

Offline war in the online arena: Showing that civil war leads to conflict over national history using 250,000 Wikipedia texts

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MH17 and the Kremlin on Wiki

- On July 17 2014, MH17 was shot down over Eastern Ukraine, killing all of the 298 people on board
- The next day the following changes were made to the Wiki page on the crash from a Russian government IP:

OLD: *"The plane [flight MH17] was shot down by terrorists of the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic with Buk system missiles, which the terrorists received from the Russian Federation"*

NEW: *"The plane [flight MH17] was shot down by Ukrainian soldiers."*

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Why Wikipedia?

Wiki is important in itself

- Wikipedia is the largest source of information ever known
- wikipedia.org is the 5th most visited site on the internet

Wiki is a great source for observing social construction

- Wikipedia allows anyone to edit (basically) anything and every article version is stored and available for download
- Wikipedia is an *encyclopedia*, meaning that people are fighting over the supposed true state of the world

How can we measure conflict over history?

- *Edit wars*: Extreme disagreement over article contents sometimes leads users to mutually undo each others contributions ("reverting")
- Identifying such reverts is simple, computationally efficient, and independent of language
- Revert-based measures correlate strongly with negative sentiment on the discussion forums associated with each article

NB! Needs some cleaning to weed out vandals and bots

Ugly table of results

Table 1: Sentiment, reverts, and years edited

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Negative sentiment		No. of reverts		Median year	
Reverts	0.02** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)			1.27 (0.90)	1.78** (0.90)
Civil war			0.77* (0.43)	0.95** (0.49)	-12.45 (95.55)	53.99 (93.43)
log(Population)		0.12 (0.46)		2.94 (2.04)		-199.46 (149.11)
log(GDP per capita)		-0.38** (0.19)		0.65 (1.46)		-32.20 (77.86)
GDP growth		0.0000 (0.01)		0.02 (0.04)		2.41 (1.50)
Polity2		-0.003 (0.01)		0.01 (0.04)		3.53 (5.64)
Reverts*Civil war					-0.22 (3.01)	-1.66 (3.79)
Country FE's	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE's	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
avg(outcome)	0.13	0.13	1.25	1.22	1742.33	1744.55
Observations	1,535	1,449	2,391	2,273	2,253	2,141

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
se's clustered by country in parentheses

Thank you!

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