Reverse-Engineering Censorship in China[1]

Gary King[2]

Institute for Quantitative Social Science
Harvard University

(Talk at IARPA seminar on "Science, Intelligence, and Security",
Virginia Tech Research Center, 11/16/2015)

[1] Based on joint work with Jennifer Pan and Margaret Roberts

[2] GaryKing.org

Papers

- An Observational Study:

  How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression (APSR)

- Experimental and Participatory Studies:

  Reverse Engineering Chinese Censorship (Science)

- Methods:
  - *General Purpose Computer-Assisted Clustering and Conceptualization* (PNAS)
  - *A Method of Automated Nonparametric Content Analysis for Social Science* (AJPS)
  - *Computer-Assisted Keyword and Document Set Discovery from Unstructured Text*

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  - (paradoxically) very revealing about the goals, intentions, and actions of the Chinese leadership

Chinese Social Media: Fractured over 1,400+ sites

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- $\rightsquigarrow$ A big prize, but payable only if we have the goals right

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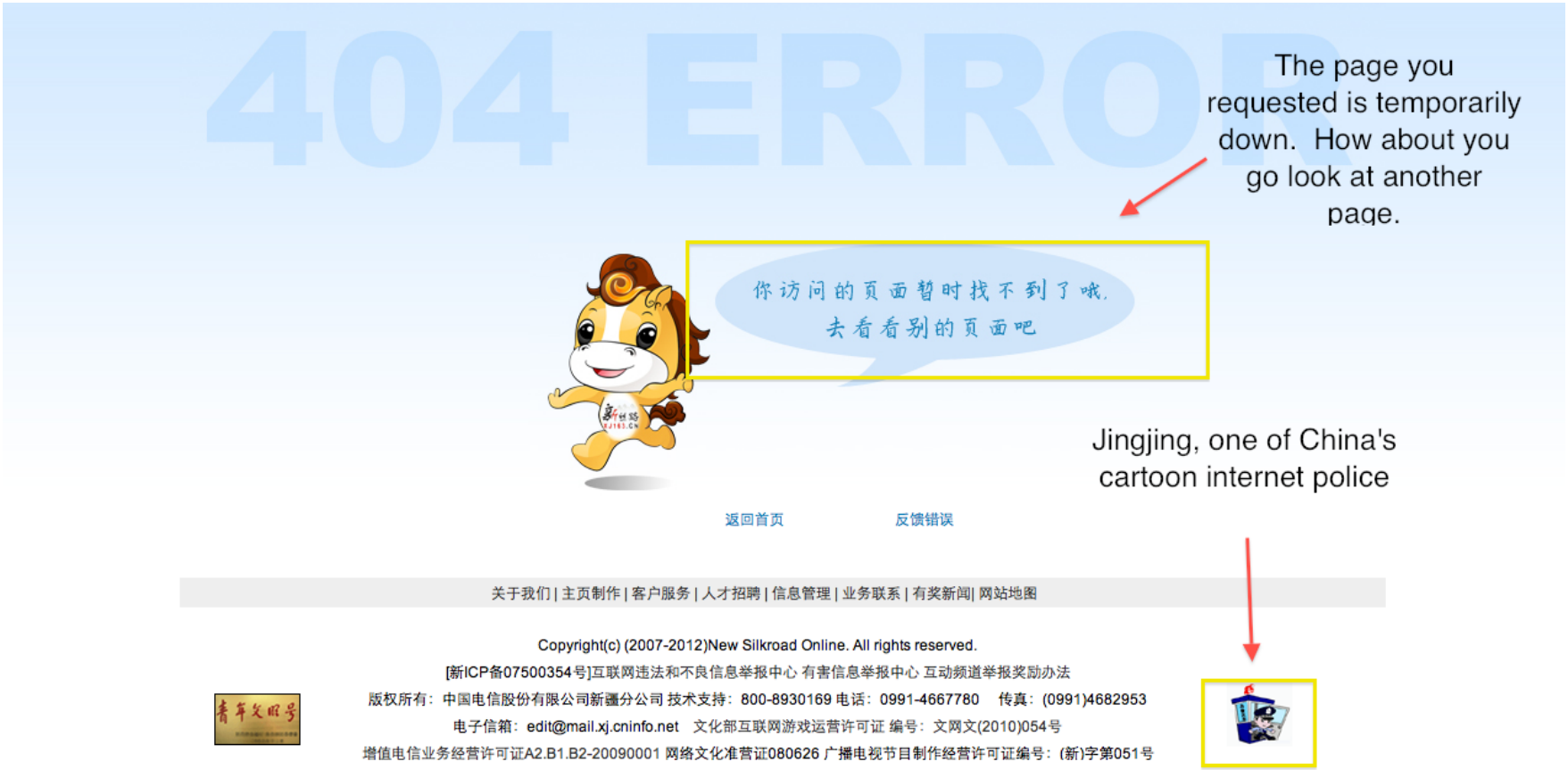
5. Analyze with new methods of computer-assisted text analysis

Censorship is not Ambiguous: BBS Error Page



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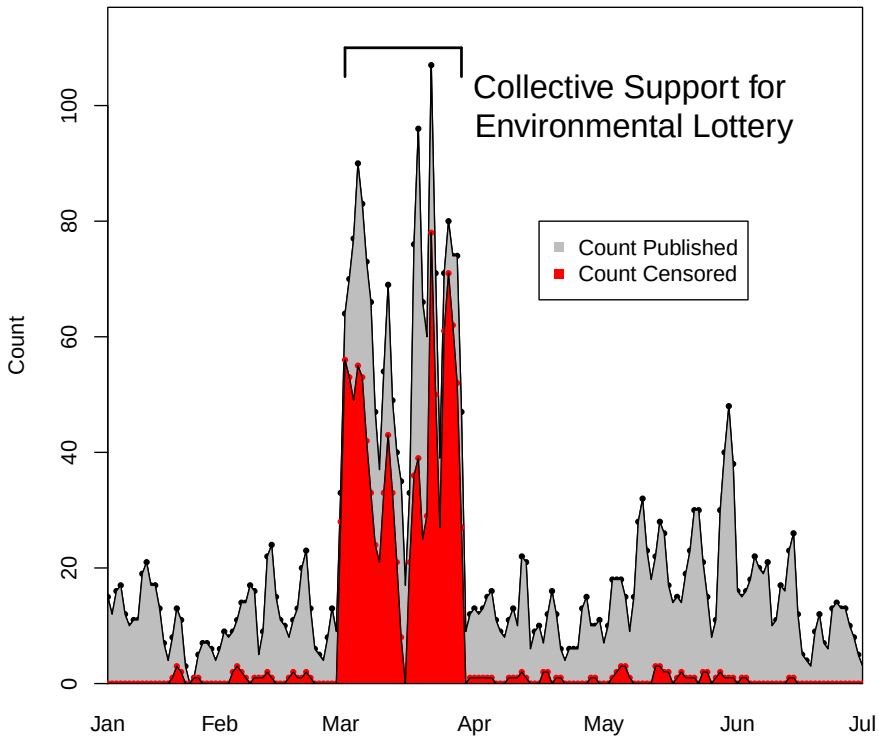

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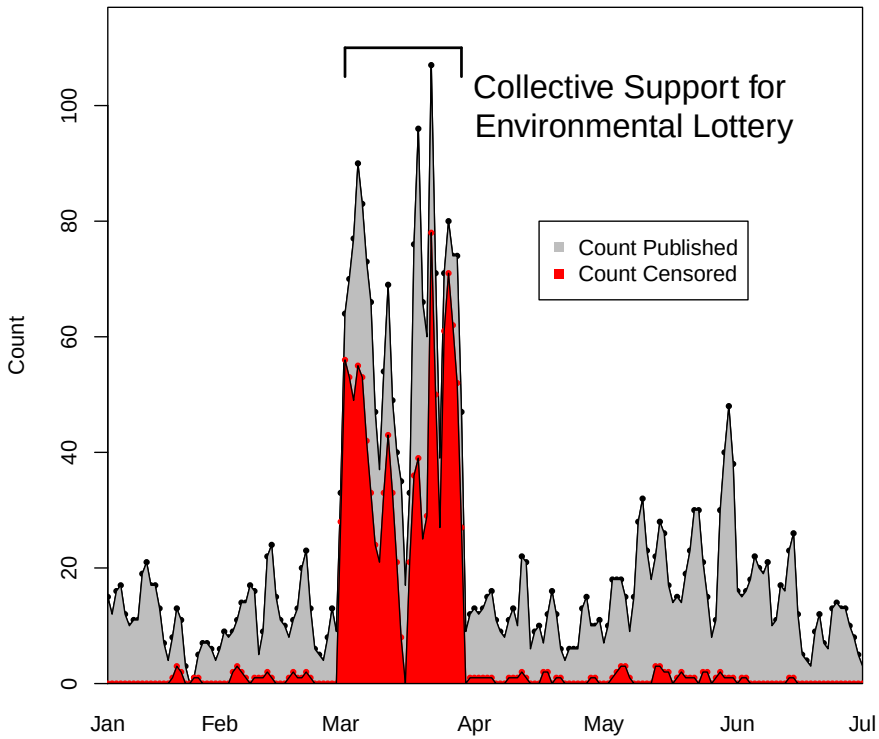

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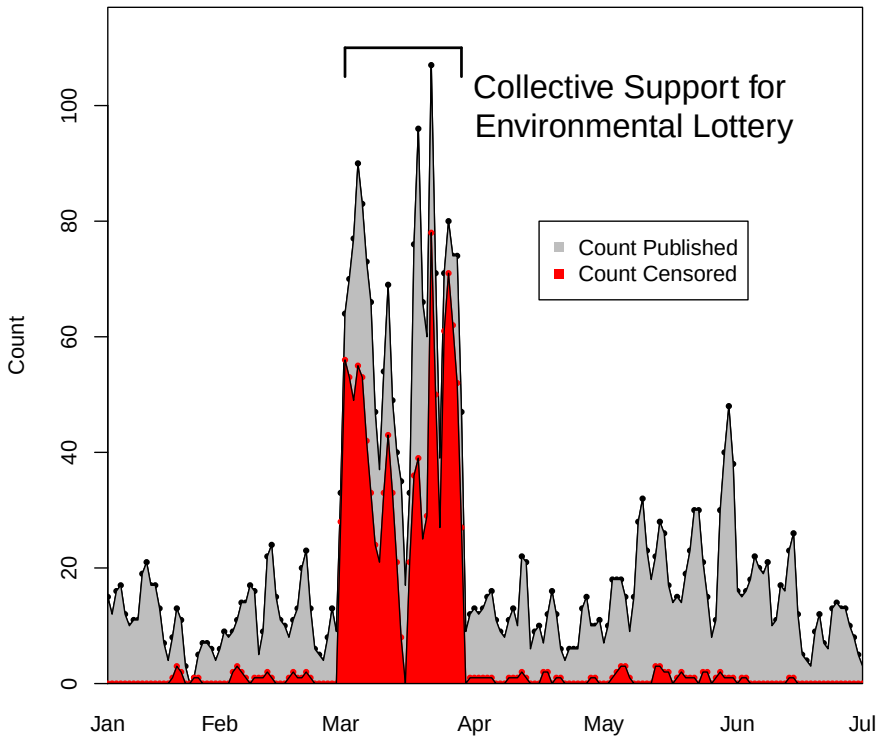

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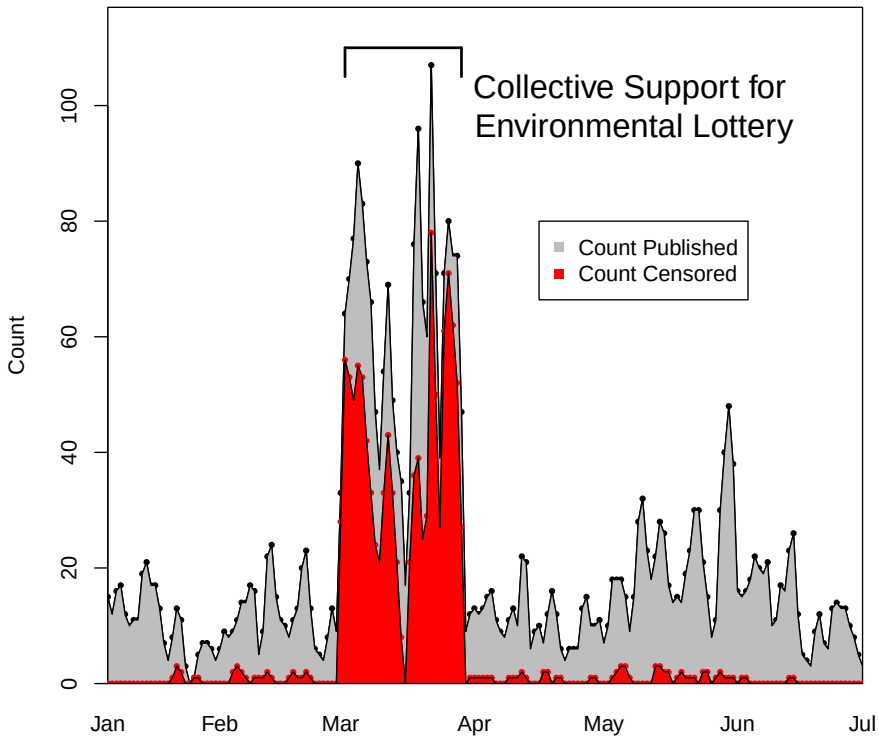

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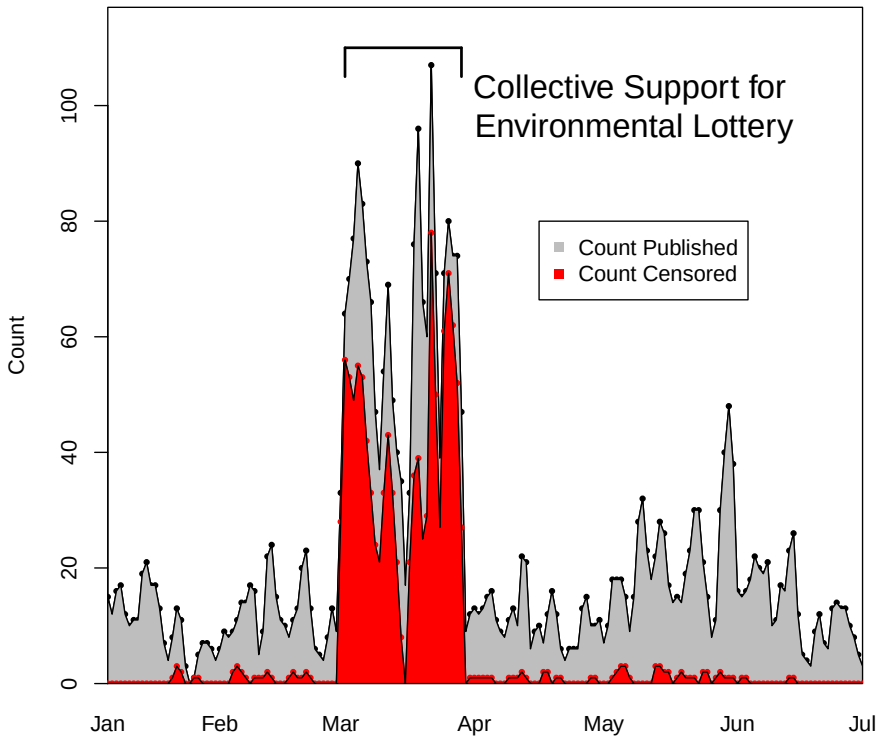

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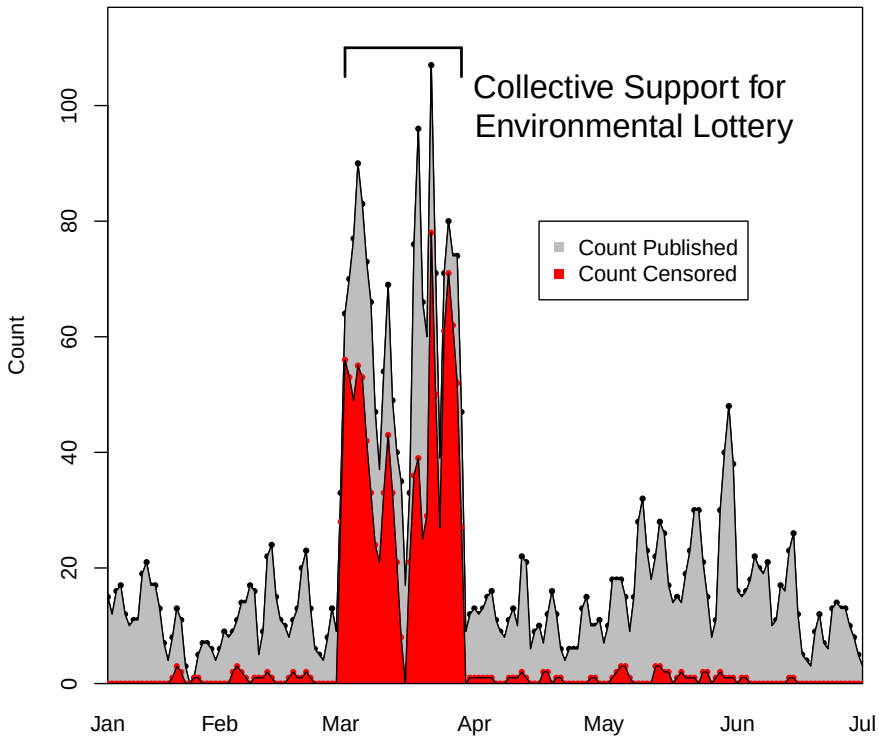

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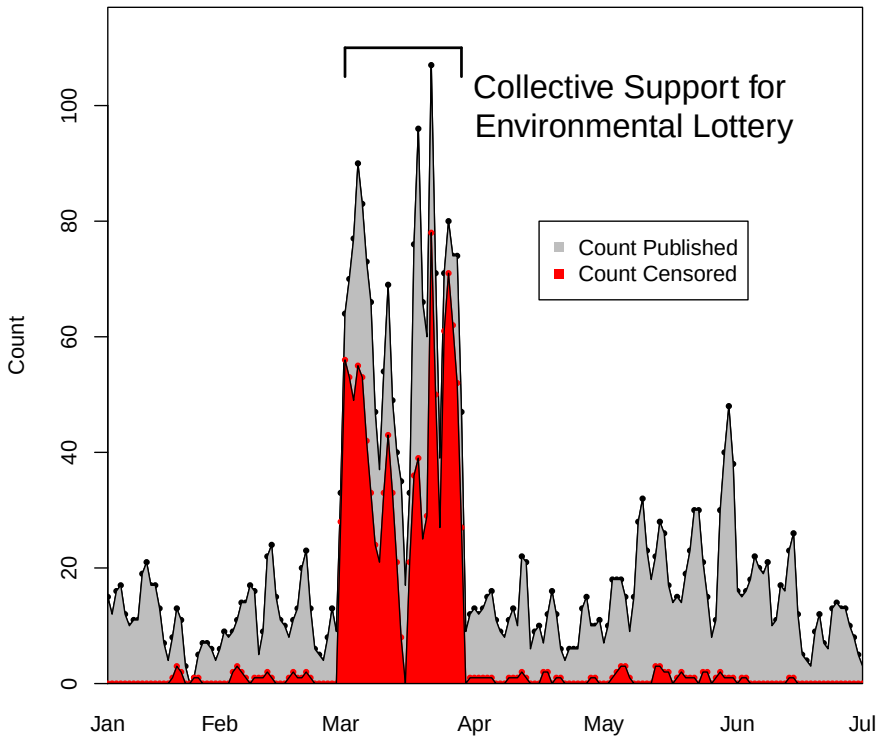

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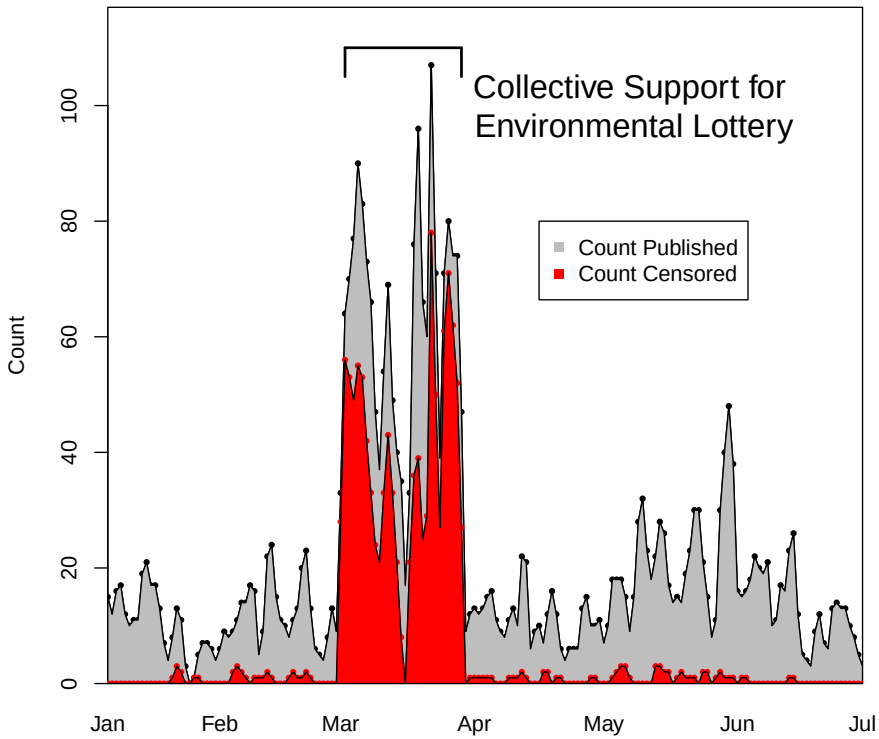

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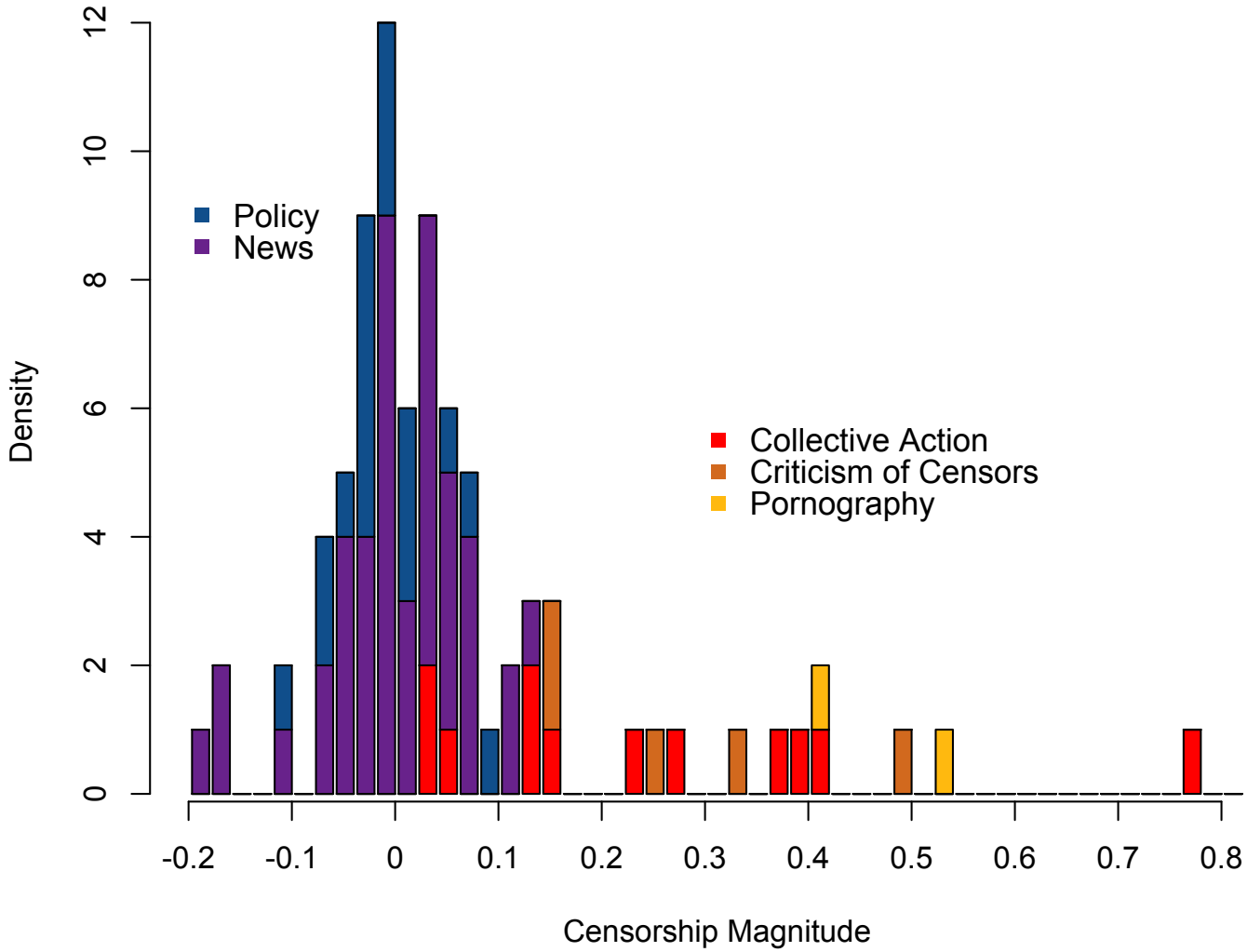

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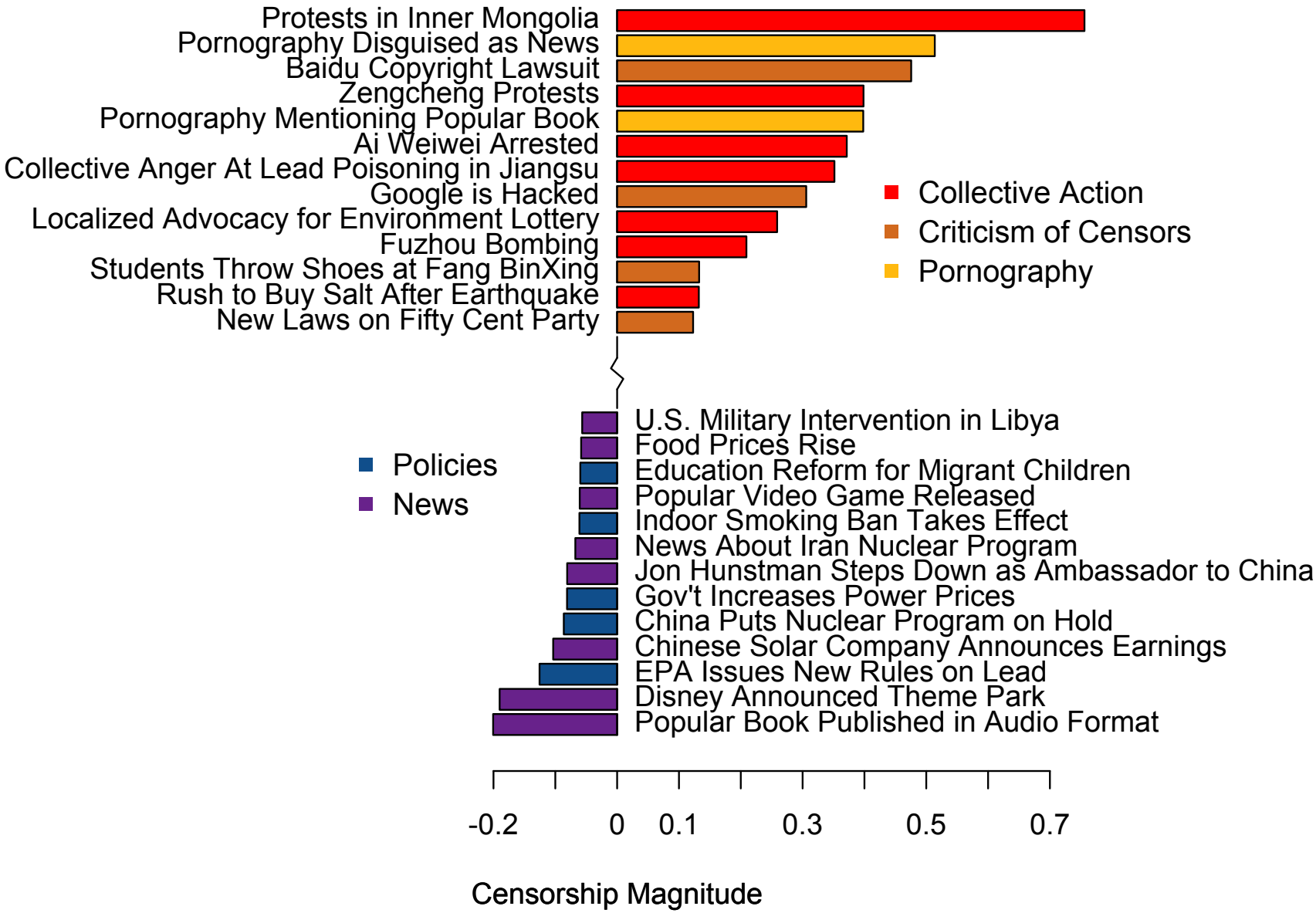
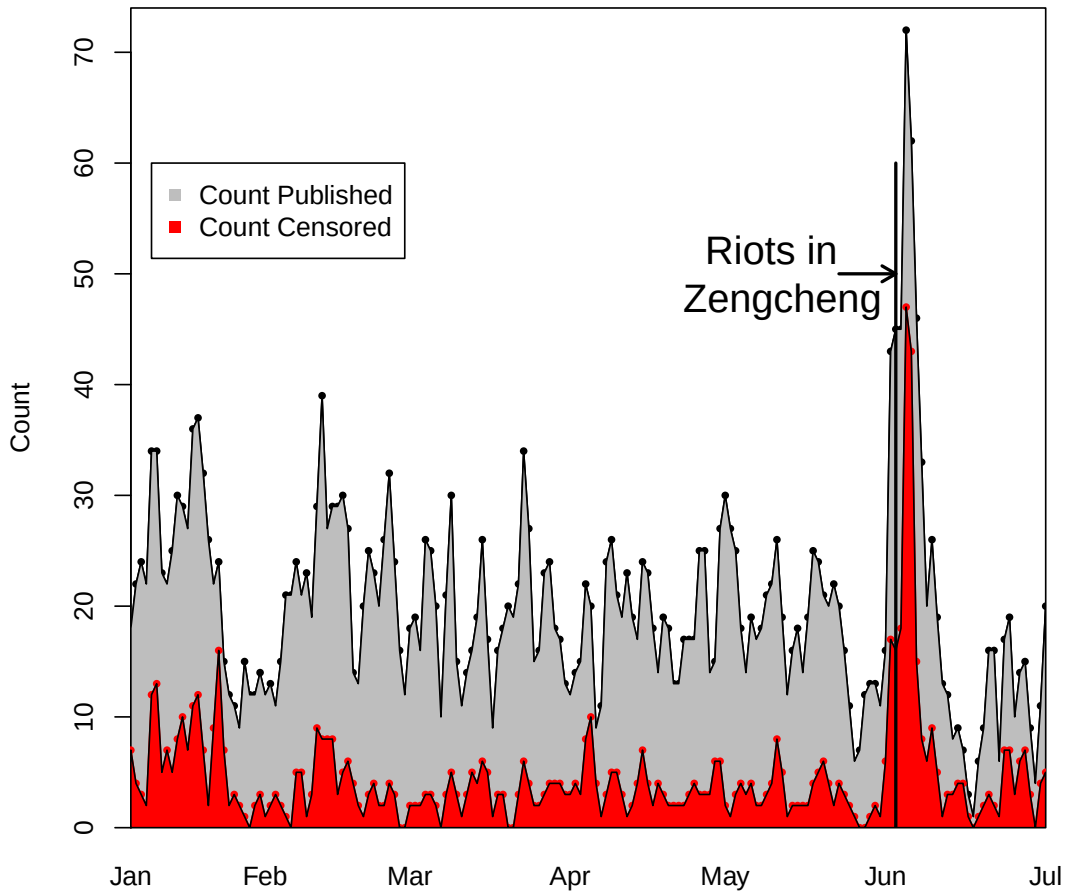
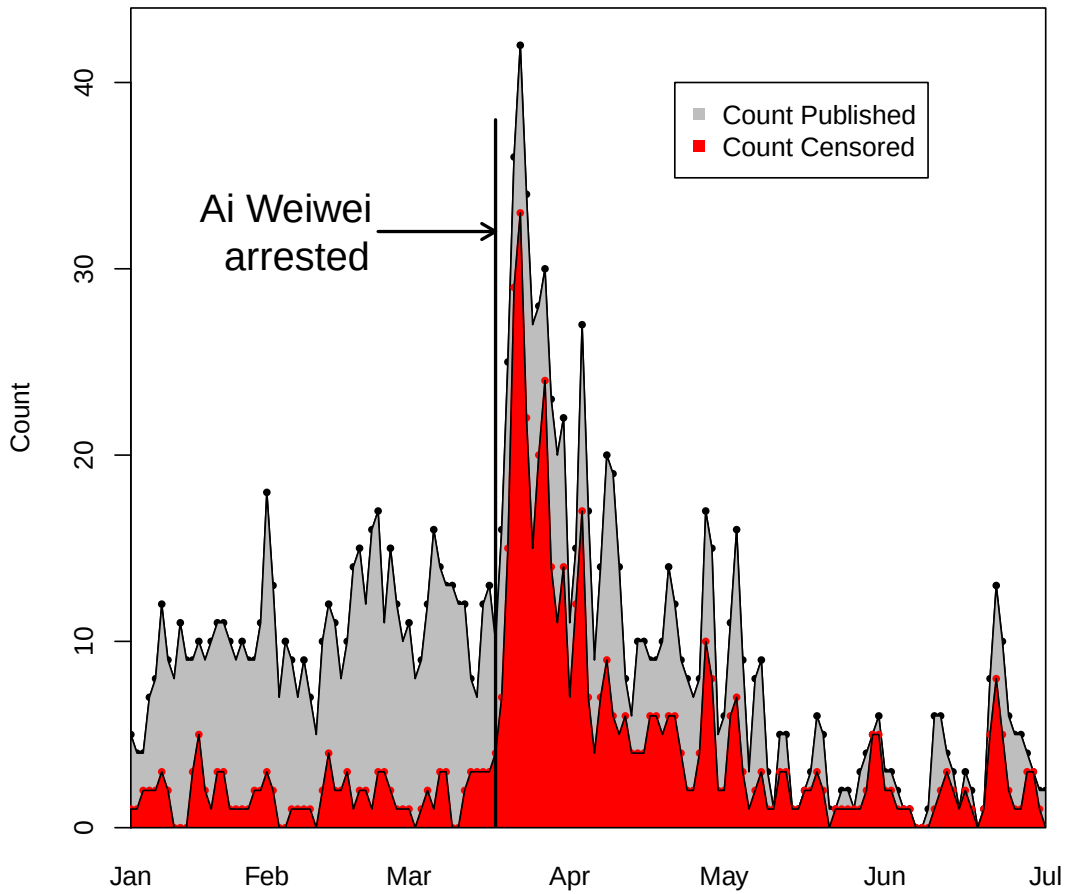


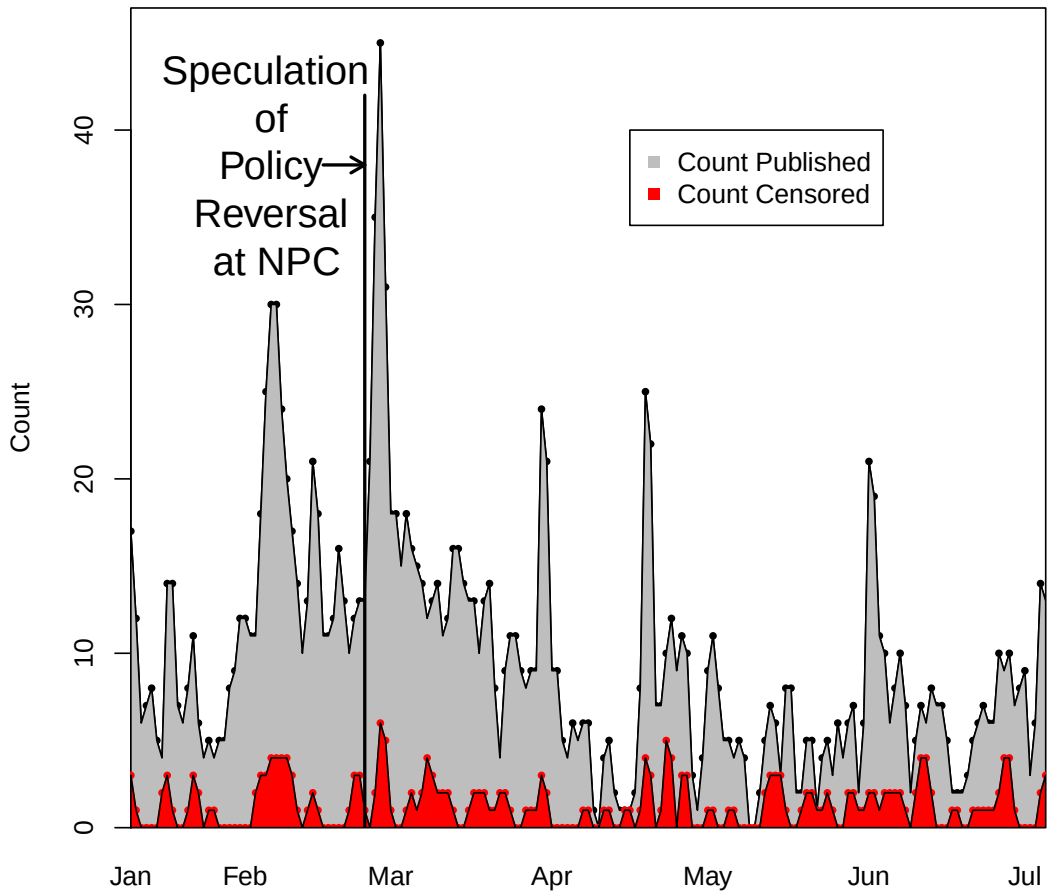
Censoring Collective Action: Riots in Zencheng



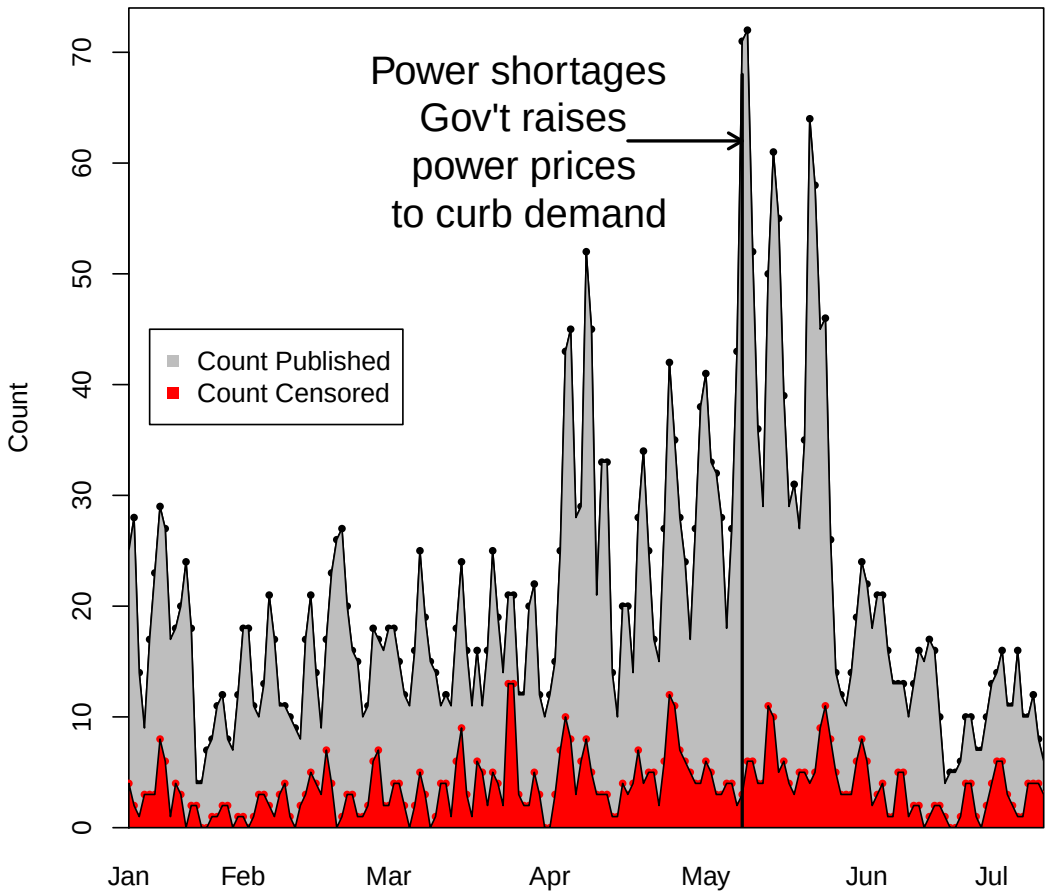
Censoring Collective Action: Ai Weiwei's Arrest



Low Censorship on Policy: One Child



Low Censorship on News: Power Prices



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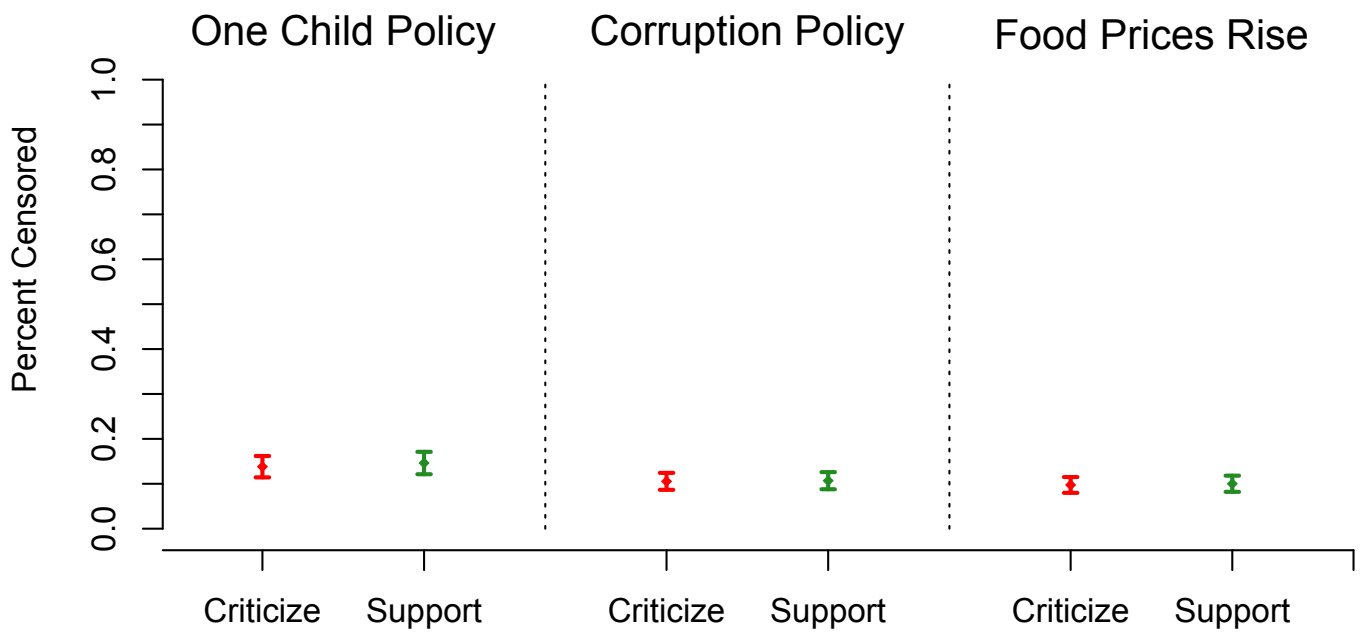

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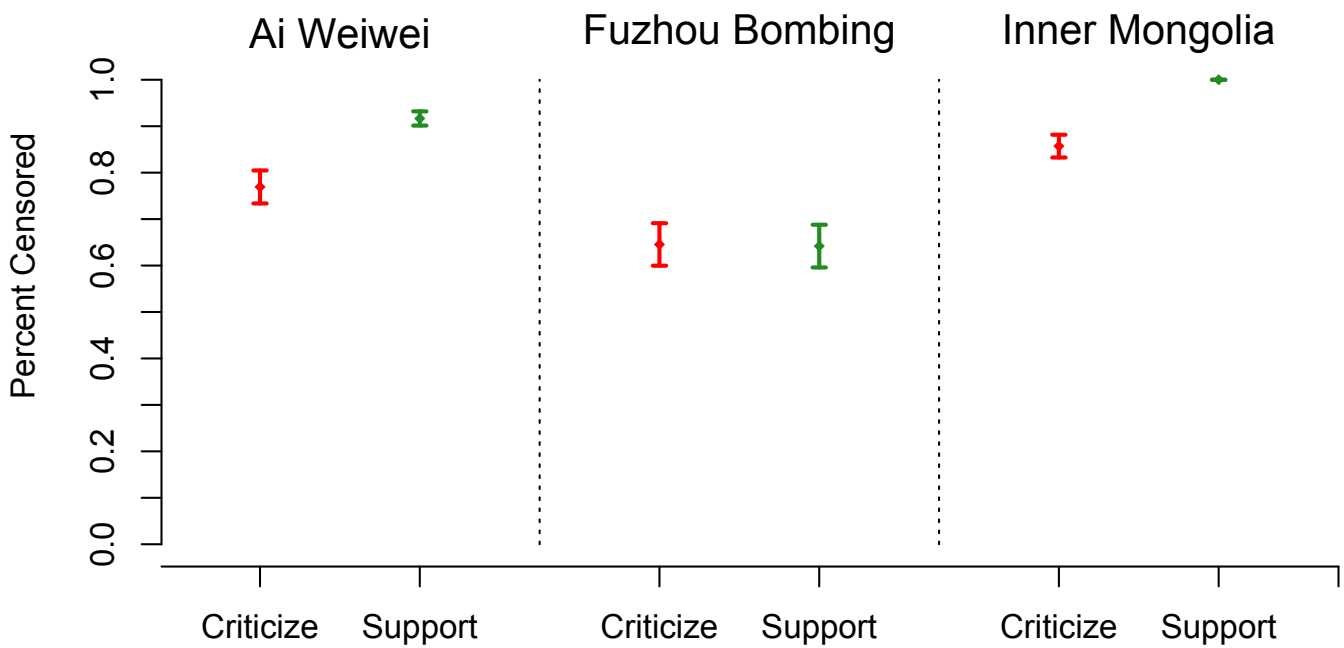

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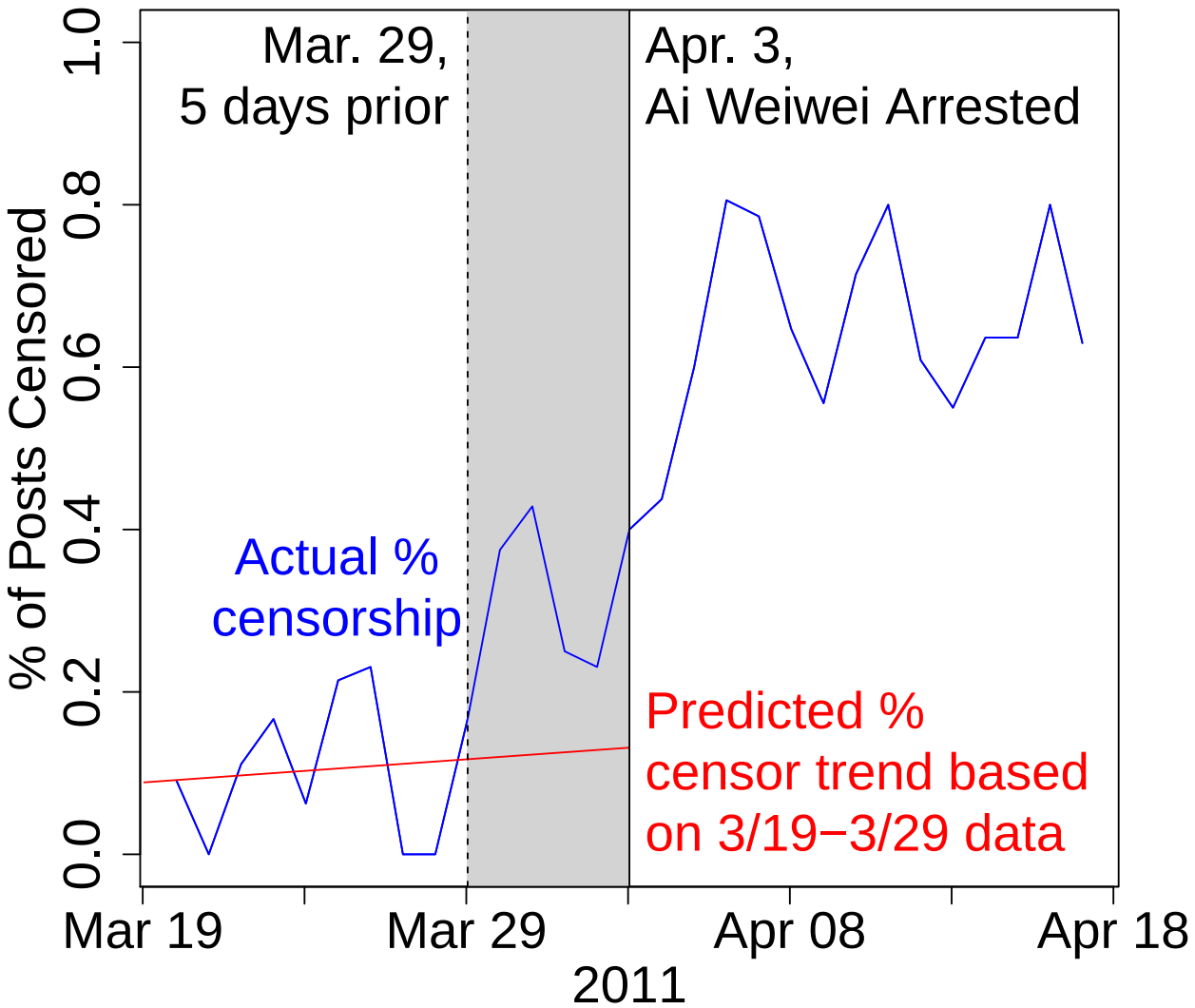

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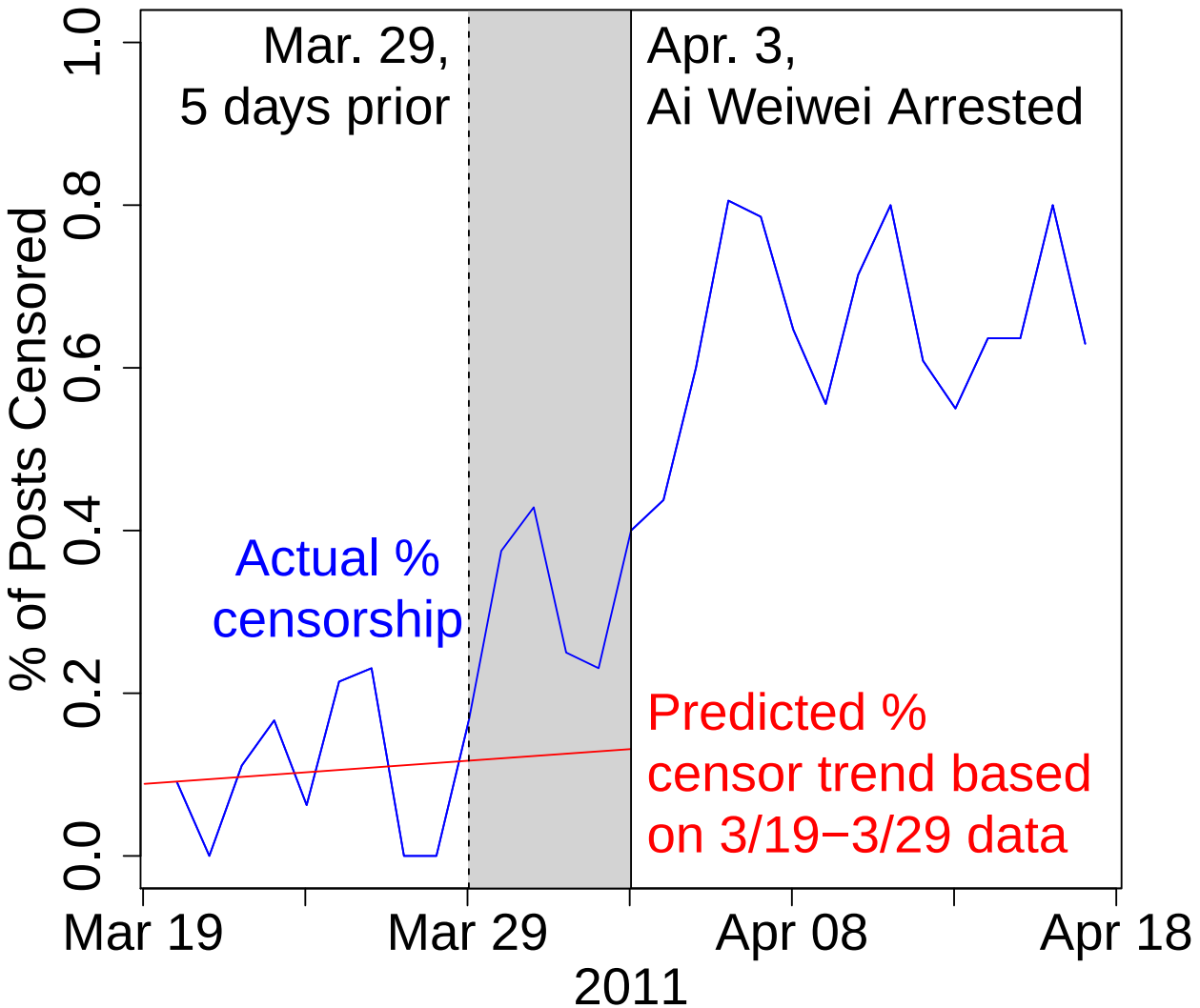

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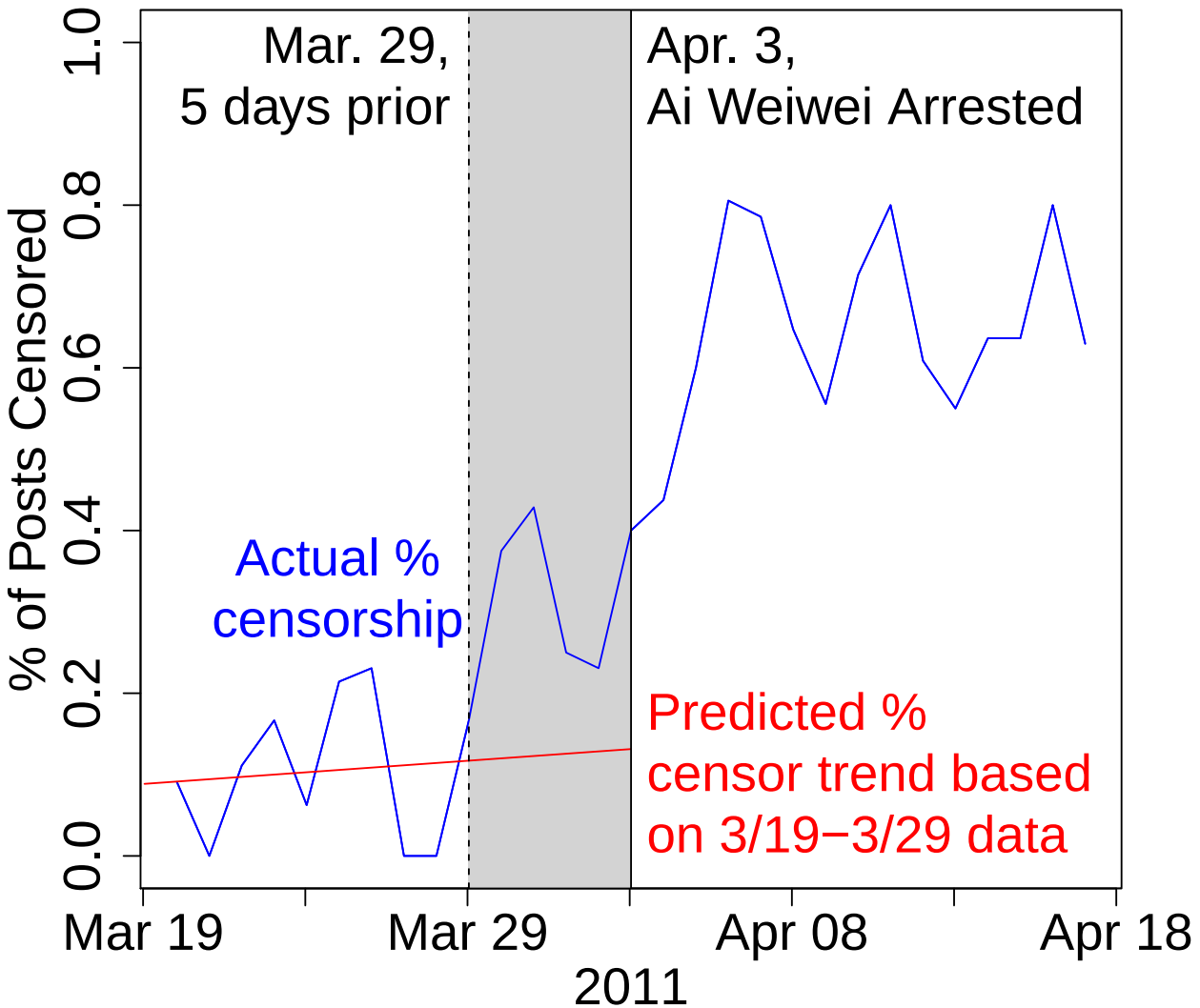

Placebo Test: Most extreme of all effects

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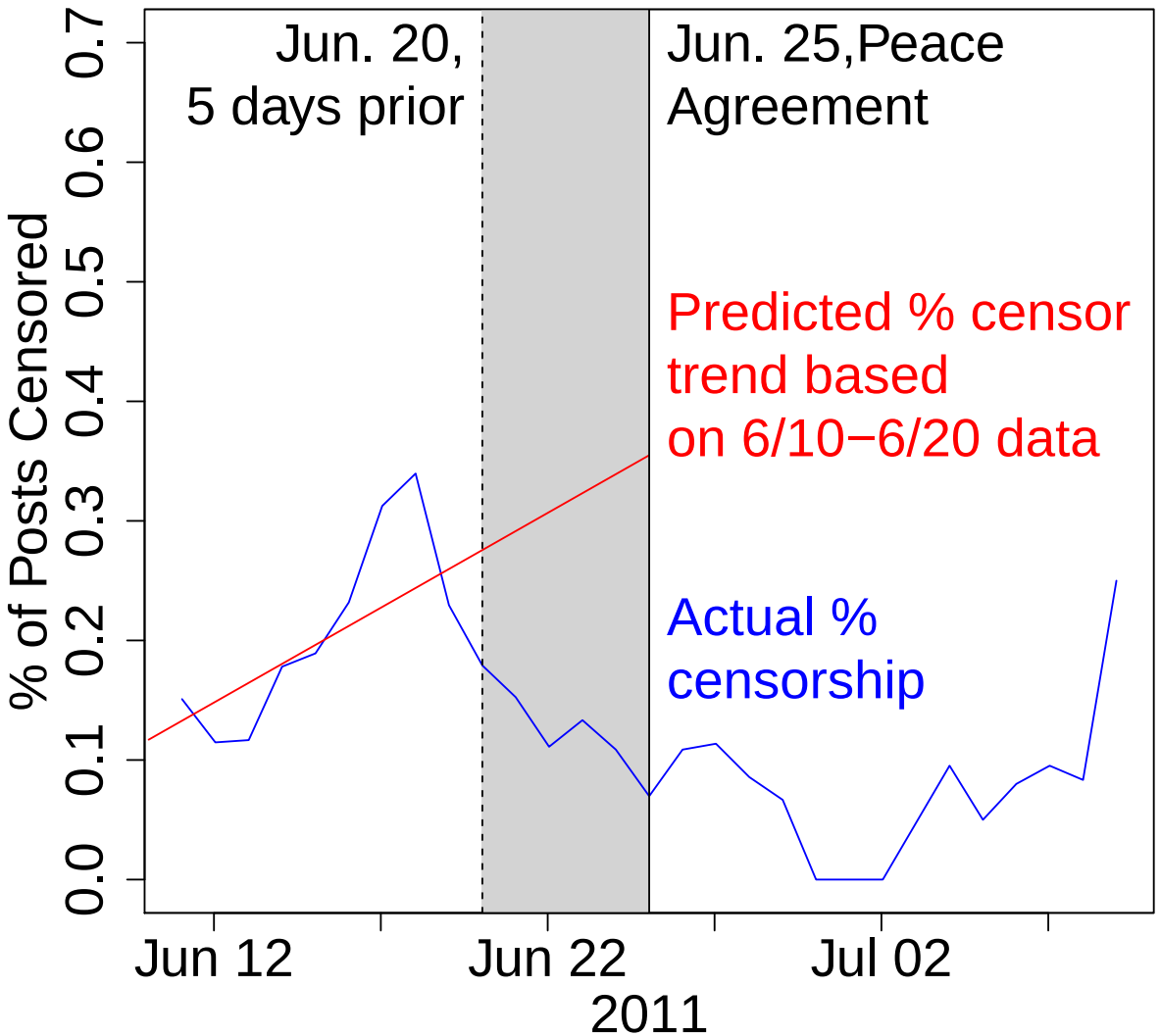

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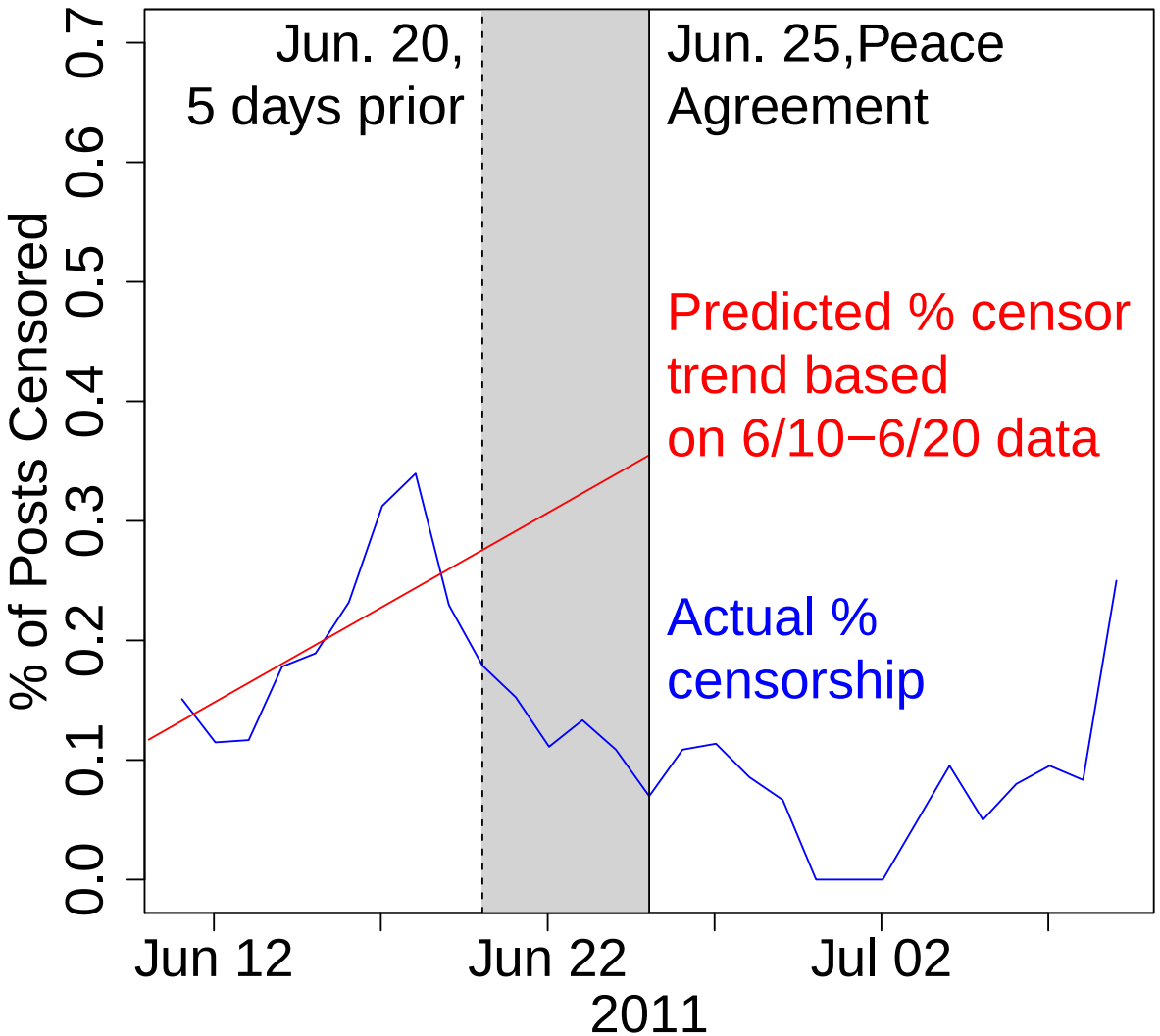

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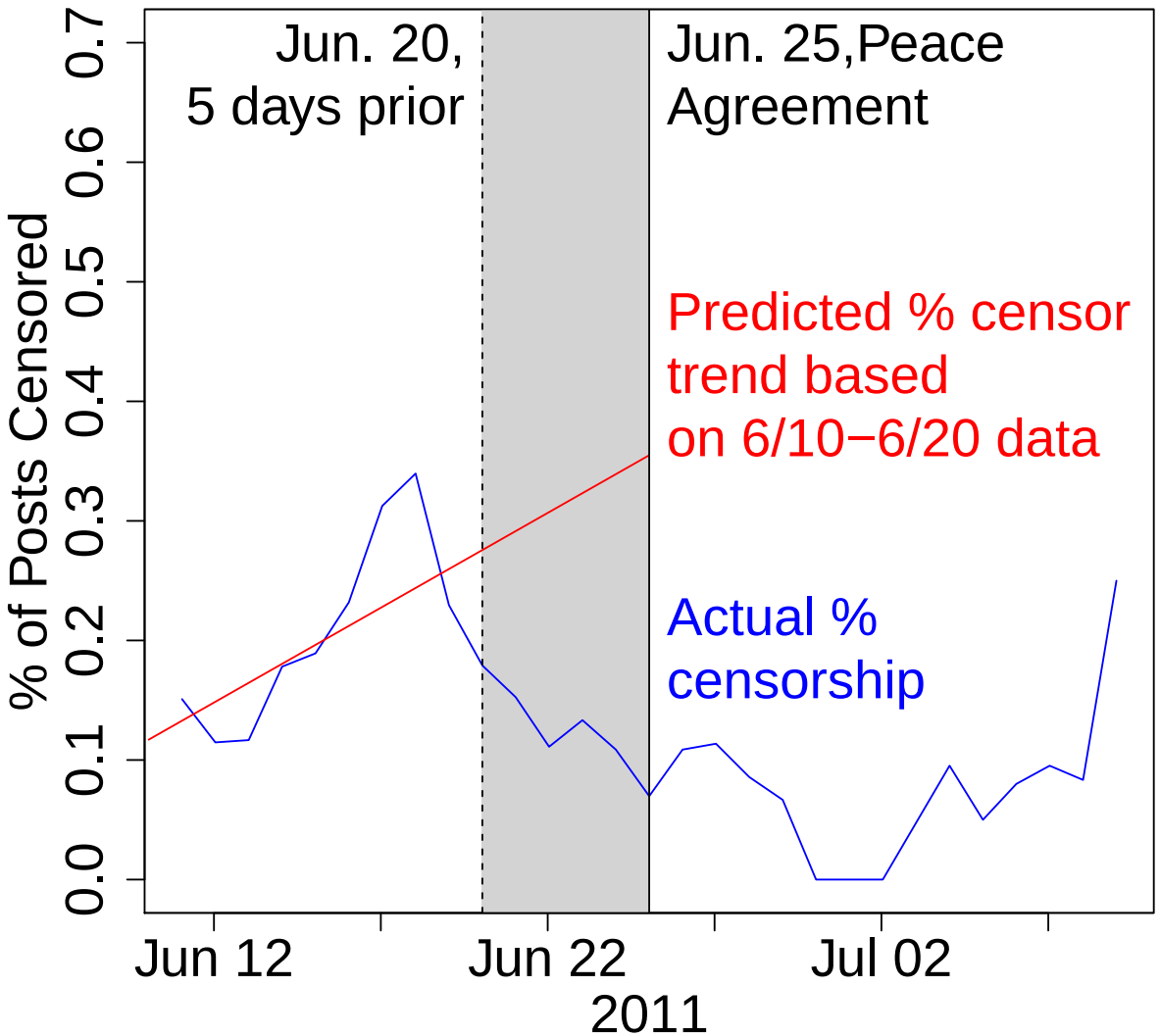

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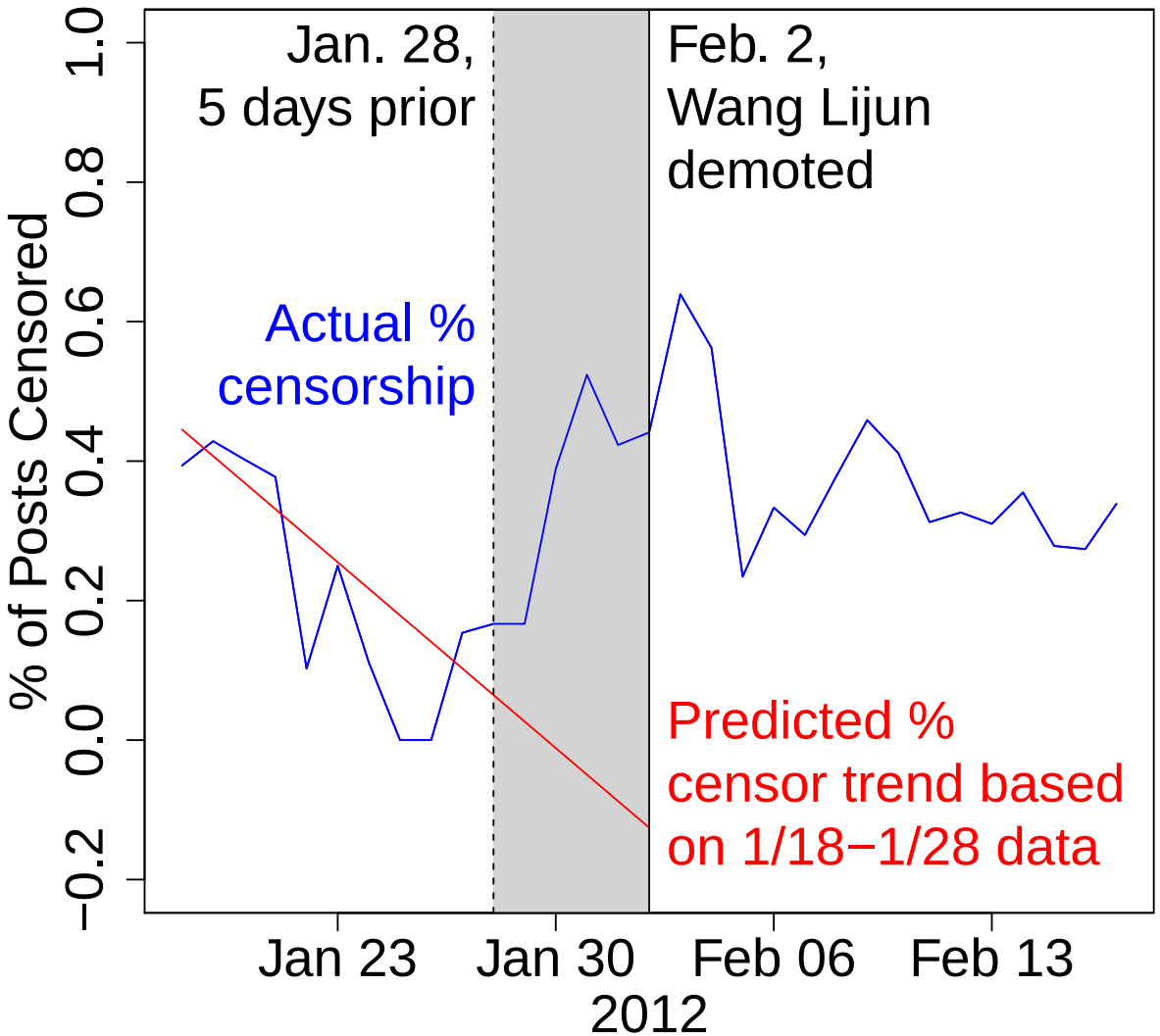

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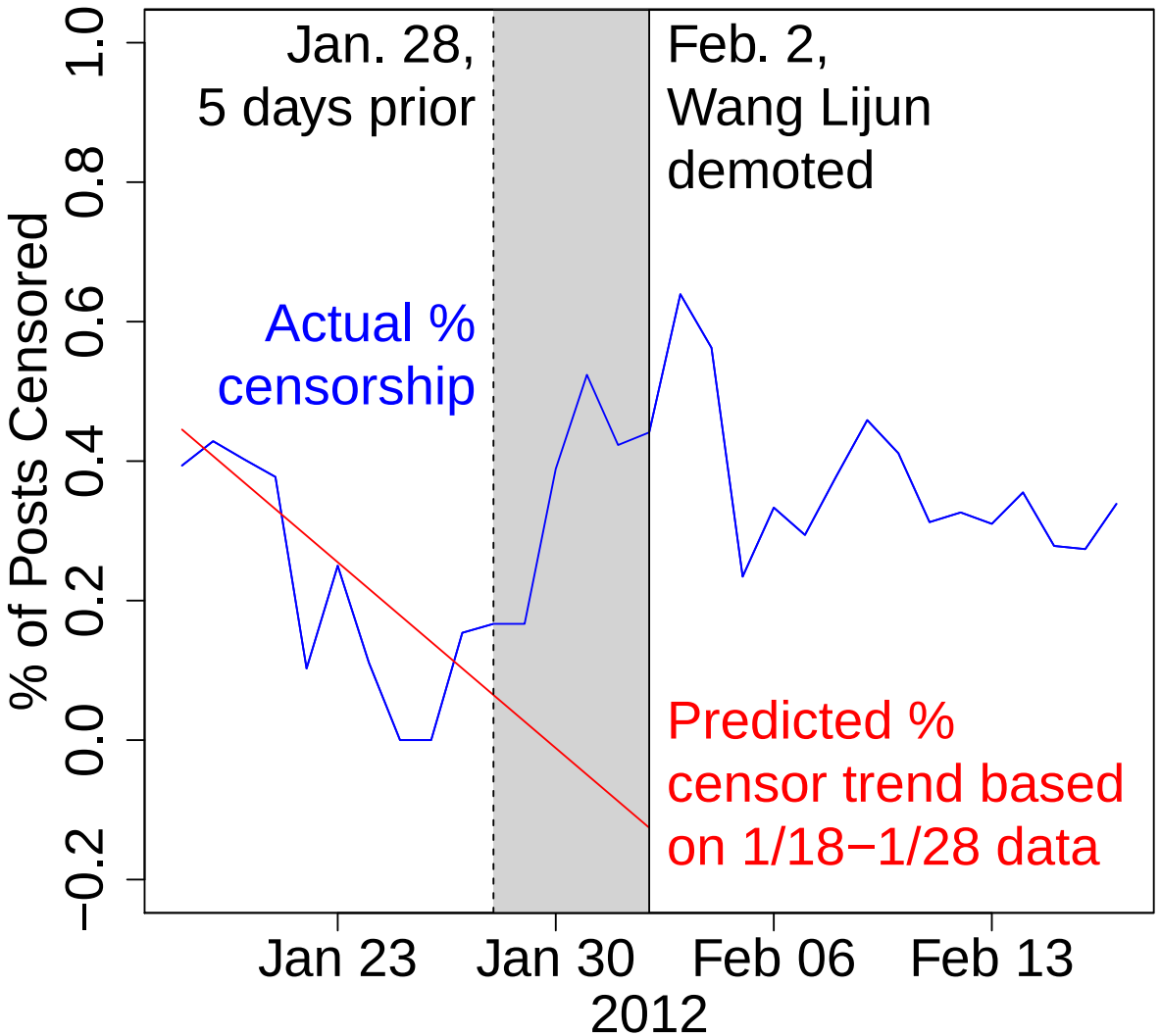

Placebo Test:

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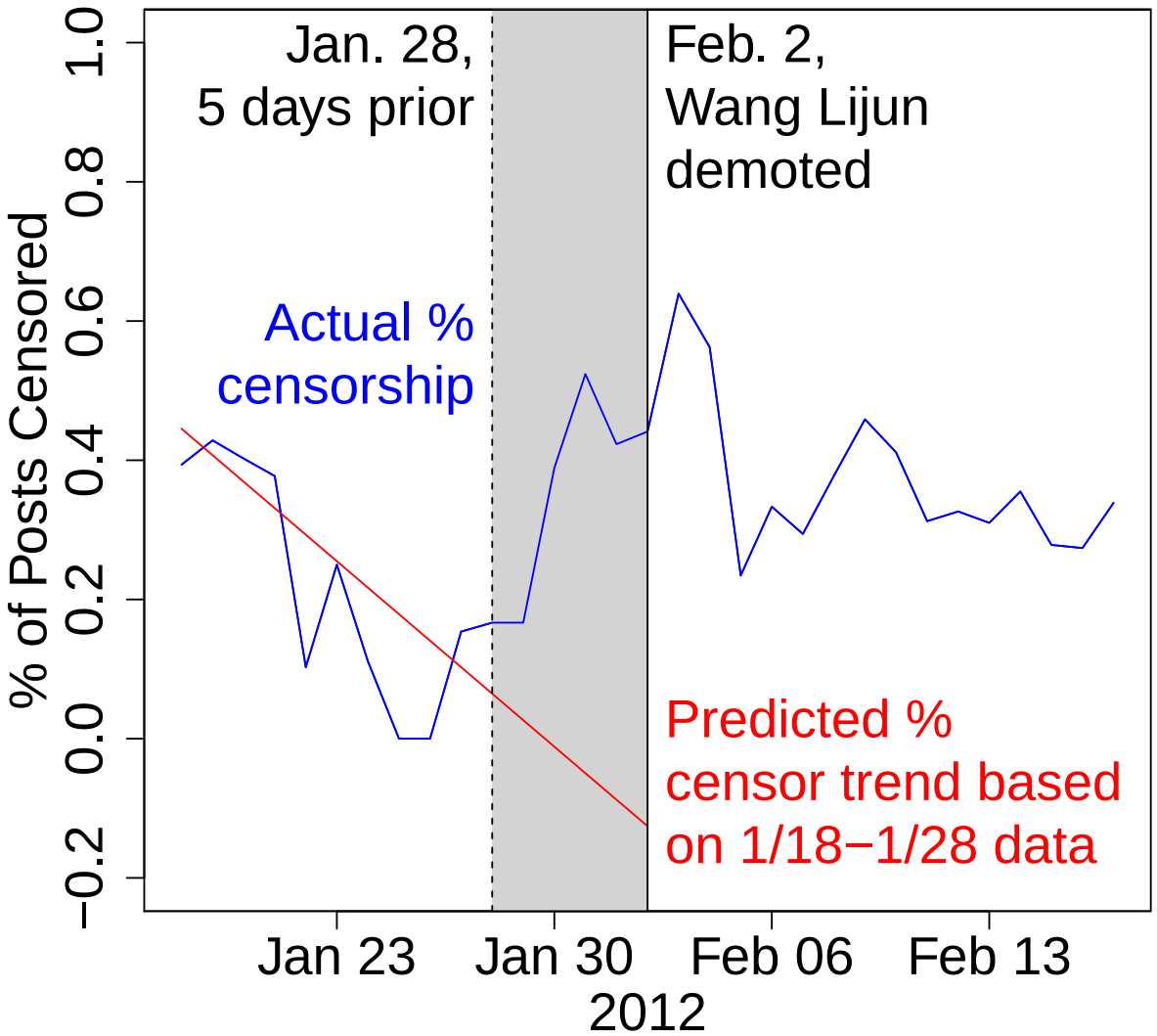

Placebo Test: Most extreme of all effects

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   - To learn: we tried every software option, read the documentation, and called customer support(!)

Mechanisms of Censorship

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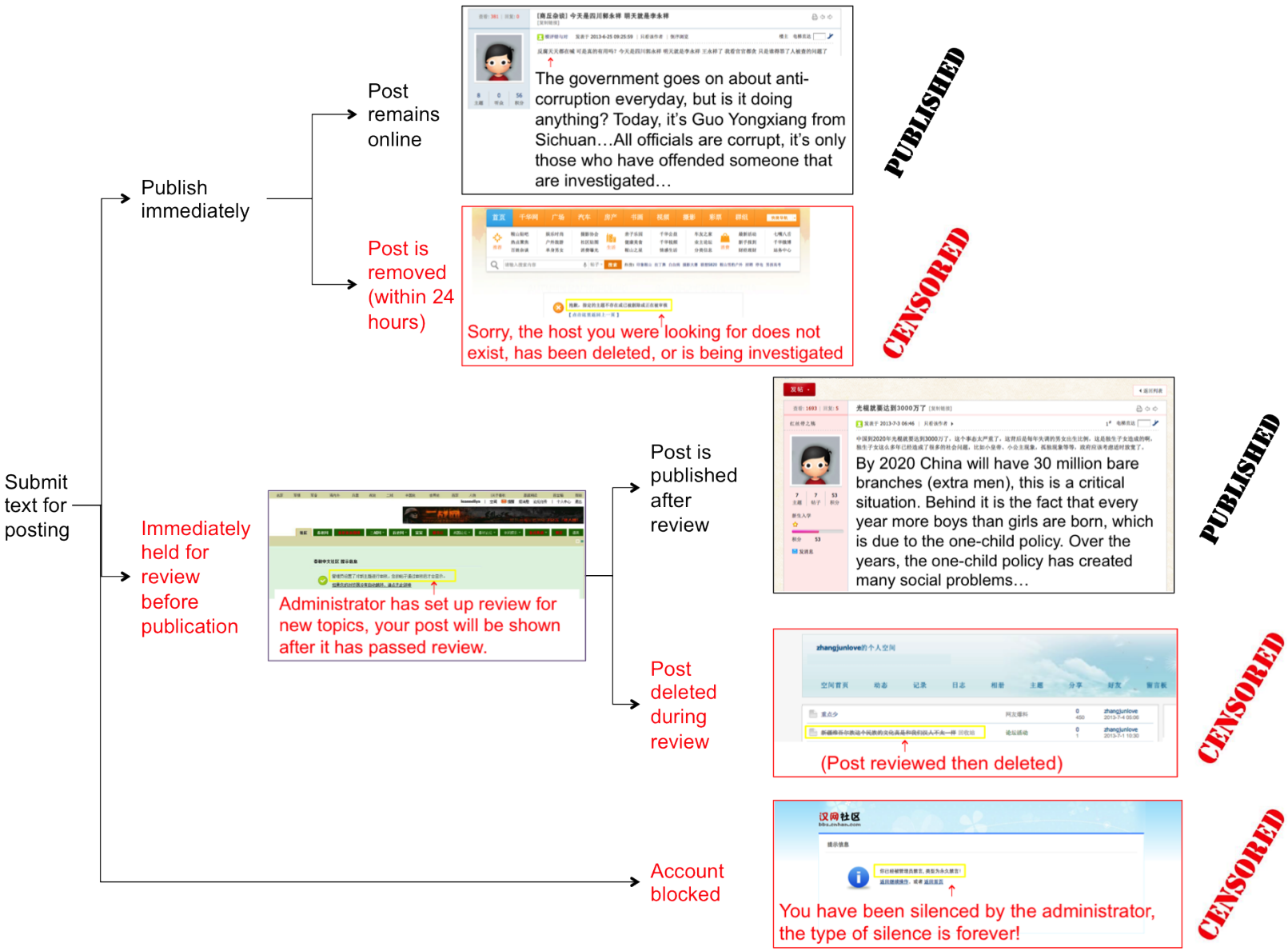

Mechanisms of Censorship

Submit text for posting

Publish immediately

Post remains online

PUBLISHED

Post is removed (within 24 hours)

CENSORED

Obser-vational study

Immediately held for review before publication

Post is published after review

PUBLISHED

Post deleted during review

CENSORED

Account blocked

CENSORED

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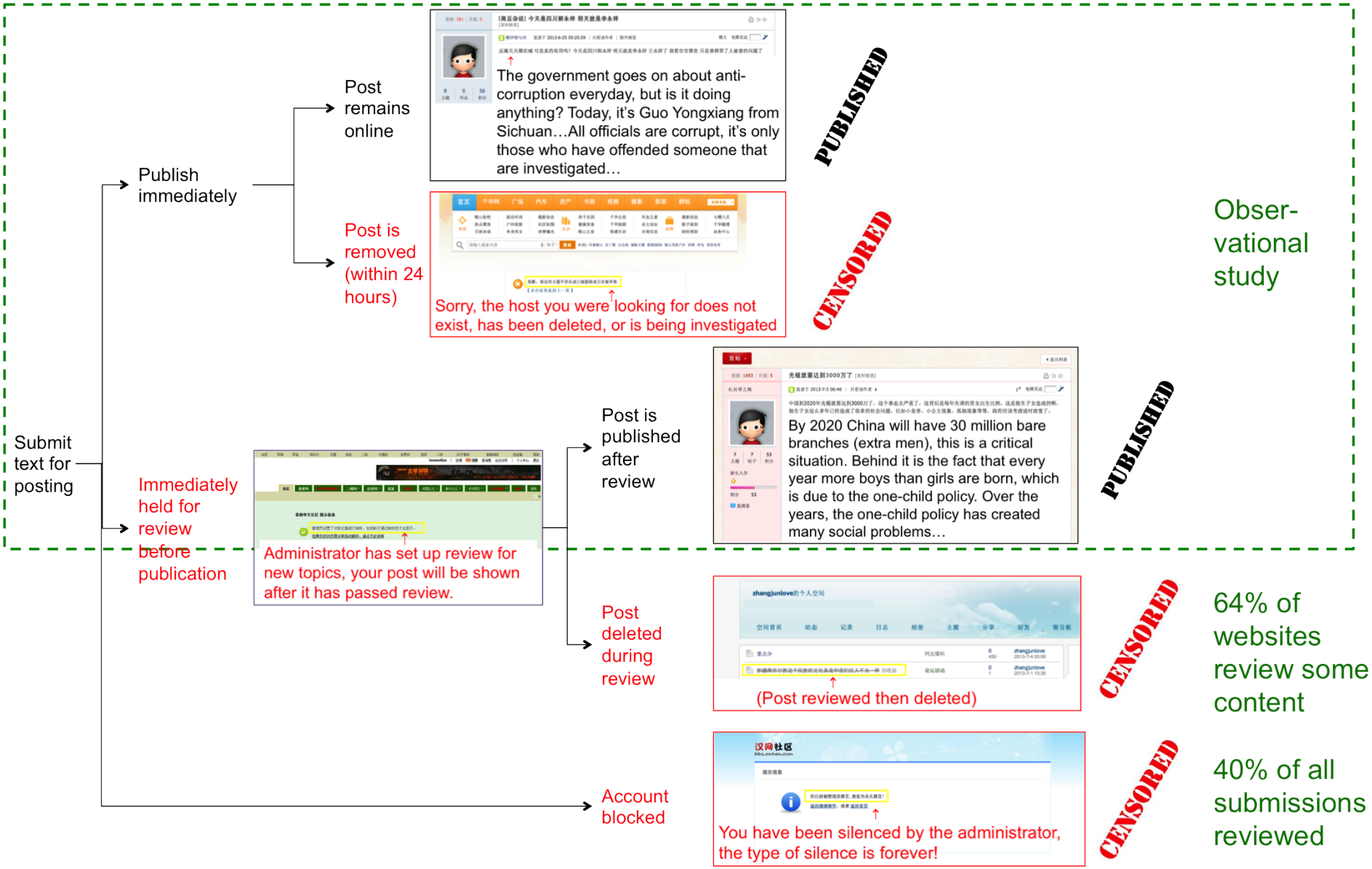

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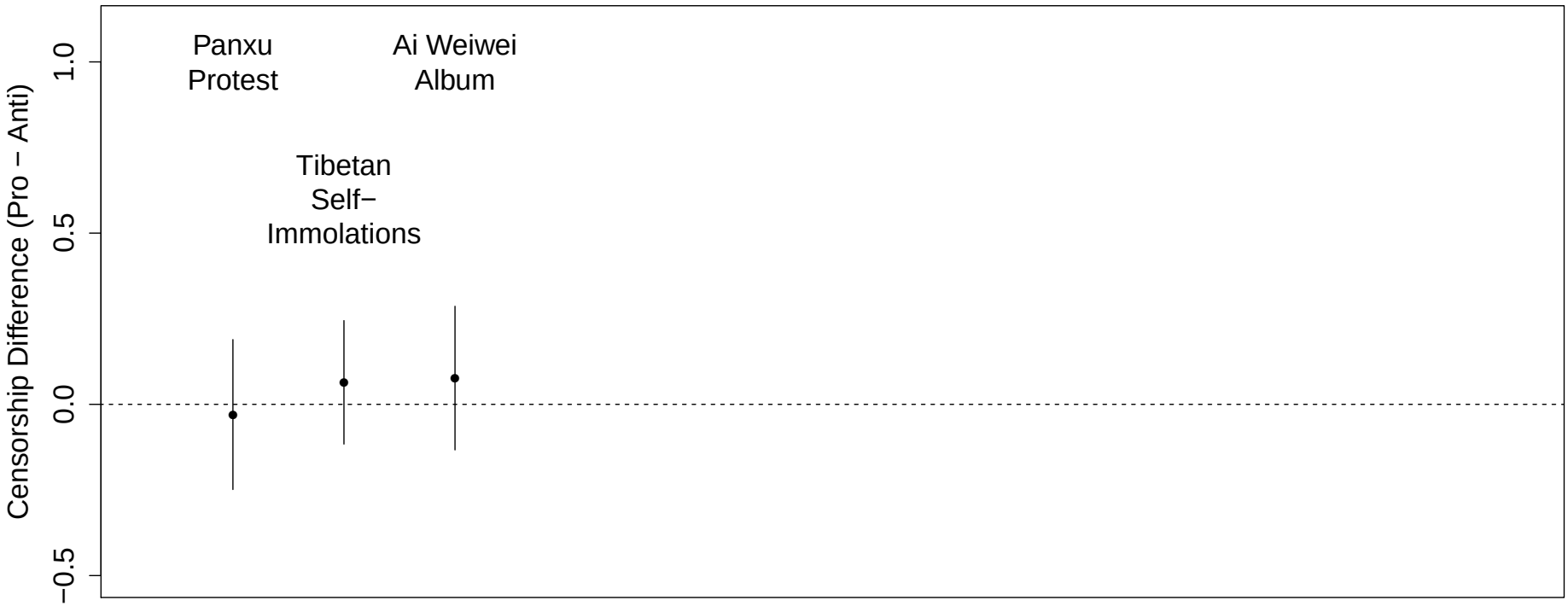

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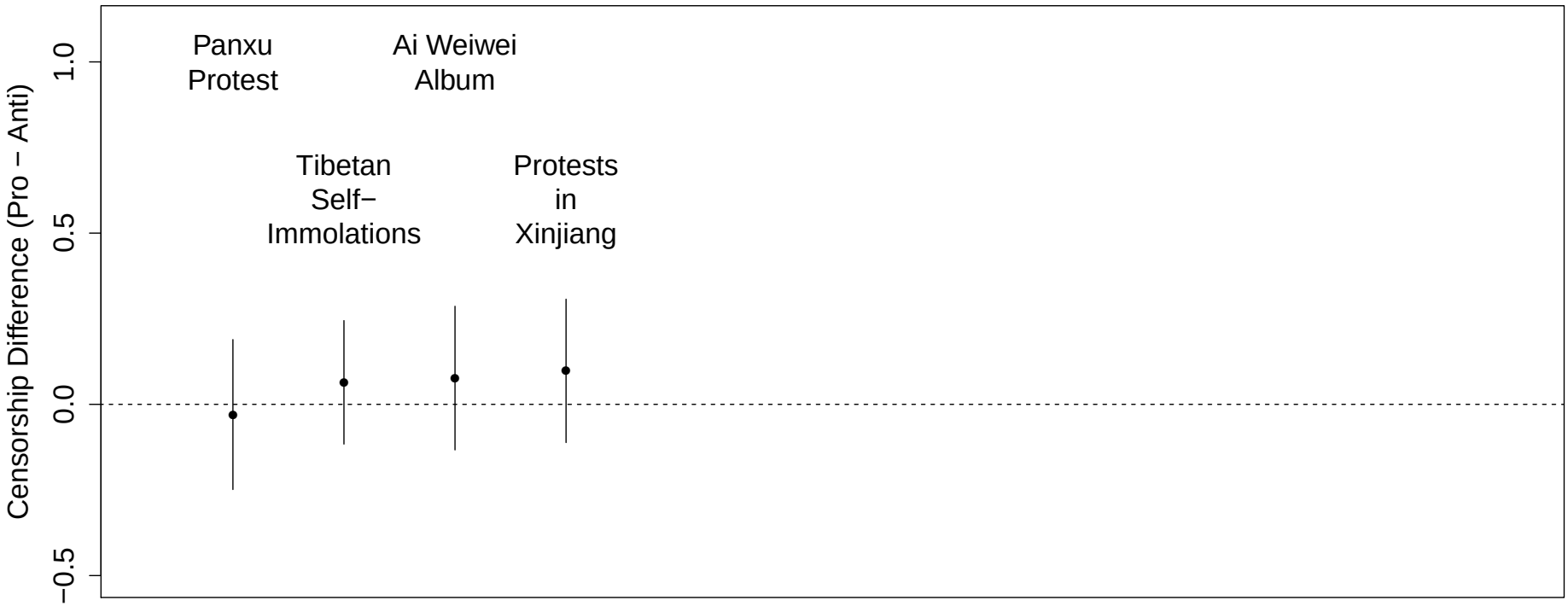

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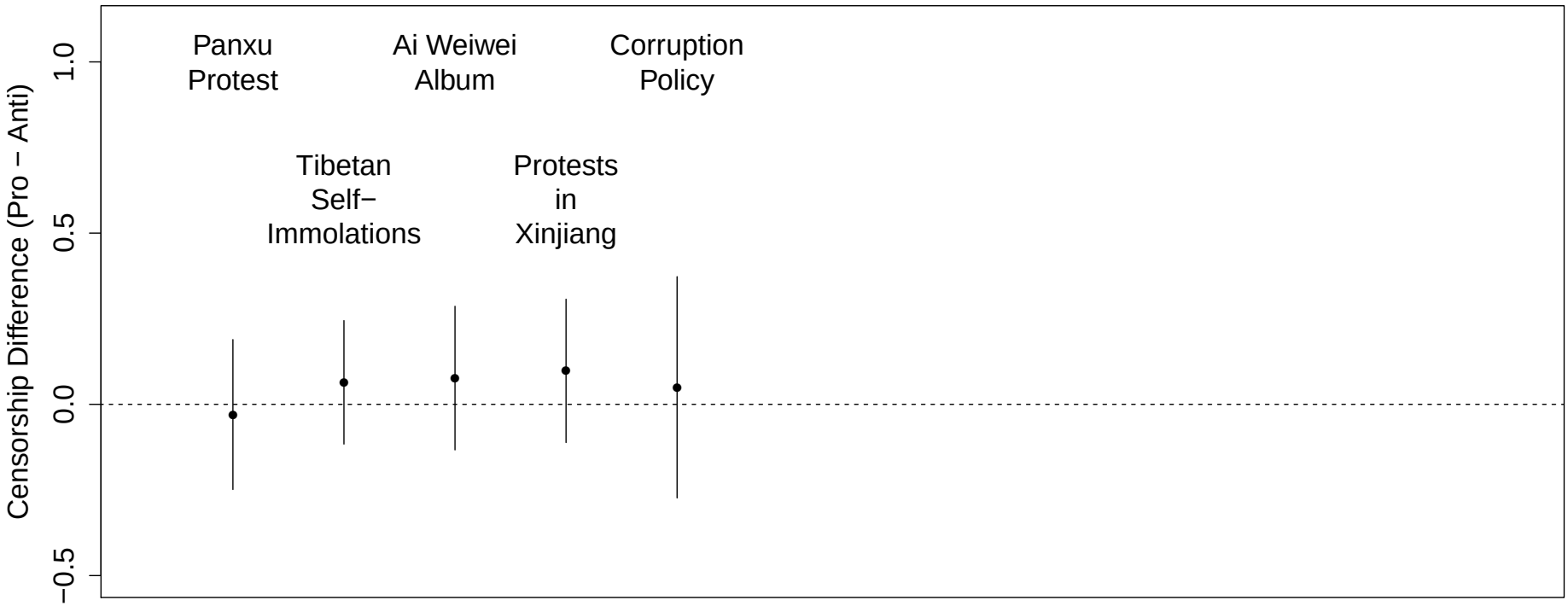

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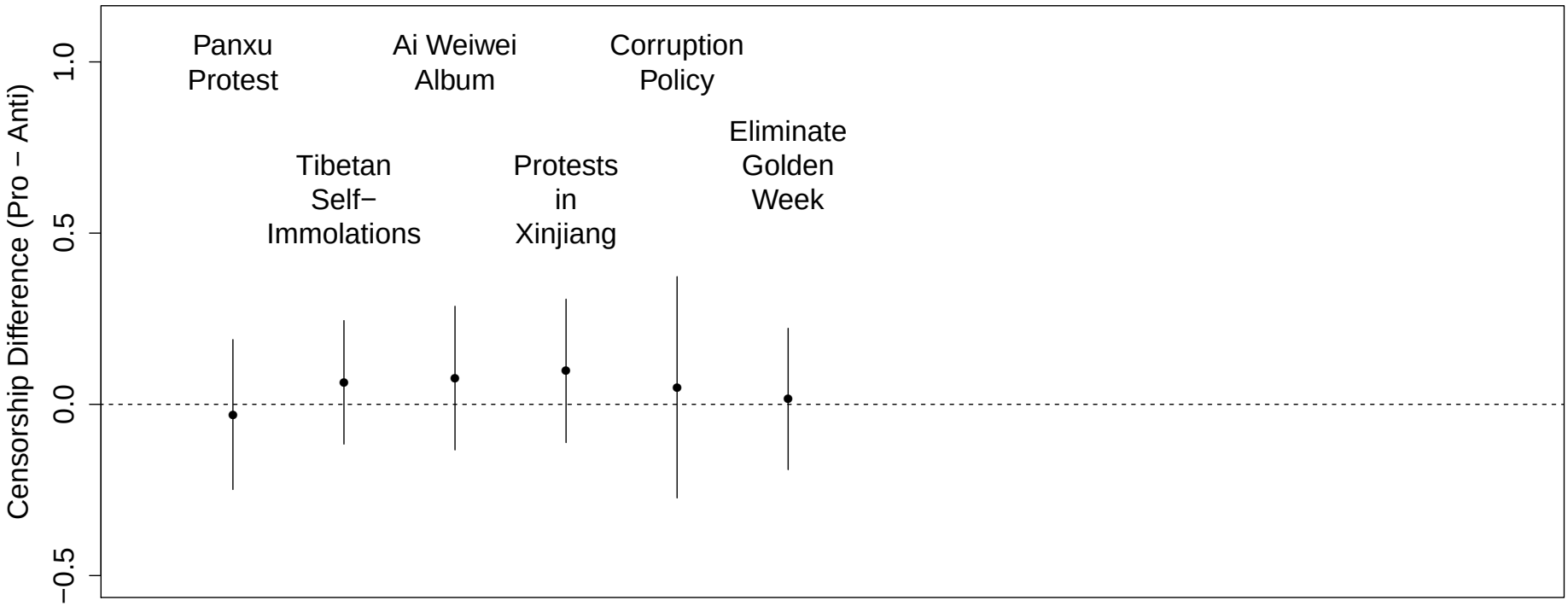

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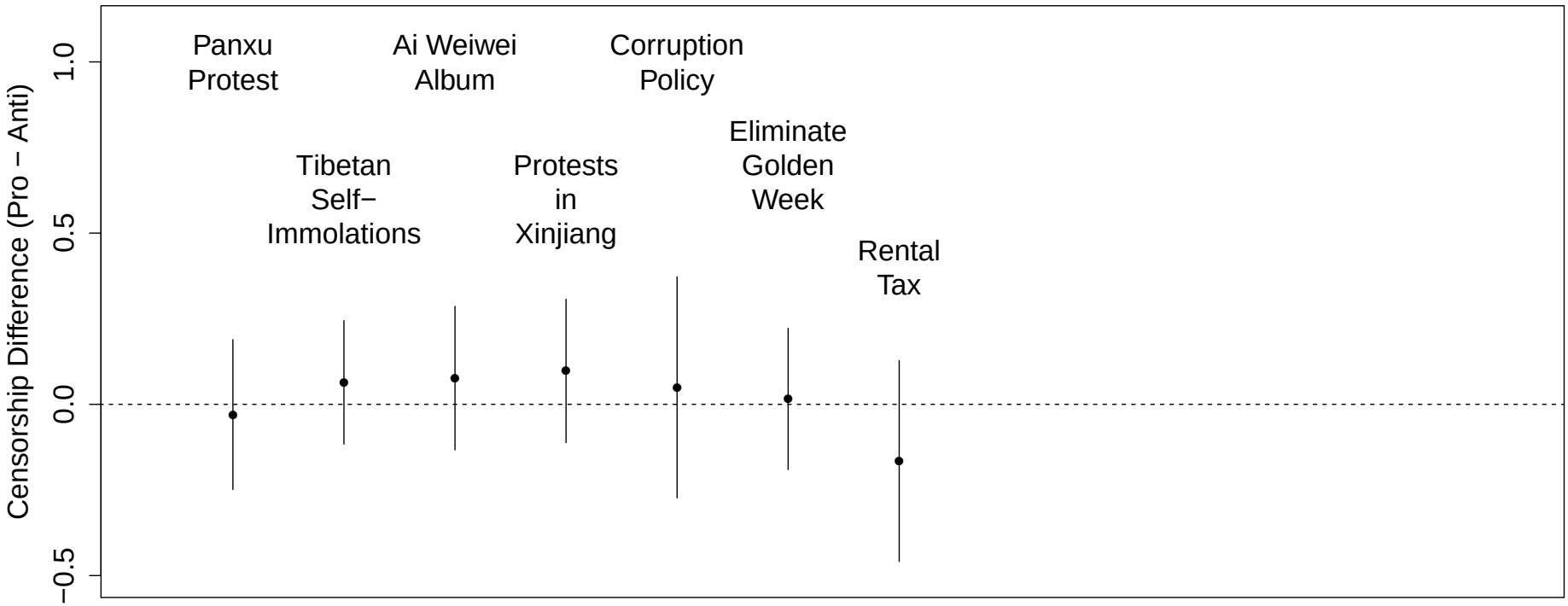

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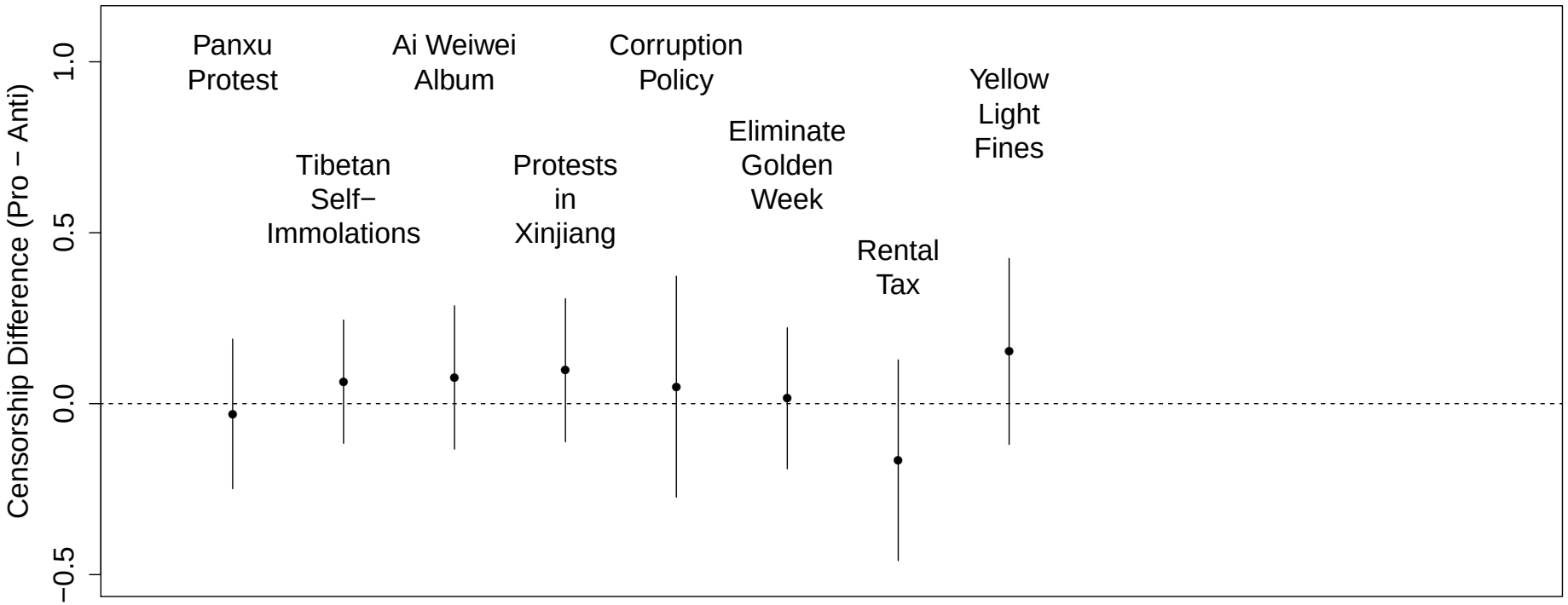

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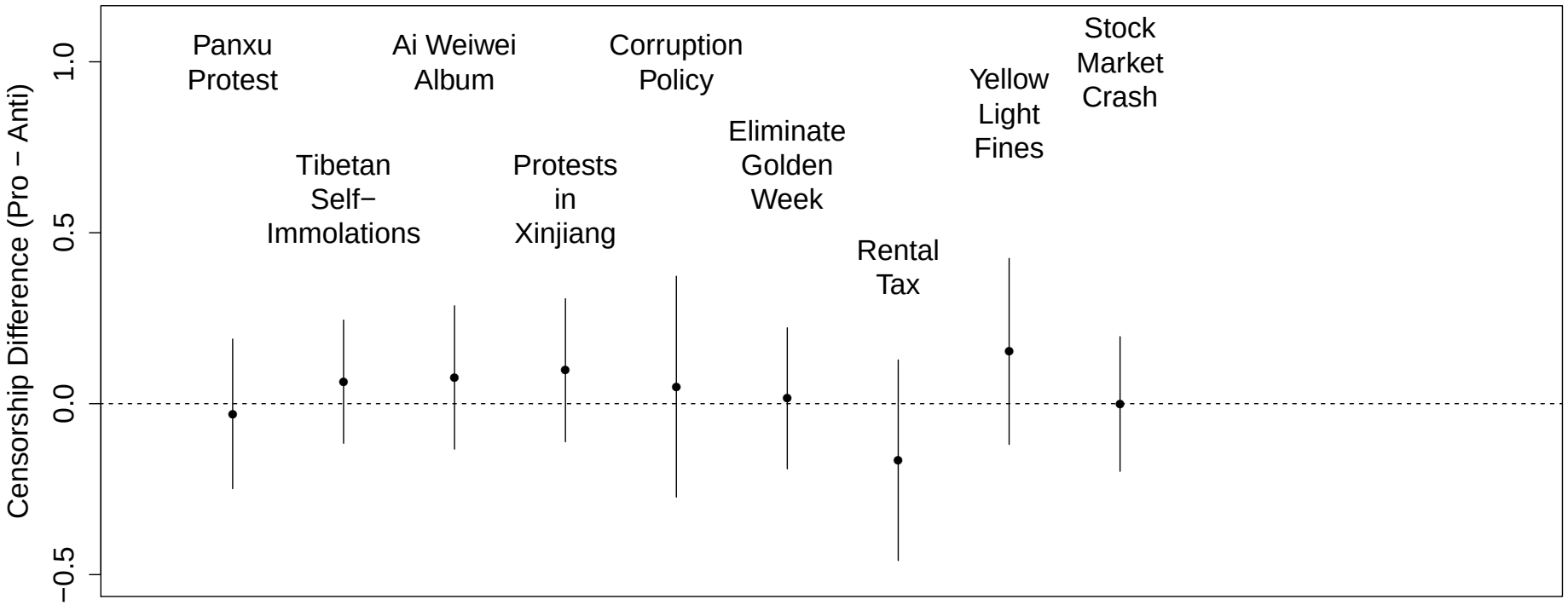

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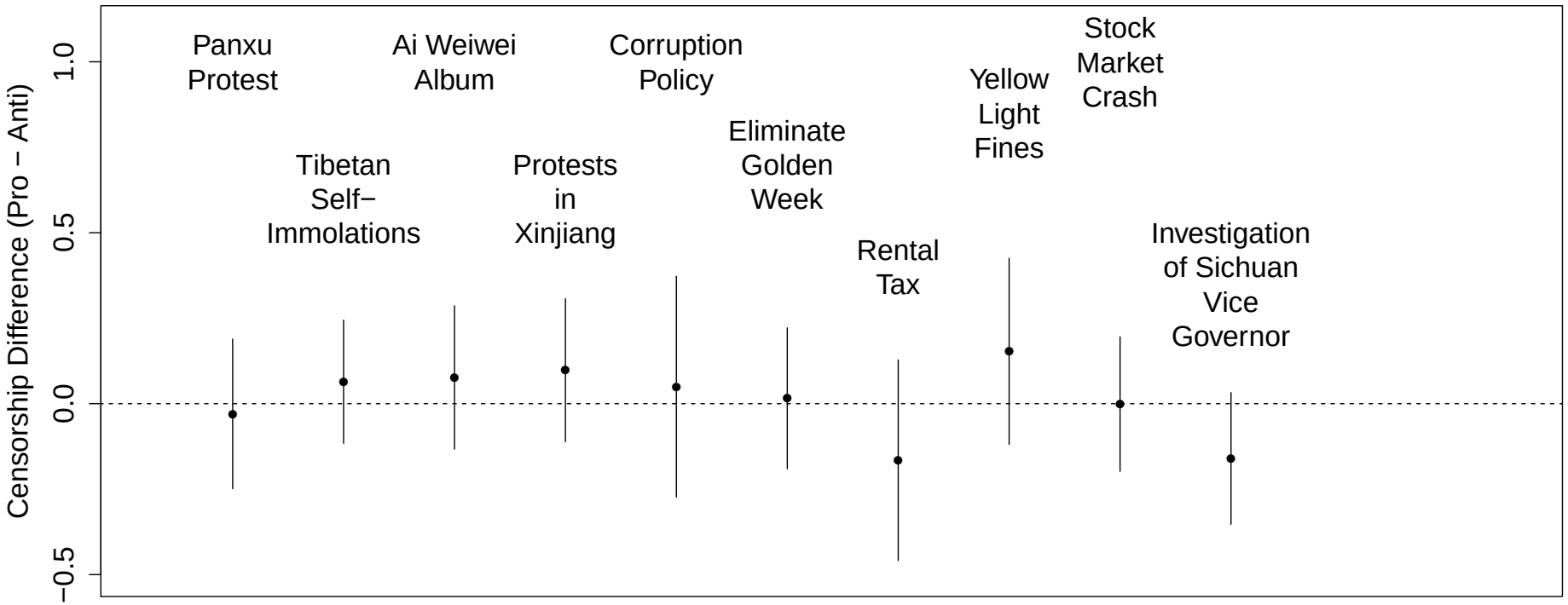

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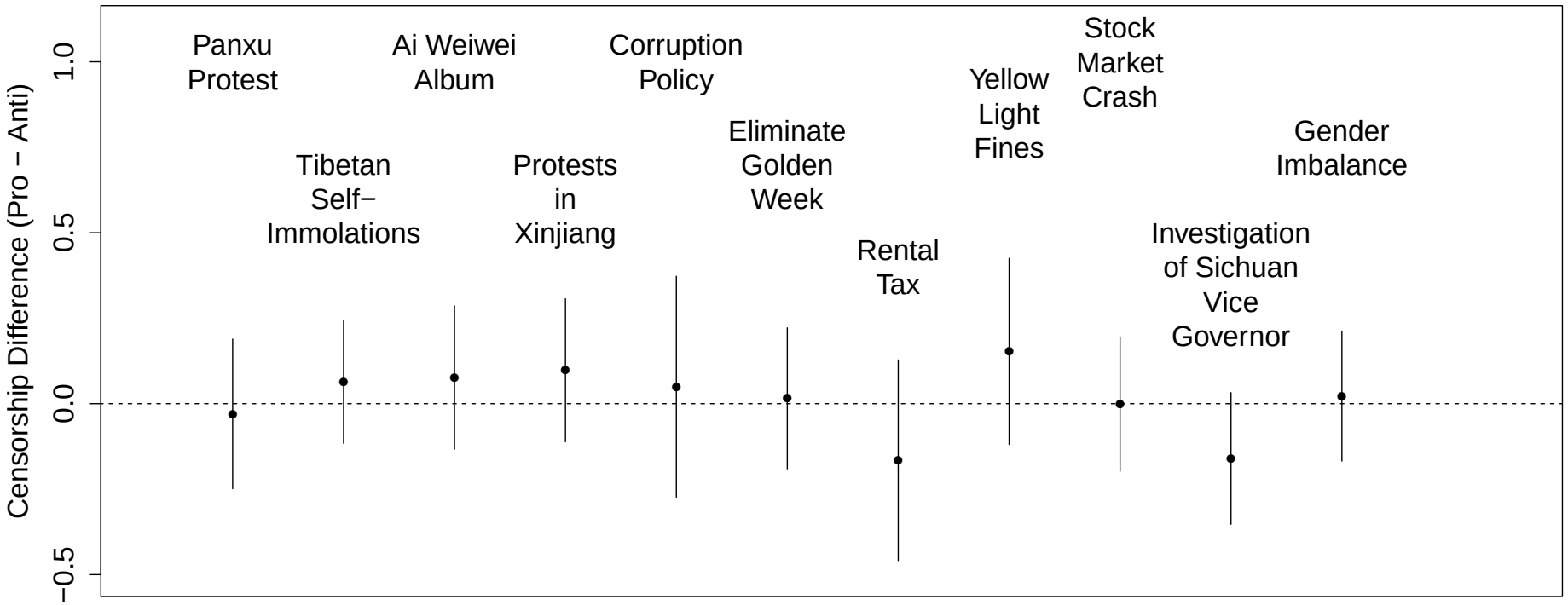

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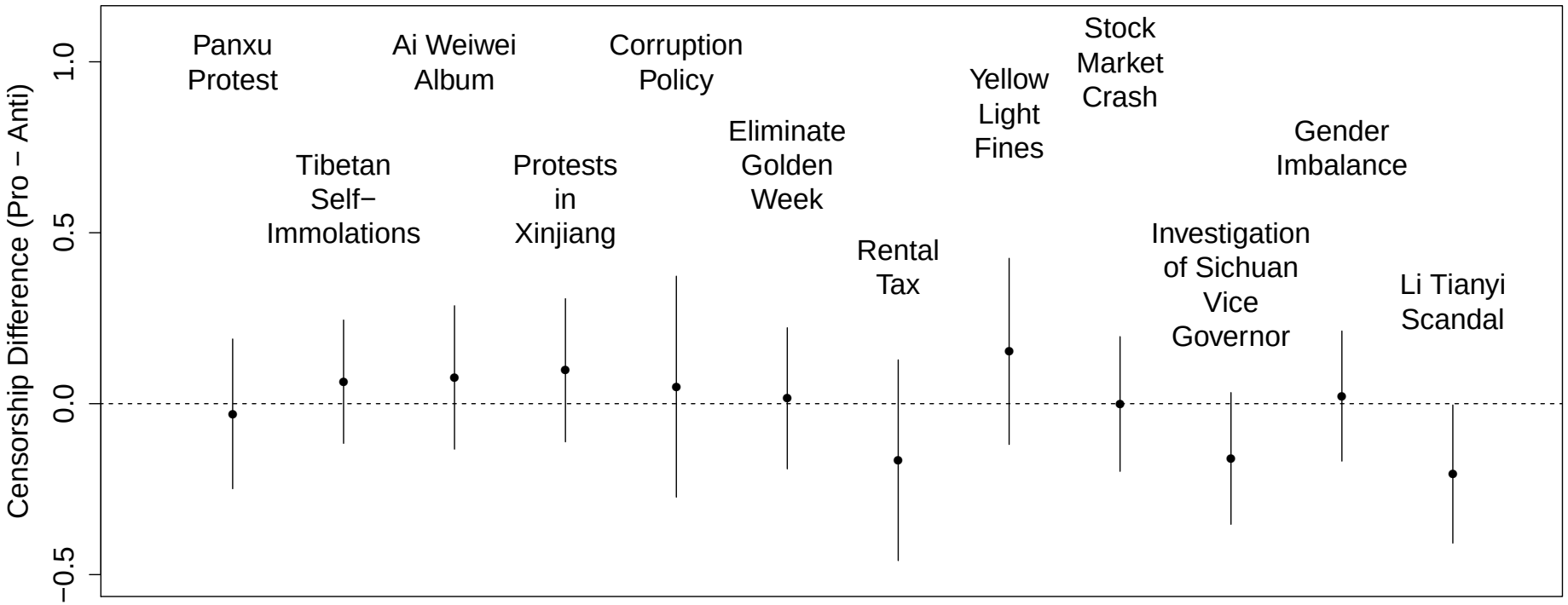

Collective Action Events: Large Causal Effect

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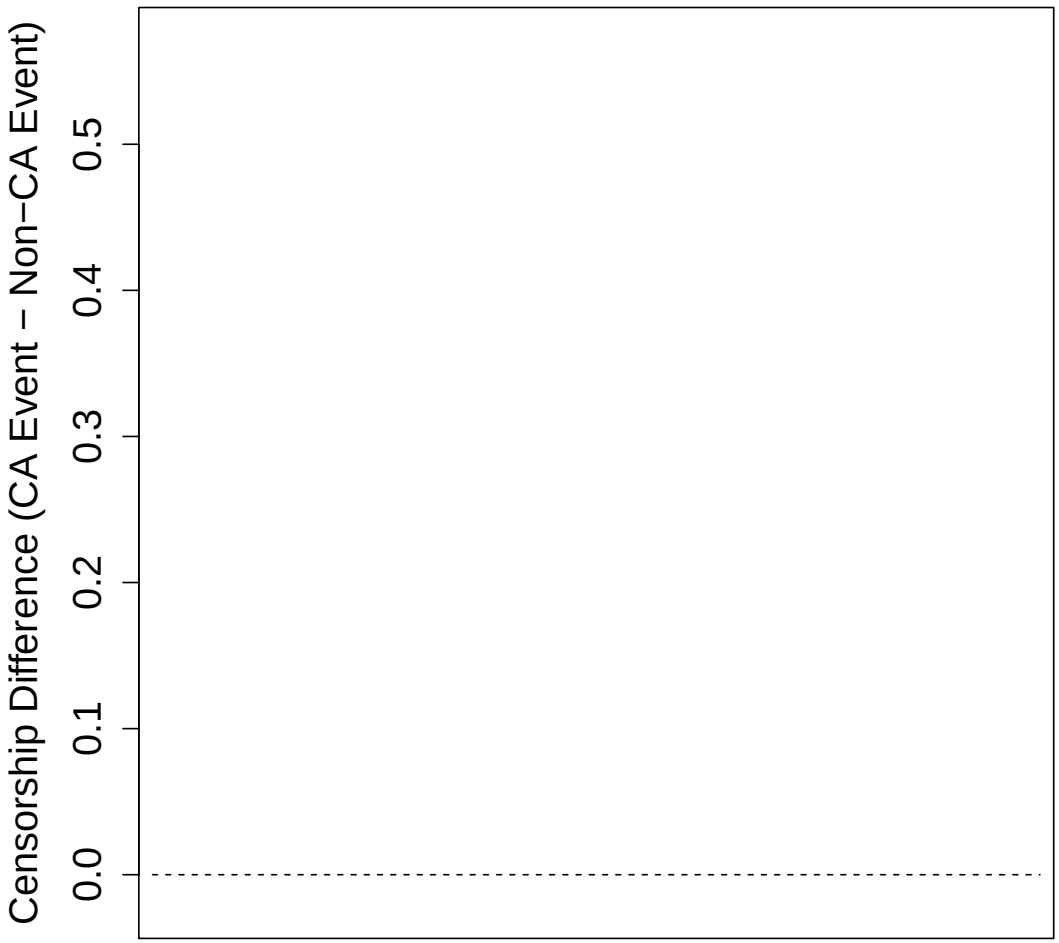

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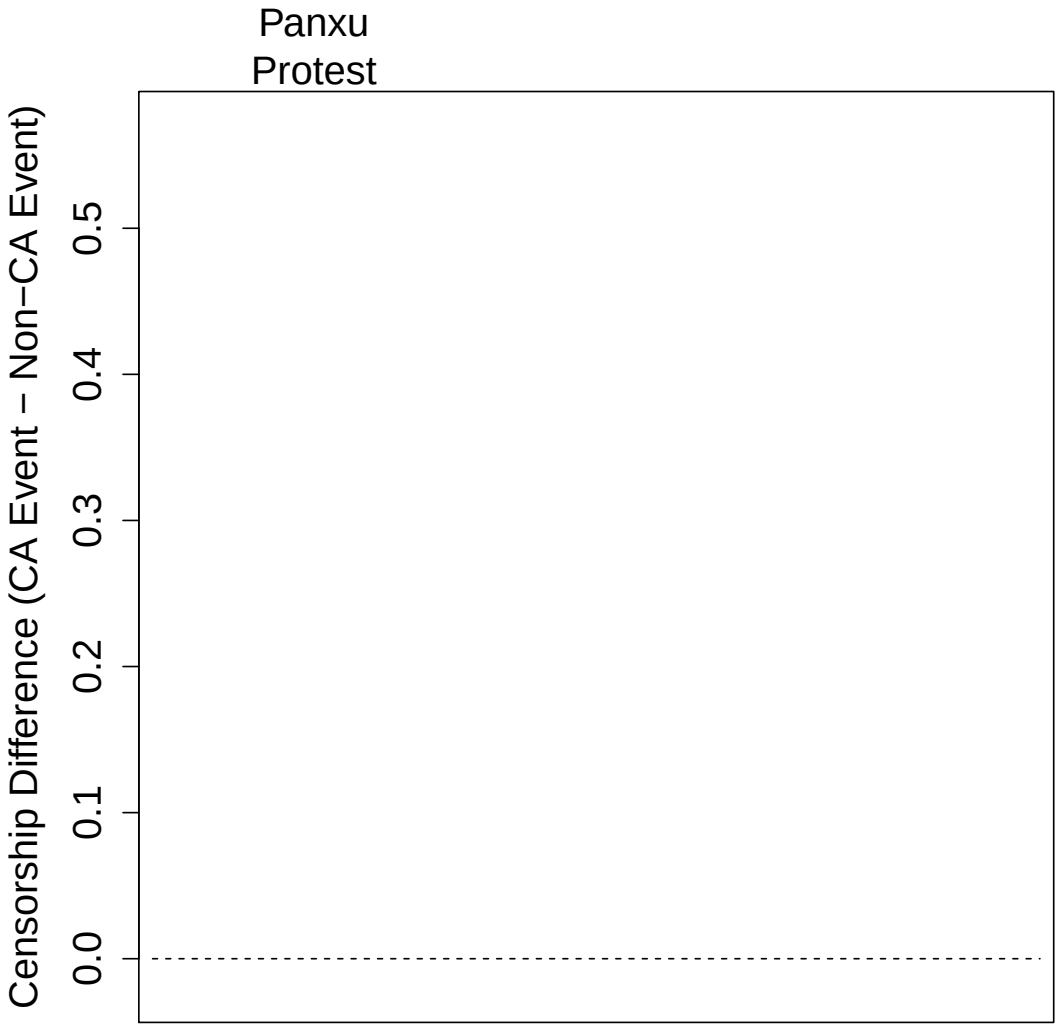

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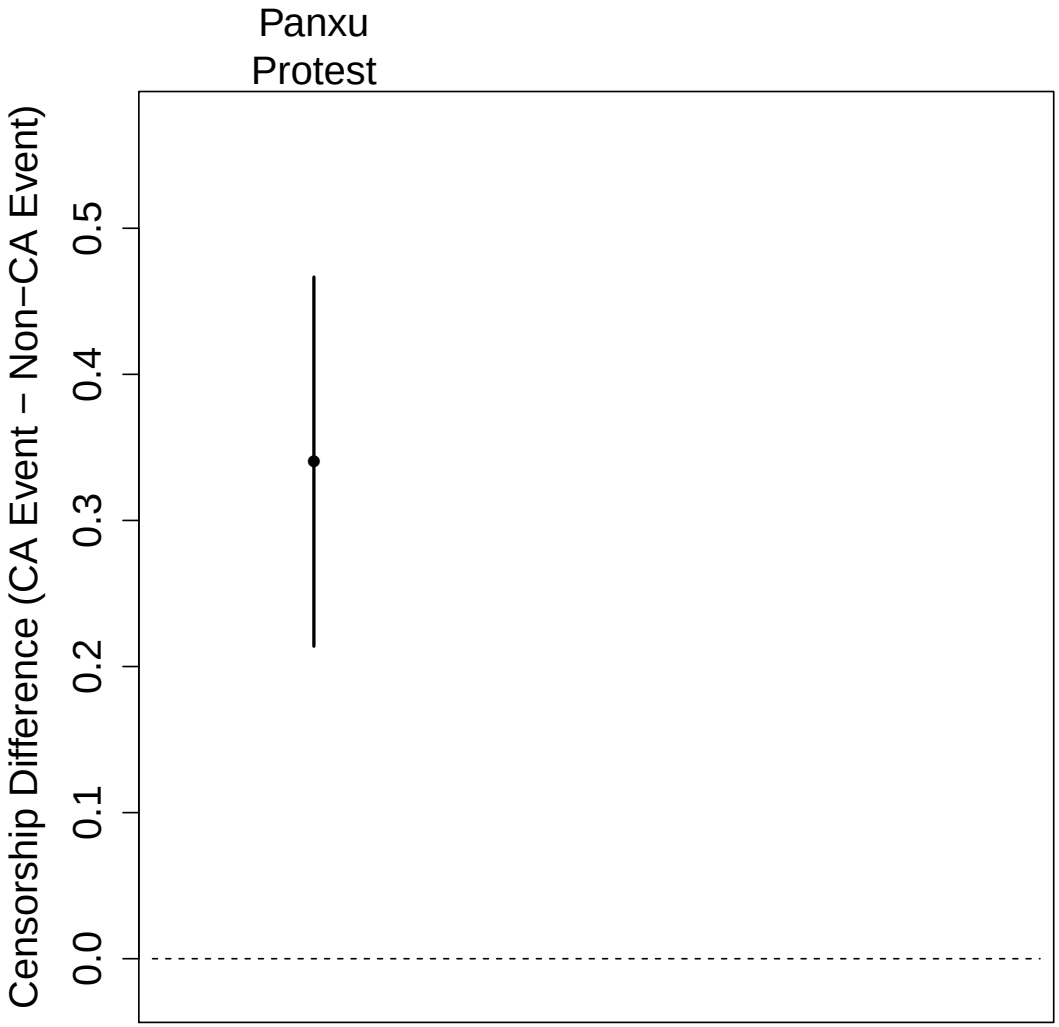

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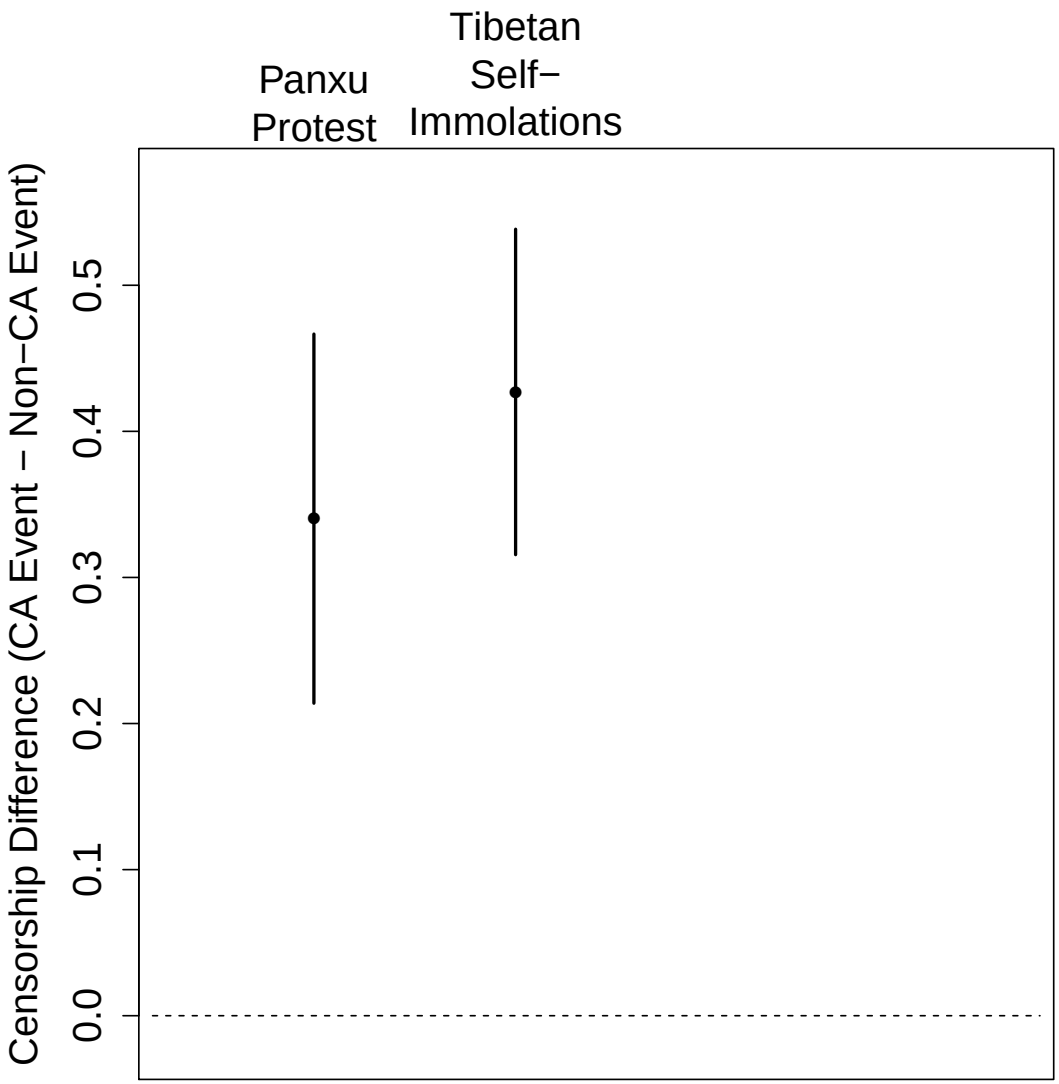

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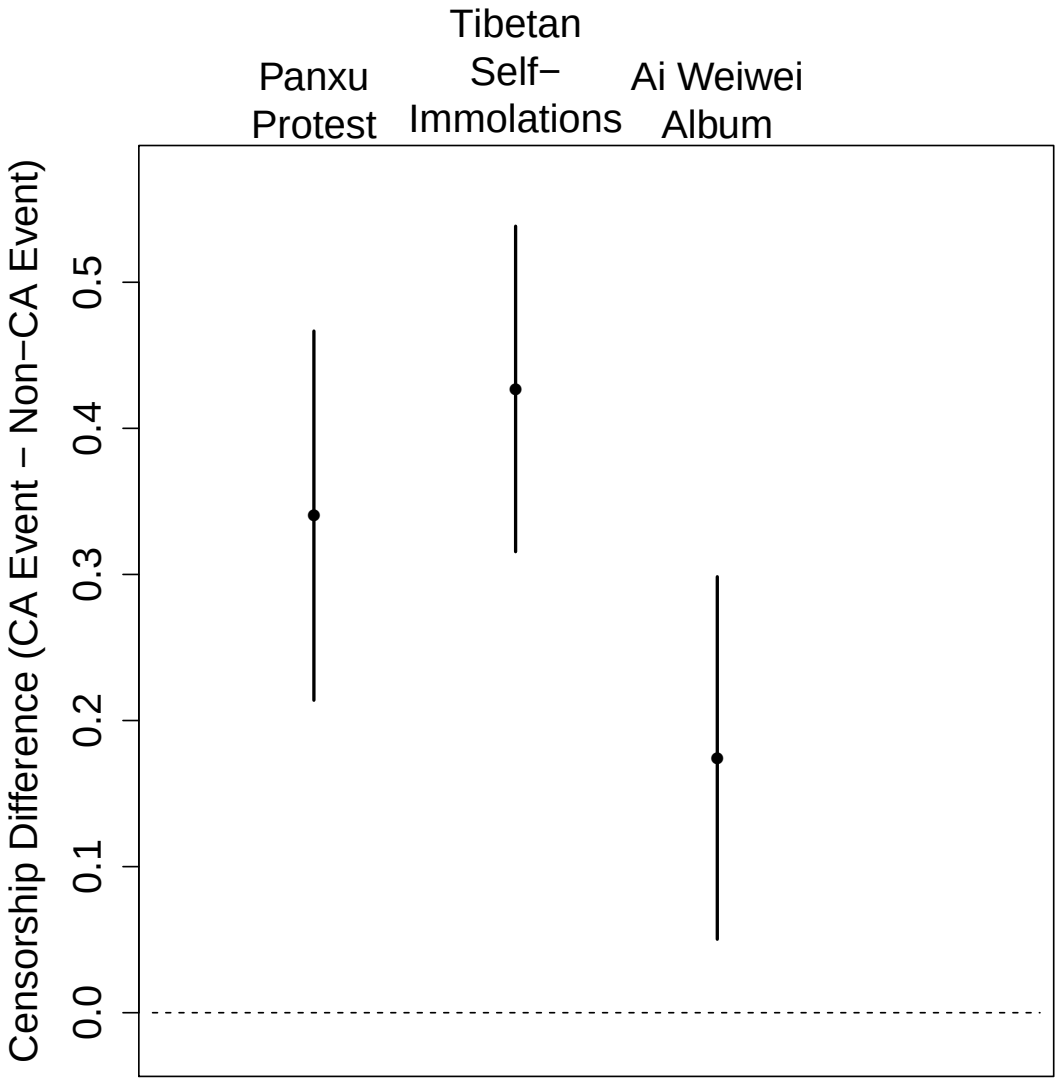

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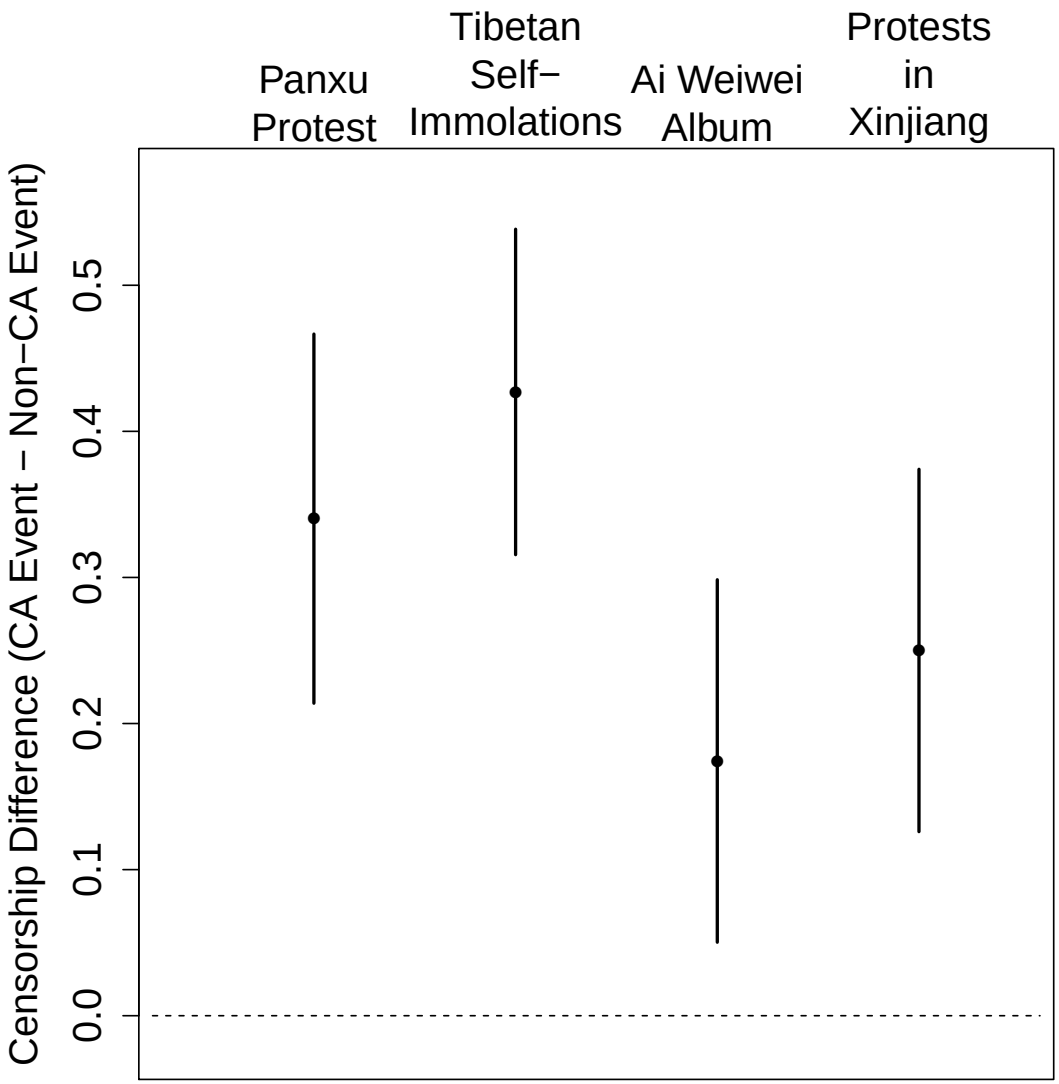

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