survive, control, and dominate the new industrial revolution.”⁹⁷ In 2013, ACIP’s chairman, Zhang Jiaohao, founded and chaired the Anhui Province Investment Promotion Association, supported by the Anhui Provincial Government and led by a team of government officials. Zhang also worked as a consultant for a number of Chinese government entities. ACIP has partnered with various Chinese government entities that fall under the United Front umbrella, including the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, as well as security companies supporting China’s national defense system.⁹⁸

The American Chinese Expert Association is also a California-registered nonprofit. It, too, has branches in China and cooperates with Chinese government entities, including players within the United Front system.⁹⁹

Other, non-UFWD Chinese institutions in the United States also leverage subnational relationships to facilitate access to U.S. resources. The Chinese Association for Science and Technology, USA (CAST-USA) is a prime case. CAST-USA is the U.S.-based

chapter of the China Association for Science and Technology (CAST), a professional organization for Chinese scientists. CAST is under the CCP’s authority and represented at the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC).¹⁰⁰ CAST-USA is incorporated as a nonprofit organization and has more than a dozen individually registered chapters in the United States, including in Washington, DC, New York, and Silicon Valley. CAST-USA also has at least 11 so-called “liaison offices” in China.¹⁰¹

CAST-USA’s activities are designed to advance China’s technological goals. The organization hosts a regular convention and other events in the United States that provide a forum for interaction among Chinese corporate, research, and government entities and their U.S. counterparts. CAST-USA’s 25th convention, in 2017, took place in New York City at Columbia University, co-organized with New York City Council member Ydanis Rodriguez. Governors Andrew Cuomo of New York and Tom Wolf of Pennsylvania both sent representatives. Congressman Adriano Espaillat (D-NY) attended, as did New York State Assemblywoman Carmen De La Rosa. Then-Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) sent a congratulatory letter. The Science and Technology Counselor from the Consulate General of China in New York delivered remarks. So did a number

96. “美中投资促进会主席张家豪领投5亿 [America-China Investment Promotion Association Chairman Zhang Jiahao Led the Investment of 500 Million Yuan],” *China Network* (China), July 5, 2019.

97. “美中投资促进会 [America-China Investment Promotion Association],” *Scicat Encyclopedia*, January 5, 2021.

98. “美中投资促进会主席张家豪领投5亿 [America-China Investment Promotion Association Chairman Zhang Jiahao Led the Investment of 500 Million Yuan],” *China Network* (China), July 5, 2019; “美中投资促进会一行莅临我集团考察指导 [The America-China Investment Promotion Association Visited Our Group for Inspection and Guidance],” *Global Express* (China), August 8, 2020; “美中投资促进会常州分会成立 [America-China Investment Promotion Association Changzhou Branch Was Established],” *Chinese Overseas Network* (China), October 28, 2018.

99. “美国华人专家会会长：‘侨梦苑’是创业沃土 [President of the American Association of Chinese Experts: ‘Qiaomengyuan’ Is a Fertile Ground for Entrepreneurship],” *China News Network* (China), December 16, 2016.

100. “中国科学技术协会2019年部门预算 [China Association for Science and Technology 2019 Budget],” *The China Association for Science and Technology*, April 2019, Translated by Georgetown University Center for Security and Emerging Technology, August 27, 2020. (<https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/china-association-for-science-and-technology-2019-budget>); “People’s Political Consultative Conference of the People’s Republic of China,” *University of Minnesota Human Rights Library*, accessed October 26, 2021. (<http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/research/ppcc.html>)

101. “2015 International Forum for Technology Innovation, Collaboration and Development: The 23rd Annual Conference of CAST-USA,” *Chinese Association for Science and Technology, USA*, October 2015. (<http://castgny.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/CAST-Conf-2015-en.pdf>)

of Chinese commercial representatives.¹⁰² There were no overt indications that CAST-USA is an extension of the CCP.

CAST-USA describes itself as “a ‘bridge’ between the United States and China for both personnel and information exchanges, and for cooperation in science and technology, economic, trade and other areas.” CAST-USA aims to establish “cooperative relations with American corporations, enterprises, institutions and organizations, to create favorable conditions and environment for cooperation between the American and Chinese people in seeking funds, market development, technology transfer and investment opportunities between the United States and China.”¹⁰³

In June 2018, a 12-person delegation from CAST-USA visited CAST’s international department in China and met with CAST Vice Minister Zhang Sen. The president of CAST-USA, Pan Xinghua, thanked “CAST for its continuous support to CAST-USA” and declared that “CAST-USA hopes to strengthen the substantive exchanges and work docking between the associations and establish a continuous and long-term working mechanism.” The two sides discussed overseas talent recruitment, then signed a strategic cooperation agreement.¹⁰⁴ Two months earlier, China’s minister of science and technology, Wang Zhigang, met with the president-elect of CAST-USA, Jiao Dequan, in Beijing. They discussed foreign technological cooperation and

talent exchanges, and Wang emphasized the “positive role played by CAST-USA in promoting Sino-U.S. scientific and innovation competition.” Jiao promised to “promote the exchange and cooperation of scientific and technological talents between the two countries.”¹⁰⁵

Where the Money Goes: Assessing State-Level Economic Exposure

Beijing’s subnational campaign rests on the premise that influence derives not only from personal relationships but also from economic dependence on China. In his 2017 article, Jia Zhongzheng of the Chinese Academy of Sciences asserted that “the degree of dependence on China will largely determine a state’s attitude: States that have more exports to China and rely more on Chinese investment are more pro-China.”¹⁰⁶ In his 2015 Seattle address, Xi likewise hinted at the role of economics in shaping political attitudes. “I know as governors, you are most concerned about employment,” he told his audience.¹⁰⁷

Chinese analysts emphasize trade and employment, focusing on the extent to which a given subnational economy relies on trade with China, as well as the extent to which Chinese investment might foster employment in the given state. This suggests that Beijing assesses

102. Chinese Association for Science and Technology, USA, Press Release, “US China Collaboration Forum,” accessed October 26, 2021. (<http://castgny.org/en/index.php/us-china-collaboration-forum>)

103. Ryan Fedasiuk and Emily Weinstein, “Overseas Professionals and Technology Transfer to China,” *Georgetown University Center for Security and Emerging Technology*, July 21, 2020. (<https://cset.georgetown.edu/publication/overseas-professionals-and-technology-transfer-to-china>); “Missions,” *Chinese Association for Science and Technology, USA*, accessed October 26, 2021. (<https://webcast621.wixsite.com/castusa/organization>)

104. China Association for Science and Technology, Press Release, “旅美科协一行拜访中国科协国际部 [A delegation from the American Association for Science and Technology Visited the International Department of the Chinese Association for Science and Technology],” June 26, 2018.

105. PRC Ministry of Science and Technology, Press Release, “科技部部长王志刚会见中国旅美科技协会候任会长焦德泉 [Minister of Science and Technology Wang Zhigang meets with Jiao Dequan, President-Elect of China Association of Science and Technology in the U.S.],” May 23, 2018.

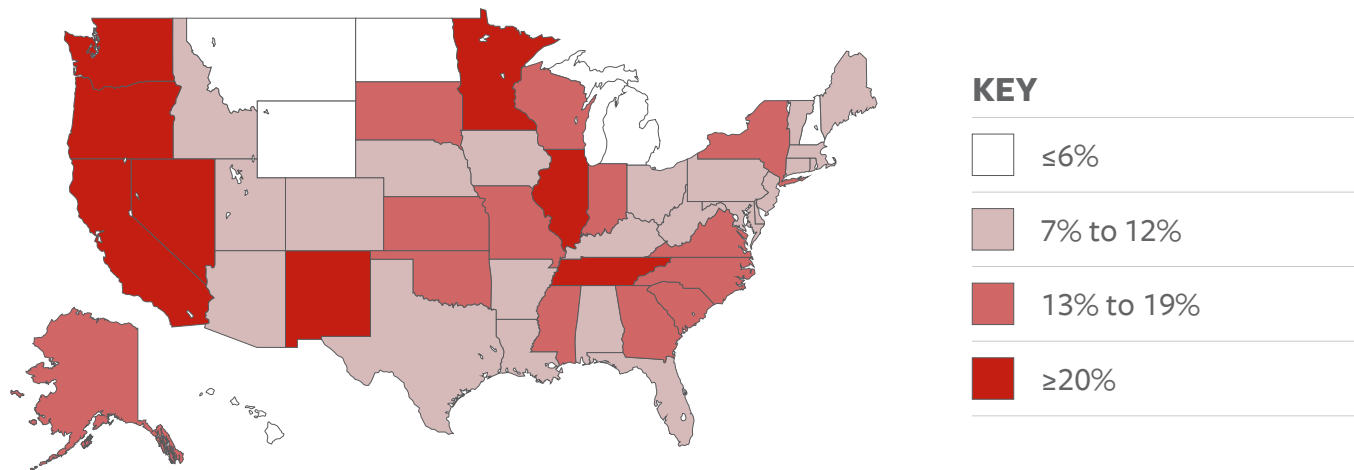
106. Jia Zhongzheng, “中美经贸关系新变化及中国对策 [New Changes in Sino-US Economic and Trade Relations and China’s Countermeasures],” *International Trade (China)*, 2017.

107. “Address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at the China-US Governors’ Forum,” *China Daily (China)*, September 24, 2015. (https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2015xivisit/2015-09/24/content_21966923_2.htm)

vulnerability to subnational influence campaigns using metrics such as China's share of a state's trade or foreign investment. The maps below show the degree to which different U.S. states might rely on Chinese markets and investment, based on their trade volume and corporate

relationships. These indicators do not show causality or even correlation with attitudes toward China. They are intended to represent potential state vulnerabilities and the levers of influence that China may be poised to wield.

China's Share of States' Commodity Trade, 2019¹⁰⁸

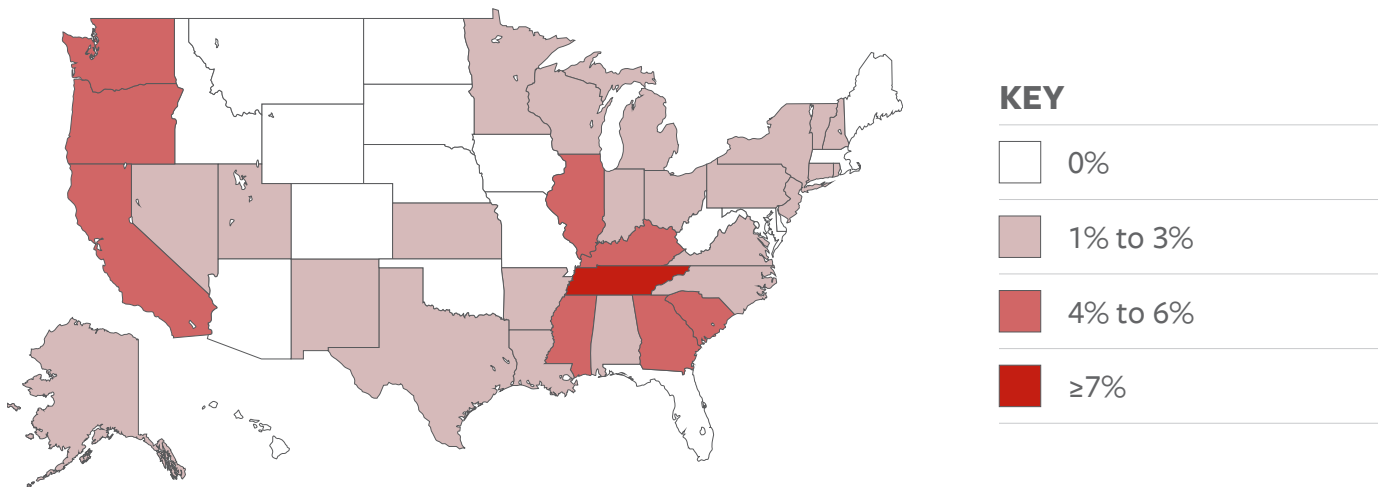


State	Trade With China as a Percentage of State GDP*
California	27%
New Mexico	25%
Arkansas	23%
Oregon	22%
Tennessee	22%
Minnesota	22%
Illinois	21%
Nevada	20%
Washington	20%
Virginia	18%

* Rounded to the nearest whole number

108. The trade data are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau. Trade with Hong Kong and with the People's Republic of China are both included.

Commodity Trade With China as a Percentage of State GDP, 2019¹⁰⁹



State	Trade With China as a Percentage of State GDP*
Tennessee	7%
South Carolina	5%
Illinois	5%
California	5%
Kentucky	4%
Mississippi	4%
Oregon	4%
Washington	4%
Georgia	4%
New Jersey	3%

* Rounded to the nearest whole number

Leaders from the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization explained in 2017: “The demand for foreign capital from China drives close connections with U.S. states. Chinese entrepreneurs who are willing to invest in state governments are generally treated as guests by state politicians and officials, regardless of their party or ruling philosophy.”¹¹⁰ They also argued that state and local officials are more malleable and readily influenced than their national counterparts.¹¹¹

Xinhua News illustrated the value of dependence for Beijing in a 2019 series of vignettes about local reactions to President Donald Trump’s trade policy:

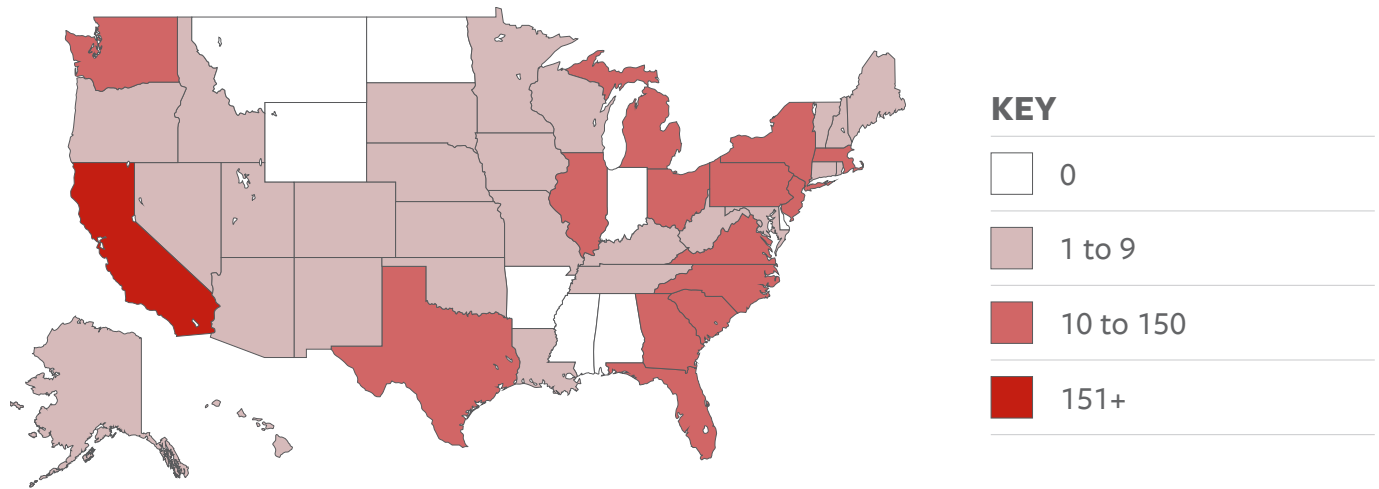
Oregon Governor Kate Brown said that for Oregon, which relies on trade with China, national tensions have had a “chilling effect” on [Oregon’s] exports to China, causing a serious blow to the state’s agriculture... Los Angeles Deputy Mayor Nina Hachigian stated that trade with China accounts

¹⁰⁹. The GDP data are sourced from the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. The trade data are sourced from the U.S. Census Bureau. Trade with Hong Kong and with the People’s Republic of China are both included.

¹¹⁰. Li Junqiang and Zang Zhenrui, “基础设施建设是中美合作的关键点 [Infrastructure Construction Is a Key Point of Sino-US Cooperation],” *Motherland* (China), 2017.

¹¹¹. *Ibid.*

Subsidiaries of Chinese Companies in the U.S., by State of Headquarters¹¹²



for 60 percent of the trade volume of Los Angeles. Affected by economic and trade frictions, the Port of Los Angeles' exports to China have fallen sharply, and uncertainty has also brought challenges to port operations. She said that California's exports of fruits, nuts, and wine products to China have suffered heavy losses, Chinese companies' investment has declined, and Los Angeles' tourism industry has also suffered.¹¹³

After Los Angeles, the Xinhua account turns to Missouri, followed by Kentucky, Louisiana ("We are still open for business"); Idaho ("Still very interested in China"); and Washington state ("Lieutenant Governor Cyrus Habib said the relationship with China is the most important secret of Washington State's success").¹¹⁴

Conclusion: Documenting and Responding to China's Influence Campaign

The U.S. government is starting to acknowledge Beijing's bid for subnational influence. In August 2020, the State Department designated the Confucius Institutes' head office in the United States as a PRC foreign mission, a status requiring it "to regularly provide information to the State Department about PRC citizen personnel, recruiting, funding, and operations in the United States."¹¹⁵ Two months later, the State Department issued another foreign-mission designation, this time targeting six Chinese-domiciled media companies operating in the United States: *Yicai Global*, the *Jiefang Daily*, *Xinmin Evening News*, the *Beijing Review*, the *Economic Daily*, and Social Sciences in China Press.¹¹⁶ Days later, then-Secretary of State Mike Pompeo discontinued

¹¹². The headquarters data are sourced from Uniworld Online's *Foreign Company Database*.

¹¹³. "通讯：逆风前行——美地方政府积极寻求对华合作 [Correspondence: Going Against the Wind: U.S. Local Governments Actively Seek Cooperation with China]," *Xinhua News Agency* (China), August 19, 2019.

¹¹⁴. Ibid

¹¹⁵. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, Fact Sheet, "Confucius Institute U.S. Center' Designation as a Foreign Mission," August 13, 2020. (<https://www.state.gov/confucius-institute-u-s-center-designation-as-a-foreign-mission>)

¹¹⁶. Ben Westcott and Jennifer Hansler, "U.S. designates six more Chinese media companies as foreign missions," *CNN Business*, October 22, 2020. (<https://www.cnn.com/2020/10/22/media/us-china-media-company-pompeo-intl-hnk/index.html>)

participation in the memorandum of understanding undergirding the China-U.S. Governors Forum.¹¹⁷

These measures signaled Washington's intention to resist Chinese influence efforts. However, the effort was haphazard: While the United States pulled out of the governors forum, the China-U.S. Sub-National Legislatures Cooperation Forum was not affected. Despite designating six media outlets as foreign missions, the State Department did not address the full ecosystem of Chinese-language media outlets that attend the China News Service's World Chinese Media Forum. At least for now, Beijing benefits from an asymmetry: Its centralized control of subnational influence efforts facilitates coordinated action, while American responses are scattershot. The U.S. government must target the core of the system rather than singling out individual offshoots in an ad hoc fashion.

The first step is to build a strategic framework for identifying both the organizing nodes of China's subnational influence campaign and the vulnerabilities of state and local governments. This report lays the foundation for such a framework by profiling the strategic goals behind China's state and local influence efforts, the bureaucracies that implement those efforts, the specific tools and mechanisms Beijing employs, and potential indicators of vulnerability at the state and local level.

This framework should be paired with parallel documentation efforts that aggregate intelligence information on Chinese influence efforts — and their outcomes — to support U.S. defensive measures. The effort should be coordinated and supported by the intelligence community and shared with state and local officials in a structured and recurring fashion.

Beijing is adept at using soft-power propaganda tools to shape American narratives. Beijing's vehicles for

subnational influence — whether Confucius Institutes or CPAFFC dialogues — operate in plain sight. Yet their effectiveness depends greatly on concealing the coordinating role of the CCP and key party organs, such as the Central UFWD. By exposing purportedly benign engagement mechanisms as components of a CCP-led campaign, U.S. messaging could turn those propaganda efforts into a liability for Beijing while warning off U.S. participants. Americans are increasingly familiar with the CCP's military aggression, economic exploitation, cyber threats, and grave human rights violations. It is time for them to recognize that the CCP also shapes opinion within the United States.

The federal government should pursue the following measures to address this challenge:

- First, Congress should support the development of an information-collection program focused exclusively on analyzing the Chinese subnational influence apparatus and the ways in which it reaches into the United States. Such an effort could be housed within the Department of Homeland Security or the Department of Justice (DOJ). The Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 tasked the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) with increasing efforts to combat Chinese influence efforts in the United States and to strengthen civil liberties protections.¹¹⁸ FBI progress spurred by that legislation may provide a foundation on which to build.
- The findings of this collection program should be shared broadly across the interagency.¹¹⁹ Counterintelligence, homeland security, and law enforcement actors with domestic security mandates should have access to the same information that informs China policy. Existing efforts, such as those led by the National Counterintelligence and Security Center in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, should share their findings

117. "U.S. designates Chinese body a foreign mission, quits local cooperation agreement," *Reuters*, October 28, 2020. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-pompeo/u-s-designates-chinese-body-a-foreign-mission-quits-local-cooperation-agreement-idUSKBN27D305>)

118. See: Section 605 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. 116-260, 134 Stat. 1185. (<https://www.congress.gov/bills/116th-congress/house-bill/133>)

119. See, for example: David Brunnstrom, "U.S. congressmen reach back into Cold War armory to respond to China," *Reuters*, July 28, 2021. (<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-congressmen-reach-back-into-cold-war-armory-respond-china-2021-07-28>)

not only with the appropriate oversight committees in Congress but also with relevant state and local authorities.

- The Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA) is another tool that federal authorities should leverage at the subnational level. As a first step, the FARA registration and oversight apparatus at DOJ could launch a series of pilot engagements with state and local leaders. These engagements could socialize the legal requirements that FARA imposes on foreign agents and should emphasize the legal and reputational risks that businesses may encounter in their operational, business, and lobbying efforts.
- The federal government should examine whether existing mechanisms for monitoring investment-driven foreign influence, such as the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, sufficiently account for the impact of investments in technology, infrastructure, and data at the subnational level.
- The EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, which provides green cards to foreign investors, should vastly improve its due diligence for applicants with ties to the CCP. Key findings from these due diligence efforts should feed into the subnational influence documentation program prescribed above.

Federal investments and information sharing are necessary but not sufficient to address the CCP's subnational influence campaigns. CCP strategy exploits the decentralized nature of American government, so state and local leaders and organizations must play an integral role in addressing this challenge. To that end, state and local governments should:

- Recognize the long-run costs associated with the short-term economic rewards that so often drive unbridled engagement with the Chinese influence apparatus.

- Develop a framework for monitoring the national security risks posed by subnational engagement with actors connected to the Chinese government, the CCP, and the Chinese military. State and local governments should factor these risks into their trade and investment promotion programming. Governors should lead this effort.
- State registries of foreign businesses would benefit from additional information-collection requirements and consistency. State-level investment mechanisms may also benefit from developing restrictions on the eligibility of state-owned and state-backed actors, similar to the restrictions that apply to Federal Transit Administration funding pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020.¹²⁰
- Trade and investment promotion activities should carry due diligence requirements to assess the potential for malign Chinese influence.
- Delegations that visit China for business development purposes or that host visiting Chinese groups should receive briefings on malign influence and counterintelligence risks from DOJ liaisons. American delegations should also be debriefed to update monitoring and shape best practices.
- Fora that convene state and local leaders, such as the National Governors Association, should promulgate best practices and informational resources that empower states and localities to tailor counter-influence programs.

Beijing has pursued a systematic, long-term approach to building up a set of institutions capable of influencing at the subnational level in the United States. American government is decentralized by design, yet only by working together can federal, state, and local authorities counter CCP influence. There is no time to waste.

120. U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, “Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Section 7613 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020,” accessed October 26, 2021. (<https://www.transit.dot.gov/funding/procurement/frequently-asked-questions-regarding-section-7613-national-defense>)

Appendix

The Minzhi International Research Institute is a Beijing-based think tank launched in September 2016. It focuses on globalization, Sino-U.S. trade, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. It is funded by the Democratic National Construction Association, one of China's eight political parties.¹²¹ Minzhi's founder and chairman, Chen Mingjian, describes the think tank as a mechanism for "the globalization of the United Front."¹²² Minzhi's research team has close ties with authorities within the Chinese system. The team includes Tu Xinquan, dean of the China WTO Research Institute; Fan Jishe of the American Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; Jia Qingguo of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference; Li Mingde, director of the Intellectual Property Center of the Chinese Academy

of Social Sciences; and Li Yong, deputy director of the Expert Committee of the China Society for International Trade. The team also includes Zhu Xiangyuan, vice chairman of the 9th and 10th Beijing CPPCCs and member of the Standing Committee of the 9th and 10th National People's Congresses.

Tsinghua University is among China's most prestigious universities. Xi's alma mater, Tsinghua is consistently ranked as the top university in China. It partners with UC Berkeley in running the Tsiinghua-Berkeley Shenzhen Institute and hosts the Schwarzman Scholars program. Tsinghua also has partnerships with the University of Michigan, MIT, UC Davis, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, Dow Chemical, Microsoft, the Lego Foundation, and Intel, among others.¹²³

The list of governor attitudes outlined in the Minzhi-Tsinghua report are as follows.

U.S. Governors With "Friendly" Attitudes Toward China, According to the Minzhi-Tsinghua Study

State	Governor
Alabama	Kay Ivey
Arizona	Doug Ducey
Colorado	Jared Polis
Delaware	John Carney
Idaho	Brad Little
Indiana	Eric Holcomb
Maine	Janet Mills
Massachusetts	Charlie Baker
Montana	Steve Bullock
New Hampshire	Chris Sununu
North Carolina	Roy Cooper

121. Membership in the Democratic National Construction Association does not preclude membership in the CCP. For example, Xhu Xiangyuan, one of the experts at Minzhi, is described on the think tank's website as a member of both the China Democratic National Construction Association and the CCP. The website also says he served as vice chairman of the 9th and 10th Beijing CPPCCs as well as a member of the Standing Committee of the 9th and 10th National People's Congress.

122. "陈明键：\"全球化大统战\"的纵横家 [Chen Mingjian: A strategist of the \"Global United Front\"]," *Overseas Student Association*, March 13, 2017.

123. "海外合作 [Overseas Cooperation]," *Tsinghua University*, accessed November 2, 2021.

U.S. Governors With “Friendly” Attitudes Toward China, According to the Minzhi-Tsinghua Study (Continued)

Stat	Governor
North Dakota	Doug Burgum
Oregon	Kate Brown
Tennessee	Bill Lee
Utah	Gary Herbert
Vermont	Phil Scott
West Virginia	Jim Justice

U.S. Governors With “Ambiguous” Attitudes Toward China, According to the Minzhi-Tsinghua Study

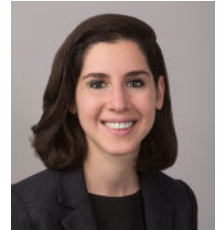
State	Governor
Arkansas	Asa Hutchinson
California	Gavin Newsom
Hawaii	David Ige
Iowa	Kim Reynolds
Kentucky	Matt Bevin
Louisiana	John Bel Edwards
Maryland	Larry Hogan
Michigan	Gretchen Whitmer
Nebraska	Pete Ricketts
Ohio	Mike DeWine
Pennsylvania	Tom Wolf
South Dakota	Kristi Noem
Texas	Greg Abbott
Washington	Jay Inslee

U.S. Governors With “Tough” Attitudes Toward China, According to the Minzhi-Tsinghua Study

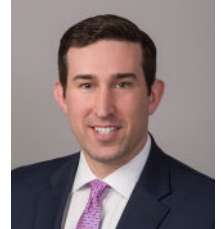
State	Governor
Florida	Ron DeSantis
Georgia	Brian Kemp
Missouri	Mike Parson
New York	Andrew Cuomo
South Carolina	Henry McMaster
Wyoming	Mark Gordon

About the Authors

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