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## How Guyana's Oil Discovery Rekindled a Border Controversy

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1 **Introduction**

2 For much of Guyana’s history, it appeared as though the presence of oil in commercial  
3 quantities would defy Tobler’s first law of geography, “*everything is related to everything else, but near things*  
4 *are more related than distant things*” (Tobler 1970: 236). The agonizing question for Guyana appeared to  
5 be how close in space it needed to be to Venezuela, and its oil-producing neighbors, before it could  
6 attain the status of being an international oil producer. Thus, when Exxon Mobil announced on May  
7 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 that it had found oil (ExxonMobil 2015) in commercial quantities (Krauss 2017) in the  
8 Stabroek Block 190 kilometers off the Guyanese coastline, Guyana was finally close enough its oil-  
9 producing neighbors to become Latin America’s next oil exporter. Guyana greeted oil discovery with  
10 euphoria, but the opposite reaction emanated from Venezuela. Guyana shares a long-standing  
11 border controversy with Venezuela (Clegg 2014), and the news on Guyana’s oil find triggered  
12 Caracas to immediately issue a decree renewing its claim to the Essequibo (Stabroeknews 2015).

13  
14 In reality, the border controversy between Guyana and Venezuela dates back to the late  
15 1400s (see Braveboy-Wagner 1984 for an overview). An 1899 arbitration agreement (hereafter  
16 arbitral award) established the boundaries of British Guiana and Venezuela (see Braveboy-Wagner  
17 1984; Mohabir 2015). Scholars, including Manley (1979), Braveboy-Wagner (1984), Clegg (2014),  
18 and Bons (2015), have provided details of the arbitral award, its historical context, and modern-day  
19 status. In essence, Venezuela claims all of the land west of the Essequibo River (Clegg 2014: 402) or  
20 between two-thirds to five-eighths of Guyana’s territory (Braveboy-Wagner 1984; Griffith 2011: 22,  
21 see Ramraj 1989:54 and Connett 2015 for maps of the disputed territory). The arbitral award granted  
22 5000 square miles of land and the Orinoco River to Venezuela (Braveboy-Wagner, 1984), but denied  
23 Venezuela’s request that the Essequibo River be the boundary between the two countries (Manley  
24 1979). In 1962 as Guyana moved towards independence from Britain, Venezuela expressed its

25 displeasure over the arbitral award and notified the United Nations that it no longer accepted the  
26 findings of the tribunal. Venezuela began claiming the Essequibo (see Manley 1979; Braveboy-  
27 Wagner 1984; Mohabir 2015) or Guayana Esequiba or *la Zona en Reclamación* (Griffith 2001:22) as it  
28 is referred to in Venezuela (Braveboy-Wagner 1984), giving rise to the modern-day controversy.

29

30 Over the years, the contention over the Guyana-Venezuela border has been given fuel by the  
31 internal politics of both countries (see Jagan 1968; Braveboy-Wagner 1984). Since the issuance of the  
32 arbitral award, the tone and tenor of relations between the two countries have fluctuated (see Jagan  
33 1968; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1981), with the issue used as a tool to gain internal political leverage.  
34 In fact, Jagan (1964:29) argued that the border controversy had been kept alive by both countries for  
35 three main reasons: as a diversion tactic, to intimidate its neighbors or to justify militarization. The  
36 wranglings over the border have led to the loss of economic opportunities within the Essequibo with  
37 direct impacts on Guyana's development (see Domínguez 2003; Simmons 2005; 2006). Simmons  
38 (2005: 269) estimated that the cumulative trade lost as a result of the Guyana-Venezuela border  
39 controversy was USD 603.8 million for the period 1967-2000. In fact, both Domínguez (2003) and  
40 Serbin (2001) asserted that the former U.S. firm, Beal Aerospace Technologies, canceled its planned  
41 development of a rocket launching site on Guyana's sparsely populated northeastern coastline because  
42 of the controversy. While the true economic cost of Beal's withdrawal remains unknown, the fact that  
43 the Essequibo hosts a wealth of minerals, timber, and oil (Griffith 2001: 22), along with the internal  
44 politics of both states, have helped to keep the controversy alive (see Braveboy-Wagner 1984). Yet,  
45 these historical wranglings and tensions occurred with the potential of finding oil in the region.  
46 ExxonMobil's announcement, therefore, was bound to change the trajectory of Guyana -Venezuela  
47 relations.

48           Whether the presence of oil triggers war between nation-states remains a moot topic (see for  
49   example Lujala, Rod, and Sagely 2007; Klare 2012; Colgan 2013b; Wegensast 2015; Meierding 2016;  
50   Crooks and Schipani 2017). Nevertheless, a large body of evidence points to the presence of oil  
51   increasing tensions, and even triggering armed conflict around the national borders of oil-producing  
52   nation-states (see Shankleman 2006; Colgan 2013). In Africa, for example, Nigeria and Cameroon  
53   fought over the sovereignty of the oil-rich Bakassi peninsula in the 1990's (Konings 2005). In Asia,  
54   the Tiaoyu/Senkaka Islands and the oil deposits of the region, has brought China and Japan into  
55   dispute since the 1970's (Su 2005; Scoville 2013). Similarly, in Latin America, the Chaco war of the  
56   1930s between Bolivia and Paraguay had at its core sovereignty over the oil-rich Chaco Boreal (see  
57   Larden 1934; but see Meierding 2016 for an alternative view). Beyond conflict between nation-states,  
58   oil has also triggered internal conflict and change, including movements away from diplomatic  
59   norms within the political landscapes of nation-states and reduced development performance,  
60   including leading to the resource curse (see McSherry 2006). Further, Appel (2012) suggested that oil  
61   production can create an alternative reality for oil producing nation-states. In the case of Equatorial  
62   Guinea, with its oil production facilities located offshore, the capital that gets oil to the market can  
63   ‘appear removed from local entanglements,’ (Appel 2012; 692). Such removal of contact with local  
64   realities is a deliberate ploy by oil companies to escape their developmental-related obligations within  
65   their host nations (see Appel 2012).

66

67           In Latin America, tensions have historically existed along the region's borders, and these  
68   have triggered militarized crises and war preparations (see Kacowicz 1998; Miller 2007; Battaglino  
69   2012). While these tensions are dynamic and ongoing, Bons (2015) developed a classification  
70   scheme, utilizing a spectrum of temperatures - cold, cool, tepid, warm, slow boil, and hot - with the  
71   extremes representing the lowest and highest levels of tensions that provide insights into the status

72 of these conflicts. In the case of the Guyana-Venezuela border, Bons (2015) declared that the status  
73 was tepid. While this classification places a static measure on a volatile and dynamic reality, it  
74 nonetheless provides a lens for understanding the nature of relations between the two countries at  
75 the time of Bons (2015) writing. Missing from Bons (2015) classification was how Guyana's oil  
76 discovery impacted the status of the Guyana -Venezuela border controversy. On the backdrop of  
77 the ongoing debate in the literature as to whether oil triggers conflict between nation-states and the  
78 evidence that oil influences the nature of relations around borders, I track how the discovery of oil  
79 by Guyana influenced its relationship with Venezuela.

80

81 In this paper, I posit that the discovery of oil by Guyana disrupted the tepid status of the  
82 border controversy with Venezuela and allowed for the historic wranglings over the Essequibo to re-  
83 emerge. This paper pursued two primary research questions to understand how oil discovery  
84 impacted the status of the border controversy. First, what was the nature of relations between  
85 Guyana and Venezuela over the period January 2009 to December 2017? Second, how did the  
86 discovery of oil by Guyana impact the status of the border controversy as described by Bons (2015),  
87 and was the border controversy used as a 'tool' by Venezuela to divert attention away from its  
88 internal political crises? Two primary objectives were addressed to provide insights into the research  
89 questions. In the first objective, I provide a descriptive analysis of the nature of relations between  
90 Guyana and Venezuela, as portrayed through the text of a Guyana-based newspaper. In the second  
91 objective, I use the status of the border controversy, as depicted through the newspaper archives, to  
92 identify the moments changes occurred in the relations between the two countries relative to Bons  
93 (2015) classification.

94

95

## 96 **Methods**

### 97 **Study Area: Guyana and Venezuela**

98 The study area (Figure 1) is located in northeastern South America. Guyana is South America's  
99 only English speaking nation and, up to this point in its history, an oil importer. In fact, for much of  
100 its history, the former British colony has been in search for oil within its terrestrial spaces (see  
101 example in Figure 2). Various companies, including Hunt Oil of Texas, have explored for oil in  
102 commercial quantities in Guyana (Oil and Gas Journal 1990; Braveboy-Wagner 1984). Venezuela, on  
103 the other hand, is one of nine Spanish-speaking nations in South America and is one of the world's  
104 largest oil producers (EIA 2016). Despite the recent political unrest, Venezuela remains a major  
105 petroleum reserve. Culturally, Venezuela is firmly aligned with Latin America, while Guyana, with its  
106 Anglophone history, aligns with the English-speaking nation-states of the Caribbean Sea. In fact,  
107 Guyana is a founding member state of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), a regional trading  
108 and economic block. Despite the cultural differences between the two countries, Guyana and  
109 Venezuela have developed trade agreements, including for oil at concessionary rates (see Clegg  
110 2014). Guyana also ships paddy (the raw product for rice) to Venezuela (Clegg 2014). Despite the  
111 cultural differences between the two countries, people have historically moved across the border. In  
112 the 1970s, for example, severe economic hardships ensued when Guyana adopted strong  
113 nationalistic policies and the border controversy used to insight national unity, with food production  
114 and self-sustainability central to its domestic landscape (Braveboy-Wagner 1984). Guyana's  
115 nationalistic policies led to food shortages, and by the early 1980s products such as milk and flour  
116 were being illegally imported from Venezuela. Trading in food and other commodities continued  
117 until the late 1980s to early 1990s when policy changes in Guyana led to a more open trading  
118 posture. However, the economic difficulties during Guyana's nationalistic period led many Guyanese  
119 to migrate to Venezuela for a better standard of living. Interestingly, as the Maduro administration



122 Figure 2: Oil exploration equipment leaving the Rupununi, Southern Guyana, in 2010 after another  
123 failed oil exploration venture.



130

131  
132 maneuvered to hold on to power in Venezuela over the past five years or so, the resulting political  
133 and economic crises have led to Venezuelans moving to Guyana for food and health care services  
134 (Stabroeknews 2018), a reversal of the situation seen in the 1980s and 1990s.

135  
136 **Data Source**

137 To address the paper’s primary objectives, I use discourse and content analyses methods (see  
138 Markula and Silk 2011). As an analytical method, discourse analysis examines and assess a variety of  
139 topics (see Chiapello and Fairclough 2002; Reed 2000), including the portrayal of power structure and  
140 politics. Reed (2000: 525), in pointing out the limitations of discourse analysis noted that “reality is  
141 “talked and texted” into existence. Further, discourse analysis tends to “idealize meaning and  
142 marginalize the non-semantic aspects of economic and political reality” (Reed 2000: 525). With this  
143 particular weakness in mind, the paper utilized the archives of the Guyana-based newspaper, the  
144 Guyana Chronicle, as the discourse to assess the reports published as a means to conceptualize the  
145 relationship between Guyana and Venezuela. Content analysis techniques were used to search the



146 archives to develop the outlines of this relationship. The online archives of the Guyana Chronicle, one  
147 of Guyana’s oldest news sources, were used to understand the primary events that shaped the  
148 relationship between the two countries and how this changed over time. The Guyana Chronicle is  
149 recognized as a state news agency, providing a space for the government of the day to channel  
150 newsworthy items, such as the border controversy with national-level importance, which privately-  
151 owned news organizations might not cover. However, the reader should note that the Chronicle may  
152 be perceived differently by citizens of Guyana with opposing political views.

153

### 154 **The Archives and Its Contents**

155 A quantitative content analysis (Neuendorf 2002) search on the archives available at  
156 <http://guyanachronicle.com/archives>) was used to uncover the nature of the interactions between  
157 Guyana and Venezuela. The keyword “Venezuela” was used to identify reports for the period from  
158 January 1<sup>st</sup> 2009 to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017. The date Guyana discovered oil, May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015, was used as  
159 a point to divide the archives into pre-oil discovery and post-oil discovery periods. The two periods  
160 cover the timeframe from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009 to May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015 to December 31<sup>st</sup>,  
161 2017, respectively, and were used to gauge how the relationship between the two countries changed.

162

163 Archival searches returned a wide variety of pieces, including coverage of sports and similar  
164 events. For this analysis, I only used reports that included some aspect of the relationship between the  
165 two countries or contained commentary on the socio-economic and political situation in Venezuela.  
166 Among the reports returned from the search were editorials, news reports, and letters to the editor.  
167 As the goal of the paper was to track the changes in the trajectory of relations between the two  
168 countries, each report type was given equal value, regardless of its author. A qualitative assessment  
169 was completed on the contents of each report to allow for its placement into one of 21 thematic

170 classes (Table 1). Thematic classes were used to understand and track how the nature of relations  
171 between the two countries shifted and quantify which issue (s) was more prominent over time.

172  
173 Thematic classes, therefore, covered a range of socio-economic issues, including trade, the  
174 border controversy and natural disasters (see Table 1) that was covered by each report or was the  
175 report's central organizing point. Each theme is mutually exclusive, with the frequency of occurrence  
176 of each class tracked on a daily and then monthly basis. The frequency of occurrence of each class  
177 was aggregated to the level of the year, except for May 2015, when the month was divided into two  
178 parts for the pre- and post- oil discovery periods. The frequency of occurrence of each theme and, in  
179 particular, the 'border controversy' was used to determine how the nature of relations between the  
180 two countries changed over time, relative to Bons (2015) classification of the border status. The  
181 analysis ascribed a temperature classification to periods in the archives based on the frequency of  
182 occurrence of the border controversy between the two states. Periods with higher frequencies were  
183 classified as warmer, and those with fewer reports as cooler. The changing relationship between the  
184 two states was gauged through the top five most frequently occurring themes.

185  
186 [Table 1 about here]

## 187 188 **Results**

### 189 **Overview of the Nature of Guyana-Venezuela Interactions**

190 The archives contain 392 reports with the keyword "Venezuela." Of these reports, eleven  
191 are letters to the editor, with the remainder news articles or editorials, with 58% published in the  
192 post-oil discovery period. Overall, 37% of reports referred to the border controversy. The ongoing  
193 political and economic crises in Venezuela ranked second (17%), followed by trade between the two

194 countries (12%). The proportion of the archives each theme represented, both before and after the  
195 discovery of oil in Guyana, is provided in Figure 3, with the most dominant themes provided in  
196 Tables 2 and 3.

197

198           Among the 163 reports published in the pre-oil discovery period, nineteen themes (see Table  
199 1) were represented (see Figure 3a). Of these, trade, diplomacy, border controversy, crime, and  
200 illegal entry to Guyana by Venezuelans had the highest frequency, in this order (Table 2). Trade,  
201 driven primarily by agreements for the sale of Guyanese rice to Venezuela, and the import of  
202 Venezuelan fertilizer and fuel into Guyana were the issues that dominated this period. A few points  
203 stood out in the interactions between the two countries during the pre-oil discovery period. First, in  
204 the area of diplomacy, on August 31st, 2013, President Nicholas Maduro made a state visit to  
205 Guyana (Guyana Chronicle 2013a). A key point of Maduro’s visit was a joint press conference at  
206 which he and his Guyanese counterpart, Donald Ramotar, expressed their opposition to a proposed  
207 US attack on Syria. Secondly, on the occasion of the passing of former President Hugo Chavez, the  
208 Guyanese Minister of Foreign Affairs was quoted as saying, “I have absolutely no doubt in my mind  
209 that our

210

211

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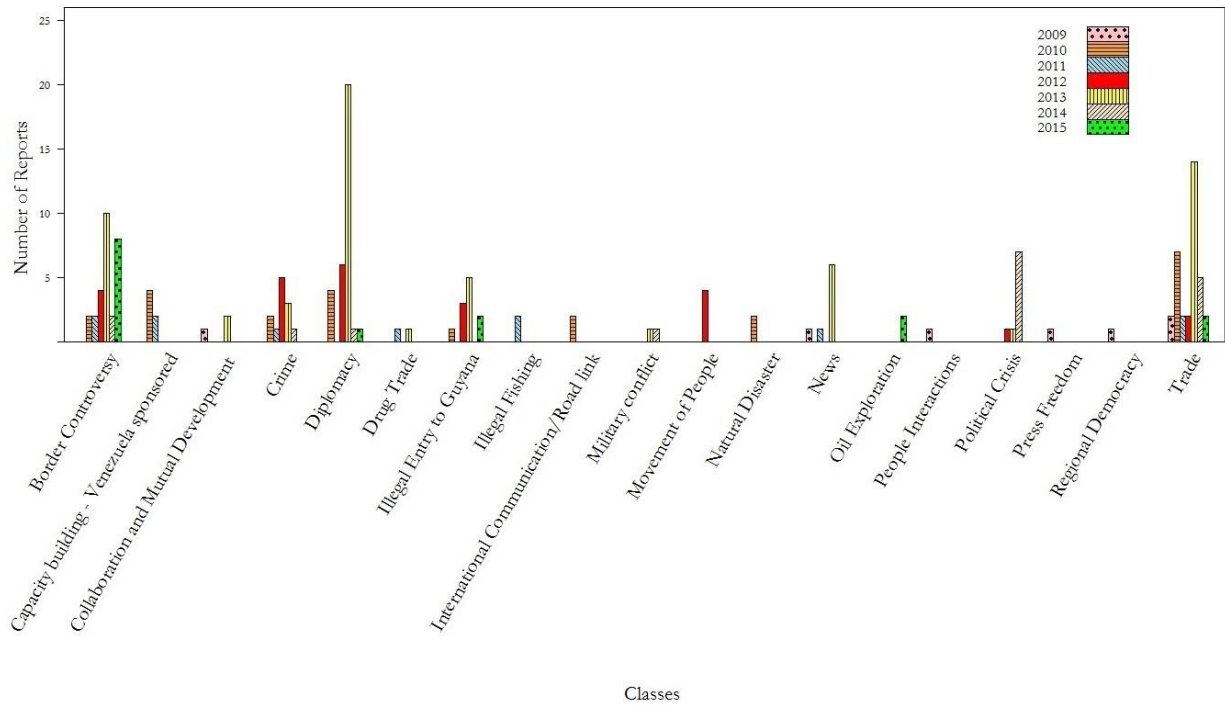
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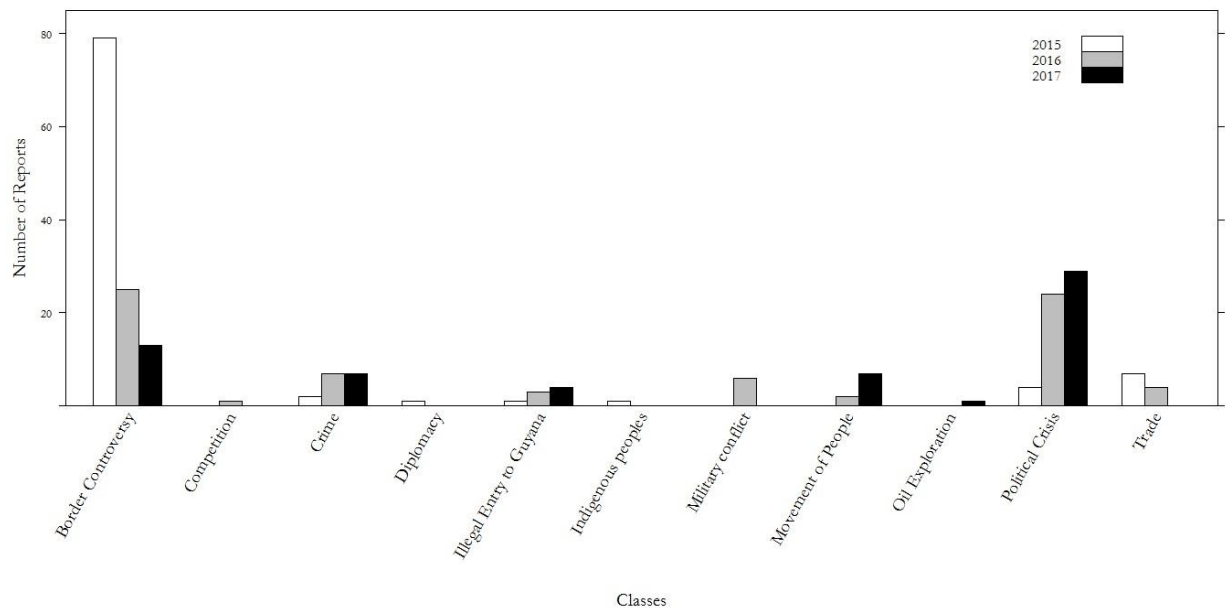
217

218 Figure 3a: The frequency of reports on the various thematic classes in the pre-oil discovery period.



219

220 Figure 3b: The frequency of reports on the various thematic classes in the post-oil discovery period.



221

222 relations with Venezuela under President Maduro would continue to flourish...but Guyana is willing

223 to work with any Government of Venezuela for the advancement of our two peoples," (Guyana

224 Chronicle 2013b). Thirdly, as Venezuela celebrated its 202nd anniversary of Independence, the  
225 Prime Minister of Guyana, Mr. Samuel Hinds, attended the celebrations in Georgetown. The  
226 newspaper headline covering the event, “Guyana remains committed to maintaining its strong  
227 relationship with Venezuela ...PM at country’s 202nd Independence Day observance” (Guyana  
228 Chronicle 2013c) suggested friendly relations between the two countries. This period also included  
229 reports on plans to develop a road link between Guyana and Venezuela (Guyana Chronicle 2013d).  
230 Overall, therefore, the pre-oil period saw generally good relations between the two countries. There  
231 were twelve reports on crime during this period, with reports in each year except 2009 and the pre-  
232 oil discovery period of 2015. In three of these reports, Venezuelans were arrested in Guyana for  
233 ammunition smuggling or possession (e.g., Guyana Chronicle 2010a), while a Guyanese miner was  
234 shot and killed in Venezuela (Guyana Chronicle 2011). There were nine reports on illegal entry of  
235 Venezuelans into Guyana, with many appearing before the courts for deportation hearings.

236

237 [Table 2 about here]

238

239 The post-oil discovery period, in contrast, saw a noticeable shift in relations between the two  
240 countries, moving from friendly to hostile. While nineteen thematic classes covered reports in the  
241 pre-oil discovery period, the post-oil discovery period covered only eleven (11) classes (Figure 3b).  
242 The border controversy dominated the post-oil discovery period (Table 3), accounting for 56% of all  
243 reports. Two of the top five themes in the pre-oil discovery period, diplomacy and illegal entry to  
244 Guyana, was replaced by the political crisis in Venezuela and the movement of people into Guyana  
245 on humanitarian grounds in the post-oil discovery period (Table 3; Figure 3b). Crime remained a  
246 prominent issue in the post-oil discovery period, ranking third (Table 3), as it did in the pre-oil  
247 discovery period. Illegal possession of guns and ammunition remained an important crime in this

248 period, as were the robbery and murder of Guyanese gold miners by Venezuelans (e.g., Guyana  
249 Chronicle 2017a).

250

251 [Table 3 about here]

252

### 253 **Moments of Change in the Border Controversy**

254 Across the pre-and post-oil discovery periods, some moments of change in the relations  
255 between Guyana and Venezuela were evident based on the frequency of reports on the border  
256 controversy. These moments are described below, relative to Bons (2015) classification of border  
257 status across Latin America.

258

#### 259 *The Cool Moments: 2009 – 2012*

260 The border controversy first received attention in the archives in March 2010 (see Table 2).  
261 One report, a news item (Guyana Chronicle 2010b), noted that the United Nations had appointed a  
262 new Good Officer to deal with the Guyana-Venezuela controversy. As if to hint that the  
263 government was making plans for oil exploration, one of the two reports published in 2011 (Guyana  
264 Chronicle 2011), noted that Guyana had applied to the Commission on the Limits of the  
265 Continental Shelf (CLCS) to extend its continental shelf. In response, Venezuela pointed out that it  
266 was not informed of Guyana's intent to apply to the CLCS, a claim that Guyana refuted. Four  
267 reports published in 2012 made reference to the border controversy, including one that attempted to  
268 place in the public domain Guyana's position that the controversy was a settled matter (Guyana  
269 Chronicle 2012a). However, towards the end of this period, it was evident that the cool and friendly  
270 relations between the two states were not sustainable. Indeed, two reports in 2012 suggested that  
271 Venezuela was unhappy with Guyana's oil exploration efforts (Guyana Chronicle 2012b; Ellsworth,

272 2012). Ellsworth (2012), in a Reuters report carried in the Chronicle, suggested that the Venezuelan  
273 opposition had accused their government of turning a blind eye to Guyana's oil exploration activities  
274 in the Essequibo. The second report (Guyana Chronicle 2012c) suggested that internal Venezuelan  
275 politics were driving their response to Guyana's oil exploration activities while suggesting that  
276 Guyanese politicians needed to remain unified in responding to Venezuela's threats.

277

278 *The Tepid Moments: 2013 - May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015*

279         Prior to Guyana announcing that it had discovered oil in May 2015, the archives suggest  
280 increasing tensions between the two countries. Between 2013 and 2014 there were twelve reports on  
281 the border controversy. This period was perhaps best defined on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 when the  
282 Venezuelan Navy ship, Yekuana, evicted an oil exploration vessel - RV Teknik Perdana - operated  
283 by United States-based Anadarko Petroleum from Guyana or Venezuela waters (Guyana Chronicle  
284 2013e). Eight of the ten reports published in 2013 reacted to the evicted exploration vessel. But RV  
285 Teknik Perdana eviction went against the flow of relations between the two countries, coming  
286 immediately after the state visit by President Maduro. During his visit to Georgetown, Maduro had  
287 declared that the border controversy was "a legacy of colonialism" that required diplomacy to be  
288 resolved (Guyana Chronicle 2013f). In response to RV Teknik Perdana's eviction, reports in 2014  
289 aimed at reducing tensions created by this incident. Efforts to reduce tensions included the  
290 Guyanese Minister of Foreign Affairs discussing the controversy with the UN Secretary-General  
291 (Guyana Chronicle 2014a). However, the diplomatic efforts from Guyana appeared to contradict the  
292 actions of Venezuela, with the Guyana Defense Force reporting an investigation into a clash  
293 between Venezuelan soldiers and Guyanese civilians within Guyana's territory (Guyana Chronicle  
294 2014b).

295

296           There were eight reports on the border controversy in 2015 before ExxonMobil's  
297 announcement of finding oil. Among the five reports published in March, was an analysis by  
298 journalist Rickey Singh (Guyana Chronicle 2015a) on the implications of Venezuela's actions for  
299 relations between the two countries. Singh noted that under President Chavez, and indeed during  
300 the early periods of Maduro's tenure, relations between Guyana and Venezuela could be described  
301 as 'friendly.' Once oil exploration began, however, Singh suggested that Maduro maintained public  
302 silence and avoided friendship gestures towards Guyana (Guyana Chronicle 2015a). Following  
303 Singh's analysis, the official Government of Guyana spokesperson, Roger Luncheon, suggested that  
304 there was a need for a diplomatic solution to the border dispute (Guyana Chronicle 2015b, c).

305

306           In March 2015, Guyana's Minister of Foreign Affairs accused Caracas of attempting to  
307 stymie Guyana's development (Guyana Chronicle 2015d). Perhaps the most consequential report of  
308 2015, before ExxonMobil's announcement of finding oil, was that the Government of Venezuela  
309 had written to ExxonMobil's CEO Jeff Simon. In the letter, Caracas asserted that it would not  
310 accept "the raid" or any interference from any transnational company in sovereign affairs,  
311 particularly those related to the territorial dispute between Guyana and itself (Guyana Chronicle  
312 2015e).

313

314 *A Warmer Period: May 20<sup>th</sup> – December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015*

315           ExxonMobil's announcement that it had discovered oil in Guyana's territory (ExxonMobil  
316 2015) came just after Guyana's general elections on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The elections produced a new  
317 government, with the Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change collation, led by David  
318 Granger, replacing the Donald Ramotar-led People's Progressive Party/Civic government. Seven  
319 days after ExxonMobil's announcement, Venezuelan President Maduro issued decree 1787, creating



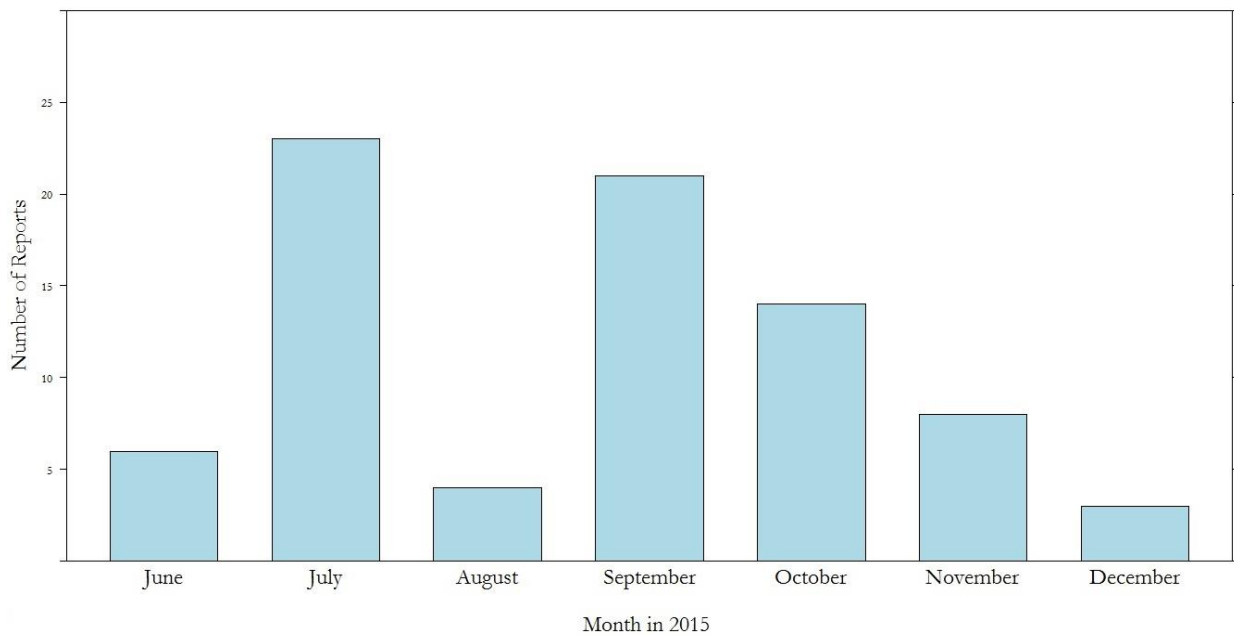
320 the Atlantic coast of Venezuela (Mohabir 2015). Under the decree, Maduro declared sovereignty  
321 over Guyana's territorial waters in the Atlantic Ocean off the Essequibo and attempted to block  
322 Guyana's access to the area in which oil was found (Mohabir 2015).

323

324 The initial decree from President Maduro did not gain traction in the archives until June 8th,  
325 2015 (Mohabir 2015). However, by the time decree 1787 could be absorbed, Maduro issued a  
326 second decree (1859), on July 6th, 2015 (Wills 2015) because Venezuela's State Council to the  
327 Supreme Tribunal of Justice (TSJ) raised concerns on the scope of the first decree. The new decree,  
328 according to the State-sponsored Venezolano de Television [VTV Channel 8 in Venezuela], had  
329 provided maritime coordinates of the territorial limits of the country (Wills 2015). Further, through  
330 the second decree, Maduro provided authority to the Bolivarian National Armed Force (FANB) to  
331 operate in defense of maritime claims to the Counties of Essequibo and Demerara. The second  
332 decree obtained a high level of attention for the border controversy in the archives (see Figure 4).

333

334 Figure 4: The frequency of reports published on the border controversy in the 2015 post-oil  
335 discovery period.



336 From the time Guyana’s oil discovery was announced in May 2015 to December 2015, there  
337 was a 200 % increase in the number of reports on the border controversy relative to the pre-oil  
338 discovery period (see Table 3). The highest number of reports were in July (23), the second highest  
339 in September (22), declining to three in December (Figure 4). In June 2015 the reports covered a  
340 range of response to the decree, including Guyanese protesting the actions of Venezuela at the  
341 Embassy in Georgetown (Guyana Chronicle 2015f), to Guyanese foreign affairs experts arguing that  
342 Venezuela violated International Law (Guyana Chronicle 2015g). Following the protests of citizens  
343 in Georgetown, in July 2015, President Granger either traveled overseas or consulted foreign  
344 missions in Georgetown, to register Guyana’s objections to Venezuela’s actions (see Guyana  
345 Chronicle 2015h, i,j). In response to Granger’s outreach, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago  
346 and members of CARICOM offered their support for Guyana.  
347

348 Trade in rice was an immediate casualty of the increasing tensions over Guyana's oil  
349 discovery (Guyana Chronicle 2015k), and diplomacy was no longer among the top 5 themes (Table  
350 3). But perhaps the most consequential report during this moment came from Venezuela. The  
351 Venezuelan opposition suggested that President Maduro was using the controversy to divert  
352 attention from the ongoing political and economic crisis in his country (Guyana Chronicle 2015l). In  
353 July and August 2015, the United Nations was more actively involved in resolving the matter, with  
354 Granger meeting a United Nations team (Guyana Chronicle 2015m).

355

356 Despite the involvement of the United Nations, however, by September 2015 the archives  
357 suggest that Venezuela had embarked on "extraordinary military deployments" in border regions,  
358 with guns and missions moving closer to Guyana (Guyana Chronicle 2015n, o). In response, the  
359 Guyanese government urged calm and alertness but pointed out that it had no intention of sending  
360 troops to the border (Guyana Chronicle 2015o). In fact, the activities of the Venezuelan military led  
361 to a rare moment of national unity in Guyana, where the opposition leader, Bharat Jagdeo, noted  
362 that he endorsed the idea of the government talking to Venezuela (Guyana Chronicle 2015p).  
363 Meanwhile, the Granger administration actively pursued the support of China, Cuba, and India. In a  
364 sign that tensions were beginning to wane, Presidents David Granger and Nicolas Maduro met with  
365 the UN Secretary General in New York in September 2015 (Guyana Chronicle 2015q).

366

367 As a consequence of the meeting between Granger and Maduro, Venezuela agreed to accept  
368 Guyana's ambassador to Caracas, to send back the ambassador recalled in July to Georgetown  
369 (Reuters 2015), and to scale back the military presence on the border. On September 25th, Guyana  
370 raised the concern that there was a "threat of war" with Venezuela over the border controversy and  
371 oil (Guyana Chronicle 2015r). In addition, Guyana suggested that the Venezuelan claim must go to

372 the UN Security Council while at the same time Granger called on the UN to protect small states.  
373 Mirroring protest actions in Georgetown, US-based Guyanese mounted a protest of Venezuela's  
374 actions at the United Nations in New York (Guyana Chronicle 2015s) in September.

375

376 In October 2015, two of the nations involved in the 1899 arbitral agreement, the United  
377 Kingdom and the United States, asked that the instrument be respected. The US urged the two  
378 countries to pursue diplomatic solutions, while the UK reaffirmed that the arbitral award was final  
379 (Guyana Chronicle 2015t). The UN Secretary General and team visited Guyana in October, while  
380 the Guyanese opposition leader, Bharat Jagdeo, suggested that Guyana should compromise with  
381 Venezuela and cede some maritime space (Guyana Chronicle 2015u). Not surprisingly, Jagdeo's idea  
382 was not well received by Granger, who noted that Guyana was not ready to give up any of its  
383 territory (Guyana Chronicle 2015v).

384

385 By November 2015 a Guyanese ambassador was headed to Caracas, but this sign of  
386 improving relations was complicated by Maduro asking the US not to meddle in relations with its  
387 neighbor (Guyana Chronicle 2015w). In November too, the former Guyanese Ambassador to the  
388 U.S., Odeen Ishmael, urged Guyana to build a strong relationship with the Saudis, so as to gain an  
389 ally in the petroleum world, while urging the leadership of the Union of South American Nations  
390 (UNASUR) to speak out against Venezuela's actions (Guyana Chronicle 2015 x, y). December saw  
391 some return of tensions at the border, with a Venezuelan helicopter landing in the indigenous  
392 Guyanese village of Kaikan (Guyana Chronicle 2015z). Concurrent to these developments, the  
393 Venezuelan opposition was reported to be open to the idea of seeking peace with Guyana (Guyana  
394 Chronicle 2015aa). Despite the signs towards improving relations and decreased tensions, Guyana's

395 President expressed skepticism on its success, noting “I wouldn’t hold my breath” to Venezuela  
396 agreeing to a judicial settlement with Guyana (Guyana Chronicle 2015ac).

397

398 *Tepidity Returns: 2016 - 2017*

399 While there were twenty-five reports on the border controversy in 2016 (Table 3), the year  
400 saw a general de-escalation of tensions between the two states. A general theme for 2016 was that  
401 Guyana continued to seek support from the United Nations to resolve its position through the  
402 Good Officer process. The Government of Guyana expressed the hope that the issue would go to  
403 the international court in four months (Guyana Chronicle 2016a). The Venezuelan opposition, in  
404 contrast to its government, reportedly expressed a desire to pursue mediation with Guyana (Guyana  
405 Chronicle 2016b). As these reports unfolded, the Guyanese president urged his citizens to remain in  
406 solidarity against Venezuela’s threats (Guyana Chronicle 2016c). Even though the Guyanese  
407 Ambassador traveled to Caracas in November 2015, it was not until February 2016 that  
408 accreditation was received (Guyana Chronicle 2016d). Trade unions in Georgetown marched  
409 through the streets to protest Venezuela’s actions on the border in February while delivering a  
410 “Peace Declaration” to Venezuela’s Ambassador to Guyana, Margarita Reina Arratia Diaz (Guyana  
411 Chronicle 2016e). By the end of 2016, Guyana’s opposition leader pledged to support Guyana’s  
412 stance on Venezuela (Guyana Chronicle 2016f).

413

414 In 2017, Venezuela’s actions at the border had noticeably reduce. The dominant theme of  
415 2017 was that the United Nations was continuing to engage Guyana and Venezuela through the UN  
416 Good Offices process (Guyana Chronicle 2017b). One report suggested that the Government of  
417 Guyana was planning to include the Guyana-Venezuela controversy as a part of schools’ curriculum  
418 (Guyana Chronicle 2017c). To engage the public on the issue, the Government of Guyana embarked

419 on “Action Stand Up,” an initiative aimed at urging citizens to respond in unity to Venezuela’s  
420 actions (Guyana Chronicle 2017d). By the end of December 2017, Guyana and Venezuela had re-  
421 affirmed their commitment to the UN Good Offices processes (Guyana Chronicle 2017e).

422

### 423 **The Rising Tide and Its Spill Over Effects: Political Crises**

424 As the two states squabbled over the border, the political and economic crises in Venezuela  
425 deepen. The ‘political crises,’ (see Table 1), began to gain attention in the archives in June 2012  
426 (Guyana Chronicle 2012b). Reports on the crises appeared throughout the years, but it was not until  
427 January 2016 that the subject began to gain consistent traction (see Table 2; Guyana Chronicle  
428 2016g). The frequency of reports on the political crises was not on the same scale as those on the  
429 border controversy. In fact, the coverage of the two themes had an almost inverse relationship (see  
430 Figure 3b; Tables 2 and 3).

431

432 As a consequence of the deepening political and economic tensions, a number of  
433 Venezuelans moved to Guyana for health care and other services. In July 2016, the Government of  
434 Guyana announced that it was prepared to help Venezuelans on humanitarian grounds (Guyana  
435 Chronicle 2016h). By February 2017, Venezuelans started moving to Guyana for trading in food and  
436 other items (Guyana Chronicle 2017f). The movement of Venezuelans to the Guyanese border  
437 regions for malaria, measles and other health care treatments (Guyana Chronicle 2017g,h,i) in 2017  
438 pointed to a humanitarian crises gripping Venezuela. In September 2017 the Government of  
439 Guyana re-iterated its willingness to provide humanitarian support to Venezuelans who made it to  
440 Guyana (Guyana Chronicle 2017h).

441

442

443

444

## 445 Discussion and Conclusions

446

447 This paper set out to describe the nature of relations between Guyana and Venezuela as  
448 portrayed through the text of the state-owned daily newspaper, the Guyana Chronicle, in the periods  
449 before and after Guyana announced the discovery of oil. The discourse and content analyses  
450 approach showed a highly dynamic and complex relationship between the two countries. Still,  
451 allowed for some important observations to be made on how oil discovery may have changed the  
452 interactions between neighboring states, in particular as it relates to the border controversy. Four  
453 primary observations are outlined below.

454

455 First, the paper opted to use Bons (2015) tepid characterization of the status at Guyana-  
456 Venezuela border as the basis for understanding how relations changed over time. The archives  
457 appear to support Bons (2015) characterization in at least two periods. During the pre-oil discovery  
458 period, January 2009 - December 2012, as Guyana searched for oil, there was a high frequency of  
459 diplomatic contact between the two nations (see Table 2). This period coincided with the presidency  
460 of Hugo Chavez, and as Clegg (2014: 402) pointed out the relationship between the two countries  
461 was 'quite good'. A characteristic of this moment, which was characterized as 'cool' in this paper was  
462 the high diversity of themes covered in the relations between the two countries. In fact, the border  
463 controversy was of little concern during this moment (see Table 2). However, the period 2013 –  
464 May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2015 saw tensions warming up, or based on Bons (2015) classification this was a moment  
465 where relations were tepid. Even though this moment was marked by a state visit from Venezuela's  
466 President to Georgetown, Guyana's oil exploration efforts led to the temperature in the relations  
467 between the two countries to increase. In the moment immediately after oil discovery in 2015, and  
468 towards the end of 2015, it appears Bons (2015) classification was not accurate (see Table 3 and  
469 Figure 3b) with the status at the border approaching a slow boil. In fact, in 2015 there were

470 opportunities for armed conflict between the two states. The moment between January 2016 and the  
471 end of 2017, where the United Nations intervened, the temperatures cooled at the border. Based on  
472 the number of reports on the border controversy (Table 3) it appears that this moment was again  
473 tepid as per Bons (2015) classification. This is not to say that tensions vanished, but the border  
474 controversy was no longer the most dominant topic in the archives. Therefore, Bons (2015)  
475 classification scheme with the various temperatures, was found to be a useful tool in following the  
476 dynamic nature of relations between nation states once oil is discovered. As Nyman (2015: 1) noted,  
477 especially in the maritime environment, new oil and gas developments are coming on stream in a  
478 contentions international environment where conflict is possible. Similarly, other scholars have  
479 noted that conflict occurs between nation states in the presence of oil (e.g. Colgan 2013a; Larden  
480 1934; Konings 2005; Scoville 2013; Shankleman 2006; Su 2005). From the observations in the  
481 archives used in this study, it would appear unlikely that tensions around oil will static. But Bons  
482 (2015) classification and the example demonstrated in this paper, can be useful in helping us to  
483 understanding how relations change over time and determine where and when efforts measure to  
484 resolve conflict may become necessary.

485

486         Secondly, the data give a strong indication that while much has changed in the relationship  
487 between Venezuela and Guyana over the years, much has remained the same. The border  
488 controversy is still an effective ‘tool’ for politicians to use to distract or divert attention from their  
489 internal political realities (Jagan 1968). The pre-oil discovery and post-oil discovery periods (see  
490 Tables 1 and 2; Figures 3 and 4) showed clearly how this ‘tool’ was used. Although tensions in the  
491 relationship between Guyana and Venezuela are long standing (e.g., Braveboy-Wagner 1984; Manley  
492 1979), in the early periods of the pre-discovery period, the range of issues that defined Guyana-  
493 Venezuela relations (see Table 2; Figure 3) can only be described as friendly. Indeed, friendly



494 relations dominated when Hugo Chavez was president of Venezuela (see Colgan 2013a for an  
495 alternative view). While the archives reported a presence of the political crises during Chavez's  
496 presidency (see also Colgan 2013b), it was not until 2014 that the issue appears in the archives. As  
497 Maduro established himself as President, followed by the political fall-out from his rise, the border  
498 controversy became an ideal 'tool' for exploitation (see Table 2). Indeed, the timeframe that Guyana  
499 began exploring for oil coincided almost perfectly with the rise of Maduro, and hence references to  
500 the border controversy and Venezuela military aggression at the border appear almost simultaneous  
501 with his struggles in office.

502

503         Thirdly, there is some debate in the literature as to whether oil predisposes conflict between  
504 nation states (Colgan 2013b; Wegensast 2015; Meierding 2016). Was oil responsible for the creating  
505 the tensions that arose between Guyana and Venezuela in the timeframe considered in this study?  
506 The results of this analysis seem to suggest that the answer may be both yes and no. Yes, the  
507 Guyana-Venezuela border controversy was resurrected as a consequence of Guyana's oil exploration  
508 efforts. However, it also appeared that the inherent economic challenges facing the Venezuelan  
509 government led to the use of the border controversy as a means to distract public attention. The  
510 involvement of the UN reduced tensions between the two countries and by the end of 2017, the  
511 border controversy almost disappeared from the archives. At the same time, Guyana stepped up  
512 plans to become an oil producer. Based on this evidence, either Venezuela accepted that Guyana  
513 would be an oil producer and chose to stay away from its affairs, or the magnitude of the internal  
514 politic crises in Venezuela was such that the Guyana oil issue fell to the wayside. Either way, it was  
515 not oil alone that triggered or resurrected the border controversy. This observation seems to stand  
516 in contrasts to other examples in the Chaco of South America (see Larden 1934) and Africa  
517 (Konings 2005) where the presence of oil triggered armed conflict.

518 Fourthly, the discovery of oil by Guyana was greeted with much euphoria within that  
519 country. Today Guyana is making significant investments to come to terms with the reality of  
520 becoming an oil producer. As the archives show, the presence of oil within the Venezuelan  
521 landscape did not preclude its politicians from using the border controversy as a tool to deal with  
522 their internal shortcomings. Similarly, in the absence of sound infrastructure and plans for dealing  
523 with the presence of oil, Guyana may itself attempt to use the border controversy in the future to  
524 distract from its internal political turmoil. As the expectations for what oil wealth may mean for  
525 Guyana continues to grow, the chances for disappointment grow. Most critically, as Guyana's  
526 population continues to decline due to outmigration, the shortage of human resources may pose a  
527 significant challenge. To be a successful oil producer, it may be necessary for Guyana to maintain  
528 good relations with its neighbors in order to access the skills and knowledge necessary to develop  
529 strong public institutions in the changing economy. Therefore, an oil-producing Guyana will likely  
530 result in changed relations with its neighbors, and therefore maintaining cool borders will ensure  
531 such change will bring sustainable benefits to its people and peace within the region.

532

533 Finally, this analysis come from the perspective of the state-owned Guyanese media,  
534 inevitably biasing perspectives on Venezuela's actions and Guyana's response. Future work should  
535 consider the border relationships from the perspective of the privately-owned media in Guyana and  
536 the Venezuelan media to determine whether alternative perspectives exist.

537

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952 **Tables**

953 Table 1: The Themes Used to Classify the Newspaper Archives.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Description</b>
Border Controversy	Reports that referenced the 1899 arbitral award and/or the Guyana -Venezuela border status.
Capacity building - Venezuela sponsored	Capacity building efforts in Guyana that were funded by Venezuela.
Collaboration and Mutual Development	Guyana and Venezuela working together on international issues.
Competition	Sports and similar interactions between citizens of the two states.
Crime	Reports on criminal activity, beyond the drug trade, committed by or on Venezuelans in Guyana and Guyanese in Venezuela.
Diplomacy	Official interactions between representatives of the two states aimed at extending friendship and improve relations.
Drug Trade	Trafficking in narcotics between and by citizens of either of the two states.
Illegal Entry to Guyana	Venezuelans illegally entering Guyana and being brought before the courts.
Illegal Fishing	Guyanese illegally fishing in Venezuelan waters and/or Venezuelans illegally fishing in Guyanese waters.
Indigenous peoples	Reports on the issues that impact the life of indigenous peoples in either state.
International Communication/Road link	Reports on Guyana and Venezuela exploring establishing links by road and other means.
Military conflict	Reports on tensions and conflict between the Guyanese and Venezuelan militaries.
Movement of People	The legal travels of people between Guyana and Venezuela for humanitarian and business purposes.
Natural Disasters	Reports on natural disasters and their impacts in Venezuela.
News	Reports on general developments in Venezuela beyond the political crisis.
Oil Exploration	Activities aimed at identifying areas of oil deposits in Guyana's territory.
People Interactions	Citizens of Guyana and Venezuela, beyond those in the diplomatic services, working to improve relations.
Political crisis	Reports covering political and economic changes in Venezuela.
Press Freedom	Reports on the treatment of journalists in Venezuela.
Regional Democracy	Venezuela's contribution to regional democracy.
Trade	Agreements between Guyana and Venezuela for trading in rice, fertilizer and other commodities.

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959 Table 2: The top five themes in the archives in the pre-oil discovery period.

Theme	Year							Number of Reports
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	5/19/2015	
Trade	2	7	2	2	14	5	2	34
Diplomacy	0	4	0	6	20	1	2	32
Border Controversy	0	2	2	4	10	2	8	28
Crime	0	2	1	5	3	1	0	12
Illegal Entry to Guyana	0	1	0	3	5	0	2	11
Total	2	16	5	20	52	9	13	117

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962 Table 3: The top five themes in the archives in the post-oil discovery period.

Theme	Year			Number of Reports
	5/20/2015	2016	2017	
Border Controversy	79	25	14	117
Political crisis	4	24	29	57
Crime	2	7	7	16
Trade	7	4	0	11
Movement of People	0	2	7	9
Total	92	62	56	210

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