

The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes, primarily triangles and polygons, in various shades of green, creating a modern and dynamic visual effect.

Self-censorship in China: an experimental design

Hao Wang

Purpose

- ▶ Do Chinese citizens censor themselves?
- ▶ Who is more likely to conduct self-censor behaviors?
- ▶ Study sensitive questions using survey experiment.

Censorship

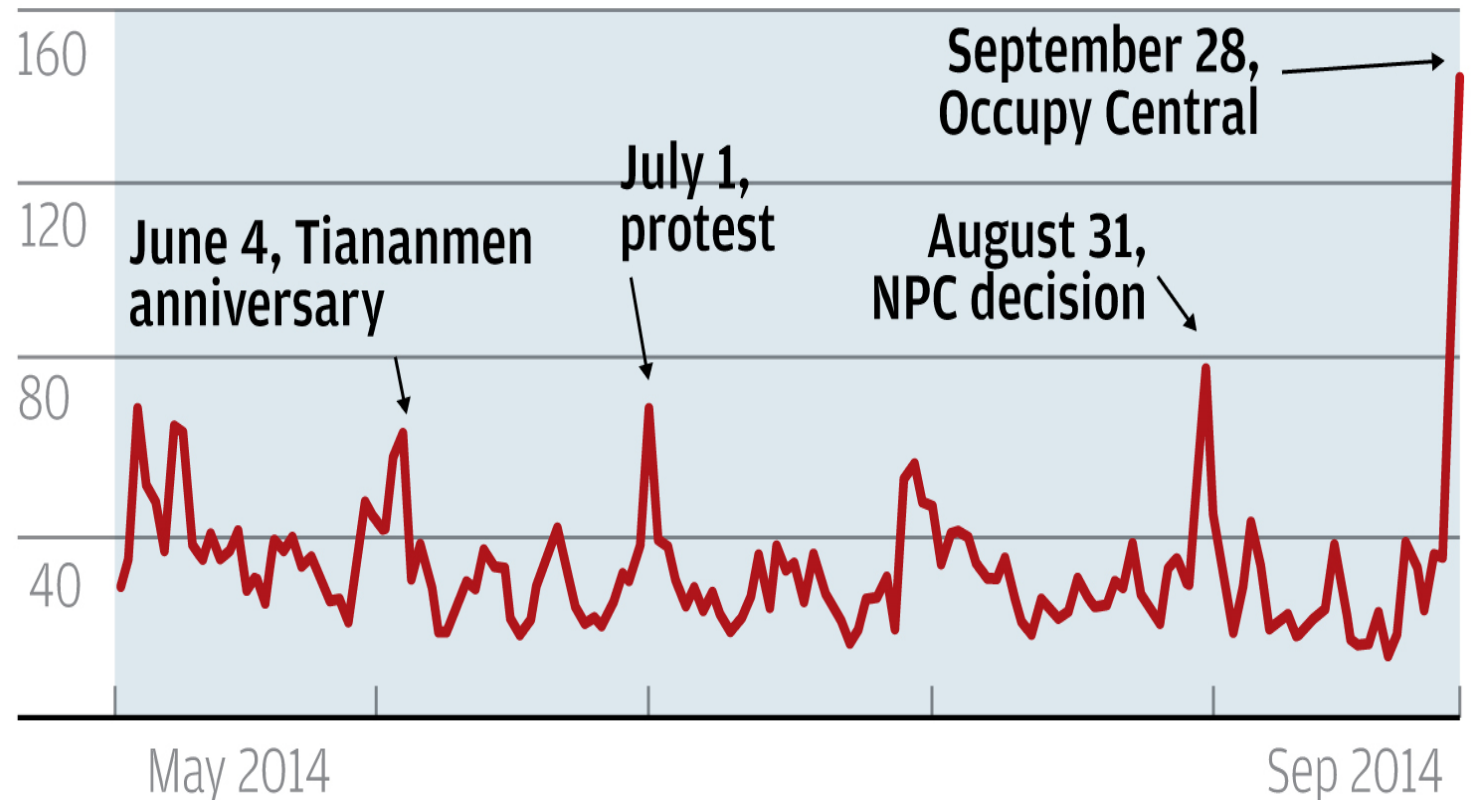


Censorship in Practice

- ▶ Great Fire Wall (Golden Shield Project) : certain websites like google, facebook, twitter, Instagram are blocked in China.
- ▶ Real-time Internet censoring: online comments including certain contents will be filtered out

Censorship on China's social media

— Inaccessible Weibo posts per 10,000



Sources: Weiboscope, Journalism and Media Studies Centre, HKU

SCMP

Self-censorship

- ▶ In authoritarian countries, citizens censor themselves.
- ▶ Evidence:
- ▶ Tsai 2007: Revealing true preferences in Authoritarian countries may be difficult because many questions are sensitive.
- ▶ Wang 2009: Even for online comments, citizens are hesitant to voice their true opinions.

Puzzle

- ▶ If traditional surveys cannot reveal the true opinion, how to obtain valid data in authoritarian countries like China?
- ▶ The results from opinion surveys will NOT be valid!

List Experiment

- ▶ Instead of asking the question directly, list experiment asks respondents indirectly.
- ▶ Respondents are divided randomly into control group and treatment group
- ▶ Control group (T 0) will be assigned with N non-sensitive issues.
- ▶ Treatment group (T 1) will be assigned with N+1 issues, the added one is the political sensitive issue which we are interested in.
- ▶ Asking respondents how many issues do they support in two groups and compare the mean.

Why list experiment can detect levels of self-censorship?

- ▶ Respondents are only required to provide the number of arguments they agree/disagree - protect their anonymity
- ▶ By comparing the difference mean values we get the estimated proportion of population who agree/disagree with the sensitive issue.

Example: control group

- ▶ Now I'm going to read you 4 opinions about contemporary China. After I read all four, just tell me HOW MANY of them do you agree. Control group (4 non-sensitive opinions)
- ▶ 1 People hold the government's accountability.
- ▶ 2 China has its own distinctive features, Western political system may not be practical in China.
- ▶ 3 We should value the integrity of China's territory.
- ▶ 4 Reform and Open policy has dramatically increased people's living standard, but it enlarges the income gap between the rich and the poor.

Example : treatment group

- ▶ The four non sensitive questions in control group, plus one sensitive question:
- ▶ Government officials are corrupted and politicians should be elected by people.

Detect levels of self-censorship

- ▶ The level of censorship is the DIFFERENCE of between list experiment and direct surveys.
- ▶ $\text{Pr}(\text{favor election} \mid \text{list experiment}) = \text{Mean}(\text{Treatment} - \text{Control})$
- ▶ $\text{Pr}(\text{censorship bias}) = \text{Pr}(\text{favor election} \mid \text{list experiment}) - \text{Pr}(\text{favor election} \mid \text{direct survey})$

QUESTIONS!