

# A Grade Round 1, 2021

*That Victoria should abandon the Belt and Road deal with China*

## Background

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), formally known as the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road Development Strategy’, is a global development strategy spearheaded by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Xi Jinping.

Paying homage to the original Silk Road, a trade network connecting the East to the West, the BRI was proposed in 2013 as an opportunity to enhance transnational trading, cultural understanding and mutual trust. By establishing new transport corridors and physical infrastructure, it is believed that the BRI will generate extensive economic opportunity, particularly for African nations, and reduce the environmental impact associated with transportation.

The initiative is not without criticism, however, with many experts suggesting that the BRI serves little practical purpose, and is merely a sinocentric attempt by the CCP to achieve greater global influence and perpetuation of national ideals.

On a national level, Australia has rejected the BRI, instead opting to join the Blue Dot Network (BDN)—a joint counterproposal by the USA, Japan and Australia to improve global infrastructure via the promotion of financial transparency, environmental sustainability and economic development.

Opposing the national recommendation, Victorian Premier Dan Andrews signed a BRI memorandum of understanding (MoU) in late 2018 outlining guidelines for Victoria-Chinese BRI cooperation, coordination and engagement. Although not unprecedented, the action of an Australian state going against national policy is highly unusual, and raises several questions.

## Questions for consideration

- Why was the BRI proposed, and to what benefit does it serve its stakeholders?
- Given China’s growing influence throughout the globe, how will the BRI impact the future state of international affairs? To what degree will Australia be implicated?
- Are concerns surrounding modern sinocentrism warranted?
- Does an Australian state have the right to oppose national policy? What are the ramifications of a state-based intervention on national affairs?
- Can a nation-state ever justify endorsing countries with a compromised history of human rights abuse? Is it ever acceptable to prioritise economic opportunity over moral interest?

## Resources

Background of BRI: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

BRI impact by country: [https://www.bakermckenzie.com/-/media/files/insight/publications/2020/03/bmbri\\_qa.pdf?la=en](https://www.bakermckenzie.com/-/media/files/insight/publications/2020/03/bmbri_qa.pdf?la=en)

BRI Debt Trap: <https://www.csis.org/nfp/its-debt-trap-managing-china-imf-cooperation-across-belt-and-road>

Victorian MoU: <https://www.vic.gov.au/bri-framework>

Analysis of Victorian-Chinese relationship: <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/us-weighs-in-on-australias-bri-controversy-amid-state-and-federal-divide/>