



The Authoritarian Nexus:

How Russia and China Undermine Democracy Worldwide

ARGENTINA | BOSNIA & HERZEGOVINA | CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC | CHILE | LIBYA | MONTENEGRO | NORTH MACEDONIA | SERBIA | SUDAN





LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

ARGENTINA

Introduction

Over the past two decades, under the first two administrations of then-President (2007-2015) and then Vice President (2019-2023) Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, Argentina has deepened its ties with Russia and the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the expense of its relationships with the United States and other democracies. Plagued by economic crises and political dysfunction, Argentina has looked to the PRC for much-needed financing and investment with fewer conditions than required by the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral institutions. It has looked to Russia for political support and as an alternative to the U.S. The government of President Alberto Fernández (2019-2023), in which Vice President Kirchner played a leading role, actively courted partnerships and investments from both powers with the publicly stated intention of distancing Argentina from reliance on the U.S. dollar and from U.S. strategic interests. While current President Javier Milei (2023-present) has signaled that he will reevaluate the country's relationship with the PRC and announced that it won't join BRICS, it is too soon to tell whether he will pursue such a policy in the face of close economic ties and business interests.

The PRC and Russia, for their part, have encouraged the cultivation of closer relations, viewing Argentina as a key pathway for influence in the rest of Latin American and the Caribbean. The PRC has sought to benefit from Argentina's economic crises by providing a financial lifeline through increased trade and investment in sectors ranging from mining to energy infrastructure. It has utilized its economic leverage as Argentina's top trading partner to advance its own economic, political, and security interests in the country and across the region. Russia has welcomed the opportunity to enhance its influence in an area of the world long seen as in the American sphere of influence, both to project Russian power abroad and undermine the U.S. while at the same time pursuing economic engagement in areas of strategic interest such as nuclear energy. Both Russia and the PRC seek to advance narratives that weaken the U.S. position in Argentina and the hemisphere and to promote their respective models of governance and international partnership.

Argentina has a checkered record in recent decades on combatting corruption and supporting rule of law and democratic governance. These challenges encourage foreign authoritarian actors, often in concert with domestic actors with authoritarian tendencies, to use the openings they create to influence Argentina's political and economic system to advance their own interests. The result undermines the rule of law, independent media, and U.S. interests. This report analyzes the scope and scale of PRC and Kremlin influence in Argentina in the economic, political, and information domains and its impact on democracy and good governance in the country. Further, it assesses to what degree – if any – Russia's and the PRC's strategies and tactics overlap and if there is an impact on democratic norms and institutions in Argentina. The report is based on interviews with nine individuals who have direct knowledge of some of Russia's and the PRC's actions in Argentina, who monitors their activities, and an open-source review of literature in English and Spanish.

The Kirchner Legacy

During her two terms as president, from 2007 to 2015, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner expanded Argentina's relations with both Russia and the PRC, welcoming growing trade and diplomatic ties, in line with the Peronist Party's and Kirchnerism's anti-imperialist, populist, "third position" (non-aligned) agenda.¹ Argentina looked to the PRC for investment and as an alternative to U.S. and multilateral lending for industry and infrastructure.²

While economic issues are foundational to the partnership and are pursued at both the national and subnational level, Kirchner's government also sought to expand political and security ties.³ Argentina has been an attractive partner for the PRC's own development needs and to advance its economic and political objectives across Latin America. Argentina's rich natural resources provide mineral and food commodities essential for the PRC's own development, and its advanced manufacturing and technology sector allows for robust commercial partnerships. Argentina also serves as a hub for PRC engagement across Latin America, given its membership in the Southern Common Market (Mercosur) regional trade group.

The PRC presents itself as an ideal partner to support Argentina through its economic crises, and in turn it benefits from increased political influence in the country. Under the Kirchner administration, the two countries signed the 2014 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership treaty, expanded military-to-military cooperation, increased trade levels, and struck deals on a few notable investments, including the controversial building of a PRC owned and financed deep space station almost entirely free of Argentinian oversight or information-sharing agreements.⁴ The PRC also inked deals with Argentina's state media, in addition to influential dailies such as *La Nación* and the media conglomerate Group América over this period, providing the PRC with a local platform for disseminating pro-PRC narratives.⁵

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Russia has a longstanding, leftist, revolutionary legacy in Latin America. Argentina has looked to Russia for as an alternative ally to the U.S. and for deepened military, security, and economic engagement. Russia's interests in Argentina are multiple. They include advancing its influence in the U.S.' "backyard," eroding U.S. leadership in the hemisphere, expanding Russian military arms and equipment sales, and deepening commercial and energy ties, in part to offset sanctions imposed over its aggression in Ukraine in 2014 and again in 2022.⁶ Russian efforts to develop ideological allies in the region appear to center on Argentina where it finds common cause with the Peronist party, most notably its Russia-aligned wing.

During her tenure, Kirchner welcomed Russian President Vladimir Putin to Argentina, allowed Russian media network RT to broadcast in the country, and increased meat and other exports to Russia. Kirchner has cultivated close ties with Putin and engaged in numerous high-level exchanges with him, more than any other leader in Latin America.⁷ In 2015, the two announced a comprehensive strategic partnership with agreements on Russian investment in hydroelectricity, nuclear energy, and cooperation on defense.⁸

1 Over the past three decades, Argentina's relationship with the United States has oscillated between formal, cordial diplomatic ties to strained and non-cooperative relations, especially when former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner is in power either directly or indirectly.

2 Lanteigne, Marc. "Argentina Joins China's Belt and Road." *The Diplomat*, 10 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/argentina-joins-chinas-belt-and-road/>.

3 Ellis, Evan. "New directions in the deepening Chinese-Argentina engagement." *Global Americans*, 11 February 2021, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/02/new-directions-in-the-deepening-chinese-argentine-engagement/>.

4 Gedan, Benjamin, Veronica Uribe-Kessler, and Joey Zhou, "From Beijing to Buenos Aires." Woodrow Wilson Center, 2021 October 22, 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/beijing-buenos-aires>.

5 Cook, Sarah. "Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022 – Argentina Country Report." Freedom House, September 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/argentina/beijings-global-media-influence/2022>.

6 Gurganus, Julia. "Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 May 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228>.

7 Bouchard, Joseph. "The Fernández-Kirchner Government in Argentina Trades American Support for Chinese and Russian Money." *Spheres of Influence*, 11 April 2022, <https://spheresofinfluence.ca/argentina-kirchner-economic-crisis-china-russia-imf/>.

8 "Russia and Argentina agree framework energy deals." *BBC*, 23 April 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32443264>.

Deepened ties during Cristina Kirchner's administrations set the foundation for Argentina's relationships with both countries today. Former President Mauricio Macri (2015-2019) did attempt a rebalancing of Argentina's foreign policy, pursuing renewed ties with the U.S. and assessing relations with Russia and the PRC with a particular focus on limiting Argentina's economic dependence on the PRC. While Macri was successful in revitalizing ties with the U.S. to some degree, disentangling from the PRC proved more difficult given the deep economic and trade ties between the two countries, as well as the PRC's willingness to employ coercive strategies.⁹ The case of the Santa Cruz dams project illustrates this point. Upon taking office, Macri's administration conducted a review of the structure and financing deals signed with China during the Kirchner administration. The review of two important loan-for-infrastructure agreements revealed a cross-default clause between them; if Argentina pulled out of a deal to borrow \$4.7 billion from PRC banks to build two hydropower dams in Santa Cruz, the PRC would pull its financing for a project to improve the Belgrano railway network, a vital hub. Despite the political will to pull the dams project, as the Santa Cruz project is located in a Kirchner stronghold and there were corruption allegations around her business dealings in the province, Macri was invested in the railway hub and allowed both to go ahead, though he was able to secure some concessions. As Luke Patey, a senior researcher at the Danish Institute for International Studies, said of the case in *Foreign Policy* in 2017, "It was a clear demonstration that Chinese finance is becoming a potent tool of coercion in global affairs...Beijing managed to exploit its significant economic influence in Argentina to rebuff the agenda of its duly elected president. And while Mauricio Macri is the latest global leader to feel the political power of Chinese trade and investment, he is certain not to be the last." In the end, the Macri administration was unable to pivot as much as initially planned. Moreover, the 2019 election of President Alberto Fernández and Vice-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner ostensibly undid any successful rebalancing.

Since taking office, their administration has gone out of its way to open doors to the PRC, Russia, and Iran while marginalizing the U.S. and its strategic allies, marking a return to the anti-America posture adopted under Kirchner's presidency. Support for economic recovery after decades of high inflation, unemployment, debt, and corruption drove Argentina's deepened ties with the PRC and Russia. However, Argentina has also welcomed the closer political and security ties that have resulted from closer economic engagement.¹⁰ Cristina Kirchner, who many viewed as wielding more real power than former President Fernández,¹¹ personally took over managing the relationships with the PRC and Russia, as she did when she was president. The Kirchner administration was accused of extensive documented corruption and ties to multiple malign state and nonstate actors,¹² but outreach to Russia and the PRC continued at a rapid pace with worrisome results for democracy and rule of law in Argentina.

Economic Ties and Political Influence: The PRC in Argentina

Economic ties between the PRC and Argentina span an array of sectors, including mining, agriculture, and aerospace and defense. Trade flows have expanded drastically in recent years, growing 129 percent from 2010 through 2020.¹³ In 2020, the PRC was Argentina's top trade partner. Argentina bought \$8.3 billion of PRC exports while selling the PRC goods worth \$5.4 billion. In contrast, the U.S. exported products worth \$5 billion to Argentina and bought goods worth \$3.5 billion.¹⁴ Since 2017, Argentina has received \$17 billion in loans from PRC banks, and in 2022 Argentina was invited to become a member of the BRICS' New Development Bank, an alternative to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.¹⁵

9 Patey, Luke. "China Made Mauricio Macri a Deal He Couldn't Refuse." *Foreign Policy*, 24 January 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/24/china-made-mauricio-macri-a-deal-he-couldnt-refuse/>.

10 Bouchard. "The Fernández-Kirchner Government in Argentina Trades American Support for Chinese and Russian Money."

11 Gonzalez, Fernando. "Fernández-Kirchner Looks like Medvedev-Putin." *WorldCrunch*, 31 August 2020, <https://worldcrunch.com/opinion-analysis/argentina-fernaacutendez-kirchner-looks-like-medvedev-putin>.

12 Farah, Douglas. "Inside Argentina: 'La Cámpora' in Argentina, Back to the Future." *InterAmerican Institute for Democracy*, Democracy Paper 9, 2013, <https://www.amazon.com/Inside-Arentina-Democracy-Paper-Douglas/dp/1493714546>

13 "OECD Trade, Complexity and Rankings, China-Argentina." *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/chn/partner/arg>. Accessed 4 January 2023.

14 "OECD Trade, Complexity and Rankings, United States-Argentina." *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/usa/partner/arg>. Accessed 4 January 2023.

15 Levaggi, Ariel Gonzalez and Ryan C. Berg. "Argentina's Embrace of China Should Be a Wake-up Call." *Foreign Policy*, 23 May 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/23/argentina-china-us-imf-bri-debt-economy-summit-americas/>.

During a June 2023 meeting in Beijing between Zhao Leji, the head of the PRC National People's Congress, and Cecilia Moreau, the President of Argentina's Chamber of Deputies, the PRC also expressed support for Argentina's broader inclusion in the BRICS group.¹⁶

PRC investments in Argentina include some in strategic sectors such as lithium mining¹⁷ and energy, as well as in more sensitive sectors like 'smart' cities and surveillance technology. These sectors are a key part of the PRC's economic engagement at the subnational level, and they are also areas where national and provincial government officials have sought PRC investment. In a few illustrative examples, ZTE signed an agreement with the province of Jujuy to install facial recognition cameras, the city of Buenos Aires installed a PRC-made facial recognition system, and local officials and businesspeople in Chubut, Jujuy, and Salta have pursued PRC investment in solar and wind energy.¹⁸

Former President Fernández sought to further cultivate ties. At the start of the February 2022 Winter Olympics he flew to Beijing, where he met with PRC President Xi Jinping and promised closer cooperation between Argentina and the PRC on a range of issues. On the economic front, most notable was the announcement that Argentina would formally join the Belt and Road Initiative, further deepening economic ties between the two countries with the promise of PRC lending.¹⁹ The joint communiqué issued after the meeting noted \$23.7 billion in PRC funding to Argentina and cooperation in "agriculture, mining, energy, and investment."²⁰ During the visit, Argentina agreed to spend \$8 billion on a procurement and construction contract for the Atucha 3 power plant, with much of the financing for its expenditures coming from the PRC. The agreement was hailed by both sides as the beginning of a new cycle of cooperation and mutual understanding. PRC leaders called the agreement a sign "of auspicious prosperity for both nations, allowing the strengthening of ties for the peaceful development of nuclear energy generation, nuclear science and technology, and industrial development."²¹ Fernández also agreed to renew and expand a controversial currency swap agreement with the PRC from \$20.6 billion to \$24 billion (out of a total of about \$34 billion in total foreign reserves),²² again with the explicit intention of moving away from the U.S. dollar.²³

The visit had implications for the Argentina-PRC relationship beyond commercial and trade ties. Xi and Fernández discussed a wide-ranging agreement between Argentina's foreign ministry and the China Media Group, opening the door to a cornerstone of the PRC's expanding media and propaganda presence in the region.²⁴ Fernández also paid a visit to the PRC telecommunications giant Huawei, in yet another rebuff to U.S. efforts to exclude the company from building Argentina's 's developing 5G network over concerns of data privacy and espionage. Huawei has been operational in Argentina since 2001 and supplies vital hardware to Argentina's top three telecommunications companies.²⁵ Argentina and China also reaffirmed their mutual support for key political issues, with Fernández noting Argentina's support for the "principle of One China" and his admiration for the Chinese communist system. In turn, Xi noted the PRC's support of Argentina's claim of sovereignty over the Falklands (Malvinas) Islands.²⁶

16 "China pushes for Argentina to join BRICS." Fundación Andrés Bello, 26 June 2023, <https://fundacionandresbello.org/en/news/argentina-%F0%9F%87%A6%F0%9F%87%B7-news/china-pushes-for-argentina-to-join-brics/>.

17 Lithium is a key component in batteries for electric vehicles and there is vast demand for this important mineral as countries look to address climate change through lower emissions.

18 Jáuregui, Juliana González. "How Argentina Pushed Chinese Investors to Help Revitalize Its Energy Grid." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 22 December 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/12/22/how-argentina-pushed-chinese-investors-to-help-revitalize-its-energy-grid-pub-86062>.

19 Lanteigne, Marc. "Argentina Joins China's Belt and Road." *The Diplomat*, 10 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/argentina-joins-chinas-belt-and-road/>.

20 Ellis, Evan. "Alberto Fernández's Magical Odyssey to Russia and China." *Global Americans*, 15 February 2022, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2022/02/alberto-fernandezs-magical-odyssey-to-russia-and-china/>.

21 "China and Argentina sign nuclear project deal." *World Nuclear News*, 2 February 2022, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/Articles/China-and-Argentina-sign-nuclear-project-deal>.

22 "Argentina Foreign Exchange Reserves, 1956-2023," CEIC Data, 20 March 2023, <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/indicator/argentina/foreign-exchange-reserves>.

23 Doll, Ignacio Olivera. "Argentina Asks China to Expand Yuan Swap to Strengthen Reserves." *Bloomberg*, 26 January 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-01-26/argentina-asks-china-to-expand-yuan-swap-to-strengthen-reserves>.

24 "La Argentina profundiza su relación con el mayor conglomerado de medios de China [Argentina deepens its relationship with the largest media conglomerate in China]." Ministry of Foreign Relations of Argentina, 15 November 2021, <https://www.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/actualidad/noticias/la-argentina-profundiza-su-relacion-con-el-mayor-conglomerado-de-medios-de-china>.

25 "La Argentina profundiza su relación con el mayor conglomerado de medios de China [Argentina deepens its relationship with the largest media conglomerate in China]."

26 Ellis, Evan. "Alberto Fernández's Magical Odyssey to Russia and China."

27 Author interview with Argentinian business person, Buenos Aires, 20 June 2022.

Such deepened ties have created an environment for increased PRC political influence in the country. As one business source who deals directly with the PRC and the Fernández government interviewed for this report noted, "China understands that Argentina is constantly in an inflation-to-recession cycle, and that it can apply pressure to get what it wants, especially when you have a political elite that is willing to give in easily. It is a very convenient arrangement for both, and the U.S. can't compete because it plays by different rules."²⁷ The PRC has also used the opacity offered by the corrupt, but controlling, Kirchner power structure to advance its interests with little public scrutiny, while also seeking to marginalize the U.S. to the greatest possible degree.

Two sources interviewed for this report²⁸ said PRC representatives, as they have been documented doing in many other countries around the world, often bully officials to get what they want by threatening to cancel projects or investments, rewarding officials by promising trips to China, offering consulting jobs to relatives, or facilitating business opportunities that were difficult to trace.²⁹

The two scenarios described below provide a window into understanding how the PRC deploys coercive tactics in Argentina to advance its interests and sideline those of the U.S. Both cases relate to the PRC's growing use of science to legitimize its presence while simultaneously expanding its military footprint.

Deep Space

The two areas where PRC representatives focus scientific endeavors for strategic gain under what Xi calls "the correct political inclination" that is "imbued with patriotic feelings" are exploration in Antarctica and deep space. The Chinese Communist Party controls both endeavors and has already integrated them into the PRC's civil-military complex.³⁰ Given its geopolitical position, Argentina has become a key frontline for PRC's efforts.

The first case involves the PRC's pursuit of deep space exploration from Argentina. When the PRC signed a treaty with the government in 2015 to build the Espacio Lejano Station in the far southern Neuquén province (following talks since 2012),³¹ its intended aim was peaceful space observation and exploration. The deal to build the station had already been ratified by Argentina's Congress and signed by outgoing President Kirchner. The Macri administration, upon entering office, added a stipulation to the agreement that the station would be used only for civilian purposes and have both a visitor's center and offer full access to visiting scientists. While the agreement required the PRC to inform Argentine officials of the station's operations, it had no monitoring or enforcement mechanism to ensure compliance. This was particularly alarming given that the PRC space program is run by the People's Liberation Army (PLA). By the time the station was operational in 2017, it was directly under the control of the PLA and the 200-hectare property was enclosed behind an eight-foot barbed-wire fence. The agreement contained a secret clause ceding the land to the PRC for 50 years — essentially granting the compound diplomatic embassy status and eroding Argentine sovereignty. Argentine officials were banned from entering the site without prior approval by PRC officials.³²

One former senior Macri administration official charged with the station's oversight said that despite his supervisory position, he was never granted access to the station nor were any other Argentine officials, limiting the government's physical oversight of the station.³³

28 Author interview with former vice minister who dealt with the PRC directly, Buenos Aires, 1 March 2021; Authortelephone interview with former anti-corruption prosecutor, 2 February 2022.

29 In addition to many dozens of media reports on the Kirchner family's corruption, the most complete mapping can be found in a bestselling book from 2014: Jorge Lanata, 10K: La Década Robada, Grupo Editorial Planeta, Buenos Aires, 2014.

30 Garrick, John. "China's 'Maritime Powerhouse' Goals Include Expansion in Antarctica." *The Maritime Executive*, 14 November 2021, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/china-s-maritime-powerhouse-goals-include-expansion-in-antarctica>.

31 "Chinese Government provides \$50 million for construction of space station in Neuquén Province." *AidData*, <https://china.aiddata.org/projects/52875/>.

32 This information is based on the author's visit to the site in 2019, interviews with two former officials who interacted directly with the PRC on the space station, and open-source reporting. The most complete reporting comes from Cassandra Garrison, "China's military-run space station in Argentina is a 'black box,'" *Reuters*, 31 January 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-space-argentina-china-insight/chinas-military-run-space-station-in-argentina-is-a-black-box-idUSKCN1PP0I2>.

33 Author interview, Buenos Aires, 2 March 2020.

The exception was when his team put together a visit to all of Argentina's deep space stations, including Neuquén, which the PRC reluctantly accepted. It is common practice for scientific delegations to visit the deep space stations in both Argentina and Chile, where numerous countries have scientific stations that take advantage of the Earth's unique curvature near the South Pole. Neuquén appears the sole exception to this. When the Argentine government delegation arrived, all the equipment was covered with giant drop cloths. It was impossible for the group to determine what kind of equipment had been installed. "We could monitor less than half of what the station was actually doing," the former senior Macri official said. Concerned by their inability to see the work at the site, and by concerns raised by the U.S. about how the PRC was using the base,³⁴ Macri tried to revoke the sovereignty clause of the agreement, the former Macri official, as well as two Western diplomats, said.³⁵ This was unsuccessful, the former Macri official said, noting that "When Macri tried to revoke the sovereignty clause, the PRC ambassador called Beijing, then came back and said that China would accept the modification. In the same breath he said he would be informing Macri very soon that China was ending its billion-dollar imports of Argentine beef. Macri understood the message, and the treaty was never modified."

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Approaches to the Antarctic

The second example involves the PRC's approaches to the Antarctic in Argentina. The PRC has made no secret of its desire to be considered a polar great power. It has maintained a research presence on Antarctica since 1984 and conducted naval exercises in the region with Chile as early as 2013. In 2015, the PRC asserted the right to polar leadership in a national security law that emphasized the PRC's interests in new frontiers, including Antarctica.³⁶ As one expert noted, "Chinese influence in Antarctic forums reinforces the broader Chinese narrative of its natural right to leadership in international governance. On top of this, the People's Liberation Army has for some time highlighted the likelihood of polar regions being spaces for 'new geopolitical conflict.'"³⁷

More recently, and toward this end, the PRC has been interested in establishing or gaining access to a port in southern Argentina or Chile to support resupply efforts for its Antarctic bases. One idea under consideration on the Argentina side – and the subject of much speculation given the strategic implications – was the construction of a logistics base in Ushuaia, Argentina.³⁸ For much of his first two years in office, former President Fernández denied he had any intention of building such a base in Ushuaia and emphasized that should Argentina do so it would do so independently of foreign financing. Fernández said the project was too costly and told U.S. officials the PRC would not gain another major foothold in Argentina.

34 The PRC's ongoing operation of a military base, with limited to no oversight by the Argentine government, has caused alarm in the U.S. government. At the base, China has the capacity to probe deep space and collect strategic intelligence, allowing it to monitor and potentially interfere with U.S. satellites and spaced-based weapons systems. See Bouchard, "The Fernández-Kirchner Government in Argentina Trades American Support for Chinese and Russian Money."

35 Author interview with diplomats in Buenos Aires, 3 March and 4 March, 2020.

36 Garrick, "China's 'Maritime Powerhouse' Goals Include Expansion in Antarctica."

37 Garrick, "China's 'Maritime Powerhouse' Goals Include Expansion in Antarctica."

38 Ellis, Evan, "China's Strategic Military Advance in Argentina," EconVue, 16 November 2021, <https://econvue.com/pulse/china%E2%80%99s-strategic-military-advance-argentina>.

Yet by July 2021, Fernández began publicly pushing for the construction of a \$300 million Antarctic logistics center in Ushuaia,³⁹ a move sources with knowledge of events said would primarily be financed by the PRC and designed to benefit the PRC.

Shortly after the Ushuaia announcement, the Fernández government announced it would spend \$664 million on multipurpose fighter jets to refurbish Argentina's air force.⁴⁰ One former Argentine defense official and one European diplomat monitoring defense issues said these two events are directly related. Under an unwritten agreement, the PRC would provide some \$220 million for the Ushuaia station and access to use it, and Argentina would buy PRC jets. The fighter jet deal initially stalled as parts of the Fernández/Kirchner political coalition balked at the announcement but in early 2023 the Fernández government publicly revived the possibility of the purchase of F-17 fighter jets after intense PRC lobbying for a new round of negotiations.⁴¹ As of July 2023, Argentine media reported that the Ministry of Defense had approved the purchase of twelve F-17s.⁴²

Consolidating Ties, Consolidating Corruption?

These cases, as well as others illustrated throughout the report, highlight how the PRC uses its economic leverage over Argentina to advance its political, economic, and security interests in the country and the region. This has undermined Argentinian oversight of its operations and limited transparency and accountability around the PRC-Argentina relationship. While there is limited evidence of direct corruption, *quid pro quos* appear to be a standard part of agreements between the two countries. Moreover, there are reasons to be wary of corrupt influences given then-Vice President Kirchner's track record. Her December 2022 conviction on corruption charges stemming from reports that she skimmed \$1 billion from state coffers through fake contracts and fake construction of 51 public works projects was one of many allegations that have plagued – but not hindered – her political career.⁴³

While Kirchner and other political and economic elites are certainly responsible for the entrenchment corruption in Argentina's political system, and with it, undermining democracy, they are certainly aided in those efforts by close partnership with the PRC. The presence of a foreign patron committed to deep political, economic, and security investment in the country has facilitated democratic backsliding and provided economic support and relief that has, to date, allowed the government to avoid facing economic realities. As Professor Evan Ellis, of the U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute has noted, "Chinese resources and other support decrease the degree to which the Argentine government must worry about the responses of Western investors, banks, multilateral institutions, and governments, as it consolidates power in increasingly undemocratic ways, and undermines the U.S. agenda in the region—to China's commercial and strategic benefit."⁴⁴

The Gateway for Russian Expansion in Latin America: Russian Influence in Argentina

Russia's political and economic engagement in Argentina is more limited in scope and scale than the PRC's, but it has been an important partnership for both countries under the Kirchner and Fernández-Kirchner administrations. Economically, Russia trails far behind the PRC, exporting goods worth \$121 million to Argentina in 2020 and importing Argentinian products valued at \$685 million.⁴⁵ Trade has nevertheless increased between the two countries, and they have sought collaboration on everything from railroad development to oil, gas, and nuclear energy.⁴⁶

39 Heiner Kubny, "Argentina plans Antarctic logistics center in Ushuaia," *Polar Journal*, 27 July 2021, <https://polarjournal.ch/en/2021/07/27/argentina-plans-antarctic-logistics-center-in-ushuaia/>.

40 Misculin, Nicolás. "Argentina plans to spend \$664 mln on fighter jets, possibly from China or U.S." *Reuters*, 21 September 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/argentina-plans-spend-664-mln-fighter-jets-possibly-china-or-us-2021-09-21/>.

41 Zuanzun, Liu. "Argentina is considering procurement of JF-17 fighter jets: embassy." *Global Times*, 15 March 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202303/1287349.shtml>

42 "Argentina would re-equip its fleet of fighter planes with a purchase from China [Argentina reequiparía su flota de aviones caza con una compra a China]." *Seminario*, 11 July 2023, <https://semanariodejunin.com.ar/nota/38229/argentina-reequiparia-su-flota-de-aviones-caza-con-una-compra-a-china/>.

43 Kahn, Carrie. "Argentina's vice president is found guilty of corruption." *National Public Radio*, 6 December 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/12/06/1141134320/argentina-cristina-fernandez-de-kirchner-corruption-guilty>.

44 Ellis. "New directions in the deepening Chinese-Argentina engagement."

45 "OECD Trade, Complexity and Rankings, Russia-Argentina." *Observatory of Economic Complexity*, <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/rus/partner/arg>. Accessed 4 January 2023.

46 Bouchard. "The Fernández-Kirchner Government in Argentina Trades American Support for Chinese and Russian Money;" Ellis. "Alberto Fernández's Magical Odyssey to Russia and China."

Russian economic outreach in Argentina is carried out by the trade organization Comité Nacional para la Cooperación Económica con los Países Latinoamericanos⁴⁷ (CN CEPLA) whose hemispheric headquarters is in Santiago, Chile, but which holds events and conferences in Argentina.⁴⁸ The committee's board is comprised of Russian government bureaucrats and its state sponsorship is clear. However, CN CEPLA does not present itself as formally representing the Russian state. Formed in 1998 with the approval of the office of the Russian President Boris Yeltsin, today CN CEPLA includes high-ranking representatives from various Latin American departments within Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Economic Development, Chamber of Commerce, Rosnauka (Russian Science), the Institute of Latin America of the Russian Academy of Sciences and other state structures.⁴⁹

In Argentina, CN CEPLA-sponsored meetings are usually held with business associations and ties remain robust, despite U.S. and EU sanctions following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It is interesting to note that after a new ambassador from Argentina arrived in Moscow in May 2021, one of his first diplomatic stops was at the Russian headquarters of CN CEPLA, underscoring the organization's importance. There, the Argentinian ambassador met with its director, Tatiana Mashkova. More recently, Mashkova said in an interview that only one company in Latin America had notified her consortium that it was cutting economic ties to Russia after the invasion. She said "The biggest problem now is logistics, transportation. The second is the transfer of payments. But we are already working very hard on these issues, and we see that there will be a solution for each case." In Mashkova's assessment, many Latin American companies face a choice between "losing their contacts with Russia, missing a good opportunity to export, losing good buyers, or maintaining relations with the United States."⁵⁰ To date, Argentina has maintained these contacts with Russia both on the economic and political front.

This is due in no small part to Kirchner's vocal political support for Russian President Vladimir Putin over the years. Putin has returned the favor, notably on important domestic issues. For Kirchner, one such issue has been the dispute with the United Kingdom over the Falklands Islands (known in Argentina as the Malvinas). During her second presidency, Kirchner utilized the Falklands issue⁵¹ to rally her nationalist, populist base as a means of distracting from severe economic and social crises in the country.⁵² The issue also served her Peronist party's "anti-Western" agenda. While the Falklands held a referendum in March 2013, in which 99.8% of the population voted to remain a British overseas territory, Kirchner has refused to acknowledge the outcome of that vote and the dispute has become a key issue for her legacy. She used the 2014 Russian takeover of Crimea and eastern Ukraine to advance and revisit Argentina's own claims over the islands.⁵³ Putin has expressed support for Argentina in the dispute. Kirchner and Putin have found themselves strong partners committed to an anti-U.S. agenda, which both use to further their ambitions at home and abroad.

It was therefore unsurprising when former President Fernández pursued deeper ties with the Kremlin, particularly given Kirchner's powerful role within the administration. Fernández visited Moscow in February 2022, just as Moscow was massing troops to invade Ukraine. At a joint press conference after a private meeting with Putin, former President Fernández announced that Argentina could serve as the gateway for expanded Russian engagement across Latin American and the Caribbean.⁵⁴

47 Russian National Committee for the Promotion of Economic Trade with Countries of Latin America

48 The once-active English-language website for CN CEPLA was taken down following the invasion of Ukraine, but the Spanish-language site remains active.

49 This information is taken from CN CEPLA's Spanish-language website accessed at: <http://www.cepla.ru/es/about/>

50 Brown, Ana Luisa. "Latin American businesspeople are interested in Russian market." *Prensa Latina*, 1 April 2022, https://www.plenglish.com/news/2022/04/01/latin-american-business-people-are-interested-in-russian-market/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=latin-american-business-people-are-interested-in-russian-market.

51 The United Kingdom and Argentina both assert sovereignty of the Islands, which have been under British control since 1833. In April 1982, the two sides fought a brief war when Argentina military forces invaded the islands, which were shortly thereafter retaken by British forces.

52 Hoare, Liam. "Falklands Redux: Is President Kirchner South America's Biggest Troll?" *The Atlantic*, 11 January 2013, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/01/falklands-redux-is-president-kirchner-south-americas-biggest-troll/267067/>.

53 Bouchard, "The Fernández-Kirchner Government in Argentina Trades American Support for Chinese and Russian Money."

54 Ellis. "Alberto Fernández's Magical Odyssey to Russia and China."

Evidently going off script from prepared remarks by the Foreign Ministry, he noted that Argentina needed to “stop being so dependent on the [International Monetary] Fund and the United States and has to open up to other places, and that is where it seems to me that Russia has an important place.” He finished by saying Russia and Argentina should work together to release Argentina from the “grip” of Washington and move away from the U.S. dollar and the United States.⁵⁵ This was particularly unsettling in Washington because the U.S. had just exerted its influence with the IMF to approve a \$44.5 billion standby loan for Argentina that staved off a devastating debt default, and the Argentine foreign ministry had assured U.S. officials Fernández would not publicly support Putin.⁵⁶

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Fernández condemned the attack but also spoke out against international sanctions on Russia and called for a negotiated end to the conflict. Argentina’s willingness to vote against Russia in international forums like the United Nations was seen as politically necessary.⁵⁷ The Kremlin, nevertheless, kept up its efforts to influence public opinion on the war and was aided in these efforts by the PRC. For both countries, messaging campaigns around the war in Ukraine are part of a broader effort to influence the information space in Argentina to advance favorable narratives for their interests.

PRC and Kremlin Influence in the Information Space: Different Tactics, Similar Objectives

Both the PRC and the Kremlin have deployed a range of efforts to manipulate the media and information space in Argentina. Both the PRC’s (Xinhua) and Russia’s (RT and Sputnik) state media have large bureaus in Argentina that produce Spanish-language content and amplify pro-PRC/Kremlin narratives, creating an enabling environment for the economic and political influence described previously. While Argentina’s ever-shifting, administration-dependent policies between the Peronists and pro-U.S. conservatives have made the operating environment less predictable and stable than either the PRC or Russia would like, at present both countries deploy a range of tools and tactics toward a similar objective: advancing their respective interests and undermining those of the U.S.

PRC Information Influence

In February 2016, Xi Jinping stated, “Wherever the readers are, wherever the viewers are, that is where propaganda reports must extend their tentacles.”⁵⁸ To this end, the PRC developed a multipronged approach to shaping the media environment in Argentina. This includes training journalists, disseminating its narratives in PRC and local publications, and signing content-sharing and bilateral agreements with official Argentine media.⁵⁹ According to a 2022 Freedom House report on Beijing’s global media influence, the PRC increased its efforts to influence Argentina’s information space during the first few years of the Fernández administration.⁶⁰ This included inking new agreements with Argentine state media that build on a long history of ties between the two countries’ state media outlets and PRC diplomats cultivating thought leaders in media and academia to disseminate pro-PRC narratives.

The PRC relies on a range of media outlets. In addition to the Xinhua bureau in Buenos Aires, PRC state media, including People’s Daily, China Radio International, and China Global Television Network (CGTN) have Spanish-language websites accessible to audiences across Argentina, and CGTN broadcasts on one Argentine cable network.⁶¹ The PRC also benefits from content-sharing and media cooperation agreements with a number of influential domestic media outlets, including Clarín, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country. The PRC and Argentina have also increased cooperation in bilateral fora.

55 Raszewski, Eliana. “Argentina’s Fernandez, in Russia, says must end economic ‘dependence’ on U.S., IMF.” Reuters, 3 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/argentinas-fernandez-russia-says-must-end-economic-dependence-us-imf-2022-02-03/>.

56 This information is based on interviews with two Argentine foreign policy sources in the Fernández government, and partially substantiated by open-source reporting. See Ellis. “Alberto Fernández’s Magical Odyssey to Russia and China.”

57 “Argentina joins UN in condemnation of ‘Russian aggression’ in Ukraine.” Buenos Aires Times, 4 March 2022, <https://www.batimes.com.ar/news/latin-america/argentina-joins-un-condemnation-of-russian-aggression-in-ukraine.phtml>.

58 Xi Jinping, February 2016, as quoted in: Cook, Sarah. “Beijing’s Global Megaphone: The Expansion of Chinese Communist Party Media Influence since 2017.” Freedom House, January 2020, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/special-report/2020/beijings-global-megaphone>.

59 For a comprehensive overview of PRC media engagement in Argentina, see: Cook, Sarah. “Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022 – Argentina Country Report.” Freedom House, September 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/argentina/beijings-global-media-influence/2022>.

60 Cook. “Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022 – Argentina Country Report.”

61 Cook. “Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022 – Argentina Country Report.”

For example, the November 2021 bilateral media forum “Panorama China-Argentina” was sponsored by China Media Group, Argentina’s national news agency Telam, and state-run Argentina Radio and Television. In addition, the forum was sponsored by the Grupo América media conglomerate, which is influential in provinces largely outside Buenos Aires.⁶²

The PRC’s efforts to influence the information space also include academic engagement through three Confucius Institutes in the country. They are based at the nation’s oldest university, Universidad Nacional de Córdoba, as well as at the University of Buenos Aires and the Universidad Nacional de La Plata.⁶³ In one example of content sharing, the announcement of the opening of the third Confucius Institute was published word for word in English by Xinhua, China Press, and the Mercosur news agency, jointly owned by Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela.⁶⁴ In addition to the Confucius Institutes’ outreach, individual companies have discreet communications and training opportunities. The most visible is the Seeds for the Future program, sponsored by the PRC telecommunications giant Huawei, which offers scholarships and technical training in China. Programs focus on information technology training and knowledge transfers, combined with a study of Chinese history and culture, highlighting Chinese culture and technological innovation as a counterpoint to Western portrayals of China. Argentina was awarded its two rounds of scholarships under the program from 2017 to 2019, and virtual scholarships were open for application for 2022. The project is carried out by Huawei in coordination with the Ministry of Modernization and the Ministry of Education.⁶⁵

This multitude of pathways has facilitated the creation and distribution of PRC narratives in the country. Such efforts have largely focused on disseminating positive narratives about the PRC’s and the PRC-Argentina relationship, and occasionally, negative narratives about U.S. engagement in the country and across the region more broadly. Recent efforts include campaigns around the PRC’s response to COVID-19, the PRC’s economic model as a means of promoting human development, and its peaceful rise as a global power, in addition to defending the PRC’s record on human rights. Notably, the PRC has also appealed to popular sentiments in the country, amplifying Peronist narratives on Argentina’s claims to the Falklands and criticizing perceived U.S. foreign interference in the country.⁶⁶ The PRC also used messaging around Argentina’s claims to the Falklands to support its own claims on Taiwan.⁶⁷

Argentina nevertheless has a robust media environment. There are numerous outlets reporting objectively on the PRC. They cover issues related to PRC economic and political engagement on topics ranging from corruption in PRC infrastructure projects to sovereignty concerns over the Espacio Lejano space station. Moreover, according to interviews with three journalists at major media outlets in Argentina, Xinhua Español, the Spanish-language outlet of the official Xinhua news agency, has had little success in penetrating the mass media market. While it offers high-quality production values and impeccable Spanish, Xinhua offers primarily traditional news programming and a wire service for print and radio media. This combination of a healthy independent media and limitations on PRC penetration have blunted the PRC’s influence (and associated government pursuit of pro-PRC policies) in the information space.

Kremlin Information Influence

The dissemination of state-sponsored propaganda has been a key feature of Moscow’s influence strategy across Latin America and the Caribbean. Argentina is both a priority target and has historically welcomed Kremlin engagement in the information space.

62 “China Media Group and Argentine media hold online forum ‘Panorama China-Argentina,’” CGTN, 4 November 2021, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-11-04/CMG-and-Argentine-media-hold-online-forum-Panorama-China-Argentina--14UYqAoMwz6/index.html>

63 “Argentina opens 3rd Confucius Institute at its oldest university,” Xinhua, 17 October 2020, <https://global.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202010/17/WS5f8a6761a31024ad0ba7f49b.html>

64 “Argentina opens 3rd Confucius Institute at its oldest university.”; “China opens third Confucius Institute in Argentina: University of Cordoba,” Mercopress, 13 October 2020, <https://en.mercopress.com/2020/10/13/china-opens-its-third-confucius-institute-in-argentina-university-of-cordoba>

65 “History - Seeds for the Future,” Huawei, <https://www.huawei.com/minisite/seeds-for-the-future/history.html>

66 Cook, “Beijing’s Global Media Influence 2022 – Argentina Country Report.”

67 “Argentina and China share ‘territorial integrity’ concept,” Mercopress, 8 August 2022, <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/08/08/argentina-and-china-share-territorial-integrity-concept-pelosi-s-trip-to-taiwan-a-provocation-argentine-ambassador-in-beijing>

Russian state media RT Spanish language service *Actualidad RT* (formerly Russia Today) and *Sputnik's* Spanish language *Sputnik Mundo* are the primary outlets for the Kremlin propaganda and disinformation efforts across the region. In Argentina, *RT* and *Sputnik* tried to move into the Argentine media market by providing new, dynamic content. In 2014, *RT* began broadcasting on Argentina's publicly available (non-streaming) television, providing Russia with a national platform available to every home in the country.⁶⁸ The Macri government tried to suspend the agreement with *RT*, but conceded under Russian protest, and *RT* remains on the air today. To supplement its media strategy and amplify its message, Russian news outlets *RT* and *Sputnik* also formed strategic alliances with other ideologically compatible networks that also broadcast across the region. These include Telesur, the widely viewed Venezuela-based regional channel founded by Hugo Chávez; and HispanTV, the Iranian 24-hour Spanish-language satellite network that enjoys only a modest following in the Western hemisphere.⁶⁹ Argentina also has an arrangement allowing Telesur to broadcast on public television, providing a further outlet for Russian propaganda and disinformation in the country.⁷⁰

Through these outlets, Russia can promote anti-US narratives and advocate in favor of the Bolivarian alliance, a bloc of 10 countries led by Cuba and Venezuela. The Russian, Venezuelan, and Iranian outlets offer overlapping narratives depicting the U.S. as a counter-revolutionary "enemy of humanity" with vast imperialist designs that must be defeated. The three use a small group of correspondents who report the same information on all three platforms, forming a core of "super-spreaders" who create echo chambers across the media landscape. The most prolific is Pablo Jofré, a Chilean who broadcasts for *RT* and *Sputnik* from Chile.⁷¹ Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russian media have also made a concerted effort to promote pro-Russian narratives around the war. This includes allegations that Ukrainian forces are firing on their own civilians⁷² and that Latin American "mercenaries" hired by Ukraine (along with mercenaries from other countries) have not been paid and are angry at the lack of compensation and disillusioned with the fighting. Other coverage advances the theme that Russian forces are "de-Nazifying" Ukraine.⁷⁴

Russian state media promotion of anti-American narratives resonates with broad audiences across Latin America, given the historical legacy of U.S. engagement in the region. Two recent studies found that Russian media outlets *RT* and *Sputnik* remain broadly influential in Latin America, with a combined following of 30.4 million on all social media accounts. This is far larger than the 26.4 million *RT/Sputnik* English followers and less than the 39.8 million *RT/Sputnik* Arabic.⁷⁵ Collectively, Argentina, Mexico, and Venezuela account for 42 percent of *RT* Español readers and readers online.⁷⁶ Another recent report found Russian-sponsored Spanish-language media was having a significant impact in Latin America, noting that it is spreading widely in the region, helping make Kremlin-controlled outlets some of the top Spanish-language sources for information about the war in Ukraine immediately after the Russian invasion. Russian outlet *RT* Español was the third-most shared site on Twitter for Spanish-language information about Russia's invasion of Ukraine after the war started in 2022.⁷⁷

68 Gurganus, Julia. "Russia: Playing a Geopolitical Game in Latin America." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 May 2018, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/03/russia-playing-geopolitical-game-in-latin-america-pub-76228>.

69 Farah, Douglas and Alexa Tavaréz. "Iran in Latin America: Malign Alliances, 'Super Spreaders,' and Alternative Narratives." *Strategic Perspectives* 34, Institute for National Strategic Studies (National Defense University), 2 June 2021, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-34.pdf>.

70 Rojas Medina, Daniela. "Growing Audiences and Influence: Russian Media in Latin America." Bertelsmann Foundation, 9 June 2022, <https://www.bfna.org/digital-world/growing-audiences-and-influence-russian-media-in-latin-america-7wlrwqupm/>.

71 Farah and Tavaréz, op. cit.

72 Based on *RT* News coverage, such as "Tanques ucranianos disparaban a los civiles." ["Ukrainian tanks were shooting at civilians." *RT*, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425313-testimonios-emerger-sotanos-mariupol-liberar-ciudad-ucrania>]. Other coverage from *Sputnik Mundo*, for example, suggested that Russian soldiers in Mariupol found tortured bodies and other evidence that Ukraine committed human rights violations: "Defensa rusa: encuentran cuerpos con huellas de tortura y esvásticas en Mariúpol [Russian Defense: We found bodies with traces of torture and swastikas in Mariupol]." *Sputnik Mundo*, 28 March 2022, <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/20220328/defensa-rusa-encuentran-cuerpos-con-huellas-de-tortura-y-esvasticas-en-mariupol-1123684569.html>.

73 Based on *RT* coverage such as: "Mercenarios, muchos de Latinoamérica, denuncian que Ucrania incumple sus promesas [Mercenaries, many from Latin America, denounce that Ukraine is breaking its promises]." *RT*, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425288-mercenarios-latinoamerica-denunciar-incumplimiento-promesas-ucrania>.

74 See for example this series of articles from *Sputnik Mundo*: "Russian operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine." *Sputnik Mundo*, https://mundo.sputniknews.com/category_operacion-militar-especial-de-rusia-en-ucrania/.

75 Sekkarie, Sana. "A Global Tour Through Russia Propaganda: Where Russian Narratives on Ukraine are winning, where they're losing, and where they're not even competing." *Miburo Substack*, 6 March 2022, https://miburo.substack.com/p/a-global-tour-through-russian-propaganda?r=1dxl2&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web. The user numbers are not broken down by country.

76 Rojas Medina. "Growing Audiences and Influence: Russian Media in Latin America."

77 "Russia disinformation on Ukraine spreads on Spanish-speaking social media." Associated Press, 4 April 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/russia-disinformation-ukraine-spreading-spanish-speaking-media-rcna22843>.

Media messaging and narrative collusion is one area of joint influence between Russia and the PRC in Argentina and across Latin American and the Caribbean. Specifically, media outlets from each provide news that is distorted in similar ways and supports mutually shared goals.

It is unclear how much of an impact this is having on popular perceptions of Russia and of the Ukraine war, though generally, favorable public opinion of Russia has increased since the Russian media began its Spanish language efforts in 2014.⁷⁸

PRC-Russia Narrative Collusion

Media messaging and narrative collusion is one area of joint influence between Russia and the PRC in Argentina and across Latin American and the Caribbean. Specifically, media outlets from each provide news that is distorted in similar ways and supports mutually shared goals. On the PRC side, state media have printed or broadcast Russian disinformation regarding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Unlike at more reputable news sites, these unsubstantiated stories are not contextualized, but rather provide a transcript-like summary of Russian talking points.

In addition to amplifying Russian content, Xinhua has also published stories that advance anti-Western narratives around the war. For example, Xinhua publishes stories with "experts" who criticize NATO expansion across Western Europe. The outlet features those who argue that NATO's expansion toward Ukraine was the driving factor behind the Russian decision to invade in 2022.⁷⁹ As part of its coverage— in Spanish and English alike -- Xinhua is also very careful not to blame Russia for the war in Ukraine and to highlight the PRC as an honest broker that only wants peace.⁸⁰

In a virtuous cycle of disinformation, Russian state media quote PRC media to reinforce its line of attack on U.S. policy. For example, in March 2022, RT wrote an article reflecting conclusions from an opinion piece published by the CCP's Global Times on the war in Ukraine. The articles' conclusions are that the U.S. wants to "turn Ukraine into a quagmire so that Russia continues to bleed."⁸¹ Russian state media in Latin America also paint both Russia and the PRC as enemies of the U.S., arguing that American is trying to convince the PRC to withdraw support for the Russians. This narrative argues that the U.S. is desperately trying to divide the PRC and Russia, calling the sanctions on Russia an "act of war". The PRC (like Russia) views confrontation with the United States as "inevitable."⁸² Although there is no evidence of overt coordination between Russia's and the PRC's messaging operations, their amplification of each other's narratives serves to undermine information integrity in Argentina.

78 Rojas Medina. "Growing Audiences and Influence: Russian Media in Latin America."

79 See for example this short article, which provides a summary of a Foreign Policy analysis piece, "Aquellos imprudentes que defendieron membresía de Ucrania en OTAN deben asumir responsabilidad moral: académico [Those reckless who defended Ukraine's NATO membership must bear moral responsibility: academic], Xinhua Español, 25 March 2022, http://spanish.news.cn/2022-03/25/c_1310528973.htm

80 From a Xinhua report: China, US must cooperate to end Russia-Ukraine conflict despite differences: Chinese diplomat." Xinhua Español, 25 March 2022, http://spanish.news.cn/2022-03/25/c_1310528810.htm.

81 "Acusan a Biden de querer 'convertir Ucrania en un lodazal para que Rusia siga sangrando' [They accuse Biden of wanting to 'turn Ukraine into a quagmire so that Russia continues to bleed'], RT, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425299-biden-convertir-ucrania-lodazal-rusia>; Sheng, Yang and Wan Hengyi, "Biden makes US tensions with Russia 'personal'; calling for 'regime change' in a nuclear power dangerous: expert." Global Times, 27 March 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1256924.shtml>.

82 Based on RT coverage from March 2022: "China es el principal competidor estratégico: el Pentágono entrega al Congreso de EE.UU. una versión clasificada de su estrategia de defensa nacional [China is the main strategic competitor: the Pentagon gives the US Congress a classified version of its national defense strategy]." RT, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425339-pentagono-estrategia-defensa-nacional>.

Conclusion

Russia's and the PRC's overlapping interests in displacing the United States as the historical partner of choice for Argentina is clear. It is also damaging to Argentina's democratic future. As in most of Latin America, the PRC brings significant resources and pursues a broad economic, political, information, and security agenda, while Russia focuses on a narrower range of issues that directly help shape a country's political and media landscape. Both Russia and the PRC have strong interests in Argentina and warm relations with the current Peronist government. With the exception of an overall shared goal of undermining U.S. leadership in the hemisphere and opportunistic narrative collusion toward that end, each country separately pursues its own specific strategic interests. This report found no clear indicators of direct coordination between Russia and the PRC in their influence efforts.

The combination of their influence efforts nevertheless has significant implications for democracy in Argentina. Consistent political and financial support from the PRC and Russia has enabled Argentina, and in particular the Fernández-Kirchner administration, to pursue populist policies. They have done this with limited accountability to the population. In return, Argentina has allowed Russia and the PRC to operate without significant oversight, whether by the PRC expanding its military presence or both countries using public television to disseminate disinformation and propaganda. Collectively, foreign authoritarian influence from Russia and the PRC and corruption in Argentina's political leadership undermines the rule of law, transparency, and democratic norms.



LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

CHILE

Introduction

One of South America's strongest democracies, Chile offers an interesting case study for understanding both foreign authoritarian influence and democratic resilience. Despite its strong democratic foundation and commitment to human rights and democratic principles, Chile has been a strong partner of the People's Republic of China (PRC) for decades. Chile has long sought to bolster its economic ties to Asia and the broader Pacific, and Chilean presidents across the political spectrum have pursued economic and political ties with the PRC. For the PRC, Chile is an entry market for economic engagement in Latin America. It is also, increasingly, a key supplier of critical mineral resources. Ties between Russia and Chile have been less robust. Nevertheless, and as it has elsewhere in Latin America and the Caribbean, Russia has deployed state-sponsored propaganda and disinformation to undermine information integrity in the country.

The PRC and Russia pursue their own strategic interests in Chile. Research conducted for this study¹ found that China and Russia are economic competitors in Chile. The research found no clear indicators of coordination between Russia and the PRC in their efforts to reshape Chile's traditionally U.S.-centric, liberal democratic governance model. It did identify significant overlap in the official and unofficial media and messaging operations of each country. Although each country employs specific messaging regarding its own interests, both countries support, and advocate for, the view that Chile and other Latin American countries can and should move away from the U.S. and toward more robust partnerships with their respective countries. Both Russia and the PRC deploy an array of activities designed to enhance their own image and story while engaging in disinformation campaigns, often with overtly anti-U.S. messaging.

The combined impact of these overlapping operations has strengthened the PRC and Russia's presence in the country at the same time as the U.S. has pulled back from engagement, resulting in a weakening of U.S. diplomatic, military, and economic influence in Chile. PRC and Russian influence also could erode Chile's relatively robust institutionalized democracy in important ways. These include combating corruption and promoting transparency. And authoritarian influence can chip away at the credibility of independent media and fact-based information.

Economic Ties and Political Influence: The PRC in Chile

Economic Influence

Chile and the PRC have a longstanding economic partnership. Chile established diplomatic relations with the PRC in December 1970. Chile was also the first Latin American country to support the PRC's bid to join the World Trade Organization and, in 2005, the first country in the world to sign a bilateral Free Trade Agreement with China.² Over the past two decades, successive Chilean presidents have worked to deepen ties. During President Michelle Bachelet's first term (2006-2010), she and President Hu Jintao signed a supplementary agreement on trade in services.

1 These findings are based on interviews with 11 people who have direct knowledge of some of the endeavors of Russia and China in Chile or monitor the activities of one or both countries on an ongoing basis, as well as an open-source review of literature in both English and Spanish.

2 Heine, Jorge. "Still Trailblazing? The Chile-China relationship at fifty." *China Dialogues/The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 23 August 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2021/08/23/still-trailblazing-the-chile-china-relationship-at-fifty/>.

The first administration of conservative President Sebastián Piñera (2010-2014) agreed to a number of investments with the PRC, with Chile becoming a strategic partner of the PRC in 2012. In 2016, during Bachelet's second term (2014-2018), Chile became a comprehensive strategic partner, demonstrating the PRC's commitment to work with the country across economic, scientific, technological, political, and cultural fields. In Piñera's second term (2018-2022), Chile joined the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in November 2018 and signed a Joint Action Plan to advance the Chile-PRC partnership in April 2019.³ As a result of these partnerships, trade between the two countries has expanded exponentially over the past two decades, growing from \$2.3 billion in 2002 to \$57.72 billion in 2021.⁴ The PRC is now Chile's top trading partner.

Chile's business community has been at the forefront of efforts to expand economic relations with the PRC. Through the government's export promotion agency, ProChile, the country has promoted exports to the PRC market, notably in mineral resources such as copper and potassium nitrate. Chile also exports agricultural products, including wine, grapes, blueberries, and cherries.⁵ In 2020, a third of Chile's exports went to the PRC.⁶

The PRC is also Chile's leading source of foreign investment. From 2013-2021, foreign direct investment from the PRC totaled \$13.17 billion, reaching nearly \$8 billion in 2021 alone. Most PRC investments were in natural resources, construction, transport, and the financial sector.⁷ Investments include a \$2.5 billion contract to the PRC's state-controlled China Railway 16th Bureau Group to build the capital's controversial Metro Line 7,⁸ and the China Railway Construction Corporation's (CRCC) purchase of the right to toll a 169km stretch of Chile's main highway, Route 5, between Chillán and Collipulli. CRCC will update and maintain the road in return for the right to collect tolls. In March 2021, CRCC acquired a similar concession for 195km of Route 5 between Chillán and Talca.⁹

The most important investments, however, have been in strategic infrastructure. Despite the Piñera and Bachelet governments' close political and military ties to the U.S., they allowed significant PRC investments in Chile's strategic mineral resources, electric grid, and in fiber optic cable installation in the southern Austral region.¹⁰

Mining

Mining is a key part of the PRC-Chile economic partnership. It accounted for 84.4 percent of Chile's exports to the PRC in 2021,¹¹ with 49 percent of Chilean copper exports going to the PRC market.¹² Mining has become increasingly important in recent years given Chile's lithium reserves, a critical mineral for rechargeable batteries for phones, laptops, and electronic vehicles. Control of lithium is key to the green energy revolution.

While Chilean restrictions on foreign investment in mining have historically limited the PRC's presence in the sector, PRC companies have made some inroads through purchase agreements and by buying mines.

3 Ellis, Evan. "Chinese advances in Chile." *Global Americans*, 2 March 2021, <https://theglobalamericans.org/2021/03/chinese-advances-in-chile/>.

4 Fernández, Pamela Aróstica. "Chile's once-pioneering relationship with China is turning into dependency." *Mercator Institute for China Studies*, 18 August 2022, <https://merics.org/en/chiles-once-pioneering-relationship-china-turning-dependency>.

5 Ellis. "Chinese advances in Chile."

6 Heine, Jorge. "Still Trailblazing? The Chile-China relationship at fifty." *China Dialogues/The London School of Economics and Political Science*, 23 August 2021, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/cff/2021/08/23/still-trailblazing-the-chile-china-relationship-at-fifty/>.

7 Fernández. "Chile's once-pioneering relationship with China is turning into dependency." Cardamone, Michael. "China's Belt and Road Initiative in Chile." *Borgen Magazine*, 6 September 2022, <https://www.borgenmagazine.com/belt-and-road-initiative-in-chile/>.

8 Troncoso, Francisco and Andrés Cárdenas. "The Chinese construction of Metro Line 7: Piñera's priority one that threatens the veins of Parque Forestal [La construcción china de la Línea 7 del Metro: la prioridad uno de Piñera que amenaza las venas del Parque Forestal]." *El Mostrador*, 7 February 2022, <https://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/2022/02/07/la-construccion-china-de-la-linea-7-del-metro-la-prioridad-uno-de-pinera-que-amenaza-las-venas-del-parque-forestal/>.

There are hints of the political tradeoffs in the media but nothing that states this quid pro quo clearly, although the controversy over the construction's potential ecological damage was widely reported.

9 Rogers, David. "China Railway pays \$600m for another stretch of Chile's main highway." *Global Construction Review*, 2 February 2023, <https://www.globalconstructionreview.com/china-railway-pays-600m-for-another-stretch-of-chiles-main-highway/>.

10 "Piñera inaugurates fiber optic cable with a Huawei executive [Piñera inaugura fibra óptica Austral; Participó Huawei]." *El Economista*, 28 May 2019, <https://www.eleconomista.com.mx/empresas/Pinera-inaugura-Fibra-Optica-Austral-participo-Huawei-20190528-0109.html>.

11 Fernández. "Chile's once-pioneering relationship with China is turning into dependency."

12 Ellis. "Chinese advances in Chile."

From 2005-2017, for example, China Minmetals gave a loan to the Chilean state-owned mining company CODELCO in exchange for copper purchases at a negotiated rate. When that agreement expired in 2017, the two parties signed a new agreement allowing Minmetals the right to explore lithium and the future possibility to buy mines.¹³ In 2019, the PRC firm Tianqi purchased a 24 percent stake in SQM, a Chilean company extracting lithium in the Atacama salt flats.¹⁴

PRC Control of Chile's Electrical Supply

The PRC's control of Chile's electrical grid is a notable case of a successful takeover of strategic infrastructure. With the support of former President Eduardo Frei, the PRC has acquired more than half of the nation's grid. Frei served as Chile's ambassador-at large to Asia Pacific from 2018 until the end of the Piñera administration in early 2022.¹⁵ From 2018-2020, PRC companies gained control of 57 percent of the electricity grid in Chile. The PRC's Southern Power Grid bought a 27.7 percent stake in Transelect, Chile's largest transmission company. The next year, China Three Gorges bought Atiaia Energía. And in 2020, the PRC's State Grid International Development Limited (SGID) bought Chilquinta Energía, the third-largest distributor of electricity in Chile for \$2.23 billion.¹⁶ SGID also bought a 96 percent stake in one of Chile's main electricity providers, Compañía General de Electricidad (CGE), for \$3 billion. SGID's acquisition of Chile's electrical production assets grant it unprecedented control of electricity production and distribution. It leaves Chile's critical infrastructure vulnerable to a foreign actor known to deploy economic coercion to advance its political and economic aims. SGID outlines in its mission as "sticking to the leadership of the Party, comprehensively implementing the decisions and policies of the Central Party Committee [CCP] and the State Council and unleashing the potential of employees to run business."¹⁷ SGID's acquisition of critical energy infrastructure essentially gives the CCP majority control of electricity in Chile.

Elite Capture: The Foundational Role of Eduardo Frei in Advancing PRC Interests in Chile

The relatively rapid success of the PRC's efforts in Chile can be traced in part to powerful official lobbying led by former President Frei. Frei is a close personal friend of Piñera and has access to Piñera's political machinery. Piñera's National Renewal party has been an advocate for, and defender of, PRC investments. During his tenure as an unpaid envoy to the Asia Pacific region, Frei spoke out in dozens of interviews, seminars, op-eds, and forums on the benefits to Chile of PRC investments. During the Trump administration, he was particularly assertive in pushing the view that the PRC was a preferable alternative to the U.S. In a 2019 interview with the PRC state-owned Xinhua news agency, Frei praised the "strategic partnership of Chile with China," while saying Chile has "supported the great Chinese Belt and Road Initiative from the very beginning."¹⁸

Frei has benefited economically from his unstinting support for the PRC, specifically by selling Frei Presidential Wine, according to published reports and two sources interviewed.¹⁹ The wine is sold in the PRC via a joint venture between Chilean Viña Undurraga and China's Perfect China, and almost all of the Frei family vineyard's 10,000-bottle annual production is sold in the PRC. According to one report, Frei receives \$100,000 a year in royalties simply for the use of the Frei name.²⁰

13 Ellis. "Chinese advances in Chile."

14 Ellis. "Chinese advances in Chile."

15 Nogales, David. "Former President Frei once again highlights relations with China and the growth of the Asian giant's investments in Chile [Ex-presidente Frei Vuelve a destacar las relaciones con China y el crecimiento de las inversiones del gigante asiático en Chile]." *La Tercera*, 28 November 2020; <https://www.latercera.com/pulso/noticia/expresidente-frei-vuelve-a-destacar-las-relaciones-con-china-y-el-crecimiento-de-las-inversiones-del-gigante-asiatico-en-chile/FAJBV6G4RJBPHVA64PMCOIGUI/>.

16 Ellis. "Chinese advances in Chile."

17 State Grid Corporation of China, http://www.sgcc.com.cn/html/sgcc_main_en/col2017112330/column_2017112330_1.shtml.

18 Nogales. "Former President Frei once again highlights relations with China and the growth of the Asian giant's investments in Chile."

19 Saleh, Felipe. "Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle's business in Asia, President Piñera's 'gold' CD [Los negocios de Eduardo Frei Ruiz-Tagle en Asia, el DC de 'oro' del Presidente Piñera]." *El Mostrador*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.elmostrador.cl/destacado/2019/04/18/los-negocios-de-eduardo-frei-ruiz-tagle-en-asia-el-dc-de-oro-del-presidente-pinera/>.

20 Riveros, Mario and Carlos Valdés. "Wine named after former President Frei sells in China for nearly \$900,000 a bottle [Vino con el nombre del ex Presidente Frei se vende en China a casi \$900 mil la botella]." *Emol Noticias*, 25 April 2019, <https://www.emol.com/noticias/Tendencias/2019/04/25/945876/Vino-del-ex-presidente-Frei-se-vende-en-China-a-casi-900-mil-la-botella.html>.

"This is what the Chinese investments have brought us," said one senior Piñera administration official. "The ability of a respected former president to make money from investments while giving a megaphone to Chinese economic investments. Our laws are not designed to prevent this type of influence peddling, but it clouds the ethical waters."

The Limits of PRC Economic Influence

Despite these successes, the PRC suffered a significant setback during the Piñera presidency. In November 2021, under heavy U.S. pressure, the Piñera administration canceled China's Aisino Co. Ltd.'s \$205 million USD contract to create new national identification cards and passports with advanced anti-fraud design.²¹ The U.S. government expressed concerns over the protection of personal data by the PRC in light of the PRC Data Security Law.

"The ability of a respected former president to make money from investments while giving a megaphone to Chinese economic investments. Our laws are not designed to prevent this type of influence peddling, but it clouds the ethical waters."

The U.S. also threatened to remove Chile from the popular and economically valuable Visa Waiver Program, which allows travelers from many countries to go to the U.S. without a visa. "U.S. officials told us clearly that as soon as the PRC had access to our passport system, the program would end," said one Chilean official involved in the discussions. "We were determined to find a way to legally reopen the bidding process after that, and we did." Because the bid was relatively small, the loss could be considered more of an embarrassment than an economic setback for the PRC.

This wasn't the only deal that went awry. In 2014, for example, a project to construct five hydroelectric facilities in Patagonia in cooperation with China National Water Resources and Hydropower Corporation was halted over environmental concerns. China Railway Group and China Road and Bridge also pulled out of a project to build the Chacao suspension bridge when it seemed like they didn't have favored status to win the bid.²² PRC telecommunications giant Huawei Marine did bid to lay fiber optic cable in the southern Austral regional,²³ but was not awarded the contract to build the final piece of the system. The PRC had pushed for this work, since it controls the flow of data to scientific stations in the Antarctic.²⁴

Political Influence?

Successive Chilean administrations have cultivated ties to the PRC, regularly visiting the PRC on official delegations to ink economic and other deals, as outlined above. Beyond the executive, members of the National Congress and other policymakers have also participated in PRC-sponsored delegations, which are designed to win friends to advance the PRC's objectives in Chile. This outreach has yielded dividends. The PRC benefits from support from Chilean political and economic elites who defend PRC-Chile relations and the PRC's human rights record in the Chilean media. During a 2019 visit to the PRC, then-President Piñera stated that, "every country has a right to the political system of its choosing" – advancing a common PRC refrain.²⁵

21 Nogales, David and Francisco Artaza, "Government cancels tender for passports to Chinese company Aisino after warning from Foreign Ministry and the US [Gobierno anula licitación de pasaportes a empresa china Aisino tras advertencia de Cancillería y EE.UU.]," La Tercera, 15 November 2021, <https://www.latercera.com/pulso/noticia/pasaportes-el-registro-civil-deja-sin-efecto-la-adjudicacion-de-aisino/OZQEJBQUZ5CHVHNAMSJWLXSK5Q/>.

22 Ellis, "Chinese advances in Chile."

23 "Piñera inaugurates fiber optic cable with a Huawei executive."

24 For a complete overview of the PRC and Russia's expanding interests in Antarctica, see: Pervaze A. Sheikh, Bruce Vaughn and Kezee Procita, "Antarctica: Overview of Geopolitical and Environmental Issues," Congressional Research Service, 10 March 2021, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46708/2>

25 Han, BC and Sascha Hannig, "Chile Country Report: Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022." Freedom House, September 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/chile/beijings-global-media-influence/2022>.

The PRC has also made connections in Chile's police sector, including sending small numbers of officers to the PRC and reciprocating with visits to Chile. Chilean leaders have also participated in numerous security conferences and symposiums in recent years.²⁶ According to an interview with a senior security official, the PRC's biggest success came when Chile allowed the PRC to post a permanent attaché to the prestigious Carabineros national police force. Chile can do the same in the PRC. The permanent attaché, the source said, gives the PRC access to the Carabineros' entire network, including its capabilities, deficits, and operational strategy. It also gives PRC visibility into U.S. cooperation with one of its closest hemispheric allies.

However, there are limits to the extent of PRC economic and political influence in the country. While the PRC has made massive economic and political inroads in the country over the last few decades and made inroads with Chilean economic and political elite, this has not always translated into political influence. Chile's strong institutions and transparency standards have played a role in mitigating and reducing the risks that trade with the PRC automatically translates into corrosive political influence.

From "Active Neutrality" to Condemnation: Russia-Chile Relations

Russia and Chile have maintained historic diplomatic ties and trade relations since 1990, but neither side has made a concerted effort to deepen engagement. Russia has tried to influence Chile's information space (see below), much as it has across Latin America and the Caribbean. Chile has courted Russia as an export market but, as of 2022, Russia accounts for only 0.4 percent of Chilean exports. The Piñera administration took a relatively neutral stance on Russia. It allowed the Russian state media entities RT and Sputnik to operate freely, but did not engage in significant economic or diplomatic partnerships with the Kremlin. One senior foreign relations source called the stance "active neutrality," an effort to not antagonize either Russia or the U.S.²⁷

There are several plausible reasons for this. First, in contrast to the PRC and its relationship with former President Frei, Russia had no champions in the Piñera administration. Second, Russia's economic competitiveness in the country is limited. Russian businesses seeking opportunities in Chile offer few products or services that are competitive with either the PRC or U.S. counterparts, with the important exception of cyber security products and services, according to interviews with two businessmen and a senior Piñera Foreign Ministry official.²⁸ PRC companies are adept at Chilean bidding processes and effectively market their products. Russian businesses offer a much narrower range of goods and usually try to sell them through personal visits to potential clients. "The Chinese understand the need to go to the market," said one businessman who has dealt with executives from both countries.²⁹ They enter the market through partnerships with private enterprises that already exist. The Russians don't do that. They want to sell you their product — no partnership, no marketing. So, they lose almost every time to the Chinese."

Russia relies on a mix of semi-official and unofficial business groups, based in Santiago, to reach out across Latin America. This might also limit the Russians' effectiveness. The Comité Nacional para la Cooperación Económica con los Países Latinoamericanos (CN CEPLA; "Russian National Committee for the Promotion of Economic Trade with Countries of Latin America"), is the government's primary lobbying tool in Chile. The board of the CN CEPLA is comprised of Russian bureaucrats and its partners, as listed on its website, includes Russian organizations as diverse as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Chamber of Commerce, Rosnauka (Russian Science), the Institute of Latin America of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and other state agencies.³⁰

CN CEPLA's main task is to organize meetings with Latin American business representatives, chambers of commerce, and diplomatic representatives; promote Russian investments in Latin America; and keep a record of Russian business transactions in the region.

26 Ellis. "Chinese advances in Chile."

27 Author telephone interview with source in Santiago, Chile. 9 February 2022.

28 Author WhatsApp telephone interviews with sources in Santiago, Chile. Week of 14 February 2022.

29 Author WhatsApp telephone interview with source in Santiago, Chile. 16 February 2022.

30 "About the Committee [Sobre el Comité]." National Committee for Economic Cooperation with Latin American Countries, <http://www.cepla.ru/es/about/>.

The organization is quite active; according to its news page, it frequently holds meetings with representatives of Latin American states in Moscow and has 91 members.³¹ Its representatives also attend meetings in Cuba, Venezuela, and Nicaragua, anti-U.S. countries in Latin America. CN CEPLA also serves as a mouthpiece for pro-Russian propaganda. Its website is a repository of dozens of pro-Russia articles, relating to the invasion of Ukraine and alliances with Cuba and Venezuela.

In addition to promoting Russian business interests, there is some indications the CN CEPLA is also engaging in espionage and other activities beyond its specific soft power activities. On its website the group posted its authorizations from both the FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation) and the Russian Ministry of Defense to operate on behalf of the Russian state, and the site's Russian language website sells Russian state sponsored, sophisticated surveillance equipment from the Russian Protei system using the SORM-3 spyware.³² CN CEPLA's long-time director Alexander Starovoitov, who served from the early 2010s until his death in 2021, was a former senior member of the KGB, a decorated general in the Soviet army, and a specialist in electronic communications technology and cryptography, and most of the identified leadership of the organization came out of the former Soviet intelligence services.³³ His obituary in Russian state media called Starovoitov a "Hero of the Russia State" and listed his many strategic ties to the Russian state.³⁴ Starovoitov served as president of the Russia-Chile Business Council, director general of related company Inter EVM, and director of TSITiS. Inter EVM and TSITiS operate extensively in Latin America, and both are closely tied to the Russian defense ministry and FSB, Russia's main intelligence organization,³⁵ according to online CN CEPLA documents reviewed by the authors, many of which have now been taken down since the invasion of Ukraine. Tatiana Mashkova, Starovoitov's long-time deputy, held multiple senior positions under Russian president Vladimir Putin, and followed him as the head of CN CEPLA.³⁶

PRC and Kremlin Influence in Chile's Information Space: Different Tactics, Similar Objectives

The PRC and Russia want to advance their strategic objectives and boost public perceptions of their roles in Chile. They advocate for a multipolar world in which they challenge American dominance in education, culture, technology, and language. More broadly, they aim to weaken the U.S. Though the PRC and the Kremlin have similar objectives and sometimes collude, particularly on anti-U.S. narratives, the two countries deploy different tools, tactics, and messages.

PRC Information Influence

The PRC has a multipronged approach to shaping the information space in Chile. It focuses on training for journalists, content sharing, agreements that support its Chilean media partners, and educational and cultural outreach. Pro-PRC stories and narratives are presented to Chilean audiences as if they were independent media reports instead of state-sponsored propaganda.³⁷

Though the PRC and the Kremlin have similar objectives and sometimes collude, particularly on anti-U.S. narratives, the two countries deploy different tools, tactics, and messages.

31 National Committee for Economic Cooperation with Latin American Countries, <http://www.cepla.ru/es/about/>.

32 While much of the information has been taken down since the invasion of Ukraine, IRI Consultants monitored the site over seven years and captured much of the content, including the certificates at the time of authorization from the FSB, valid from 2013-2018, and the Ministry of Defense (2014-2019), and the sales operations. See: Farah, Douglas and Marianne Richardson, "Dangerous Alliances: Russia's Strategic Inroads in Latin America." Institute for National Strategic Studies - National Defense University, December 2022, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/strategic-perspectives-41.pdf>

33 "An important figure in Russia-Latin America relations dies in Moscow [Fallece en Moscú una importante figura en las relaciones Rusia-Latinoamérica]." National Committee for Economic Cooperation with Latin American Countries, 21 July 2021 http://cncepla.ru/es/press-center/news/79346/?sphrase_id=19627.

34 "Hero of Russia Alexander Starovotov dies at 81," RT, July 17, 2021, <https://russian.rt.com/russia/news/886328-geroi-rossii-aleksandr-starovoitov>

35 National Committee for Economic Cooperation with Latin American Countries, http://www.cepla.ru/es/events/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=11928&phrase_id=90484.

36 "Our Team [Nuestro equipo]." National Committee for Economic Cooperation with Latin American Countries, <http://cncepla.ru/es/about/staff.php>.

37 For a complete assessment of PRC influence in the media and information space, please see: Han, BC and Sascha Hannig. "Chile Country Report: Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022." Freedom House, September 2022, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/chile/beijings-global-media-influence/2022>.

PRC narratives in Chile have largely focused on promoting the “win-win” relationship between the two countries, muting criticism of the PRC or the PRC-Chile relationship, and promoting anti-U.S. sentiment.³⁸ China is broadly popular among Chileans. According to the 2020 report from Latinobarómetro, a non-profit polling organization, 53.1 percent of Chileans hold a favorable view of China, as compared to 54.9 percent for the U.S. and 47.9 percent for Russia.³⁹

PRC Influence in Chile's Media

When President Xi spoke at the first China-Latin America Media Leaders summit in Santiago in 2016, he emphasized the need to greatly expand media cooperation between the two continents. Xi declared that the aim of the summit was to “show the world a more authentic and vibrant China” and work with Latin America to “jointly voice opinions on world peace, development, and other major issues.”⁴⁰ Toward that end, he noted that the PRC and Latin America should strengthen exchanges between media outlets, including training for Latin American journalists in the PRC, joint production on stories, and content exchanges. The PRC has pursued this strategy in Chile under the umbrella of the China-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) Forum and via bilateral engagement.

The state-controlled Xinhua news agency has a bureau in Santiago that produces a steady stream of content portraying the PRC as a benefactor that provides vital investments and vaccines while championing world peace. Xinhua Español offers high-quality news programming, as well as a news wire service for print and radio media. Xinhua Español has had little success penetrating Chile's mass media market, according to interviews with three journalists at major news outlets, including one who has refused all PRC overtures for content sharing and training. PRC diplomats have also published content favorable to the PRC, though former PRC Ambassador Xu Bu's (2018-2020) aggressive approach backfired, as he was forced to leave his post early because he was too outspoken and responded aggressively to any perceived criticism of Beijing.⁴¹ One noteworthy incident occurred when Xu Bu criticized a Chilean parliamentarian for meeting with a Hong Kong activist, penning an op-ed in *El Mercurio*, a prestigious newspaper, stating the parliamentarian shouldn't meet with “social thugs.”⁴²

A more effective strategy for the PRC than placing stories in Xinhua and other PRC state media has been to rely on exchanges, co-production, and content sharing between PRC and Chilean media outlets. This gives the PRC propaganda machine direct access to almost all of Chile's national and significant regional media. In turn, by paying for content or funding journalists to skew their stories toward the PRC's successes, the PRC provides an economic lifeline to financially struggling media outlets.

Several of Chile's leading media organizations have signed content sharing agreements with PRC state-sponsored media over the last few years, allowing the PRC to disseminate its narratives across the country. In January 2020, *La Tercera*, a major newspaper and radio outlet, signed an agreement with the China Media Group/Voice of China to produce China Connection (Conexión China). China Connection offers “relevant stories to show an updated vision of the culture” of China.⁴³ Radio Cooperativa, a chain of 41 radio stations, maintains a content-sharing agreement with China Media Group that includes op-eds, interviews, and a weekly radio program called *The China Effect* (Efecto China).⁴⁴ *El Mercurio* accepts paid PRC “news inserts” that are barely distinguishable from the news content, and they often feature strongly anti-U.S. material. Xinhua also maintains an agreement with the Chilean Ministry of Foreign Affairs to promote information sharing.

38 Han and Hannig. “Chile Country Report: Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022.”

39 “Chile.” Latinobarómetro, 2020, <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp>.

40 “Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence.” National Endowment for Democracy, December 2017, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence-Full-Report.pdf>.

41 Ellis. “Chinese advances in Chile.”

42 “The unusual round between the Chinese ambassador and the deputy Belloli [El insolito ronde entre el embajador chino y el diputado Bellolio].” *El Mostrador*, 2 September 2019, <https://www.elmostrador.cl/noticias/pais/2019/09/02/el-insolito-round-entre-el-embajador-chino-y-el-diputado-bellolio/>.

43 “China Connection [Conexión China].” *La Tercera*, <https://www.latercera.com/canal/conexion-china/>.

44 “China Effect [Efecto China].” *Cooperativa*, <https://www.cooperativa.cl/efectochina/>

As the American pro-democracy group Freedom House has noted, "Chinese state media content from outlets like Xinhua, CGTN, and China Radio International is mixed with original content or content from other sources on China, which obfuscates the distinction between state-produced propaganda and independent reporting."⁴⁵

The use of paid content is effective. Even paid print inserts marked as such are difficult to distinguish from actual news content. This is particularly confusing for readers who are not familiar with the nuances of paid propaganda. Further, on national radio and television stations, stories are almost never attributed to PRC media sources. Some reporters and editors who use PRC content say the sharing agreements, which allow for free use of Chilean stories in PRC media outlets and vice versa, are an economic necessity. Content sharing helps keep media companies afloat as advertising revenue shrinks, particularly as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The journalists agreed about the ethical pitfalls inherent in using propaganda without noting it, but they argued the policy must be weighed against the alternative, which would be the likely closure of news outlets for lack of funding.

All three media sources noted that PRC government information monitoring of Chilean media is relentless and persistent. When the PRC learned of a story it deemed unfriendly, an emissary, usually a PRC embassy attaché, called to complain. The attaché would usually issue a detailed critique and request remedial action. If the news organization pushed back, the emissary often threatened to cut Chinese subsidies to that organization. PRC diplomats have also used such tactics to censor policymakers. As a result, and in spite of the fact that Chilean media have published content critical of the PRC, there does appear to be self-censorship on PRC-related coverage.⁴⁶

Educational and Cultural Outreach

Chile's pro-PRC business leanings have created an entry point for educational exchanges. Chile is home to three Confucius Institutes, based at Santo Tomás University, Universidad Católica, and La Frontera University, as well as 21 Confucius Institute satellite campuses and classrooms.⁴⁷ In addition to Mandarin language training, Confucius Institutes offer scholarships, conferences, sister university agreements with schools in the PRC, and a broad array of courses, from psychology to nutrition to law and accounting.⁴⁸ Hanban, a Chinese language organization, offers scholarships to Chilean students to study in the PRC. In 2023, 18 students took advantage of the scholarships.⁴⁹ Universidad Católica has also partnered with Tsinghua University to provide scholarships to study journalism, part of a broader PRC strategy to train reporters across Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵⁰ These opportunities are widely advertised in academic circles for the best and most promising students.

Chinese companies also provide outreach and training opportunities. The most visible is Huawei's Seeds for the Future program. It offers scholarships and technical training, in China, on information technology, combined with a study of Chinese history and culture.⁵¹ Seeds for the Future awarded five Chilean students scholarships in 2018 and 10 in 2019. On the program's website, Huawei noted that the program yielded a "bumper crop" of scholars and had been praised by "former presidents" and other Chilean officials.⁵²

45 Han and Hannig. "Chile Country Report: Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022."

46 Han and Hannig. "Chile Country Report: Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022."

47 "Confucius Institutes Around the World - 2023." Digmandarin, 7 January 2023, <https://www.digmandarin.com/confucius-institutes-around-the-world.html>.

48 "Entities from Santo Tomás and the CLEC Foundation strengthen Ties with the Chinese Embassy in Chile [Entidades de Santo Tomás y Fundación CLEC afianzan lazos con embajada de China en Chile]." Santo Tomás, 11 March 2022, <https://enlinea.santotomas.cl/actualidad-institucional/instituto-confucio/entidades-de-santo-tomas-y-fundacion-clec-afianzan-lazos-con-embajada-de-china-en-chile/234029/>.

49 "Notice on Announcing the List of Chinese Government Scholarships for the 2023/2024 Academic Year." Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Chile, 23 June 2023, http://cl.china-embassy.gov.cn/zzgx/kjww/202306/t20230623_11102808.htm.

50 Han and Hannig. "Chile Country Report: Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022."

51 "History - Seeds for the Future." Huawei, <https://www.huawei.com/minisite/seeds-for-the-future/history.html>.

52 "History - Seeds for the Future." Huawei, <https://www.huawei.com/minisite/seeds-for-the-future/history.html>.

Kremlin Information Influence

The Russian government relies on state-owned and state-sponsored media to promote its worldview, and it has gained a significant following in Chile. Rather than try to coopt existing media, like China does, the Russian government has had significant success in providing new, dynamic content. This content is more clearly anti-U.S. and includes overt support of the pro-Bolivarian Alliance (led by Venezuela). Like CN CEPLA, discussed above, Russia also relies on non-official front organizations.

Kremlin Influence in Chile's Media

Russian state media runs the Spanish language services Actualidad RT/RT en Español (formerly Russia Today) and Sputnik's Sputnik Mundo. These are the primary outlets for Kremlin propaganda and disinformation efforts across the region. In addition to its television channel, the state-run RT runs a news website and social media on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. Sputnik Mundo also controls a radio broadcast service which broadcasts Spanish-language content on the radio and web. Two recent studies found that RT en Español and Sputnik Mundo are broadly influential in Latin America, with 30.4 million combined followers on social media. This is larger than the 26.4 million RT/Sputnik English followers, and fewer than the 39.8 million following RT/Sputnik Arabic.⁵³ In celebrating its 10 years of operation in Latin America in 2020, RT claimed 20 million viewers in Latin America, with 10.7 million followers on Facebook, 3.2 million Twitter followers, 2.8 million YouTube subscribers, and 650,000 Instagram followers.⁵⁴

Russia-sponsored Spanish language media has a significant impact in Latin America. RT en Español is the third most-shared site on Twitter for Spanish-language information about Russia's invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁵ Interviewees uniformly indicated that people age 25 and under in Chile see it as a cheeky, irreverent, and valid source of information with a noteworthy presence on social media. However, the older population, which still relies on printed newspapers for their information, has little knowledge of either RT or Sputnik. Actual figures are not available.

Russia also uses social media to promote its narratives, often through proxies or sites that appear not to be affiliated with its media, but in fact, are. The most popular Russian platform operating out of Chile, an RT en Español YouTube channel called *Ahí les Va* (There You Go), boasted more than one million subscribers before YouTube removed the channel following the invasion of Ukraine.⁵⁶ *Ahí les Va* used the tagline "Information with a bit of humor, humor with a lot of information. We publish a little but very tasty. There you go!" (*Información, pero con algo de humor. Humor, pero con mucha información. Publicamos poco pero sabroso. ¡Ahí les va!*).

To amplify pro-Kremlin messages, RT and Sputnik have formed alliances with other ideologically aligned networks. Primarily, these networks are Telesur, the widely-viewed Venezuela-based channel founded by former President Hugo Chávez, and HispanTV, the Iranian Spanish network with only a modest following in the Western hemisphere. The Russian, Venezuelan, and Iranian outlets offer overlapping anti-American narratives stressing that the United States is a counter-revolutionary enemy of humanity with vast imperialist designs. The three rely on a small group of correspondents who report the same information on all three platforms, a core of "super-spreaders" who create echo chambers across the media landscape. The most prolific is Pablo Jofré, who broadcasts for RT and Sputnik from Chile.⁵⁷

53 Sekkarie, Sana. "A Global Tour Through Russia Propaganda: Where Russian Narratives on Ukraine are they're winning, where they're losing and where they are not even competing." Miburo Substack, 6 March 2022, https://miburo.substack.com/p/a-global-tour-through-russian-propaganda?r=1d12&s=r&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web. The user numbers are not broken down by country.

54 Quintero, Jaime. "RT celebrates 10 years and reaches 20 million viewers [RT cumple diez años y llega a 20 millones de televidentes]." *Producciones*, 5 March 2020, <https://www.produ.com/noticias/rt-cumple-diez-anos-y-llega-a-20-millones-de-televidentes>.

55 "Russian disinformation on Ukraine spreads on Spanish-speaking social media." Associated Press, 4 April 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/russia-disinformation-ukraine-spreading-spanish-speaking-media-rcna22843>.

56 Motta, Isabela. "The Russian Media Account Hitting It Off with Spanish Speakers." German Marshall Fund, 16 August 2022, <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/ahi-les-va-the-russian-media-account-hitting-it-off-with-spanish-speakers/>.

57 Farah, Douglas and Alexa Tavaréz. "Iran in Latin America: Malign Alliances, 'Super Spreaders,' and Alternative Narratives." Institute for National Strategic Studies - National Defense University, June 2021, <https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-34.pdf>.

According to a source who has done media content analysis on both Russian and PRC operations in the information space, Russian outlets almost never comment on internal Chilean affairs because the Kremlin strives to maintain good relations across the political spectrum and not call attention to Russian groups operating there. "The Russians have a global project, visible in Chile, to portray itself as a world power with allies in Latin America," the source said. "So, what happens in Chile is much less interesting than how Russia is perceived in Chile."⁵⁸

Toward that end, Russia has a propaganda and disinformation campaign in Chile around the Ukraine war, perpetuating pro-Russian narratives and blaming the U.S. for the fighting. Key campaign themes include allegations that Ukrainian forces fire on their own civilians,⁵⁹ Latin American "mercenaries" hired by Ukraine (and other countries) are not being paid and are disillusioned with the fighting,⁶⁰ and Russian forces are "de-Nazifying" Ukraine.⁶¹ RT and Sputnik have also used their Spanish outlets to undermine U.S. policy toward Ukraine and claim that the U.S. is trying to prevent Russia's and China's exertion of power on the world stage.⁶²

PRC-Russia Narrative Collusion

The PRC and Russia share complementary aims in influencing the information space in Chile: promoting their respective interests and disseminating anti-U.S. propaganda and disinformation. While there is no evidence of coordinated collusion, Russian and PRC state-media outlets in Spanish reinforce each other's narratives. As it has elsewhere, PRC state news has reprinted Russian disinformation regarding the invasion of Ukraine.⁶³ These unsubstantiated stories provide a transcript-like summary of Russian talking points on the war in Ukraine. Xinhua interviews experts who criticize NATO's expansion, and emphasizes commentators who argue that NATO's expansion east, toward Ukraine, was the driving factor behind the Russia's invasion.⁶⁴

In turn, the Russian media quotes PRC news outlets to reinforce its line of attack on U.S. policy on Ukraine and the war. For example, RT wrote an article based entirely on a Global Times piece affirming "the U.S. desire to turn Ukraine into a quagmire so that Russia continues to bleed" as its population is forced to "elect a pro-American regime."⁶⁵ Given the absence of evidence of coordination between Russia's and the PRC's propaganda efforts, this talking point is more likely an example of the convergence of interests between the two countries.

Since the invasion of Ukraine, both Russia and the PRC have sought to push narratives that there is a shift away from the U.S. dollar as the global reserve currency.

58 Author in-person interview with Chilean social media analyst visiting Washington, D.C. 26 January 2022.

59 Based on RT News Coverage, for example: "Ukrainian tanks were shooting at civilians: Testimony emerges from Mariupol basements as Kyiv troops withdraw [Tanques ucraniano disparaban a los civiles: Emergen testimonios de los sótanos de Mariúpol a medida que se retiran las tropas de Kiev]." RT, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425313-testimonios-emergen-sotanos-mariupol-liberar-ciudad-ucrania>. Other coverage from Sputnik news, for example, suggests that Russian soldiers in Mariupol are finding tortured bodies and other evidence that Ukraine committed human rights violations: "Russian Defense: They find bodies with signs of torture and swastikas in Mariupol [Defensa rusa: encuentran cuerpos con huellas de tortura y esvásticas en Mariúpol]." Sputnik Mundo, 28 March 2022, <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/20220328/defensa-rusa-encuentran-cuerpos-con-huellas-de-tortura-y-esvasticas-en-mariupol-1123684569.html>.

60 Based on RT News coverage, for example: "Mercenaries, many from Latin America, denounce that Ukraine is breaking its promises [Mercenarios, muchos de Latinoamérica, denuncian que Ucrania incumple sus promesas]." RT, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425288-mercenarios-latinoamerica-denunciar-incumplimiento-promesas-ucrania>.

61 See for example this series of articles from Sputnik Mundo: "Russian operation to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine [Operación rusa de desmilitarización y desnazificación de Ucrania]." Sputnik Mundo, 2022-2023, https://mundo.sputniknews.com/category_operacion-militar-especial-de-rusia-en-ucrania/.

62 Based on RT News coverage, for example: "China is the main strategic competitor: the Pentagon gives the US Congress a classified version of its national defense strategy [China es el principal competidor estratégico: el Pentágono entrega al Congreso de EE.UU. una versión clasificada de su estrategia de defensa nacional]." RT, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425339-pentagono-estrategia-defensa-nacional>.

63 "Armenia denies reports of transfer of fighter jets to Russia for military operations in Ukraine [Armenia niega reportes de transferencia de aviones de combate a Rusia para operaciones militares en Ucrania]." Xinhua Español, 28 March 2022, http://spanish.news.cn/2022-03/29/c_1310533292.htm.

64 See, for example, this short article, which provides a brief summary of a Foreign Policy analysis piece: "Those reckless who defended Ukraine's NATO membership must bear moral responsibility: academic [Aquellos imprudentes que defendieron membresía de Ucrania en OTAN deben asumir responsabilidad moral: académico]." Xinhua Español, 25 March 2022, http://spanish.news.cn/2022-03/25/c_1310528973.htm.

65 "They accuse Biden of wanting to 'turn Ukraine into a quagmire so that Russia continues to bleed' ['Acusan a Biden de querer' 'convertir Ucrania en un lodazal para que Rusia siga sangrando']]." RT, 28 March 2022, <https://actualidad.rt.com/actualidad/425299-biden-convertir-ucrania-lodazal-rusia>. The article is based entirely on a Global Times piece: "Biden makes US tensions with Russia 'personal'; calling for 'regime change' in a nuclear power dangerous: expert." Global Times, 27 March 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202203/1256924.shtml>.

In March 2022, a popular RT show covered a "rebellion against the dollar," noting that the PRC is considering challenging the dollar's, and the euro's, dominance in the international financial system.⁶⁶ The show's Russian host argued that "It is not normal that all of the countries who don't use dollars or euros in their economies to continue to use them [for international transactions]." This is consistent with PRC messaging on the need for global economic reform to displace the dollar.

Anti-U.S. rhetoric from the PRC and the Kremlin only serves to reinforce with the widespread perception that the United States has significantly withdrawn from the hemisphere, as evidenced by the lack of a U.S. ambassador in Chile, long one of the U.S.'s strongest allies, from January 2019-September 2022.

The First Year of the Boric Administration and Looking Ahead

The Communist Party, with significant historic ties to Russia and the former Soviet Union, is an important part of the governing coalition of President Gabriel Boric. Despite this, Boric has repeatedly condemned the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and publicly condemned President Vladimir Putin as the aggressor in the conflict, while expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people.⁶⁷ In the aftermath of the Ukraine invasion the media landscape is rapidly changing, as major social media platforms move against Russian state-sponsored propaganda and disinformation.

The Boric administration's approach toward the PRC is less defined. According to interviews with senior officials from the previous government who are close to current officials in the Foreign Ministry, few in Boric's inner circle have tried to curtail PRC strategic investment opportunities in Chile. However, officials have expressed interest in limiting the environmental damage caused by extractive mining and the fishing industry, which is dominated by the PRC firms.

In November 2022, President Boric met with President Xi in Bangkok.⁶⁸ During the meeting, according to PRC-state media, President Boric "applauded the remarkable achievements that China has made under the leadership of President Xi Jinping." Boric also reportedly stressed Chile's commitment to the one-China policy and noted that Chile "hopes to learn from China's governance experience and deepen cooperation with China in infrastructure, poverty reduction and digital economy."⁶⁹ The readout from President Boric's office highlighted progress made between the two countries on "trade, climate change, scientific cooperation, and technological development," as well as continued PRC investment, but made no mention of Xi's leadership or the one-China policy.⁷⁰ For his part, Xi noted the PRC's eagerness to deepen cooperation with Chile on governance, development, BRI cooperation, and trade and investment, in addition to calling for joint efforts to "uphold true multilateralism."⁷¹ To date, President Boric looks set to maintain and even deepen close economic ties with the PRCs, with a priority on generating additional investment in Chile from any country interested.

Conclusion

Over the last several decades, successive Chilean administrations have consolidated relations with the PRC to boost Chilean exports and attract foreign direct investment. The PRC is now Chile's top trading partner and source of investment, offering it pathways to use its economic might to exert influence with the political and business elite in the country, as most clearly evidence by the activities of former President Frei. Economic engagement has been coupled with a PRC-sponsored effort to tell China's story in Chile.

66 "Rebellion against the dollar? What about the Russian and Chinese plan for a Eurasian currency (and other rebellions)? [¿Rebelión contra el dólar? ¿Qué se sabe del plan de Rusia y China de una moneda euroasiática (y otras rebeliones)?]." *Ahí les Va*, 25 March 2022, https://odysee.com/@ahilesva:e/2022.03.25_Mirko-China-Eurasia-Odysee:1. The report notes that the main proponents of the change are five nations of the former Soviet Union, nicknamed the "Istans."

67 "Chilean President-elect Again Condemns Russian Invasion of Ukraine." *Mercosur*, 1 March 2022, <https://en.mercopress.com/2022/03/01/chilean-president-elect-again-condemns-russian-invasion-of-ukraine>.

68 "President Xi Jinping Meets with Chilean President Gabriel Boric." Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 18 November 2022, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202211/t20221119_10977908.html.

69 "President Xi Jinping Meets with Chilean President Gabriel Boric."

70 "President of the Republic Gabriel Boric Font ends his participation in APEC 2022 Thailand [Presidente de la República Gabriel Boric Font finaliza su participación en APEC 2022 Tailandia]." *Prensa Presidencia - Gobierno de Chile*, 19 November 2022, <https://prensa.presidencia.cl/comunicado.aspx?id=204916>.

71 "President Xi Jinping Meets with Chilean President Gabriel Boric."

Deploying a mix of content-sharing arrangements with leading Chilean newspapers, efforts to co-opt journalists, and applying economic and other pressure on media to limit critical coverage, the PRC has made real gains in this effort. While Chilean media remains robust and independent, there are emerging signs of self-censorship on media coverage of the PRC and the PRC-Chile relationship.

Russia, by contrast, has made few inroads in the country beyond the information space. President Boric has been outspoken on the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Chilean people have demonstrated solidarity with Ukraine. Kremlin-sponsored propaganda and disinformation nevertheless continues to appeal to people in Chile and across Latin America and the Caribbean, building on preexisting anti-U.S. sentiment. To date, however, Chile has maintained a principled commitment to democracy and to upholding robust transparency and accountability standards, enabling it to withstand the corrosive impact of greater economic engagement with the PRC and increased influence efforts from the PRC and Russia.

CONCLUSION

This report examines the deepening relationship between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, spotlighting their unprecedented collaboration, manifest in China's support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the burgeoning economic, political, and military ties between the two nations. This partnership underscores a larger trend of an emerging authoritarian nexus, wherein illiberal actors join forces, both individually and collectively, to erode democratic principles on a global scale. The varied case studies within this report shed light on how these authoritarian forces intersect and reinforce, or undermine, each other's actions, profoundly affecting democratic norms and institutions.

The studies reveal a multi-faceted approach to such influence across the political, economic, information and security domains, including corruption, elite capture, economic coercion, military cooperation, and diplomatic and cultural influence. The overarching objective of these authoritarian actors is to diminish transparency and democratic governance, fostering disunity among democratic allies and pushing various nations to adopt their governance and bilateral cooperation style. Whether it's exploiting societal divisions, leveraging historical ties, empowering corruption, or employing propaganda campaigns, these actions collectively pose a substantial challenge to democratic stability.

In response to these alarming trends, this report advocates for a proactive approach to fortify democratic institutions. Recognizing the critical role strong democratic foundations play in countering foreign authoritarian influence, it emphasizes the imperative of addressing governance gaps that domestic and foreign authoritarian actors exploit. The compendium's conclusions advocate for cross-sectoral response and enhanced cooperation between various stakeholders, including media outlets, civil society organizations, and politicians, to safeguard democratic governance and enhance resilience against foreign authoritarian influence.

An essential aspect of this initiative involves promoting awareness and education. Leaders in civil society, policymakers, government officials, and activists must comprehend the destabilizing influence campaigns affecting their nations and formulate a cohesive response. Tackling the spread of propaganda, enhancing media literacy, and reinforcing cybersecurity efforts are paramount in the fight against foreign authoritarian influence. Policies against online harassment and hate speech, coupled with investments in independent media, are critical components of this effort. Ultimately, the report underscores the importance of offering citizens transparent, accountable governance as a deterrent to undemocratic political systems, encouraging democratic participation, adherence to the rule of law, and civic engagement to safeguard institutions from external threats. In a world where the battle for democratic ideals intensifies, the insights provided here are crucial for shaping effective strategies to preserve and promote democracy in the face of growing authoritarian influence and a growing authoritarian nexus.