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

Arya D. McCarthy
Giovanna Maria Dora Dore

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

HEADLINE ANALYSIS

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

KEYWORD DENSITY

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

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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hong Kong–based</th>
<th>Western–based</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>confront (17th percentile)</td>
<td>work, met, acts, spirit, reasons, decisions, trying, voice, intolerable, tsang</td>
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<tr>
<td>retreat, intimidated, abused, reminded, understandable, upset, confronting, provoked, regularity, provoking</td>
<td>demonstrations, umbrella, peaceful, movement, began, streets, activists, mass, 1m, referendum</td>
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<tr>
<td>protest (65th percentile)</td>
<td>culture, state-owned, protections, tourists, market, base, rise, travel, closer, argued</td>
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<tr>
<td>rally, sit-ins, demonstration, demonstrations, rallies, campaign, strike, movement, march, demonstrations</td>
<td>us-china, tension, war, dispute, uncertainty, heightened, prolonged, worsening, fallout, turmoil</td>
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<tr>
<td>tensions (63rd percentile)</td>
<td>protests, confront, conflict, confrontation, and terrorism</td>
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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

Legislation

Social