

The Media on Gitmo: Measuring the Sentiment Towards the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center in
Newspapers from the United States and Cuba

Introduction and Research Motivation

The terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001 caused a flood of societal and political changes in the United States. Perhaps most prominent amongst these changes was the War on Terror launched by the George W. Bush administration to combat the forces behind the attacks in an effort to exact revenge and prevent any such attacks in the future. The aftermath of this campaign is still strongly felt across the world and in some cases still ongoing, especially in the Middle East. A pillar of this massive effort was the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center, opened at the name-bearing naval base in Cuba to detain captured terrorists who were deemed to be the greatest threats to US safety.

Guantanamo Bay quickly captured foreign and domestic attention for striking deviations from the standard protocols about capturing and detaining military hostages. First, the capturing country was using a separate country to hold its hostages. Second, and more importantly, “these detainees were captured on foreign soil, not charged with any particular crime, brought to Guantanamo, detained indefinitely without trial, and denied access to counsel” (Pearlman, 2015); nearly every one of those descriptors could be argued as a violation of the Geneva Convention accords that lay out international rules for prisoners of war. Finally, reports of inhumane treatment and torture at the detention center started to quickly surface, raising humanitarian and legal concerns. Many have called for it to be closed.

So why did this happen? Driven by both national pride and a deep fear of the threat that terrorism posed, Congress passed Joint Resolution 23 just three days after the attacks, which authorized the President to “use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determine[d] planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorists attacks on September 11, 2001” (Clover, 2004). Bush took swift advantage of this authorization and gave the military power to detain suspected terrorists at Guantanamo. On top of that, the US government claimed that these detained terrorists did not constitute as prisoners of war, which deprived the detainees of many basic rights generally given to people in their position (Clover, 2004). At the same time, officials have disputed the gruesome accounts reported about Guantanamo and provided strong reasoning for labeling the detainees as enemy combatants rather than prisoners of war (Morris, 2007). Underlying all of this as well is the widespread idea that the country’s citizens can sleep better at night knowing that the individuals behind 9/11 were detained and not actively roaming about.

The vast military, humanitarian, and geopolitical implications of the debate around Guantanamo Bay have elevated it to be among the most discussed political topics, especially during the Bush and Barack Obama administrations. As described previously, Bush was one of the prime enablers and proponents of the detention center. Over 700 detainees were incarcerated at Guantanamo during his watch. He even went so far as to uphold the questionable interrogation tactics that the Central Intelligence Agency was using at the facility, up to and including torture. (Pearlman, 2015) Many Americans

backlash against this stance. Accordingly, then-Senator Barack Obama made closing Guantanamo Bay one of his presidential campaign promises, inspiring hope amongst many that his election would spell the end of the controversial detention center (Yin, 2011). While Obama did succeed in transferring nearly 200 detainees out of the prison during his tenure, there were still 41 detainees remaining when he left office with the encampment still fully operational. Obama claimed to have done all he could to end detention at Guantanamo, but he blamed Congress for ultimately being a blockade towards that goal (Rosenburg, 2017). As such, the debate remains ongoing.

Notably, this Congressional opposition was often bipartisan. The past four presidents have mostly aligned with the stance that would be associated with their political party. After Bush and Obama, Donald Trump signed an order to keep Guantanamo open indefinitely, and Joe Biden's administration claims to be working to continue shrinking the detention center (Fox, 2022). This split would suggest that there should be a clear difference between Democrats and Republicans on their stance towards Guantanamo, but bipartisan Congressional options would suggest otherwise. Furthermore, a 2014 Gallup poll of Americans found that 66% opposed the detention center, including 54% of Democrats (McCarthy, 2014). Additionally, none of this discussion has yet considered the perspectives in Cuba, where the detention center actually lies. If Democratic presidents want to close Guantanamo Bay but most of their voters and constituents oppose this decision, where is the support for this goal coming from? Some of that undoubtedly comes from criticism overseas, but there are surely still domestic factors at play.

One of these factors could be the tight interplay between politics and media. A myriad of books and research papers have gone lengths to document the massive impact that media perceptions have on US politics (Willis, 2007)(Druckman, 2012), and even any aware citizen could tell you the same. This fact then begs the question: how have the political issues surrounding Guantanamo Bay been portrayed in the US media? Could this media perception and factors related to each piece of media output help point towards an explanation for the observed goals that each president has had for the detention center? We propose a high-level analysis of newspapers from across Cuba and the US to reveal nation-wide trends in how the issue has been portrayed in the media. In order to analyze nearly 100 newspapers across several decades, we propose a data-driven, digitized analysis that can capture these trends and allow us to compare them with other contextual information. We predict that US newspapers will lean towards more anti-Guantanamo sentiments than the average US population, especially at the end of Republican presidential tenures or in the middle/end of Democratic presidential terms; this would align well with Democratic presidents wanting to close the detention center. We also predict that Cuban newspapers will generally lean towards anti-Guantanamo sentiments as well since the naval base imposes an American presence on their soil and houses extremely dangerous individuals in their country. If found to be true, understanding how these media sources portray the Guantanamo issue and putting them in comparison with US public opinion on the matter can point towards which forces may be shaping the political agenda around this topic and the media-politics link as a whole.

Methodology

To give a broad overview, this study will analyze newspaper sentiment about Guantanamo Bay using datasets with US and Cuban newspapers, optical character recognition (OCR) to read the articles, and natural language processing (NLP) to perform a sentiment analysis on those articles. We want to pull from reliable, regular, digitized, and well-labeled media data, and newspapers fulfill this need. The scope of the analysis will be limited to publications between 2000 and 2018, as this captures the presidential administrations of greatest relevance; moreover, Google Ngram Viewer shows this to be the time range when the term “Guantanamo Bay” was most prevalent in public discourse. Next, these findings will be compiled in a geographical representation with additional information overlaid on top. Finally, the study will also provide correlational values between the newspaper sentiment and the metadata provided with the articles.

To begin, US newspapers will be gathered from the Library of Congress (LoC) Stacks collection, which provides access to a variety of documents that are still rights-restricted. Many newspapers from the mid-20th century are digitized and openly available, but papers published in the 21st century are usually still under copyright protection. Stacks receives regular digital copies of major newspapers from 36 of the 50 states (96 news outlets total), and covers the full geographical spread of the nation. As such, the first step in this project will be gaining Stacks access and finding the time and resources to travel to the LoC reading rooms to collect newspaper data from their on-site computers.

At the LoC reading room computers, the Stacks access looks like the following:

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS STACKS

Everything Search

Stacks > Newspapers > The Dallas morning news

The Dallas morning news

About this newspaper

Place of publication: Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, United States
Publisher: A.H. Belo & Co. Inc.
Published: Dallas, Tex.: A.H. Belo & Co. Inc.
Description: Presents the online edition of the "Dallas Morning News," a daily Texas newspaper. Includes national, international, state, and local news articles, business news, and sports information. Contains features and religion articles, arts reviews, and weather forecasts. Offers a classified section and a FAQ. Provides subscription information and postal contact information via street address, telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail.
Language: English
Subjects: Dallas (Tex.) -- Newspapers | Dallas County (Tex.) -- Newspapers | Electronic journals
Genres: Electronic journals
LCCN: 2004216240
ISSN: 1553-842X
Format: Newspapers

Browse available issues

Select a year: 2020

January 2020	February 2020	March 2020	April 2020
Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30
May 2020	June 2020	July 2020	August 2020
Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31
September 2020	October 2020	November 2020	December 2020
Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30	Su Mo Tu We Th Fr Sa 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

Mavs' Porzingis eager, confident after downtime

The Dallas Morning News

Dallas, Texas, Saturday, July 4, 2020

CORONAVIRUS

County reports 1,085 cases

Jenkins announces 6 deaths as weekly toll hits 42, a new record

A different kind of blast

Abbott's policies prompt pushback

Dallas Morning News from July 5, 2020 in STACKS. Serial & Government Publications Division.

Image provided online at:

<https://guides.loc.gov/united-states-newspapers/current-newspapers#s-lib-ctab-24174735-1>

This project would begin at this webpage and first perform a digital search through the LoC's system for "Guantanamo Bay", "Guantanamo detention center", and "Gitmo", the shorthand name for the detention center. Then, we would collect these digital copies from the Stacks records and carefully attach the following metadata to each copy in a series of spreadsheets: newspaper, publisher, date, author, and location. This work would be done in close collaboration with experts at the LoC to make sure that all copyright and IP protections are correctly maintained.

Cuban newspapers will be gathered from the Hoover Institution's Cuba Newspaper Collection housed at Stanford University. According to the Online Archive of California website (*accessed: https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8ft8ssp/dsc/#aspace_507438143deb9248dc05715ba5f84332*), the Cuba Newspaper Collection has articles from the Granma international newspaper published in 2000, 2001, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010. The newspapers are stored as physical copies and would hence need to be first digitized and then searched for relevance to Guantanamo Bay. While the years with available newspapers are limited, we can still gain a sense for the sentiment around the detention center during these pivotal years. Moreover, Granma is the official newspaper of the Cuban communist party, which means that while we will be getting the perspective of the ruling party rather than independent journalists, we may be capturing some of the political ideas that are prevalent in any discussions that Cuba had with the US government about the naval base.

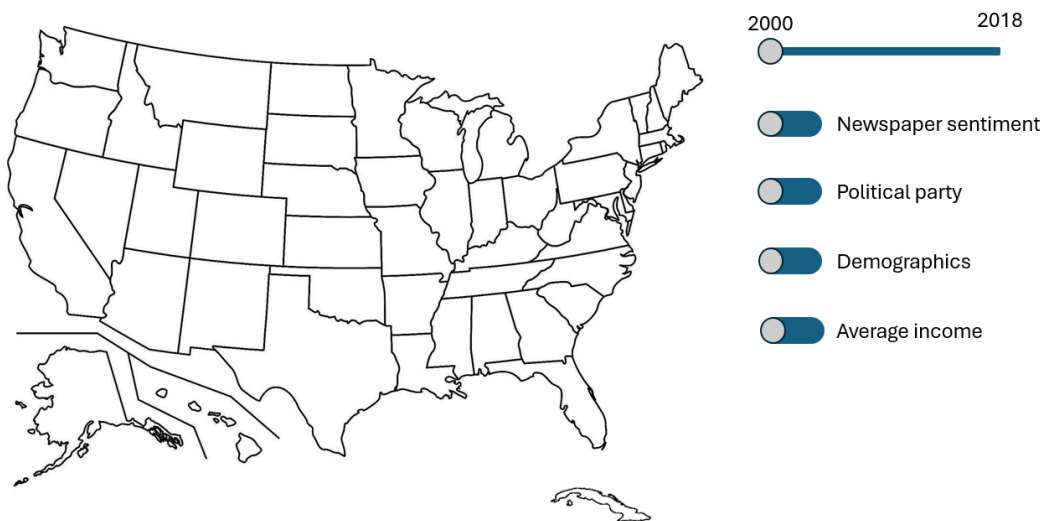
After the newspaper collection, the next phase would be the digital analysis of these data with OCR and NLP. These tools allow us to efficiently gauge the sentiment on the thousands of articles we will have without having to manually read each one. We plan to use OpenRefine to clean the data as needed and eScriptorium to perform the OCR, as it is open source, reliable, and can work with the newspapers from Cuba that are in Spanish. This process will involve downloading all the eScriptorium code from its GitHub repository, setting up the environment, and performing layout recognition within the program for the newspaper layouts. Then, running the OCR will provide us with transcripts of all the newspaper articles along with the linked metadata described earlier. We anticipate that these two phases - collecting the newspapers and performing the OCR - will be the most time-intensive and manual labor-intensive parts of this project.

With these transcripts in hand, we can begin NLP on them to detect the document-level emotional sentiment in each one. This method has previously been widely used with high accuracy by researchers and corporations for detecting sentiment in social media posts (Nandwani, 2021), and thus we aim to bring this technique to analyzing newspapers concerning Guantanamo Bay. The current state-of-the-art models are deep neural networks, and hence we will use this method for our work (Tan, 2022). We plan to perform this NLP analysis in Python using CSVs as the primary layout for inputting and outputting data. After grouping all the articles by the year they were published, our aim would be to characterize each article on a scale of -10 to +10, where -10 represents a very strong anti-Guantanamo sentiment and +10 represents a very strong pro-Guantanamo sentiment; assigning a numerical value with each sentiment will allow us to better compare and visualize these results.

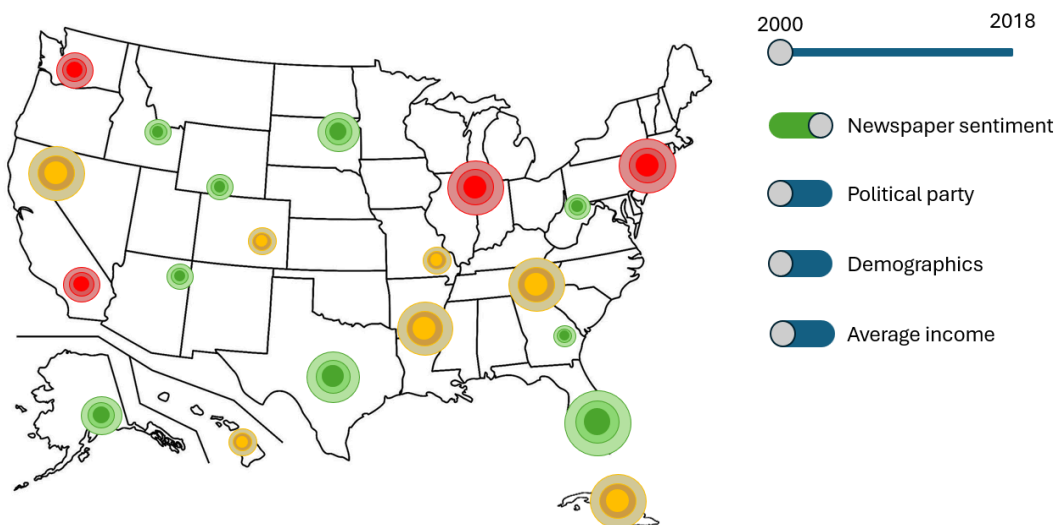
Project Output

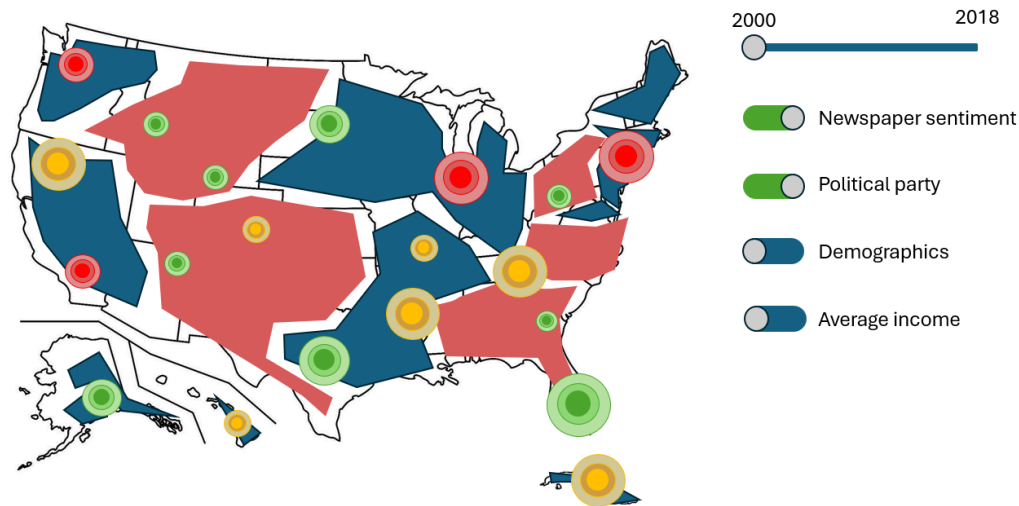
The primary deliverable we aim to create is a geographical map in ArcGIS that overlays newspaper sentiment by location with county presidential voting results (Democratic or Republican), average county income, and county demographic information. We are curious to see if any of these additional factors align with the sentiment and political data. Since this analysis runs from 2000 to 2018, we will create a separate map for each year and use the most relevant US Census or election results for that year. This kind of data may not be readily available or relevant for Cuba, but we will attempt to gather as much of this information as possible.

The baseline map will look like the following:



The map starts with a blank outline of the US and Cuba. The slider on the top right transitions the map to each year between 2000 and 2018, and each of the switches below that flips on and off the respective information on the map. For instance, switching on “Newspaper sentiment” and “Political party” would give the following two maps, where green dots are pro-Guantanamo and red are anti-Guantanamo newspapers (*these data are entirely fictional and just for illustration*):





Our intent is that this interactive map can be embedded into a website online. Having a visual representation of this data can streamline the observation of new trends and lower the barrier of entry to understanding the meaning of the data. The map would thus be readily available to anyone who has internet access. We plan to make all of our code, newspaper metadata, and background work open access on the website and readily available such that others can better understand our work or build off of it.

In addition to putting the interactive map on the internet, communicating the raw data and numerical descriptions of it is just as important. We will again divide our sentiment analysis data by year and calculate linear r^2 values between the sentiment value, the dominant political party where it was published, the average income of the publishing area, and some numerical descriptor of the demographics of that publishing area. Furthermore, we will aggregate the average sentiment for articles by each newspaper, as well as the percentage of articles concerning Guantanamo Bay from each newspaper to indicate how significant each publisher views the issue. Finally, since the overall goal of this project is to gauge the media perspective on the detention center, we will compile all the NLP results into a singular sentiment analysis value for all US newspapers and all Cuban newspapers and then compare this to the results from the Gallup poll measuring the opinions of the American public. We aim to publish these results and our raw data in a peer-reviewed academic journal.

We hope that this study will point towards explanations or forces behind certain federal and presidential policies regarding the Guantanamo Bay Detention Center in Cuba. More broadly, we hope that this work can highlight how media perceptions and actions by political leaders may differ from the popular opinion among their constituents. These proposed findings are not causational by any means, but they are more meant to inspire new, in-depth research into this particular instance of the historical interplay between the US government and the media. Newspapers are surely not the full scope of US media and have in many cases been replaced by other information sources, but much can still be garnered from them. The debate surrounding Guantanamo Bay was and continues to be an important topic concerning military conduct, terrorism, human rights, and government accountability; better understanding how it unfolds can reveal a bounty of impactful insights.

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This essay represents my own work in accordance with University regulations.

x Colin Brown

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