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)
[2]GaryKing.org

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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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> 65% *argue* with critics of the regime

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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

First Systematic Evidence on China's 50c Party

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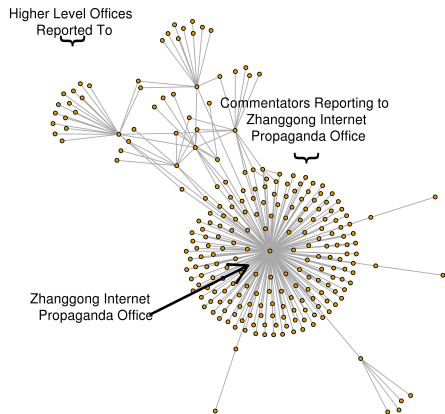# First Systematic Evidence on China's 50c Party

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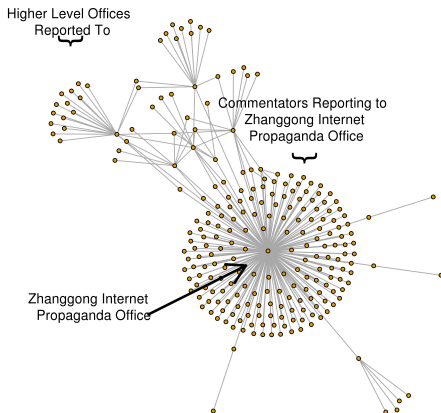
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- Who is posting?

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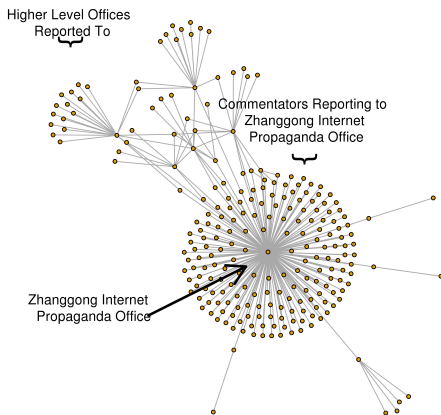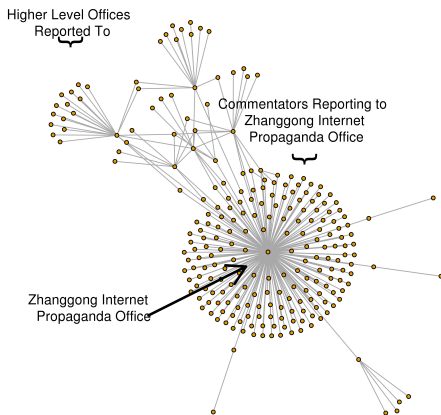
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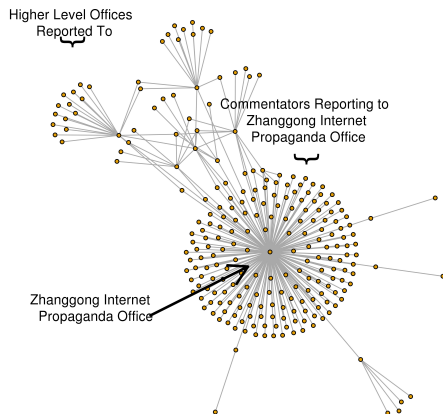
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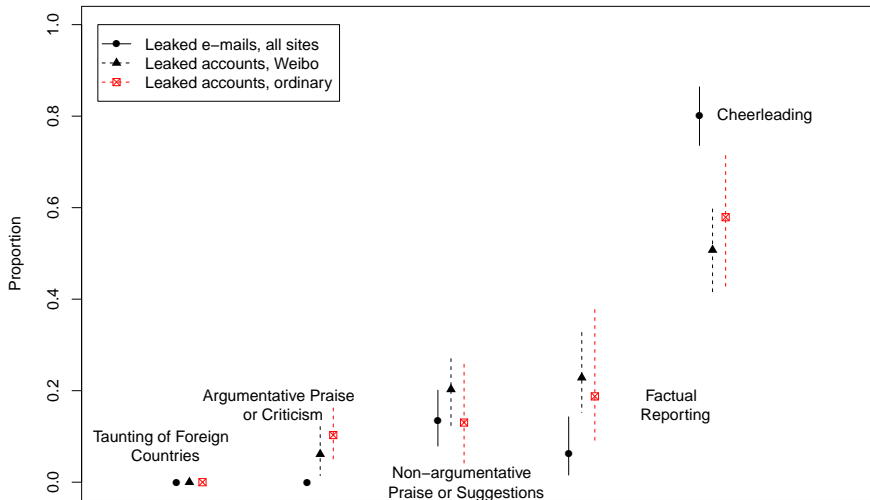# Content of Leaked and Predicted 50c Party Posts
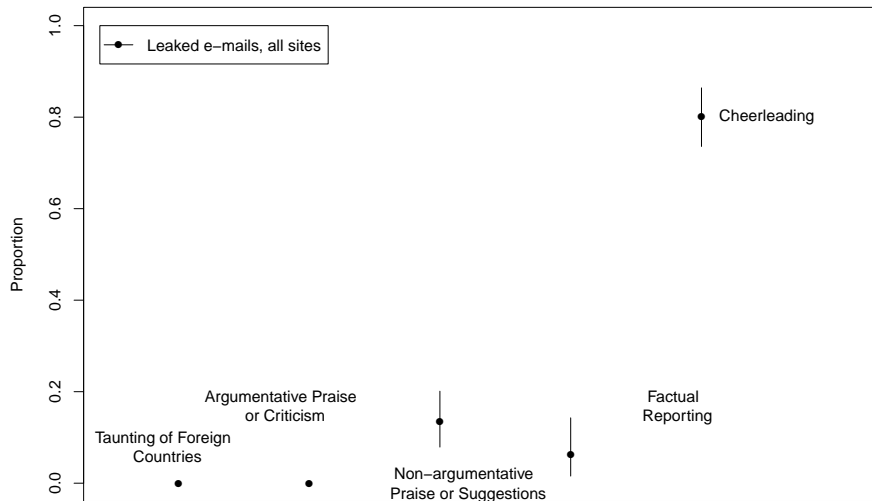
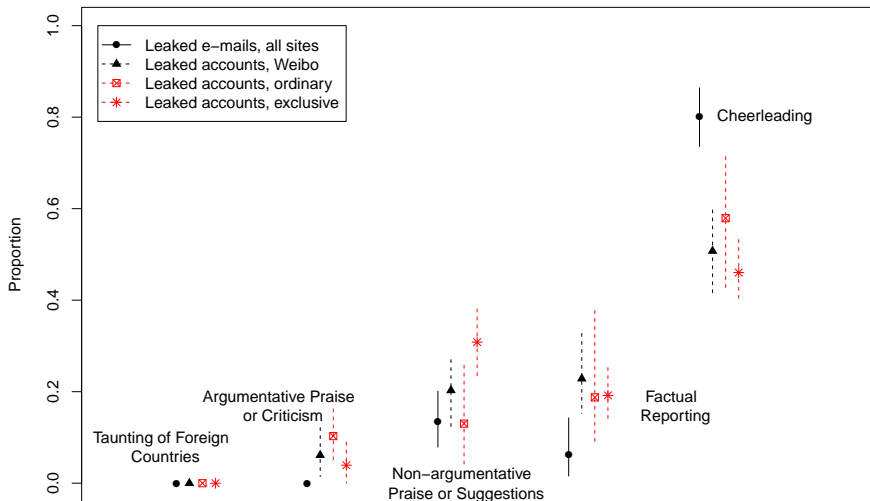## Content of Leaked and Predicted 50c Party Posts
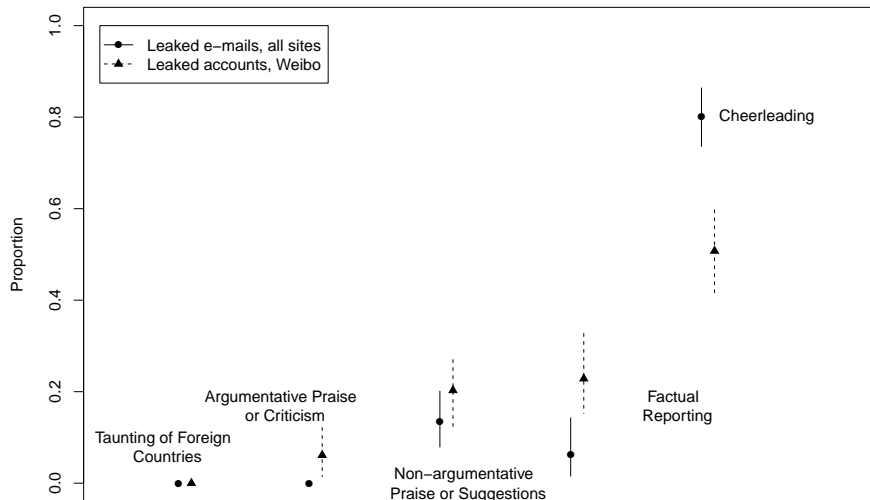
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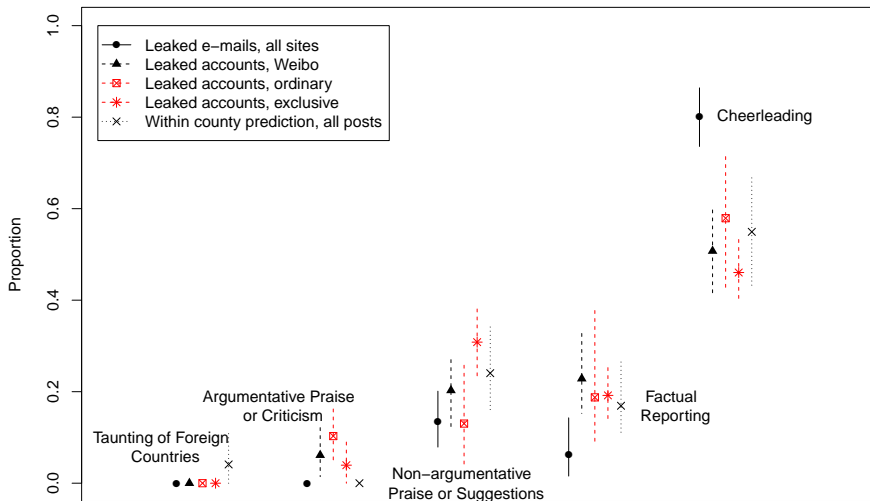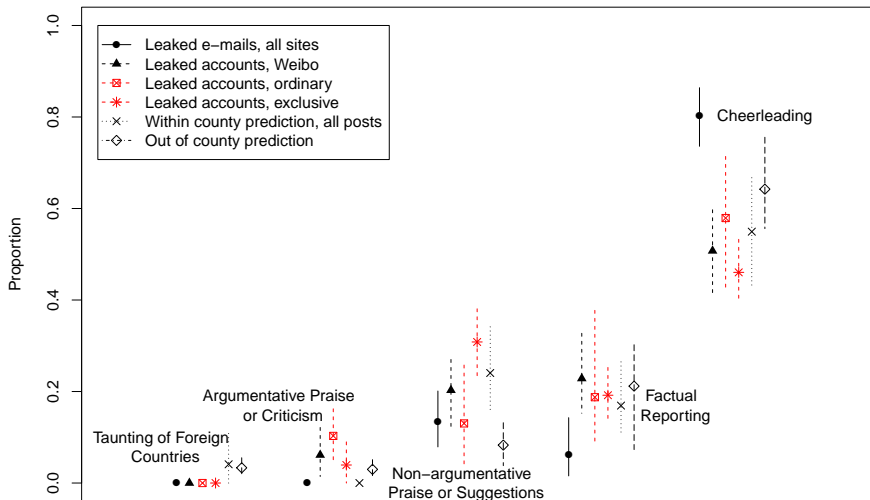
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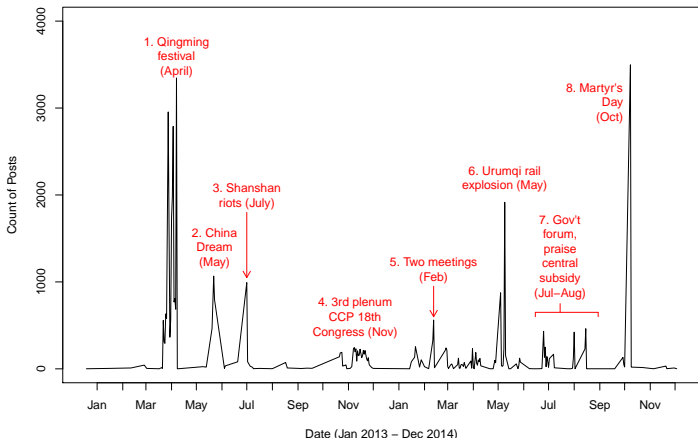
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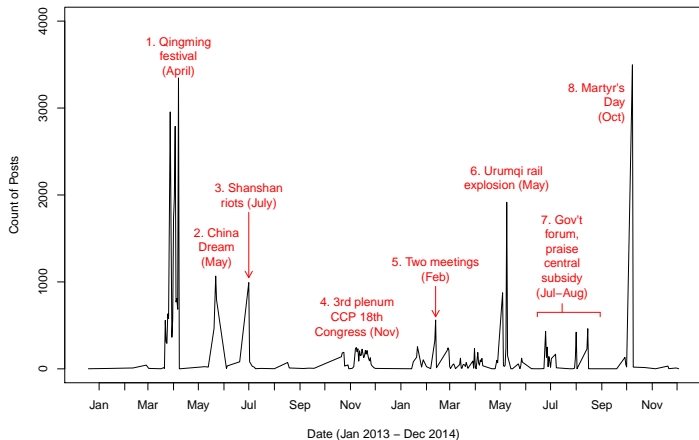
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Coordinated bursts, many for events with collective action potential

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Survey Validation of 50c Party Membership Predictions

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50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes

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Predicted 50c	Across China	

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50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
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Predicted v. known: not significantly different

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Theoretical Implications

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  - WHEN STUDIED AT SCALE, GOVERNMENT INFORMATION CONTROLS LEAVE BIG FOOTPRINTS.

For more information

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