

Looking for Trouble

Analyzing Search Engine Data during International Crises

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- Liberal theories of IR assume people obtain information.
Fearon 1994, Schultz 2001, Baum 2004
- Very few studies have tested whether, when, and why this is true.
Pelc 2013
- Surveys do not get an unbiased or unprompted display of behavior.
Hiscox 2006
- Search engine data addresses these issues.
Ripberger 2011, Mellon 2014

The South China Sea



- Competition over natural gas, fish, and sea lanes.

- People seek information to allay uncertainties.

Shannon and Weaver 1949, Kuhlthau 1993, Wilson 1999, Case 2008, Chowdury et al. 2011

- This should be especially true in response to potential crises.
- Some testable implications on information-seeking:

Any Event > No Event (H1)

Conflictual Event > Cooperative Event (H2)

Events toward China > Events from China (H3)

Closer to SCS > Further from SCS (H4a)

Closer to SCS | Event < Further from SCS | Event (H4b)

- The last point echoes the notion of “habituation.”

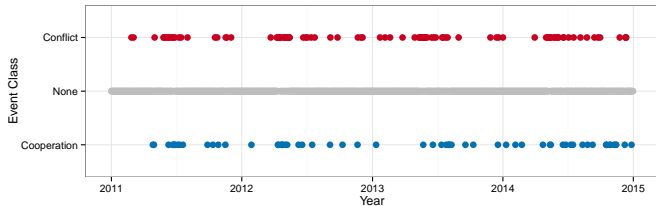
Thompson and Spencer 1966, Rankin et al. 2009

Search and Event Data

- Daily Baidu indices from 34 provincial-level units, 2011-2014.
 - Several advantages over Google Trends data.



- 160 events reported in several key periodicals.



Hypotheses 1, 2, 3

	<i>Baidu Index</i>
Any	0.502*** (0.022)
Cooperation	0.318*** (0.034)
Conflict	0.617*** (0.029)
To China	0.628*** (0.034)
From China	0.408*** (0.027)

Hypothesis 4

	<i>Baidu Index</i>
Coastal	1.251*** (0.067)
Coastal × Coop.	-0.101* (0.062)
Coastal × Conf.	-0.396*** (0.037)
Cooperation	0.360*** (0.044)
Conflict	0.792*** (0.032)

Quasipoisson regressions with robust standard errors.

Lagged DVs and fixed effects included.

Controls include media reporting, internet access, education, GDPPC.

- Information-seeking occurs, but not only for political reasons.
- Signals sent during crises do not always make things clearer.
- Search engine data provides a fine-grained reflection of behavior.
- This provides useful information to study authoritarian regimes.
- Many next steps lie ahead.
 - Do authoritarian leaders care about these patterns?
 - What specific information are people searching for?

Thank You!