

New White Paper on China's Full-Spectrum Information Operations | Stanford Internet Observatory

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Today the Stanford Internet Observatory published a joint white paper with the Hoover Institution examining China's covert and overt capabilities in the context of modern information operations. Much of the attention to state-sponsored influence practices in recent years has focused on social media activity, particularly as social network companies have announced takedowns of accounts linked to state-backed operations. However, state-sponsored operations are broader than social media. Countries including Russia, China and Iran have demonstrated the ability to operate a full-spectrum capability set that spans both traditional and social media ecosystems.

While some of the technologies leveraged towards today's information campaigns are new, the strategies are well-established. In the case of China, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) relies on an extensive influence apparatus that spans a range of print and broadcast media, with varying degrees of attributability, to advance both its domestic monopoly on power and its claims to global leadership. This apparatus draws on nearly a century of experience running information operations.

Our white paper explores the impact of technological innovations on these established strategies and tactics, asking the question: what is the scope and nature of China's overt and covert capabilities, and how do they complement one another? We evaluate China's capabilities through three timely case studies: 1) Hong Kong's 2019-2020 protests; 2) Taiwan's January 2020 election; and 3) the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand how China's abilities compare to those of other powers, we contrast China's activities with Russia's.

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