Hong Kong: Longitudinal and Synchronic Characterisations of Protest News between 1998 and 2020

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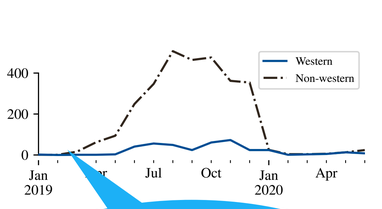
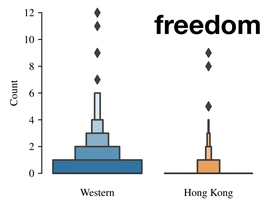
RESEARCH GOAL

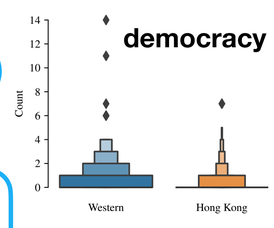
- Broader goal: mark inconsistencies in English-language newspaper portrayal of civic unrest in Hong Kong, 1998–2020
- This work: zoom in on 2019–2020:
  1. What Hong Kong and western papers discuss about protests
  2. How Hong Kong & western portrayals of Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (ELAB) protests differ
  3. Changes in protest coverage pre- and post-June 2019

KEYWORD DENSITY



HK sources wrote hundreds of articles pre-June 2019 while Western sources wrote 3.





3400 articles; 2 HK papers (SCMP, China Daily) and 6 western papers (NYT, WaPo, WSJ, Guardian, Times, FT)

HEADLINE ANALYSIS

- 63% have long headlines (≥6 words)
- 52% neutral, 32% judgmental, 15% mild

NYT

The Worst of Times

NYT

Hong Kong: A City Divided

FT

Xi's Authoritarianism Clashes with West's Democratic Tradition

SCMP

Hong Kong Extradition Bill: Business Groups Breathe Collective Sigh of Relief Over Government Decision to Delay Legislation

SCMP

The Politics, Semantics, and Substance of 'Suspending' a Bill versus ' Withdrawing' It

SCMP

City University Reveals Bill to Fix Vandalized Campus Will Run Hundreds of Millions of Dollars

DIFFERENCES IN PORTRAYAL

- DistilBERT sentiment analysis shows
  - Hong Kong sources slightly more negative on average (1.5%)
  - *The Times* is the most negative (28.3% pos)

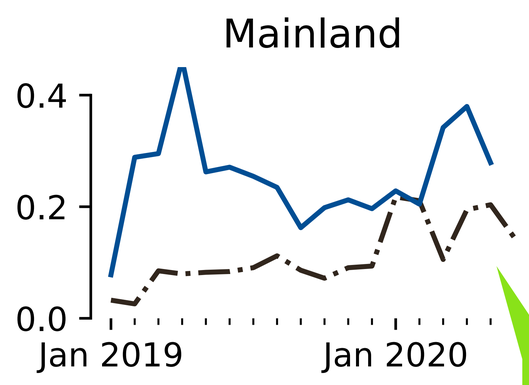
Hong Kong–based	Western-based
confront (17th percentile)	
retreat, intimidated, abused, reminded, understandable, upset, confronting, provoked, regularly, provoke	work, met, acts, spirit, reasons, decisions, trying, voice, inteolerable, tsang
protest (66th percentile)	
rally, sit-ins, demonstration, demonstrators, rallies, campaign, strike, movement, march, demonstrations	demonstrations, umbrella, peaceful, movement, began, streets, activists, mass, 1m, referendum
tensions (63rd percentile)	
us-china, tension, war, dispute, uncertainty, heightened, prolonged, worsening, fallout, turmoil	culture, state-owned, protections, tourists, market, base, rise, travel, closer, argued

- Embedding neighborhood differences and percentiles show Hong Kong newspapers' language is more negative and emotional

CHANGEPOINT ANALYSIS

- Meaning changed for several keywords in June 2019: *resistance*, *severe*, *riots*, *confront*, *confrontation*, and *terrorism*
- Friedman's test: protests did not exacerbate/alter biases in reporting between West and HK
- June 2019 still a pivotal moment (escalating, massive protests labeled as riots by Chief Executive Lam & chief of police)
  - "riots" neighbors before: *actions*, *open*, *engage*, *taken*
  - "riots" neighbors after: *violent*, *escalated*, *destructive*, *anti-government*, *sparked*

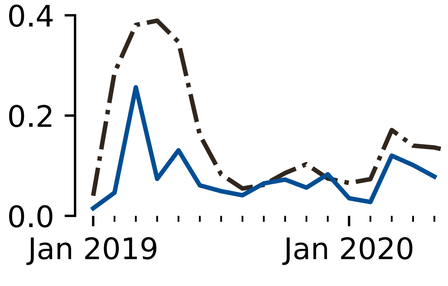
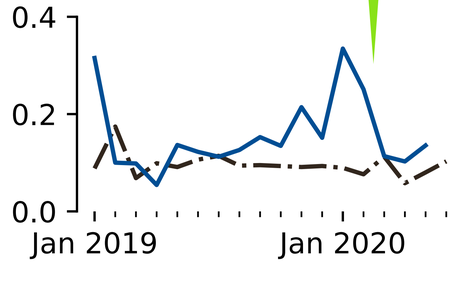
NEWS FRAMING



10 frames: finance, social media, legislation, air travel, international, law&order, mainland, clashes, students, chief executive

Used by west to highlight failures of *one country, two systems.*

Peaks during public consultation period and when bill is withdrawn



May reflect local digital activism or Beijing's dissatisfaction with social media