

New York University

Global Interest in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election:

Analyzing Google Trends Data

Isak Jones

American Empire?

Professor David Denoon

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Abstract

In this paper, I make the case that the 2020 U.S. Presidential election has attracted more global interest than any other U.S.-related event since 2004. In practice, that means that if one were to poll the global population and ask what major American historical event since 2004 they have found most captivating, a majority of respondents would cite the 2020 U.S. Presidential election in November, provided that respondents are truthful. This hypothesis is confirmed by data from Google Trends, a large dataset that tracks search traffic in Google's search engine. I analyze the empirical data and discuss underlying assumptions.

I. Introduction

In the last decade, social scientists have increasingly turned to “big data” to test their hypotheses. One of the major datasets used has been the one provided by Google Trends, which records historical internet search traffic on Google (Jun et al., 2018). Data from Google Trends has been used for a variety of purposes, from forecasting political elections to estimating missing economic indices, to analyzing foreign policy dynamics (Stephens-Dawidowitz, 2014; Narita and Yin, 2018; Zeitzoff et al., 2015).

This essay reaffirms the power of data from Google Trends in understanding opinions and interests of people globally. I hope to demonstrate that rigorous analysis of such data can yield results akin to global surveys such as those put out by Pew Research (Wike et al., 2015). In the following section, I explain the essay’s main hypothesis: that the 2020 U.S. presidential election was the most captivating major American event in recent history. I continue by enumerating the assumptions that lead me to draw the hypothesis as a conclusion from the observed data. In the section following that, I discuss the dataset that confirms this hypothesis, accessed through the Google Trends application. After providing justification for my assumptions, I display the data in the empirical section of this paper and analyze it. Finally, in the conclusion I discuss what these findings say about the United States’ role in the world today.

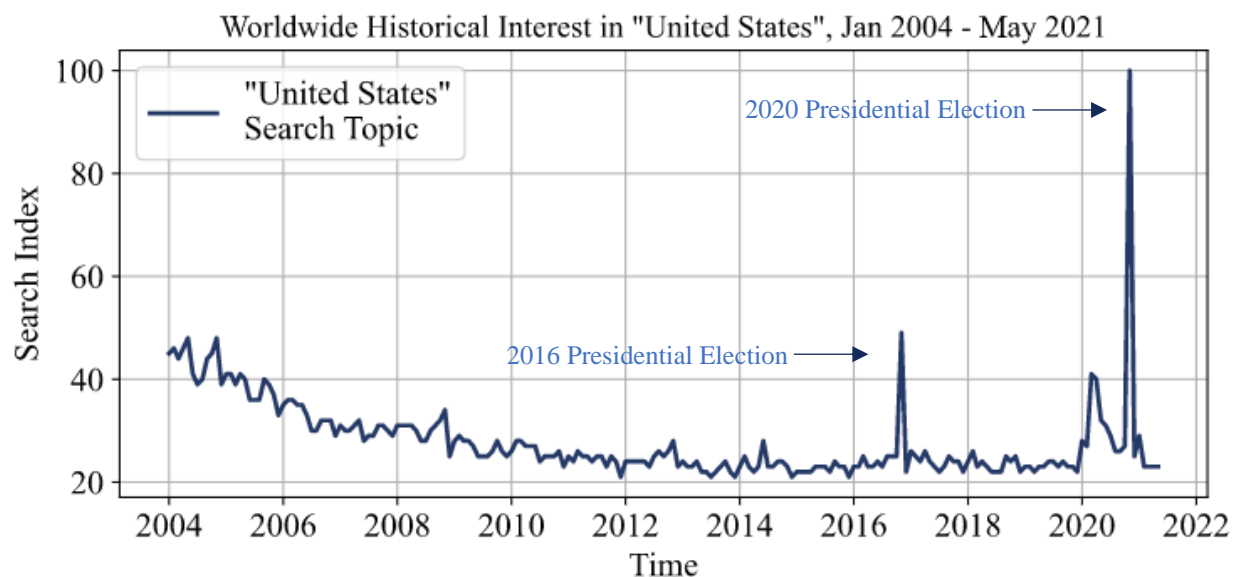
II. Main Hypothesis

This paper’s main hypothesis is that the 2020 U.S. Presidential election has attracted more global interest than any other U.S.-related event since 2004. In practice, that means that if one were to poll the global population and ask what U.S.-related event since 2004 they have found most captivating, a majority of respondents would cite the 2020 U.S. Presidential election in November, provided that respondents are truthful.

This hypothesis is grounded on a number of assumptions and a wealth of data. The assumptions, which will be explained in the next section, are the following:

- Data from Google Trends accurately reflects search traffic;
- Search traffic represents interest;
- If an event has received much global search traffic in relation to a country, and more than any other event explicitly related to that country in a given historical period, and of great, historical quality, then that event is the single most significant historical development for that country in the given period.

These assumptions are not trivial, and I make the case that they are mostly correct for the scope of this essay. From these assumptions, it follows that if data from Google Trends reports a peak in search traffic for the United States, as related to a specific event, then that is the event substantially tied to the United States that has garnered most attention worldwide.

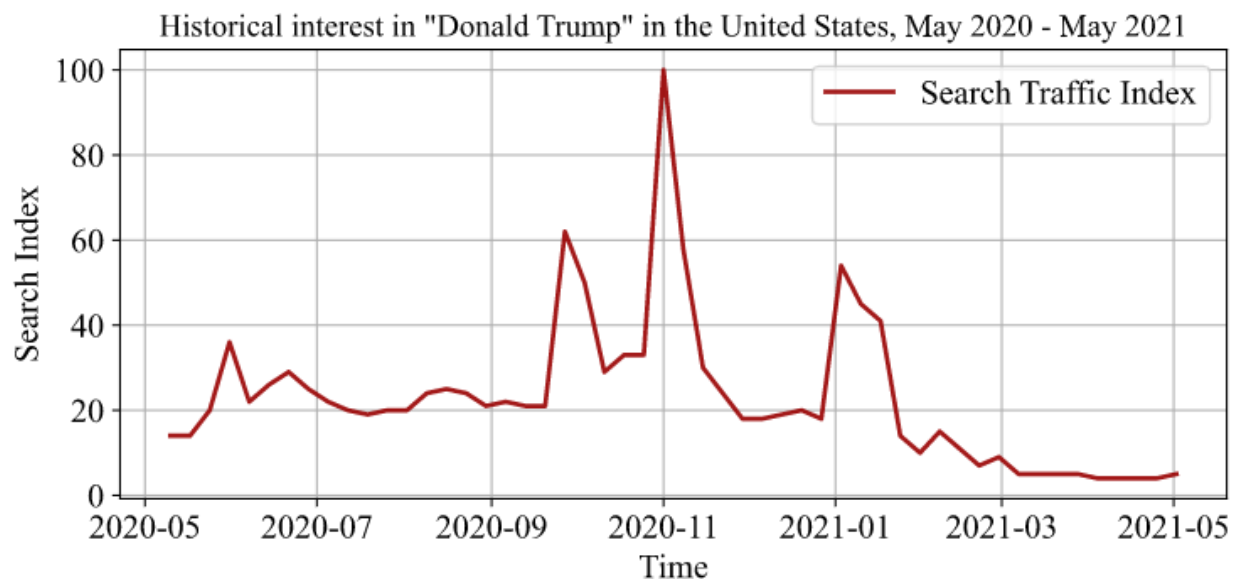


Hence the hypothesis is confirmed by the data depicted above. The graph plots time on the x-axis, from January 2004 to May 2021, and worldwide search traffic on the y-axis, on a monthly basis. It clearly shows a surge in search traffic for the month of November 2020. Further research

confirms that the surge is attributed by the 2020 presidential election. The data confirms that, for the majority of people worldwide, the 2020 election is most significant major American event since at least 2004.

III. Interpreting Data from Google Trends

Since the paper will primarily draw on search engine data, it is essential to understand how the data is stored on Google Trends. The website, founded by the homonymous tech giant, offers users statistics about its search queries. A search query is a term or a group of terms that is submitted in a search engine. The main type of data that Google Trends presents is historical search traffic on a monthly basis, going as far back as January 1st, 2004, when the company started to record this information. An example is provided below:



The above graph plots United States monthly search traffic for the term “Donald Trump” from May, 2020 to May, 2021. The plot shows, intuitively, how throughout 2020, there was a relatively consistent amount of traffic; then, this peaked during November, for the elections, and January, likely in the wake of the Capitol attack; lastly, traffic dips to a stable, low level after the former President left office.

The most unintuitive aspect to Google Trends is the way search traffic is quantified. Search traffic is not reported in absolute values – in other words, the graph above does not report the total number of search queries per month. Instead, what is reported is an “index of search activity”, which measures “the fraction of queries that include the term in question in the chosen geography at a particular time relative to the total number of queries at that time” (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2015, 12). The index is always relative to a geography; hence the graph above reports search indexes for all searches conducted within the United States. But the index is also relative to total search traffic, for all terms. Hence results can be skewed if there is a change in total search traffic.

To clarify this, I will offer an example. Suppose that, in a small country, during a given month there are ten thousand search queries a day, one thousand of which concern “Donald Trump”. Now, suppose further that the next month, as a virus spreads, the state imposes tough lockdown restrictions, forcing its citizens to stay home. As people spend more time at home, they also spend more time on the internet, and the total number of search queries reaches thirty thousand a day. But, since the new search queries are inputted for the sake of entertainment, and not for seeking information on politics, none of the new search queries include the term “Donald Trump”, whose monthly queries stay unchanged. Since total queries tripled, but “Donald Trump” queries stayed unchanged, Google Trends will report a lower search index for “Donald Trump” in the second month as compared with the first month, because such searches decreased as a share of total searches. This relative decrease likely doesn’t apply to the data depicted above, as there is no strong reason to think that the total number of monthly search queries in the United States changed in any significant way in the past year. But this type of phenomenon will become important later.

While there are other nuances to the way that Google Trends records search traffic, it is clear that the application’s data accurately reflects changes in online search traffic (Stephens-

Davidowitz, 2015, 13). This is true almost universally, especially considering that more than 92% of global search traffic goes through Google (“Search Engine Market Share Worldwide”, 2021). There are a few exceptions to this, such as China, where Baidu processes 72% of search queries, compared to Google’s 2% (“Search Engine Market Share China”, 2021). But, barring China, it should be fair to say that data from Google Trends accurately reflects search traffic worldwide, because of Google’s dominance. Thus, the first assumption listed previously has been justified.

IV. Search Traffic is Interest

The next assumption I want to validate is that search traffic represents interest. This is an important assumption, because it gives meaning to the data extracted from Google Trends. I argue that, most often than not, what drives users to look up terms on Google is interest in a topic. In fact, I can think of few other reasons for doing so. Users input search queries on Google and other search engines when they seek new information that they cannot otherwise acquire.

Similarly, barring certain exceptions, an increase in search queries for a certain term or topic represent an increase in interest for that topic. If, in the case above, there was an increase in search queries for “Donald Trump” during the buildup to the 2020 U.S. elections, it was most likely because Americans were more interested in issues relating to him, such as his election campaign, and the election itself. I mentioned that there can be exceptions – for example, if search traffic increases, and search traffic for the term in question stays the same, then a lower index will be reported, as in the previous example. Moreover, Google Trends records data most accurately when there are a wealth of search queries, so results are less reliable when analyzing a smaller number of queries, as in the case of a very small country or a query term that is not popular (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2015, 13). But, barring these exceptions, fluctuations in the search index should indicate fluctuations in the real interest that users hold for the topics they look up.

The connection between search traffic and interest is what makes Google Trends such a powerful tool to analyze people's preferences. Traditionally, surveys have been used for this purpose by researchers, and survey results likely provide more transparent information about people's preferences than data from Google Trends. At the same time, in the last ten years social scientists have increasingly resorted to Google Trends for their research, and there are notable advantages over surveys. The most obvious one concerns cost, as running surveys is often expensive, while Google Trends data, reflecting information from as far back as 2004 and more than 240 countries, is available for free. Also because of this, there is more flexibility for conducting comparisons across time and geography, which are especially costly with traditional surveys (Mellon, 2013). Moreover, people often lie in surveys, and there is virtually nothing that researchers can do about this (Stephens-Davidowitz, 2017, 105-108). This is because people who take surveys are not incentivized to tell the truth; conversely, when looking up something on Google, users are highly incentivized to search according to their interest or preference, as that is the only way to uncover desired information. The added benefit of anonymity only encourages sincerity, hence people report being unusually forthcoming when submitting search queries in Google (Conti and Sobiesk, 2007, 112). These reasons should be enough to recognize Google Trends as an acceptable tool to gauge people's preferences. If it is true that search traffic represents interest, then, even though it might not always be perfect, Google Trends could be the single best metric to gauge popular interest outside of surveys.

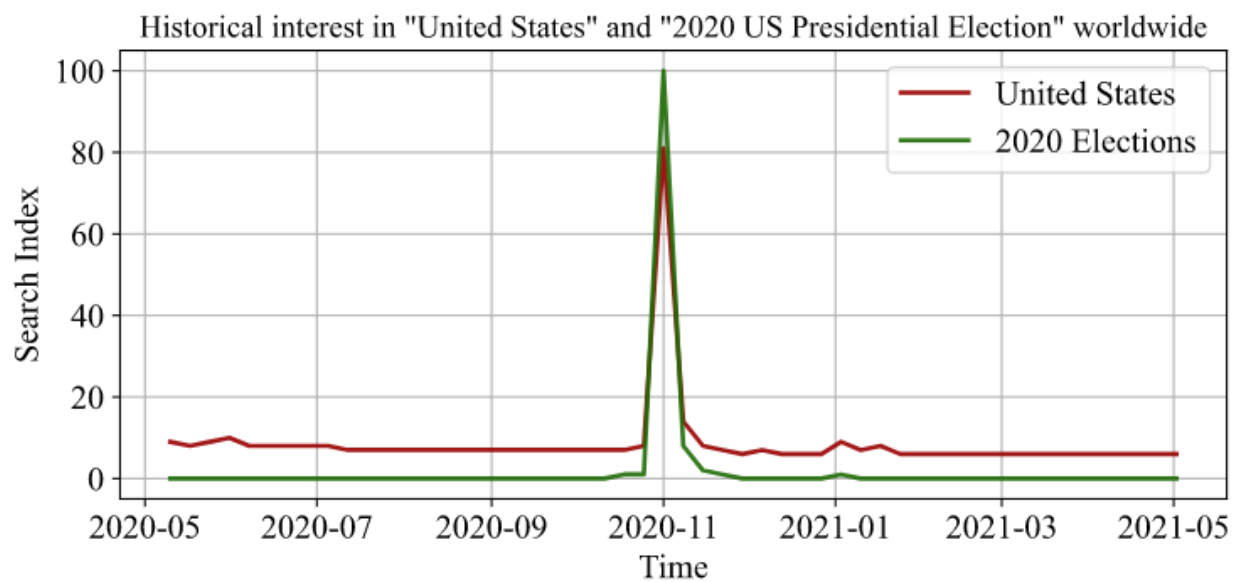
V. Interest in the United States

At this point, I have established that Google Trends accurately reflects search activity, and that search activity represents interest. These two assumptions by themselves should lead to think about the first set of data depicted, of search traffic for "United States". Of note, the data doesn't only concern search queries with the literal term "United States" – it also accounts for searches

including terms such as “US”, “USA”, “America”, and corresponding terms in foreign languages, such as “Estados Unidos” or “E.E.U.U.” in Spanish (“Compare Trends”, 2021). Given the assumptions, the surge in search traffic in November 2020 should clearly signal that people’s interest in the United States was higher in that month than in any other month since 2004.

In this essay, I would like to assert something even stronger: that the 2020 presidential election has attracted more global interest than any other U.S.-related event since 2004. To be able to assert that, I first need to establish that the surge in traffic for “United States” in the period was related to interest in the 2020 elections, and then I need to explain why there is no other U.S.-related event that could have garnered more interest since 2004.

It is easy to show that interest for the 2020 election drove interest in “United States” for the month of November 2020, as the graph below shows.



The green line, as in the case of “United States”, doesn’t track a single string of characters, but rather any search related to the 2020 U.S. Presidential election, in any if not most languages. Because most queries must have referenced the United States when referring to the 2020 presidential election, it would make sense that increased interest for the latter would also boost

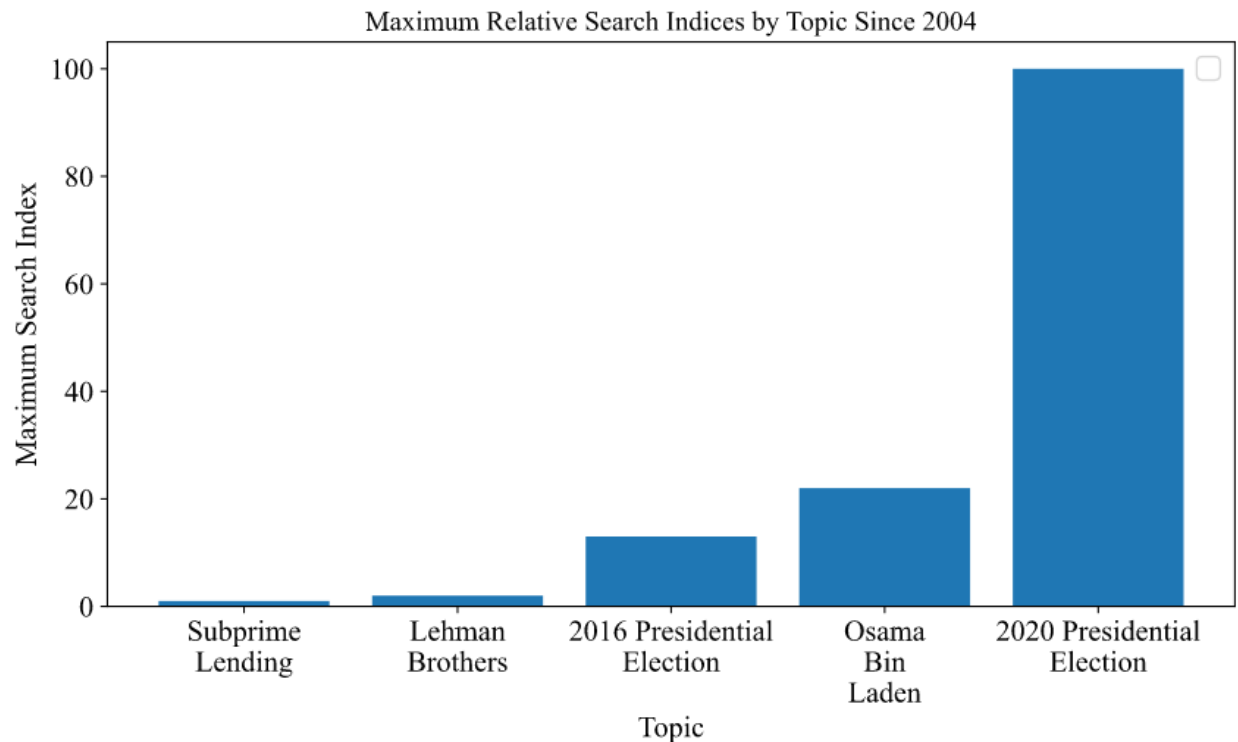
searches for the former.¹ So, given the data, and the absence of other very notable U.S.-related developments in the same month, it is plausible to claim that the surge in traffic for “United States” in the period was related to interest in the 2020 elections.

Now, I have to argue that there is no other *substantial* American event that could have garnered more attention global interest than the 2020 elections. I use the term “substantial” because what I don’t mean is that the 2020 elections were the most globally interesting American event. To explain this, suppose that the last Super Bowl attracted more search traffic than the 2020 elections (empirically, this is false – the 2020 elections garnered almost exactly nine times the search traffic that the last Super Bowl did – but it makes for a good example). I think I may plausibly claim that, while the last Super Bowl as an American event might have garnered more interest than the 2020 elections, the latter marks a more historically significant event for the United States. In other words, if a survey were administered globally about the most captivating American event in the last 17 years, and a majority of respondents cited the last Super Bowl, I would assume that those same respondents would admit that, in some intuitive way, the Super Bowl is not as substantial an event as the 2020 elections, as regards the United States.

There is a difference in type between a certain class of events, such as the Super Bowl and other events more exclusive to pop culture, and great historical events such as the 2020 elections that mark a stepping stone in a nation’s development. I argue that the 2020 elections are the most groundbreaking American development in the last 17 years, according to global interest. I argue this on the basis of the fact that, if it were false, then there should be another surge in interest for the topic “United States”, as spurred by a great historical American event. I have analyzed search

¹ This is not inconsistent with the fact that there was more search traffic for the 2020 presidential election than for “United States” in November 2020. As I will soon explain, queries could have successfully searched for the election without explicitly mentioning the United States, especially if the query was submitted in the United States.

traffic for other substantial American events like the Subprime mortgage crisis, the collapse of Lehman brothers, the killing of Osama Bin Laden, and search activity for any of those topics is dwarfed by that for the 2020 elections.



VI. The Data

In the previous section, I established the last theoretical assumption I need to allow the Google Trends data to confirm my hypothesis. In this section, I will report some of the raw empirical findings, and explain how I calculated certain statistics. The full tables, as well as the code necessary to plot the following graphs, is available in the Online Technical Appendix, linked at the end of the paper.

In summary, I have extracted historical interest in the term “United States” from 192 countries, corresponding for UN member states, with the exception of Tanzania.² It is important

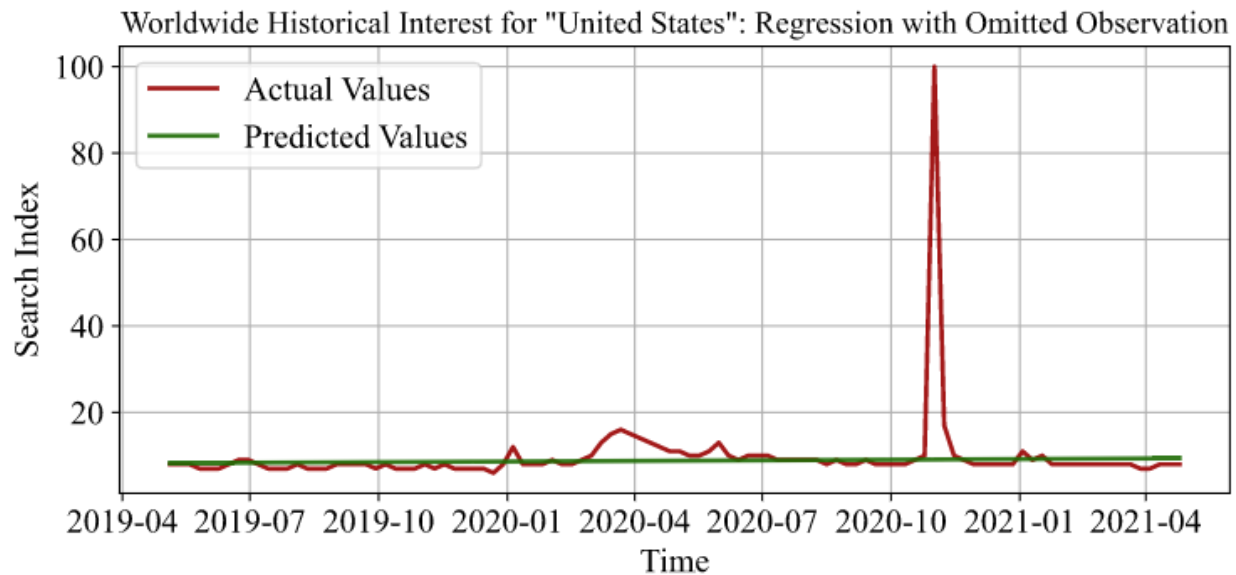
² Google Trends records data for more than 50 countries beyond that, but I have chosen to omit it because of these countries’ small population sizes and low internet usage, which make for search traffic data. Moreover, other data

to compare data international search traffic because the worldwide search traffic index is weighted by countries' total search traffic, and hence shows a bias toward countries with large populations or a high degree of internet adoption. From this data, I have calculated useful statistics that can help us assess the significance of fluctuations in search traffic. I have recorded some data from the World Bank Data, such as 2019 GDP per capita, 2004 population size and 2004 internet usage for some analysis that will follow. Lastly, I have extracted detailed traffic data representing hourly search traffic for "United States" worldwide from November 2nd to November 15th, 2020, to observe how interest for the 2020 election changed on an hourly basis during the two-week period surrounding the election.

I will start by talking about the metric I have used to judge the significance of the surge in search traffic for "United States" from country to country. In summary, I sampled search traffic data from the past 2 years, ran a single variable linear regression while omitting the observation concerning November 2020, the month of the election, calculated the regression's predicted value for November 2020, and calculated both the difference between the actual value and the predicted value, and the fraction between the actual value and the predicted value. The difference I have called "residual"³, and the fraction I have called "multiplier", or the factor by which the predicted value would have to be multiplied to reach the actual value. 2 years is an arbitrary period of time – I thought it was long enough to not be skewed by random fluctuations, and short enough to have a "trend" be captured by a single-variable linear regression. An example of this calculation can be intuited from the graph below:

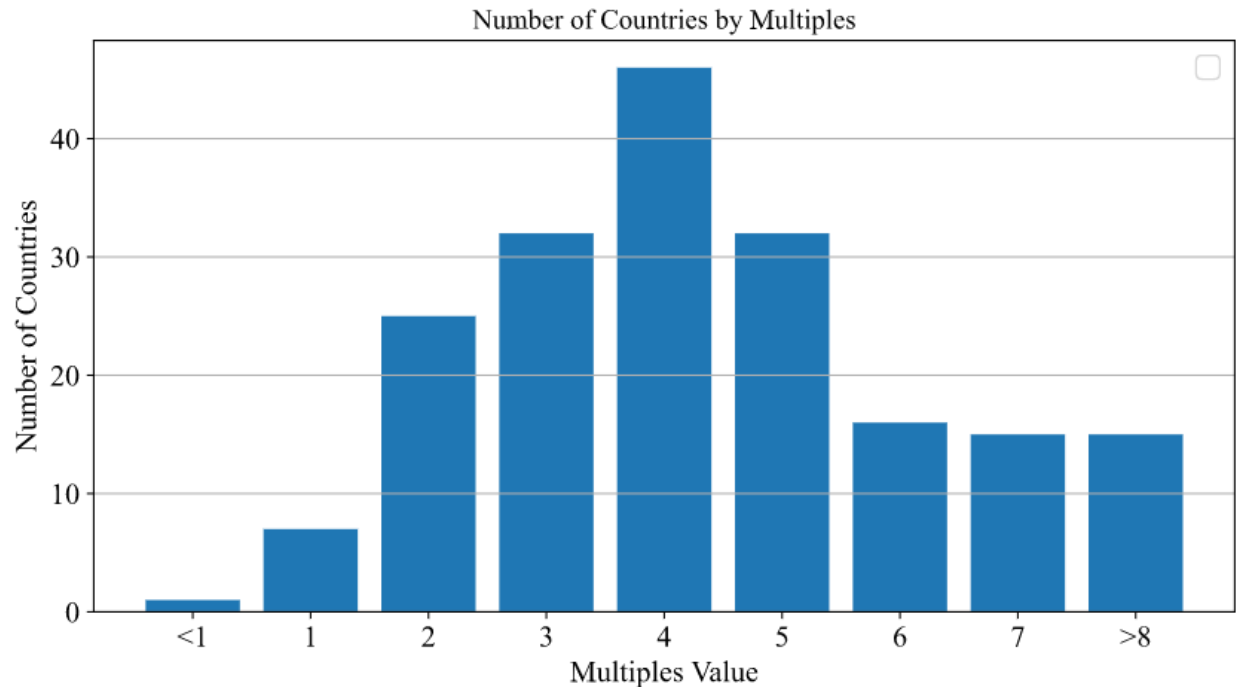
gathered from the World Bank was much poorer for these countries. For similar reasons, I have to exclude even some UN member states from certain analyses, such as Tuvalu or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

³ I have included "residual" in quotes because, usually, in statistical terminology, the residual is the difference between the predicted value and the actual value as included in the fitted sample, but in this case the actual value was omitted in the fitted sample.

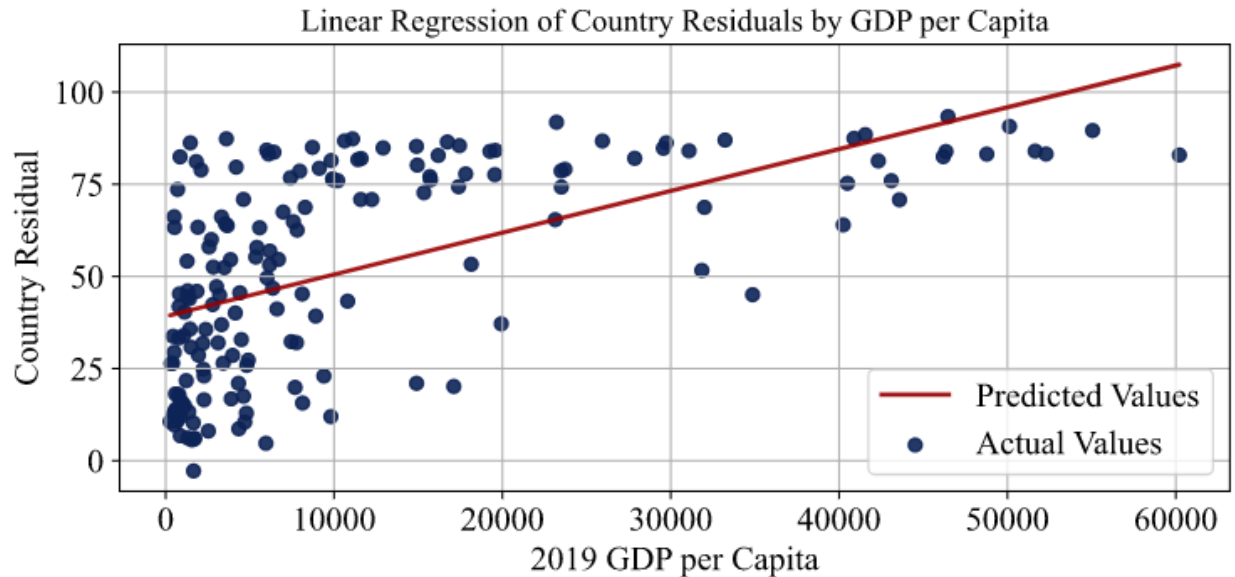


In this case, the regression line is almost perfectly flat, indicating that search activity for “United States” was unaffected by time. If the November 2020 observation were not omitted, then the slope would be slightly positive. The residual, or the distance between the red line’s highest peak and the green line below it, measures just over 91, meaning that actual search traffic in that period was higher by 91 in the index’s scale than what the simple linear regression model would have predicted. The multiple measures just over 11, meaning that actual search is 11 times the predicted search traffic.⁴ This is an example; using the Python coding language, I downloaded the same data for UN member countries and calculated residuals and multiples for each, always with reference to search traffic on November 2020. Below, I’ve included distributions of multiples.

⁴ I hesitated doing hypothesis tests taught in introductory statistics classes, such as those that I am familiar with, because they assume that instances of a random variable are independent, and I was unsure of whether this applied to search traffic. Moreover, Google Trends’ data records a wealth of traffic activity, based off of incredibly large samples, and I didn’t know whether this would change procedures to conduct hypothesis tests. Perhaps it is because of this that the academic literature on Google Trends rarely mentions traditional hypothesis tests and confidence interval when analyzing data.



The graph shows that, in the majority of countries, search traffic was significantly higher than would have been predicted. In fact, almost two-thirds of countries (65%) saw search traffic for “United States” more than quadruple in November 2020. There are exceptions. The graph shows that only one country (Kiribati) experienced lower search traffic than would be predicted, as the multiple was below 1. Seven countries saw search traffic less than double, as indicated by the second bar. The list of all countries per bar can be found on the Online Technical Appendix. Ordering the countries according to the measured residual, I was struck by how, seemingly, less developed countries, on average, recorded lower residuals than more developed countries. A linear regression, with 2019 GDP per capita on the x-axis, and countries’ residuals on the y-axis, yields the following graph (I have excluded the few countries with GDP per capita higher than \$60,000, as it skewed the results somewhat):

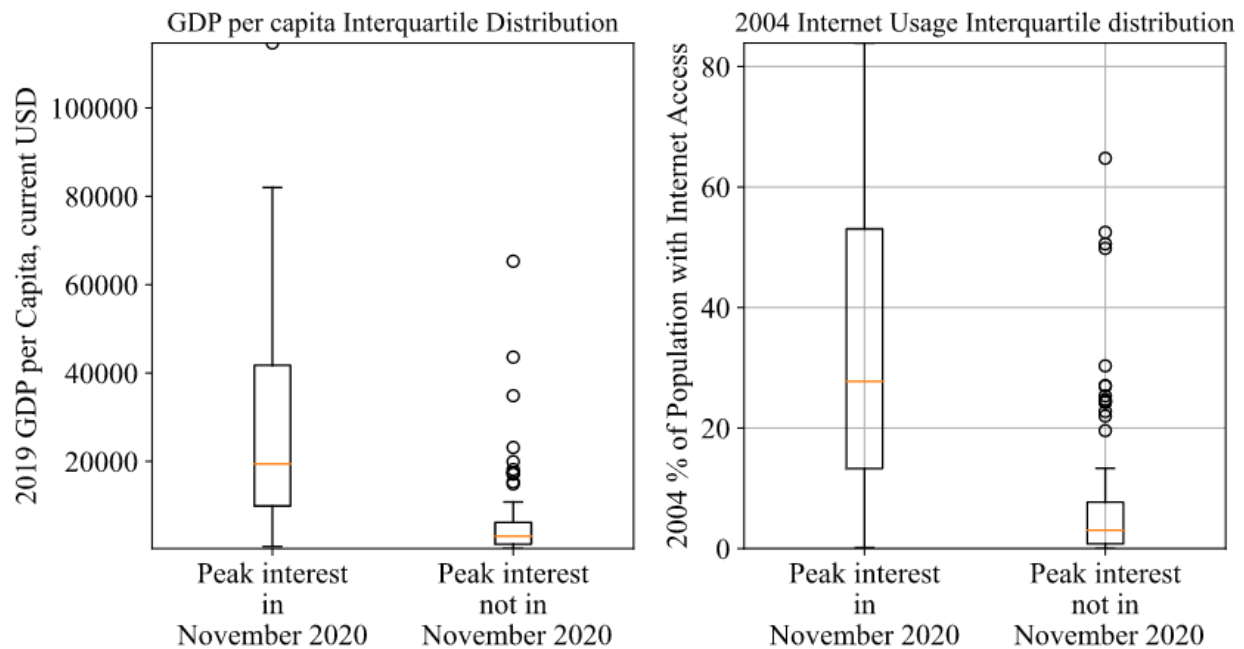


The regression line clearly shows that countries with higher GDP per capita exhibited a higher increase in search traffic for “United States” during November 2020. The R^2 is 0.32, which is somewhat low. It is hard to explain the correlation between GDP per capita and increased interest. It could be a geographic issue; countries with higher GDP tend to cluster in Europe, which has stronger historical ties with the United States, and is more closely tied with American domestic affairs, while countries with low GDP per capita tend to be in Asia and Africa, which have less significant historical ties. Maybe the answer is instead institutional: democracies, which tend to have a higher GDP per capita than their autocratic counterparts, are more invested in American democratic events. Further research should explore this topic.

VII. Exploring Anomalies

In this section, I will explore a few anomalies in the data. Earlier in the essay, I emphasized that “United States” received most search traffic in November 2020. While this is true worldwide, as weighed by countries’ share of search traffic, this is not true in the case of countries’ individual historical interest for the term. In fact, it turns out that, of the 192 UN member states, only 78, or 40%, have seen interest peak in November 2020, compared to 114 that haven’t. In this section, my

main concern is addressing this inconsistency, and making the case that it doesn't fail to confirm this essay's hypothesis.



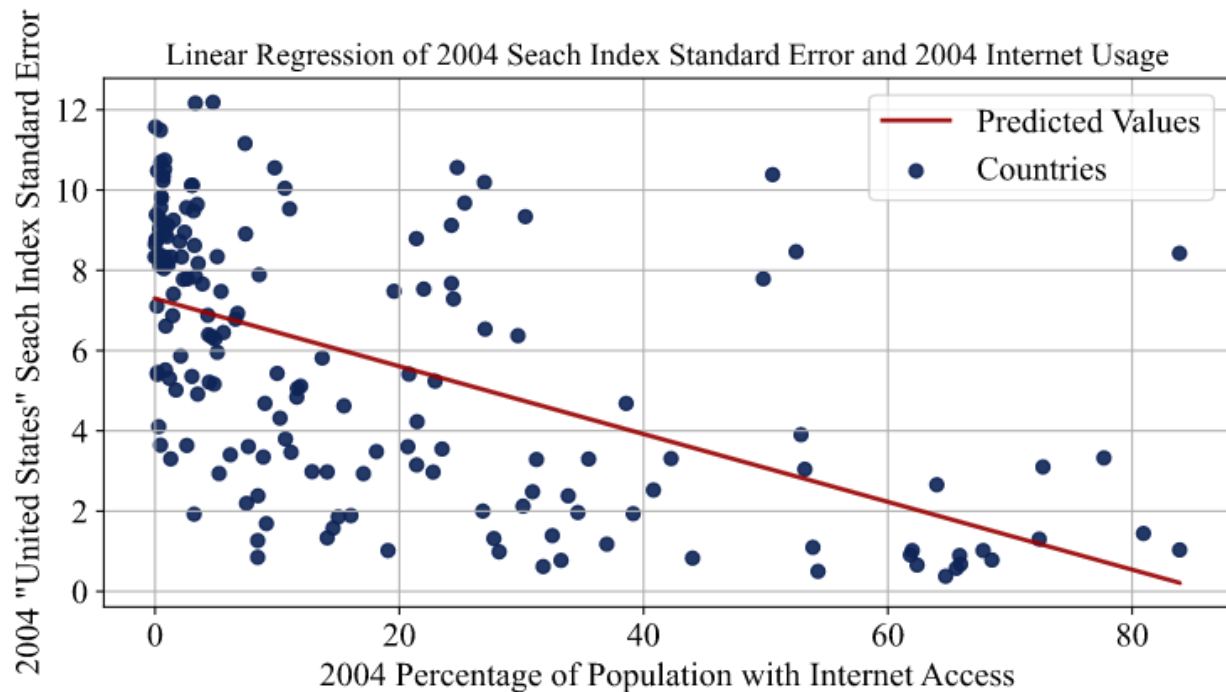
The graph above to the left shows the interquartile distribution for 2019 GDP per capita for both countries that have search traffic for “United States” peak in November 2020 on the left, and those that don't on the right. As one would expect from the previous regression, countries whose interest in the term peaked in November 2020, hence whose residual is likely higher, have significantly higher GDP per capita on average. In fact, of the G20 countries, only three didn't see interest peak in November 2020: Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and the United States, whose situation will soon be explained. Given that worldwide interest, where countries' search traffic is weighed according to their share in global search queries, peaks in November 2020, it must be that the 78 richer countries that were most interested in “United States” in that month form an overwhelmingly large share of global search queries.

However, I make the case that there is good reason to believe that it is highly likely that, in most countries which didn't see search traffic peak in November 2020 since 2004, the hypothesis

holds nonetheless. As I mentioned before, Google Trends data becomes less reliable as the total number of search queries diminishes. Moreover, it is likely that Google Trends records data more reliably today than it did in the past. I argue that, if search traffic for “United States” did not peak for a country in November 2020, that is most likely because of a measurement error for Google Trends than because of a genuinely higher prior interest in the United States.

My argument is as follows. Of the 114 countries whose interest in the term did not peak in November 2020, 108 of those countries saw interest peak before 2010. Hence, for 108 of those countries, the November 2020 U.S. election was the most captivating American historical event of the decade. But, observing some of the data, I noticed that it exhibited much less consistency in certain countries before 2010. For example, Afghanistan’s interest in “United States” before 2010 fluctuates wildly in the early 2000s, going from peak traffic one month to zero traffic the next. I don’t think it is plausible to explain this data by claiming that interest in the country was very high one month, and nonexistent for the next. It sounds much more likely that, because in 2004 in Afghanistan only a minority of citizens had online access, search traffic wasn’t recorded properly. In fact, the box plot above to the right shows that countries whose interest in “United States” did not peak in November 2020 had a significantly lower percentage of the population with access to the internet, so search traffic data must have been less reliable. In light of this, I ran a regression between countries’ 2004 internet usage and the standard error of their 2004 search traffic for “United States” – that is, the sample standard deviation of 2004 search indexes. The intuition is that, in countries with little search traffic, recorded data will be recorded more poorly, hence be more unevenly distributed, and the sample standard deviation will be higher. I extracted internet usage statistics from the World Bank. I have also filtered out countries with a population size greater than Indonesia’s in 2004 (224 million), to exclude cases where a low percentage of the

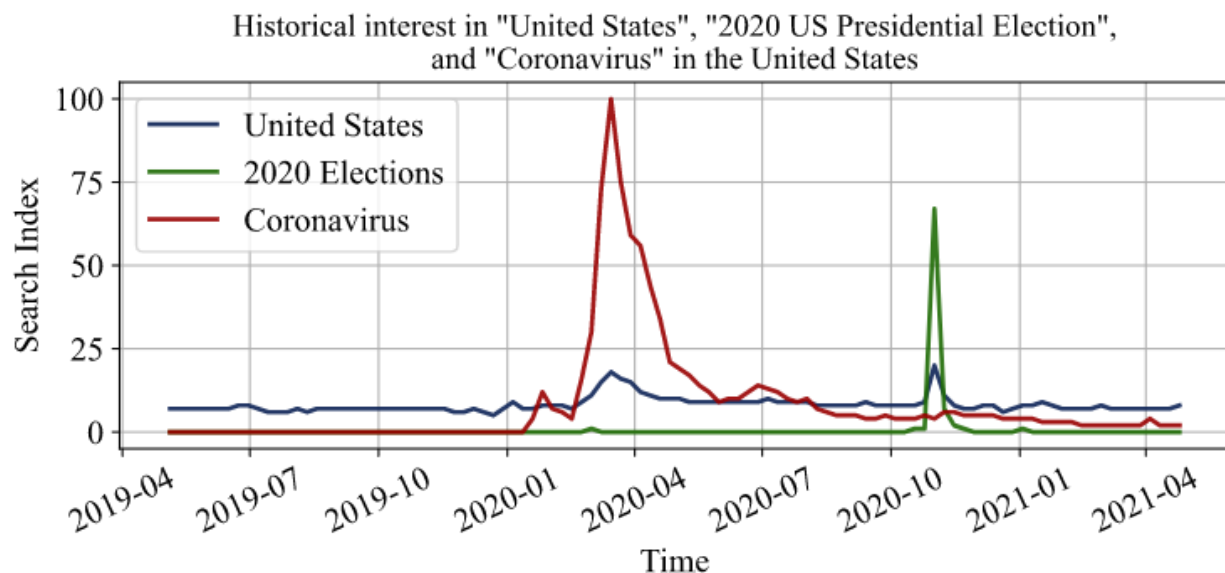
population has internet access, but the population as a whole is large enough to ensure enough search queries for reliable data.



In this case, the R^2 is just under 0.31, confirming that, as internet usage declines, search indexes for “United States” are more unevenly distributed, likely because of measurement issues (in fact, as the cutoff population size decreases, the R^2 increases; for example, if the cutoff population is 10 million instead of 224 million, then the R^2 is 0.37). This regression constitutes only a preliminary analysis, and as I have not been able to find any study linking low internet usage to patterns in search data, I would encourage data scientists to explore this issue to make comparisons across time on Google Trends less uncertain. However, I think that this preliminary analysis gives enough reason to doubt the reliability of search traffic data for countries with limited internet access and relatively small populations. This fact, combined with the lack of great events marking American history between 2004 and 2010, gives enough reason to believe that this essay’s central hypothesis is likely valid for most countries, even if Google Trends doesn’t report search

traffic peaking in November 2020. This includes large G20 countries like Indonesia and Saudi Arabia, the only exceptions aside from the United States.

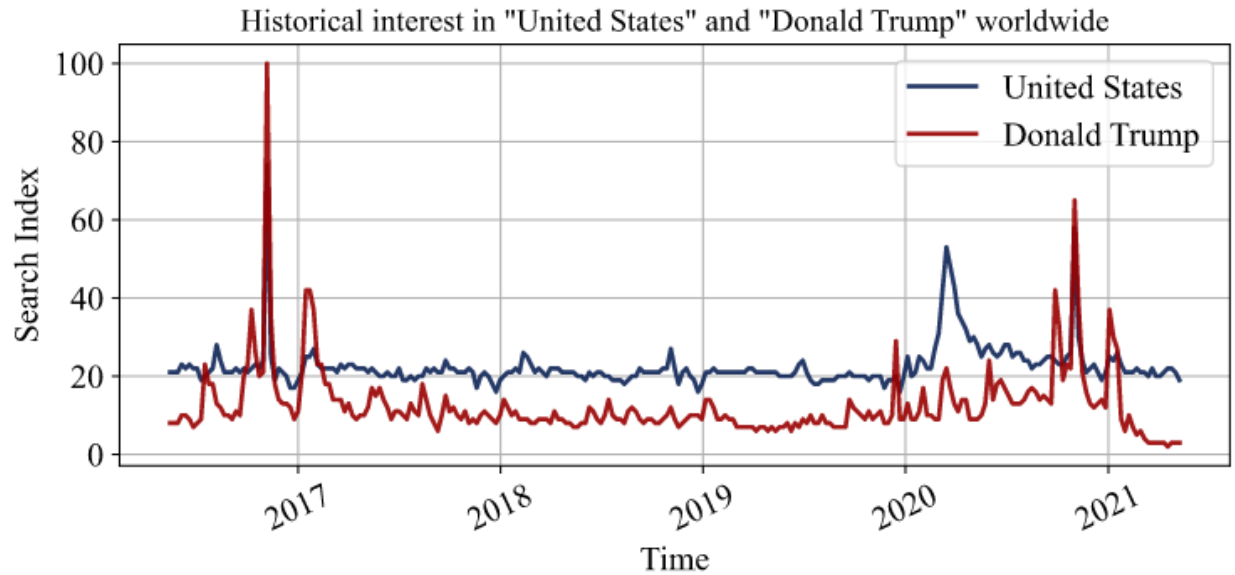
I have to admit that this essay's central hypothesis is not true for all countries. Libya, for example, saw search traffic peak in Spring of 2011. It makes sense that Libyans would have been less concerned about the United States during its latest election than during a spring when the U.S. intervened militarily. Another interesting example is the United States. November 2020 marks the second highest peak for search traffic for "United States" in the country, because of the elections. Initially, I thought this was just because Americans didn't have to include "U.S." and related terms when looking up their own election. This certainly explains the gap between search traffic for the election and for "United States". The highest peak, though, occurred in March of 2020, and I realized that this was because of searches for "Coronavirus". This strongly suggests that, for Americans themselves, the spread of Covid-19 was a more significant historical event than the 2020 elections.



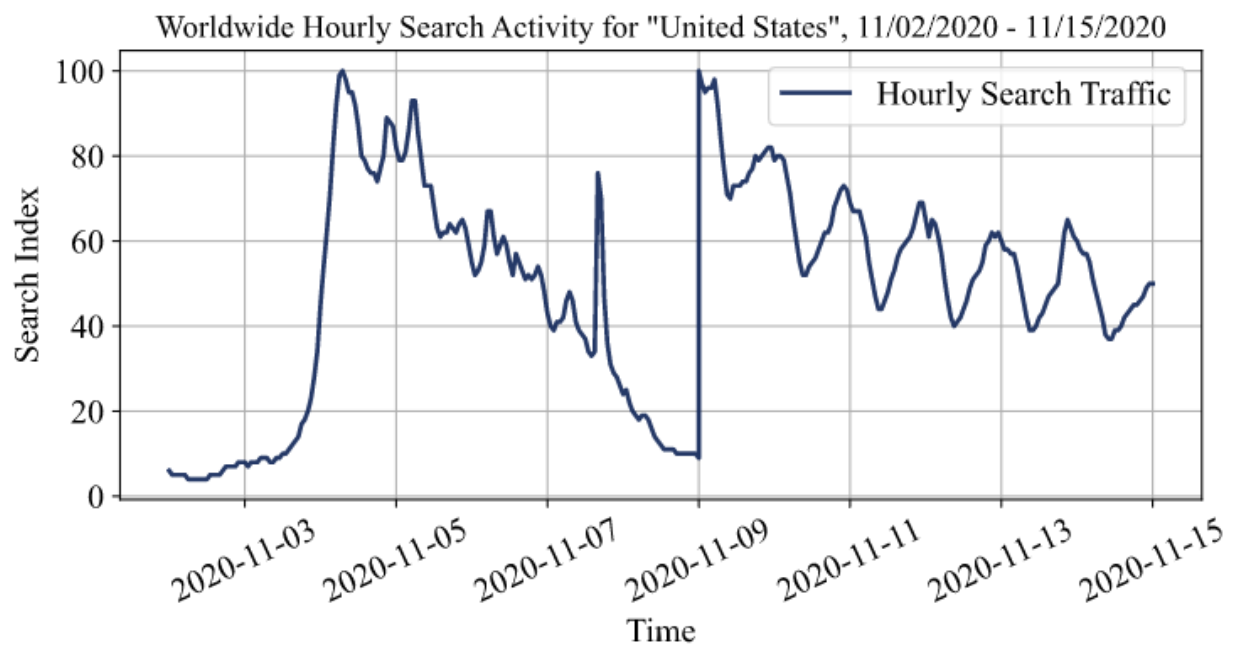
VIII. Explaining Interest

In this brief section, I will explore possible explanations for the global rise in search traffic in time for the elections. The first possible explanation is that search traffic always increases during American elections, and that the 2020 election happens to have received more traffic randomly. I argue that this is very unlikely because the search index for “United States” in November 2020 was double that of November 2016 and almost triple that of previous presidential elections, reaching as far back as 2004. Given the sheer amount of millions of search queries that this data is based on, I don’t think that a conventional hypothesis test is needed to rule out this explanation on its own. Moreover, though this is certainly a less “rigorous” reason, I think most people can agree that something about the 2020 election made it a “bigger deal” than most other presidential elections.

Another explanation, one which I found most intuitive before analyzing the data, is that people worldwide were interested in the 2020 November elections because they find Donald Trump to be an interesting political figure, and were interested in whether he specifically would stay in office, or what he would do. I’ve been struck by how foreigners I meet, no matter how uninformed or otherwise uninterested in U.S. politics, always seem to have a strong opinion on Trump. Now, if this hypothesis were true, then, given that Trump was a contender in the previous election, and the previous election attracted less interest than the latest, I think one should expect to see interest in Trump increase in the 2020 election. But this is not true – interest in Trump seemingly decreased in the 2020 election. The graph below shows this – the first spike to the left takes place during November 2016, while the spike to the right takes place during November 2020. This explanation is therefore not plausible.



I think the most plausible explanation for global interest in the election was the delay and uncertainty of the outcome. That, in combination with the perceived stakes in the election, drove increased search traffic not only on the day of the election, but also on the following week. Users worldwide likely checked regularly whether any development favored one candidate over the other. This sustained interest is shown below.



Hence it was not so much a brief surge in interest, but rather a long, sustained period that marks the surge in interest seen in graphs with a longer timeframe.⁵ The election's suspense is therefore likely the culprit for the surge in search traffic. This is a rather banal reason, but I do want to stress that the explanation's banality should neither discredit the validity of this essay's central hypothesis, or its implications.

IX. Conclusion

In this paper, I argued that the United States 2020 election was, for the majority of people worldwide, the most significant American event since at least 2004. I have based my argumentation on a series of assumptions and a wealth of data from Google Trends. Recently, a lot of work has been published on Google Trends data's potential to forecast outcomes contingent on preference, but I have opted instead to use the same data to gauge the preferences and interest of internet users worldwide, aiming for the type of research otherwise destined for surveys. While I have covered much ground, there is also room for further research, mostly by data scientists. In particular, my findings should be corroborated and further investigated, as should other interesting questions I haven't explored: do other countries' elections match with similar surges in search traffic, or is this phenomenon exclusive to the United States? Are users worldwide particularly invested in U.S. politicians' policy agendas or foreign policy? I hope this essay has demonstrated that analyzing Google Trends data might provide meaningful contributions to questions such as these. In the rest of this conclusion, I will offer a few closing thoughts on what my findings imply.

My hypothesis implies that, if people from across the globe were polled about the most significant historical event in recent U.S. history, and respondents didn't lie, then they would most

⁵ Unfortunately, Google Trends makes it very difficult to reliably extract search data on hourly intervals for timeframes as long as two weeks. Because of that, I have been unable to download the corresponding data for the 2016 election, and compare it. But I think it is plausible to assume that, given the early certainty of that election's outcome, search traffic for the 2016 election waned after the first week of November.

likely cite the 2020 November elections. If this event were seen as reflecting poorly on the United States, then Americans would rightfully worry about their image abroad. I think they should be. Much of the international community perceived the outcome's delay and Donald Trump's precocious declaration of victory as dysfunctional elements of the world's oldest democracy (Gorbiano, 2020). America's greatest adversaries, China and Russia, heralded the ordeal "as a sign of the inherent flaws in the world's oldest democracy and hypocrisy of its rule of law" and proclaimed "end to the American system of government" (Shinkman, 2020). The emptiness of this rhetoric, coming from some of the world's most repressive autocratic governments, should not undermine its global resonance. Throughout the 2010s, political commentators have pointed out the decline of liberal democratic institutions (Niblett, 2017). The 2020 election could only have confirmed foreign fears of democracy's weakness, both inside and outside of the United States.

Global fears for the integrity of American democratic institutions culminated with the January 2021 insurrection. Even leading news outlets from Europe's oldest democracies couldn't help but compare the attack to a coup (Solnit, 2021; Kauffman, 2021; Rampini, 2021). Iran proclaimed that Washington declared the "failure of Western democracy" (Franceschini, 2021). Of course, this is only a perception – personally, I strongly doubt that American democratic institutions are as imperiled as the rest of the world seems to fear. But, if events like the January insurrection or, as I hope to have shown, the 2020 Elections are top of mind for people across the globe, the United States cannot anymore guarantee the solidity of its democratic institutions, without demonstrating it first.

Online Technical Appendix

I have decided to include my appendix online. It features the code used to generate the essay's graphs and figures and includes the organized tables I compiled by extracting data from Google Trends and the World Bank. The link is included below:

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