

How UFO sightings can help measure public attention and economic patterns

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A new study [published](#) in *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, unveils a novel approach to measuring public attention using reports of Unidentified Aerial Phenomena (UAP). The research

bridges the gap between unconventional indicators and macroeconomic analysis, revealing surprising links between UAP sightings and economic conditions at multiple geographical levels in the United States.

The study highlights that UAP reports, often dismissed as a niche phenomenon, serve as a robust proxy for public attention. By analyzing daily-level data from NUFORC (National UFO Reporting Center), the researchers show that UAP sightings are more frequent in wealthier regions but exhibit counter-cyclical patterns within those regions over time. These findings suggest that shifts in attention to extraordinary phenomena may reflect broader fluctuations in public focus.

Key findings include:

- **Macroeconomic correlation:** UAP sightings are positively correlated with [economic conditions](#) across regions but display counter-cyclical patterns within regions over time.
- **Causal evidence:** A quasi-experimental design leveraging variations in COVID-19 lockdown restrictions demonstrates a [causal link](#) between restricted mobility and increased UAP reports, further establishing the measure as an indicator of public attention.
- **Policy implications:** Regions with higher UAP sighting levels show muted responses to monetary policy shocks, suggesting that attention variations can significantly influence economic outcomes.

The researchers compared UAP sightings to conventional attention metrics, finding strong correlations. This innovative measure offers unique advantages, including the ability to analyze attention at different geographical and temporal scales.

Implications for policy and research

Goldstein and Raveh's findings underscore the central role of public attention in economic dynamics. Their work not only enhances the toolkit for macroeconomic analysis but also provides policymakers with insights into managing public attention to mitigate economic shocks.

The study invites further exploration into how unconventional forms of attention, like UAP sightings, intersect with economic behaviors. "We hope this work inspires future research to deepen our understanding of the connection between public attention and macroeconomic outcomes," the authors state.

The research uses comprehensive UAP sighting data from NUFORC, spanning over two decades, to construct a daily-level panel of reports across U.S. counties. The analysis integrates economic, social, and [environmental factors](#) to ensure robust conclusions.

This pioneering work highlights the value of thinking beyond traditional metrics, shedding light on the role of seemingly unrelated phenomena in understanding economic patterns.

More information: Nathan Goldstein et al, Looking up the sky: unidentified aerial phenomena and macroeconomic attention, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (2024). [DOI: 10.1057/s41599-024-04182-z](#)

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