

Pragmatic, Strategic and Wide-Reaching: The CCP's Party Diplomacy in Africa

Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader

In the past few years, China's engagement in Africa has (again) caused controversy as to whether, how and to what effect China seeks to actively share lessons from its political and economic system in its relations with African countries. One important actor in this regard is the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP-ID), which is in charge of China's party diplomacy in Africa and beyond. This policy brief analyses recent patterns and motives of China's party diplomacy in Africa. It finds that the CCP maintains close ties with the main ruling parties in southern Africa and in some countries in East Africa, while engaging with a broad range of parties in countries in North Africa. Beijing's party diplomacy in Africa seeks to promote China's core foreign policy interests, advance an alternative narrative on global China and normalize China's authoritarian system. Even though it remains unclear as to what extent China can reach its goals through party diplomacy, African policymakers certainly welcome the continuous and high-level engagement by Chinese party officials. European policymakers, in turn, should invest more in better understanding party diplomacy, and reflect on how to respond to a growing competition of narratives.

One important actor in China's Africa policy is the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP-ID).¹ Since Xi Jinping has come to power, the CCP has considerably deepened its party diplomacy globally as well as in Africa. Africa is the third most important region for China's party diplomacy after Asia and Europe in terms of the frequency of party meetings.² The CCP-ID maintains ties with more than 130 parties across all countries on the continent except for Eswatini³ (Figure 2). High-level CCP officials regularly meet with their African counterparts to discuss the political and economic situation in their countries, political strategies, and relations between the party, the state and society. The CCP-ID signs

¹ Some studies have started to analyse China's party diplomacy, with a specific focus on Africa. See: Joshua Eisenmann, "China's Relational Power in Africa: Beijing's New Type of Party-to-Party Relations", *Third World Quarterly* 44, no. 12 (2023): 2441-2461; Lina Benabdallah, "Power or Influence? Making Sense of China's Evolving Party-to-Party Diplomacy in Africa", *African Studies Quarterly* 19 (2020): 3-4; David Shinn and Joshua Eisenmann, *China's relations with Africa. A new Era of Strategic Engagement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023).

² Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence: The Chinese Communist Party's Global Outreach", *International Studies Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (2020): 723-733.

³ Eswatini is the only country in Africa that still maintains relations with Taiwan.

Memorandums of Understanding with African ruling parties,⁴ provides training on public policies or China's economic reform and supports African party schools.

Many political parties across the globe engage in external contacts and participate in international party alliances or other forms of transnational party exchange. But China's party diplomacy is unique in terms of the scope and density of its network as well as the scale of the political and administrative resources invested.⁵ This is made possible by the structure of the Chinese party state in which power (including the field of foreign policy) is concentrated in the CCP. China's party diplomacy operates in parallel to official state diplomacy conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other state organs, but the minister of the CCP-ID is of higher rank than Chinese state ministers. In addition, China's party diplomacy can complement and reinforce state diplomacy by being high-level but more informal and is therefore able to reach key decision-makers who do not hold formal government functions and are therefore mostly out of reach for regular state diplomacy.

This policy brief analyses how China's party diplomacy in Africa has evolved since the early 2000s and which factors motivate China's party diplomacy. The policy brief finds that dominant ruling parties in southern and East Africa are among the closest partners of the CCP-ID. In North Africa, it engages with a broader range of parties. Party diplomacy in Africa seeks to promote China's core foreign policy interests, advance an alternative narrative on global China and share lessons from the Chinese political system. Our analysis builds on a comprehensive dataset that allows us to trace party diplomacy for the period 2002 until 2023 and to infer China's perspectives on party diplomacy.

Infobox 1: China's Party Diplomacy: Exploring the Data

The CCP-ID has comprehensively documented its activities since the early 2000s on its own website in short news items. These reveal with whom the CCP interacts, where and when. In some cases, the items also give short descriptions of the topics discussed. The items generally report meetings that involve high-level officials, such as the minister or deputy ministers of the CCP-ID, the heads and deputy heads of other departments of the Central Committee, or high-level provincial party officials. Even if the CCP-ID reporting is limited to high-level contacts, analysing these items substantially increases our understanding of existing relations with African partners and the disseminated discourses. The website contains 6,600 (English-language) news items for the period 2002 until 2023; 1,400 items give insights into the CCP's cooperation with African partners. Some of this information has been triangulated with articles in African media as well as interviews with high-ranking officials in China and African countries. For more information on this first comprehensive dataset on the topic please refer to Hackenesch and Bader (2020). All news items are publicly available at: <http://www.idcpc.org.cn/english/>.

⁴ For instance, with the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) in 2018, or in 2023 with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in South Sudan and the Chama Cha Mapinduzi in Tanzania.

⁵ David Shambaugh, "China's 'Quiet Diplomacy': The International Department of the Chinese Communist Party", *China: An International Journal* 5, no. 1 (2007).

Party Diplomacy in China's Foreign Policy

The CCP maintains a major influence on the strategic directions of China's foreign policy, particularly on high-profile issues such as relations with North Korea or Iran.⁶ In addition to shaping the strategic direction of China's foreign relations, it has its own foreign policy organ, the CCP-ID. The CCP-ID sends party officials abroad to gather information on policies and developments in other countries and provides policy advice to the CCP's Central Committee and the Politburo Standing Committee.⁷ It provides training for foreign party officials to learn from China's modernization process and it receives party delegations in China.⁸

The CCP-ID organizes visits for its own representatives, for members of the Politburo and the Central Committee and other high-ranking provincial party officials who do not hold government positions. It has its own intelligence branch, its so-called "research office". Eight divisions take care of party-to-party relations with different geographical regions, including one division responsible for relations with political parties in Sub-Saharan Africa and another for relations with countries in West Asia and North Africa.⁹

The CCP-ID became a prominent foreign policy actor during the 1950s. Contacts with African parties were strengthened in the follow-up to the 1955 Bandung Conference, when several African countries became independent.

In the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union and regime transitions in Africa considerably changed the context for China's party diplomacy in Africa. The 14th CCP National Congress in 1992 no longer highlighted the importance of relations with communist parties, but instead proclaimed that it valued relations with all political parties in all countries.¹⁰ At the same time, according to Zhong Weiyun, Deputy Director-General of the Africa Bureau of the CCP-ID, political openings in Africa in the early 1990s had a negative impact on the CCP's relations with African parties.¹¹ Some partners of the CCP lost power, and incumbents had little knowledge and sometimes little interest in closer links with the CCP.

In the early 2000s, the CCP's relations with parties around the globe re-gained prominence as an instrument of China's foreign relations.¹² China's rise to become a major global economic and political power, and its re-engagement with the Global South, has been underpinned by substantial investments in public diplomacy, and a strategy to promote Chinese soft power.¹³ In this context, the CCP re-vitalized its party-to-party engagement and unrolled a large visiting and training programme for party officials, particularly in Africa.

⁶ Shambaugh, "China's 'Quiet Diplomacy'", 26; Qingmin Zhang, "Bureaucratic Politics and Chinese Foreign Policy-making", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9, no. 4 (2016): 441.

⁷ Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "China's Foreign- and Security-policy Decision-making Processes under Hu Jintao", *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 38, no. 3 (2009): 68.

⁸ David Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa. A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 56.

⁹ Shambaugh, "China's 'Quiet Diplomacy'", 42.

¹⁰ Lianyan Zhong, "Parties and Organizations the CPC Has Relations With", in *International Relations of the Communist Party of China* (Beijing: China Intercontinental Press, 2007), accessed July 2024.

¹¹ Zhong, Weiyun (2012) Inter-Party Relations Promote Sino-African Strategic Partnership, China.org.cn, accessed July 2024.

¹² Shinn and Eisenman, *China and Africa. A Century of Engagement*; Shambaugh, "China's 'Quiet Diplomacy'".

¹³ Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive – How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007). For a critical perspective, see Joseph Nye, "China's Soft Power Deficit: To Catch Up, Its Politics Must Unleash the Many Talents of Its Civil Society", *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 May 2012, accessed July 2024.

Pragmatic and Strategic: Main Patterns in China's Party Diplomacy in Africa

Between 2000 and 2018, party diplomacy in Africa gradually intensified (Figure 1), in a similar way to China's party outreach in other regions. Party contacts saw a peak around 2018, around the time when Xi Jinping started his second term and before the Covid-19 pandemic made international travel impossible. In autumn 2020, the CCP started to use online formats to meet with African party officials. In 2023, after the relatively late opening up of travel in and out of China in January of that year, most meetings took place in person once again, yet with not the same frequency as in the pre-pandemic years. The coming years will show whether in-person meetings increase to pre-Covid-19 levels.

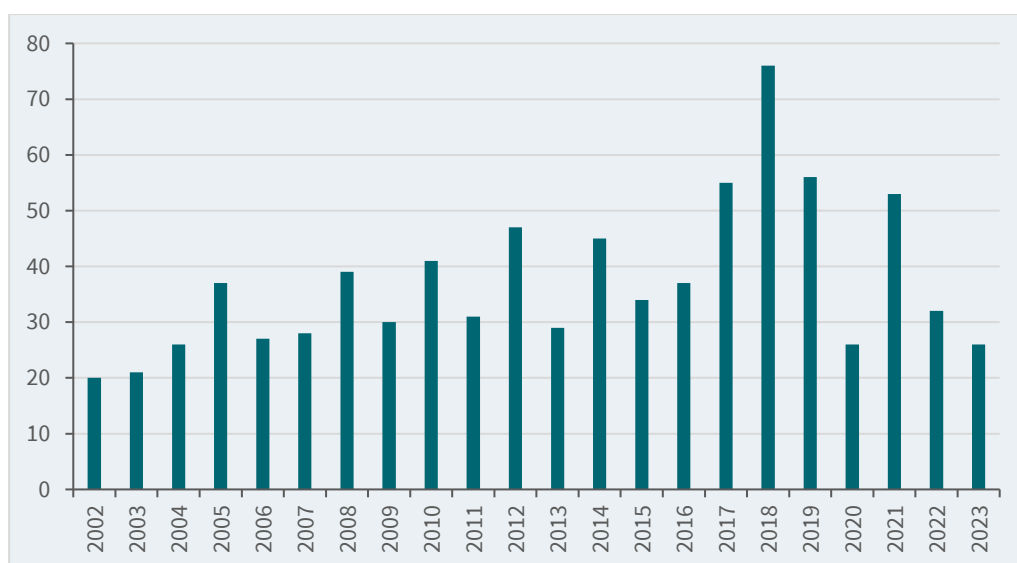


Figure 1: Number of contacts between the CCP and African parties, 2002 until September 2023. Source: Authors' own compilation.

The CCP itself claims to establish contacts with political parties in power as well as in opposition.¹⁴ In Europe and Asia, the CCP indeed engages regularly not only with ruling parties but also with many opposition parties.¹⁵ For African countries, however, the CCP maintains high-level contacts almost exclusively with ruling parties, and in many cases with the main ruling party only.¹⁶ These differences across different world regions indicate the great flexibility and pragmatism of the CCP-ID's approach in responding to different local realities and regime types.

Closest Friends: Parties in Southern Africa and North Africa

The CCP maintains relations with parties across almost all African countries, but the frequency of contact varies significantly across countries and parties (Figure 2). Relations are

¹⁴ Lianyan Zhong, "Parties and Organizations the CPC Has Relations With".

¹⁵ The CCP maintains contact with European and Asian Communist parties as well as with various other opposition parties that might become a governing party in the future. See Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence".

¹⁶ The CCP-ID's website reported only a handful of encounters with African opposition parties. In the past few years, it has established contact with some parties in North African countries that do not form part of the government. Between 2002 and 2017, it reported only about three meetings with opposition parties.

particularly close with parties in South and North Africa as well as in some countries in East Africa.

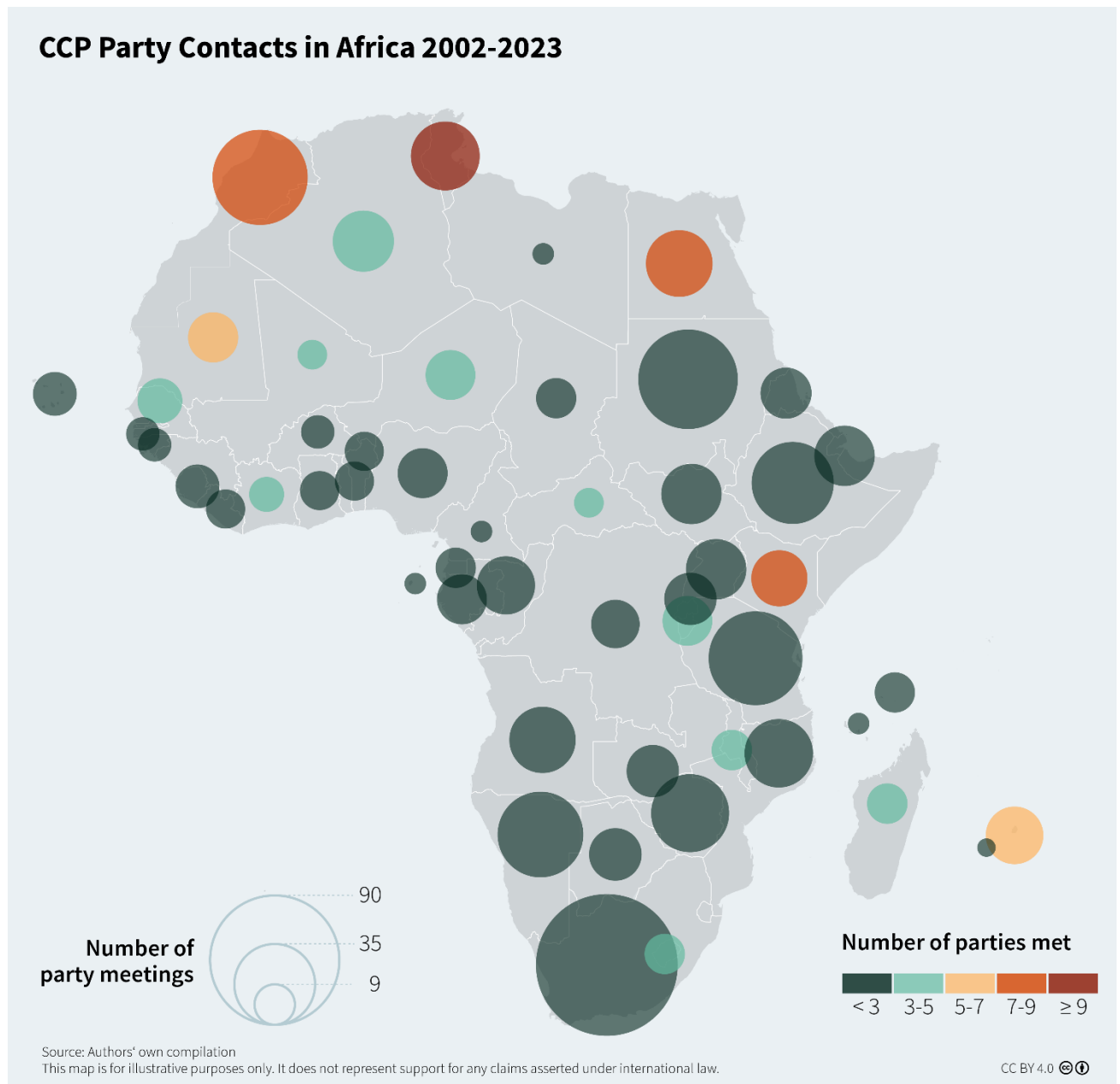


Figure 2: Contacts between the Chinese Communist Party and parties in Africa, 2002 to 2023.

In southern Africa, the CCP has close contact with most of the former liberation movements in power. Relations between the CCP and South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) are particularly strong. The ANC is among the ten most important party partners worldwide.¹⁷ The CCP also maintains very close contact with the South African Communist Party. Close and regular contact also exists with the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) in Namibia and the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) in Mozambique. The CCP regularly meets with the Angolan Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola (MPLA), although much less frequently than with the other former liberation movements in power in southern Africa. Close relations with the former liberation movements in power are driven by these parties' cen-

¹⁷ Christine Hackenesch and Julia Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence".

tral role in politics and the economy. Even though these parties are under considerable domestic pressure, they remain the dominant political forces in their countries. Historic ties and continuities might also help explain close relations with some of these parties, although the CCP sometimes backed rival movements during the Cold War period.¹⁸

These cooperation patterns in southern Africa starkly contrast with the CCP's engagement with North African countries, reflecting the pragmatism and flexibility in the CCP's approach in responding to the domestic situation in partner countries. Different cooperation patterns could also be shaped by different approaches to cooperation of the third bureau of the CCP-ID (responsible for North Africa and the Middle East) compared to the fourth bureau (responsible for Sub-Saharan Africa).¹⁹

With the exception of Libya, all North African countries are important targets for China's party diplomacy, and China's outreach towards North Africa has intensified in recent years. Whereas in southern Africa, the CCP engages with the main ruling parties only, in Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco it reaches out to a very broad range of political parties. Following the Arab Spring and the ousting of the longstanding ruling parties in Egypt and Tunisia in 2011, the CCP's relations with those ruling parties also discontinued, and party exchanges became more prominent again from 2018 onwards. In both countries as well as in Morocco, the CCP now engages with many different parties. As political power is largely concentrated with the military in Egypt and Tunisia, and with the monarchy in Morocco, China's outreach towards various political parties probably aims to foster a positive image of China through engagement with a variety of partners.

The picture is more mixed in East Africa, where the CCP has close ties with dominant ruling parties in authoritarian countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Rwanda and Tanzania, as well as with a broad range of political parties in Kenya, one of China's most important destinations for loans and investments. Parties in West and Central Africa receive less engagement from the CCP overall, which might be a result of the generally weaker party systems compared to southern Africa, or to the presence of many conflict-affected states. Outreach is very limited, for instance, in Mali, Chad and the Central African Republic, which are affected by internal conflict, and where political parties play a less relevant role. Interestingly, party diplomacy is also limited in some lower middle-income countries such as Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Nigeria, where China has considerable economic trade and investment relations and where, in cases such as Cameroon, one main ruling party has been entrenched in power for decades.

The CCP-ID's main counterparts in African countries are political parties. However, it sometimes also reaches out to non-party actors, such as African diplomats in Beijing. Presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers are sometimes engaged in their state function and not as party representatives. Moreover, the CCP-ID meets business actors, particularly from North African countries, think tank representatives and journalists. Overall, however, in its relations with African countries, non-party actors do not play a prominent role. In this regard, party diplomacy in Africa differs from party diplomacy in Asia and Europe, where non-party actors are increasingly important counterparts for the CCP-ID.²⁰

¹⁸ During the Cold War, the CCP had backed UNITA, which might partly explain its reluctance until recently to engage more closely with MPLA.

¹⁹ For the internal structure of the CCP-ID, see also Shambaugh, "China's 'Quiet Diplomacy'".

²⁰ Julia Bader and Christine Hackenesch, "The Chinese Communist Party's Relations in Asia", in *Authoritarian Gravity Centres: A Cross-regional Study of Authoritarian Promotion and Diffusion*, ed. Marianne Kneuer and Thomas Demmelhuber (New York: Routledge, 2020), 225-248.

Changing Instruments and Forms of Engagement: Support for (Online) Training, Seminars and Party Schools

The CCP's engagement with African political parties takes various forms and the instruments and forms of engagement have been evolving over the past few years. One key feature of the CCP's party diplomacy are high-level bilateral encounters between the CCP-ID Minister or his deputies and high-level African party officials. These types of bilateral meetings have been a constant in the CCP's engagement with African countries, even though the frequency of this type of meeting seems to have reduced over time, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic. Another constant in China's party diplomacy have been study tours for African partners in China. Yet, as China only lifted Covid-19 travel restrictions and reopened its borders for international visitors in 2023, these types of visits have not been very frequent since 2020. In addition, the CCP has introduced new mechanisms of cooperation to engage many African parties at the same time. In 2017, it organized for the first time a "CCP in dialogue with World Political Parties" meeting. Building on this experience, it organized a "CPC in dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting Africa" in 2018 in Tanzania, engaging with many African parties at once.²¹

With the spread of online meetings and attempts by the CCP to reach out to a broader range of parties at once, several new formats of cooperation have been introduced and other forms of cooperation intensified. Most notably, the CCP has rolled out regular online training sessions for cadres from African ruling parties. In 2021 alone, such seminars, designed for 20 or more cadres from individual parties, were held for the ruling parties in Algeria, Angola, Eritrea, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, South Sudan and Zimbabwe, among others. These meetings enable the CCP to reach out to key decision-makers in the ruling parties or to future political leaders. The online training sessions are specific to the CCP's cooperation with African countries and are not offered, for instance, to countries in Europe.

Infobox 2: Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School

The CCP is also supporting African party schools. The most prominent example is the Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School in Tanzania. The ANC, CCM, FRELIMO, MPLA, SWAPO and ZANU-PF had longstanding plans, dating back to the early 2000s, to set up a joint party school for cadre formation. In 2018, the CCP offered to finance the building, which allowed the school to open in February 2022. Meanwhile, the CCP also cooperates with the school on the curriculum and organizes some training sessions. One example is a seminar specifically for middle-aged and young cadres.²² While the Leadership School in Tanzania has received particular public attention, the CCP also supports party schools at the national level, for instance in Zimbabwe.²³

²¹ "The CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties as High-level Meeting Africa Thematic Event Opens in Tanzania", IDCPC, accessed July 2024.

²² "Mwalimu Julius Nyerere Leadership School Holds This Year's Seminar for Middle-aged and Young Cadres of Six Parties in Southern Africa", idcpc.org.cn, 25 May 2022, accessed July 2024.

²³ China Escalates Its Political Party Training in Africa, Africa Center for Strategic Studies, accessed July 2024.

China's Motives and Interests in Party Diplomacy

China's strategic engagement in Africa aims to sustain China's economic growth, creating a stable international environment and promoting China's rise from a regional to a global power. Similar to government-to-government relations, the CCP uses its contacts with African parties to advance these broader economic and political interests, including normalizing its own authoritarian governance. Party ties thereby complement government-to-government relations, but also have some strategic advantages over government diplomacy.

Party Diplomacy to Advance Political Interests

Party ties promote China's core foreign policy interests, very similar to government diplomacy, but they are instrumentalized even more strategically to construct and manufacture consent with China's narratives about the international order and its own role therein.²⁴

Party diplomacy complements and reinforces state efforts in isolating Taiwan. For instance, the CCP can informally already establish contact and thereby pave the way for official government relations. Once a country has switched its relations from Taiwan to the PRC, the CCP regularly meets with the ruling party in order to ensure continued compliance with the One China policy, as happened for instance in the case of Burkina Faso and Benin.

In addition, party diplomacy helps to diffuse China's foreign policy concepts in Africa and beyond. Under President Hu Jintao, concepts such as Peaceful Rise and Peaceful Development, and then later Harmonious World, were regularly mentioned during party meetings, including with African partners. Under Xi Jinping, the party channel has been used much more prominently to advance foreign-policy concepts and strategies. In most meetings, the Belt and Road Initiative is a topic of debate, while counterparts are also introduced to "Xi Jinping Thought". Moreover, Xi Jinping used the CCP in Dialogue with World Political Parties' meeting in 2017 to promote the new concept of building a "community with a shared future for mankind"²⁵. Whereas the CCP uses party meetings with European partners generally to "inform" others about the "community with shared future for mankind", in relations with African partners the CCP uses the concept to directly frame bilateral relations.

The descriptions in the news items also reveal that the CCP has started more proactively to construct a narrative about China's global rise and its domestic situation. Until around 2015, the CCP mostly sought to collect positive statements that its African partners "share" China's position, for example on human rights in Tibet or Xinjiang. Since then, it has started more actively to use the party channel to construct an alternative narrative.

The human rights situation in Xinjiang and the Covid-19 pandemic are two interesting cases in point. With regard to Xinjiang, the CCP shifted its strategy from defensively "briefing" partners about China's position and reporting partners' support for China's position to organizing dedicated study tours to Xinjiang intended to demonstrate that criticism of human rights abuses is unjustified. Parties from North African and Arab countries regularly participate in these study tours. With regard to the Covid-19 pandemic, the CCP collected 230 signatures from parties around the globe to an open letter that called for international

²⁴ For this and the following, refer to Hackenesch and Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence".

²⁵ Xi's speech on cooperation among world political parties published: "Xi calls on world political parties to build community with shared future for mankind", XINHUANET, accessed September 2024.

cooperation to fight Covid-19 and against the politicization of the virus and the stigmatization of certain countries.²⁶ Many signatory parties came from African countries, even though the full list of signatories was never published. Hence, the CCP-ID is now actively constructing a stage to deflect criticism, and approaching foreign parties to fish for compliments and fabricate international recognition of the CCP. Positive foreign reactions during party meetings are subsequently published in Chinese media in order to legitimize the CCP's rule to a domestic audience. Whereas this shift in strategy is not specific for African parties, African partners are more prominently addressed compared to, for example, European parties, as the CCP maybe expects more openness from African partners to subscribe to the CCP's narrative.

Party Diplomacy to Normalize Authoritarianism

In addition to advancing foreign policy interests, party diplomacy is also a vehicle to normalize China's authoritarian governance and share lessons with other autocrats. The CCP regularly invites African party delegations for study tours in China to introduce them to the CCP and the Chinese political system more generally, and to showcase China's economic development. These short-term visits to China are used to disseminate "norms, produce knowledge, and increase networking and social power".²⁷

In particular, since 2014, when Xi Jinping announced that China is now willing to share the lessons of its political system, the CCP has used the party channel more prominently to share its governance experiences with African parties. References to learning have clearly become more prominent over time in the CCP's relations with African parties.

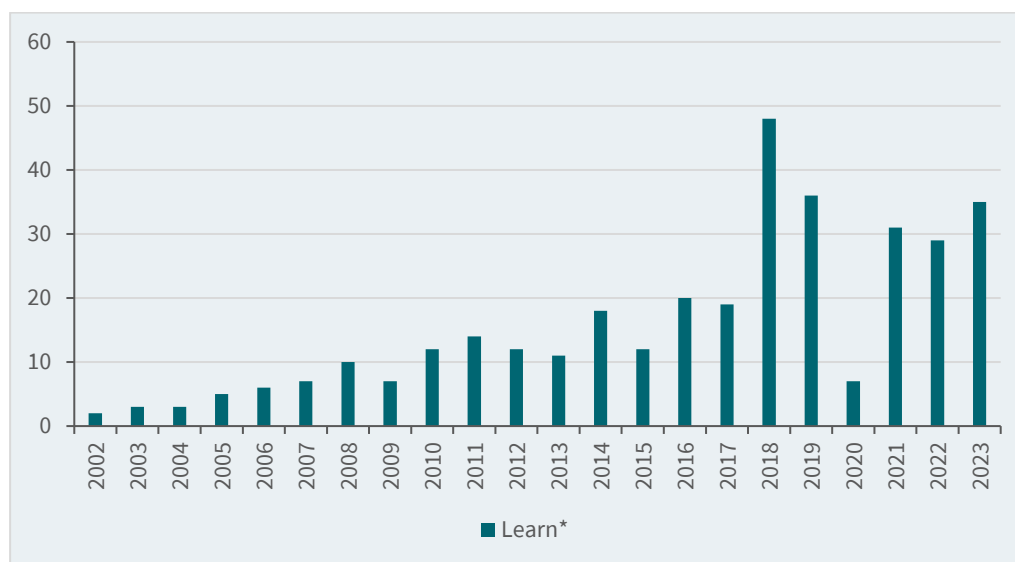


Figure 3: Frequency of "learn" mentioned in the CCP's news items for cooperation with African countries, 2002-2023. Source: Authors' own compilation.

Whereas in the early 2000s, the CCP spoke about mutual learning or sometimes also said that it is interested in learning from its partners, since 2014 it mostly reports about partners being interested in learning from the CCP. This changing discourse in the news items has

²⁶ Wen, Yao, "Branding and Legitimation: China's Party Diplomacy Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic." *China Review* 21, no. 1 (2021): 55-90.

²⁷ Lina Benabdallah, "Power or Influence".

gone hand in hand with new cooperation formats, such as training sessions for cadres or support for African party schools, as discussed above, which aim to familiarize counterparts with China's experience of "state governance and administration" or the CCP's experience of party building.

Whether African parties are genuinely interested in learning from the CCP experience, and what the broader effects of cadre trainings are, is beyond the scope of this paper and would be areas for future research. What is very clear, however, is that the CCP is increasingly eager to report its partners' interest in learning from the CCP experience for the purpose of domestic propaganda and to strengthen domestic legitimacy in China.

Party Diplomacy to Foster Business Relations

Beyond fostering political interests, party contacts also help in realizing Chinese economic goals.²⁸ As the business environment in many Sub-Saharan African countries involves high levels of uncertainty, weak legal frameworks and high levels of corruption, the CCP's access to the ruling party may help to overcome some of these challenges. In the context of regimes where the ultimate powerhouse lies within a strong dominant party that has close ties with the business sector, party contacts may be of particular help in navigating through weak regulatory frameworks and secure a better access to resources. This might be particularly relevant for countries in southern Africa where a dominant ruling party fuses with the business sector. Another example would be South Sudan, where the CCP invested heavily in relations with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement ahead of South Sudan's independence with a view to guaranteeing a grip on South Sudan's oil deposits. With regard to countries in North Africa, economic interests also drive party diplomacy, albeit in different ways. Outreach towards a broad range of political parties in Tunisia and Egypt, for example,²⁹ might also be intended to foster a positive image of investment through the Belt and Road Initiative.

In addition to these general economic interests, party diplomacy also helps to further the interests of particular sectors or Chinese actors. For instance, since 2009 Chinese provinces have regularly taken turns in organizing a forum for Small and Medium Enterprises for countries in North Africa and West Asia in cooperation with the CCP.³⁰ The CCP-ID thereby uses its large networks to help other Chinese actors realize and advance specific niche interests.

Conclusions

China's party diplomacy matters and can be an effective foreign policy tool. Party diplomacy in Africa has allowed the CCP to collect positive statements on the situation in Xinjiang or the origins of the Covid-19 coronavirus and China's domestic response to the pandemic, both of which help boost external and internal legitimation. In this regard, party diplomacy contributes to advancing a different narrative on global China and on international relations more generally. It thereby contributes to the competition of narratives on the benefits of different types of different external actors towards African countries. While it

²⁸ For this and the following see also Hackenesch and Bader, "The Struggle for Minds and Influence".

²⁹ "China-Egypt Political Parties Formally Establish Communication Mechanisms for the Construction of the Belt and Road Initiative and Hold the First Video Conference", IDCPC.org.cn, 21 December 2020, accessed July 2024.

³⁰ "SMEs forum promotes regional economic cooperation", IDCPC.org.cn, 26 June 2013, accessed July 2024.

is unclear whether African partners are genuinely interested in learning from the CCP's experience, African policymakers welcome the continuous and high-level engagement by Chinese party officials.

Among European policymakers, the role of party diplomacy in China's relations with Africa has largely been overlooked so far. Europeans should be aware that this form of flexible, informal and high-level outreach exists next to official Chinese diplomatic channels.

Given the existing geopolitical challenges and the importance of Africa for European countries, European policymakers should reconsider how they can achieve their policy goals with African partners. Whereas recent European initiatives focused on strengthening economic cooperation through Global Gateway, or on stemming migration through various forms of migration partnerships, transnational contacts that include party-to-party cooperation have not been high on the agenda. European actors should invest more in strengthening party cooperation with a view to contributing to democracy within political parties, and to the plurality of African party systems while respecting democratic principles and ensuring transparency in their cooperation. Strengthening party cooperation should thus not be about copying China, but about presenting an attractive alternative offer for cooperation, building on European democratic values and norms.

Christine Hackenesch is Project Lead at Megatrends Afrika and Senior Researcher at IDOS.

Julia Bader is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of Amsterdam.

Megatrends Afrika

is a joint project of SWP, IDOS and IfW.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s).

All project publications are subject to an internal peer review process.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

SWP

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik | German Institute for International and Security Affairs

IDOS German Institute of Development and Sustainability

IfW Kiel Institute for the World Economy

www.megatrends-afrika.de
megatrends-afrika@swp-berlin.org

ISSN 2747-4119

DOI 10.18449/2024MTA-PB29



Funded by:

