

# Framing Effects in the Wild

Does News Framing Affect Public Opinion?

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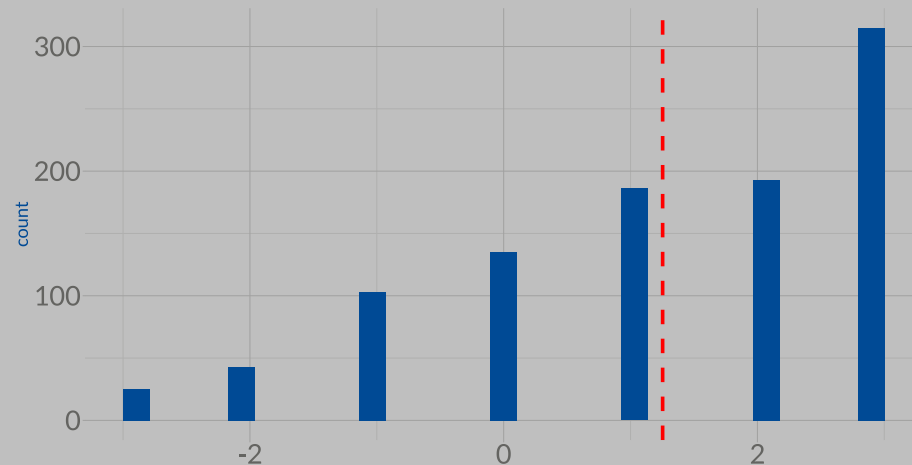
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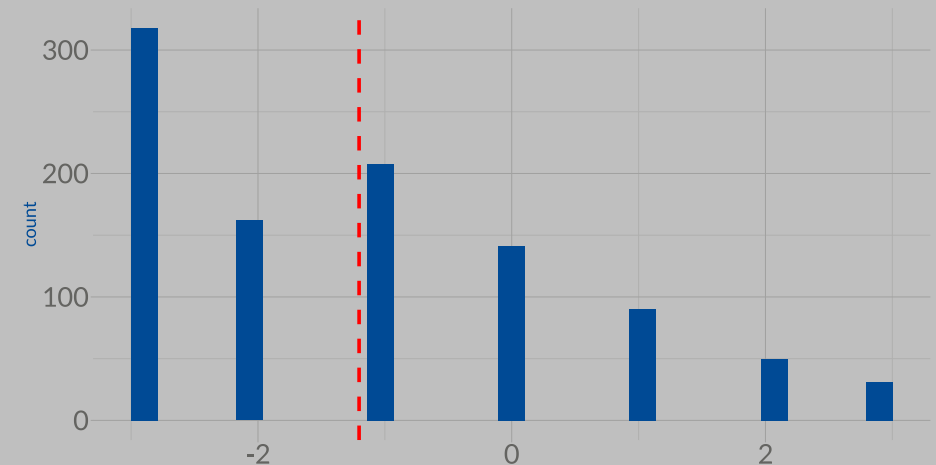
# A classic framing experiment

Would you support increased welfare spending...

in order to support the poor?



even if it means higher taxes?



(Very liberal after Sniderman and Theriault 2004)

# Are framing experiments externally valid?

- Plenty of evidence from experiments (Busby Flynn, et al., 2019; Leeper and Slothuus, 2020)
- But limited capacity to emulate real world environments (Barabas and Jerit, 2010) .
- Strongest theoretical critique: **selective exposure** (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Lau Rogers, et al., 2021) .

"A more balanced reading [...] requires methodological diversification, experiments and studies oriented to the world outside" (Kinder, 2007: 157) .

# Evidence from Observational Studies

- Few observational studies with mixed findings and endogeneity concerns (Jerit, 2008; Jerit, 2009) .
- Causal inference work not concerned with framing (Durante and Knight, 2012; Foos and Bischof, 2020; Martin and Yurukoglu, 2017; Spirig, 2020) .

**No observational studies assessing causal effect of framing!**

# What is necessary for the study of framing effects?

1. Precisely identifiable, sharp change of frames in communication.
2. Good measure of frames in mind.

# Case

# Bild's migration coverage following 2015



- Editorial change in the largest German tabloid newspaper, **Bild**.
- Increasingly **framed migrants as criminals**.
- Potentially exogenous timing.

# Bild's migration coverage following 2015



## Interesting because:

- **Clearly identifiable short-term-change** in migration coverage.
- Clear expectations regarding impact.
- Change not debated in the media → **No co-treatment!**  
(Spirig, 2020).



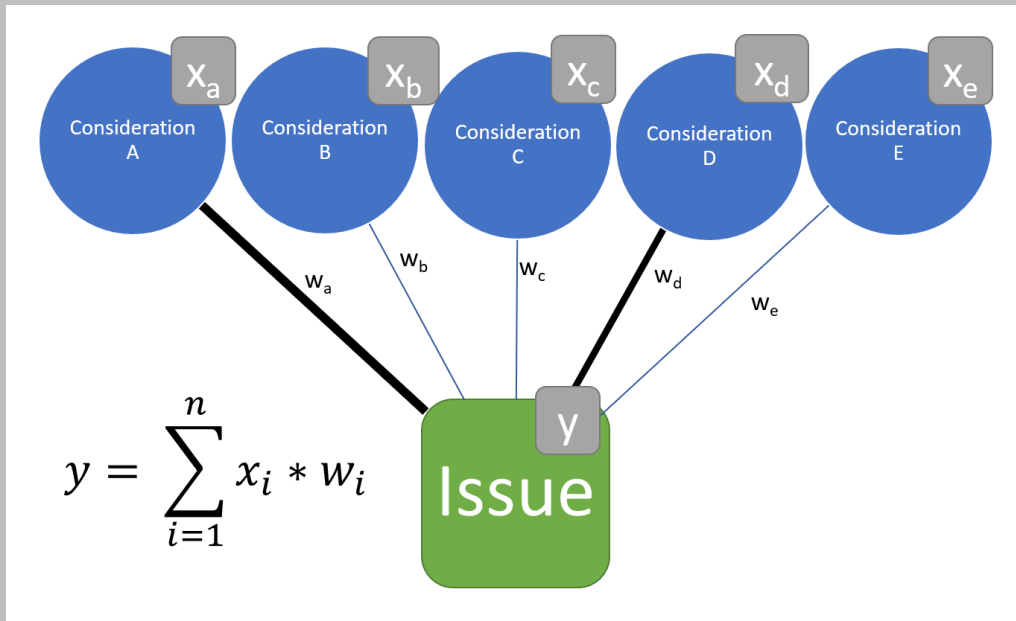


**How does this affect migration attitudes?**

# Theoretical Expectations

Increased exposure to crime frames will lead to...

- H1: **more conservative** attitudes towards migration.
- H2: **stronger association** of crime and migration attitudes.



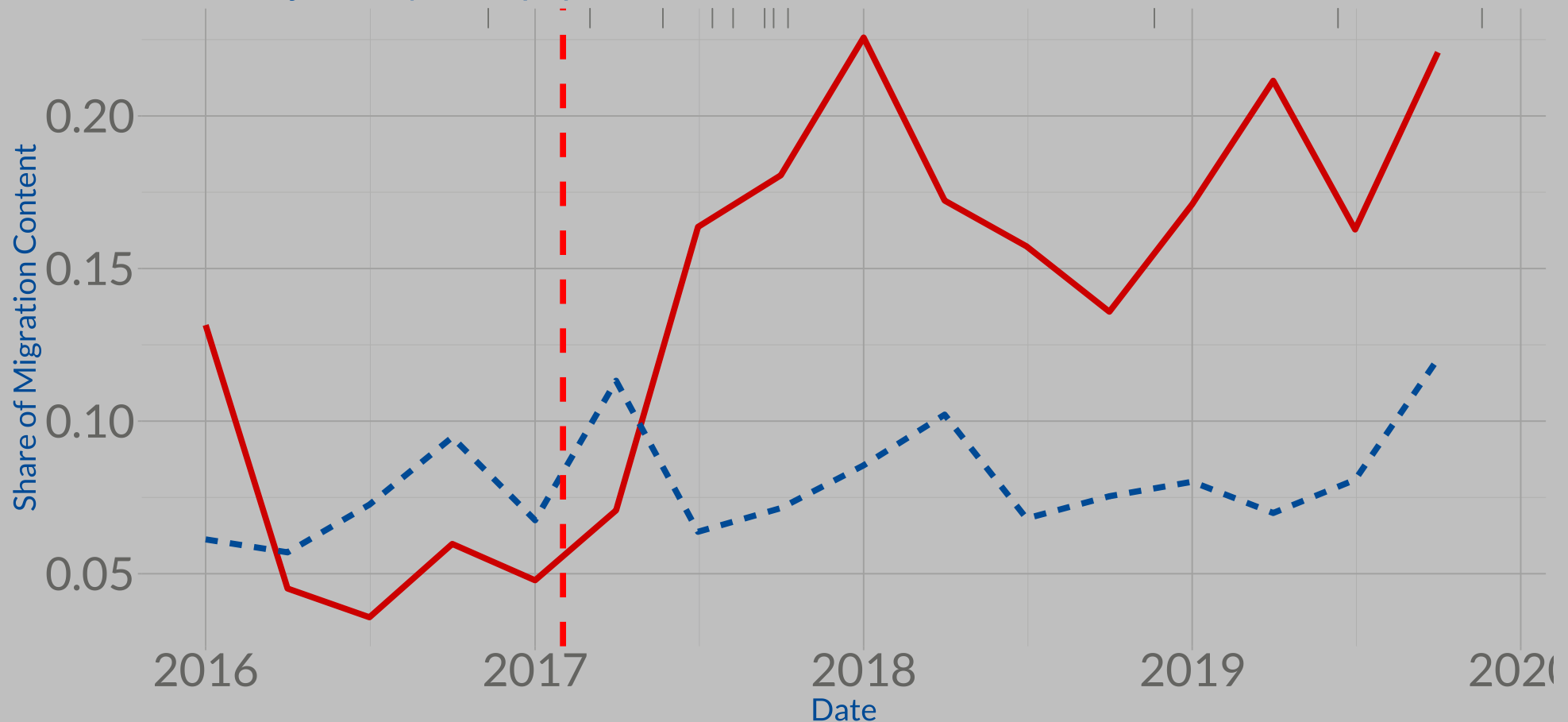
# Measurement & Estimation

# Frames in Communication

- Collected 2.5M news articles from major German daily newspapers' websites.
- Two-step identification of crime frames:
  1. **Select migration content:**
    - Generate dictionary, oversample migration content.
    - Annotate 1800 articles.
    - Supervised deep-learning model (BERT) to **identify migration content**.
  1. **Select crime frames.**
    - Same, but subset of articles about migration content.

# A sharp, identifiable change in frames in communication

Quarterly Share of Migration Content Devoted to Crime Frames  
Bild vs. other major daily newspapers, 2016-2020



# Frames in Mind

German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) Panel (Debus Faas, et al., 2017).

## Immigration Attitudes

- **Opportunities for immigration** of foreigners should be
  - extended (-3) or
  - restricted (3).
- Asked in **13** waves (1 pre).

## Integration Attitudes

- Foreigners should...
  - completely **adapt to German culture** (-3) or
  - be able to live according to their own culture (3).
- Asked in **4** waves (1 pre)

# Frames in Mind (continued)

## Support for radical-right AfD

- Attitude towards **AfD**
  - strongly dislike (-5) to
  - strongly like (5).
- Asked in **14** waves (1 pre)

## MIP: Migration

- Binary indicator, 1 if most important problem is migration.

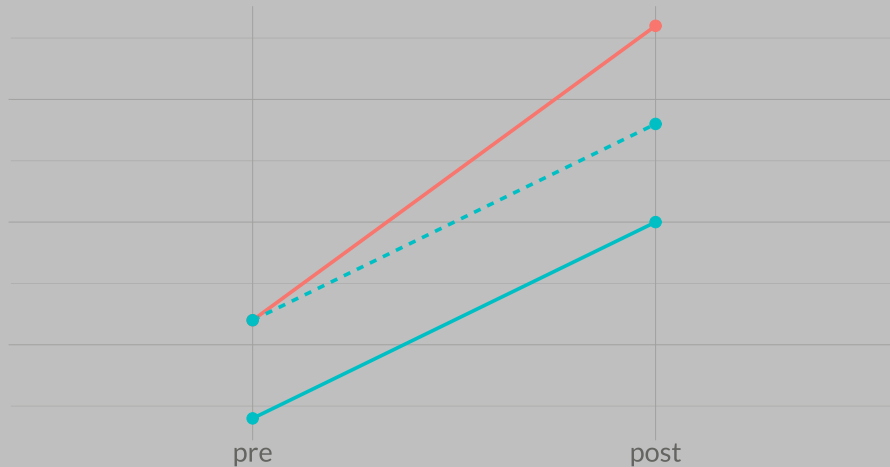
## Attitude towards crime policy

- "state should get **more competences in fighting crime**, even if this means more surveillance"
  - strongly disagree (1) to
  - strongly agree (5).
- Asked in **4** waves (1 pre)

# Estimation

## Difference-in-Differences Design

$$y_{it} = \delta * Post_t * Bild_i + \lambda * Post_t + \rho_i + \epsilon_{it}$$

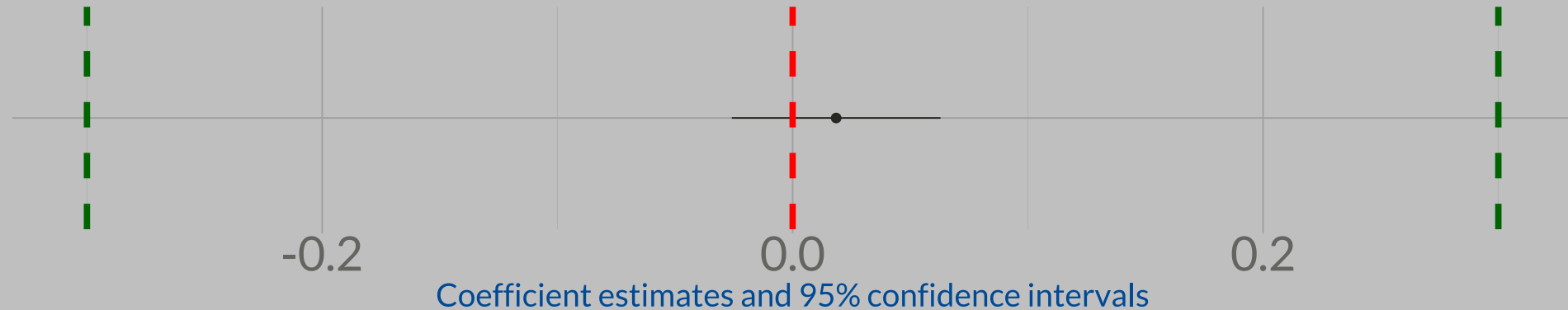


- Compare those reading *Bild* in W1 to *never*-readers.
- $ATT = \Delta \text{ attitude Bild readers} - \Delta \text{ control group}$ .



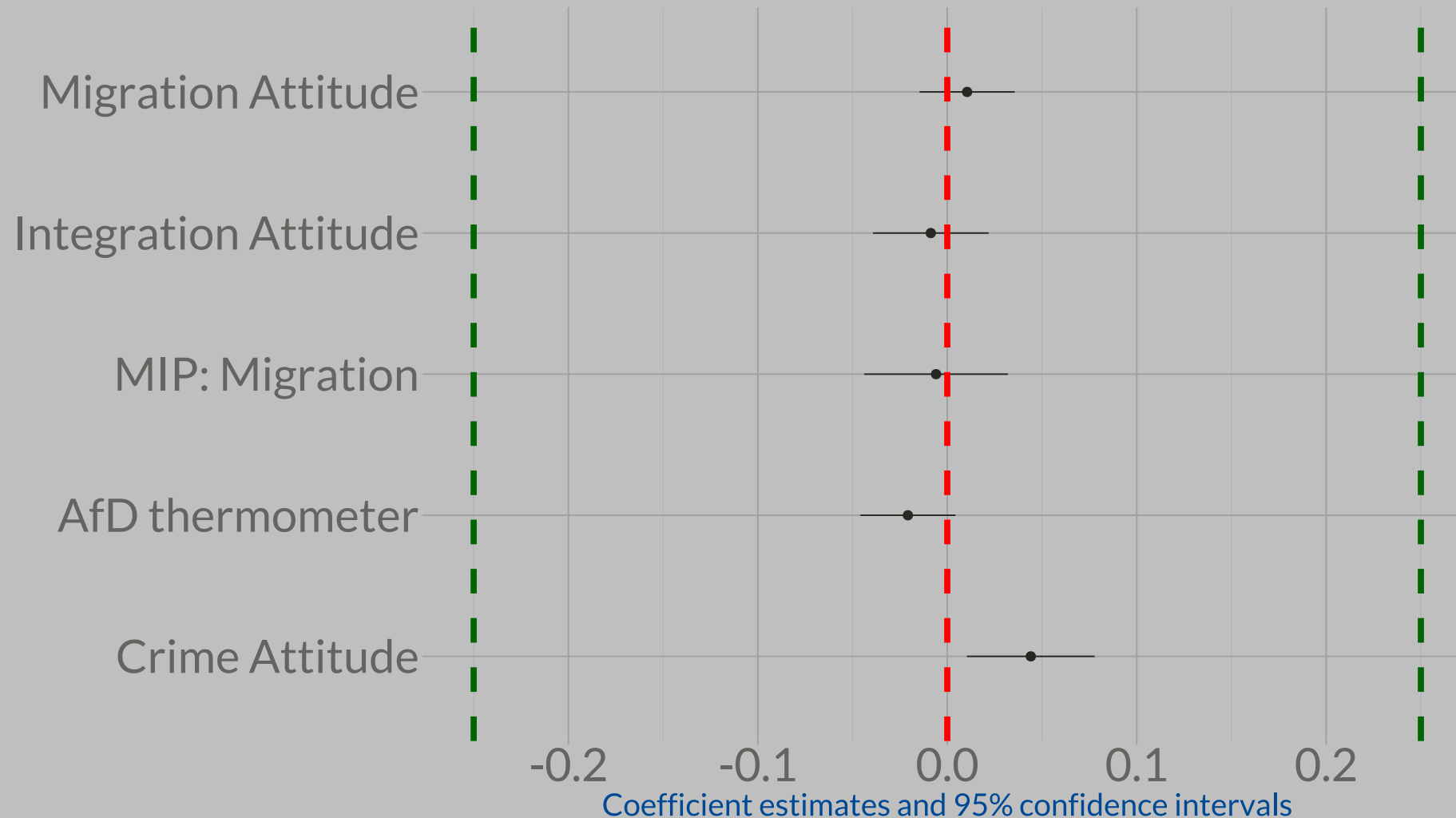
# Results

# Effect on Immigration Attitudes

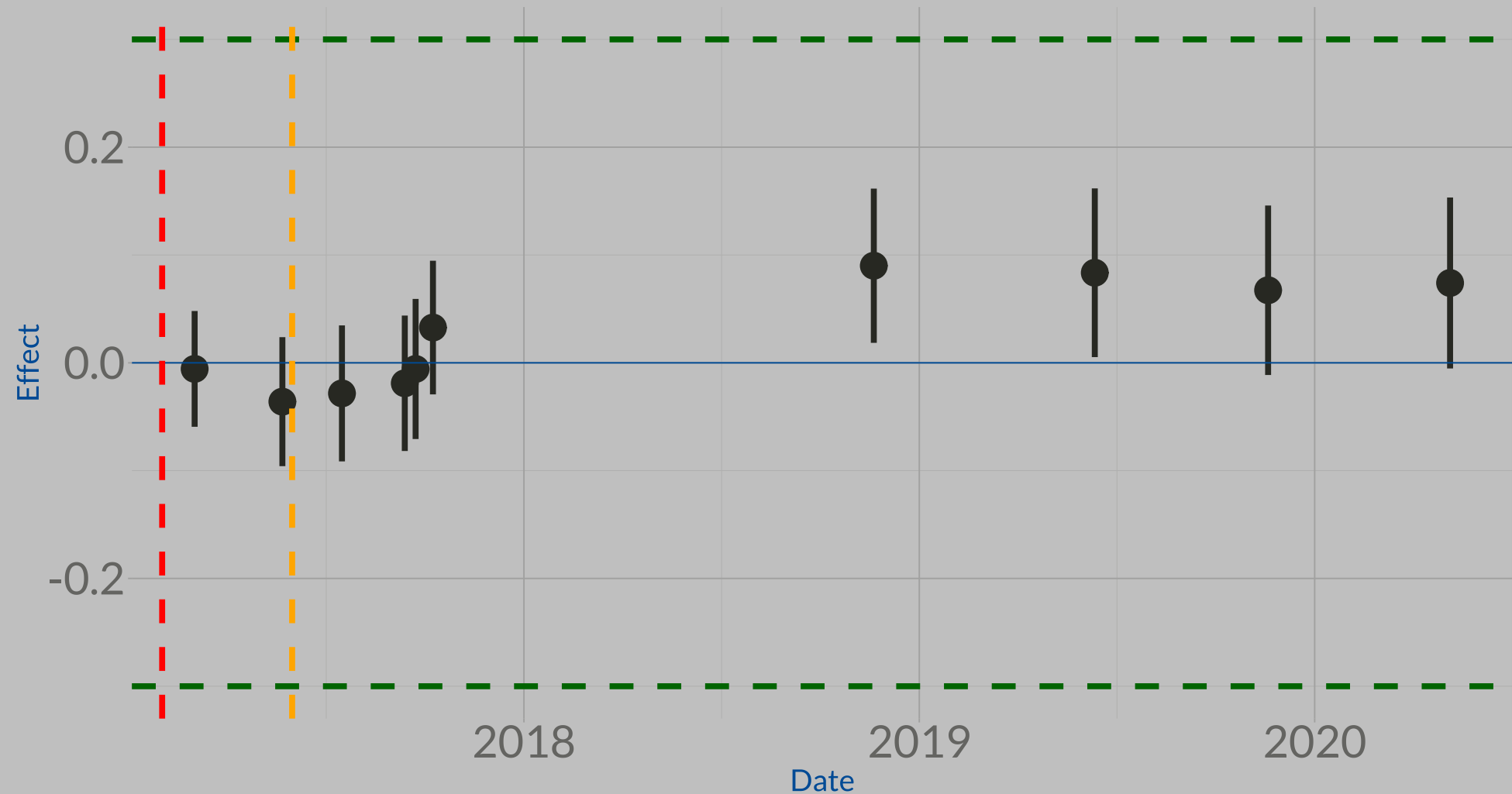


(Green lines indicate effect equivalent to 5% of scale. Effect size in (Nelson Clawson, et al., 1997): 0.65/11% of scale.)

# Effect of Changing Framing on Alternative DVs

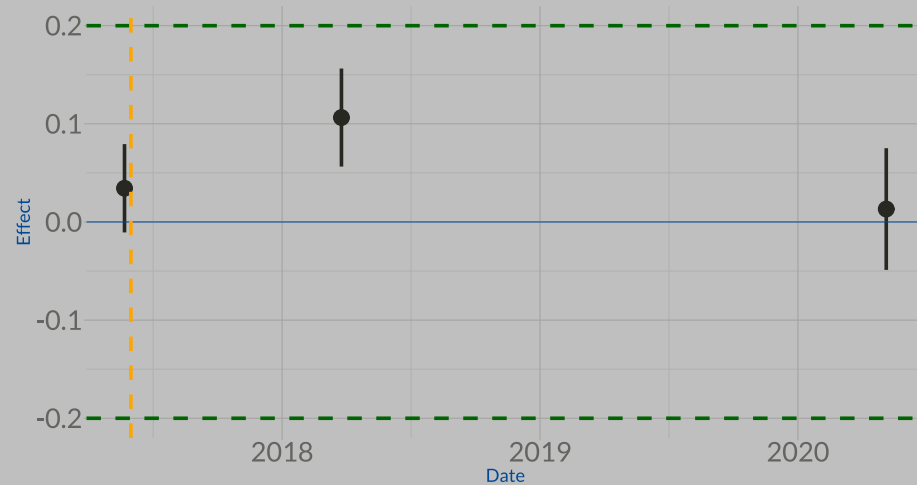


# Effect on Migration Attitudes across Waves

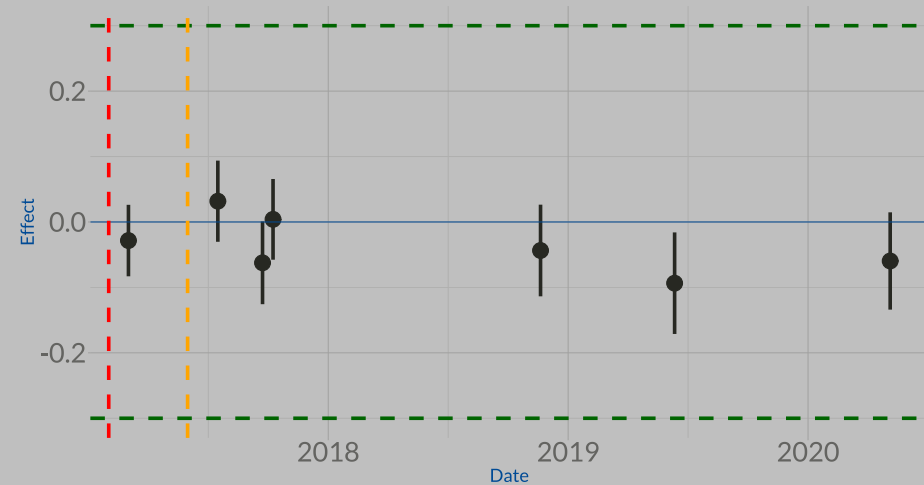


# Effect on other Attitudes across Waves

## Crime

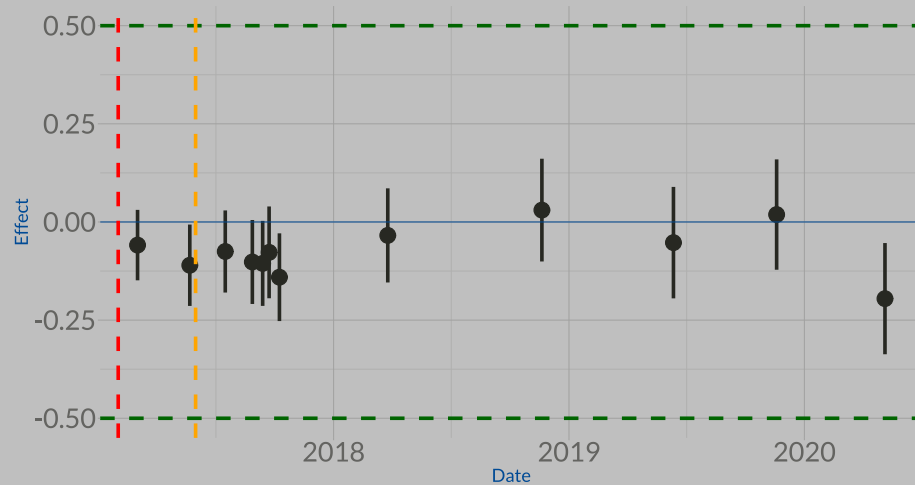


## Integration

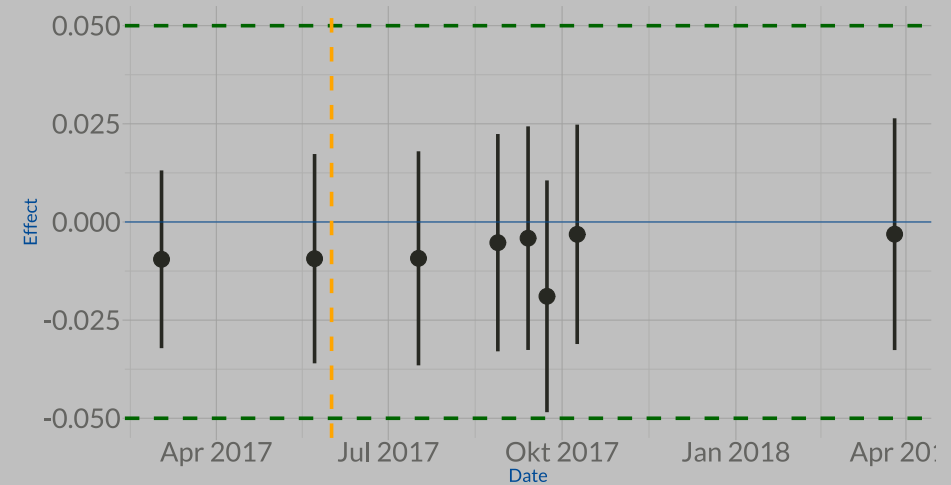


# Effect on other DVs across time I

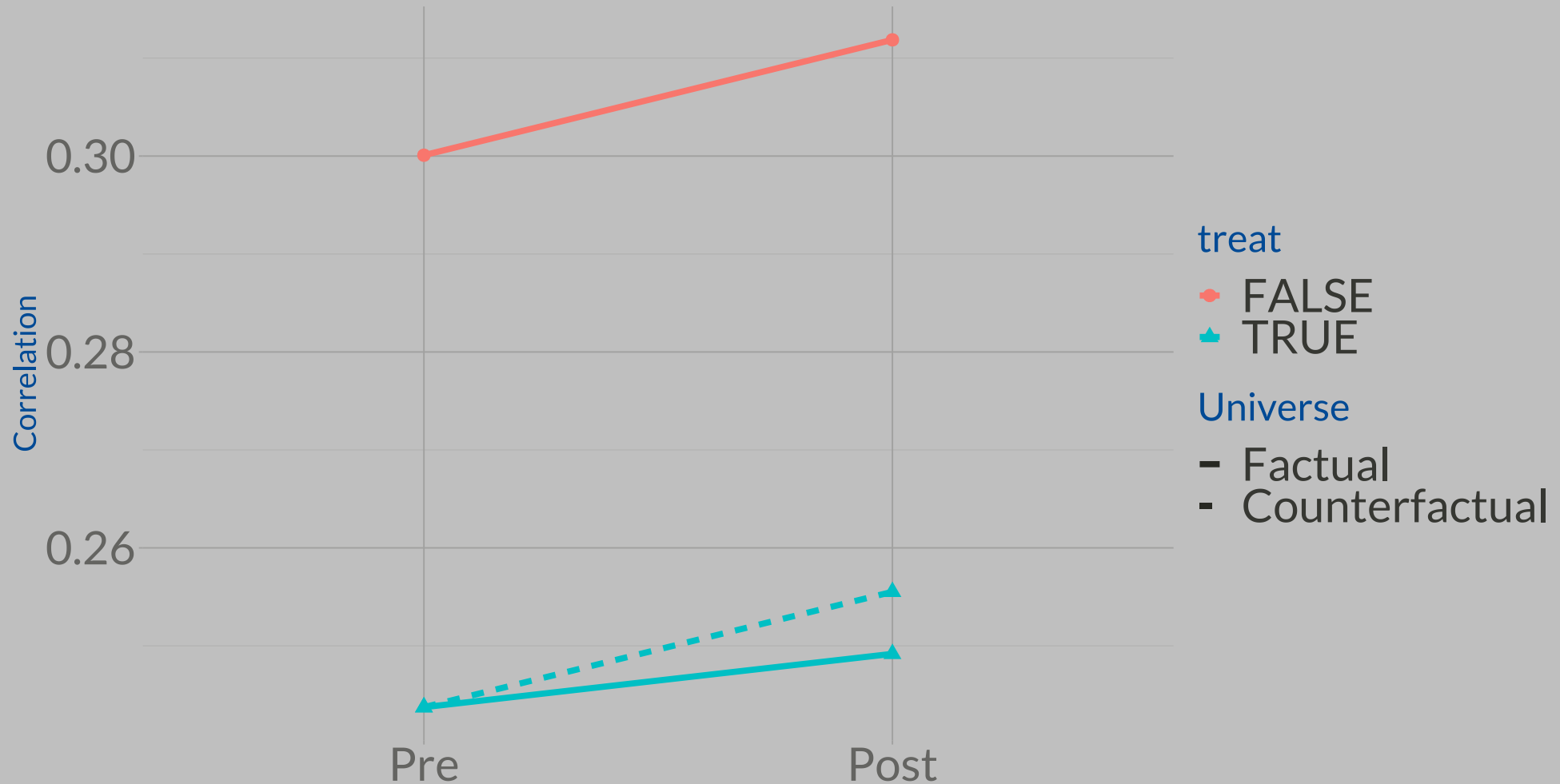
## AfD Vote



## MIP: Migration



# Association of Immigration and Crime Attitudes



# Selecting out

- No change in association of migration attitudes and Bild readership.
- No differential out-selection across prior attitudes.



# Takeaways

## 1. News framing effects do not easily translate into real world.

- Questions external validity of decades of framing studies.
- Single media outlets have limited influence on public opinion.

## 2. Media effects literature should pay more attention to precise changes in *content*.

# Fin

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# Resources I

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