How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument[1]

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[1]Based on joint work with Jennifer Pan (Stanford) and Margaret Roberts (UCSD)

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Papers

- Empirical Results:

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  - Reverse Engineering Chinese Censorship (*Science*)

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    - Common name: "50c Party" members

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    - Disagreements between central and local leaders

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> *"posting information favorable to the regime and chastising its critics"* *(Deibert and Rohozinski, 2010)*

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    "undercover pro-government Internet commenters" (Foreign Policy)

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  "neutralize undesirable public opinion by pushing pro-Party views" (Far Eastern Economic Review)

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> *"If you oppose the US and Japan [online], you are a member of the 50 cents army" (artist-dissident Ai Weiwei)*

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> *"Combat hostile energy [which should be] resolutely resisted, proactively refuted, and eagerly reported to Internet authorities"* (Haley, 2012)

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    It's antidisestablishmentarianism!

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- Distracts; redirects public attention from criticism and central issues to cheerleading and positive discussions of valence issues

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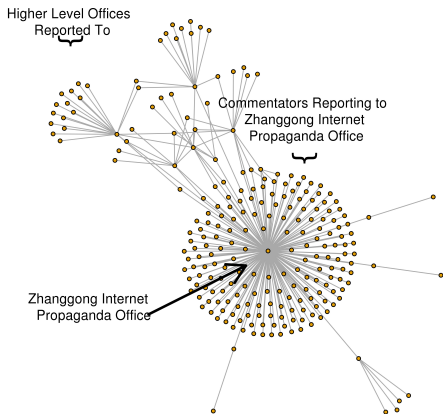   - 43,797 <u>known</u> 50c cent posts

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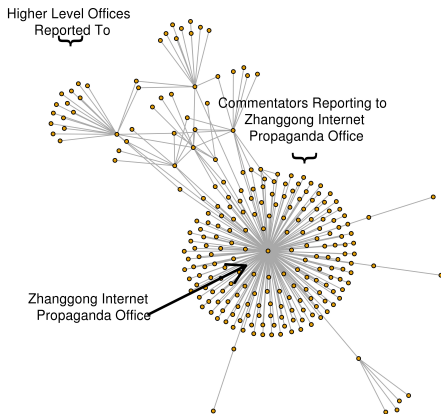- Leaked emails: Zhanggong Internet Propaganda Office (网宣办)
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Higher Level Offices Reported To

Commentators Reporting to Zhanggong Internet Propaganda Office

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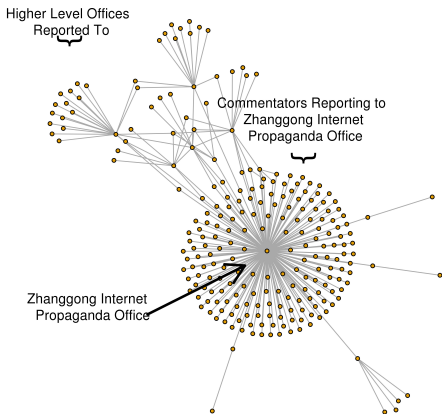
Zhanggong Internet Propaganda Office

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- Who is posting?
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  - No evidence of 50c (or any piecemeal) payments; probably part of their jobs

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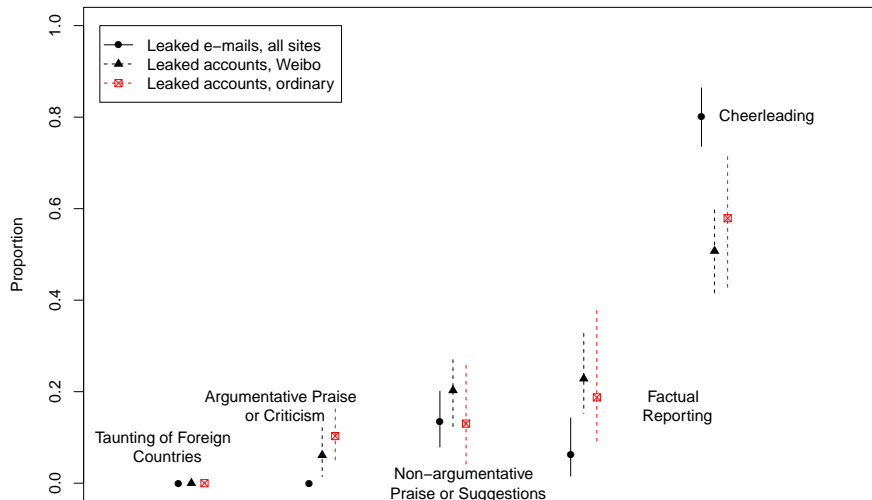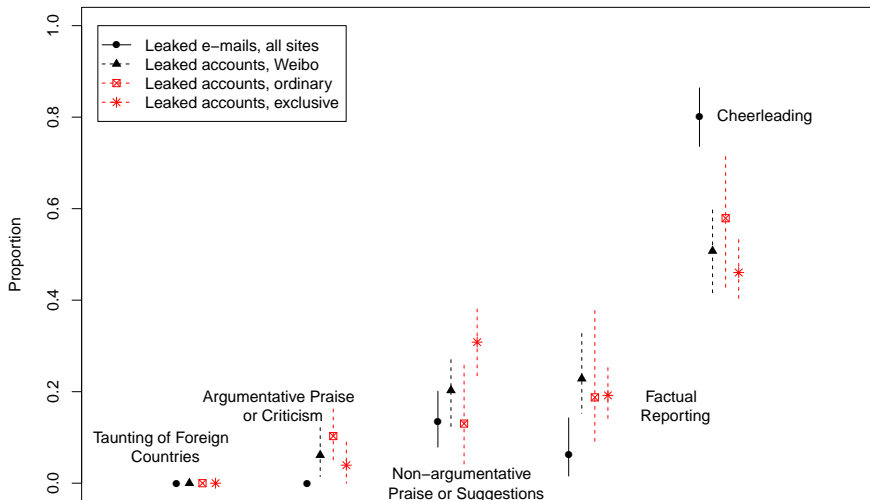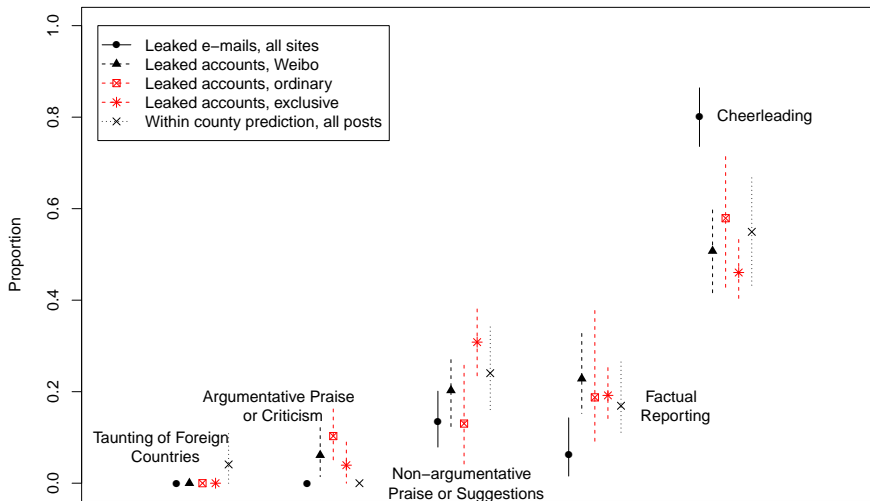 5. Unleaked posts from exclusive 50c weibo accounts across China

Content of Leaked and Predicted 50c Party Posts
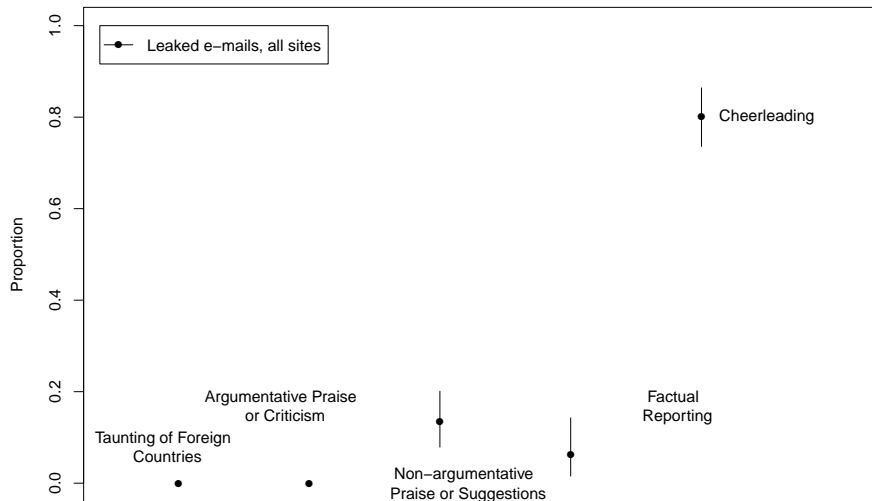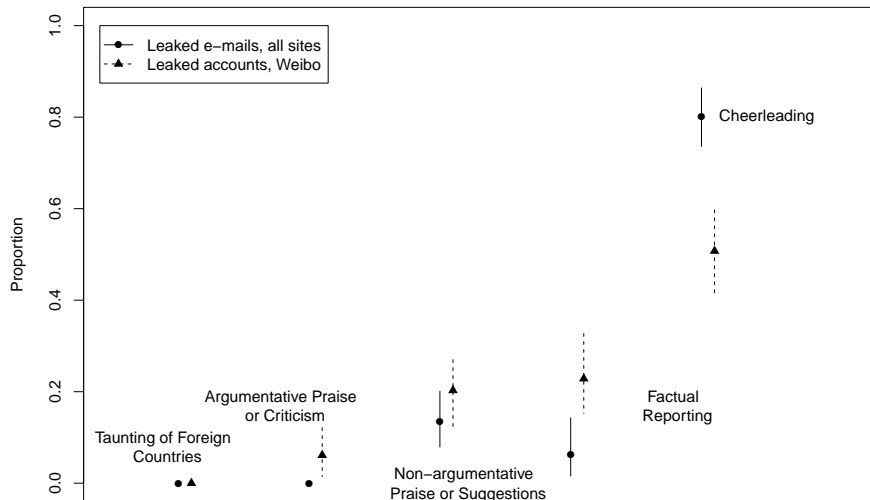
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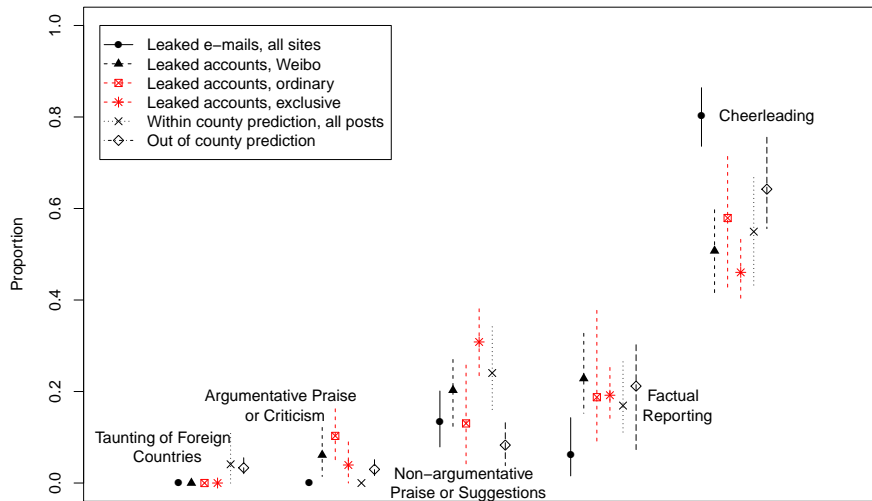# Content of Leaked and Predicted 50c Party Posts

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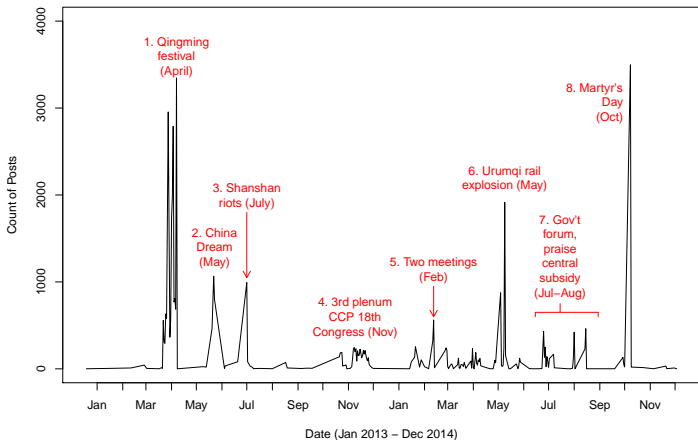
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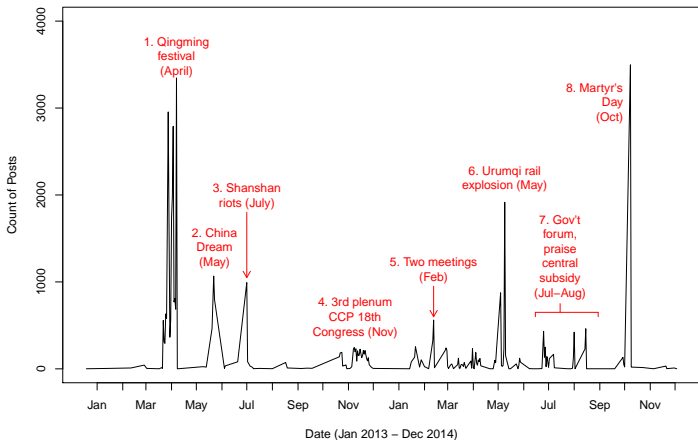
Coordinated bursts, many for events with collective action potential

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For more information

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