**Background**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which launched in 2013, is a collection of Chinese infrastructure investments that has been characterized as a strategy to improve China’s image abroad and to attract other countries to China’s worldview. More than five years since the launch, this study assesses how the BRI strategy has been going. In particular:

- Where has China’s BRI been understood as a tool for improving China’s image abroad, been the least successful?
- Which countries has China targeted with its BRI investments?
- Which countries has China experienced backlash understood as anti-China events, such as protests or targeted bombings, to Chinese investment?
- Are China targeted with its BRI investments also countries that have experienced backlash to BRI investment?

**Methods and Limitations**

I created a composite index to identify where the BRI is failing the most. The index includes information about (1) how targeted BRI investment has been; (2) perceptions of China in host countries; and (3) anti-BRI and anti-China events. Each indicator created a rating, and the ratings were combined to create a composite score. The composite includes both the number of anti-China events—protests, targeted bombings, targeted shootings, etc.—and the intensity of those events, measured by number of fatalities. High index scores indicate high failure, and low index scores indicate low failure, not necessarily success.

There have been several limitations to this analysis. The BRI began in different years in different countries. What is considered a BRI investment can be subjective. Many existing projects were subsumed under the BRI umbrella after it was launched. There are also holes in the data. For example, ACLED only recently started collecting conflict data in some countries. Gallup has not collected opinion data in some countries and was only available through 2017. Furthermore, cross-country comparisons involve a vast array of variables, and one major variable in this case is countries’ historic relationships with China.

**Results**

The BRI has been most problematic in countries near the South China Sea and in Africa, particularly in Guinea. BRI investment has been most targeted in the small economies near China’s borders and in resource-rich African countries. More than 20% of money invested through the BRI, nearly $226.4 billion, has been invested in countries that have been deemed high failure countries for the BRI. Backlash to the BRI has been intense in South and Southeast Asia. It has also been intense in rich African countries. More than 20% of money invested through the BRI, nearly $226.4 billion, has been invested in countries that have been deemed high failure countries for the BRI. Backlash to the BRI has been intense in South and Southeast Asia. It has also been intense in

- Most intense in South and Southeast Asia. It has also been intense in
- Backlash to the BRI has been intense in
- The BRI, nearly $126.8 billion, has been invested in countries that have been
- The BRI, nearly $126.8 billion, has been invested in countries that have been
- The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which launched in 2013, is a collection of
- The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which launched in 2013, is a collection of

**Conclusion**

Apparent, China's BRI as a tool for improving its global image has been problematic, but the degree of failure has been more pronounced in some parts of the world than in others. The results of this analysis may be helpful to members of the Chinese central government who are interested in doing damage control, as it will tell them where to focus their efforts. It may also be interesting to China's competitors, as it has identified countries where China has tried and failed to make friends, so to speak. Future analysis might look at regime type, since oppression and electoral access may have an impact on the types of backlash that are feasible or worthwhile. It would be interesting to compare the findings from this analysis to patterns of anti-China events and changes in approval of China during a period that is fully before the BRI began. Furthermore, considering that this project only looks at BRI investment, which focuses on infrastructure projects, it would be interesting to see if the findings hold when the same analysis is applied to all types of modern Chinese investment.

**Sources**