

How the Chinese Government Fabricates Social Media Posts for Strategic Distraction, not Engaged Argument¹

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US Government, 7/28/2016

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

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- Empirical Results:

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China's Highly Contested Social Media Landscape

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- > 1,400 diverse sites, fast changing, technological arm's race



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 - Official name: “Internet commentators”
 - 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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We collected people accused on social media of being 50c:

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We collected people accused on social media of being 50c:
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

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 - **43,797 known 50c cent posts**

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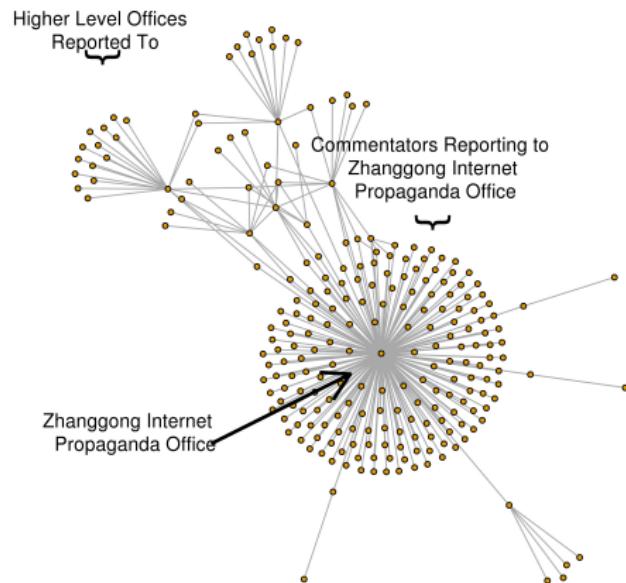
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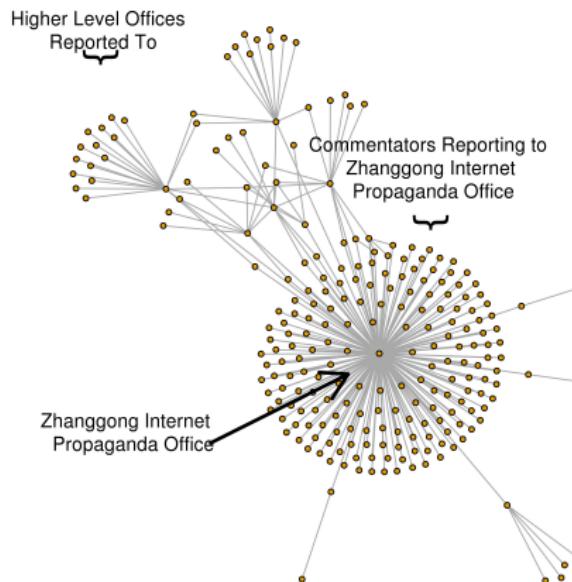
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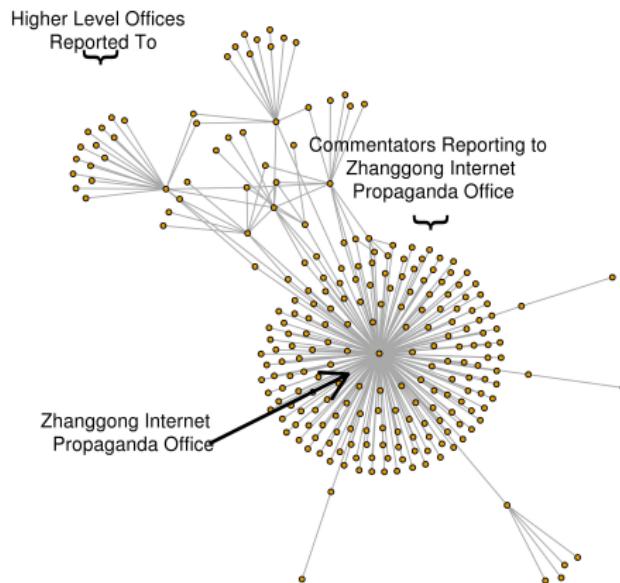


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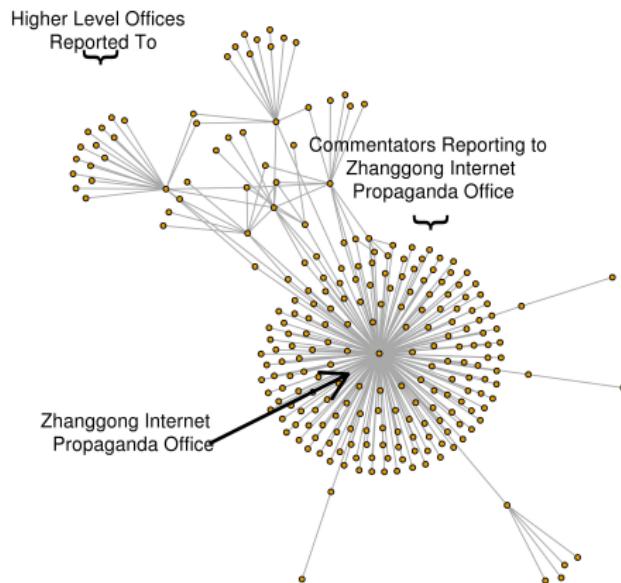
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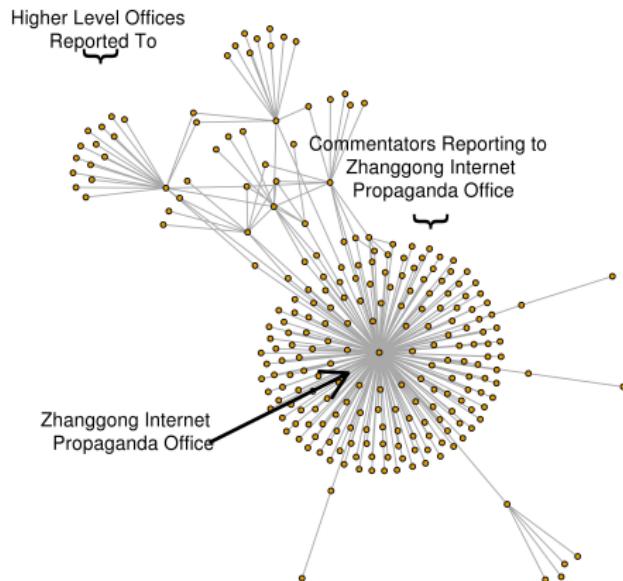
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 - **In fact:** 99.3% of posts made by >200 government offices
 - **No evidence of 50c (or any piecemeal) payments;** probably part of their jobs

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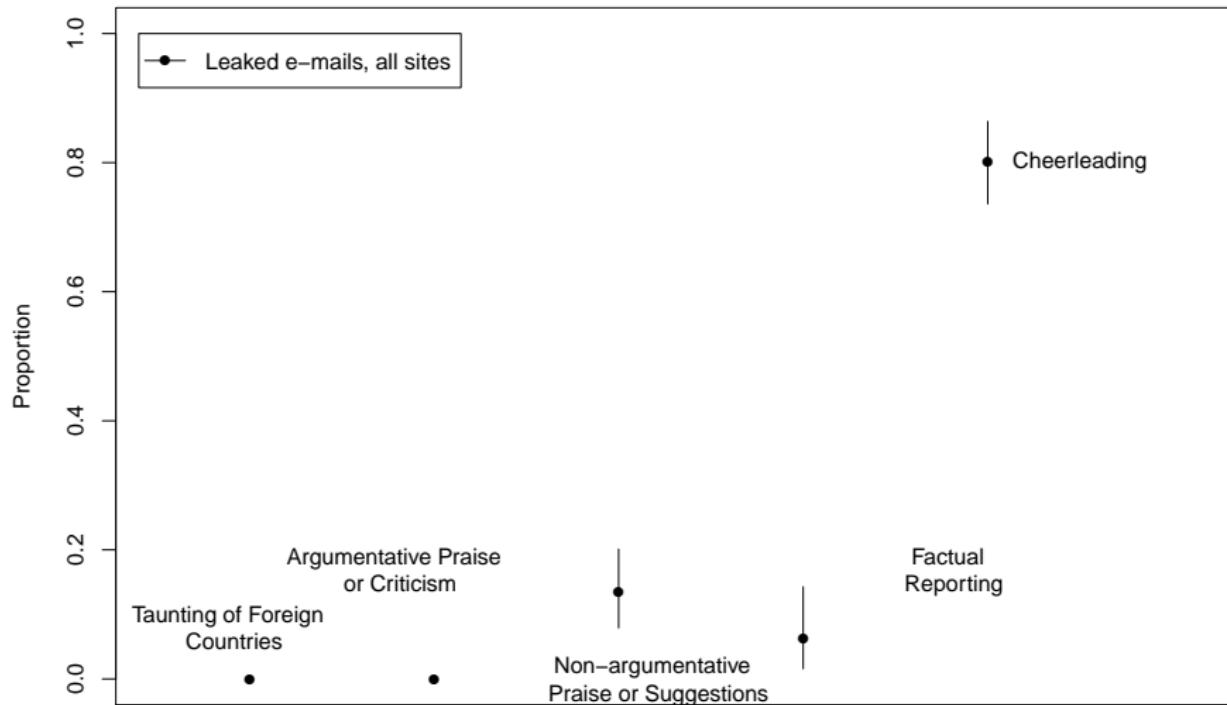
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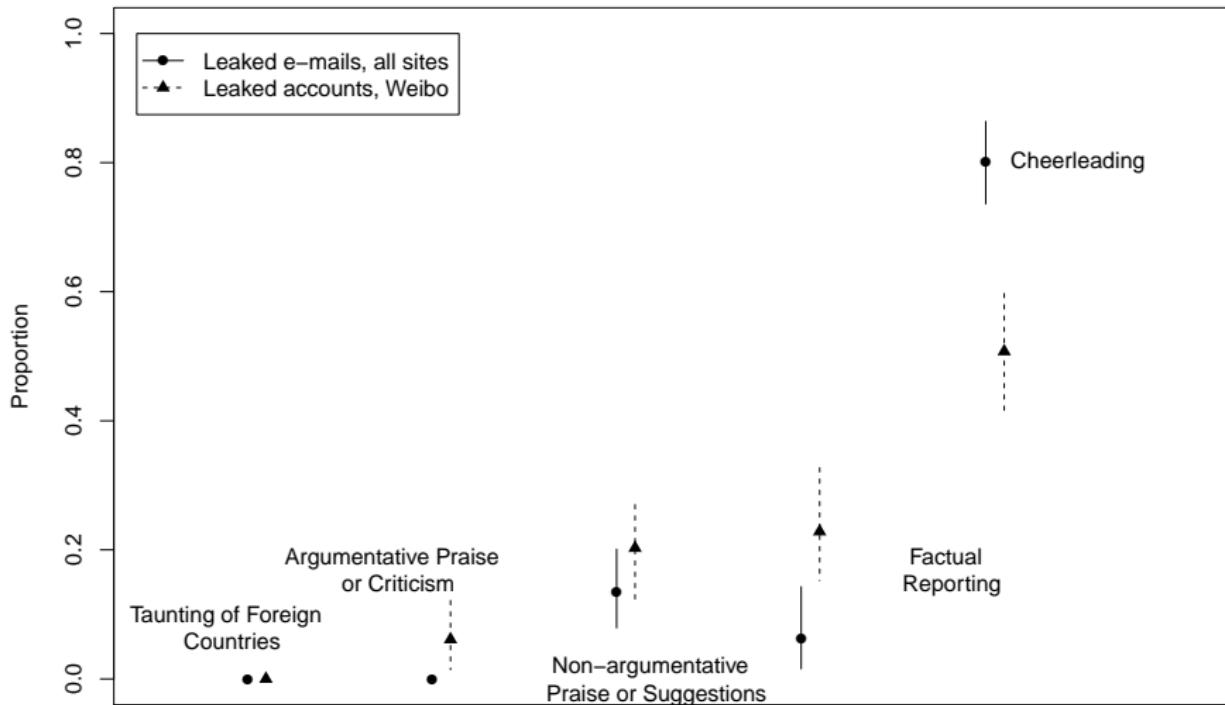
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Content of Leaked and Predicted 50c Party Posts

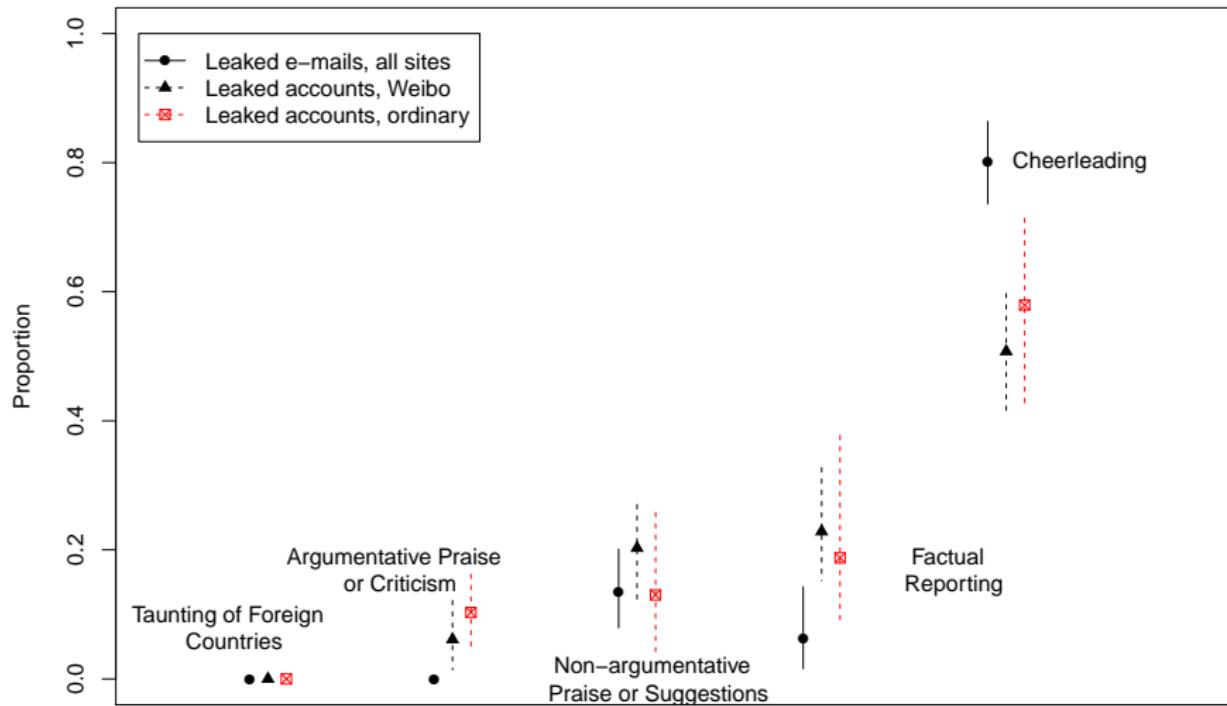
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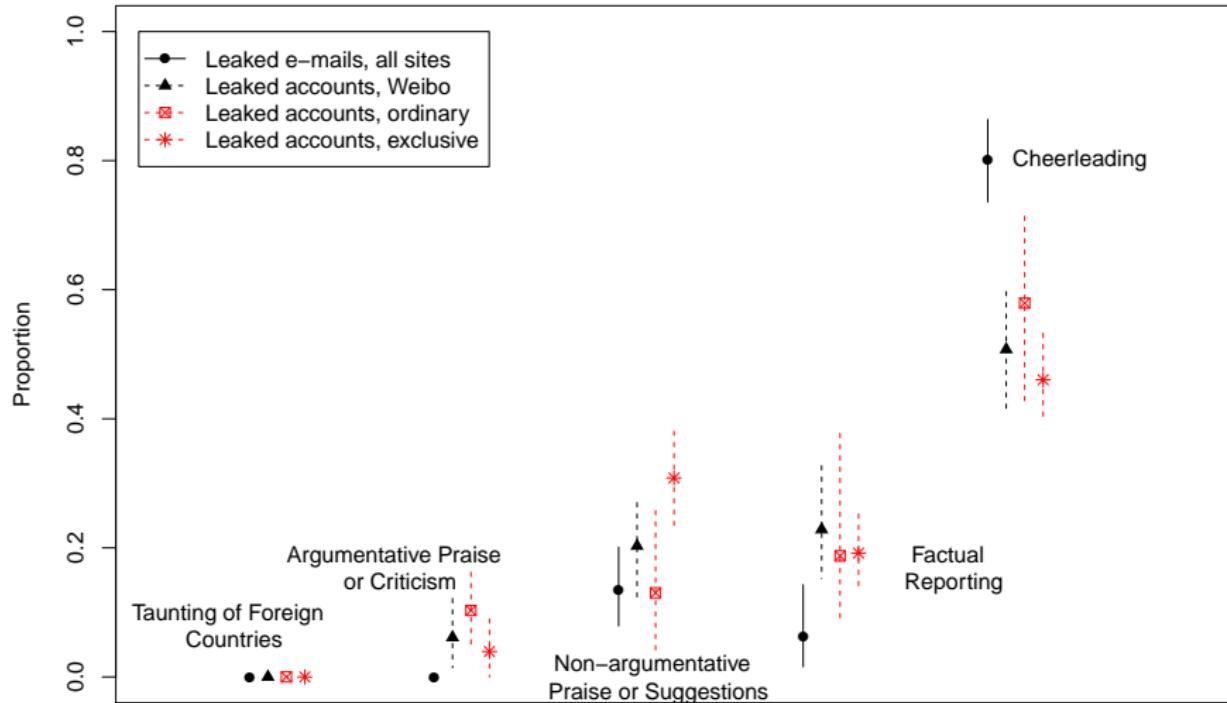
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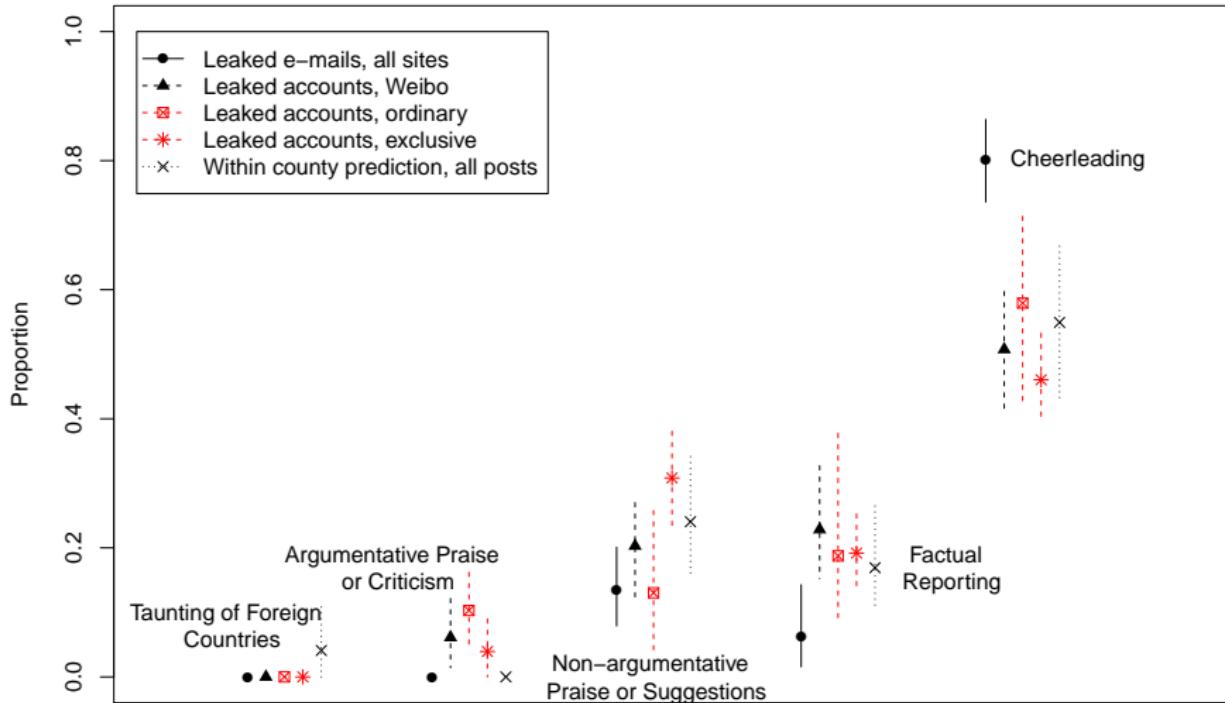
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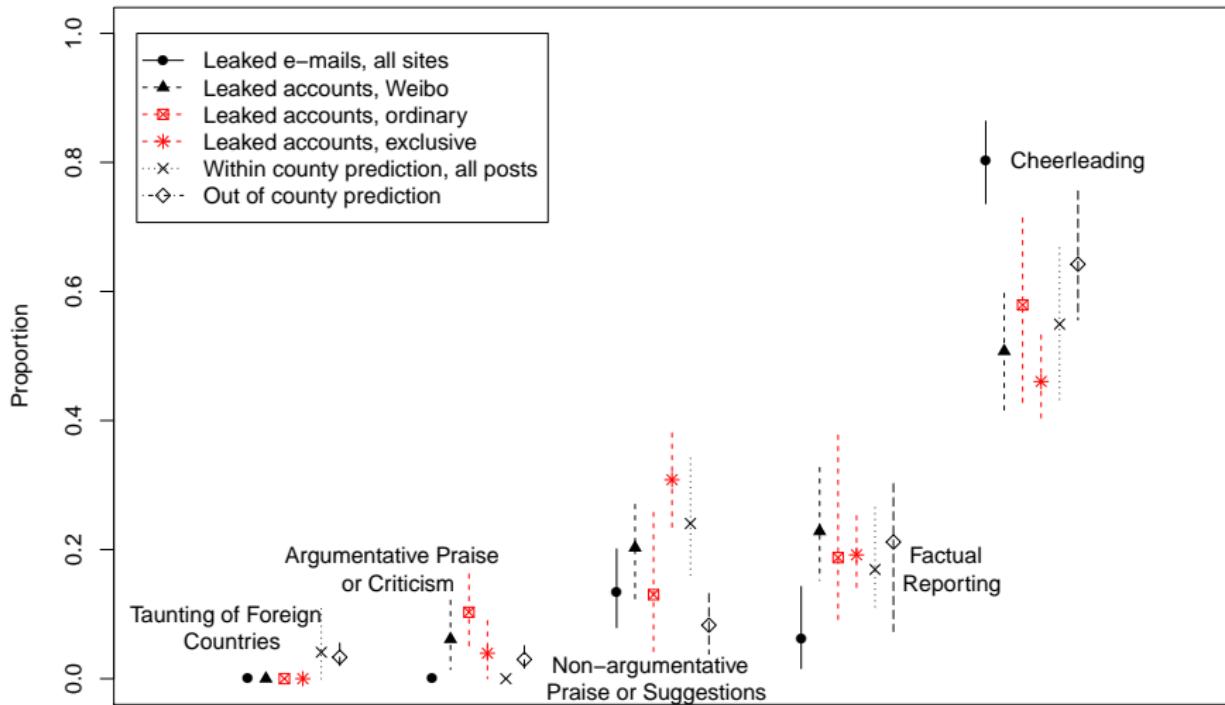
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Size of the 50c Party (in 2013)

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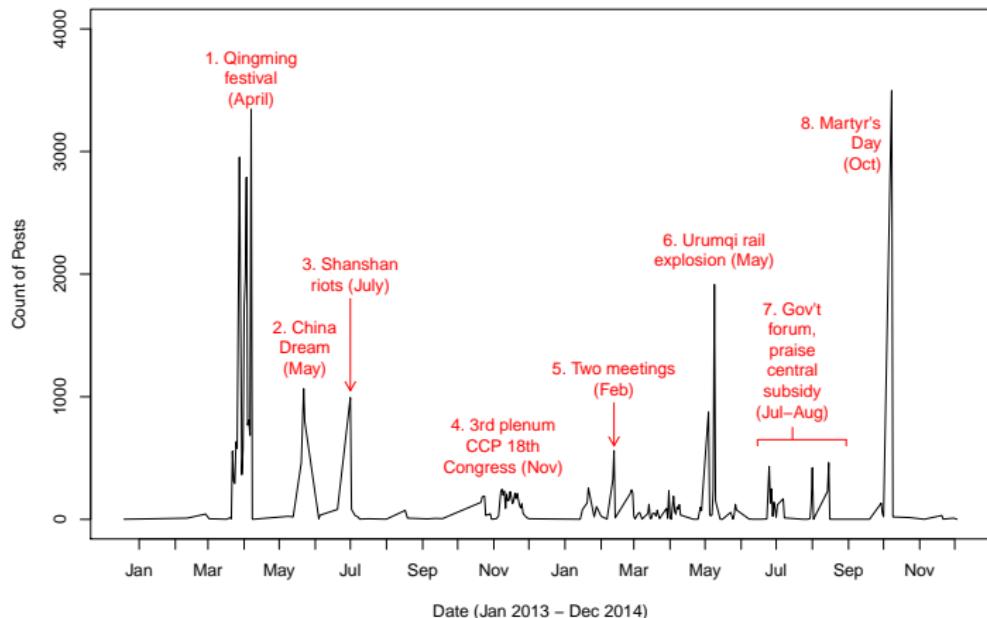
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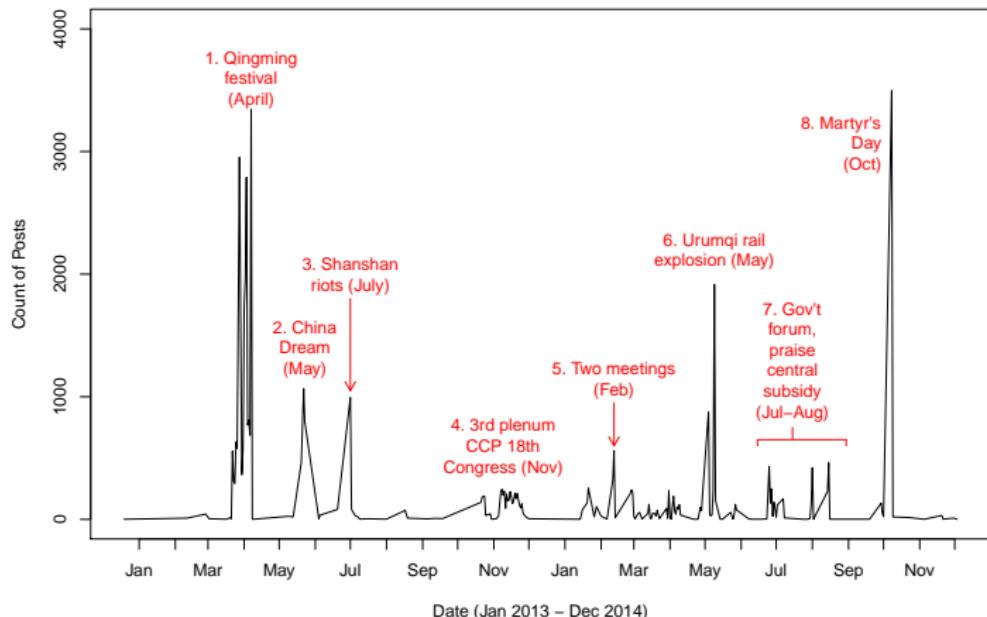
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 - 53% on government sites (a noticeable proportion of all)
 - 47% on commercial sites (1 of every 178 posts)

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Coordinated bursts, many for events with collective action potential

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 - Ask same question of accounts *known not to be* 50c

Survey Validation of 50c Party Membership Predictions

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50c Status

Origin

Percent Yes

Survey Validation of 50c Party Membership Predictions

50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
Predicted 50c	Across China	

Survey Validation of 50c Party Membership Predictions

50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
Predicted 50c	Across China	59%

Survey Validation of 50c Party Membership Predictions

50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
Predicted 50c	Across China	59%
Known 50c	Leaked Zhanggong Archive	

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50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
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Known 50c	Leaked Zhanggong Archive	57%

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50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
Predicted 50c	Across China	59%
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Known "Not" 50c	Random sample	

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50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
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Survey Validation of 50c Party Membership Predictions

50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
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Known "Not" 50c	Random sample	19%

Predicted v. known: not significantly different

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For more information



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