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Paranormal Sightings and Government Trust in the United States

Introduction

I sought to compare periods when paranormal sightings peaked to when public trust in United States government fell and determine if they are possibly related. For this report, I compared the dates of Bigfoot sightings reported to the Bigfoot Field Research Organization (BFRO) and UFO sightings reported to the National UFO Reporting Center (NUFORC) to the Pew Research Center's study of the American public's opinion of the United States government.

Pew Research Organization collected the data of “% who say they trust the government to do what is right just about always/most of the time” (Pew Research Center, 2022) between 1958 and 2022. Pew Research Center, in addition to their polling, from National Election Studies, Gallup, ABC/Washington Post, CBS/New York Times, and CNN Polls.

BFRO was founded in 1995 by Matt Moneymaker. They describe their mission as

seeking “to resolve the mystery surrounding the bigfoot phenomenon...through the proactive collection of empirical data and physical evidence from the field and by means of activities designed to promote an awareness and understanding of the nature and origin of the evidence.” (Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization, n.d.)

NUFORC was founded in 1974 by noted UFO investigator Robert J. Gribble to record, corroborate, and document reports from individuals who have witnessed UFO-related events (National UFO Reporting Center, n.d.)

The tools I used to complete my goal were Python modules Matplotlib, Pandas, BeautifulSoup, and Cloudscraper.

Process

First, I had to determine my data sources. I selected the BFRO and NUFORC reports because they were collecting individual reports with dates attached. I then scraped each website for the reports in the United

States only, since they were being compared to government trust in the United States.

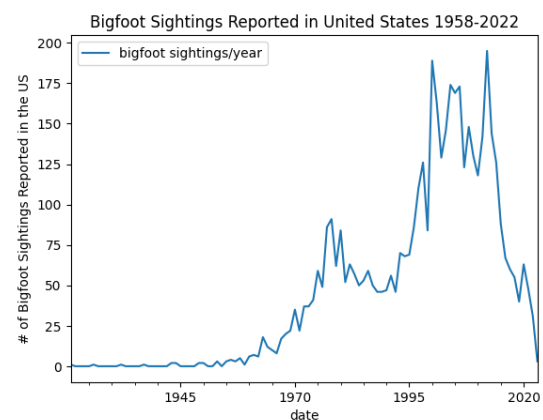
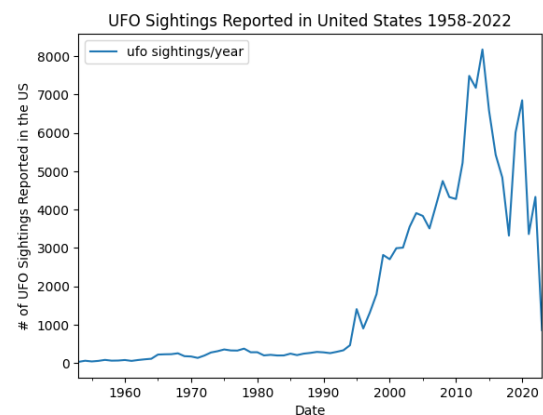
Once I was assisted in getting started, I found the NUFORC website very easy to scrape. The data is laid out into HTML tables, and each table tends to be the only thing on the webpage.

The BFRO reports were not as simple. Bigfoot reports are mainly collected in the United States and Canada. The United States and Canada reports are broken down geographically by state/province and then by county, with no notable separation within the HTML tags. What I did to retrieve the United States reports only was scrape the first two tables on the report page. I then scraped through all of the states and all of the counties. Once in the reports, I scraped all of the `` tags for the information I was looking for.

After exporting the dictionaries I created from the reports to a CSV, I cleaned up data that was unusable or input incorrectly. The data on BFRO seems to be published with no mediation or standardization by BFRO researchers. The data on NUFORC is standardized before it is published. Pew Research Center is protected from scraping. The data I was looking for was laid out in a table that could easily be copied into a CSV.

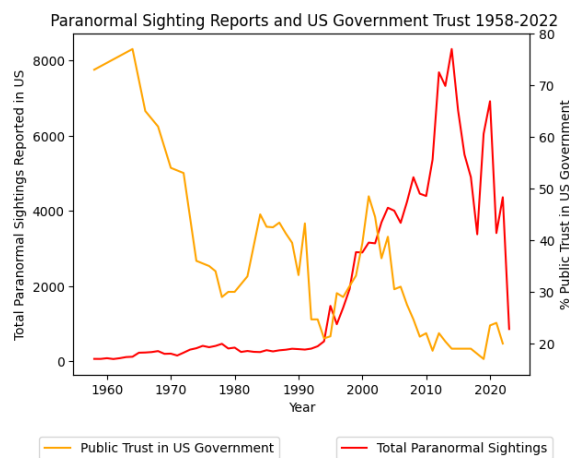
Since there were thousands of reports on NUFORC and BFRO, I wanted to see a visual representation of my data. By viewing all of my data as line charts, I realized that I need to compare my data year to year, rather than month to month in my final report. To do this, I resampled the data for the date of sighting from each data source to a yearly count.

While the data predating 1958 is interesting, the only relevant data was between 1958 and 2022, since that is the data Pew Research Center provides for public trust in the United States government.



At first, I had Bigfoot Sightings and UFO Sightings in the same plot, with Bigfoot on the left y-axis and UFOs on the right y-axis.

I wasn't sure how to include government trust in my plotted data, so I decided to create a CSV combining the yearly reports of both BFRO and NUFORC for a total count of paranormal sightings. I then plotted those results into a chart with the percent of government trust on the right y-axis.



Conclusion

My hypothesis that reports of paranormal sightings were higher when government trust was lower was correct. Even before the internet made reporting paranormal sightings more accessible, you can still see the trend.

When the public feels powerless, they begin to wonder what else the government is keeping from them. Marc E. Fitch wrote,

“The idea of a secret rogue government was born out of the Kennedy assassination where, for the first time, the public fear was not that the U.S. government was being subverted by outside forces, but rather that the government itself was acting independently of checks and balances—working in secrecy, committing acts of murder, kidnapping, and worse, all to keep the American public in the dark” (Fitch, 2013, p. 78-79)

Some notable dips in government trust can be attributed to the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, the Waco siege, and the Great Recession. All of these events are examples of the vulnerability of the American public to government power.

Data and Documentation

To view the documentation and data collected, visit the [GitHub](#).

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