

Taiwan's Clear-eyed Moves to Counter Disinformation and Deepfakes



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As countries around the world struggle to address the weaponization of disinformation and synthetic media, or deepfakes, one nation is leading the way: Taiwan.

Taiwan is in a perilous geostrategic neighborhood. It has been subjected to ferocious information operations from the People's Republic of China (PRC), especially, as the PRC has intensified its threats against the island. As the Center for Strategic and International Studies reported in 2021, Beijing aims to meddle in Taiwanese domestic politics by manipulating public discourse through disinformation. Taiwan's experiences battling these malign efforts could inform the responses of other countries facing challenges of viral propaganda and believable phony media.

For example, in early November 2021, a delegation of European Union lawmakers visited Taipei to learn more about Taiwan's response to Chinese-backed disinformation campaigns. The resistance of Taiwan's civil society to Chinese active measures is "quite strong," said Wu Ming-hsuan, co-founder of a Taiwan-based counter-disinformation organization. Fact-checking communities and volunteer groups work on "not only fact checks, but how to disseminate those fact check results to the general public by using messenger apps, chatbots, or just going directly to the community," Wu told *The Diplomat*.

The EU delegation, dispatched by the European Parliament's special committee on foreign interference and disinformation, INGE, comes after the European Parliament passed a non-binding resolution that called, in part, on the European Commission to "consider learning from Taiwan's experience of fighting disinformation" from China. The INGE report noted that "the threat Taiwan faces from China's disinformation operations is part of a larger problem facing democracies across the globe in an era where communication technologies are central to the geopolitical competition for global leadership."

Also in November, Google donated \$1 million to the Taiwan FactCheck Center to support media literacy to help combat disinformation campaigns, particularly those from China. The grant will finance roughly 700 trainers and 600 workshops that will focus on educating Taiwanese senior citizens, those in remote communities, Aboriginal people, and new citizens. The funding comes amid "sustained levels of COVID-19 disinformation" in Taiwan, rooted in a "concerted offensive" and a "pressure test by the Chinese Communist Party against Taiwan," the *Taipei Times* reported.

Taiwan is also moving aggressively to mitigate the dangers of deepfakes, where believable media is either manipulated or wholly generated by artificial intelligence. In November 2021, Taiwan's intelligence and military intelligence agency, the National Security Bureau (NSB), established a task force to counter deepfakes pushed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that could be used to influence elections or harm Taiwanese society. The discovery of CCP-created falsified photos and videos featuring Taiwanese leadership in 2018 compelled the stand-up of this task force, the deputy director-general of the NSB, Chen Chin-kuang, said, according to the *Liberty Times* and *Taiwan News*.

And in December 2021, Taiwan's Cabinet announced it will consider amendments to Taiwanese criminal law targeting the creators of deepfake and "revenge" pornography.

“Government ministries and departments are coordinating their efforts to draft policies and regulations that must be implemented if the proposed bill passes into law,” reported the *Taipei Times*, citing a government spokesperson. Taiwanese lawmakers have proposed a separate bill that would punish the creators of deepfakes under forgery laws by making it a crime to manipulate video or audio recordings without authorization in a way that harms the subject’s reputation and would ban the use of sexual recordings that have been digitally or technologically manipulated.

Nonconsensual deepfake pornography — when a nonconsenting person’s face is placed on a nude body to create a realistic pornographic image — accounts for the vast majority of deepfake videos now on the internet. These videos victimize famous and ordinary women, [alike](#). [Several U.S. states](#) have barred nonconsensual deepfake pornography either civilly or criminally. [Two U.S. states](#) also outlaw certain deepfakes that target elections, although those laws have yet to be enforced. Deepfakes are not yet regulated at the federal level.

There has been a bumper crop of important recent reports on the dangers of disinformation and deepfakes to American society from the [Aspen Institute](#), the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) [Intelligence and Analysis division](#), and many others. And soon, as required by [law](#), the DHS’s Science and Technology Directorate, the Department of Defense, the National Science Foundation, and the National Institute for Standards and Technology are all due to issue reports on various aspects of deepfakes — their dangers to society, civil rights, the military, and possible counter-measures.

As Congress, states, regulators, and academia consider how to address the harms and foster the hopes of this new technology, they would do well to learn from Taiwan’s experience.

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