

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Chinese People Are Hearing Less About America— How We Know and What It Means

Under Xi Jinping, China has become more assertive in its foreign policy and positioned itself as a champion of globalization. Yet foreign news coverage in China’s official media during Xi’s administration declined compared to during the administrations of his predecessors. In “China’s Domestic Politics and Editorial Control over Foreign News Coverage in the *People’s Daily*, 1993–2022,” Jianbing Li, Jiakun Jack Zhang, Duoji Jiang, and Weifeng Zhong show that China’s shift in propaganda strategies is less about external interests and more about domestic policy concerns.

A Shift in Propaganda Strategies

The *People’s Daily* is the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party and serves as the Party’s chief mouthpiece and instrument of propaganda. The paper combines the functions of news reporting and editorial commentary, which are traditionally separate in Western media outlets. As Chinese leaders have consolidated power, they have exerted greater control over the newspaper’s content, printing less objective “news” in favor of more subjective “editorial” pieces.

Using advanced natural language processing techniques, the authors have analyzed foreign coverage in more than one million articles published in the *People’s Daily* between 1987 and 2022. They find that the Chinese public is hearing less about America, even as China becomes a more active player on the world stage and features more prominently in US media.

What Explains the Shift? What Dangers Does It Pose?

The strategic reduction in foreign news coverage in the *People’s Daily* is a consequence of Chinese leaders’ attempts to consolidate power. Chinese leaders are allocating more editorial space to promote their foreign policy visions and are thereby squeezing out conventional foreign news coverage. This development risks making diplomacy more difficult and conflict more likely.

- China has been positioning itself to exert substantial influence on international affairs by elevating the importance of foreign policy within its overarching political agenda.
- The coverage of foreign affairs shapes both public and elite opinions on international relations. The risk of miscalculations and misperceptions in China’s dealing with foreign nations increases when the information available to the Chinese public about the outside world becomes less objective and less accessible.
- The fact that the country’s state-controlled newspaper is reporting less foreign news does not mean China is becoming more inward-focused. Rather it means that the Chinese president is further consolidating his power at home and prioritizing domestic control over foreign reporting.