Leading by Example?

How Elite Behaviour affects Individual Vaccination Decisions

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What are the limits of cue taking?

Cue Taking

"cues—information about what positions political parties take on policy issues" (Slothuus & Bisgaard 2021a, 1)

- Cues are powerful determinants of reported political attitudes (Slothuus & Bisgaard 2021a),
- even when this goes against personal stakes (Slothuus & Bisgaard 2021b).

But does this translate into behaviour as well?

Partisanship as a "Perceptual Screen"

- builds on evidence of partisan differences in reported factual beliefs.
- Paying people to give better answers mitigates *some* bias, but not all of it (Prior, Sood & Khanna 2015).
- **PS hypothesis**: differences are caused by differences in **perception of reality** (Campbell 1960; Green & Huber 2009).

Can strong cues alter factual beliefs?

(and what about realms beyond the economy?)

Vaccination Decisions

- Behavioral data.
- Highly tangible issue.
- Costly behavior.
- Clear and strong cues.

Ideal case to study limits of cue taking.

Alternatively: Issue Sorting (Carmines & Stimson 1986)

- Citizens do not follow party's incongruent issue position.
- Instead choose different party in line with their preferences.

Little causal inference work here so far.

The Case

Hubert Aiwanger's Vaccination Decision

- Leader of "Freie Wähler" & Deputy PM of Bavaria
- In May 2021, it became increasingly clear that HA **would not get vaccinated** immediately.
- Plenty of media attention.
- Finally got vaccinated in Nov 2021.

Design

Difference-in-Differences

- Exploit **novelty** of Covid-issue $\rightarrow$ cannot affect prior voting decision!
- Compare change in vaccination rates of districts with low FW-share to those with high FW-share (cue taking).

Data

- Unit of Analysis: Governing/Voting District
- Conditioning variable: Share of (direct) votes for FW in 2017 Bundestag election.*
- Treatment: pre-post 07.05.2021 (first news report about decision).
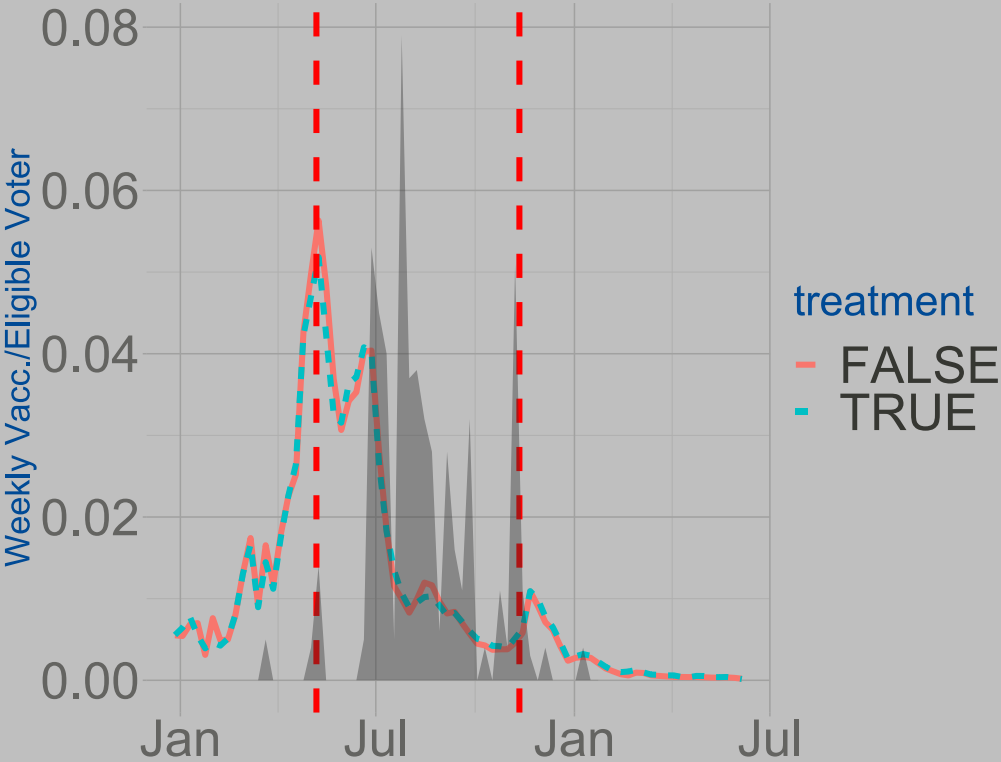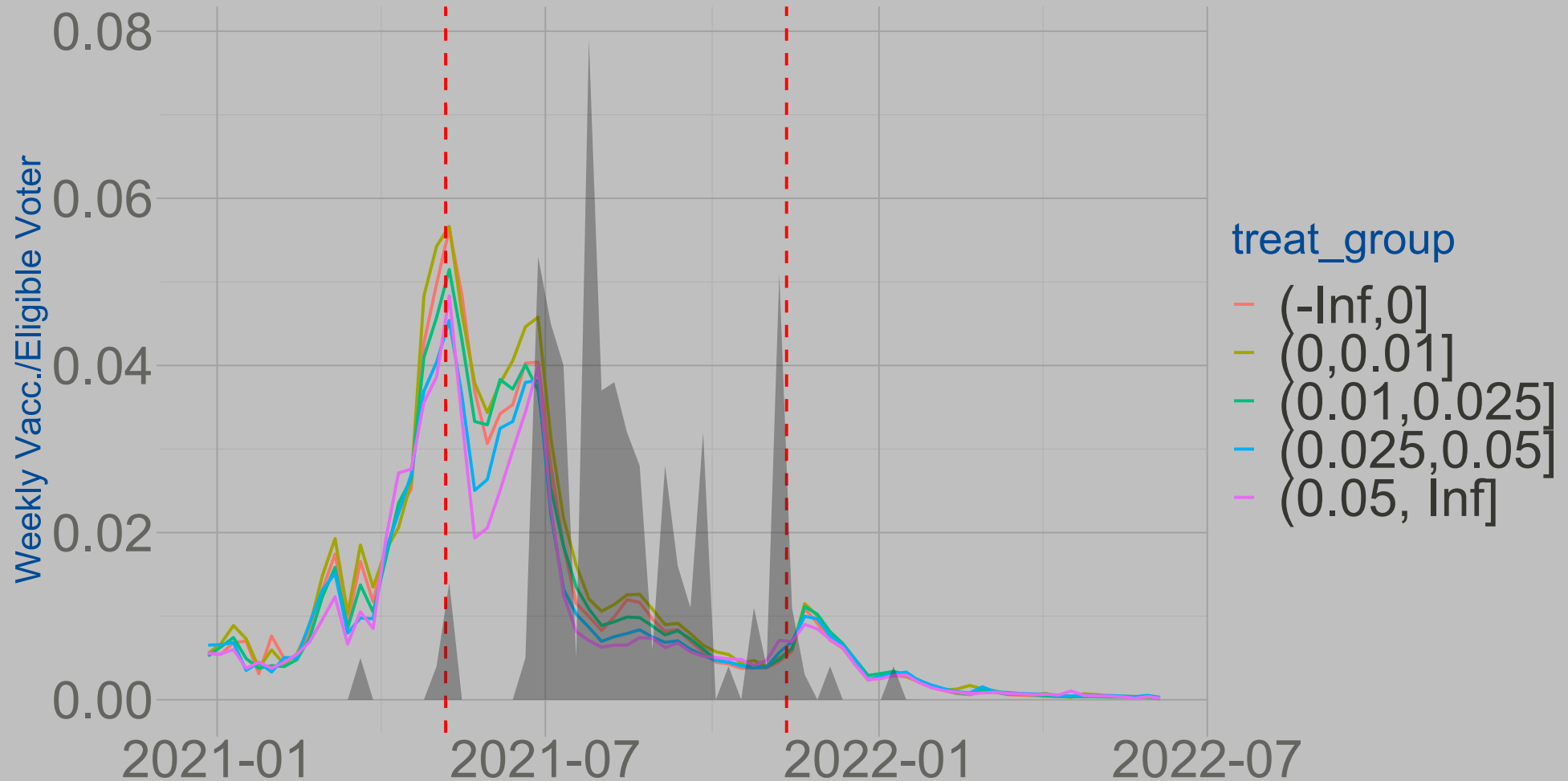- Dependent: Vaccination rates.

Preliminary Results
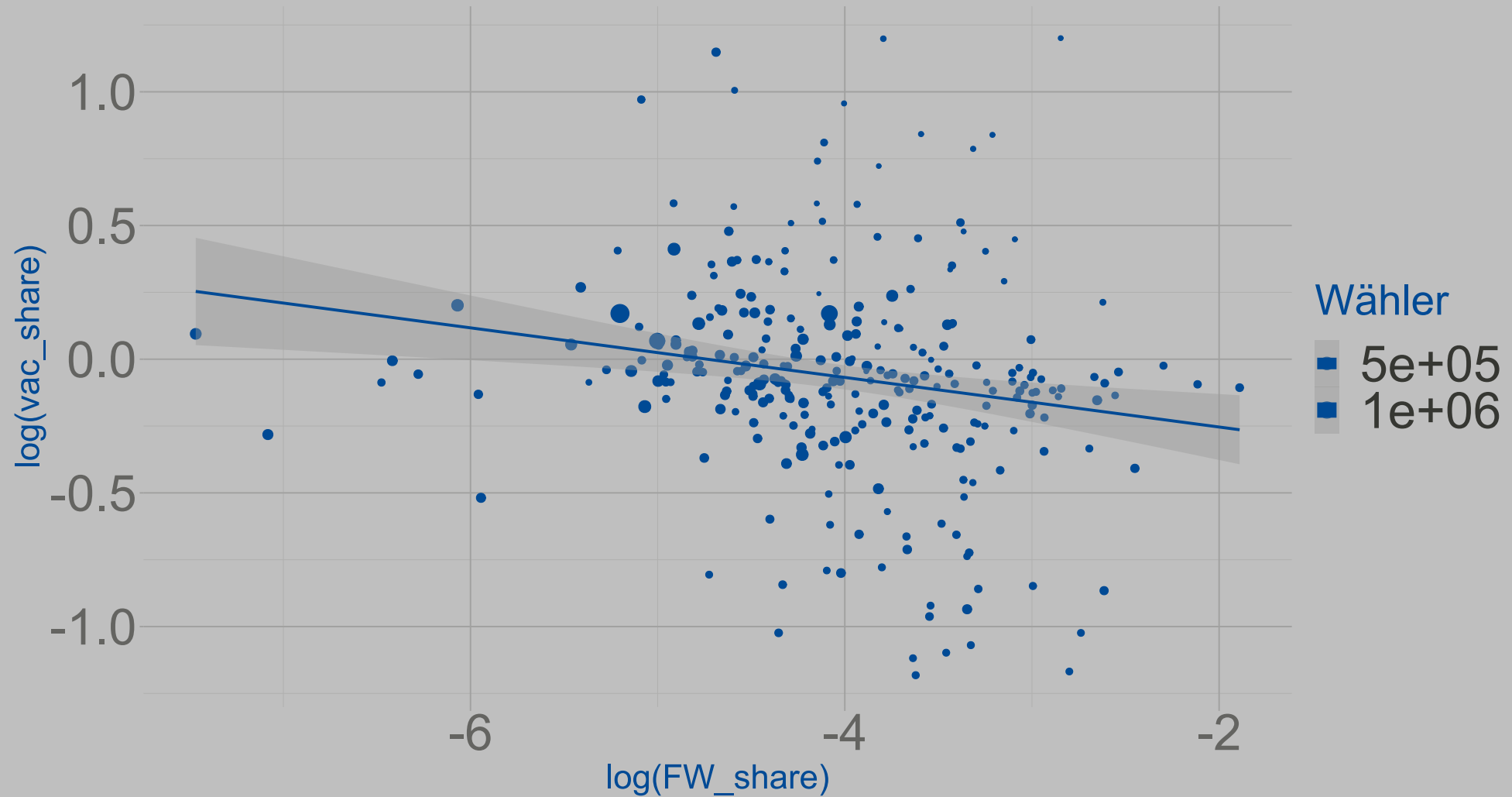
Preliminary Results

	Model 1
(Intercept)	0.241 *
treatmentTRUE	0.004
post_ivTRUE	0.038 *
treatmentTRUE × post_ivTRUE	-0.002

Note: ^^ + p < 0.1, *p < 0.05*, **_p < 0.01,_** p < 0.001

Preliminary Results
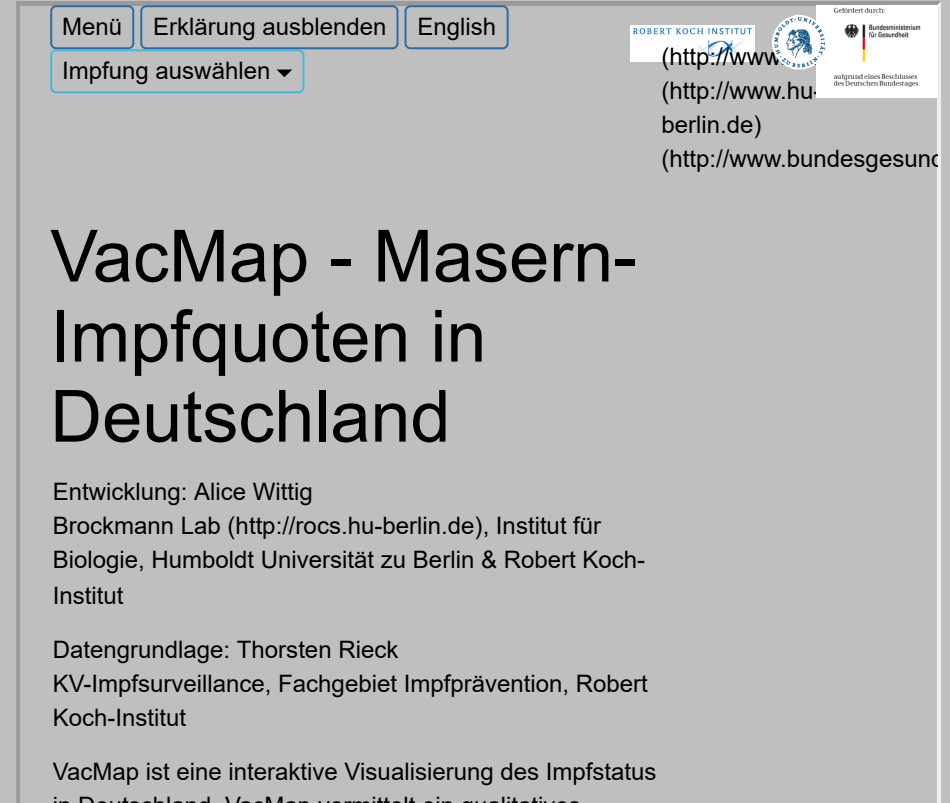
Next steps

Matching

Match based on prior measles-vaccination rate

$\rightarrow$ **ensures treatment exogenous to vaccination attitudes.**

Current Issues

- Future vaccinations function of prior vaccinations.
- What's the right metric?
  - per capita vaccinations (but different organisation),
  - mean vaccinations (but differing pop size)
- Staggered vaccination of different groups.
- Are really only partisans treated?
- Weak case of partisanship.
- Framing: perceptual screen dead?

Potential next steps

- Assess issue sorting effect based on change in 2017-2021 election.
- Panel data (GLES Panel) assessing attitudes towards Covid policy (incl. vax mandate).
- Candidacy as instrument?
- Different case?
- ...?

Thank you for your attention!