

# Deliberation and Resolution on Wikipedia: A Case Study of Requests for Comment

Jane Im\*, University of Michigan

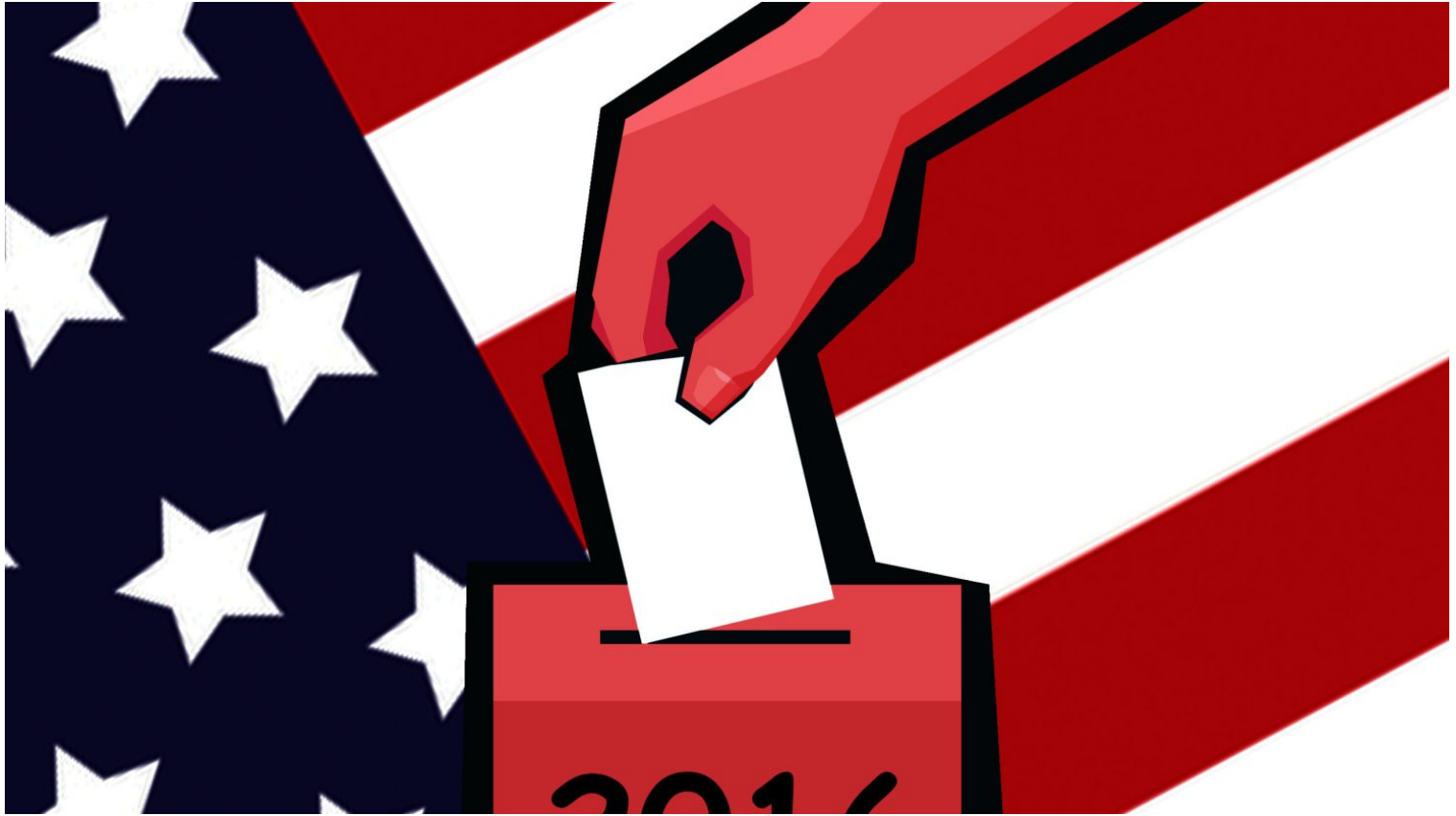
Amy Zhang, MIT CSAIL

Christopher Schilling, Wikimedia Foundation

David Karger, MIT CSAIL

Jonathan Morgan, Wikimedia Foundation

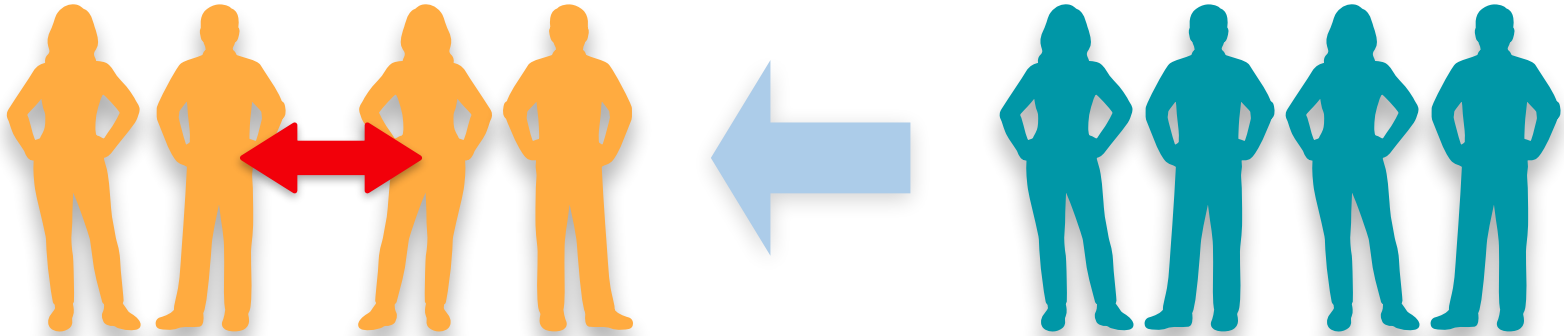
\* Work was done while at Korea University 1



# Content related disputes arise on Wikipedia



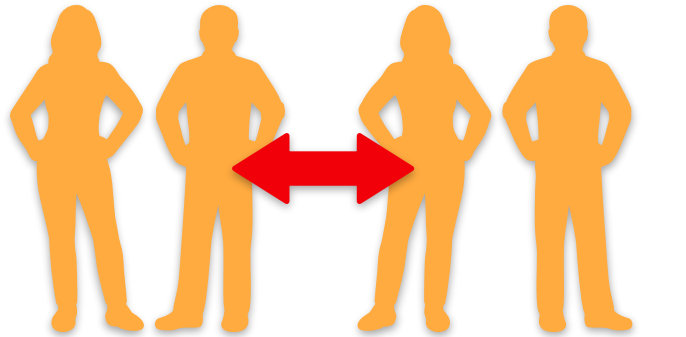




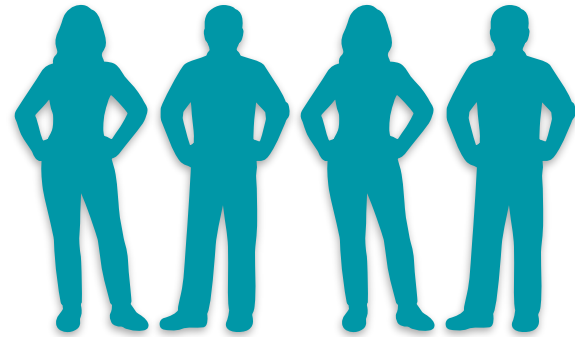
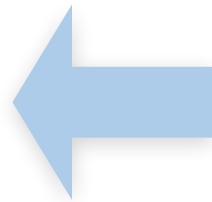
**Help from uninvolved editors**

# Requests for Comment (RfC)

Process used by Wikipedia editors for requesting input from uninvolved editors concerning content disputes



Unresolved content dispute



Uninvolved editors' new input

# Initiator opens Request for Comment

Request for comments (RFC) about whether the lead paragraph should say he's the current president

An editor has **requested comments from other editors for this discussion**. Within 24 hours, this page will be added to the following lists:



- **Biographies**
- **Politics, government, and law**

When discussion has ended, remove this tag and it will be removed from the list. If this page is on additional lists, they will be noted below.



Please consider joining the [feedback request service](#).

Assuming that the hatnote is edited to remove that he is the current ("incumbent") president, should the lead paragraph be edited to say that he is the current president?15:58, 27 March 2017 (UTC)





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- Biographies**
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Assuming that the hatnote is edled to remove that he is the current ("incumbent") president, should the lead paragraph be eddied to say that he is the current president?15:56, 27 March 2017 (UTC)

**NOTE:** The RFC question is not proposing any particular language, and is flexible regarding "current" vs. "incumbent" vs. "serving since", etc. You may indicate which specific language you prefer, but any language indicating that Trump is now president constitutes support for the RFC.Anythingnew (talk) 17:34, 27 March 2017 (UTC)

#### Survey about saying he's the current president

- Support** as proposed. This is a sensitive subject, in view of the *Not my president* and *Not My Presidents Day* movements. If the lead paragraph merely says that he is the 45th president, that does not indicate he is the current president. After all, reliable sources say that Jimmy Carter is still the 39th president, and Bill Clinton is still the 42nd president. *According to the Washington Post*<sup>6</sup>, and *CBS News*<sup>6</sup>, "Jimmy Carter is the 39th president of the United States". *According to the Washington Post*<sup>6</sup> and *Variety*<sup>6</sup>, Bill Clinton "is the 42nd president of the United States". It's true that our talk page includes a list of if more difficult to change any consensus. The list of consensuses includes the lead sentence, but removal of incumbency from the hatnote changes the context of the lead sentence, to such an extent that I think a slight modification of the lead sentence is very much justified. This RFC is not about how exactly it should be phrased ("current" vs. "incumbent" vs. "serving since", etc.). Also see the archived good article *George W. Bush*<sup>6</sup>: "**George Walker Bush** ... is the forty-third and current President of the United States." See also the featured article *Barack Obama*<sup>6</sup>: "He is an American politician who is the **44th** (UTC)
- Support.** Defining characteristic: Current, incumbent, serving all good... or bad brackets rowe (45th). Stuart (talk) 16:06, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Oppose** as unnecessary and superfluous. "Is" is present tense verb, regardless of how some sources choose to use it (I don't think WP-V applies to grammar). The notion that this is needed because of a "not my president" controversy approaches the absurd, and I use that word very sparingly in discussion. And the first sentence has already received massive discussion, linked at #Current consensus item 11. It's time to call it "good enough", leave it alone, and move on to other things. --Mandruss  ! 16:14, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** It seems to me that it's common practice on Wikipedia, and a good one, to identify officeholders as "current" during their term of office. This is how previous presidents were described when they served, and it provides clarity. --DavidK93 (talk) 16:27, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Oppose** Common practice on Wikipedia often violates the Manual of Style: MOS:CURRENT issues on the use of time-sensitive words like "current". Yes I realize this page is updated, but saying "Trump is President" is clear that he's incumbent. Obama's page doesn't say "Obama is President" any longer. --Muboshgu (talk) 16:46, 27 March 2017 (UTC)

- No, he did *not* *serve* when he was president. --Mariank (talk) 00:00, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- WP:OSE should not be our guiding light here. — JFG  <sup>100</sup> 07:15, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- Neutral** The real problem is the current wording of the full sentence in the lode. Donald John Trump is an American businessman, television personality and politician, and the 45th President of the United States. It's simply too long and omits the most important information right up front and that is, Donald Trump is the 45th and current President of the United States. This RFC will not solve that. It is ONLY suggesting that Trump's presidency be in the present tense. It DOES NOT support using the word "CURRENT". See this RFC for another *here*  ! which solves this problem. SW3 SCL (talk) 16:48, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Oppose** per *Manoroux* and *Muboshgu*.-- *MX* 16:50, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** as we can remove the word "after" Trump leaves office. GoodDay (talk) 20:54, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** per my comment below and plan good series. --John Clime (talk) 23:11, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** -Most such articles, including articles about presidents, have put "current" in the lode sentence, as noted above by Anythingnew and DavidK93. I don't like "serving as" because it seems like a kind of attempt to distance ourselves from saying (admitting!) that he IS the president - as opposed to just "serving as" the president.--Mariank (talk) 23:42, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** 100% that it needs to say Donald J. Trump is the current President of the United States of America in one way or another simply because...well, he is.—DorothyMetalhead (talk) 00:52, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** It's what we've done with Bush and Obama and should be done with Trump. He will always be "the 45th President" but now he is the current President. Dr Joseph <sup>100</sup> 08:15, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** per analogous FA Barack Obama (19 January 2017) <sup>6</sup> "... is an American politician who is the 44th and current President of the United States." WP:CCO policy and MOS:SEACFPLS. --Cherrygilla (talk) 05:51, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- Support** - My preferred formulation would be Donald John Trump is an American businessman, television personality and politician, serving as the 45th President of the United States since January 2017. — JFG  <sup>100</sup> 07:08, 28 March 2017 (UTC)

#### Discussion about saying he's the

- Comment.** Possible redundancy here.
- Comment.** User Muboshgu, not only is I would support adding "serving since" That suggestion would be fine w
- Comment** could you change the word "I have added a note,Anythingnew
- Comment.** @Anythingnew: I beg

# Participants come in to the RfC to give input

- I did not change the RFC question one iota. The only thing it quotes in the RFC question is the word "Incumbent" which is given this way as an example of what is meant by the word current. "current (Incumbent)". Feel free to change your vote if you want. If I say "Mary said that she doesn't want to ride in the car" that obviously does not produce that Mary said, "I would prefer to not ride in the automobile".Anythingnew (talk) 18:00, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
  - Comment**NotMyPresident. ThatGiffTayler (talk) 18:06, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
  - Comment** -is serving as the 45th President of the United States of America since 2017 is an unambiguous neutral introduction of fact. While it can be said that Obama is the 44th president, it can not be said that he is serving in that capacity. Only one can serve and it is a distinction due this man since January 2017. -- Proceeding unsigned comment added by John Clime (talk) (rollback)
  - That would be fine. User:John Clime. Why not support the RFC proposal which allows this language you've proposed?Anythingnew (talk) 22:35, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
  - I do support the proposal, and have made this more clear above. --John Clime (talk) 23:11, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
  - @John Clime: If you want that specific language you need to mention that in your note. Please read the note above under the RFC question. The OP's question is misleading. He wants the word, "Incumbent". He's never going to say, "serving as". If you want that choice, this is not that RFC. SW3 SCL (talk) 23:52, 27 March 2017 (UTC)
  - User:edzhb. I have said repeatedly that I will be glad with any language including Trump is now in office.Anythingnew (talk) 00:11, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
  - Let's control have no justification to assume bad faith of the OP. I believe the RFC is to determine if Donald Trump should be mentioned in the present tense without prescribing the exact phrase that will be used if the RFC gains consensus. It is not a question of what "he's never going to say", but what we will collaborate to say if such mention is preferred. I appreciate you mentioning your concern, though I believe it is misplaced. --John Clime (talk) 00:31, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- @John Clime: The previous discussions never mentioned using loose language in an RFC, but rather, the discussion had narrowed down to, "Is the 45th, and current, president." That was the language that had the most support when the OP made this RFC without previous discussion of what his RFC would say. The whole point of an RFC, and our previous discussions, was to settle on specific language. This RFC must do that, or there is no point in having it because we're right back where we started. I noticed you seemed to like "serving as", and I think that's a good idea, too. That's why I put the note at the top of this choice, the rest of us should as well. SW3 SCL (talk) 00:40, 28 March 2017 (UTC)

# This sometimes leads to long thread of comments

- @Dr Joseph: It's not about the time Warner, and it's not a reply to the Anythingnew (talk) 00:02, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- @Dr Joseph: This RFC is not for choosing specific words. Bush and Obama used, "is the current president". **Now can make that choice at the RFC here**<sup>6</sup>. Thanks. SW3 SCL (talk) 01:56, 28 March 2017 (UTC)
- @JFG: Donald Trump is not a water... , serving as the 45th President of the United States since January 2017. Sources more like a client advert. "Serving New Yorkers since 2017." Lol. SW3 SCL (talk) 14:30, 29 March 2017 (UTC)

**Wikipedia:Manual of Style/Current**  
Wikipedia:Manual\_of\_Style/Current says

The term "current" should be avoided. What is current today may not be tomorrow, situations change over time. Instead, use date- and time-specific text. To help keep information updated use the {{as of}} template.  
Incorrect: He is the current ambassador to ...  
Correct: As of March 2011, he is the ambassador to ...  
Jael PVI Stuart (talk) 22:15, 27 March 2017 (UTC)

Another thing the MOS says is  
The current president, Cristina Fernández, took office in 2007, or "Cristina Fernández has been president since 2007", is better rendered "Cristina Fernández became president in 2007".  
Stuart (talk) 22:24, 27 March 2017 (UTC)

That's not what the actual BLP says<sup>6</sup> while she was in office.Anythingnew (talk) 22:44, 27 March 2017 (UTC)

**Another MOS section**  
Per Wikipedia:Manual of Style/Dates and numbers/Statements likely to become outdated (emphasis added):

Anythingnew (talk) 22:31, 27 March 2017 (UTC)  
How would you feel about "became the 45th President in January 2017"? Stuart (talk) 00:18, 28 March 2017 (UTC)  
Meh, that's ambiguous about whether he remains president. Let's see how the RFC goes.Anythingnew (talk) 03:34, 28 March 2017 (UTC)

<sup>6</sup> Except on pages updated regularly (e.g. the "Current events" portal), terms such as now, currently, to date, so far, soon, and recently should usually be avoided in favor of phrases such as during the 1990s, since 2010, and in August 1969. For current and future events, use phrases like as of March 2017 or since the beginning of 2017 to signal the time-dependence of the information.  <sup>?</sup>

# Closer evaluates Request for Comment

Request for comments (RFC) about whether the lead paragraph should say he's the current president

*The following discussion is closed. **Please do not modify it.** Subsequent comments should be made on the appropriate discussion page. No further edits should be made to this discussion.*

---

Assuming that the hatnote is edited to remove that he is the current ("incumbent") president, should the lead paragraph be edited to say that he is the current president?15:58, 27 March 2017 (UTC)

Consensus reached to **include "current"**, exact language agreed elsewhere, see [Talk:Donald Trump#Current consensus](#), item #17. — JFG [talk](#) 20:00, 2 April 2017 (UTC)

# Who is the closer?

- Neutral editor that summarizes the RfC discussion and makes a resolution
- Usually one closer per RfC

Closer evaluates this  
Request for Comment **has a consensus.**

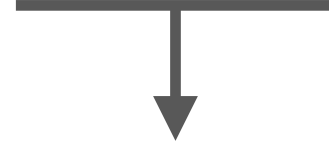
**The dispute is successfully resolved.**

**The ideal outcome is every dispute being resolved.**




**However it doesn't always happen to all RfCs.**

**1/3 of RfCs go stale.**

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**Left without any closure after the default period.  
Dispute is unresolved.**

	Formally closed	Informally ended	Stale
Dispute is resolved			
Ended by	Uninvolved editor (closer)	Participant, initiator, or uninvolved editor	None
Number of RfCs	4,086 (58%)	672 (9%)	2,329 (33%)



- **Oppose.** I think I have made my case against Ghostofnemos repeated and inherent C  
[Saddhiyama \(talk\)](#) 22:10, 17 April 2014 (UTC)
- **Oppose.** They are either fork of authoritarianism or [WP:OR](#) with [WP:POV](#). "The Econo  
are not in this case. Both represent specific political positions. [Sietecolores \(talk\)](#) 22:50

### Another, sad Wikipedia fail. [Ghostofnemo \(talk\)](#) 01:00, 27 April 2014

No, this was a success ... material that did not refer to police states was correctly reje  
"police state" and "authoritarian regime" or "unfree state" as synonymous (they clearl  
your say-so would have been a failure. -- [184.189.217.91 \(talk\)](#) 04:40, 23 April 2015 (

Why are **stale RfCs** a problem?

Number of RfCs that have over **100** comments: **430**

Highest number of comments on an RfC: **2,375**



- **Discouraging to editors** if an RfC never gets closed when they put effort into it
- **Problem for productivity** as editors involved in RfCs may wait on the outcome before further editing



**Why do many RfCs remain stale?**

# OUTLINE

1. Collection of data
2. Qualitative – Reasons behind stale RfCs
3. Quantitative – Model for predicting RfC's outcome

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1. Collection of data

2. Qualitative – Reasons behind stale RfCs

3. Quantitative – Model for predicting RfC's outcome



## Qualitative – Reasons behind stale RfCs

- Interviewed 10 frequent closers
- Inspected 40 randomly chosen stale RfCs from the dataset

## Quantitative Study – Model for predicting RfC's outcome

- 7,316 RfCs from the English Wikipedia 2011~2017
- Built models predicting RfCs' outcomes

# OUTLINE

1. Collection of data

**2. Qualitative – Reasons behind stale RfCs**

3. Quantitative – Model for predicting RfC's outcome

### 1. Problems with initiators and initial proposals

- I was randomly selected by RFCbot to comment here. This request is too vague to serve as the basis for any consensus. Please state the request explicitly (and neutrally). What is it you are asking for input about?  
[Jojalozzo](#) 20:22, 7 March 2013 (UTC)

### 2. Behavior of participants: bickering & sock-puppeting

This is a meta-comment, about the dispute rather than the substance: Both Aprock and Mirade are spending too much time bickering over this. Both of them need to slow down and let other editors comment. Both of them would do well to stop responding to the other person's comments within minutes. If you've opened this RFC to get comments, rather than to get another place to argue with each other, then you need to make this forum more accessible to other people by *not* posting.

### 3. Lack of interest/expertise from uninvolved editors

“**When no one cares enough** because even if you get it wrong, you’ve affected one small part of one article that might get 15 views a day...**passed on an RfC because I thought ‘... My time is better used elsewhere.’**”

## 4. RfC is too complicated/contentious

“...a few that I avoid just because... anything with like 300 plus comments or where feelings are running very high. Eventually I think ‘That needs one of Wikipedia’s big names to close...’”

## 5. Interpersonal issues and “wikipolitics”

“... Now suppose **people with whom I do not share a particularly good relationship** has initiated the RfC, I **don't generally close it.**”

# OUTLINE

1. Collection of data
2. Qualitative – Reasons behind stale RfCs
- 3. Quantitative – Model for predicting RfC's outcome**



# Goal of building models

1. Understand the features that can predict which RfC will go stale
2. Help initiator/participants take action to prevent stale RfCs

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Need to also build **timely models** to prevent in advance

## 5 reasons of stale RfCs

Problems with initiators/  
initial proposals

Behavior of participants

Lack of interest from editors

RfC being complicated/long

RfC being contentious

## 8 categories of features

Initiator's experience

Initial proposal tone & length

Participants' experience

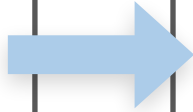
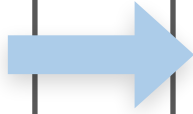
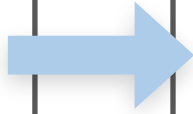
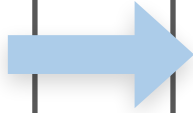
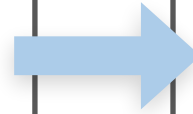
Tone of participant discourse

Popularity of RfC and topic

Participants' interest

Size & shape of discussion

Contentiousness



Adaptive Boosted Decision Trees perform the best overall

➔ **8.1% increase over the baseline performance of 67.2%**

Algorithm	Precision	Recall	F1	AUC	Accuracy
ADT	0.79	0.86	0.82	0.69	<b>0.753</b>
Baseline (predicting close)	0.67	1	0.8	0.5	<b>0.672</b>

Category
Size and Shape of Discussion
Participant Experience
Participant Interest
Contentiousness
Popularity of RfC and Topic
Tone of Discourse
Initiator Experience
Initial Proposal Tone and Length

## Categories of features

## Category

Size and Shape of Discussion

Participant Experience

Participant Interest

Contentiousness

Popularity of RfC and Topic

Tone of Discourse

Initiator Experience

Initial Proposal Tone and Length

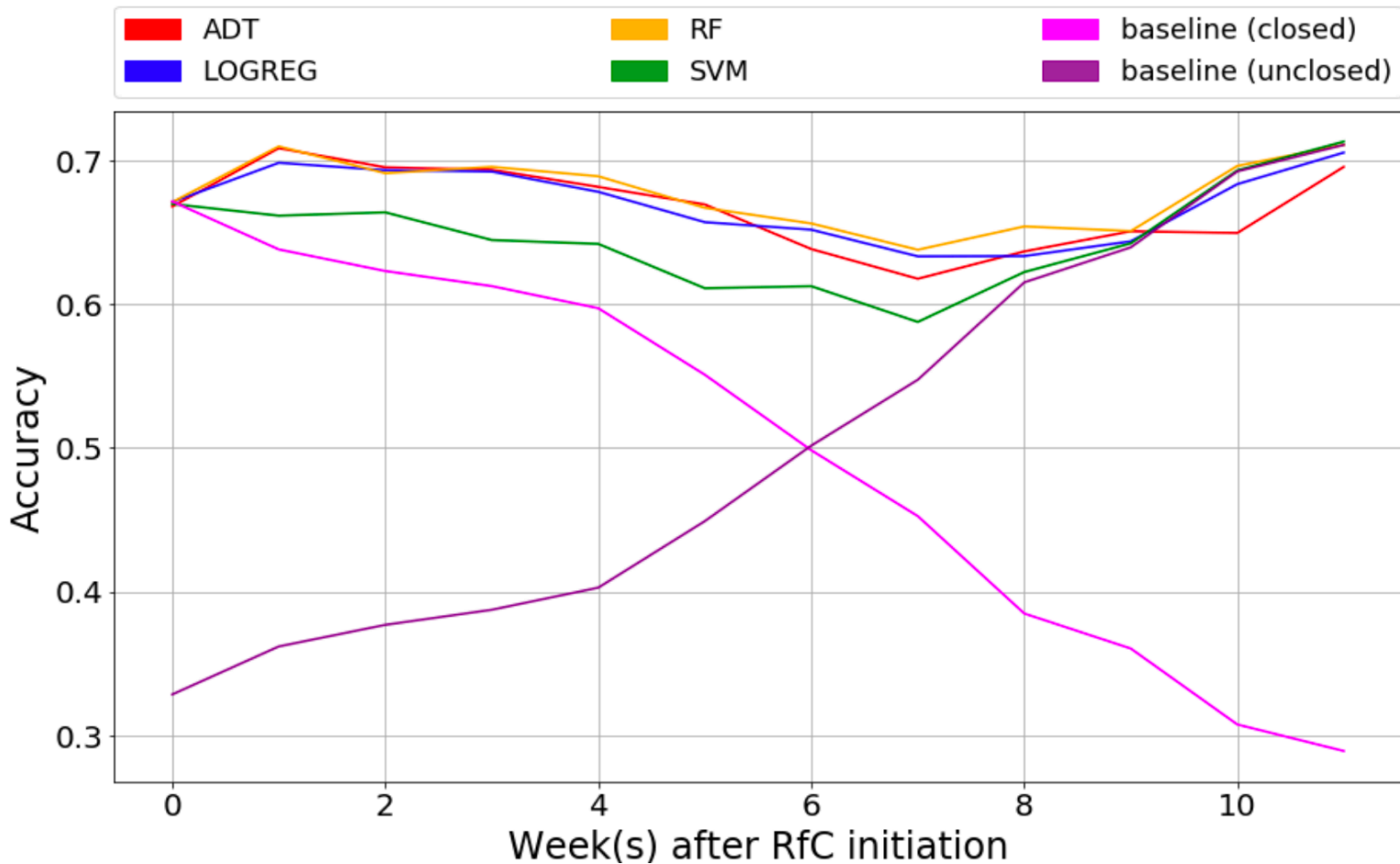
## Categories of features

Features	$\rho$	p
Maximum Wikipedia age of participants	0.12	< 0.0001
$\sigma$ of Wikipedia age of participants	0.215	
Sum of edit counts of participants	0.147	
Average edit counts of participants	0.146	

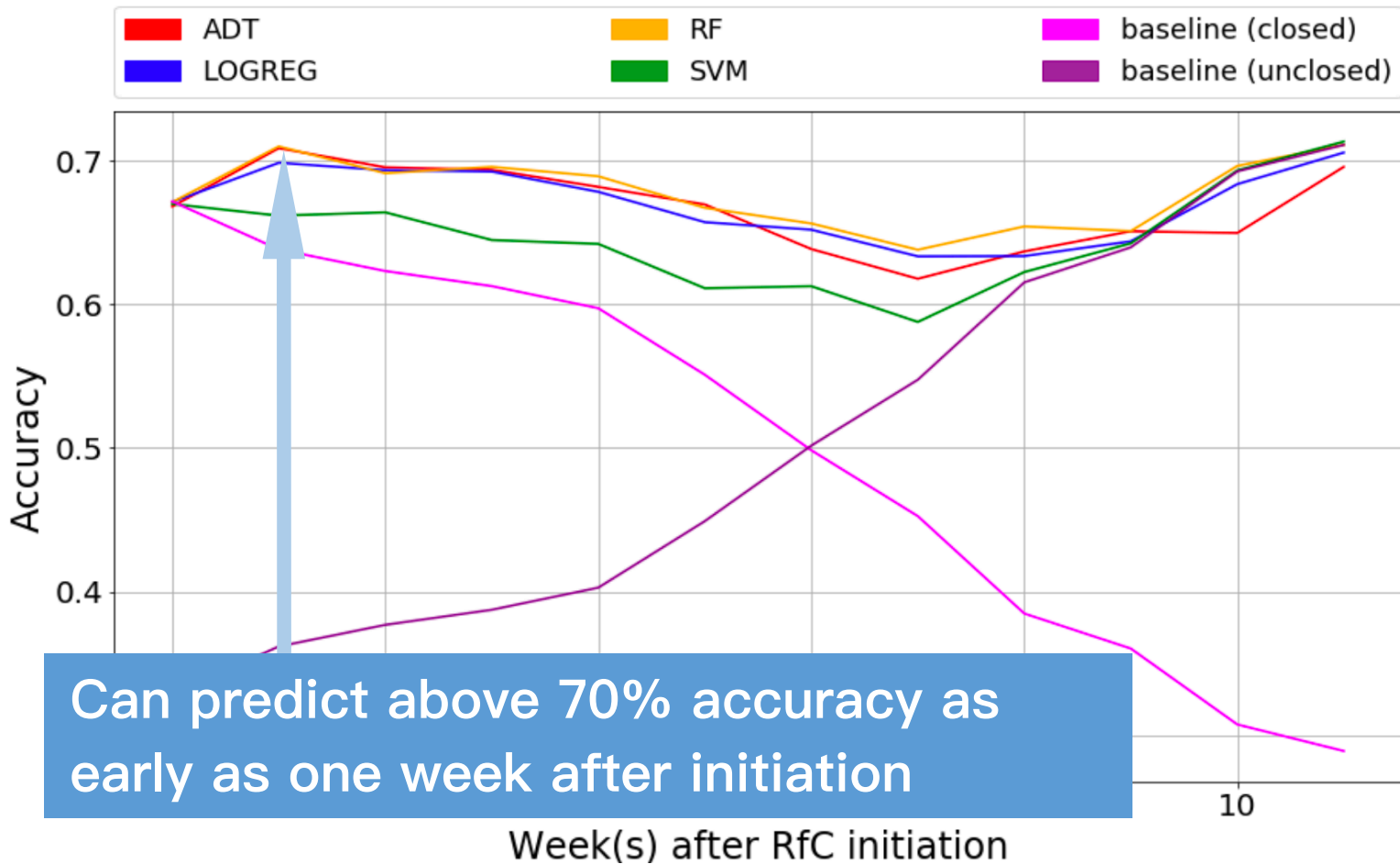
Features related to participant experience within top 14 features

**How soon after an RfC is initiated can we predict the likelihood of closure with reasonable accuracy?**

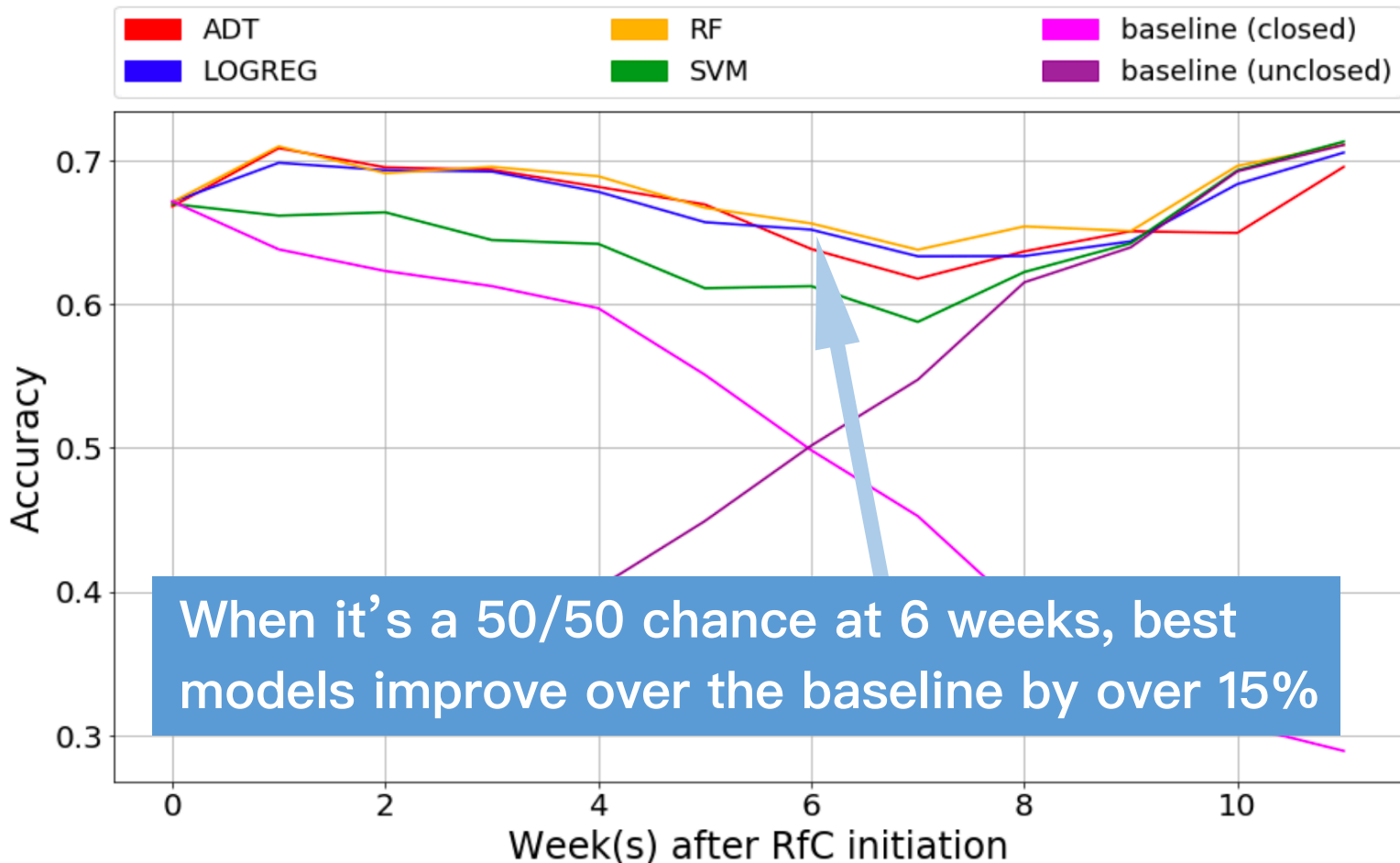




Accuracy level of models predicting RfCs' outcomes over time



Accuracy level of models predicting RfCs' outcomes over time



Accuracy level of models predicting RfCs' outcomes over time

# Implication of timely models

2 weeks after the RfC initiation:

The models show participants' expertise level is crucial.



**Participants invite experienced editors to the discussion.**

# Summary of Contributions

- 1) 1/3 of RfCs **do not get closed at all** and many do not get closed within time
  - 2) Qualitative study showing insight from the closers as to **why** this is the case
  - 3) New **models** to help predict which RfCs are likely to go stale
- Dataset of RfCs: [https://figshare.com/articles/rfc\\_sql/7038575](https://figshare.com/articles/rfc_sql/7038575)
  - Paper: [trusttri.github.io/papers/wiki\\_deliberation.pdf](http://trusttri.github.io/papers/wiki_deliberation.pdf)
  - Contact: [imjane@umich.edu](mailto:imjane@umich.edu)