



# Community, Consensus, Coercion, Control

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*CS\*W or How Policy Mediates Mass Participation*

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Joint with:

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University of Washington

Scott A. Golder

Information Dynamics Lab  
Hewlett-Packard Labs

# The many C's of CSCW

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- Computer Supported Cooperative Work
  - Does “cooperative” always mean convivial?
- Work relations are multi-valent and comprise different social patterns of interaction (Kling, 1991)
  - Coordinated, competitive, coercive, combative, committed...

\* Kling, R. (1991). Cooperation, Coordination and Control in Computer-Supported Work. Communications of the ACM, 34 (12). pp.83-88.

# The many C's of CSCW

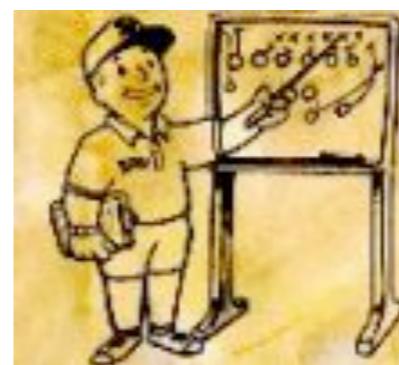
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images from the game *Fallout 2*

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# Consensus in mass collaboration

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- Mass participatory collaborations with high-stakes
  - one decision-making model is **consensus-based**
- We study Wikipedia as an example...
  - High stakes: widely used as a source of knowledge, if not truth
  - English version started in January 2001
    - ▶ 2,000,000+ articles
    - ▶ 700,000+ registered users
    - ▶ 1000+ administrators

# Wikipedia: Control

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- As the corpus and number of contributors increases...
  - How does the community protect itself from malicious activity?
  - How is content judged to be legitimate?
  - How is consensus achieved amongst the diversity of views and opinions?
- Technical
  - *Reverting revisions, locking pages, banning users*
- Normative
  - Socialization - “how we do it here”
  - Elaborate **policy environment**



# Policy environment

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- The **policy environment**...
  - Bounds legitimate activity and content
  - Referenced, rewritten
  - Violators may be subject to sanction (banning, blocking, etc.)
- Current hierarchical organization:
  - ~40 **official policies** (content, behavioral, enforcement, deletion, legal)
  - Hundreds of less strict **guidelines**
  - Numerous **informal essays** by community members



# Research overview

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- We examine the enactment of policy in Wikipedian discourse to ask...
  - How does the policy environment mediate the multi-valent nature of collaborative work?
  - How is consensus forged on discussion pages?
- How does wiki technology support consensus-seeking?

# Outline

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- Problem motivation
- Anatomy of Wikipedia
  - main page, article page, talk page, policy page ...
- Methodology
  - Sample and analyze active discussions
- Findings
  - Grounded example
- Implications



# Anatomy: article pages



WIKIPEDIA  
The Free Encyclopedia

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- Community portal
- Recent changes
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search

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- What links here
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- Special pages
- Printable version
- Permanent link
- Cite this article

Leafman my talk my preferences my watchlist my contributions log out

article discussion edit this page history watch

9,924 people have donated [Show more]

## Jimmy Wales

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

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  - 3.2 Wikia
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  - 4.3 Birthdate
- 5 Personal philosophy
- 6 Published work
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- 8 External links
  - 8.1 Audio/video

### Personal life

[edit]

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Born August 7, 1966 (age 41)  
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Spouse Christine<sup>[1]</sup>

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The screenshot shows a Wikipedia article page for "Revision history of Jimmy Wales". The top navigation bar includes links for "article", "discussion", "edit this page", "history" (which is highlighted with a yellow circle), and "watch". A message indicates "9,924 people have donated" with a link to "[Show more]". The main content area is titled "Revision history of Jimmy Wales" and is described as "From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia". It features a "timestamp" column, a "who" column, and a "comment" column. Green arrows point from these column headers to the corresponding columns in the revision log. The log lists several recent edits by users like Jossi, Vondort, and Shaggman47, with details such as edit times, user names, talk pages, contribution counts, and byte sizes. A "Compare selected versions" button is also visible.

Leafman my talk my preferences my watchlist my contributions log out

article discussion edit this page history watch

9,924 people have donated [Show more]

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## Revision history of Jimmy Wales

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Revision history View logs for this page

### timestamp who comment

(Latest | Earliest) View (previous 50) (next 50) (20 | 50 | 100 | 250 | 500)

For any version listed below, click on its date to view it. For more help, see Help:Page history and Help:Edit summary.

(cur) = difference from current version, (last) = difference from preceding version,

m = minor edit, → = section edit, ← = automatic edit summary

Compare selected versions

- (cur) (last) 21:49, 30 October 2007 Jossi (Talk | contribs) m (36,148 bytes) (Reverted edits by Vondort (talk) to last version by Kathleen.wright5) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 21:48, 30 October 2007 Vondort (Talk | contribs) (36,195 bytes) (→Education) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 21:48, 30 October 2007 Vondort (Talk | contribs) (36,197 bytes) (→Personal life) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 03:12, 30 October 2007 Kathleen.wright5 (Talk | contribs) m (36,148 bytes) (→Wikipedia and Wikimedia Foundation) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 00:52, 29 October 2007 A.Z. (Talk | contribs) m (36,151 bytes) (Undid revision 167745491 by Shaggman47 (talk)) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 00:51, 29 October 2007 Shaggman47 (Talk | contribs) (35,315 bytes) (→Personal life) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 22:03, 28 October 2007 AlleborgoBot (Talk | contribs) m (36,151 bytes) (robot Adding: tg:Чимбо Вейлс) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 17:22, 28 October 2007 Jhurlburt (Talk | contribs) (36,122 bytes) (→External links - Trimming excessive external links as per Wikipedia guidelines WP:EL.) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 06:02, 27 October 2007 LaraLove (Talk | contribs) m (38,353 bytes) (→Wikipedia biography - Ooops. Removing double closing parenthesis.) (undo)
- (cur) (last) 06:01, 27 October 2007 LaraLove (Talk | contribs) (38,354 bytes) (→Wikipedia biography - Quotations per

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Screenshot of the Wikipedia article page for Jimmy Wales.

The top navigation bar includes links for "Leafman" (user profile), "my talk", "my preferences", "my watchlist", "my contributions", and "log out". Below the bar, there are tabs: "article" (highlighted with a yellow circle), "discussion", "edit this page", "history", and "watch". A message indicates "9,924 people have donated" with a link to "Show more".

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# Anatomy: talk pages

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The Free Encyclopedia

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Leafman my talk my preferences my watchlist my contributions log out

article discussion edit this page + history move watch

9,927 people have donated [Show more]

## Talk:Jimmy Wales

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

### User-added template

↓ Skip to table of contents ↓

 Jimmy Wales has had a [peer review](#) by Wikipedia editors which is now [archived](#). It may contain ideas you can use to improve this article.

 This page was previously nominated for [deletion](#). Please see prior discussions before considering re-nomination:

- [Speedy Keep, 2007-08-31](#), see [discussion](#).
- [Speedy Keep, 2007-08-14](#), see [discussion](#).
- [Keep, 2005-05-31](#), see [discussion](#).

 If you need to contact Jimbo about something, please do so at [User talk:Jimbo Wales](#), not here. As Jimbo explains...

"People who are trying to leave messages for me will likely be more satisfied if they leave messages on my [user talk page](#) than if they leave them here. This is the talk page for the article about me, not a place to talk to me. I rarely read this. --Jimbo Wales 06:05, 23 August 2005 (UTC)"

This is the [talk page](#) for discussing improvements to the [Jimmy Wales](#) article.  
This is not a forum for general discussion about the article's subject.

Please sign and date your posts by typing four tildes Article policies

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See also

# Anatomy: talk pages

The screenshot shows a Wikipedia talk page for the article "Talk:Jimmy Wales". The page includes a sidebar with navigation links like "Main page", "Contents", and "Toolbox". A large orange watermark "conversation threads" is overlaid on the left side. A vertical orange line and a yellow circle highlight specific sections of the page content.

Leafman my talk my preferences my watchlist my contributions log out

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9,927 people have donated [Show more]

Talk:Jimmy Wales

explain the change and its purpose.  
Tualha (Talk) 19:38, 13 July 2007 (UTC)

I will use a more relevant quote. Thanks for your concern. Please review. QuackGuru talk 20:05, 13 July 2007 (UTC)

That one will do, though it can be trimmed. Thanks. Tualha (Talk) 21:17, 13 July 2007 (UTC)

**First sentence in the education section** [edit]

That part I fixed yesterday in the education section is logically inconsistent. It reads like the school was donating the software to itself. It's not Jimbo's user page so I have right to fix it, right? Why has it been undone then? greg park avenue 13:23, 23 July 2007 (UTC)

**Birthdate** [edit]

I just blogged about this.—Jimbo Wales 09:34, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

Supposedly, he was born on the 8th, and Britannica also thinks its the 7th. See this blog entry from The Oregonian newspaper. Also see the previous, related blog entry about an interview with him, Ward Cunningham and the newspaper, as well as a print article, Open-source thinking. Jason McHuff 22:49, 27 July 2007 (UTC)

It looks like a reporter from a major newspaper has reported on a public records search, confirming what I have been saying for a long time. According to my birth certificate, August 7th is not my birthdate. Perhaps someday I will produce a note from my mom for another reporter. And perhaps I will just continue to have a bit of fun with this. :)-Jimbo Wales 09:12, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

Mr. Wales has stated that his birthday is Aug. 7th, 1966. Links to these admissions can be found here and here. Also, both Current Biography and Who's Who in America list his birthday as being the 7th. 68.117.211.187 07:21, 28 July 2007 (UTC)

I hope I am not the only one who is amused that this anonymous ip number calls a discussion of my date of birth an "admission". :) Perhaps I shall next confess to having brown hair. --Jimbo Wales 18:36, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

Thanks for the links. I don't think I saw the archive of this page when I came here. I'm not seeing the first edit you link to in the page history, but the second one does seem somewhat conclusive. Its interesting, because here (at your links) he seems pretty firm that its the 7th, yet the blog post (written by a reporter for a major metro newspaper, so hopefully a reliable source) really sounds like he said that its not the 7th. Overall, it does seem that a difference of a day isn't much to worry about. Jason McHuff

WIKIPI  
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See also

# Anatomy: talk pages

It might also be worth noting that on [August 7](#) we list August 7 as his birthday. If this is incorrect, I think we look really, really stupid here. [John Carter](#) 20:34, 7 August 2007 (UTC)

Wikipedia isn't about truth, it's about providing [verifiable](#) information from [reliable, published sources](#). I really don't think it's something to worry about. [68.117.211.187](#) 21:40, 7 August 2007 (UTC)

His DOB is on August 8 according to Jimmy. Agreed? [Mr.Guru](#) [talk](#) 22:46, 7 August 2007 (UTC)

No. Sadly, Mr. Wales cannot be used as a reliable source since his statements about his DOB have been inconsistent. As previously mentioned only verifiable information from reliable, published sources can be used on Wikipedia. Even if that was not the case I can find no records where Mr. Wales has said that his birthday was on August 8th. If you can reference a source for that fact, which meets Wikipedia's guidelines, please do so. Till then I feel that we must continue to rely on the previously mentioned sources and keep his DOB as is. [Jhurlburt](#) 03:56, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

Yes! Happily, Jimbo can be used as a reliable source per [WP:SELF PUB](#) policy.

Cheers. [Mr.Guru](#) [talk](#) 05:12, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

You have failed to provide a source where Mr. Wales makes this claim. We can't just take your word for it. [Jhurlburt](#) 05:29, 8 August 2007 (UTC)

## Anatomy: talk pages

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# Anatomy: policy pages

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9,959 people have donated [Show more] 0

## Wikipedia:Verifiability

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"WP:V" redirects here. For information on vandalism, see [Wikipedia:Vandalism](#).

**This page documents an official policy on the English Wikipedia.** It has wide acceptance among editors and is considered a standard that all users should follow.

When editing this page, please ensure that your revision reflects [consensus](#). When in doubt, discuss first on the [talk page](#).

**This page in a nutshell:** Material challenged or likely to be challenged, and all quotations, must be attributed to a reliable, published source.

The threshold for inclusion in Wikipedia is **verifiability, not truth**. "Verifiable" in this context means that any reader should be able to check that material added to Wikipedia has already been published by a [reliable source](#). Editors should provide a reliable source for quotations and for any material that is challenged or is likely to be challenged, or it may be removed.

**Wikipedia:Verifiability** is one of Wikipedia's core content policies. The others include [Wikipedia:No original research](#) and [Wikipedia:Neutral point of view](#). Jointly, these policies determine the type and quality of material that is acceptable in Wikipedia articles. They should not be interpreted in isolation from one another, and editors should try to familiarize themselves with all three.

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Neutral point of view

**Verifiability**

No original research

Biographies of living persons

Working with others

Civility

Consensus

No personal attacks

Resolving disputes

Global principles

# Anatomy: policy pages

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Screenshot of the Wikipedia:Verifiability page:

- Status:** A green arrow points to the text: "This page documents an official policy on the English Wikipedia. It has wide acceptance among editors and is considered a standard that all users should follow." This is highlighted by a yellow box.
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Navigation bar (top right): Leafman, my talk, my preferences, my watchlist, my contributions, log out

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This page documents an official policy on the English Wikipedia. It has wide acceptance among editors and is considered a standard that all users should follow.

When editing this page, please ensure that your revision reflects consensus. When in doubt, discuss first on the talk page.

This page in a nutshell: Material challenged or likely to be challenged, and all quotations, must be attributed to a reliable, published source.

Shortcuts: WP:V, WP:VERIFY, WP:SOURCE

navigation

- Main page
- Contents
- Featured content
- Current events
- Random article

interaction

- About Wikipedia
- Community portal
- Recent changes
- Contact Wikipedia
- Donate
- Help

search Go

toolbox

- What link
- Related changes
- Upload file
- Special pages
- Printable version
- Permanent link

in other languages

Contents [hide]

1 Burden of evidence

2 Sources

2.1 Questionable sources

CIVILITY  
Consensus  
No personal attacks  
Resolving disputes

Global principles

# Outline

---

- Problem motivation
- Anatomy of Wikipedia
  - Main page, article page, talk page, policy page ...
- Methodology
  - Sample and analyze active discussions
- Findings
  - Grounded example
- Implications



# Methodology

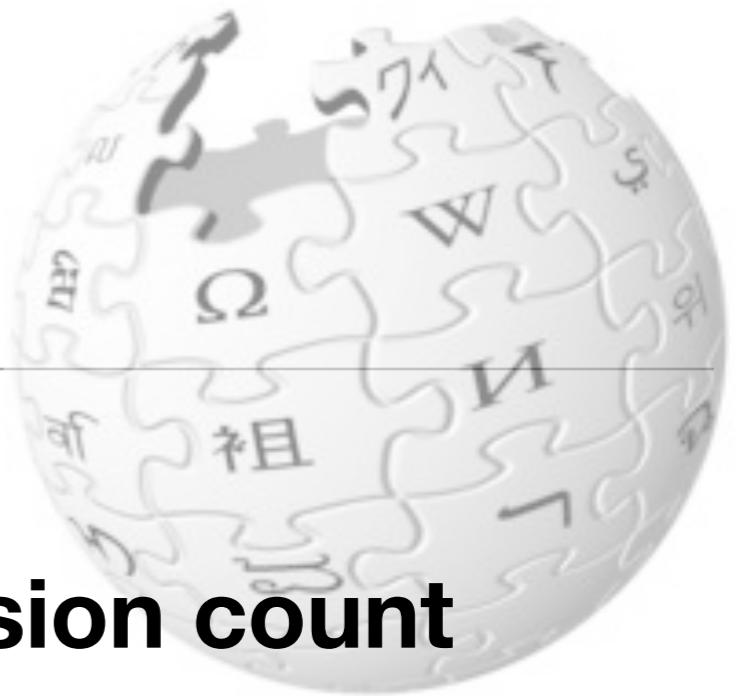
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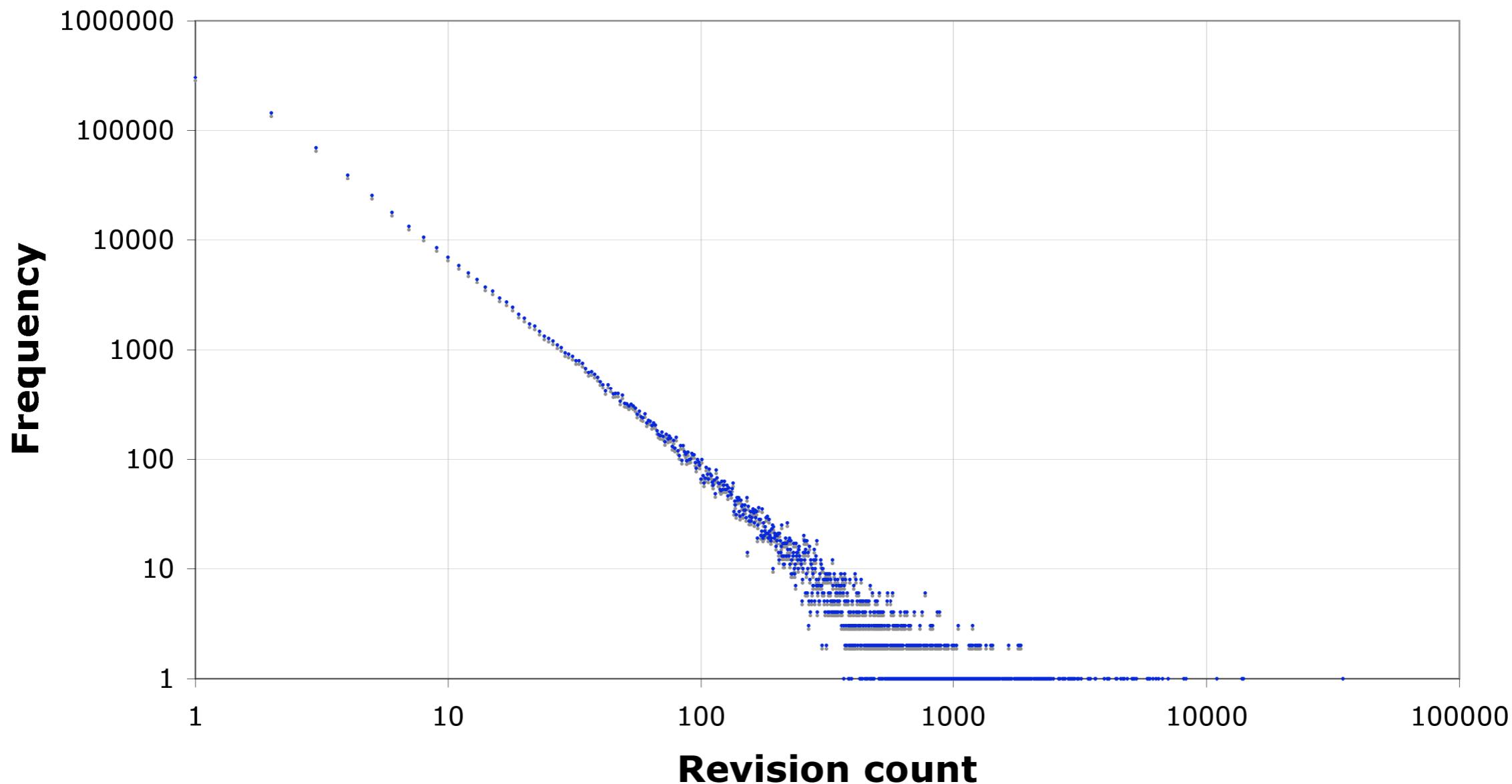
- Use grounded approach to study how multi-valent relations are implicated and handled through the enactment of policy
- Focus on talk pages
  - “all [Wikipedians] stated that talk pages were their primary communication medium”\*
  - Too much discussion, need to focus...
  - Sample “critical sections” of very actively discussed pages
  - Mine Wikipedia database dump (November 2006)

\* Bryant, Forte, Bruckman (2005) “Becoming Wikipedian: transformation of participation in a collaborative online encyclopedia” GROUP 2005. pp 1-10.

Focus on heavily edited talk pages



## Distribution of talk pages by revision count

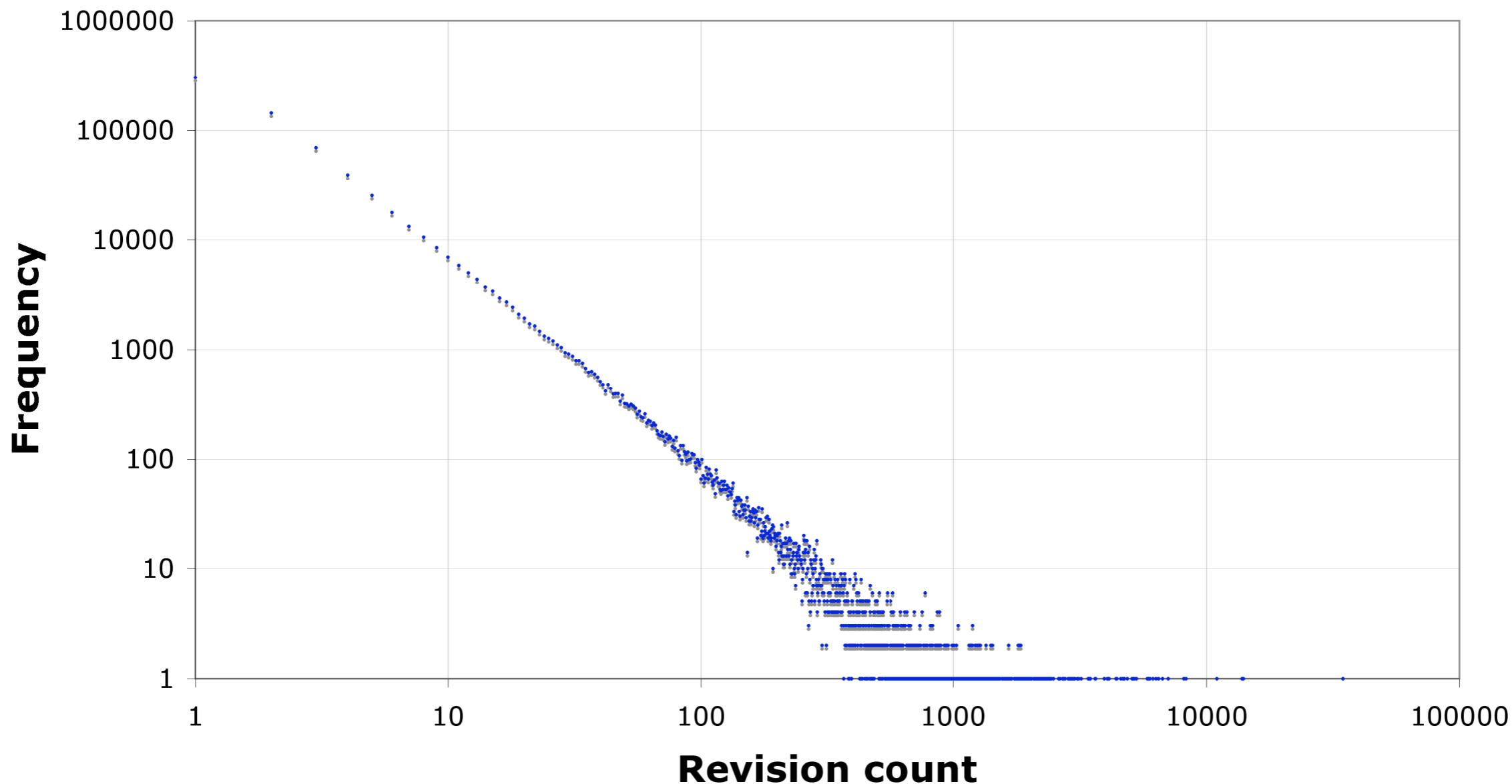


Focus on heavily edited talk pages

---



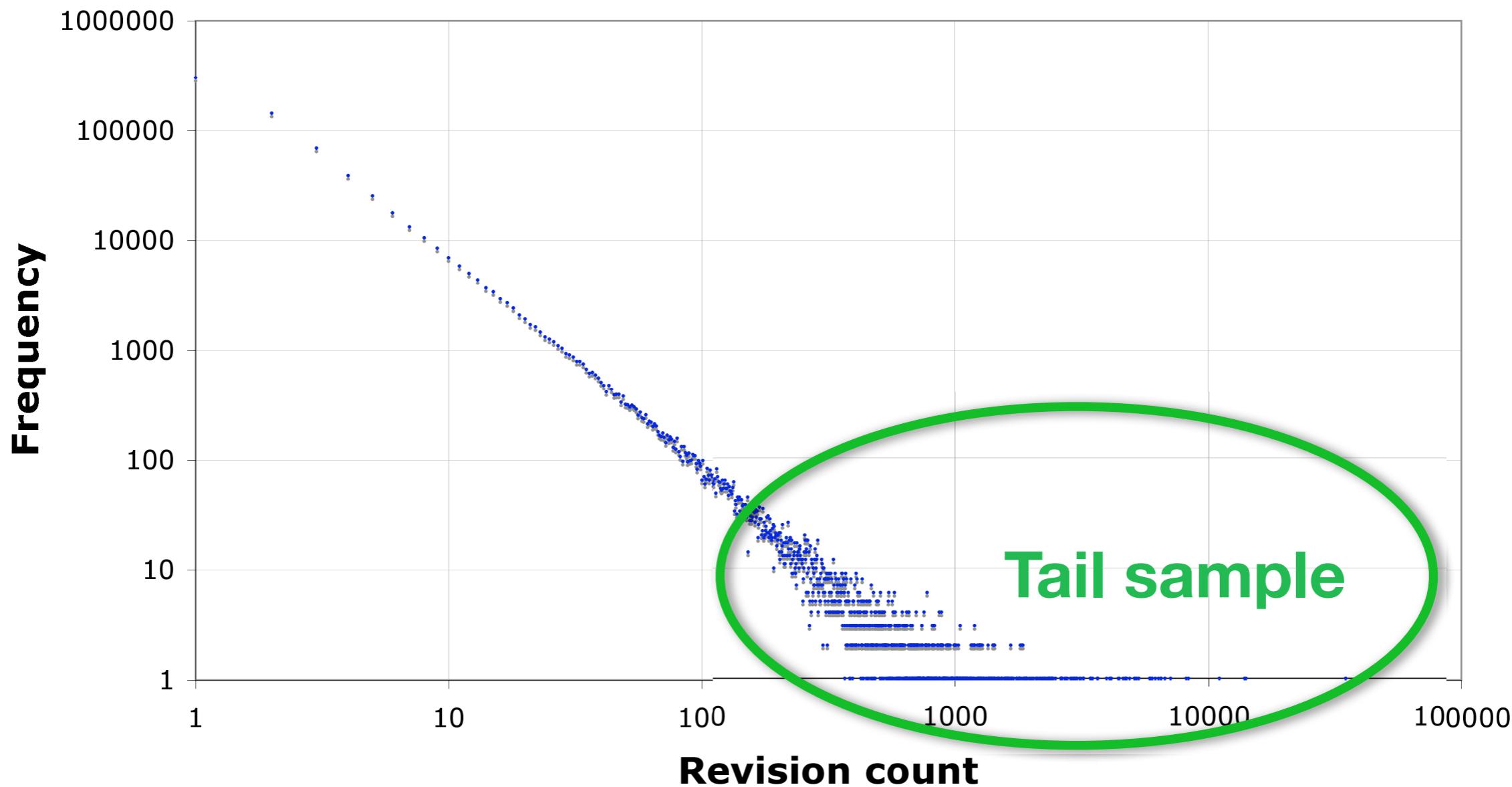
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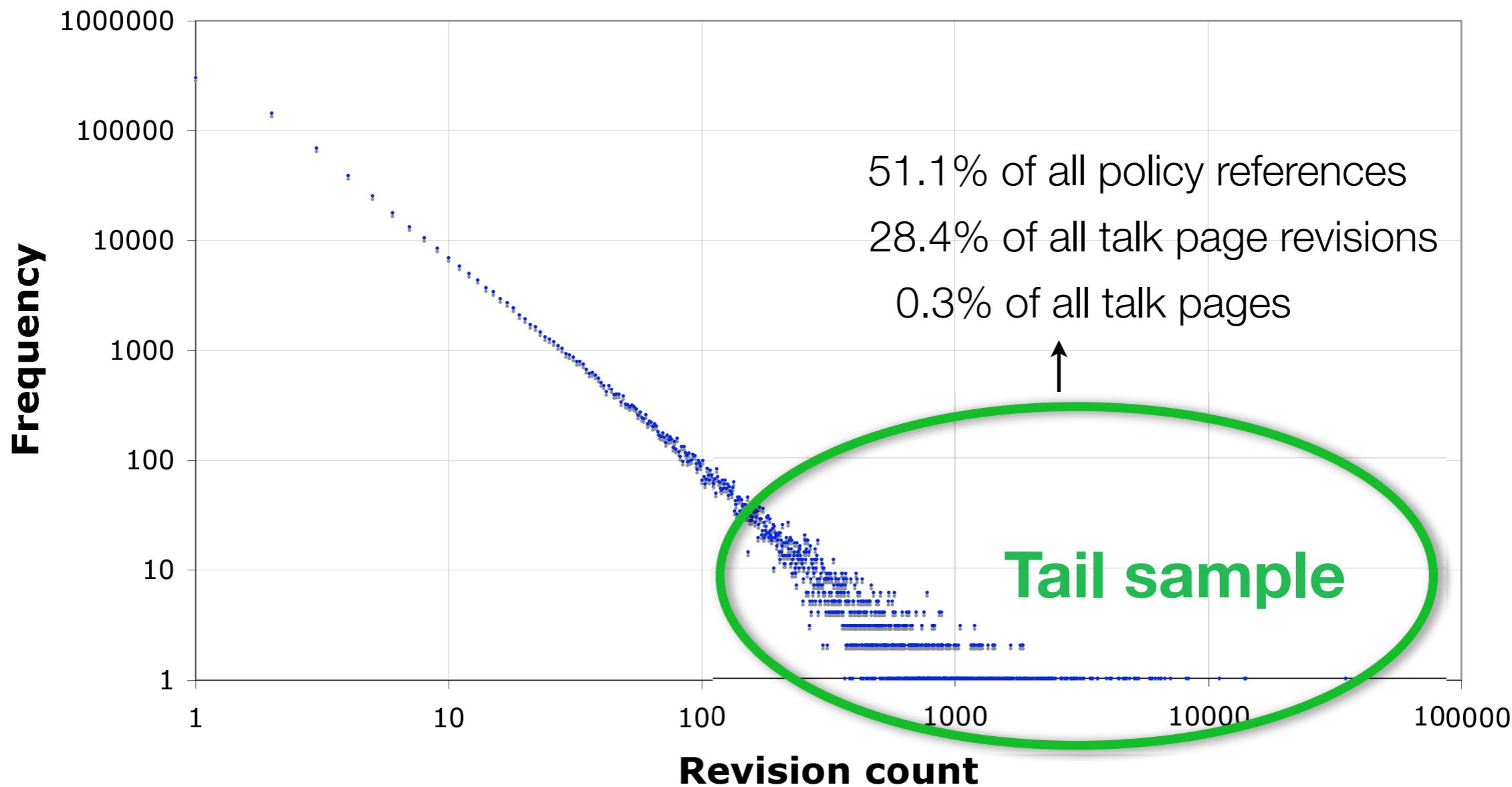
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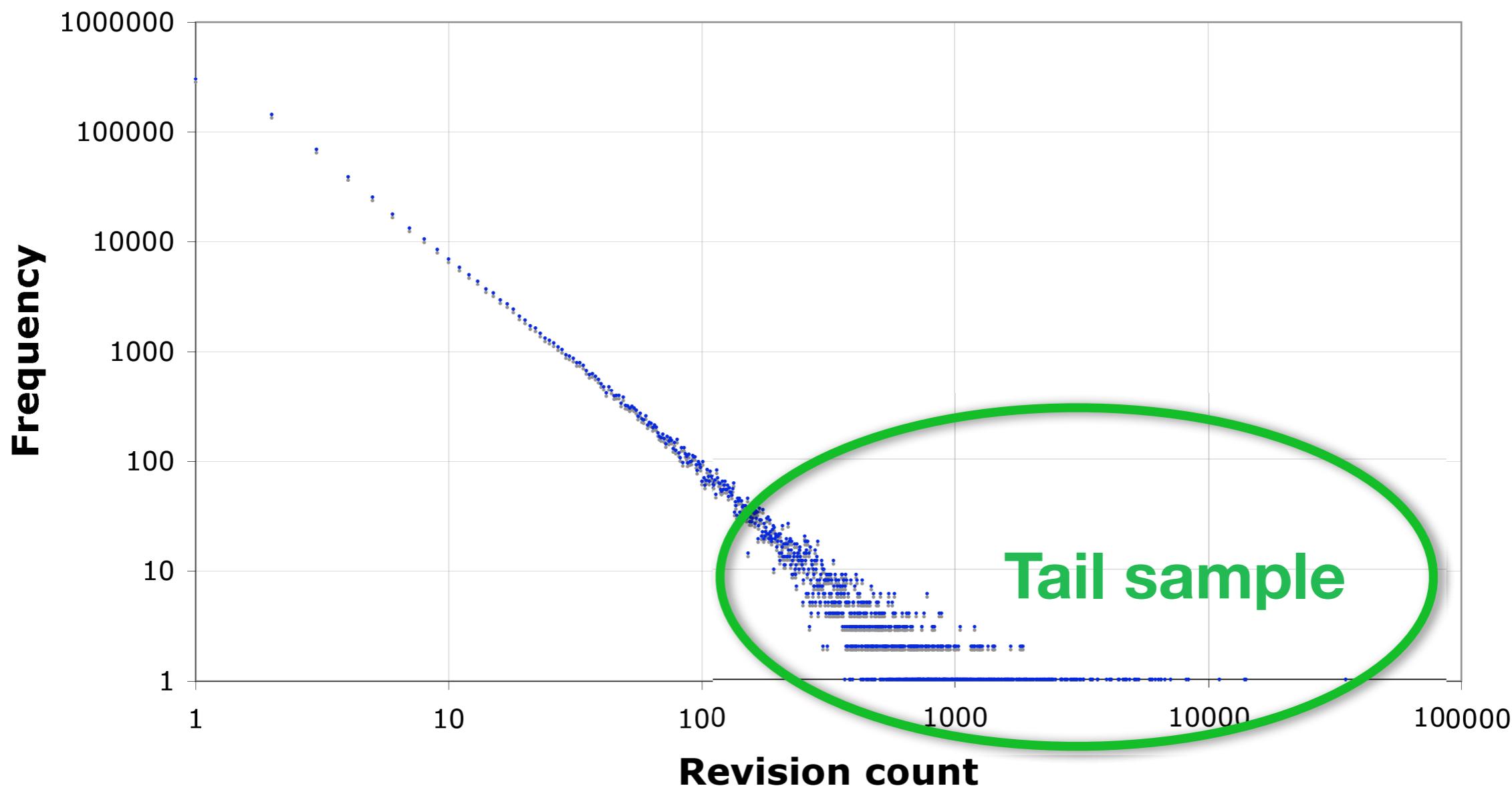
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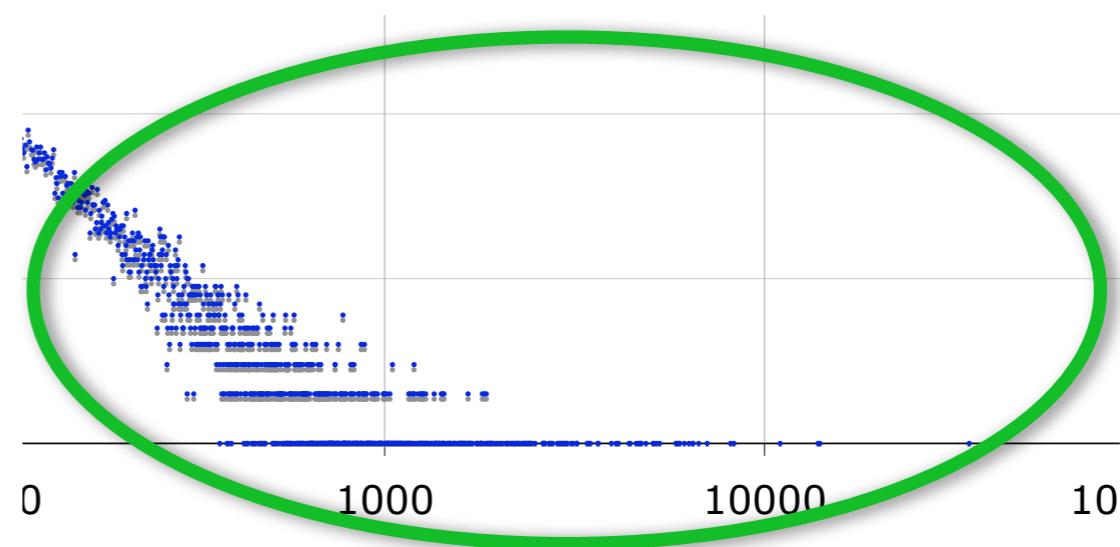
## Distribution of talk pages by revision count



# Isolate critical sections

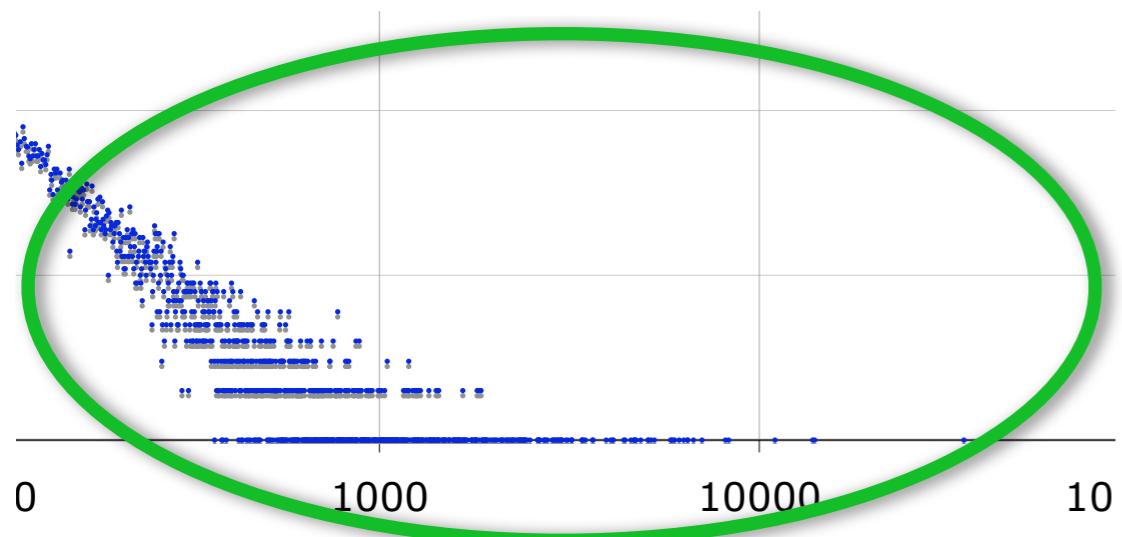
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*Periods when article and talk editing is significant*



# Isolate critical sections

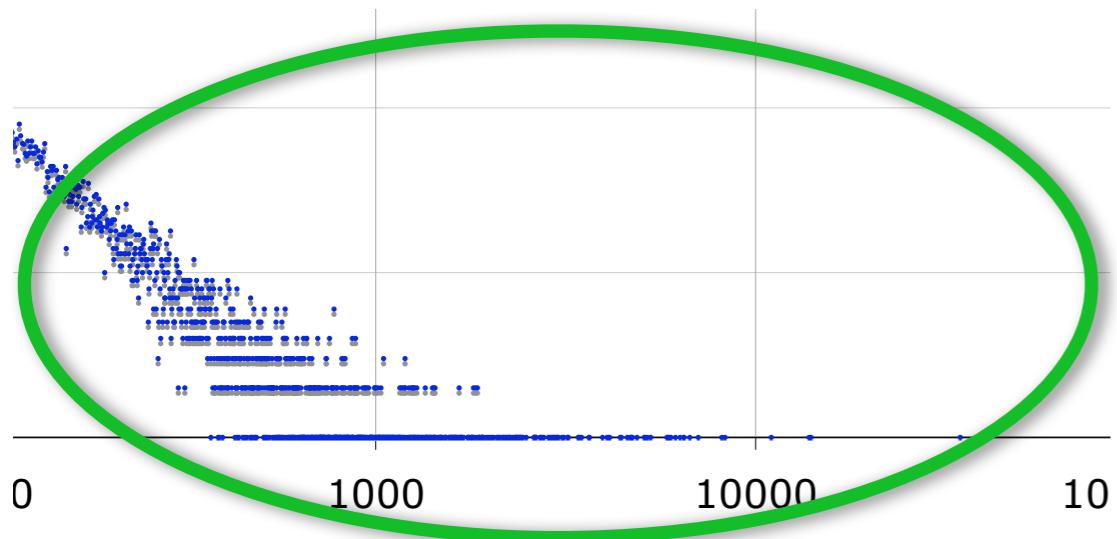
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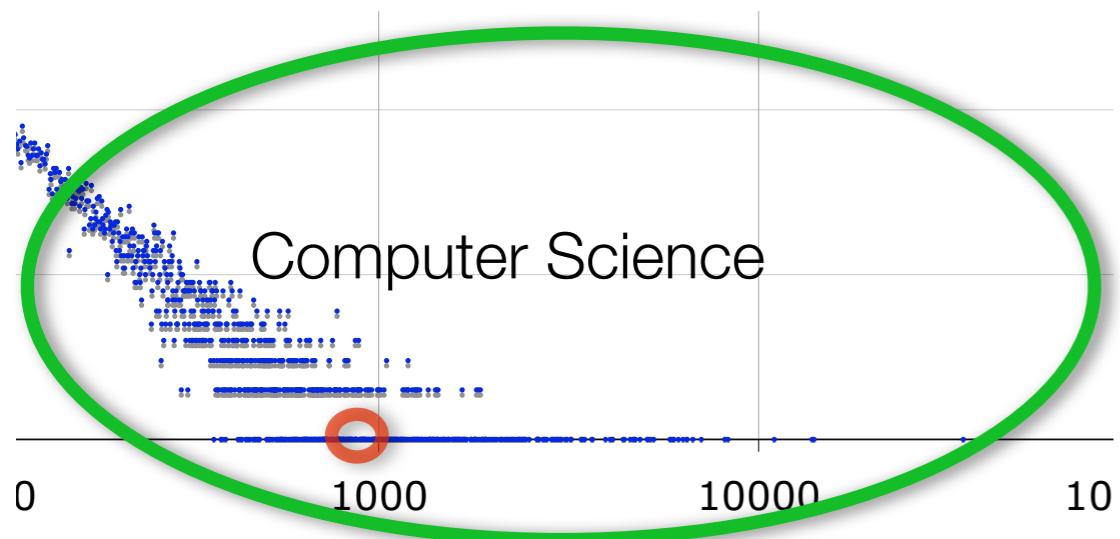
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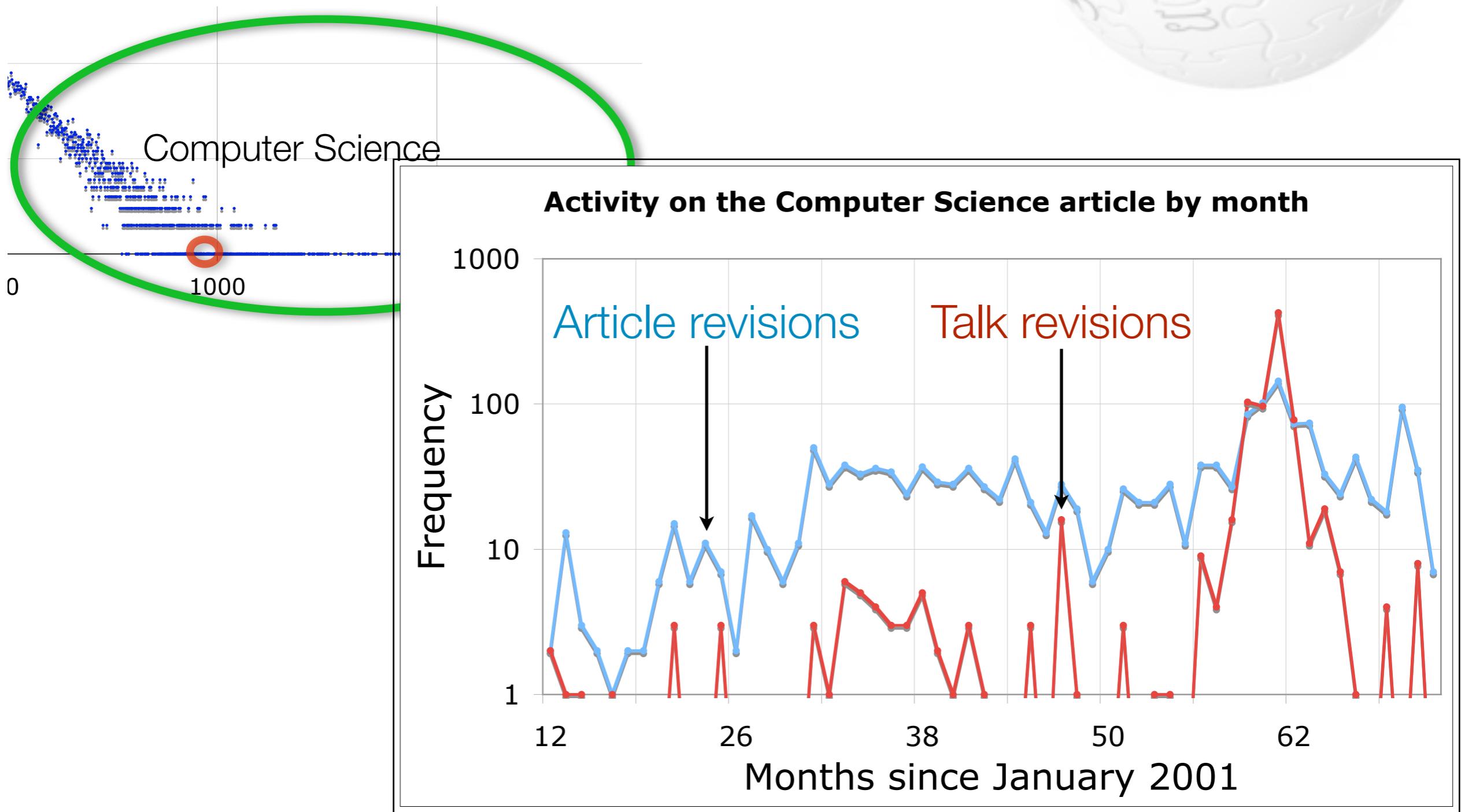
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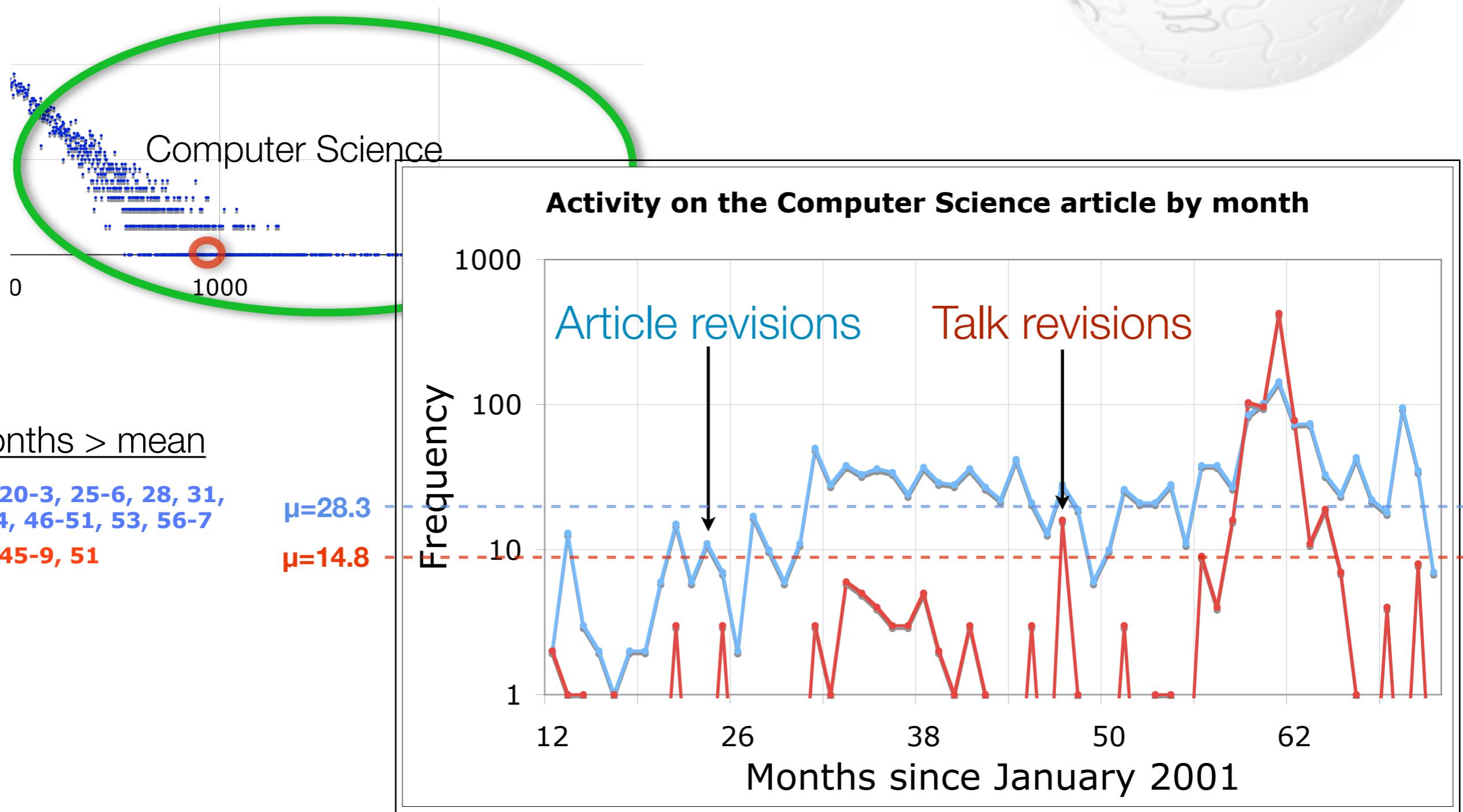
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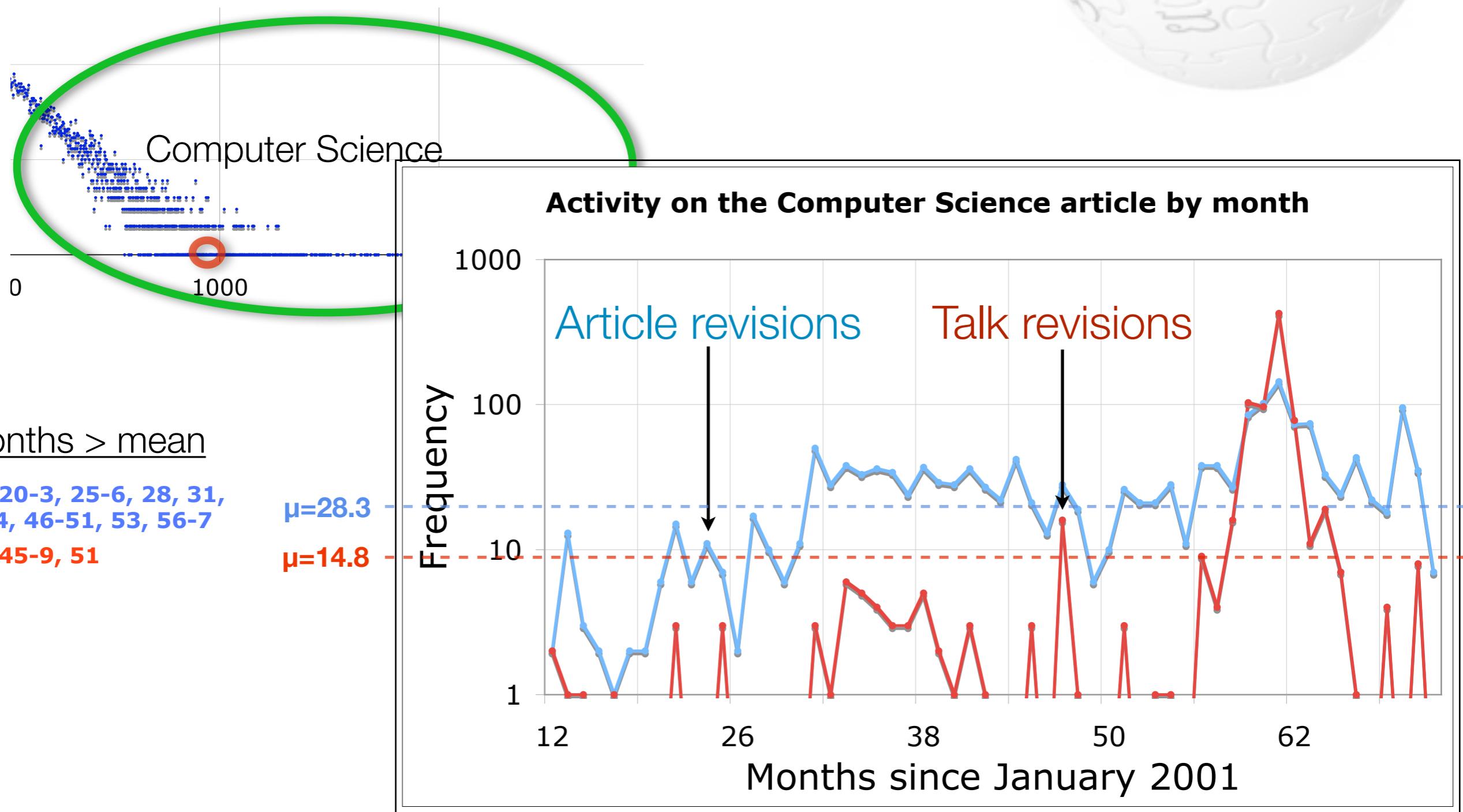
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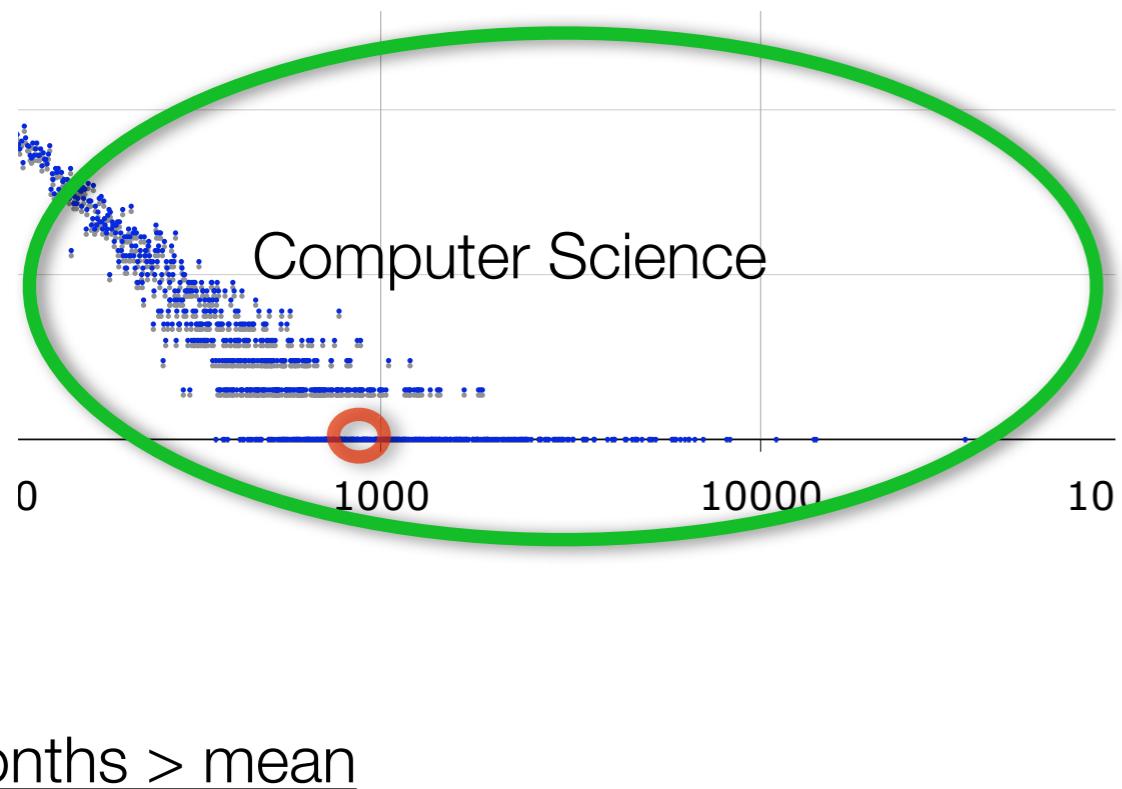
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Months > mean

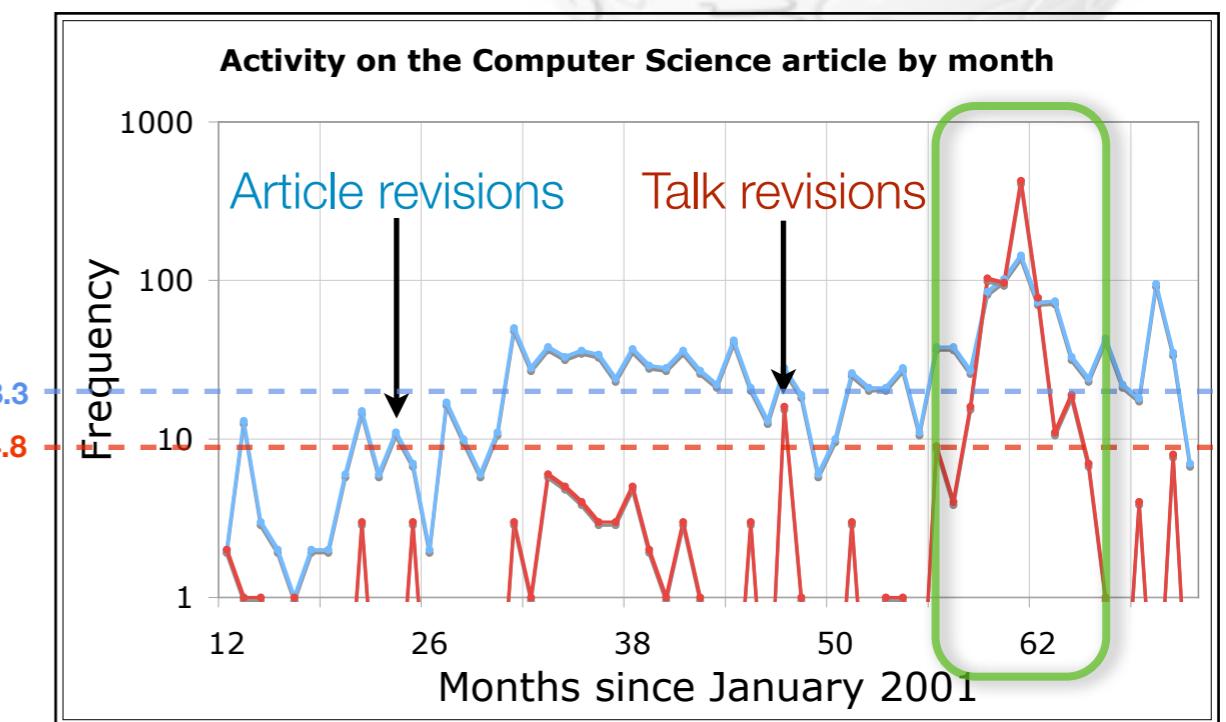
18, 20-3, 25-6, 28, 31,  
43-4, 46-51, 53, 56-7



34, 45-9, 51

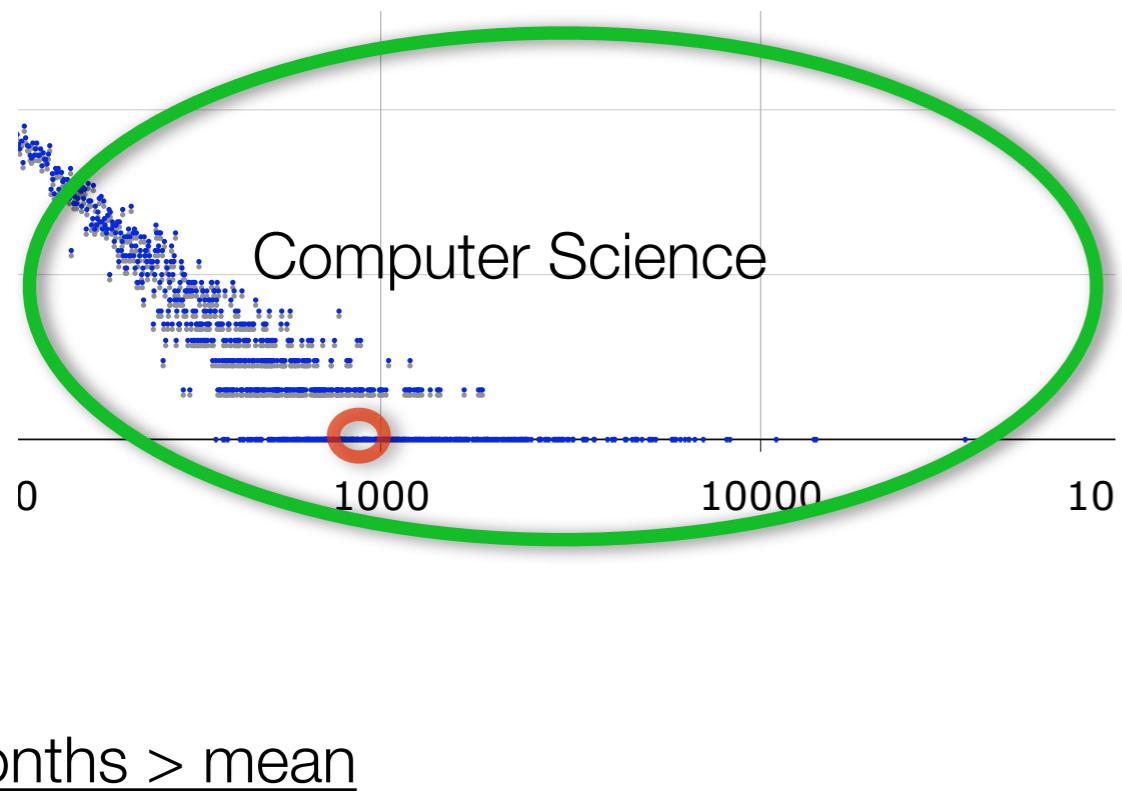


Critical Sections:  
46-49  
51



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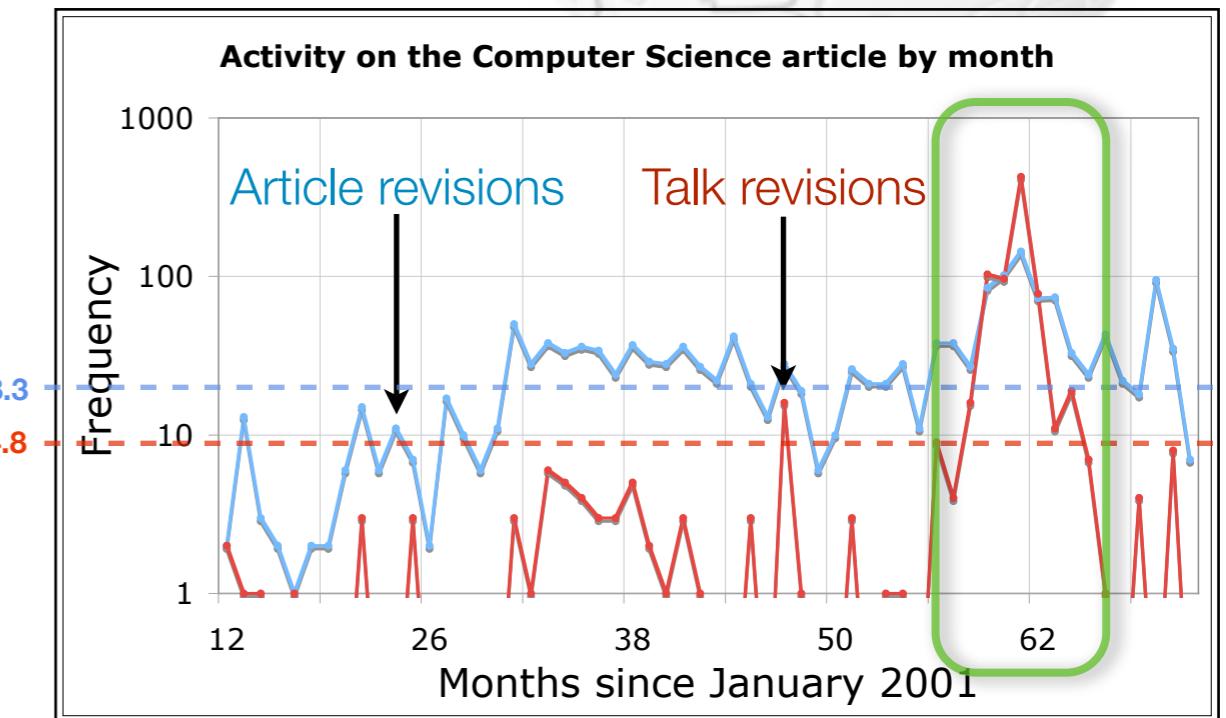
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Critical Sections:  
46-49  
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\*\*This is not the **exact** definition of critical section\*\*

# Sample critical sections

---

- Categorize critical sections
  - Natural categories
    - ▶ featured, controversial
  - Synthetic category
    - ▶ policy-laden
- Use stratified sampling to sample 69 critical sections
  - 10-100 pages of printed text each



# Analyze critical sections

---



- Use a grounded approach\*
- Perform open coding
  - Carefully read critical sections
  - Identify interesting dynamics
  - Generate rough categories
- Perform axial coding
  - Synthesize categories
  - Understand how categories relate

\* Strauss and Corbin (1990). Basics of qualitative research. Sage.

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# Excerpt from debate over article scope (2005)

- Begin with extended example
  - Unpack later
  - Excerpt from an argument on a contentious scientific topic
  - Anonymized the topic
  - Policy links are in red

# Excerpt from debate over article scope (2005)



# Excerpt from debate over article scope (2005)

This page is about paleocentrism as a scientific theory and controversies that this theory has with religion doesn't need 1/3 space in the article. . .[specific changes]...I do not want to do these changes before getting feedback. . .



Aye



Yep



Agreed

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We DID write an article just on the scientific theory of paleocentrism, before you showed up... You're obviously new here, ... arguing based on your reading of **NPOV** and **Be bold** is a bit ridiculous, like a kid just out of high school arguing points of constitutional law. These things are principles that have an established meaning. People who have been here for years understand them much better than you do. They won't prove effective weapons for you to wield in this argument...

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The social impact of “paleocentrism” is not “paleocentrism” . . .  
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Thanks for clarifying your views on the article.

Unfortunately most of the editors who work on this article do not share the same view (i hope i am speaking for most of the editors). This article is about the science .. and all other discussions ... fall outside the focus of this particular article.



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And on it goes...

# Findings: Power Plays

---

- As Wikipedians collaborate, they take actions
  - e.g. edit, revert, ignore another contributor
- **Power play:** Rhetorical strategy an individual makes to claim the legitimacy of an action
- Consensus is often a product of power plays
  - Often enacted point-counterpoint
  - Competing claims to legitimacy



# Power plays

*Legitimacy of contributor*

Traits of contributors are used to bolster or undermine a position

*Prior consensus*

Decision made in the past is presented as absolute and incontrovertible

*Article scope*

Central and peripheral content strictly defined

*Legitimacy of source*

The cited source is discredited

*Power of interpretation*

One sub-community commands greater authority than another

*Threat of sanction*

Threatening to use sanctioning mechanisms (e.g. blocking)

*Practice on other pages*

Content organization on other articles is used to validate or discredit contributions

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Article

Legitimacy

Power of

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# Findings: how policy mediates mass collaboration

---

- Policies are **enacted** to interpret and apply to complex situations
  - Common language and strategies for action\*
  - Policies justify actions by appealing to authority and precedent
- Policies are **ambiguous**
  - Relevant policy does not necessarily translate into obvious action
  - Policy enactment does not always resolve disputes
  - Contributors must argue for the relevance and saliency of a policy
- Recall use of **wiki is not paper** policy in example
  - *Enactment*: to understand whether social ramifications should be included
  - *Ambiguity*: divergent interpretation of “importance to topic”

\* Viegas, Wattenberg, Kriss, van Ham (2007) “Talk before you type: coordination in Wikipedia” HICCS 2007.

# Findings: how policy mediates mass collaboration

---

- Power plays vary in their conformity to the policy environment
  - Within bounds
  - Borderline
    - ▶ our example
  - Outside the bounds
    - ▶ see paper for example

# Findings: how policy mediates mass collaboration

---



Is the mean ... not considered original research?



It doesn't look like it to me, it looks like the original research was done by [gov't agency] or am I missing something?



If the [gov't agency] has not published the actual mean, us "calculating" it would be OR, no? I'm not sure.



No, why would it be? Extrapolating data from info already available is not OR.



From [WP:NOR](#): "articles may not contain any new analysis or synthesis of published arguments, concepts, data, ideas, or statements that serves to advance a position." For what's worth...

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# Implications: design mindset

---



- Designers must be careful in evaluating organizational overhead posed by consensus-based communities
  - We should avoid repeating the “process loss” framing criticized by McGrath<sup>†</sup>
- Rather, treat consensus as **fundamental** to Wikipedia’s success
  - CS\*W interaction patterns are endemic to mass collaboration
  - These C-words must be worked through when seeking consensus
- Tools should be designed to support the fundamental role that this discursive work performs

<sup>†</sup> McGrath (1984). Groups: interaction and performance. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

# Excerpt from debate over article scope (2005)

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Apparently  doesn't bother to read carefully what others actually wrote. Scroll up to the top of this section and you see that I voted to keep a smaller section on the social aspects of paleocentrism instead of removing it entirely and leaving just a link

4 days of a  
**single**  
conversation  
thread

On an  
article that  
has been  
around for  
5 years

\*\* In our talk, we had the full text of the text scroll by at this point, and it was very very long \*\*

# Implications: tool design

---



- \* Kittur, Suh, Pendleton and Chi (2007) "He says, she says: Conflict and coordination in Wikipedia" CHI 2007. pp 453-462.
- Viegas, Wattenberg, and Dave (2004). "Studying cooperation and conflict between authors with history flow visualizations" CHI 2004. pp 575-582.

# Implications: tool design

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- For awareness
  - Consensus-seeking is informed by prior arguments
  - Awareness of prior and ongoing consensus not supported well
    - ▶ Current mechanisms are minimal (watch lists, diff)
  - Awareness may help align power plays with policy environment
  - Other tools that may raise awareness of activity (and conflict) have been designed<sup>\*o</sup>

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  - Other tools that may raise awareness of activity (and conflict) have been designed<sup>\*o</sup>
- For reputation
  - Can be used as a potential guide to quality<sup>†</sup>
  - Can also provide awareness of other editors during consensus seeking
    - ▶ Who am I talking to? Who is this person that started the article?

<sup>\*</sup> Kittur, Suh, Pendleton and Chi (2007) “He says, she says: Conflict and coordination in Wikipedia” CHI 2007. pp 453-462.

<sup>°</sup> Viegas, Wattenberg, and Dave (2004). “Studying cooperation and conflict between authors with history flow visualizations” CHI 2004. pp 575-582.

<sup>†</sup> Adler and Alfaro (2007) “A content-driven reputation system for the Wikipedia” WWW 2007. pp 261-270.



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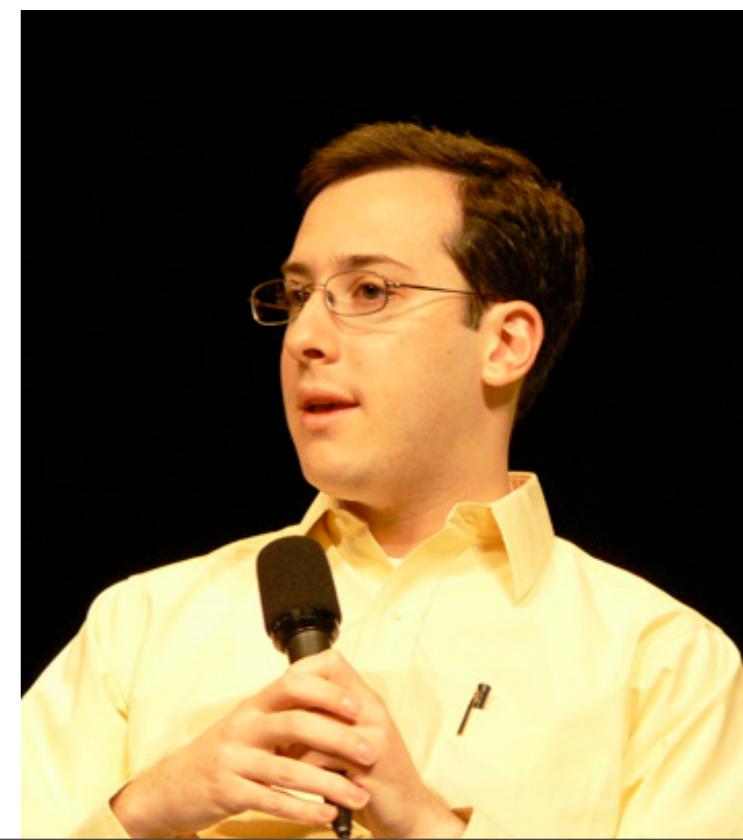


## Questions?



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Travis Kriplean



## Questions?



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