

DIGITAL BATTLEGROUND: ETHIOPIA, CHINA, AND THE FUTURE OF U.S. INFLUENCE IN AFRICA



INFLUENCE IN AFRICA

BACKGROUND

- Ethiopia is Africa's second most populous country, home to the African Union and a gateway to the Horn of Africa.
- China has invested over \$3.1B in Ethiopia's digital infrastructure—fiber optics, surveillance, and Safe City systems.

CHINA'S DIGITAL EXPANSION

- BRI + Digital Silk Road (DSR): Tools for strategic influence via infrastructure and technology.
- Huawei Safe City in Addis Ababa includes over 1,000+ AI-enabled CCTV cameras, facial recognition, and centralized monitoring systems.
- Opaque contracts, legal asymmetry (e.g., Djibouti case), and lack of data protection laws pose long-term governance risks.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The need for a U.S.-led digital development investment plan focused on building secure data centers
- Reframing U.S.-Ethiopia relations from aid dependency to strategic partnership,
- Campaign to expose risks of Chinese digital coercion, assist with contract transparency

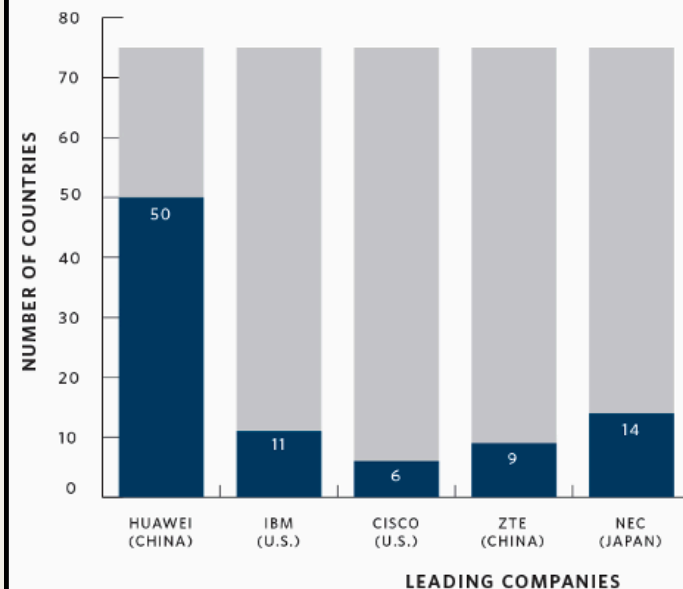


SOURCE: AFRICA BUSINESS UNION

WHY IT MATTERS

- Losing ground in Ethiopia = ceding AI, cloud, and telecom markets to China in a key region.
- Africa holds 30% of global critical mineral reserves—essential for semiconductors, batteries, and AI.
- U.S. absence risks allowing China to shape global digital norms, entrench authoritarianism, and weaken democratic alliances.

FIGURE 2
Leading Companies Contributing to AI Surveillance



SOURCE: CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT