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 Gary King (Harvard) and Margaret Roberts (UCSD)

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    - Common name: "50c Party" members (五毛党 not 自干五)

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

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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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> 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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    - ▶ "Survey" 2: the Chinese regime

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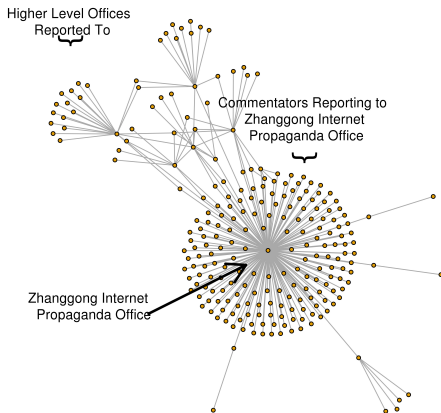
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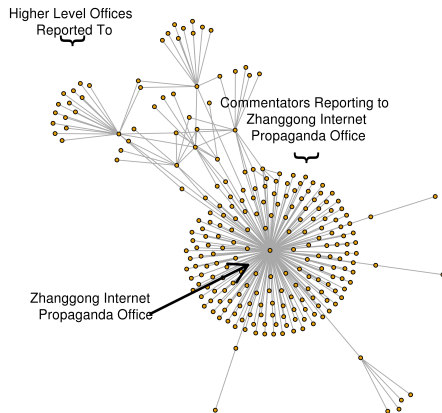
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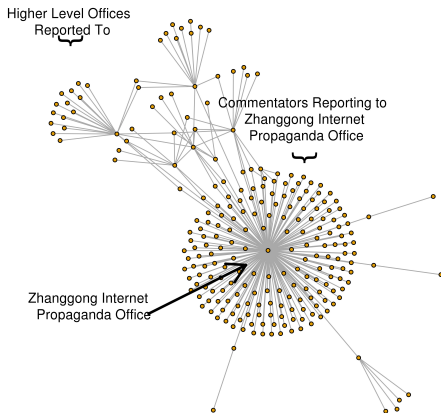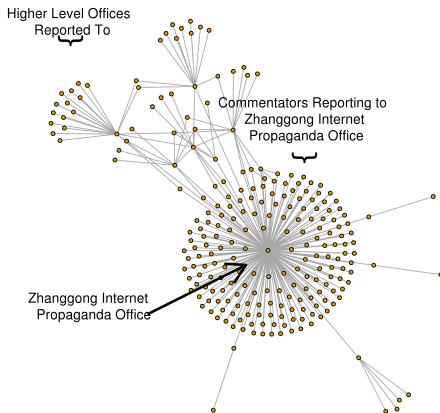
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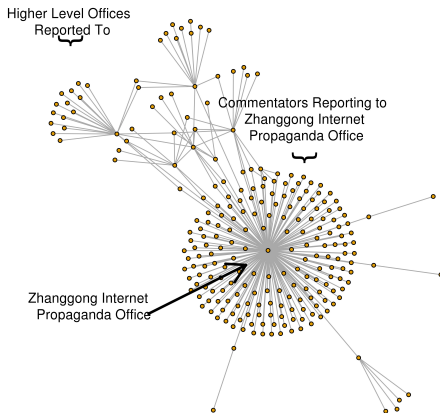 - ▶ Prevailing view: ordinary citizens getting paid 50c to make each post

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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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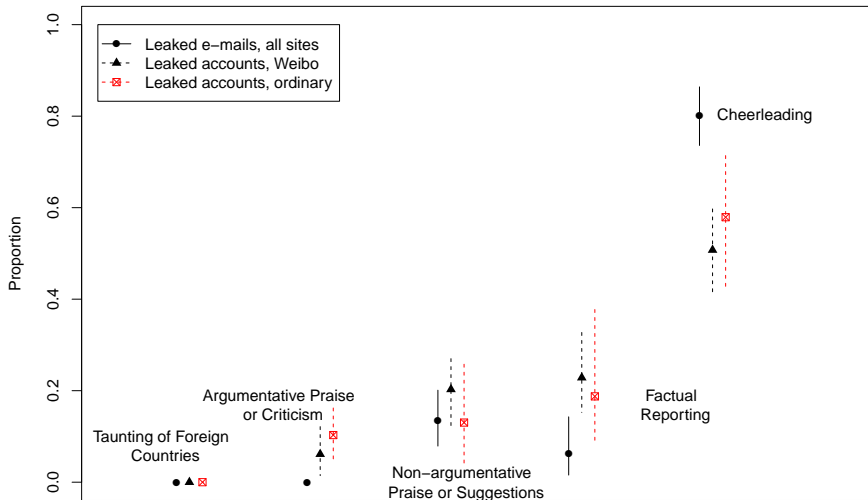
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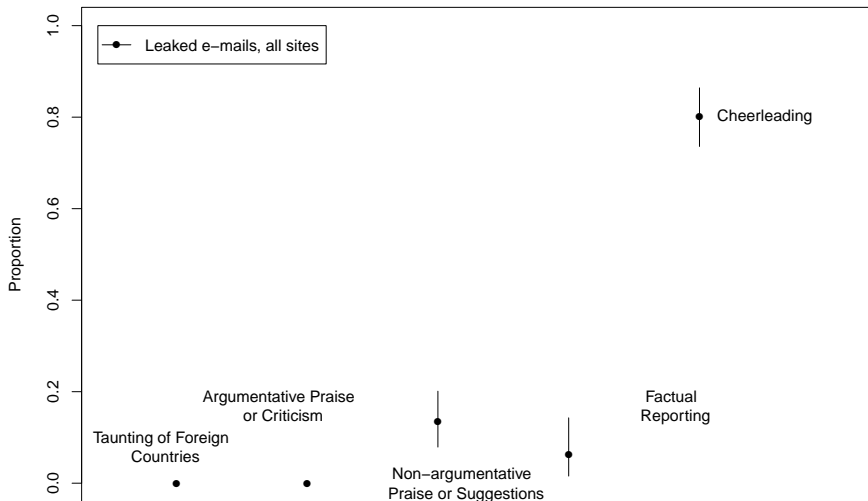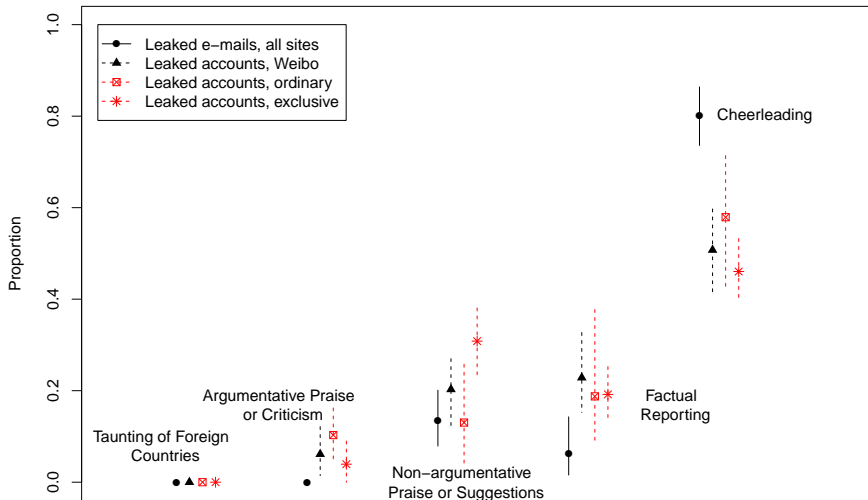
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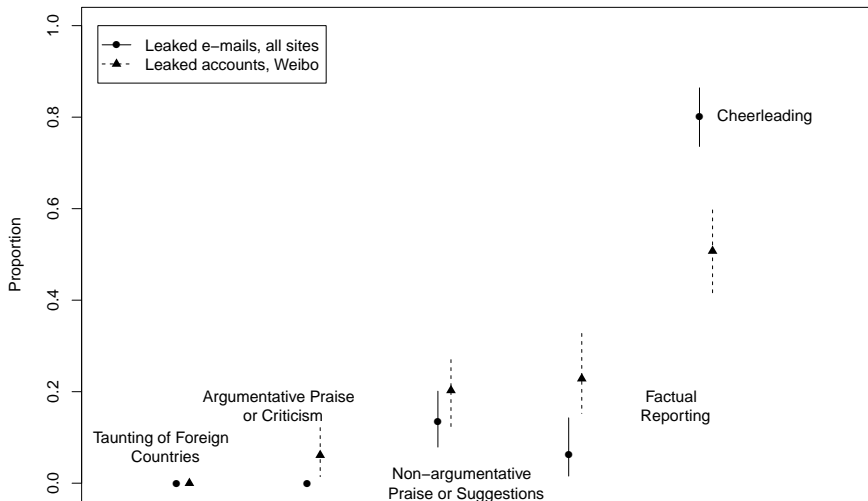
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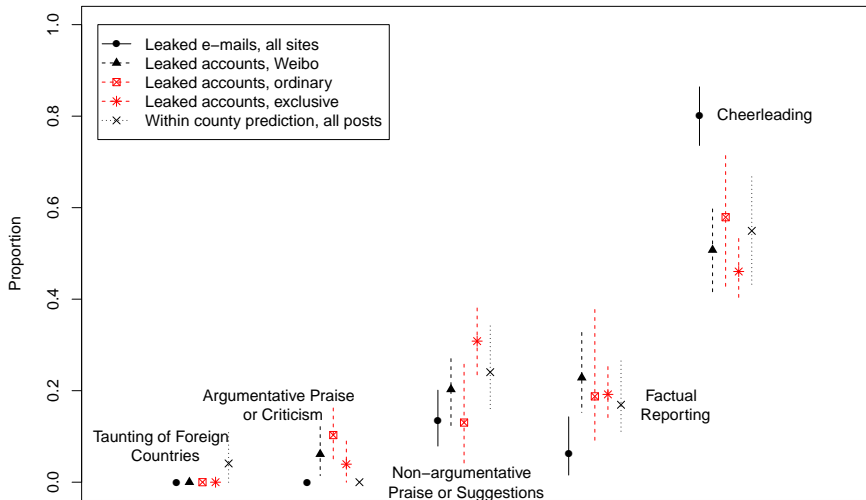
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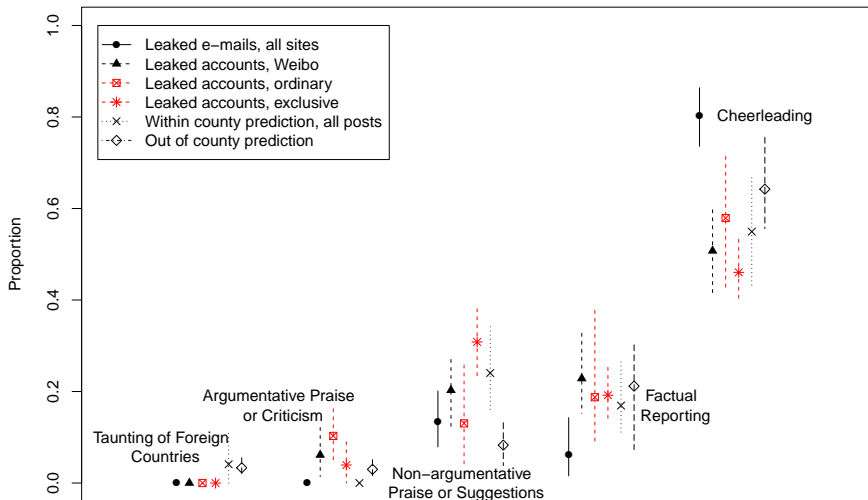
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  - 47% on commercial sites (1 of every 178 posts)

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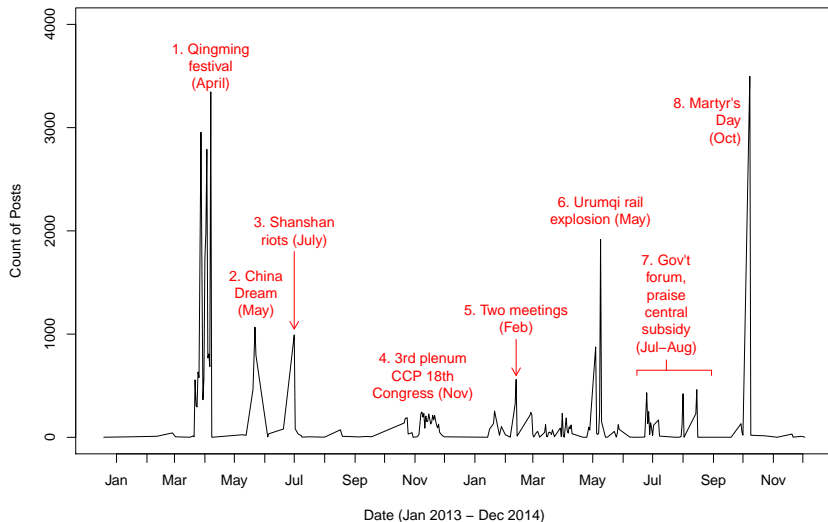
How Can We Validate 50c Party Membership Predictions?

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    - ▶ Ask same question of random sample of *known* 50c (leaked)
    - ▶ Ask same question of accounts *unlikely to be* 50c

Survey Validation of 50c Party Membership Predictions

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50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes

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50c Status	Origin	Percent Yes
Predicted 50c	Across China	

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

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Predicted 50c	Across China	59%
Known 50c	Leaked County Archive	

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

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Predicted v. known: not significantly different
Predicted v. unlikely: significantly different

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For more information

JenPan.com