

How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression¹

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¹Forthcoming, *American Political Science Review*

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- (Other examples: Iran, Saudia Arabia, Syria, Vietnam, etc.)

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 - (They also censor 2 other smaller categories we'll talk about)

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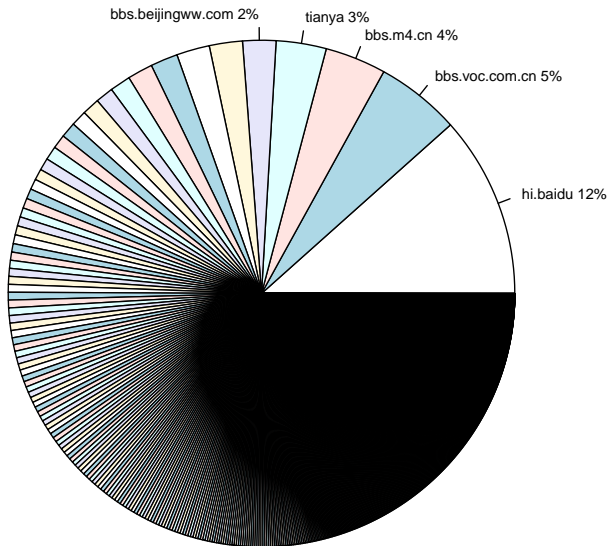
Our Data Source



crimson hexagon

KNOW MORE. KNOW WHY. KNOW HOW.

Chinese Social Media: Fractured over 1,400+ sites



(Plus 59% from Sina Blog)

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 - Use computer-assisted methods of text analysis (some existing, some new, all adapted to Chinese)

Censorship is not Ambiguous: Example Error Page



The screenshot shows the top of a forum page for '金羊社区' (Golden Sheep Community) with the URL 'bbs.ycwb.com'. The page features a search bar, navigation tabs for '首页', '论坛', '博客', '家园', and '排行榜', and a search button. Below the navigation is a search input field with the text '请输入搜索内容' and a search button labeled '帖子 - 搜索'. A red arrow points to a yellow-bordered error message box that reads: '抱歉, 指定的主题不存在或已被删除或正在被审核' (Sorry, the specified topic does not exist or has been deleted or is being investigated) and includes a link: '【[点击这里返回上一页](#)】' (Click here to return to the previous page).

Sorry, the host you were looking for does not exist, has been deleted, or is being investigated

Censorship is not Ambiguous: BBS Error Page

404 ERROR

The page you requested is temporarily down. How about you go look at another page.



你访问的页面暂时找不到了哦，去看看别的页面吧。

[返回首页](#)

[反馈错误](#)

Jingjing, one of China's cartoon internet police

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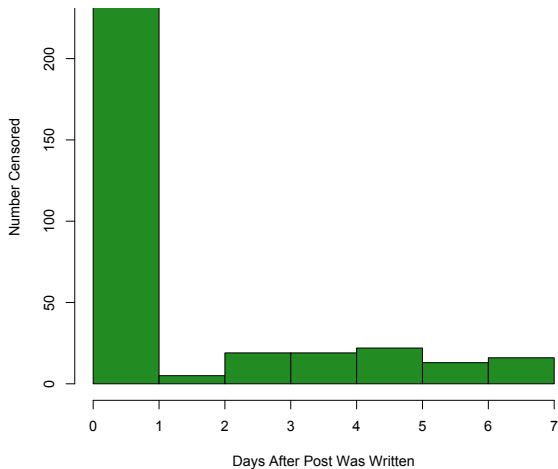
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Example: Shanghai Subway Crash

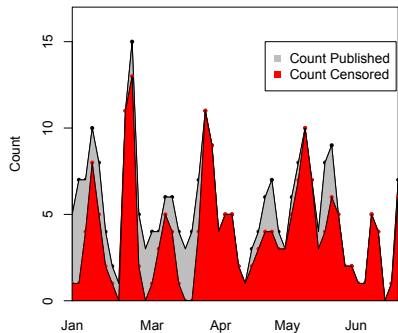
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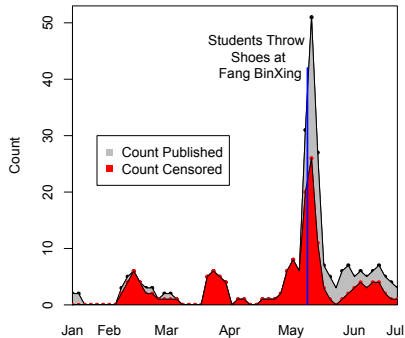


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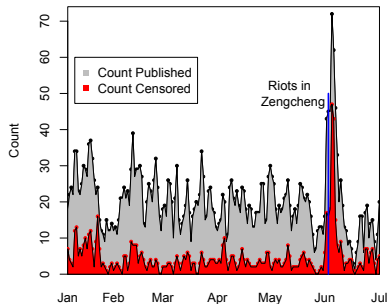
Pornography



Criticism of the Censors

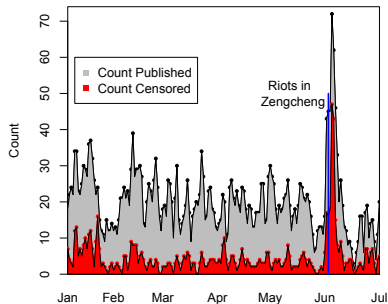
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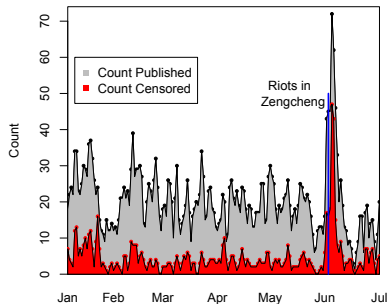


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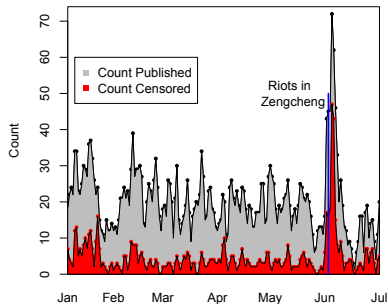


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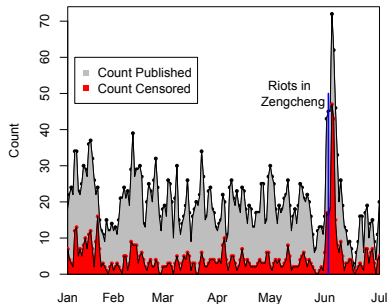
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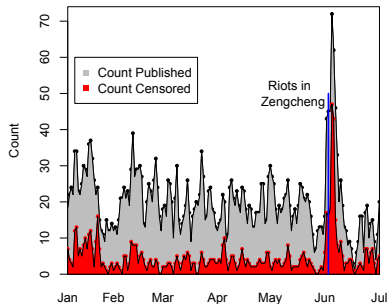
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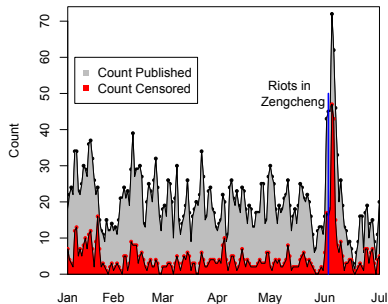
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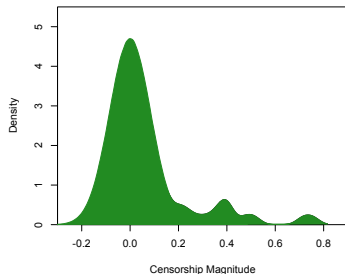
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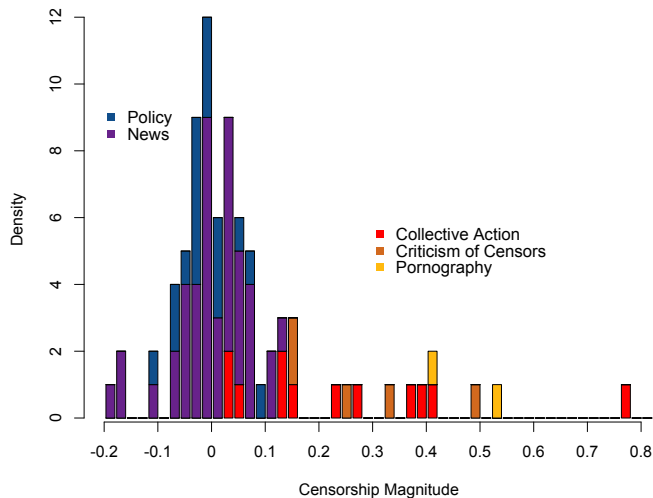
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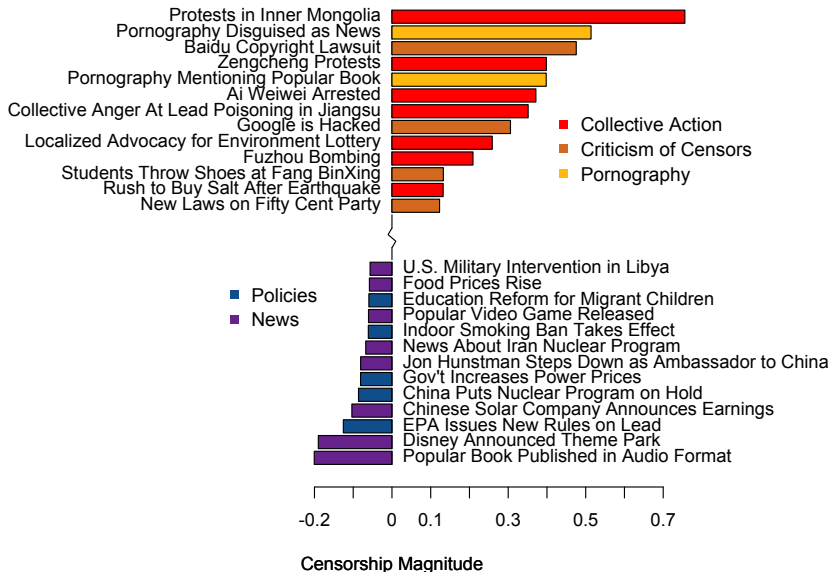
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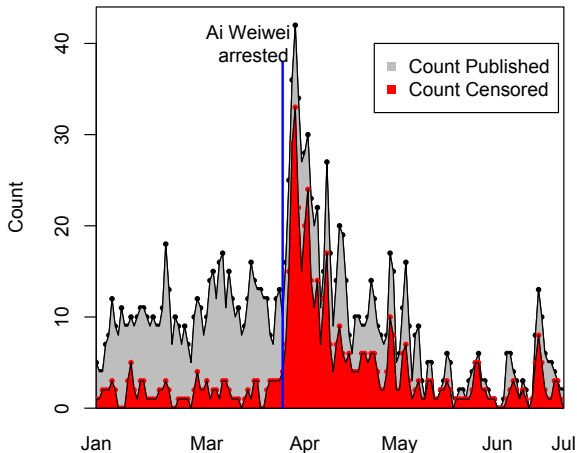
What Types of Events Are Censored?



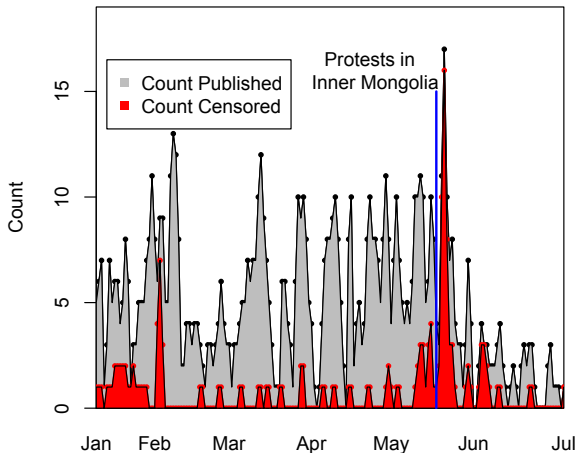
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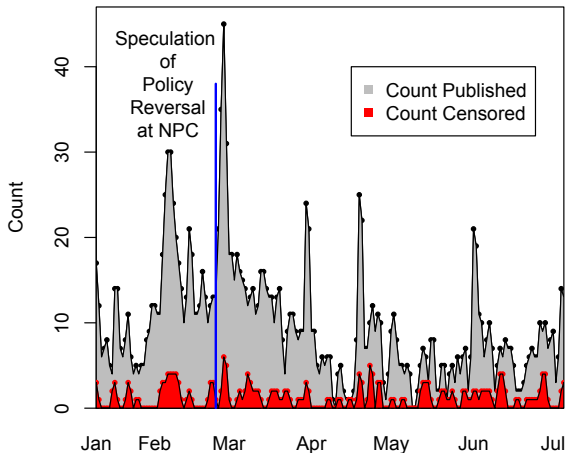
Censoring Collective Action: Ai Weiwei's Arrest



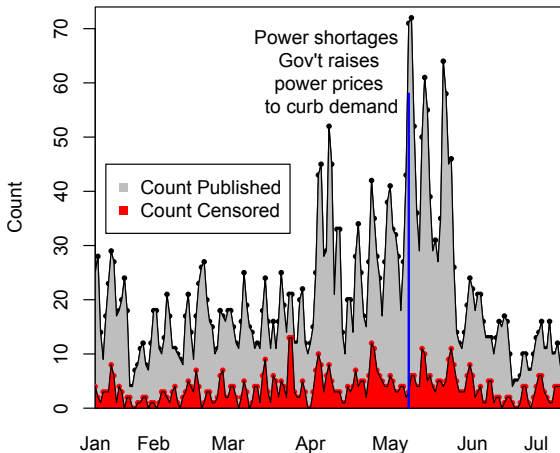
Censoring Collective Action: Protests in Inner Mongolia



Low Censorship on One Child Policy



Low Censorship on News: Power Prices



Test 3: Content of Posts

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$$P(\text{Censored}|\text{Category}) = \frac{P(\text{Category}|\text{Censored})P(\text{Censored})}{P(\text{Category})}$$

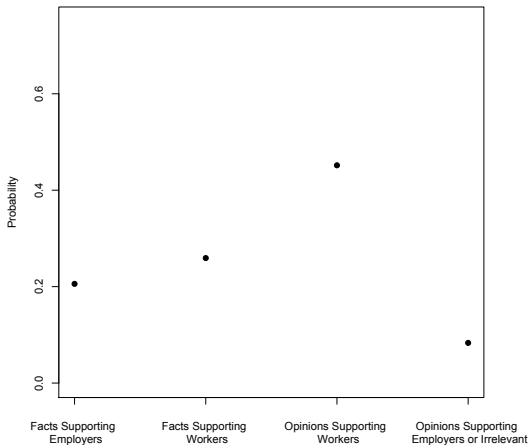
“ReadMe” Algorithm Validated in Chinese

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Example: Labor Strikes, 2010 (Training set: 100; Test set: 900)

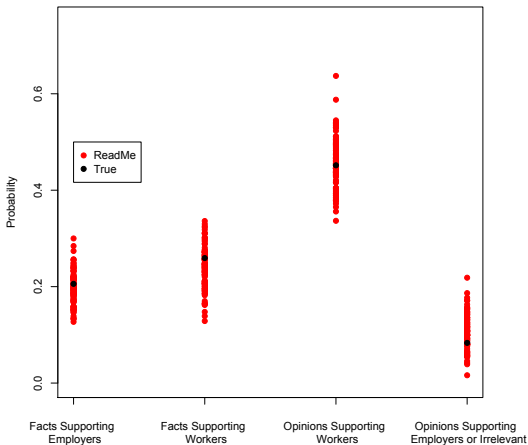
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Test 3: Content of Censored and Uncensored Posts

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Predictions from Two Theories of Censorship

Predictions of State Criticism Theory

		Collective Action	
		yes	no
State Critique	yes	CENSORED	CENSORED
	no	Free	Free

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Predictions from Two Theories of Censorship

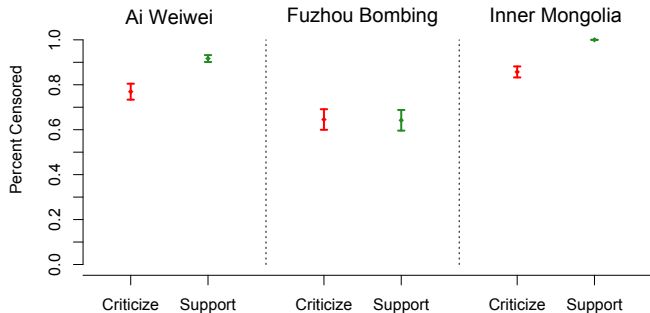
Predictions of Collective Action Theory

		Collective Action	
		yes	no
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	no	CENSORED	Free

With Collective Action, Posts that Support or Criticize the State are Censored

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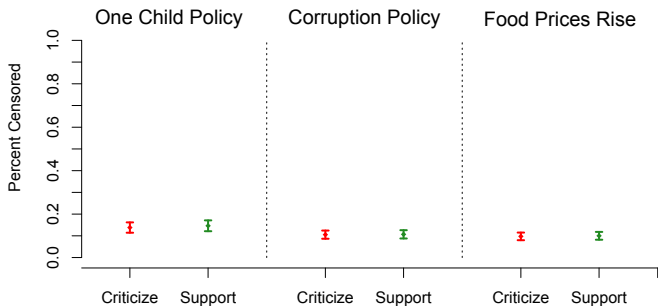
		Collective Action	
		yes	no
State Critique	yes	CENSORED	Free
	no	CENSORED	Free



Without Collective Action, Posts that Support *or* Oppose the State are NOT Censored



Without Collective Action, Posts that Support or Oppose the State are NOT Censored

		Collective Action	
		yes	no
State Critique	yes	CENSORED	Free
	no	CENSORED	Free



Uncensored Posts (w/o Collective Action Potential) Critical of the State

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		Collective Action	
		yes	no
State Critique	yes		Free
	no		Free

Uncensored Posts (w/o Collective Action Potential) Critical of the State

This is a city government [Yulin City, Shaanxi] that treats life with contempt, this is government officials run amuck, a city government without justice, a city government that delights in that which is vulgar, a place where officials all have mistresses, a city government that is shameless with greed, a government that trades dignity for power, a government without humanity, a government that has no limits on immorality, a government that goes back on its word, a government that treats kindness with ingratitude, a government that cares nothing for posterity. . .

这是一个漠视生命的市政府[陕西省榆林市]、一个官员横行的市政府、一个没有公正的市政府，一个低级趣味的市政府，一个包二奶的市政府，一个为钱不要脸的市政府，一个为个权不要人格的市政府，一个没有血性的市政府，一个没有道德低线的市政府，一个出尔反尔的市政府，一个忘恩负义的市政府，一个不要子孙后代的市政府，一个什么怪事都出的市政府，一个什么的市政府，只要你想到的就有…

Censored Post (with Collective Action Potential) Supporting the State

Censored Post (with Collective Action Potential) Supporting the State

		Collective Action	
		yes	no
State Critique	yes		Free
	no		Free

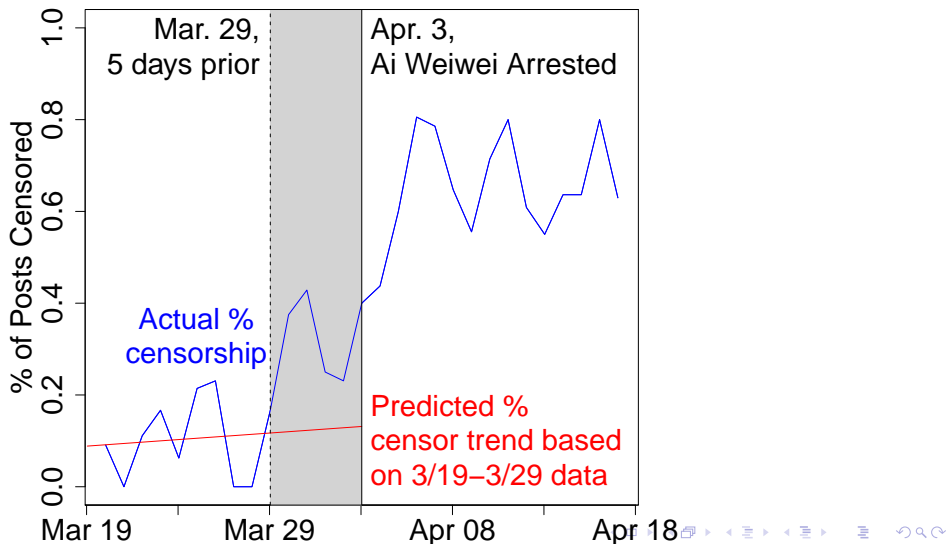
Censored Post (with Collective Action Potential) Supporting the State

The bombing led not only to the tragedy of his death but the death of many government workers. Even if we can verify what Qian Mingqi said on Weibo that the building demolition caused a great deal of personal damage, we should still condemn his extreme act of retribution. . . . The government has continually put forth measures and laws to protect the interests of citizens in building demolition. And the media has called attention to the plight of those experiencing housing demolition. The rate at which compensation for housing demolition has increased exceeds inflation. In many places, this compensation can change the fate of an entire family.

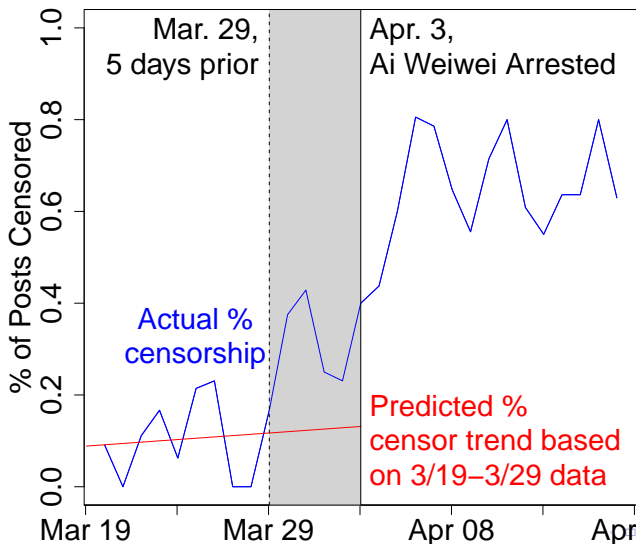
爆炸案造成他本人和多名政府工作人员死伤的悲剧，即使钱明奇在微博里所称拆迁造成的个人损失是属实的，我们也应谴责他的极端报复行为. . . . 政府在连续出台保护被拆迁者利益的政策法规，媒体也在为公平对待被拆迁者大声疾呼，各地拆迁补偿款的上升速度，大多高于商品房售价上升的速度，在不少地方，补偿款已经足以改变一个家庭的命运。

Censorship Pre-empting Collective Action: Ai Weiwei's Arrest

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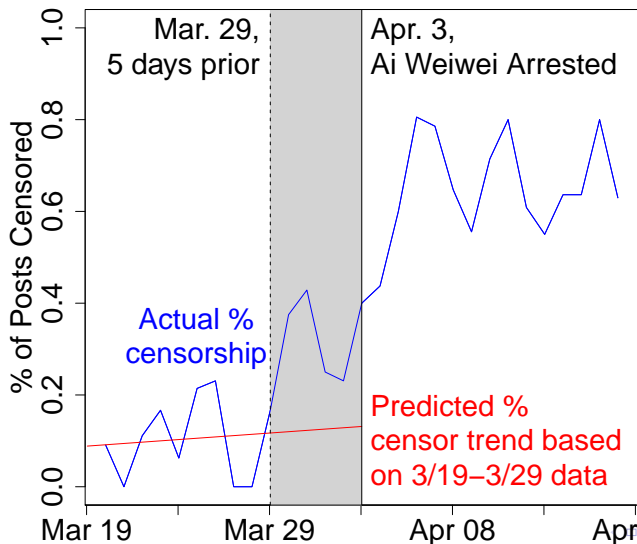


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Placebo Test:

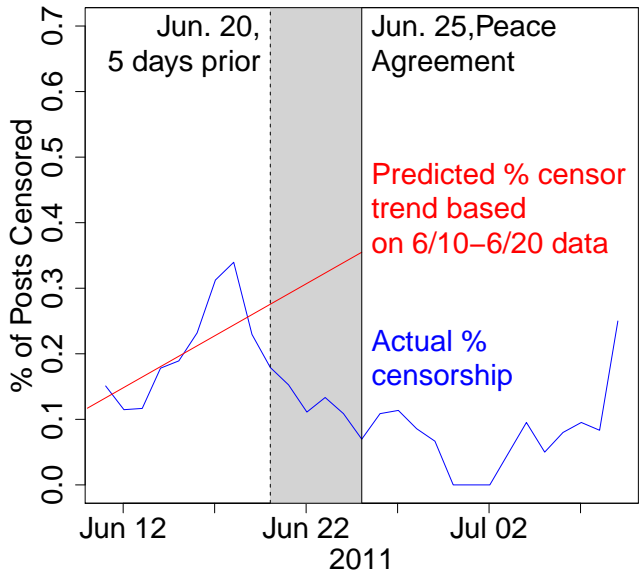
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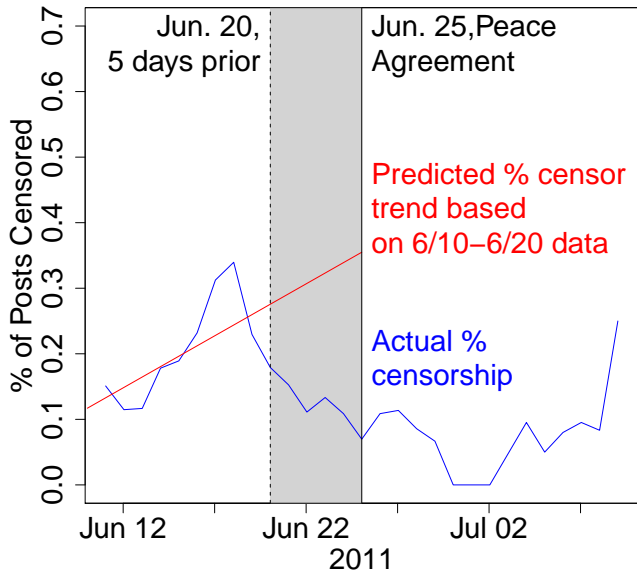
Placebo Test: Most extreme of all effects

Predicting the South China Sea Peace Agreement

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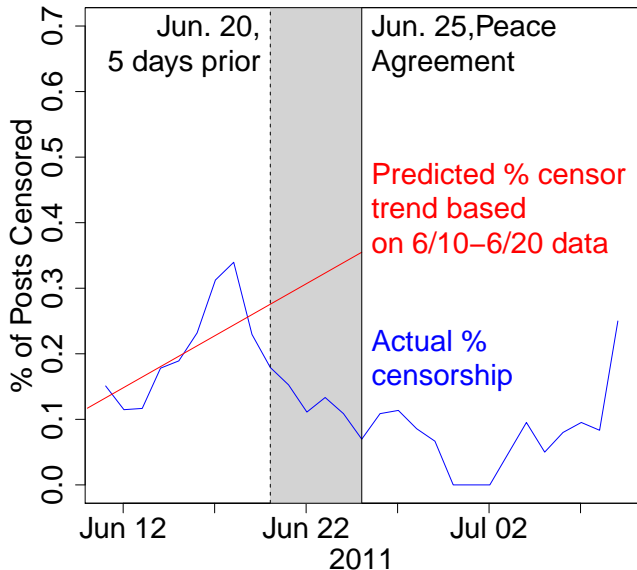


Predicting the South China Sea Peace Agreement



Placebo Test:

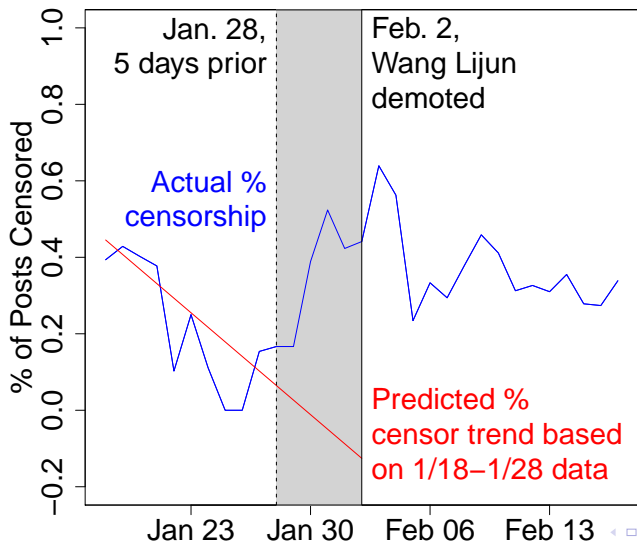
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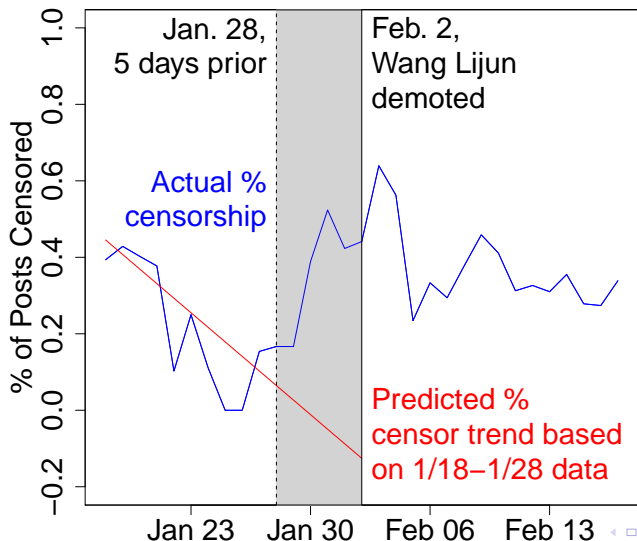
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Censorship Pre-empting Collective Action: Wang Lijun's Demotion

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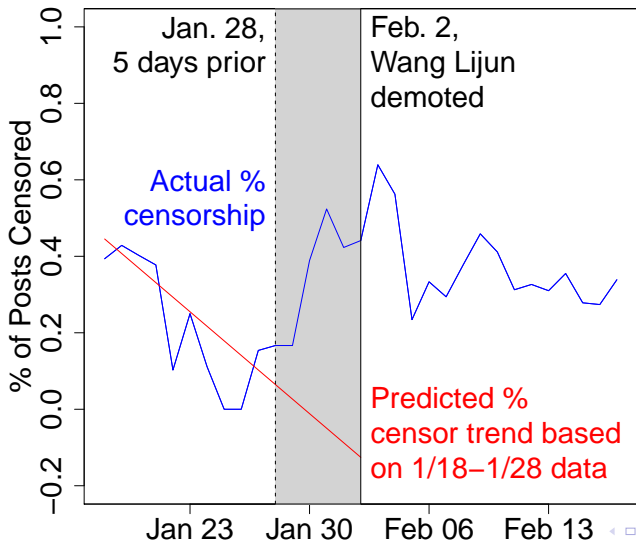


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 - Reveals information about state action when traditional media is silent
 - Might be applicable to other countries

For more information



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