Data quality and data sets in the social sciences: thinking behind the scenes
Diplomatic practices at the UN Security Council

*Trump to Preside Over U.N. Security Council, Prompting Anxiety All Around*

In a visit to the United Nations General Assembly last year, President Trump did not appear to be concerned about bruising any feelings. Chang W. Lee/The New York Times
United Nations Security Council: diplomatic practices in international diplomacy

Five Permanent Members (« P5 »): China, France, Russian Federation, UK, & USA
Ten non-permanent members: Elected for 2 years by the UN General Assembly
An international, multi-disciplinary team working across political science, geography and critical security studies.
Web-based query tool

= > quickly and intuitively assemble sub-corpora of UNSC-debates, based on chosen metadata-filters
Transcripts are publicly-available but are difficult to analyse longitudinally
Making publicly-available data searchable

United Nations
Security Council
Seventeenth year
7365th meeting
Wednesday, 21 January 2015, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Barros Melet (Chile)

Members:
Angola ... Mr. Gasper Martins
Chad ... Mr. Mangaral
China ... Mr. Liu Jieyi
France ... Mr. Lamek
Jordan ... Mr. Hmoud
Lithuania ... Ms. Mursmakite
Malaysia ... Mr. Haniiff
New Zealand ... Mr. McLay
Nigeria ... Mr. Laro
Russian Federation ... Mr. Churkin
Spain ... Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland ... Sir Mark Lyall Grant
United States of America ... Ms. Power
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) ... Mr. Ramirez Carreno

Adoption of the agenda
The agenda was adopted.

Letter dated 20 February 2014 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2014/58)

The President (spokesperson) In accordance with rule 27 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Ukraine to participate in this meeting. In accordance with rule 39 of the Council’s provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Anthony Fisher, Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Fisher.

Mr. Fisher: Today I will briefly update the Council on developments related to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as on my own recent visit to the country, from 17 to 23 December 2014, in continuation of Mr. Richard Goldstone’s fact-finding mission on the situation in Donbas.

I would like to begin by clearly stating our alarm. Following weeks of relative calm, the Council meets today amid the worst conditions in eastern Ukraine in recent history, with civilians enduring a period of heightened violence.

I will be speaking to you about a series of recent events that have underscored the perilous situation in eastern Ukraine. In the period from 5 to 5 September, unacceptable levels of violence, including massive shelling and air attacks, have debilitated humanitarian infrastructure and killed hundreds of civilians.

While the heavy fighting of the past few days was initially concentrated around Donetsk airport, the number of dead and injured, including innocent civilians, is quickly rising elsewhere, as violence spreads throughout the region.

Civilians are being caught in the crossfire, including forcibly displaced persons and civilians in the city of Donetsk. The conflict is also reportedly taking place in small towns such as Kramatorsk, Debaltsevo, and Debaltsevo, and encircling areas that until recently have been relatively quiet. In another sign of escalation, militants of笠ers are reported on both sides, with the deployment of more sophisticated and heavier weapons.

On 13 January, as a direct result of the removal of the fighting, 17 civilians lost their lives and 37 were seriously wounded when their bus was hit in Volnovaky. The United Nations has no means of verifying the facts independently, but after observing the site three times and conducting some analysis, the mission team, the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, concluded that “the attack that caused casualties 1 and 37 had been fired from a north/south direction”.

The conflict has already claimed the lives of more than 3,000 people and left at least 5,000 people wounded.

As the Secretary-General noted, this incident, which must be thoroughly investigated and for which those responsible must be brought to justice, is a stark reminder of the urgent need to halt the violence.

Let me also say in these words on the humanitarian situation, which has deteriorated further as conflict has once again intensified. A country that until a year ago had a demographic population of some 15 million people now has at least 580,000 refugees displaced within its borders and over 1.1 million in neighboring States, according to Ukrainian sources.

Humanitarian actors must have access to do their life-saving work. All parties to the conflict have an obligation to guarantee that humanitarian access to all people in need, irrespective of where they are located, and that those affected by the conflict are not denied access to humanitarian assistance.

I am deeply concerned about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine and the of笠ersof civilian casualties and destruction.

The United Nations is committed to ensure that the humanitarian assistance is delivered in a safe and effective manner, and that our partners have the means to do so.

I will be continuing to seek opportunities to engage in dialogue with the parties to the conflict, including with the Russian Federation, and to work with them to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the population in eastern Ukraine are met.

Mr. Fisher: I also want to express our regret and concern at the recent incident in Volnovaky, which claimed the lives of at least 17 civilians and wounded 37 others. We extend our deepest condolences to the families of the victims and express our sympathy to those who were injured.

As we have repeatedly stated, the United Nations is committed to working closely with all parties to the conflict to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need. We urge all parties to the conflict to respect international law, including international humanitarian law, and to facilitate and ensure the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

We are deeply concerned about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in eastern Ukraine, with millions of people affected by the conflict and requiring urgent assistance. We call on all parties to the conflict to take immediate steps to de-escalate the situation and facilitate humanitarian access.

The United Nations will continue to work closely with all parties to the conflict to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need and that the protection of civilians is a top priority.

I would like to conclude by reiterating our commitment to work for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in eastern Ukraine, while recognizing the importance of ensuring that those affected by the conflict have access to the humanitarian assistance they need.

Thank you.
Building a database **UNSCdeb8** (« debate »!)
https://unscdeb8.ethz.ch/search/

- Using automated pdf file conversions
- Web-scraping
- Manual verification
- and endless, endless trouble-shooting & testing!
How to use UNSCdeb8

• It is a ‘specialized corpus’, i.e. assembled from a single and continuous source of documents
• It allows comparisons over time, particularly of the P5 countries
• It can be used in tandem with corpus-linguistic analysis software such as Antconc or Wordsmith, for example to:
  • Calculate the most statistically significant key-words that differentiate the members of the UNSC
  • Examine how the discourse of a particular UNSC member evolves over time or changes with regard to specific thematic issues
  • Trace subtle discursive changes within a particular member state’s outlook on a particular crisis
Working through case studies

Example: the conflict in Ukraine from 2014
But what about the data behind the scene?

Diplomacy as performance

“We use many beautiful words about the need to peacefully settle political crises (...). However, after discussing Ukraine here about 30 times, the question arises as to how well-aligned the declarations are with the situation in the country. Are they directly applicable, or are they provided just for the sake of eloquence?”

Data quality and data sets in the social sciences

- Processes and debates surrounding the design of a large database shed light on what quality might mean in the social sciences.
- Data quality control & future use: Who is (legally) responsible if this database is used by others & comes up with wrong results?
- Even assuming high data quality, a lot simply cannot be captured by this type of data that appears to capture complex social and political processes.
- Despite successfully building a unique and powerful database, a number of crucial epistemological issues remain.
Are we just being hypnotised by the tool?
Behind the scenes is where the fun takes place!

• What can we say with this tool, what cannot be grasped?
• Is it just a glorified index & search tool?
• What happened before & after these speeches including closed-door preparatory meetings and behind-the-scenes negotiations?
• Can a corpus assembled partly through language translation be used for corpus analytics?
  • Example: Translating Chinese terms (“community”), culturally-situated use of first-person etc.
• Are we missing or forgetting crucial qualitative data just because it is not available?
• How can fieldwork (observations & interviews) help complicate the story?
• How do bodies perform discourse and how can that be captured?
• How can bodily reactions from others be understood?
Thinking data behind the scenes

The challenges of capturing the complexity of social and political interactions in diplomatic discourse