

Hegemonic Distraction and

Abstract

We do stuff, its pretty cool.

keywords: methods; hegemonic distraction; Sino-US relations; state preferences

Introduction

- Basic question: Does US distraction due to wars, particularly in the Middle East lead to adverse outcomes in the rest of the world.
- Contributions:
 1. . Novel and superior measure of state affinity/preferences/closeness
 2. Novel measure of US distraction
 3. . Findings about how US distraction leads states to cozy up/distance themselves from China
- Can use US withdrawal from Afghanistan and implications for US/China competition as an easy hook

Literature Review

1. Measure of US distraction – ?????
2. Measure of state preferences
 - Signorino S scores
 - Axelrod and Bennett
 - Gartzke UN voting S scores
 - Bailey, Voeten, Strezhnev ideal points
 - Gallop and Minhas
 - McManus and Neiman

Theoretical Intuition

US distraction, as measured by a larger share of resources and battle deaths in the Middle East, could be argued to have two divergent effects. On the one hand, we could think of US attention and resources as scarce, and the claim would be that while the US is distracted, say with a conflict in Afghanistan, they have less bandwidth and freedom of action to respond to a crisis in East Asia, we call this *the Distraction Model*. An alternative perspective relies on work that has been done on reputation and credibility, and this perspective argues that by spending blood and treasure in Iraq or Afghanistan, the United States demonstrates their resolve and willingness to spend blood and treasure elsewhere, we call this the *Credibility Model*.

Distraction Model

The basic insight of the Distraction Model is that both resources and attention are finite. The United States is a historically rich and powerful country, but that each successive conflict or intervention will have less resources, less oversight, and less political capital, and so all else being equal, the United States is less likely to get involved in a third (or fourth or tenth) conflict while it is, for example, involved in occupation and counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan. This has important implications for the behavior of third parties—if you are considering actions contrary to the interests of the United States, whether this be development of illicit weapons systems, invasion of a neighboring state, or simply a country choosing to align more closely with the US's strategic rivals, you are less likely to face consequences the more the United States is distracted. When applied to our measurement of state affinity, this naturally leads to our first hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: When the United States is more distracted, states will align more closely with the People's Republic of China.

Credibility Model

The second model draws on a long history of research about credibility and resolve. The basic idea behind this model is that we do not know a state's willingness to take costly actions (for example kinetic military actions or coercive economic measures) to achieve a given goal, because the ratio of the cost of these actions to their benefit is unobservable. However, we can make inferences about states' willingness to pursue costly actions using their past behavior—so if a state is willing to spend blood and treasure in one context, we should increase our belief that they are willing to do so in another context, and our measure of US distraction is also a measure of US demonstration of resolve. Now an important caveat here is that credibility and resolve are contextual: states are more willing to pay a high cost to avoid conquest by a genocidal tyrant than they would be to secure lower tariffs on agricultural goods. That being said, this leads us to a diametrically opposite view of how third parties will respond to our measure of US distraction. If the US demonstrates their willingness to bear heavy costs to achieve more congenial political outcomes in one context, we should update our belief about their willingness to bear costs in other contexts, leading to our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: When the US is more distracted, they will have demonstrated more resolve, and states will be less willing to align closely with the People's Republic of China.

Should we discuss our theory of heterogeneous effects here with its own hypothesis, or wait for the results section?

Methods

Measuring Distraction

We have developed a measure of US constraint / distraction to capture a variety of mechanisms that might limit US action. In broad terms, we believe (based on SME

input and prior research) that constraint is a function of three possible sources:

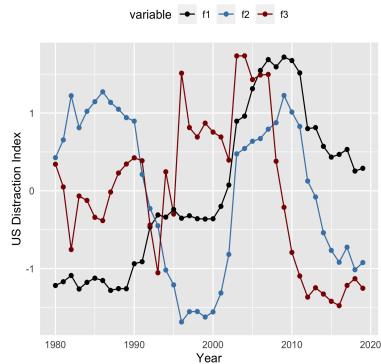
1. Active conflicts that the US is involved in with an emphasis on those conflicts that represent significant materiel commitment and US casualties
2. US force commitments around the globe
3. US political or economic distraction caused by either foreign or domestic shocks.

To population these categories, we relied on sixteen variables distributed across the following broader categories:

- Defense spending (World Bank, DoD)
- Troops levels, by region (DoD, Kane)
- US Casualties (DoD, Kane)
- Market Crises (Frieden Lake)
- Economic variables (Trading Economics)

The main source of constraint that is incomplete in the above is domestic political crises (i.e., apart from a response to economic shocks, which is captured). Prior work has shown that political crises of this sort are rare / not likely consequential (Frieden, et al., 2017), but we will add an improved measure if we continue the project. A simple latent variable model of the above variables produced three variables, representing active US conflicts, US defense spending / commitments, and the economy.

These latent variables define the level of US constraint; in what follows, we will however focus on the first two latent variables because they more narrowly affect the US (and not other members of our sample). [Go into more detail about the PCA, and add pictures.](#)



Measuring State Preference

An important component in understanding states' conflictual and cooperative behavior is to understand states affinity for each other, or the similarity of their preferences. When states have similar preferences on an issue, they will be more likely to collaborate to achieve their joint preference on that issue, and more generally states with similar foreign policy preferences will be cooperative in a larger proportion of their interactions. Unfortunately, while we have abundant data to measure the strength of states' economies, the volume of trade between states, or even their military power, it is much more difficult to measure the similarity of states' preferences, because as with many social and political constructs they cannot be observed directly.

Specifically, we argue that these relations between states constitute a multilayer network, in which the various layers correspond to different ways states are interacting with one another at a given time point. A bevy of research has shown that accounting for network structure necessitates an approach that can account for the indirect relations states share. As such we reformulated the problem of determining state preferences in terms of a network analysis. The goal of our approach is summarized in Figure 1. In the top row, we represent UN voting and alliance patterns at time t as a pair of adjacency matrices that form an evolving multiplex network. Our goal is to extract a lower dimensional representation of this system, such that the output is a series of $n \times$

n matrices, where n represents the number of actors and in which the cross-sections denote our estimates of the preference similarities between countries.

In particular here, we generate a measure of state affinity relying on two measures of economic cooperation, the volume of trade flows (as measured by the IMF), and states sharing formal economic agreements, as measured by the Design of Economic Agreements (DESTA) dataset. These form the links in our network of cooperation, which we use to estimate state affinity using the Latent Factor Model (?). The latent factor model is a network model that is designed to account for three different orders of interdependencies in relational data. First, it accounts for the tendency of some actors to trade more, and agree to more economic agreements by including sender and receiver random effects. Second it accounts for the fact that economic cooperation is often reciprocal in the composition of the error term. Finally, the area that sets the LFM apart from other network estimators is how it handles third order dependencies. Two particular types of third order dependencies which the LFM can handle are homophily – the tendency for actors that share an unobserved characteristic – to interact more with each other, and stochastic equivalence, the idea that actors which play similar roles in a network are more likely to cooperate with the same third party. The LFM handles these third order dependencies with a multiplicative random effect based on the Singular Value Decomposition.¹

¹This effect needs to be multiplicative because by multiplying random variables, we can preserve the third order residuals which would have 0 expectation if they were simply added.

$y_{ij} = f(\theta_{ij})$, where

$$\begin{aligned}\theta_{ij} &= \beta_d^\top \mathbf{X}_{ij} + \beta_s^\top \mathbf{X}_i + \beta_r^\top \mathbf{X}_j \\ &\quad + a_i + b_j + \epsilon_{ij} \\ &\quad + \mathbf{u}_i^\top \mathbf{D} \mathbf{v}_j\end{aligned}\tag{1}$$

$$\{(a_1, b_1), \dots, (a_n, b_n)\} \stackrel{\text{iid}}{\sim} N(0, \Sigma_{ab})$$

$$\{(\epsilon_{ij}, \epsilon_{ji}) : i \neq j\} \stackrel{\text{iid}}{\sim} N(0, \Sigma_\epsilon), \text{ where}\tag{2}$$

$$\Sigma_{ab} = \begin{pmatrix} \sigma_a^2 & \sigma_{ab} \\ \sigma_{ab} & \sigma_b^2 \end{pmatrix} \quad \Sigma_\epsilon = \sigma_\epsilon^2 \begin{pmatrix} 1 & \rho \\ \rho & 1 \end{pmatrix}$$

In particular, we argue that the $\mathbf{u}_i^\top \mathbf{D} \mathbf{v}_j$ term, which is included in the model to capture third order dependencies, also is useful for us as a measure of state affinity. So we run an LFM without covariates on the economic data, and then take this term for every pair of countries in every year, as a measure of those countries' affinity. **Something about how we handle time here. Also, some visualizations of country affinity score over time.**

Downstream Modeling

Data

- DV – closeness to china, Delta from previous year
- Controls – Polity, Population, Distance to Beijing, Bailey/Voeten/Strezhnev Ideal Point Distance, GDP

- Random Effects – by region
- Key IV: lagged measure of US distraction

Main Results

Heterogeneous Effect

Discussion

Look how much science we did, we in fact did a science!!!!