Economic Statecraft, Media Influence Strategies, and the Impact on Public Perceptions of Chinese Influence in African Countries

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Abstract

This paper empirically demonstrates that in African countries with higher proportions of citizens who believe electricity and water supply to be national priorities as well as higher proportions of citizens who consume news from television, positive perceptions of Chinese influence are higher. By identifying these relationships, this paper contributes to the discourse on Chinese economic statecraft and soft power in Africa, theorizing that economic statecraft is only effective when conducted in tandem with media strategies that attribute development projects to Chinese investment.

Introduction

Concurrent with China's rapid economic growth over the past two decades has been China's increasingly deep economic interest, relationship, and investment vis-à-vis the African continent. During this time period, China has positioned itself as Africa's largest economic partner, with no other country coming close in matching the breadth and depth of various forms of economic engagement.[1] Aside from becoming Africa's largest bilateral trade partner—which has fewer ties to the Chinese state—China has established itself as the largest investor on the continent, with investments increasing at a faster rate than any other country (Figure 1 depicts Chinese FDI growth in Africa from 2003 to 2015).[2] [3]

The energy sector constitutes a major focus of Chinese investment on the continent, of which the majority of China's involvement deals with hydroelectricity.[4] Chinese companies are

[1] Qingwei Meng and Eugene Bempong Nyantakyi, "Local Skill Development from China's Engagement in Africa: Comparative Evidence from the Construction Sector in Ghana," China Africa Research Initiative (SAIS, 2019).
[2] Nusa Tukic and Meryl Burgess, "China's Role in Africa's Water Sector: Mapping the Terrain," *Waterlines* 35, no. 1 (January 2016): pp. 18-36.
[3] Olayiwola Abegunrin and Charity Manyeruke, *China's Power in Africa: A New Global Order* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
[4] Giorgio Gualberti, "Energy Investments in Africa by the US, Europe, and China," AidData (AidData: A Research Lab at William and Mary, August 20, 2014).

the primary builders of global hydropower dams in Africa, in addition to constituting a substantial share of the African water market for projects such as developing water treatment and supply stations.[5] As a result, Chinese investment has led to much-needed access to electricity and water for many African communities, while also contributing to the economic development that flows from such infrastructural improvements.[6] Though many of the involved Chinese companies are driven by a profit incentive, their investments in the African energy and water sectors are made possible by funds provided by the China Exim Bank, introducing an element of economic statecraft into such engagements.[7]

Economic statecraft refers to the use of economic means to achieve political, strategic, or security goals. Such a concept goes hand-in-hand with soft power, which relies on attractiveness—in this case economic attractiveness—to gain foreign influence.[8] For China, boosting its soft power is an important goal of its economic statecraft in Africa.[9] Thus, in addition to accelerating its economic engagement on the continent, in recent years China has begun to pay more attention to media strategies needed to positively frame such involvement. Since 2009, China has greatly expanded the number of Chinese-owned news outlets operating on the continent, hoping to counter a historically Western-dominated media environment.[10] By doing so, China seeks to manage African perceptions of China's role in Africa and China as a country/world power more broadly in order to suit its foreign policy goals.[11]

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[5] Nusa Tukic and Meryl Burgess, "China's Role in Africa's Water Sector: Mapping the Terrain," *Waterlines* 35, no. 1 (January 2016): pp. 18-36.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Pippa Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24 (2019): pp. 387-409.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Larry Hanauer and Lyle J. Morris, "Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions, and Implications for U.S. Policy," RAND Corporation (RAND Corporation, 2014), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR521.html.
[11] Ibid.

Aside from establishing a footprint for state media outlets in Africa, China has employed other—arguably more effective—strategies to influence how the country is portrayed to African audiences. Benefitting both economic and media influence objectives, the rise of the Chinese television provider, StarTimes, has played a major role in transitioning African audiences from analogue to digital television services. As a result of having a Chinese television provider, StarTimes customers are naturally exposed to more China-friendly content.[12] Further, the Chinese government has facilitated extensive training programs for African journalists in China.[13] In her book, *Shaping the Future of Power: Knowledge Production and Network-Building in China-Africa Relations*, Lina Benabdallah argues that such trainings and the Chinese/African people-to-people connections that they facilitate have a larger impact on African citizens consuming more pro-China news than does the expansion of Chinese state media on the continent.[14] Due to partaking in such trainings, which includes being exposed to a rosy depiction of China and having professional access to Chinese journalists, African journalists return home to their jobs ready to report on China in a far more positive light than they otherwise would have without the trainings.[15] Thus, it is evident that soft power media strategies, in conjunction with Chinese economic statecraft, constitute an attempt by the Chinese state to produce a positive image of China and consequently gain influence over African audiences. Such a dynamic motivates the study undertaken in this paper.

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[12] Fei Jiang et al., "The Voice of China in Africa: Media, Communication Technologies and Image-Building," *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9, no. 1 (2016): pp. 1-7.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Lina Benabdallah, *Shaping the Future of Power: Knowledge Production and Network-Building in China-Africa Relations* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2020).
[15] Ibid.

Motivation for Study

As discussed earlier, China's primary instrument for charming other nations in Africa is economic statecraft, especially through encouraging or procuring Chinese-sourced economic investment.[16] [17] In an era of growing African agency (see: [18] [19] [20] [21] [22]), winning over African elites and governments is a necessary precondition for China to effectively exercise its influence. However, with growing calls for public input in the governance of African countries, the views of African citizens on China matter for African foreign policies as well.[23] If public opinion toward China is positive, African citizens are more likely to push their governments to work more closely with China, allowing China to solidify its soft power with government-level partnerships. If public opinion is negative, Chinese-driven government-level partnerships are less likely to be successful, reining in China's influence.[24]

Opinion polls, such as the Afrobarometer surveys used in this study, are effective ways to measure African citizens' perceptions of China and thus the extent of Chinese soft power.[25] However, discovering the driving factors of such views constitutes the motivation for this study, as such shines light on the elements that make economic statecraft and soft power effective or

[16] Pippa Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24 (2019): pp. 387-409.
[17] Fin24, "Chinese Firms Urged to Invest in Africa," Fin24 (News24, March 18, 2013).
[18] Giles Mohan and Ben Lampert, "Negotiating China: Reinserting African Agency into China–Africa Relations," *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (January 2013): pp. 92-110.
[19] Bulelani Jili, "Locating African Agency in Africa-China Relations," Africa Is a Country (Africa Is a Country, April 20, 2020).
[20] Chris Alden, Cobus van Staden, and Yu-Shan Wu, "In the Driver's Seat? African Agency and Chinese Power," SAIIA (SAIIA, September 2018).
[21] Paul Nantulya, "Reshaping African Agency in China-Africa Relations," Africa Center for Strategic Studies (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, March 2, 2021),.
[22] Łukasz Fijałkowski, "China's 'Soft Power' in Africa?," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 29, no. 2 (April 2011): pp. 223-232.
[23] Pippa Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24 (2019): pp. 387-409.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.

not. Research has shown that public perception of Chinese involvement in Africa is based on citizens' own (economic) experiences and exposure to media reports rather than rigorous research, meaning that proxies for experience of and media exposure to Chinese activity on the continent will constitute the independent variables this study strives to identify.[26] Before elucidating the specific research question and embarking on a series of regression analyses, it is important to review the previous literature that has investigated this topic so that it can provide guidance to this study, in addition to identifying gaps that this study can fill.

Literature Review

Upon reviewing the applicable literature, four studies surface that investigate determinants of African citizens' perspectives on China. Before summarizing the informative findings from the literature, it should be noted that some of these studies investigated the potential determinants of support for human rights and democracy, of which none of them found any significant impact on perspectives of China; as a result, such variables are not discussed in this section.

Sautman & Hairong's seminal article, "African Perspectives on China-Africa Links", identifies the crucial finding that the most dominant variation in African perspectives on China is by country, not demographic elements such as age, education, or gender.[27] [28] The authors argue that the role of country as a determinant stems from national politicians electing to raise the 'Chinese problem' and the extent of Western media influence in African states. In addition to identifying country differences as supreme, the authors also note the significant role of the media

[26] Hangwei Li and Jacqueline Muna Musiitwa, "China in Africa's Looking Glass: Perceptions and Realities," RUSI: Europe (RUSI: Europe, August 3, 2020).
[27] Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "African Perspectives on China–Africa Links," *The China Quarterly* 199 (September 2009): pp. 728-759.
[28] As a result, the study in this paper will focus on country-level differences.

in opinion formation. While this study was conducted prior to the significant Chinese media push, it notes that increased exposure to Western media dampens positive perspectives on China.[29]

A year later, in 2010, Max Rebol's article, "Public Perceptions and Reactions: Gauging African Views of China in Africa", further informed the literature with its additional insight on the economic determinants of African perceptions of China.[30] Comparing at the country level as suggested by Sautman & Hairong, Rebol highlights that there is no link between FDI levels and positive perceptions of China, arguing that trade is the economic determinant of African views on China. Rebol argues that the impact of trade is not surprising since trade has a larger impact on ordinary citizens' lives than particular investments. While Rebol goes deeper into how certain aspects of China-Africa trade can improve or deteriorate African perspectives of China, attention will not be dedicated to those relationships since trade is less aligned with Chinese economic statecraft (due to small-scale, private Chinese traders in African countries), the focus of this paper.

In his study, "African Perspectives on China-Africa: Modelling Popular Perceptions and their Economic and Political Determinants", Marek Hanusch uses Round 4 Afrobarometer data (this paper uses Round 6) to examine the primary factors that influence African perceptions of China.[31] Echoing Sautman & Hairong, Hanusch finds that country differences and national political discourse are the most influential determinants of African perspectives on China. Hanusch also echoes Rebol's findings that trade is a stronger determinant of opinions than

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[29] Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "African Perspectives on China–Africa Links," *The China Quarterly* 199 (September 2009): pp. 728-759.
[30] Max Rebol, "Public Perceptions and Reactions: Gauging African Views of China in Africa," *African Journal of Agricultural Research* 5, no. 25 (December 2010): pp. 3524-3535.
[31] Marek Hanusch, "African Perspectives on China–Africa: Modelling Popular Perceptions and Their Economic and Political Determinants," *Oxford Development Studies* 40 (2012): pp. 492-516.

investment, though Hanusch notes that if respondents are concerned about poverty reduction as a national priority, Chinese investment correlates with positive views of China. Hanusch remarks that more research should be devoted to this relationship between concern for poverty reduction, Chinese investment, and positive African perspectives of China, which this paper attempts to investigate.[32]

Lastly, Pippa Morgan's more recent study, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment, and Aid" employs Round 6 Afrobarometer data (same as this paper) in order to uncover significant economic determinants of African perceptions of China, which in conjunction with the aforementioned literature, grounds and guides this paper's study.[33] While earlier studies noted the differential impacts of various forms of Chinese economic engagement on African perspectives of China, Morgan uses elements of principal-agent theory to explain the underlying reasons behind such differences. Morgan argues that the degree of state control over the corporate implementers of economic statecraft determines the outcomes. For example, trade and its associated small-scale Chinese-owned enterprises on the African continent generally arouse negative perspectives on China due to the poor quality of the products and the undermining of local markets. It is evident that such small-scale enterprises are fronted by Chinese migrants with no ties to the Chinese state, highlighting how the lack of state control allows such business practices that arouse negative perceptions. As a result of the lack of state ties, the impact of trade on African perspectives is unimportant to this study since it does not fall under state-driven economic statecraft. However, Chinese investment for the most part is facilitated by the Chinese state, especially with respect to large-scale projects.

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[32] Marek Hanusch, "African Perspectives on China–Africa: Modelling Popular Perceptions and Their Economic and Political Determinants," *Oxford Development Studies* 40 (2012): pp. 492-516.
[33] Pippa Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24 (2019): pp. 387-409.

Though previous studies have demonstrated that increased Chinese FDI does not correlate with more positive African perspectives on China, Morgan notes that large-scale investments carried out by Chinese state-owned enterprises tend to foster positive perceptions.[34]

Research Question

As outlined above, the literature demonstrates that for the purpose of investigating the success of Chinese economic statecraft in Africa, it is necessary to focus this paper's study on how country-level African perceptions of China are driven by large-scale Chinese investments that relate to poverty reduction (proxied by electricity and water projects), while also considering the role of the media and China's soft power strategies to frame such economic engagement in a positive light.

Methodology, Data, and Variables

In order to investigate the independent variables driving differences in perceptions of Chinese influence in African countries, this paper employs OLS estimation bivariate and multivariate regression models. For survey/perception variables, this paper uses Round 6 of the Afrobarometer surveys, which conducted over 1,100 individual surveys per country in 36 African countries in 2014 and 2015.[35] Data from 34 of these countries were included in this paper's analysis (see Figure 2 for map): Mauritius was excluded for its significantly higher Human Development Index and Chinese FDI stock per capita than the rest of the countries in the sample, classifying it as an outlier, whereas Swaziland/eSwatini was excluded due to a lack of Chinese FDI as a result of it being the only African country to maintain formal relations with

[34] Pippa Morgan, "Can China's Economic Statecraft Win Soft Power in Africa? Unpacking Trade, Investment and Aid," *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24 (2019): pp. 387-409.
[35] Afrobarometer, "Afrobarometer Data," Afrobarometer, https://afrobarometer.org/data/merged-data.

Taiwan.[36] [37] Chinese FDI data was sourced from the SAIS China-Africa Research Initiative database on "Chinese Investment in Africa"; data was extracted and matched for the 34 countries used in this paper's sample, using the time period 2010-2014 to capture the recent history that aligns with the years of the Round 6 Afrobarometer surveys.[38] GDP figures, using the year 2014 for all countries in the sample, were gathered from the World Bank.[39] [40] In order to construct per capita figures, country populations for the year 2014 were sourced from the Population Reference Bureau.[41] For political freedom data, the Freedom House Global Freedoms scores for the sample's countries in 2014 were utilized.[42]

Positive Perception of Chinese Influence, the main dependent variable in this study, is a country-level quantitative variable constructed using data from the Round 6 Afrobarometer surveys.[43] First, a dummy variable was coded using amalgamated individual responses from the surveys, using the question "Do you think that China's economic and political influence on [respondent's country] is mostly positive, or mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?". For respondents who answered "very positive" or "somewhat positive", the dummy variable was coded "1"; for respondents who answered "very negative", "somewhat negative", "neither positive nor negative", or "don't know/haven't heard enough", the dummy variable was coded "0". While I was inclined to exclude the "don't know/haven't heard enough" responses

[36] UNDP, "Human Development Report 2014," United Nations Development Programme (United Nations Development Programme, July 2, 2014), http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2014.
[37] Olayiwola Abegunrin and Charity Manyeruke, *China's Power in Africa: A New Global Order* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).
[38] SAIS-CARI, "Data: Chinese Investment in Africa," China Africa Research Initiative (Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies).
[39] World Bank, "GDP (Current US$)," World Bank (World Bank).
[40] FDI Stock and GDP figures are both measured in $USD
[41] Population Reference Bureau, "2014 World Population Data Sheet," Population Reference Bureau (Population Reference Bureau, 2014).
[42] Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2014," Freedom House (Freedom House).
[43] All subsequent references to 'positive perceptions of Chinese influence' thus refer to country-level percentages.

from the dummy variable, I included them in order to align with the statistics presented by Afrobarometer in their own reports, especially one that compares responses over time.[44] Once this dummy variable was constructed, country-level positive values were calculated for the 34 countries in the sample. For example, Ghana's value of 0.338 indicates that 33.8% of respondents in Ghana held a positive view of Chinese influence in their country (i.e., dummy variable equal to "1"). Figure 3 displays the country level positive perception of Chinese influence on a map, while also indicating the range for the variable, 0.335-0.992.

Chinese FDI Stock (2010-2014) Per Capita, the first tested independent variable in this study, is a country-level quantitative variable constructed by taking the cumulative Chinese FDI stock into each African country in the sample, and then dividing each of these figures by the countries' populations in 2014. Such a time period was chosen in order to provide a recent history of Chinese FDI into African countries, which would be most likely to have a recently attributable impact; for example, a major Chinese-funded electrification project in 2012 is more likely to affect public perceptions of China in 2014/2015 than a project in in 2005. 2014 population figures were used for simplicity, rather than dividing FDI from each year by that year's population. The range for the variable is $0.73 to $666.58 per capita. It is important to note that additional variables that separated FDI by sector could not be constructed since China does not publish such disaggregated data.[45]

Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue, which becomes the primary independent variable in the study, is a country-level quantitative variable created using individual responses to the Round 6 Afrobarometer surveys. Based on the top three responses to the question, "In your

[44] Edem Selormey, "Africans' Perceptions about China: A Sneak Peek from 18 Countries," Afrobarometer (Afrobarometer, September 3, 2020).
[45] Larry Hanauer and Lyle J. Morris, "Chinese Engagement in Africa: Drivers, Reactions, and Implications for U.S. Policy," RAND Corporation (RAND Corporation, 2014).

opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?", a dummy variable focused on electricity and water supply was created. For respondents who answered "electricity" or "water supply" as one of the top three issues, the dummy variable was coded "1". For respondents who provided at least three top issues, but did not include "electricity" or "water supply", the dummy variable was coded "0". Once the dummy variable was created, country-level values were calculated based on the proportion of respondents in each country who listed "electricity" or "water supply" as a top three issue. For example, Ghana's value of 0.461 indicates that 46.1% of respondents in Ghana—using the aforementioned parameters—listed "electricity" or "water supply" as a top three issue. Figure 4 maps the values for this variable, which range from 0.04 to 0.708.

Another key independent variable in this study, *TV News Viewership*, is a country-level quantitative variable created using individual responses to the Round 6 Afrobarometer surveys. First, a dummy variable was created at the individual level based on the question, "How often do you get news from television?". Respondents who indicated "every day", "a few times a week", "a few times a month", or "less than once a month" are coded as "1"; respondents who indicated "never" are coded as "0". Once the dummy variable was created, country-level values were calculated based on the proportion of respondents in each country who fell into the "1" category. For example, Ghana's value of 0.741 means that 74.1% of respondents in Ghana consume news from television at any frequency. The regressions toward the latter of this paper employ TV news viewership as a high/low dummy variable, splitting the regressions based on whether TV news viewership in the respective countries is high or low. To create this dummy variable, the high/low groups were separated according to the mean of TV News Viewership: 0.61. Countries with TV news viewership greater than 0.61 were designated as "High TV News", whereas

countries with TV news viewership less than 0.61 were designated as “Low TV News”. Figure 5 displays a map distinguishing between countries with high TV news viewership and low TV news viewership in the sample; Ghana constitutes a country with high TV news viewership, but is shaded differently due to its status as an outlier, which will be explained in the analysis section.

The independent variable, *GDP Per Capita, 2014*, was calculated for each country by dividing 2014 GDP figures from the World Bank by 2014 country population figures from the Population Reference Bureau. Lastly, the country-level ordinal variable *Freedom House Score 2014*, was constructed using the Freedom House Global Freedoms index in 2014. Countries denoted as “not free”, “partially free”, and “free” were coded as “0”, “1”, and “2”, respectively.

The means of the country-level variables included in the final regression analysis are shown in Table 1, which presents descriptive statistics. Instead of including TV News Viewership as a quantitative variable in the table, the means for the other country-level variables are—in addition to being shown across the entire sample—shown separately according to high TV news viewership and low TV news viewership, since the role of TV news viewership as the study progresses stems from its status as a high/low dummy variable.

Regression Analysis

For the following regression analysis, attention will exclusively be paid first to statistical significance, and if such significance is present, to the direction of the statistically significant relationship. Due to the differing scales of the country-level variables in this study, the magnitude of coefficients will not be considered.

As discussed earlier, FDI constitutes a visible and realized impact on the development of African countries. Along with these economic and development benefits are questions related to

economic statecraft. Given the highly publicized and attributed nature of Chinese economic development projects in African countries, it is possible that there is a relationship between FDI per capita and positive perception of Chinese influence at the country level. Although a significant relationship is doubtful given the lack of significance in previous studies using FDI, it is worth investigating the possibility of a relationship with FDI per capita. Table 2 depicts the initial regression, which investigates whether total Chinese FDI per capita between 2010 and 2014 in 34 African countries has an impact on positive perceptions of China at the country level. The results of this regression are statistically insignificant, meaning that there is no correlation between FDI per capita and positive perceptions of China. Figure 6 presents a scatter plot of the variables and values from this regression, adding a visual demonstration of the lack of correlation between Chinese FDI per capita and positive perceptions of China.

Given China's demonstrated role in effecting numerous electricity or water supply projects in African countries and the clear desire for African citizens to access such services and their direct and indirect (economic) benefits, it is worth exploring whether countries with higher proportions of citizens identifying electricity or water supply as a top three issue also have more positive perceptions of Chinese influence.[46] Table 3 depicts the regression results investigating the existence of such a relationship. The results show that as the country-level proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue increases, country-level positive perception of Chinese influence[47] also increases, with statistical significance at the 5% level. Figure 7 presents a scatter plot that visualizes the positive correlation. Due to the

[46] Given the possibility of ambiguity regarding which sector hydroelectric dams (a major form of Chinese investment in Africa) fall into, electricity and water supply were combined.
[47] Future references to this variable may not explicitly state "country-level", but such is implied given the focus of this study

significance of the proportion of citizens identifying electricity or water supply as a top three issue as an independent variable, this regression becomes the baseline for this study.

It is thus clear that development-related variables affect perceptions of Chinese influence, in this case represented by the proportion of citizens who identified electricity or water supply as a top three issue. While this relationship is significant and promising, it is important to further investigate the *Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue* variable in order to uncover whether it is related to other independent economic variables, such as GDP per capita.

Table 4 depicts the regression results uncovering the relationship between GDP per capita and the country-level proportion of citizens who identified electricity or water supply as a top three issue. The results demonstrate that as GDP per capita increases, the proportion of citizens in a country identifying electricity or water supply as a top three issue decreases, with statistical significance at the 5% level. Figure 8 visualizes the correlation with a scatter plot. Such a relationship indicates that poorer countries are more likely to have more citizens identifying electricity or water supply as a top three issue. Given the established positive relationship between citizens identifying electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence, the statistical significance of GDP per capita in this regression begs the question as to whether simply low country income is driving the positive perceptions of Chinese influence.

Table 5 depicts the regression results investigating the existence of this aforementioned potential relationship. The results are statistically insignificant, meaning there is no correlation between GDP per capita and positive perceptions of Chinese influence, which is visualized by the scatter plot in Figure 9. Thus, while there is a positive relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of

Chinese influence, as well as a negative relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and GDP per capita, there is no negative relationship between GDP per capita and positive perceptions of Chinese influence.

Given the lack of significance of GDP per capita on positive perceptions of Chinese influence in the previous regression, it is clear that the variable reflecting the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue is not simply a proxy for country-level income. However, given the relationship between these two independent variables established earlier, it is crucial to have them control for each other in a multivariate regression investigating the impact on positive perceptions of Chinese influence. Above all, such a regression will show whether the variable reflecting the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue is significant when controlling for/in spite of GDP per capita.

Table 6 depicts the multivariate regression results assessing the effect of the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue on positive perceptions of Chinese influence, while controlling for potential effects generated by GDP per capita. The results show that even when controlling for GDP per capita, there is a significant positive relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence. However, statistical significance for the *Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue* variable drops from the 5% level to the 10% level as a result of including the GDP per capita control variable, highlighting that GDP per capita explains some of the effect of the *Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue* variable on positive perceptions of Chinese influence, but maintaining that the proportion of citizens who

identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue has an impact on positive perceptions of Chinese influence.

Given the importance of soft power media strategies previously identified in the literature, the following regression incorporates country-level TV news viewership as a proxy for (pro-China) media exposure. Table 7 displays the results of the regression investigating a potential relationship between the proportion of citizens who consume news from TV and positive perceptions of Chinese influence. The results are statistically insignificant, meaning there is no correlation between the two aforementioned variables. Figure 10 visualizes the results, which clearly displays a lack of any linear relationship. While this bivariate regression has generated insignificant results, it would be beneficial to the paper's overall analysis to add TV news viewership as a control variable on the previously demonstrated relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence. By doing so, the results will either strengthen the previously demonstrated relationship (in the event that significance for the *Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue* variable remains) or uncover a complex role of the *TV News Viewership* variable (in the event that significance or coefficient directions differ from previous regression results).

While Table 8 depicts the lack of statistical significance between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence once the model controls for TV news viewership rates, such results are invaluable to this paper's study. As mentioned above, the loss of statistical significance for the *Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue* variable when controlling for TV news viewership rates indicates that while TV news viewership rates do not independently affect positive

perceptions of Chinese influence (see Table 7), TV news viewership rates do affect the previously demonstrated relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence. In other words, TV news viewership rates condition the impact that the desire for electricity or water supply has on positive perceptions of Chinese influence.

According to the hypothesis that media serves to inform African citizens of the connections between Chinese engagement/influence and the procurement of electricity and water supply projects, it is logical to predict that the relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence will be stronger in countries with higher rates of TV news viewership. In order to test this hypothesis, the following regressions will—in addition to including the pooled sample—separate countries based on high/low rates of TV news viewership. By running regressions on the separated samples, it is possible to investigate how higher rates of TV news viewership conditions the relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence.

Table 9 tests the same relationship as the baseline (see Table 3) in which the statistically significant relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence was discovered, but additionally includes separate regressions for countries with high TV news viewership and low TV news viewership. While the results from the pooled sample are obviously identical to the baseline regression in Table 3, the separated sample regressions both lack any statistical significance. However, upon analyzing the scatter plot for the high TV news viewership group (see Figure 11), it becomes clear that there is a single outlier disrupting what would otherwise be

a positive linear relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence, as is evident in the pooled regression. Toward the bottom right of the scatter plot (see Figure 11), one can see a data point clearly separated from its projected position according to the positive linear relationship. The outlier in question is Ghana, a country in which the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue is the highest of all in the high TV news viewership sample, yet—based on this statistic—whose proportion of citizens with a positive perception of China is far lower than expected. What explains such a deviation from the projected relationship for Ghana?

In 2007, significant oil deposits—later named the Jubilee oil field—were discovered in Ghana. As a result of this discovery, many Ghanaians were optimistic about the prospect of being a self-sufficient country that would use its newfound oil wealth to develop the country and raise the incomes and living conditions of its citizens. Though China had been a major development partner in Ghana for some years, Ghanaians were increasingly concerned that the quid pro quo of oil resources flowing to China in exchange for China developing energy infrastructure in Ghana would leave ordinary citizens holding the short stick. Many Ghanaians viewed China's involvement as wanting to exploit the newly discovered resources and felt that using the oil wealth to develop their own energy infrastructure constituted a better path forward than the opaque agreements with the supposedly exploitative Chinese.[48] As a result of both the oil discovery and the perception that China sought to exploit Ghanaian resources, positive perceptions of China were hampered. On one hand, the new oil wealth convinced Ghanaians that they did not need as much outside help to develop important electricity and water projects, while

[48] Stephanie Rupp, "Ghana, China, and the Politics of Energy," *African Studies Review* 56, no. 1 (April 2013): pp. 103-130.

perceptions of an exploitative relationship only dampened positive perceptions of China even further.

Similar to the perceived exploitative relationship due to the oil discovery, the Galamsey crisis in 2013 further framed China as an exploiter of Ghanaian natural resources. Galamsey refers to illegal (unregistered and unregulated) Chinese mining activities in Ghana that resulted in very public deportations of involved Chinese nationals. Such a crisis, which peaked in 2013, a year before the Round 6 Afrobarometer survey in Ghana was taken, only compounded the narrative that Chinese involvement in Ghana was exploitive, adding further explanation as to why Ghanaians possessed an unusually negative view of China.[49] In fact, a separate question in the Round 6 Afrobarometer survey that asks about the main factor behind a respondent's negative view of China shows that in Ghana, a significant plurality of respondents indicated "China's extraction of resources of Africa" (see Table 10).

Due to Ghana's role as an outlier in the sample and the country-specific justification as to why it deviates from the projected relationship, it is logical to exclude Ghana from the sample in order to further investigate the statistical relationship among countries who do not possess such unique circumstances pertaining to their relations with China. Table 11 presents descriptive statistics for the sample after Ghana is excluded.

Table 12 presents the results of the same pooled/separated regressions as Table 9, but with Ghana excluded from the sample. In addition to the reoccurrence of a positive relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence in the pooled sample, there is—contrary to the previous regression—also a positive relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify

[49] Richard Aidoo, "The Political Economy of Galamsey and Anti-Chinese Sentiment in Ghana," *African Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 3-4 (December 2016): pp. 55-72.

electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence in the high TV news viewership sample, with statistical significance at the 5% level. There is no statistically significant relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence in the low TV news viewership sample. These results are very constructive in informing the hypothesis tested in this study.

While this paper has already identified a statistically significant positive relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence, it appears that such a relationship is driven by countries with high TV news viewership rates since when countries with low TV news viewership rates are isolated, there is no statistically significant relationship. Further, by running subsequent regressions on the TV news viewership-conditioned relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence with additional control variables, this study is able to make a stronger case for the positive relationship.

Table 13 presents the results of the pooled/separated regressions (excluding Ghana) with the added control variable, *GDP Per Capita, 2014*. In terms of statistical significance and relational direction, the results are identical to the previous regressions shown in Table 12. The high TV news viewership sample and the pooled sample (driven by the high TV news viewership countries) both present with positive relationships with statistical significance at the 5% level. The maintenance of these relationships demonstrates that the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue in countries with high TV news viewership rates have more positive perceptions of Chinese influence regardless of their

countries' per capita incomes. In other words, GDP per capita has no direct effect on positive perceptions of Chinese influence nor does it blunt the statistical significance of the main independent variables in the model.

Table 14 adds a final control variable, *Freedom House Score, 2014*, to pooled/separated regressions (excluding Ghana) in order to further test the statistical significance of the relationship demonstrating that the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue in countries with high TV news viewership rates have more positive perceptions of Chinese influence. In concert with the previous regressions shown in Table 13, the high TV news viewership sample—and consequently, but less importantly, the pooled sample—indicates a positive relationship between the proportion of citizens who identify electricity or water supply as a top three issue and positive perceptions of Chinese influence, with statistical significance remaining at the 5% level. By controlling for *Freedom House Score, 2014*, it becomes evident that political freedoms at the country level have no impact on positive perceptions of Chinese influence and that the demonstrated relationship (*Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue + High TV News ↑ Positive Perceptions of Chinese Influence*) remains statistically significant in spite of considerations of political freedoms. Because this statistically significant relationship holds after the introduction of control variables, this study concludes that such a relationship is strong and noteworthy. The next section elucidates the significance of this relationship to the discourse on economic statecraft and soft power influence of China in Africa.

Discussion of Results

After reviewing the literature relevant to this paper's study, it became clear that Chinese state-led initiatives to foster positive perceptions of its influence relied on the combination of economic statecraft and soft power media initiatives to frame a particular narrative of China. The

quantitative analysis undertaken in this paper confirms such a theory, in addition to providing further insight into how Chinese economic statecraft and soft power media initiatives foment positive perceptions of Chinese influence at the country level in Africa. As echoed in previous studies, while Chinese investment alone did not generate positive opinions, the fact that African countries with a higher proportion of citizens who prioritized electricity and water supply projects—key areas of Chinese investment—held more positive views of Chinese influence indicates that Chinese investment in electricity and water supply projects constitutes an effective form of economic statecraft when targeted at countries that need such projects the most. However, while Chinese contributions to poverty reduction and economic development via electricity and water supply projects represent the key determinant of positive perceptions of Chinese influence stemming from economic statecraft, such positive perceptions do not follow without the media necessary to attribute such development projects to China. Therefore, this paper concludes that economic statecraft must be employed in tandem with soft power media strategies—in this case proxied by Chinese state TV stations, Chinese TV providers, and Chinese-trained African TV employees—in order to effectively generate positive perceptions of the influencing country. While such an endeavor could be effective via other forms of media, this study focused on TV news given its strong and increasing ties to Chinese soft power initiatives on the continent.

Research Recommendations

Though this study has significantly contributed to the discourse regarding Chinese economic statecraft, soft power, and their impact on African citizens' perceptions of China, there remain significant avenues for further research. While it was the initial intention of this study to analyze changes of African perceptions of China over time given the repetition of China

perception questions in the Round 8 Afrobarometer surveys, such an analysis could not be conducted due to Afrobarometer not yet releasing full data from that round. Thus, future studies on this topic should employ panel data to investigate how African perceptions of China change over time given changing levels of FDI, new development projects and media exposure, etc. In addition to analyzing across time, researchers could focus more on individual countries to explain their proportions of citizens holding positive views of China. For example, as this study explained for the Ghana outlier, specific development projects and media exposure developments could be discussed to demonstrate in detail why country-level perception statistics were high/low in 2014/2015, and additionally why the percentages might have changed by 2019/2020.

Conclusion

The empirical results in this paper demonstrate that in African countries with higher proportions of citizens who believe electricity and water supply to be national priorities as well as higher proportions of citizens who consume news from television, positive perceptions of Chinese influence are higher. By identifying these relationships, this paper contributes to the discourse on Chinese economic statecraft and soft power in Africa, theorizing that economic statecraft is only effective when conducted in tandem with media strategies that attribute development projects to Chinese investment. While such a finding is significant, more research is necessary on the topic, especially given China's continued and increasing economic and soft power engagement on the African continent.

Figure 1: Chinese FDI in Africa, 2003-2015

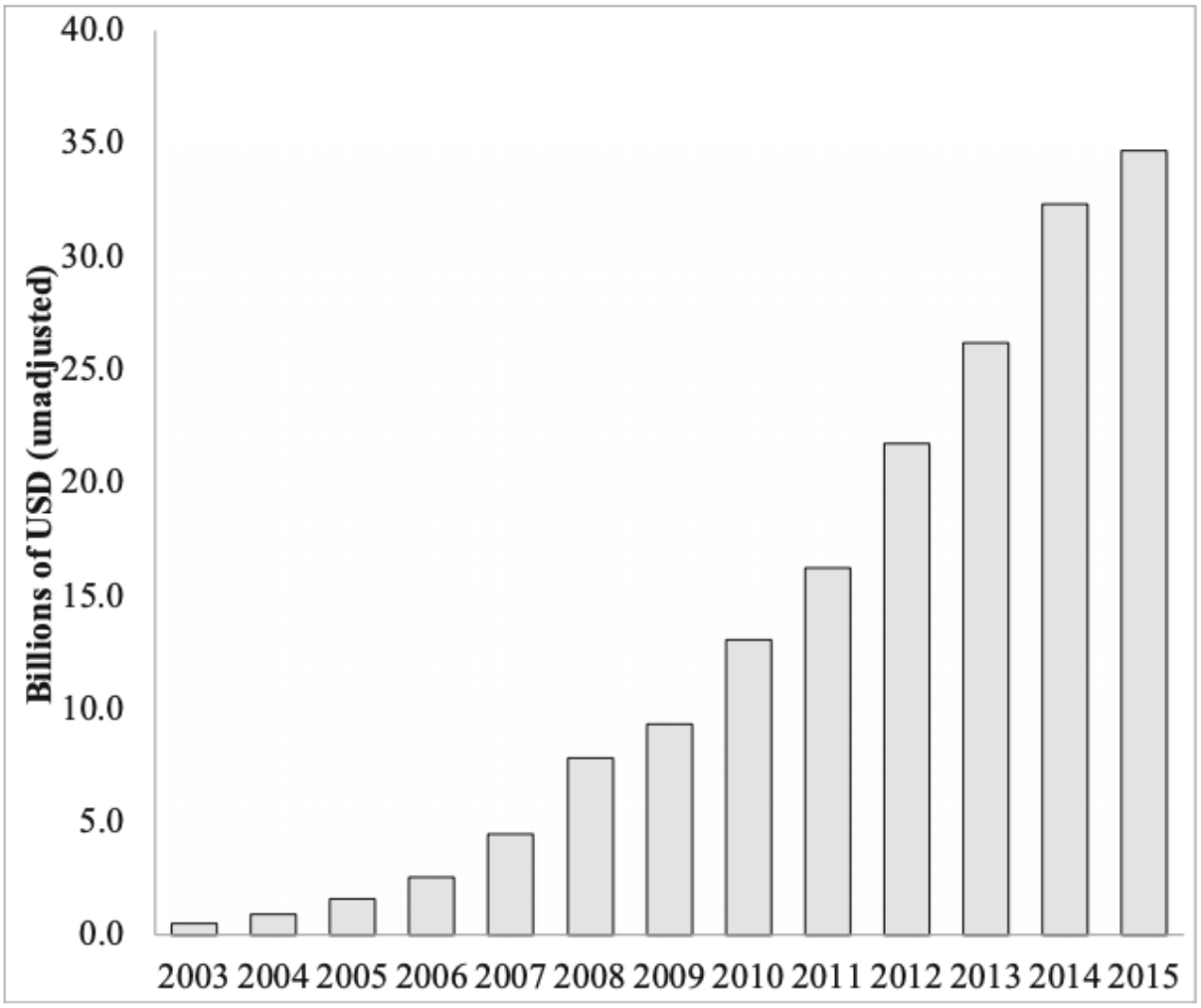

Figure 2: Countries in Study Map

Figure 3: Country-Level Positive Perception of Chinese Influence Map

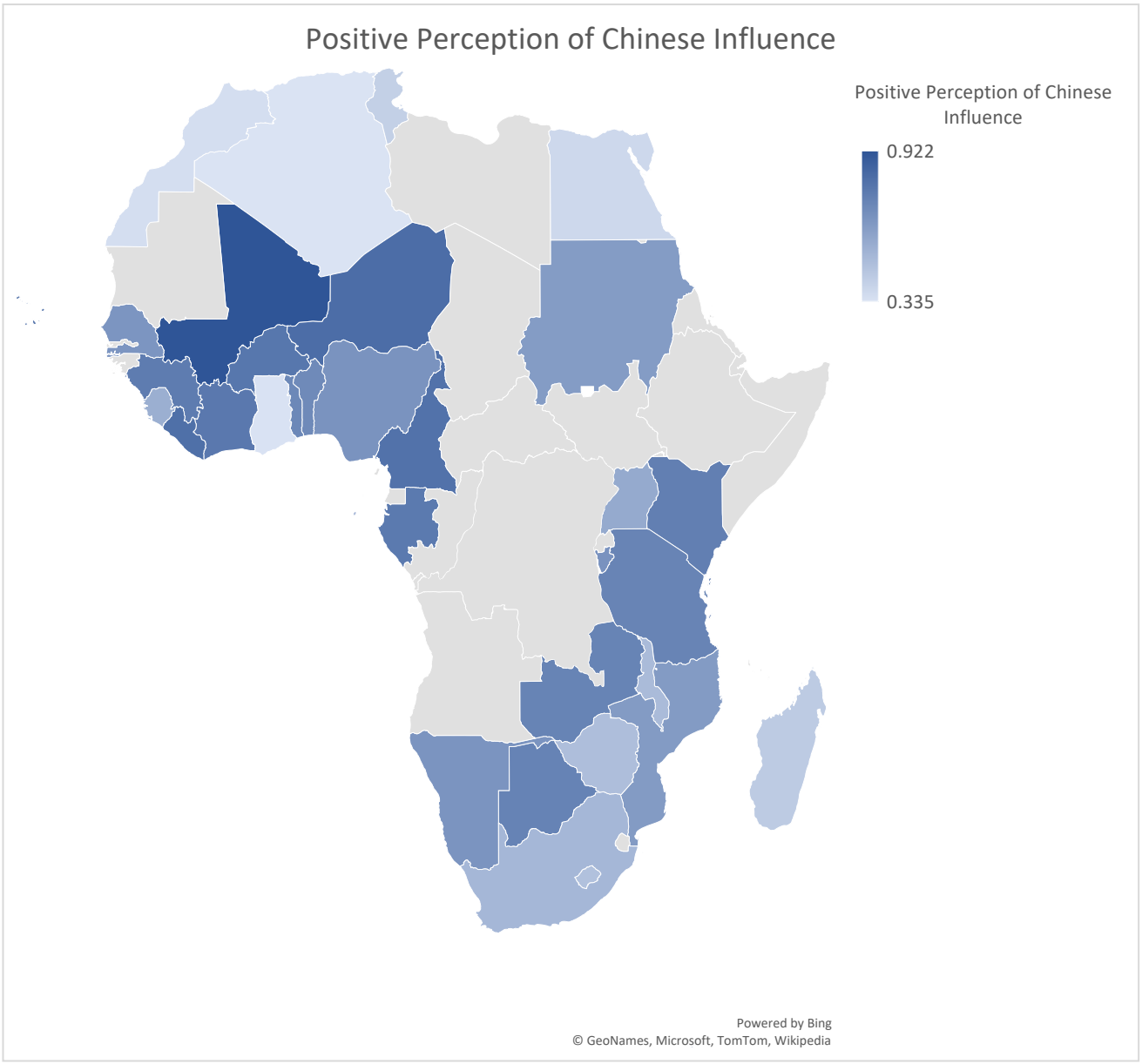

Figure 4: Country-Level Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue Map

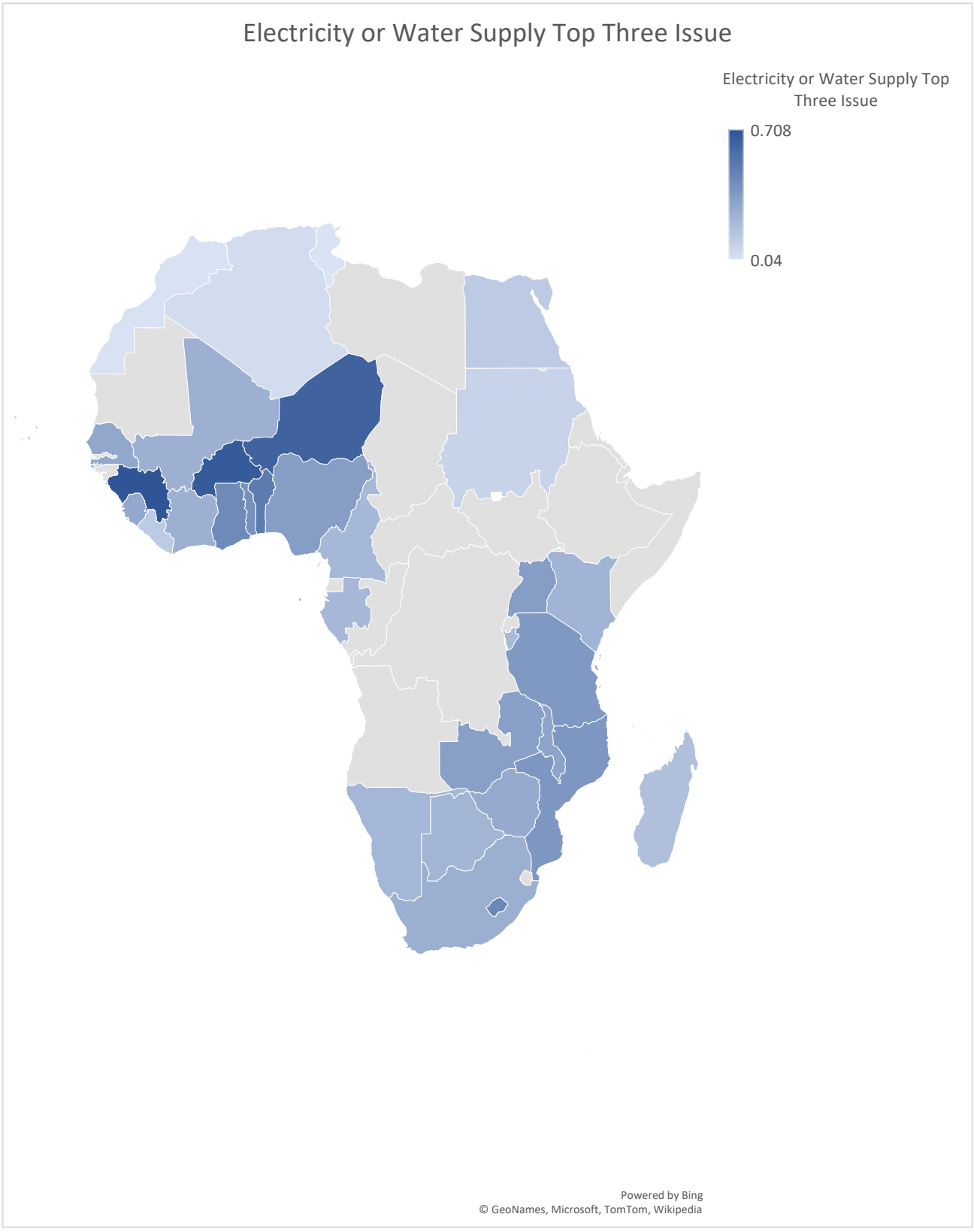

Figure 5: High TV News Viewership Countries vs. Low TV News Viewership Countries

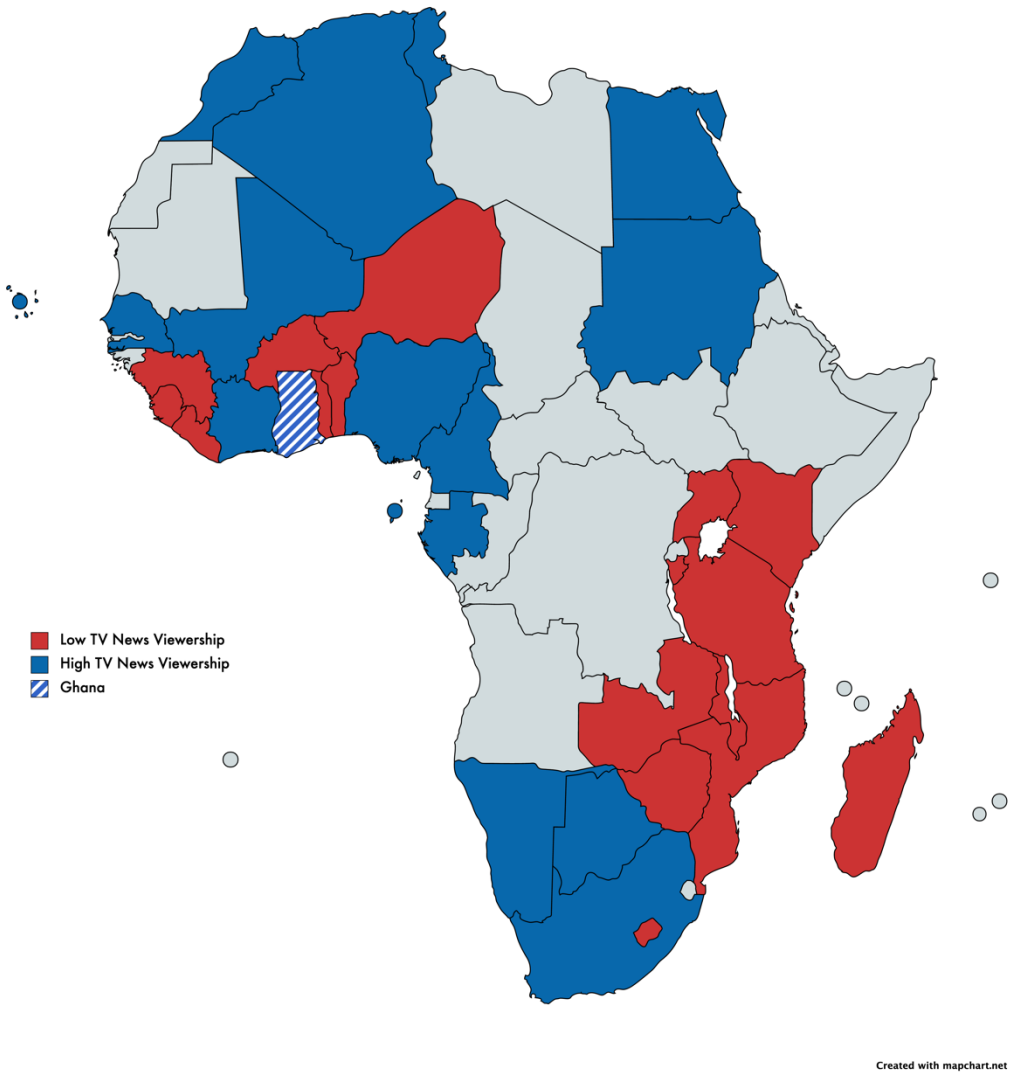

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	Pooled		High TV News		Low TV News	
Variable	Obs	Mean	Obs	Mean	Obs	Mean
Positive Perception of Chinese Influence	34	0.628	17	0.603	17	0.654
		(0.160)		(0.187)		(0.126)
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue	34	0.317	17	0.234	17	0.400
GDP Per Capita, 2014	34	2,298.912	17	3,714.835	17	882.988
Freedom House Score, 2014	34	1.088	17	1.118	17	1.059
Chinese FDI Stock (2010-2014) Per Capita	34	136.928	17	144.290	17	129.566

The standard deviation of Positive Perception of Chinese Influence is shown in parentheses.

Table 2

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)	
Chinese FDI Stock (2010-2014) Per Capita	0.000089
	(0.000)
Observations	34
Adjusted R-squared	-0.021

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 6 (corresponds to Table 2)

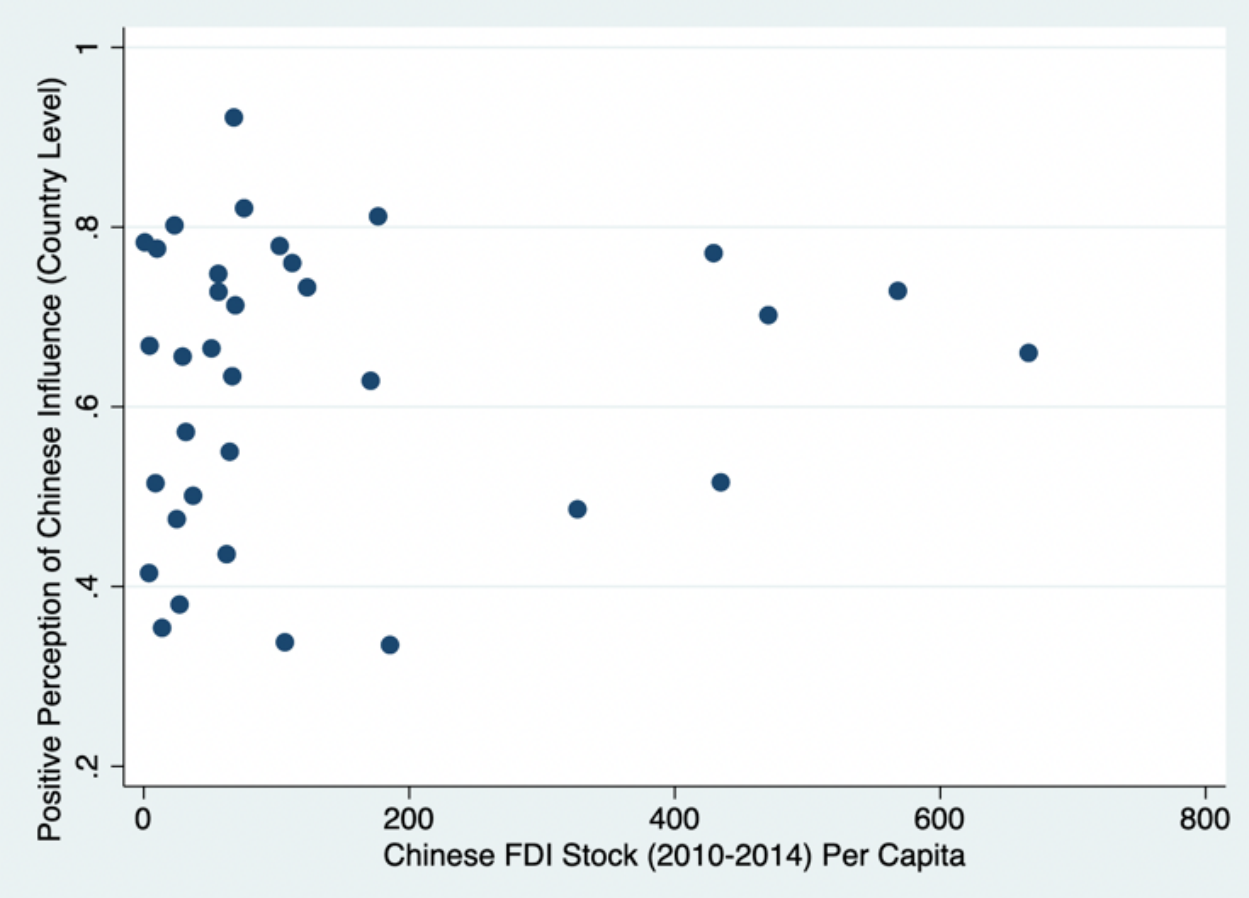

Table 3

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)	
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)	0.343**
	(0.163)
Observations	34
Adjusted R-squared	0.095

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 7 (corresponds to Table 3)

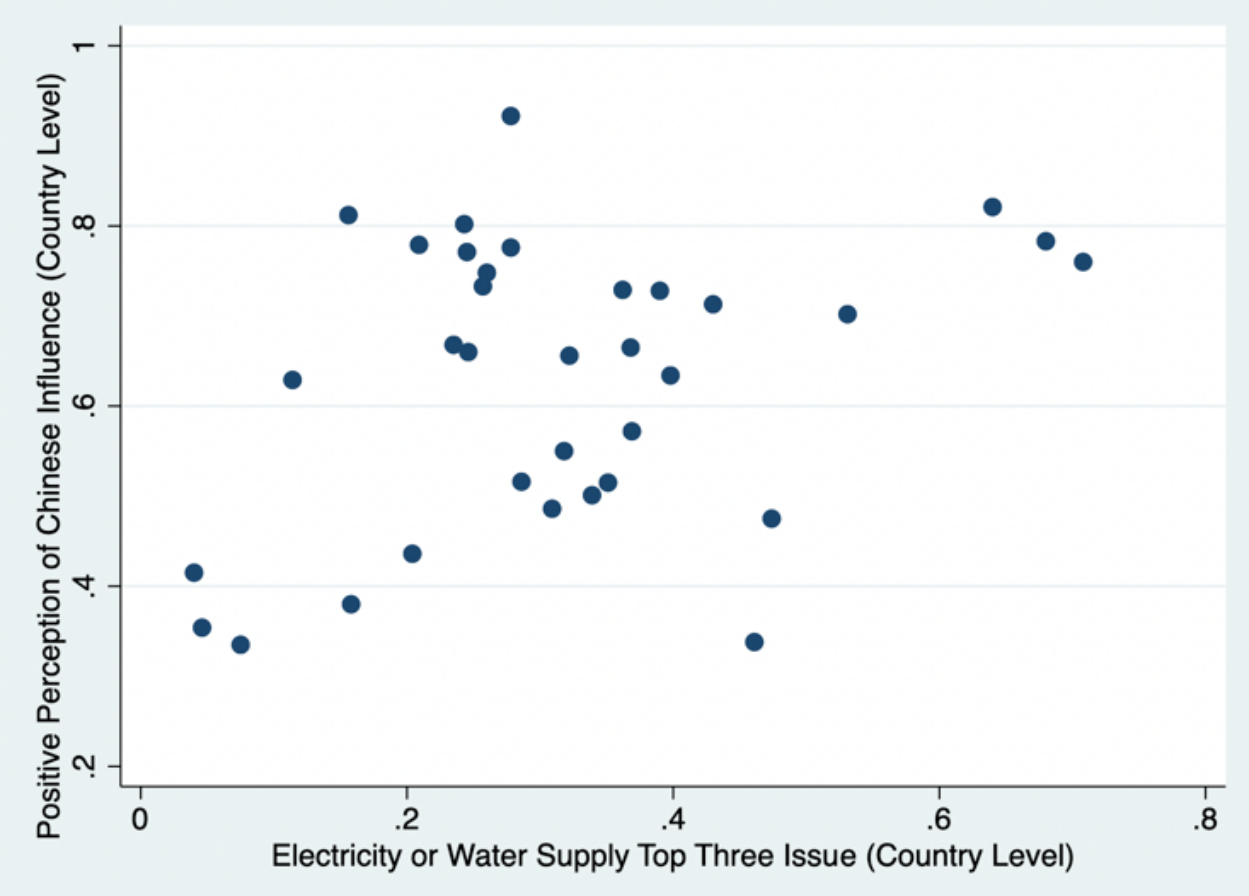

Table 4

Dependent Variable: Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)

GDP Per Capita, 2014	-0.000028**
	(0.000)
Observations	34
Adjusted R-squared	0.128

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 8 (corresponds to Table 4)

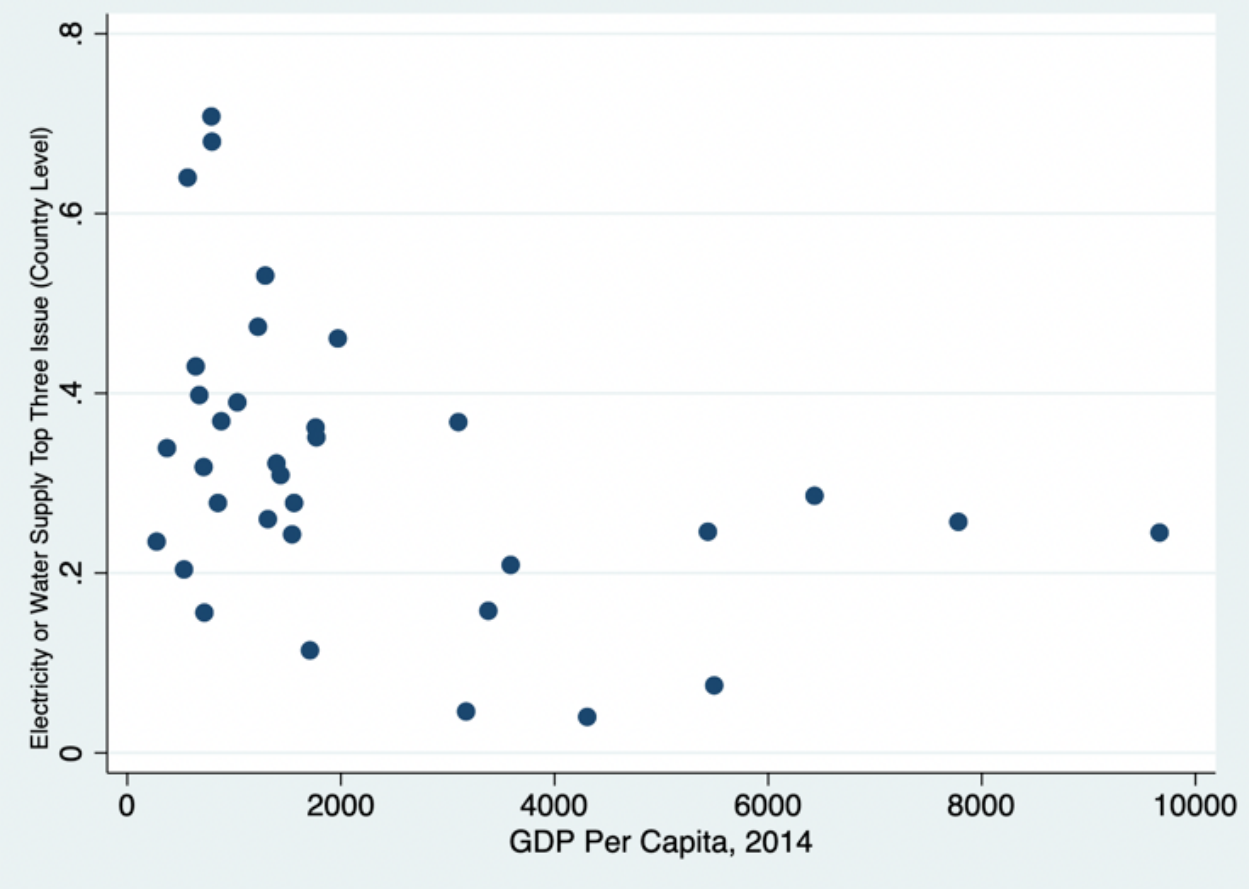

Table 5: label

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)	
GDP Per Capita, 2014	-0.000009
	(0.000)
Observations	34
Adjusted R-squared	-0.015

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 9 (corresponds to Table 5)

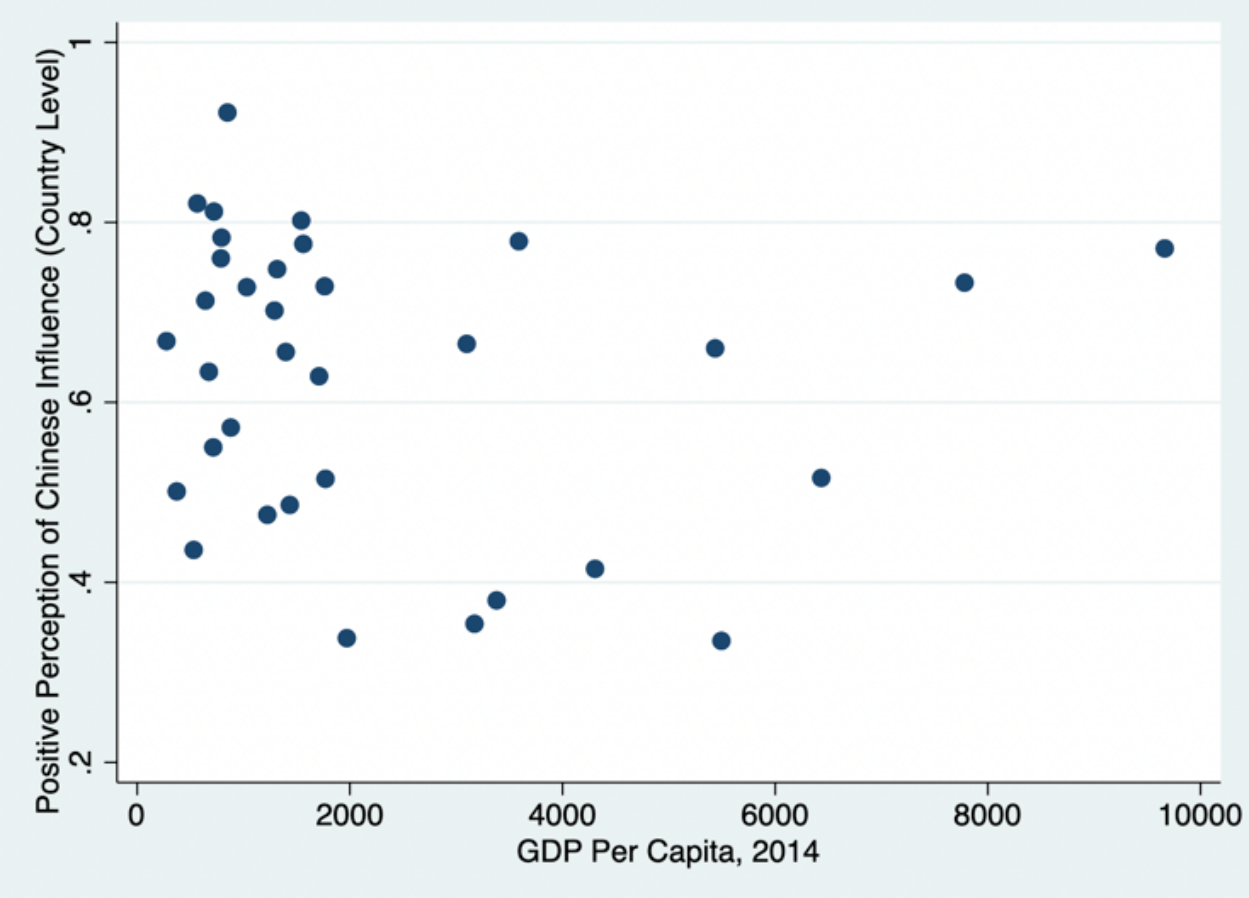

Table 6

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)	
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)	0.348293*
	(0.180)
GDP Per Capita, 2014	0.000001
	(0.000)
Observations	34
Adjusted R-squared	0.066

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 7

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)	
TV News Viewership (Country Level)	-0.125
	(0.104)
Observations	34
Adjusted R-squared	0.013

Standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 10 (corresponds to Table 7)

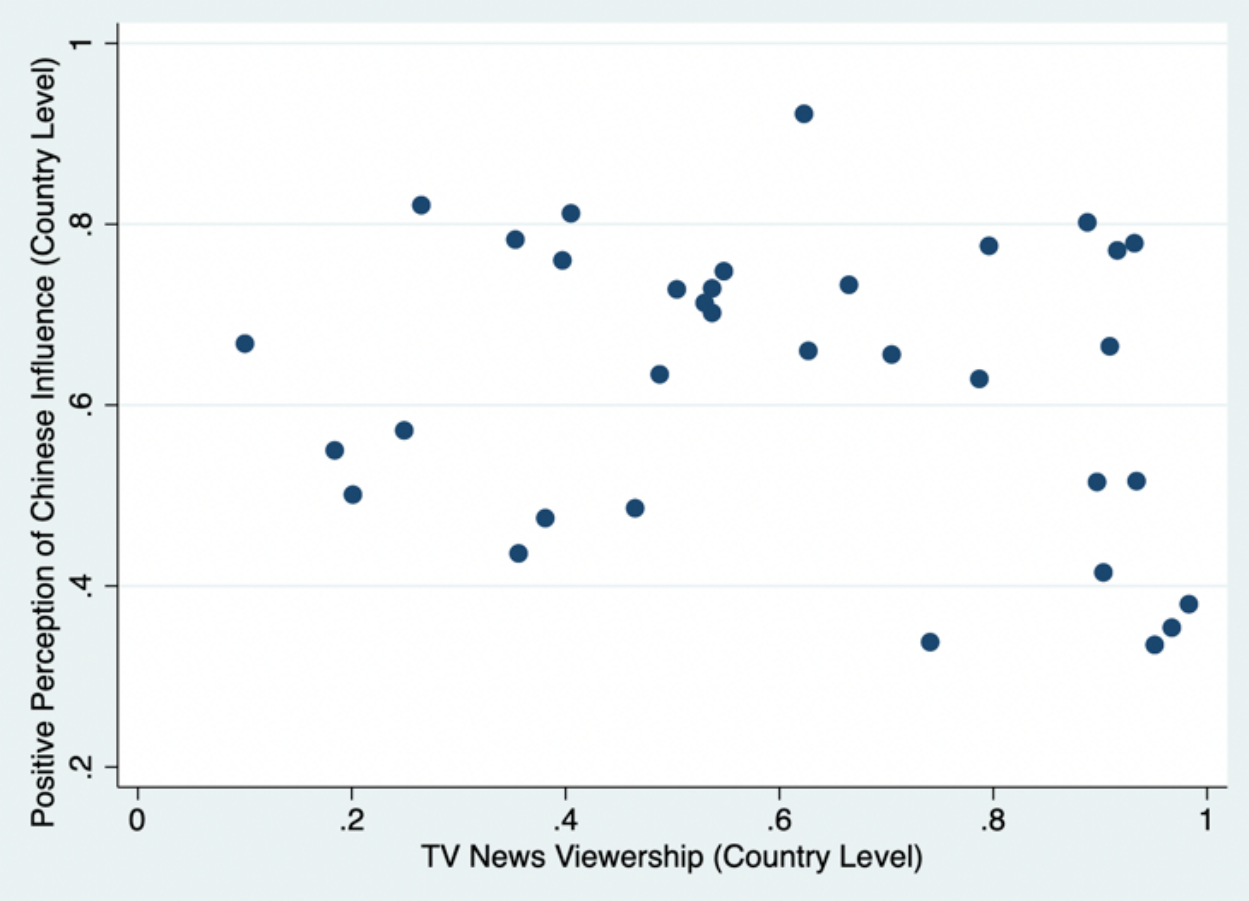

Table 8

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)	
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)	0.321
	(0.190)
TV News Viewership (Country Level)	-0.027
	(0.117)
Observations	34
Adjusted R-squared	0.067

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 9

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)

	(1) Pooled	(2) High TV News	(3) Low TV News
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)	0.343**	0.470	0.296
	(0.163)	(0.397)	(0.186)
Observations	34	17	17
Adjusted R-squared	0.095	0.025	0.087

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Figure 11

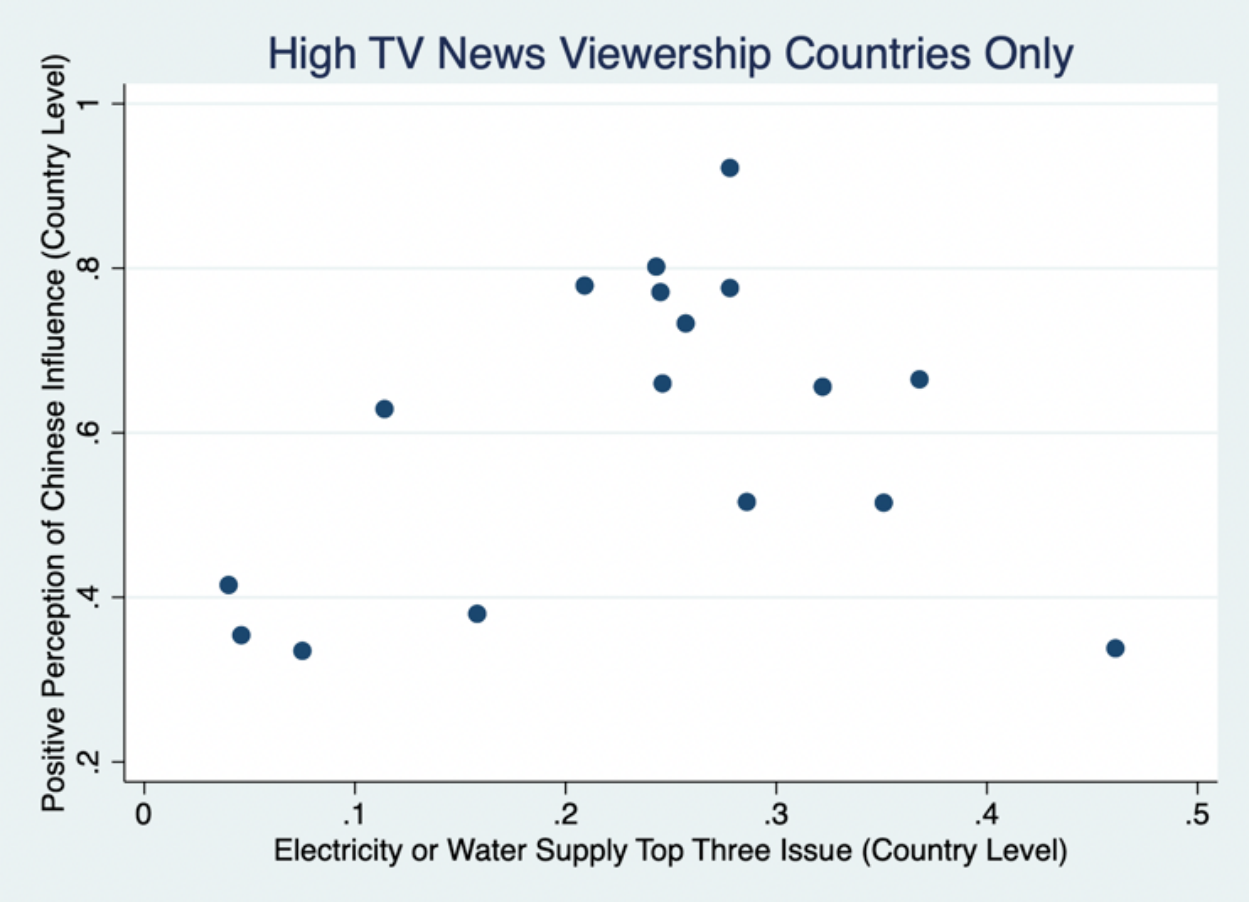

Table 10

Negative Image of China	Frequency	Percent
None of these	30	1.25
China's extraction of resources from Africa	1049	43.78
Land grabbing by Chinese individuals or businesses	273	11.39
China's willingness to cooperate with undemocratic rulers in Africa	65	2.71
Chinese economic activities taking jobs or business from Ghanaians	182	7.6
The quality of Chinese products	202	8.43
The behavior of Chinese citizens in Ghana	117	4.88
Some other factor	18	0.75
Don't know/haven't heard enough	460	19.2

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics after Excluding Ghana

	Pooled		High TV News		Low TV News	
Variable	Obs	Mean	Obs	Mean	Obs	Mean
Positive Perception of Chinese Influence	33	0.637	16	0.619	17	0.654
		(0.153)		(0.180)		(0.126)
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue	33	0.313	16	0.220	17	0.400
GDP Per Capita, 2014	33	2,308.848	16	3,823.825	17	882.988
Freedom House Score, 2014	33	1.061	16	1.063	17	1.059
Chinese FDI Stock (2010-2014) Per Capita	33	137.857	16	146.667	17	129.566

The standard deviation of Positive Perception of Chinese Influence is shown in parentheses.

Table 12

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)

	(1) Pooled	(2) High TV News	(3) Low TV News
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)	0.402**	1.021**	0.296
	(0.153)	(0.374)	(0.186)
Observations	33	16	17
Adjusted R-squared	0.156	0.301	0.087

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 13

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)

	(1) Pooled	(2) High TV News	(3) Low TV News
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)	0.414**	1.012**	0.295
	(0.169)	(0.389)	(0.193)
GDP Per Capita, 2014	0.000	-0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Observations	33	16	17
Adjusted R-squared	0.129	0.251	0.023

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 14: Final Regressions

Dependent Variable: Positive Perception of Chinese Influence (Country Level)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Pooled	High TV News	Low TV News
Electricity or Water Supply Top Three Issue (Country Level)	0.416**	1.146**	0.308
	(0.180)	(0.451)	(0.207)
GDP Per Capita, 2014	0.000	-0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Freedom House Score 2014	-0.001	-0.035	-0.019
	(0.041)	(0.055)	(0.078)
Observations	33	16	17
Adjusted R-squared	0.099	0.215	-0.048

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

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