The Police as Gatekeepers of Information: Immigration Salience and Selective Crime Reporting

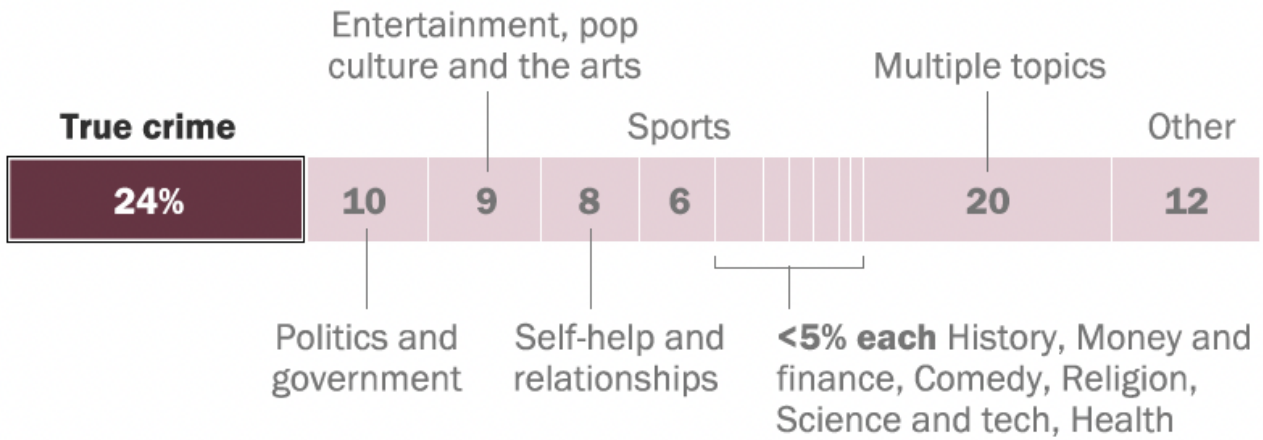
Ashrakat Elshehawy[1] Arun Frey[2] Violeta I. Haas[3]
Sascha Riaz[4] Tobias Roemer[5]

[1]Assistant Professor, University College London
[2]Postdoctoral Fellow, Stanford University, RegLab
[3]Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse, TSE
[4]Assistant Professor, European University Institute
[5]PhD Candidate, Nuffield College, University of Oxford

Political Science Seminar, Universitat de Barcelona
February 5, 2026

True crime is the most common topic among top-ranked podcasts ...

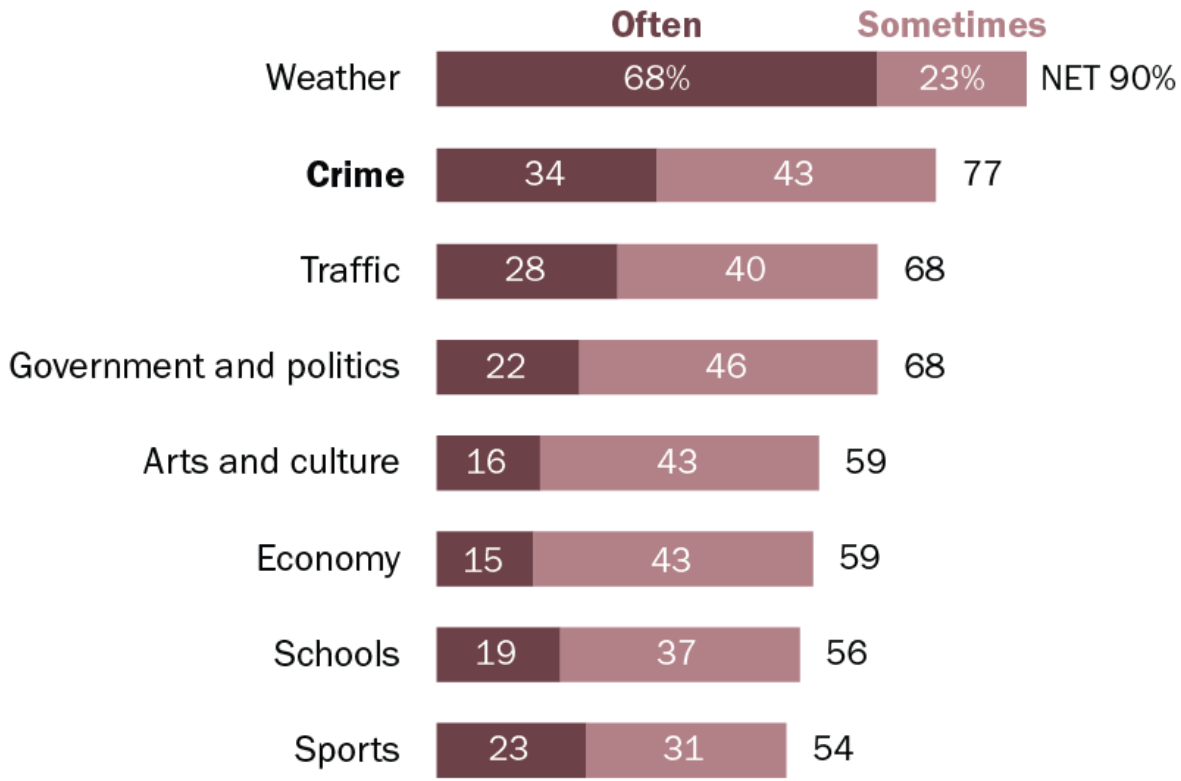
% of top-ranked podcasts that are primarily about each topic



Note: N=451 top-ranked podcasts. Refer to the "How we did this" box for more. "Podcast listeners" in this analysis are those who have listened to a podcast in the past 12 months.
Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 451 podcasts that were in the top 300 in average U.S. daily rankings on Spotify and Apple Podcasts from April 1-Sept. 30, 2022. Survey of U.S. adults conducted Dec. 5-11. 2022.

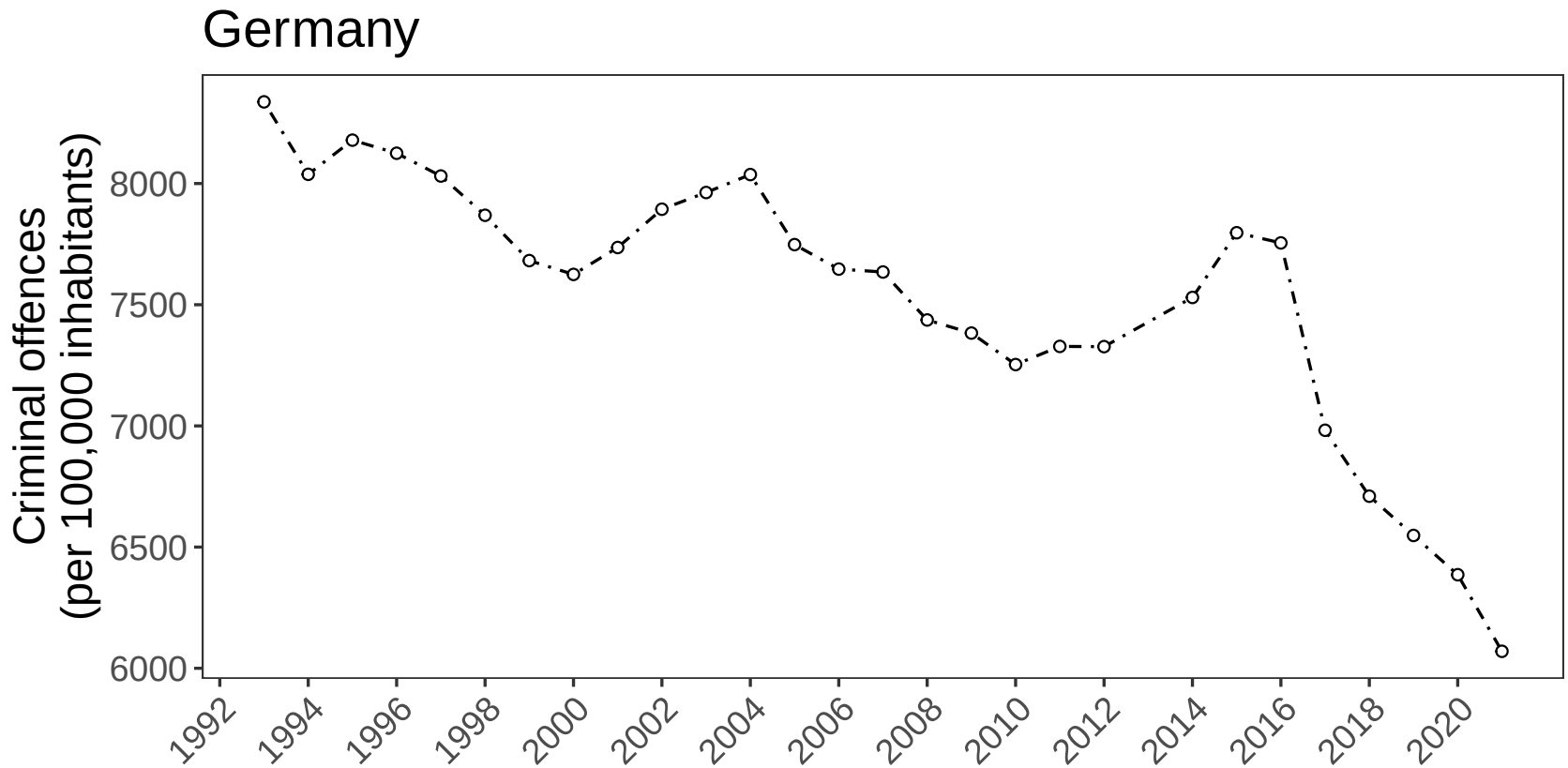
More Americans get local news about crime than any other topic except weather

% of U.S. adults who get news and information about each local topic



Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 22-28, 2024.
"Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News"

Crime rates are decreasing...



...yet worries about crime are increasing

- Misperceptions and fears about crime in Germany (Roose 2021)

...yet worries about crime are increasing

- Misperceptions and fears about crime in Germany (Roose 2021)
  - 62% (mistakenly) believe crime is increasing

...yet worries about crime are increasing

- Misperceptions and fears about crime in Germany (Roose 2021)
  - 62% (mistakenly) believe crime is increasing
  - 66% view crime as (very) important issue

...yet worries about crime are increasing

- Misperceptions and fears about crime in Germany (Roose 2021)
  - 62% (mistakenly) believe crime is increasing
  - 66% view crime as (very) important issue
  - 43% feel unsafe in public spaces at night

...yet worries about crime are increasing

- Misperceptions and fears about crime in Germany (Roose 2021)
  - 62% (mistakenly) believe crime is increasing
  - 66% view crime as (very) important issue
  - 43% feel unsafe in public spaces at night
- One-third of local news articles cover crime (van Um 2015)

...yet worries about crime are increasing

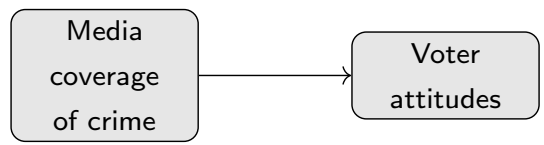
- Misperceptions and fears about crime in Germany (Roose 2021)
  - 62% (mistakenly) believe crime is increasing
  - 66% view crime as (very) important issue
  - 43% feel unsafe in public spaces at night
- One-third of local news articles cover crime (van Um 2015)
  - Disproportionate coverage of violent crime

Motivation

- Key driver of anti-immigrant sentiment: fears & prejudice about out-group crime (Fitzgerald, Curtis, and Corliss 2012; Bove, Elia, and Ferraresi 2023).
  - Large literature on media effects (Riaz, Bischof, and Wagner 2024; Keita, Renault, and Valette 2024; Couttenier et al. 2021; Berk 2025a).
  - Mismatch between perceptions and reality (Ajzenman, Fede, and Molina 2023; Roose 2021).

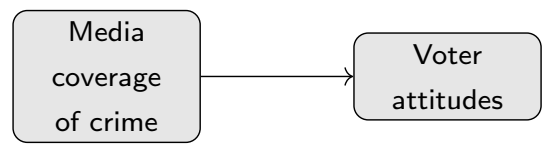
Motivation

- Key driver of anti-immigrant sentiment: fears & prejudice about out-group crime (Fitzgerald, Curtis, and Corliss 2012; Bove, Elia, and Ferraresi 2023).
  - Large literature on media effects (Riaz, Bischof, and Wagner 2024; Keita, Renault, and Valette 2024; Couttenier et al. 2021; Berk 2025a).
  - Mismatch between perceptions and reality (Ajzenman, Fede, and Molina 2023; Roose 2021).



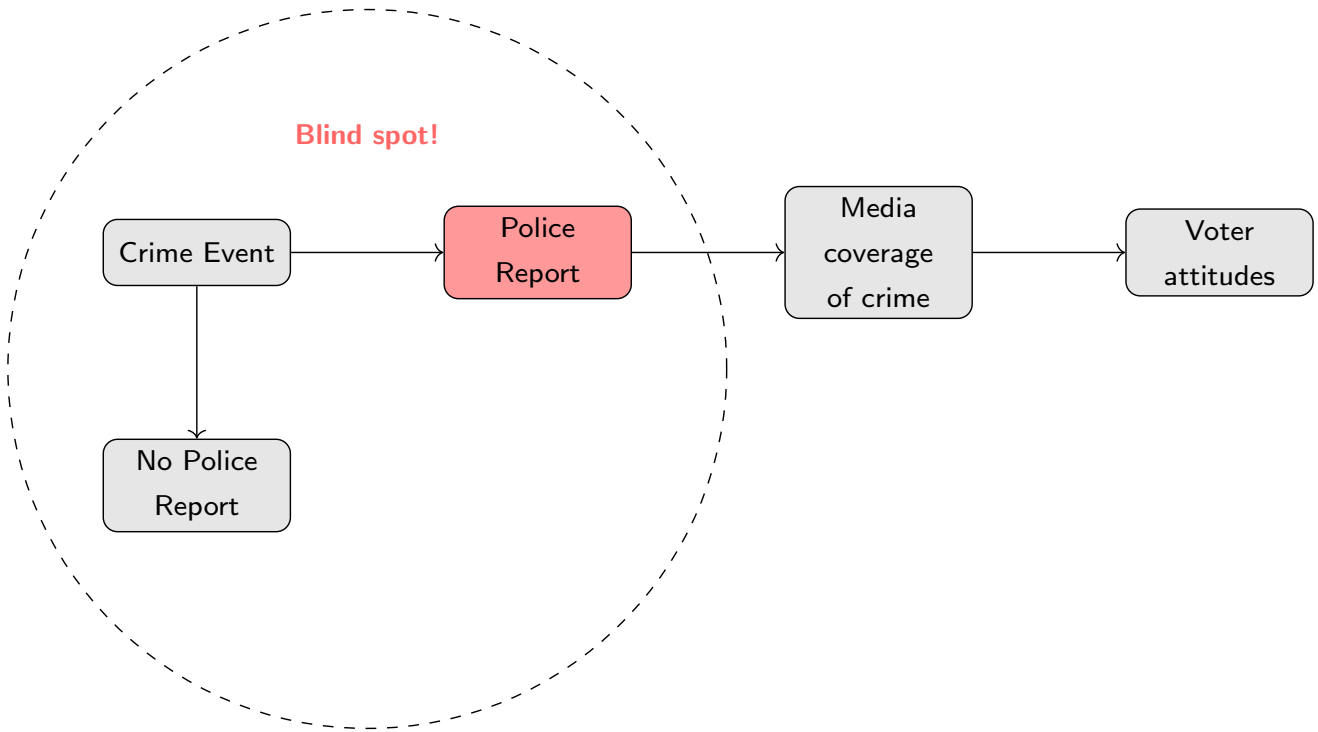
Motivation

- But: media reporting is conditional on what information is available.



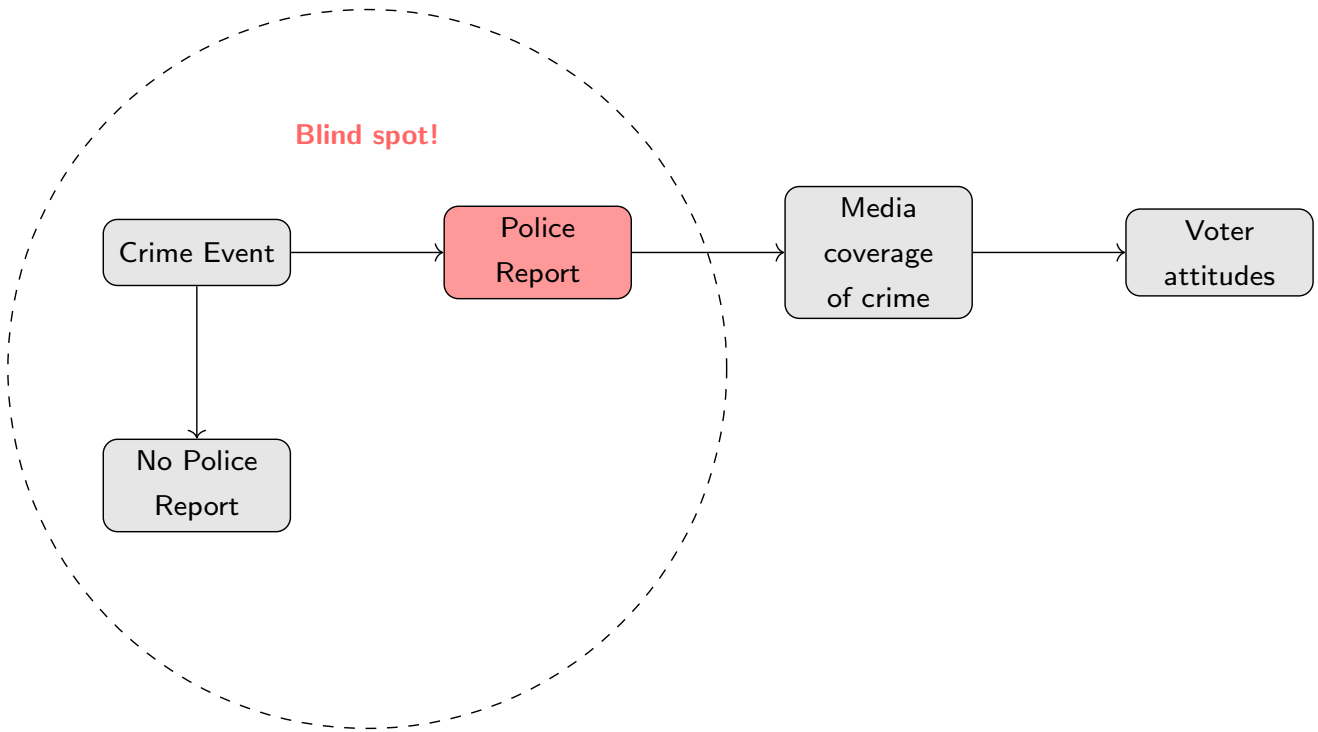
Motivation

- But: media reporting is conditional on what information is available.
  - Police choose what information to share and when.



Motivation

- But: media reporting is conditional on what information is available.
  - Police choose what information to share and when.
- **This project: police as gatekeepers of information**
  1. Choose which incidents to publicize (in Germany, less than 2%).
  2. Decide what details to include (e.g., nationality).



Argument

Strategic Bureaucrats with an Information Advantage

Argument

Strategic Bureaucrats with an Information Advantage

- Public agencies have political interests (i.e., autonomy, budget, and public legitimacy) that may diverge from political principals (e.g. Carpenter and Krause 2012).

Argument

Strategic Bureaucrats with an Information Advantage

- Public agencies have political interests (i.e., autonomy, budget, and public legitimacy) that may diverge from political principals (e.g. Carpenter and Krause 2012).
- Bureaucrats' behavior is not only shaped by formal mandates but by incentives to manage their external political environment.
  - Police have been shown to manipulate operational functions to exert pressure on politicians who adopt policies they oppose (Wirsching 2025).

Argument

Strategic Bureaucrats with an Information Advantage

- Public agencies have political interests (i.e., autonomy, budget, and public legitimacy) that may diverge from political principals (e.g. Carpenter and Krause 2012).
- Bureaucrats' behavior is not only shaped by formal mandates but by incentives to manage their external political environment.
  - Police have been shown to manipulate operational functions to exert pressure on politicians who adopt policies they oppose (Wirsching 2025).
- Agenda-setting power: control over initial collection, interpretation, and dissemination of information about crime.

Argument

Strategic Bureaucrats with an Information Advantage

- Public agencies have political interests (i.e., autonomy, budget, and public legitimacy) that may diverge from political principals (e.g. Carpenter and Krause 2012).
- Bureaucrats' behavior is not only shaped by formal mandates but by incentives to manage their external political environment.
  - Police have been shown to manipulate operational functions to exert pressure on politicians who adopt policies they oppose (Wirsching 2025).
- Agenda-setting power: control over initial collection, interpretation, and dissemination of information about crime.

$\rightarrow$ Pole position as the near-monopolist of crime information.

The Disclosure Trade-Off

Argument

The Disclosure Trade-Off

When deciding whether to disclose a suspect's nationality, police face a reputational trade-off:

Argument

The Disclosure Trade-Off

When deciding whether to disclose a suspect's nationality, police face a reputational trade-off:

Withholding: Risks accusations of a cover-up and opacity.

Argument

The Disclosure Trade-Off

When deciding whether to disclose a suspect's nationality, police face a reputational trade-off:

Withholding: Risks accusations of a cover-up and opacity.

Disclosing: Risks violating codes and accusations of racial profiling.

Argument

The Disclosure Trade-Off

When deciding whether to disclose a suspect's nationality, police face a reputational trade-off:

Withholding: Risks accusations of a cover-up and opacity.

Disclosing: Risks violating codes and accusations of racial profiling.

Interviews

The Role of Immigration Salience

The Role of Immigration Salience

High Immigration Salience Shifts the Strategic Calculation:

The Role of Immigration Salience

High Immigration Salience Shifts the Strategic Calculation:

- Immigration and crime are heavily linked in the public mind
- Police face accountability pressures during these times
- Reputational cost of being seen as hiding information increases

Argument

The Role of Immigration Salience

High Immigration Salience Shifts the Strategic Calculation:

- Immigration and crime are heavily linked in the public mind
- Police face accountability pressures during these times
- Reputational cost of being seen as hiding information increases

Strategic Shift: Police "dial up" disclosure of out-group cues to signal transparency and institutional efficacy, reinforcing legitimacy.

Argument

The Role of Immigration Salience

High Immigration Salience Shifts the Strategic Calculation:

- Immigration and crime are heavily linked in the public mind
- Police face accountability pressures during these times
- Reputational cost of being seen as hiding information increases

Strategic Shift: Police "dial up" disclosure of out-group cues to signal transparency and institutional efficacy, reinforcing legitimacy.

$\rightarrow$ The disclosure of out-group cues in police press releases will rise and fall with the political salience of immigration.

Data Collection and Processing

Data Collection and Processing

- **Source:** Polizei Presseportal

  (`https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/`)
- **Time period:** 2014–2024 ($N \approx 1$ million press releases)

Data Collection and Processing

- **Source:** Polizei Presseportal

  (`https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/`)
- **Time period:** 2014–2024 ($N \approx 1$ million press releases)
- **We observe:**
  - Location (police station)
  - Publication date

Data Collection and Processing

- **Source:** Polizei Presseportal

  (`https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/`)
- **Time period:** 2014–2024 ($N \approx 1$ million press releases)
- **We observe:**
  - Location (police station)
  - Publication date
- **Coded with GPT-4o Batching API (Prompt):**
  - Crime type
  - Ethnicity cues: In-group (German) / Out-group / No information
  - Multiple events (yes/no) and crime status (ongoing vs. concluded)

Data Collection and Processing

- **Source:** Polizei Presseportal

  (`https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/`)
- **Time period:** 2014–2024 ($N \approx 1$ million press releases)
- **We observe:**
  - Location (police station)
  - Publication date
- **Coded with GPT-4o Batching API (Prompt):**
  - Crime type
  - Ethnicity cues: In-group (German) / Out-group / No information
  - Multiple events (yes/no) and crime status (ongoing vs. concluded)
- **Performance:** Validated against human coders

Context: Police Press Releases in Germany

Context: Police Press Releases in Germany

- **Organizational structure:**
  - Policing is decentralized to the 16 states
  - Overseen by a state's Interior Ministry

Context: Police Press Releases in Germany

- **Organizational structure:**
  - Policing is decentralized to the 16 states
  - Overseen by a state's Interior Ministry
- **Press releases:**
  - Written by small press offices embedded in local police stations
  - Usually staffed by street-level officers

Context: Police Press Releases in Germany

- **Organizational structure:**
  - Policing is decentralized to the 16 states
  - Overseen by a state's Interior Ministry
- **Press releases:**
  - Written by small press offices embedded in local police stations
  - Usually staffed by street-level officers
- **Reporting rules**:
  - State press laws & internal directives
  - German Press Code §12.1: nationality/ethnicity disclosed only if *justified public interest* $\rightarrow$ inherently vague

Workflow

Data: Police Press Releases (2014-2024)

Source: https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/

02.08.2016 – 10:55 Time of release

Kreispolizeibehörde Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis Police station

POL-EN: Hattingen - Versuchter Diebstahl in Apotheke Press release title

Hattingen (ots) Location

Drei tatverdächtige Kinder und Jugendliche festgenommen Am 01.08.2016, gegen 18.25 Uhr, betreten drei männliche Kinder und Jugendliche den Verkaufsraum einer Apotheke an der Heggerstraße. Während zwei von ihnen die Angestellte in englischer und in gebrochener deutscher Sprache mit Fragen nach Waren ablenken, versteckt sich die dritte Person unbemerkt in einem Nebenraum. Seine beiden Komplizen verlassen zunächst ohne etwas gekauft zu haben das Geschäft und kehren kurze Zeit später erneut in die Apotheke zurück. Zur gleichen Zeit begibt sich ein weiterer Angestellter in den Nebenraum und trifft die versteckte dritte Person an. Er informiert die Inhaberin, die sofort die Eingangstür verriegelt und die Polizei verständigt. Die Beamten nehmen die drei Duisburger rumänischer Abstammung im Alter von 13 und 14 Jahren, die bereits mehrfach wegen gleich gelagerter Delikte in Erscheinung getreten sind, wegen des Verdachts des versuchten Diebstahls vorläufig fest. Das zuständige Jugendamt wird verständigt und übergibt das Trio in die Obhut der Jugendschutzstelle in Witten.

Press release text

Rückfragen bitte an:

Kreispolizeibehörde Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis
Pressestelle

[redacted]

Original-Content von: Kreispolizeibehörde Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis, übermittelt durch news aktuell

Data: Police Press Releases (2014-2024)

Source: https://www.presseportal.de/blaulicht/

02.08.2016 – 10:55 Time of release

Kreispolizeibehörde Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis Police station

POL-EN: Hattingen - Versuchter Diebstahl in Apotheke Press release title

Hattingen (ots) Location

Drei tatverdächtige Kinder und Jugendliche festgenommen Am 01.08.2016, gegen 18.25 Uhr, betreten drei männliche Kinder und Jugendliche den Verkaufsraum einer Apotheke an der Heggerstraße. Während zwei von ihnen die Angestellte in englischer und in gebrochener deutscher Sprache mit Fragen nach Waren ablenken, versteckt sich die dritte Person unbemerkt in einem Nebenraum. Seine beiden Komplizen verlassen zunächst ohne etwas gekauft zu haben das Geschäft und kehren kurze Zeit später erneut in die Apotheke zurück. Zur gleichen Zeit begibt sich ein weiterer Angestellter in den Nebenraum und trifft die versteckte dritte Person an. Er informiert die Inhaberin, die sofort die Eingangstür verriegelt und die Polizei verständigt. Die Beamten nehmen die drei Duisburger rumänischer Abstammung im Alter von 13 und 14 Jahren, die bereits mehrfach wegen gleich gelagerter Delikte in Erscheinung getreten sind, wegen des Verdachts des versuchten Diebstahls vorläufig fest. Das zuständige Jugendamt wird verständigt und übergibt das Trio in die Obhut der Jugendschutzstelle in Witten.

Press release text

Rückfragen bitte an:

Kreispolizeibehörde Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis
Pressestelle

[redacted]

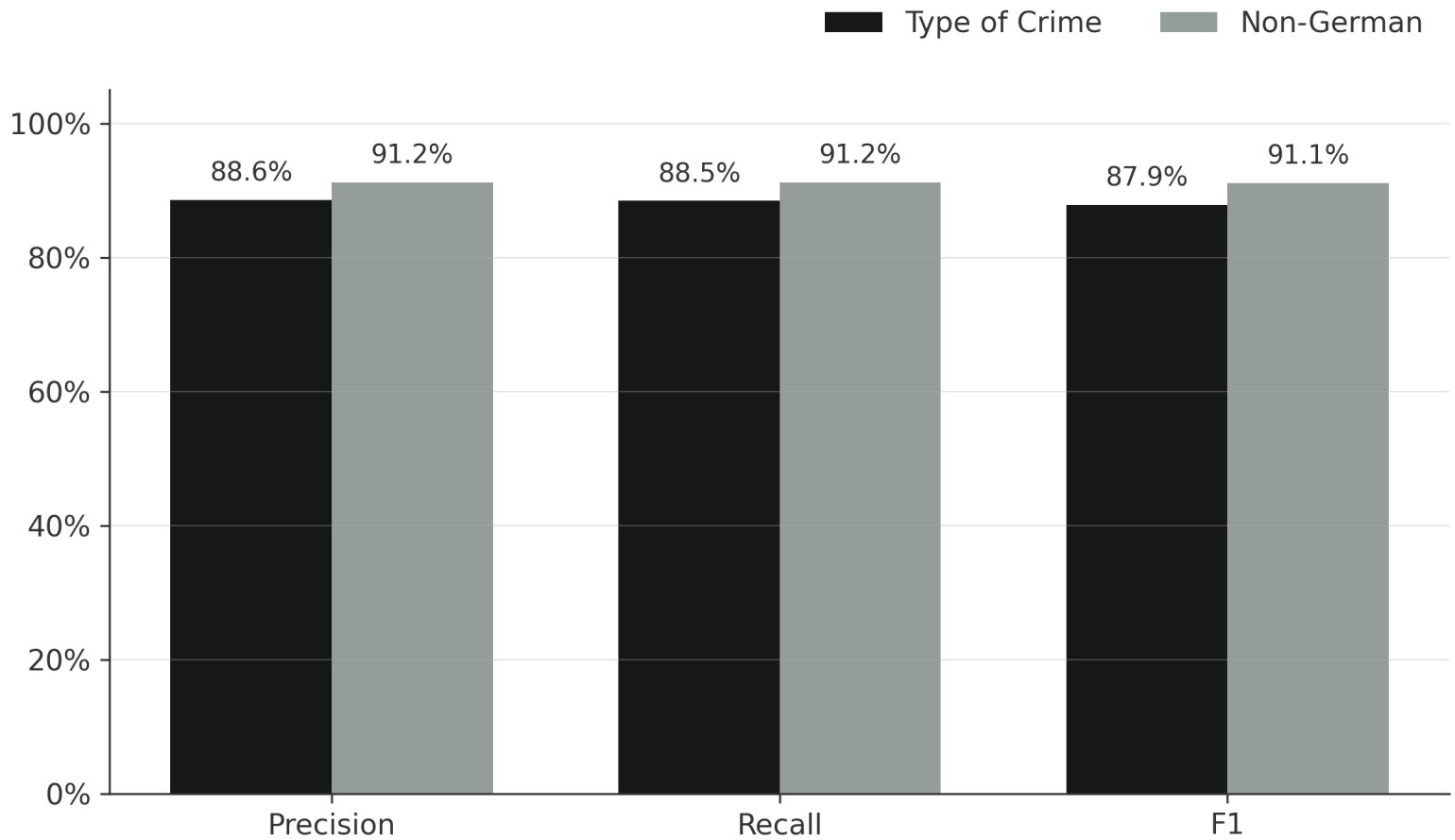
Original-Content von: Kreispolizeibehörde Ennepe-Ruhr-Kreis, übermittelt durch news aktuell

[...] Three male children and adolescents entered the sales area of a pharmacy on Heggerstraße. While two of them distracted the employee by asking questions in English and broken German, the third person secretly hid in a side room. [...] At the same time, another employee entered the side room and discovered the hidden third person [...]. The officers temporarily arrested the three youths aged 13 and 14, from Duisburg and of Romanian descent on suspicion of attempted theft [...]"

Example Classification

Variable	**Coding**
Publication Date	August 2nd, 2016
Location	Hattingen
Type of crime	Property
Investigation status	Concluded
Out-group cue	Yes
Out-group markers (verbatim)	“gebrochene deutsche Sprache” “rumänischer Abstammung”
Multiple events	No

Classification Performance GPT-4o

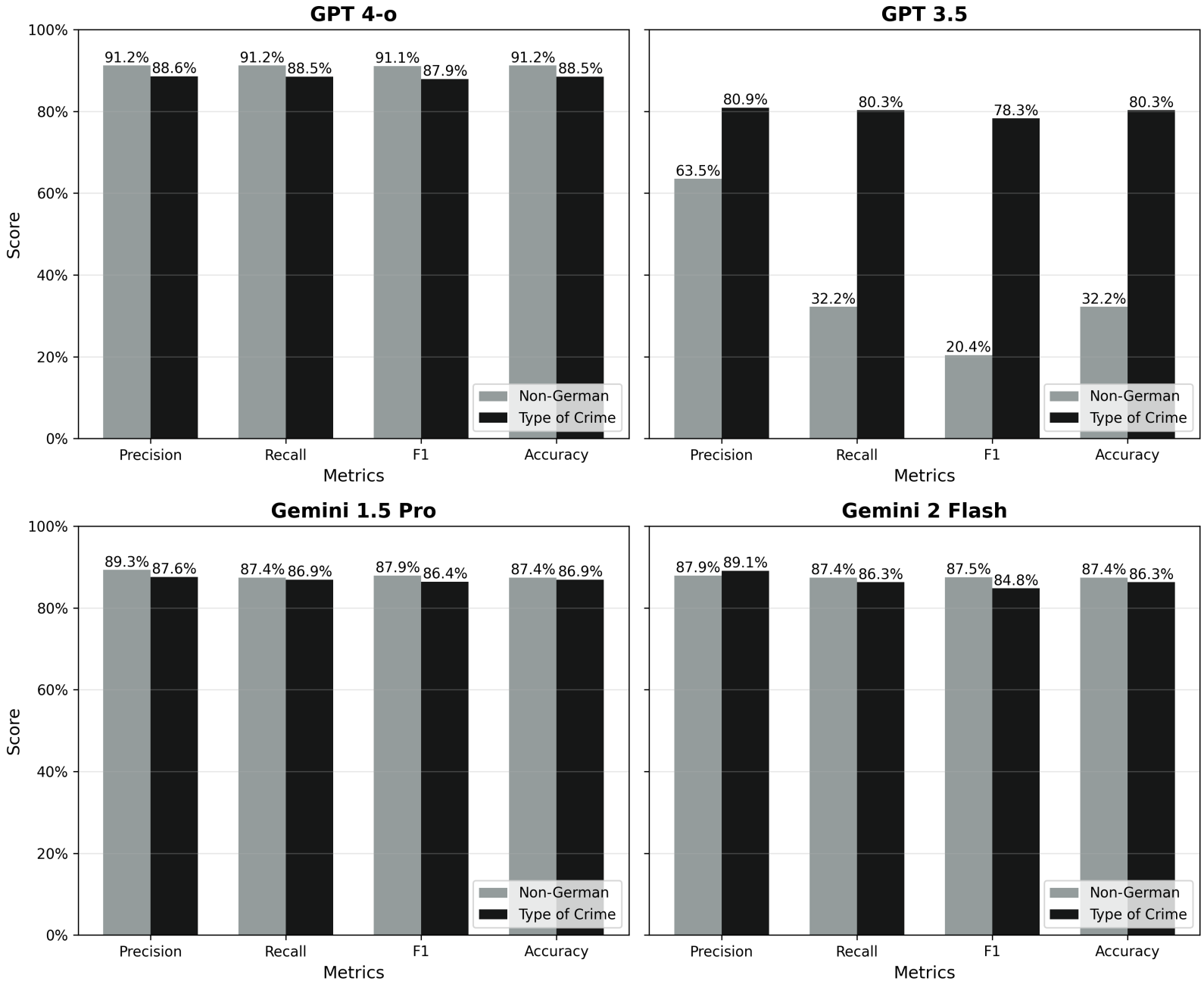


$$\text{precision} = \frac{\text{TP}}{\text{TP} + \text{FP}} \qquad \text{recall} = \frac{\text{TP}}{\text{TP} + \text{FN}} \qquad \text{F1} = 2 \times \frac{\text{precision} \times \text{recall}}{\text{precision} + \text{recall}}$$

Breakdown of Classification Performance

Intercoder Reliability

Comparision of Performance to Other Models



Police Reporting in High-Salience Periods

Police Reporting in High-Salience Periods

Study I: sudden, nationwide salience shock around 2015/16 Cologne New Year's Eve (NYE) assaults.

Police Reporting in High-Salience Periods

Study I: sudden, nationwide salience shock around 2015/16 Cologne New Year's Eve (NYE) assaults.

Study II: predictable cycles of immigration-salience around state (*Landtag*) elections

Empirical Strategy

- OLS RDiT estimator around 2015/16 NYE/state election cutoff:

$$Y_i = \alpha_{s,t} + \beta\, \text{post/pre}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

- Y_i: 1 if release i contains an out-group cue, 0 otherwise
- $\text{post/pre}_i = \mathbf{1}\{X_i < 0\}$, with $X_i =$ days from 2015/16 NYE/nearest state election for release i
- Exclude $X_i = 0$; use window $|X_i| \leq h$ with $h = 30/2$ days for main spec
- $\alpha_{s,t}$: state/police-station $\times$ election fixed effects; SEs clustered by election

Empirical Strategy

- OLS RDiT estimator around 2015/16 NYE/state election cutoff:

$$Y_i = \alpha_{s,t} + \beta \, \text{post/pre}_i + \varepsilon_i$$

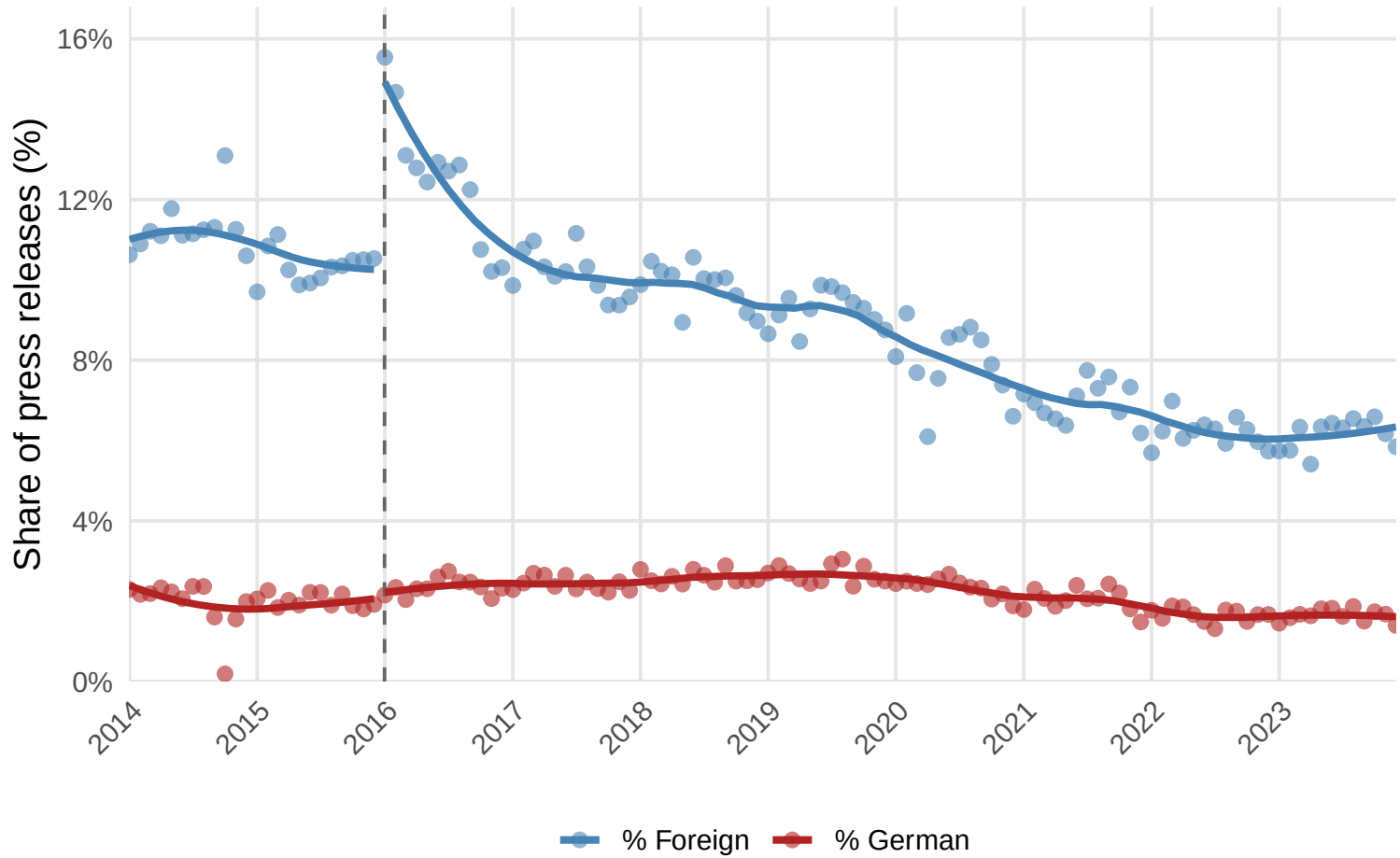
- Y_i: 1 if release i contains an out-group cue, 0 otherwise
- $\text{post/pre}_i = \mathbf{1}\{X_i < 0\}$, with $X_i =$ days from 2015/16 NYE/nearest state election for release i
- Exclude $X_i = 0$; use window $|X_i| \leq h$ with $h = 30/2$ days for main spec
- $\alpha_{s,t}$: state/police-station $\times$ election fixed effects; SEs clustered by election

Interpretation: difference in mean probability of out-group cue being disclosed

Assumption: true composition of offenders does not shift around cutoff

Study I: Reporting before and after NYE 2015/16

Discontinuity in the disclosure of out-group cues in press releases immediately following the assaults



Notes: The figure displays the monthly share of all police press releases that mention foreign versus German perpetrators from January 2014 through December 2023. Raw monthly values are shown as points, with separate LOESS smoothers fitted before and after the December 31, 2015, cutoff (vertical dashed line).

Study I: NYE RDiT OLS Estimates

Table 1: Differential reporting around NYE 2015

	Out-group cue (0/1)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Post-NYE	0.054***	0.052***	0.043***	0.053***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.005)
R^2	0.006	0.083	0.004	0.006
Observations	15,837	15,837	8,272	15,399
Police station fixed effects		✓		
Excluding NRW			✓	
Excluding Cologne				✓

Notes: Results from OLS regressions where the outcome is a binary indicator for the presence of out-group cues in a police press release. The unit of observation is the individual press release. *Post-NYE* is a binary indicator equal to one for releases issued after NYE 2015. The analysis uses a bandwidth of ±30 days around NYE. Significance codes: *** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05, * p¡0.1.

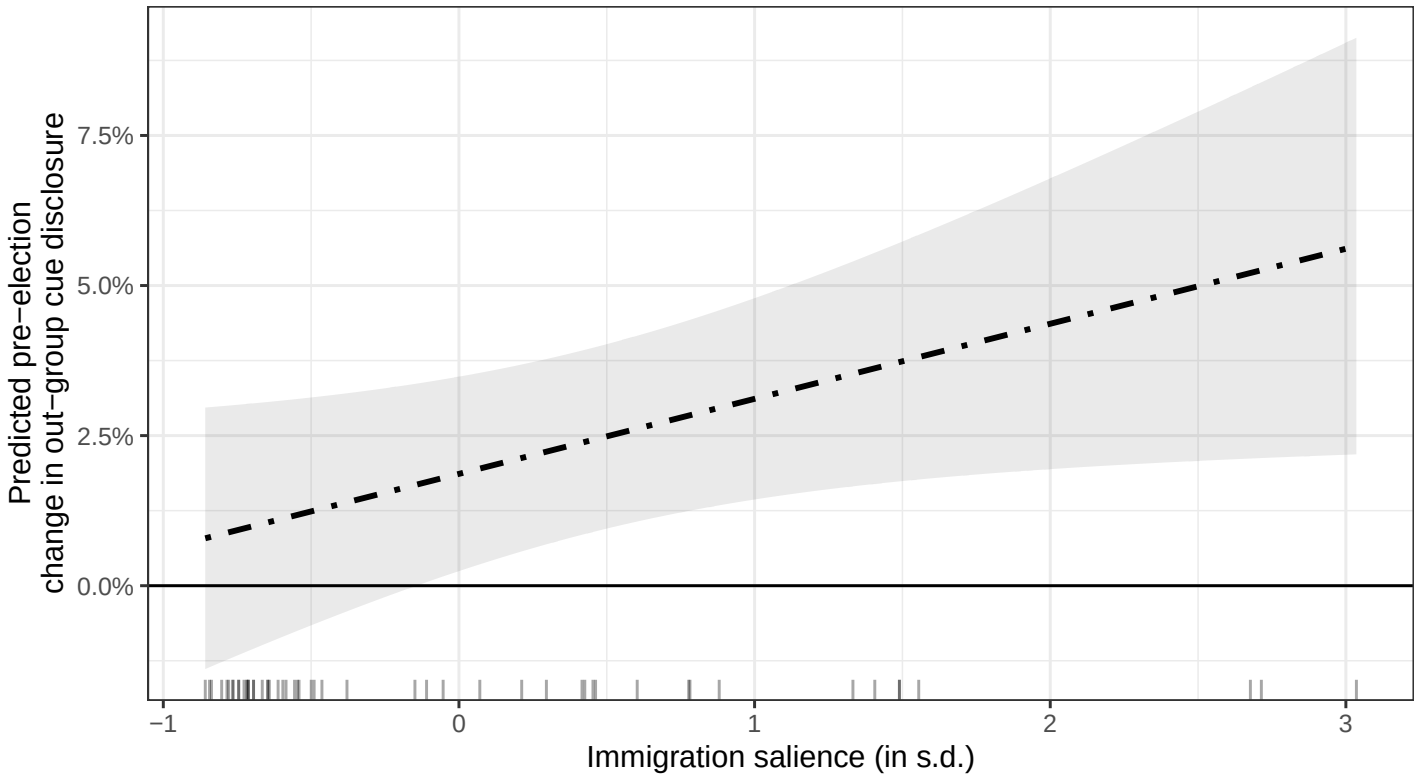
Study II: State Election RDiT OLS Estimates

Table 2: Differential reporting around elections

	Out-group cue (0/1)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Pre-Election	0.029**	0.024**	0.029***	0.027***	0.023***	0.028***
	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Pre-Election × Mig. salience				0.019**	0.018***	0.015*
				(0.008)	(0.006)	(0.007)
R^2	0.002	0.178	0.035	0.006	0.179	0.036
Observations	2,219	2,186	2,218	2,219	2,186	2,218
Police station x Election fixed effects		✓			✓	
State x Election fixed effects			✓			✓

Notes: Results from OLS regressions where the outcome is a binary indicator for the presence of out-group cues in a police press release. The unit of observation is the individual press release. *Pre-election* is a binary indicator equal to one for releases issued before a given state election. The analysis uses a bandwidth of ±2 days around state elections. The moderator is a survey-based measure of immigration salience for each state election, defined as the share of respondents naming integration, foreigners, or refugees as one of the two most important political issues facing the country. Immigration salience is calculated from the two most recent Politbarometer survey waves conducted in each state prior to its respective state election, incorporating survey weights, and standardized (mean = 0, SD = 1). Standard errors are clustered at the state-election level. Significance codes: *** p¡0.01, ** p¡0.05, * p¡0.1.

Study II: Marginal Effects by Immigration Salience



Notes: The plot shows the estimated post-election change in the probability that a police press release contains an out-group cue as a function of immigration salience. The solid line is the estimated marginal effect with 95% confidence intervals. The rug marks the empirical distribution of the moderator across state elections. Immigration salience is measured as the share of respondents naming *integration/foreigners/refugees* as one of the two most important political issues in the two Politbarometer waves prior to each election (standardized).

pre-AfD support

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

- **Is the effect specific to out-groups?** Yes. No increase for in-group (German) suspects, only decrease in reports with no ethnic cues.

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

- **Is the effect specific to out-groups?** Yes. No increase for in-group (German) suspects, only decrease in reports with no ethnic cues.
- **Are police publishing more reports?** No. Effect is purely compositional, no change in quantity around cutoff.

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

- **Is the effect specific to out-groups?** Yes. No increase for in-group (German) suspects, only decrease in reports with no ethnic cues.
- **Are police publishing more reports?** No. Effect is purely compositional, no change in quantity around cutoff.
- **Is the compositional effect driven by crime types?** No. Composition of "property", "violent" and "other" crime does not vary around the cutoff.

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

- **Is the effect specific to out-groups?** Yes. No increase for in-group (German) suspects, only decrease in reports with no ethnic cues.
- **Are police publishing more reports?** No. Effect is purely compositional, no change in quantity around cutoff.
- **Is the compositional effect driven by crime types?** No. Composition of "property", "violent" and "other" crime does not vary around the cutoff.
- **Is it chance?** 333 days Jan-No 2015/1,000 "fake" election Sundays show findings are unlikely to be driven by chance or day-of-the-week effects.

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

Study I:

- **Is it close police stations only?** No. Effect holds over 300 km distance.

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

Study I:

- **Is it close police stations only?** No. Effect holds over 300 km distance.

Study II:

- **Is it partisan politics?** No. Effect does not differ by party controlling the interior ministry. But is stronger in

Additional Analyses & Placebo Checks

Study I:

- **Is it close police stations only?** No. Effect holds over 300 km distance.

Study II:

- **Is it partisan politics?** No. Effect does not differ by party controlling the interior ministry. But is stronger in
- **Are police trying to swing elections?** Unlikely. Effect is no larger in competitive races.

Contribution

Contribution

Media & Politics:

- Downstream effects of crime news coverage on public opinion and behavior (e.g., Couttenier et al. 2021; Keita, Renault, and Valette 2024; Berk 2025b)

→ *Supply-side:* police shape information envir. before reaching the media

Contribution

Media & Politics:

- Downstream effects of crime news coverage on public opinion and behavior (e.g., Couttenier et al. 2021; Keita, Renault, and Valette 2024; Berk 2025b)

→ *Supply-side:* police shape information envir. before reaching the media

Bureaucratic Politics:

- Top-down, coerced transparency by principles (e.g. Cook and Fortunato 2023)

→ Transparency as *bottom-up*, strategic choice driven by public pressure

Contribution

Media & Politics:

- Downstream effects of crime news coverage on public opinion and behavior (e.g., Couttenier et al. 2021; Keita, Renault, and Valette 2024; Berk 2025b)

→ *Supply-side:* police shape information envir. before reaching the media

Bureaucratic Politics:

- Top-down, coerced transparency by principles (e.g. Cook and Fortunato 2023)

→ Transparency as *bottom-up*, strategic choice driven by public pressure

Racial Bias in Policing:

- Street-level interactions (Voigt et al. 2017; Hoekstra and Sloan 2022; Rho et al. 2023; Xu et al. 2024)

→ *New channel*: strategic public communications and reporting

Implications & Discussion

Implications & Discussion

- **Finding:** German local police systematically amplify out-group crime cues
  - After immigration salience triggering events (NYE 2015/16)
  - Before predictable cycles of immigration-salience (state elections)

Implications & Discussion

- **Finding:** German local police systematically amplify out-group crime cues
  - After immigration salience triggering events (NYE 2015/16)
  - Before predictable cycles of immigration-salience (state elections)

- **Implication:** Police shape the information environment in which citizens form attitudes and behavior
  - Partly explains mismatch between falling crime rates and rising fear
  - Potential feedback loop: selective reporting fuels salience driving disclosure

Implications & Discussion

- **Finding:** German local police systematically amplify out-group crime cues
  - After immigration salience triggering events (NYE 2015/16)
  - Before predictable cycles of immigration-salience (state elections)

- **Implication:** Police shape the information environment in which citizens form attitudes and behavior
  - Partly explains mismatch between falling crime rates and rising fear
  - Potential feedback loop: selective reporting fuels salience driving disclosure

- **Future Research:** Does is work?

Thank You !

Get in touch: violeta.haas@iast.fr

@HaasVioleta

References I

Ajzenman, Nicolás, Federico Fede, and Francisco J. Molina (2023). "Immigration, Crime, and Crime (Mis)Perceptions". In: *American Economic Review: Applied Economics* 15.4, pp. 143–182. DOI: 10.1257/app.20210156.

Berk, Nicolai (Feb. 2025a). "The Impact of Media Framing in Complex Information Environments". In: *Political Communication*. DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2025.2456519.

— (2025b). "The impact of media framing in complex information environments". In: *Political Communication*, pp. 1–17.

Bove, Vincenzo, Leandro Elia, and Massimiliano Ferraresi (2023). "Immigration, Fear of Crime, and Public Spending on Security". In: *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 39.1, pp. 235–280.

Carpenter, Daniel P and George A Krause (2012). "Reputation and public administration". In: *Public administration review* 72.1, pp. 26–32.

References II

Cook, Scott J and David Fortunato (2023). "The politics of police data: State legislative capacity and the transparency of state and substate agencies". In: *American political science review* 117.1, pp. 280–295.

Couttenier, Mathieu et al. (2021). "Anti-muslim voting and media coverage of immigrant crimes". In: *Review of Economics and Statistics*, pp. 1–33.

Fitzgerald, Jennifer, K Amber Curtis, and Catherine L Corliss (2012). "Anxious publics: Worries about crime and immigration". In: *Comparative Political Studies* 45.4, pp. 477–506.

Hoekstra, Mark and CarlyWill Sloan (2022). "Does race matter for police use of force? Evidence from 911 calls". In: *American economic review* 112.3, pp. 827–860.

References III

 Keita, Sekou, Thomas Renault, and Jérôme Valette (2024). "The Usual Suspects: Offender Origin, Media Reporting and Natives' Attitudes Towards Immigration". In: *The Economic Journal* 134.657, pp. 322–362. DOI: 10.1093/ej/uead059.

 Rho, Eugenia H. et al. (2023). "Escalated police stops of Black men are linguistically and psychologically distinct in their earliest moments". In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 120.46, e2307977120. DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2307977120.

 Riaz, Sascha, Daniel Bischof, and Markus Wagner (2024). "Out-group threat and xenophobic hate crimes: evidence of local intergroup conflict dynamics between immigrants and natives". In: *The Journal of Politics* 86.4, pp. 1146–1161.

References IV

 Roose, Jochen (2021). *Wenn es Nacht wird in Deutschland: Ergebnisse einer repräsentativen Umfrage zu Kriminalitätsangst und der Akzeptanz von Maßnahmen gegen Kriminalität*. Berlin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.

 Voigt, Rob et al. (2017). "Language from police body camera footage shows racial disparities in officer respect". In: *Proceedings of the national Academy of sciences* 114.25, pp. 6521–6526.

 Wirsching, Elisa (2025). "Political power of bureaucratic agents: Evidence from policing in New York city". In: URL: %5Curl%7Bhttps://elisawirsching.github.io/research/policeresistance.pdf%7D.

 Xu, Wenfei et al. (2024). "The racial composition of road users, traffic citations, and police stops". In: *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121.24, e2402547121.

Supplementary Material

Workflow

back

Stage	Description
1. Incident	Dispatched officers record details (event, witnesses, location, etc.).
2. Documentation	Officers enter data for each event into a centralized system.
3. Flagging	Local police stations review incident logs and flag high-profile events, incidents with investigative necessities, or public-awareness campaigns as "press-relevant."
4. Selection	Regional Public Relations Division receives flagged and unflagged cases and decides which incidents to release.
5. Drafting	A press officer prepares the release and selects the information to include, while considering ethical codes.
6. Review	Drafts are reviewed internally, typically by multiple staff members, sometimes by senior leadership, before approval.
7. Dissemination	Approved releases are published via the police website, Presseportal.de, and email to subscribed media. Social media is used selectively.
8. Media Interaction	Journalists may follow up with questions or requests for clarification. The press office may issue corrections or updates.

Table 1: Standard Workflow from Crime to Press Release

Selection Criteria

Three commonly referenced criteria:

(1) **public interest:** which considers media inquiries and the visibility of the incident

(2) **investigative value:** which relates to calls for witnesses or clarifications of conflicting facts

(3) **proactive communication:** which includes managing the narrative in high-profile cases

Interview Quote 1

back

"So I was very involved in the so-called refugee issue, I believe it was around 2019, when there were also many incidents. During that period, we communicated such incidents involving asylum seekers with maximum transparency because we did not want accusations or criticism from the right-wing spectrum claiming we were hiding something or allowing a narrative to emerge that we remain silent when a particular group of people, who are central to the discussion here, commit something like shoplifting."

Interview Quote 2

back

"...when we currently deal with people of Russian or Ukrainian descent, we aim to be transparent about this as well, because it is now a topic that concerns the public and people in general. We are thus more sensitive in these cases, whereas perhaps five years ago we wouldn't have even considered whether we should specifically address conflicts here between Russians and Ukrainians."

Data Collection

Performance Metrics, Main Model (GPT 4-o)

back

	precision	recall	f1-score	support
Type of Crime				
Violent	0.907	0.916	0.912	546.000
Property	0.879	0.974	0.924	1835.000
Other	0.726	0.768	0.747	280.000
None	0.898	0.564	0.693	624.000
Traffic	0.921	0.933	0.927	1074.000
macro avg	***0.866***	***0.831***	***0.840***	***4359.000***
weighted avg	***0.886***	***0.885***	***0.879***	***4359.000***
Multiple Events				
No	0.994	0.866	0.925	3042.000
Yes	0.465	0.954	0.626	373.000
macro avg	***0.729***	***0.910***	***0.775***	***3415.000***
weighted avg	***0.936***	***0.875***	***0.892***	***3415.000***
Non-German				
No Information	0.941	0.947	0.944	1443.000
No Ethnicity or Nationality	0.882	0.834	0.857	752.000
German	0.859	0.807	0.832	83.000
Foreign	0.866	0.964	0.912	334.000
macro avg	***0.887***	***0.888***	***0.886***	***2612.000***
weighted avg	***0.912***	***0.912***	***0.911***	***2612.000***

To align the evaluation sample with our empirical analysis, we exclude for both variables releases describing multiple incidents, ensuring that each observation corresponds to a single crime event. For the Non-German variable, we additionally omit traffic-related incidents, which fall outside the scope of our theoretical interest and are rarely coded for nationality or ethnicity

Intercoder Reliability

back

Table 3: Intercoder Reliability: Between Human Coders

Variable	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha
Multiple Events	0.770	0.770
Type of Crime	0.842	0.842
Non German	0.800	0.7999

Table 4: Intercoder Reliability: Human Coders Agreement Against GPT 4-o Coding

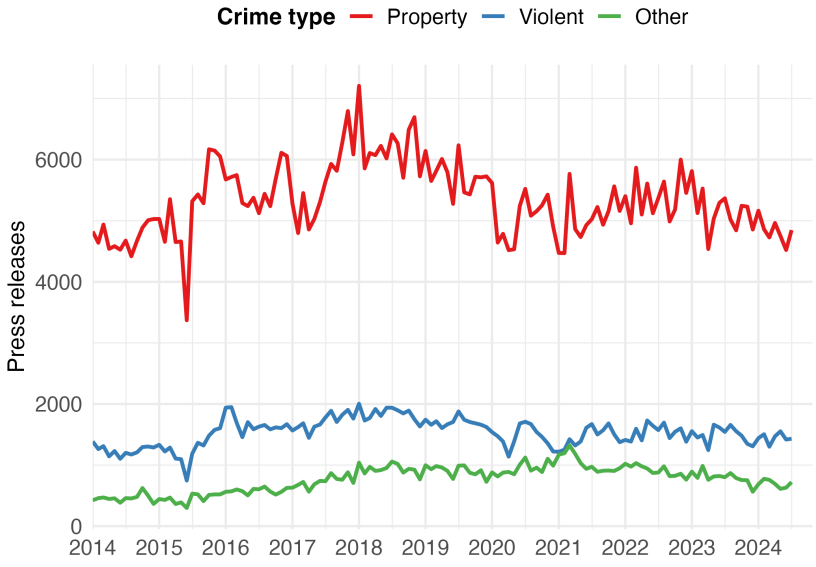
Variable	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha
Multiple Events	0.613	0.607
Type of Crime	0.869	0.869
Non German	0.940	0.940

Summary Statistics by Year

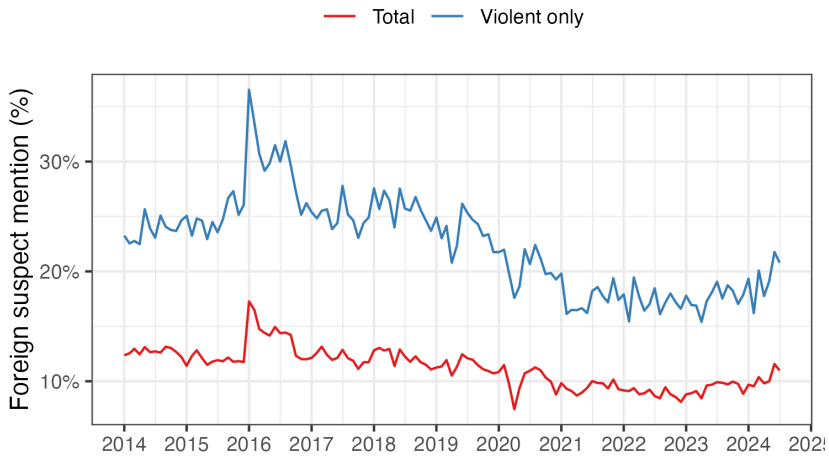
Table 5: Summary Statistics by Year

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
N	77150	82850	93728	96479	108135	100261	89523	90176	94046	89382	52099
Type of Crime											
Property	0.74	0.75	0.71	0.70	0.69	0.69	0.68	0.67	0.69	0.69	0.69
Violent	0.19	0.18	0.21	0.21	0.20	0.20	0.20	0.19	0.20	0.20	0.21
Other	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.09	0.10	0.11	0.13	0.14	0.12	0.11	0.10
Ethnicity											
Foreign	0.11	0.10	0.13	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.06
German	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
No Info / Other	0.87	0.88	0.85	0.87	0.88	0.88	0.90	0.91	0.92	0.92	0.92
Concluded (bin.)	0.15	0.13	0.15	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.14	0.14	0.14
Multiple Events (bin.)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Federal Police (bin.)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Police Crime Reporting over Time



(a) Press releases over time, by crime type



(b) Press releases with foreign perpetrator

Figure 1: Composition of police press releases

Press Releases by Weekday

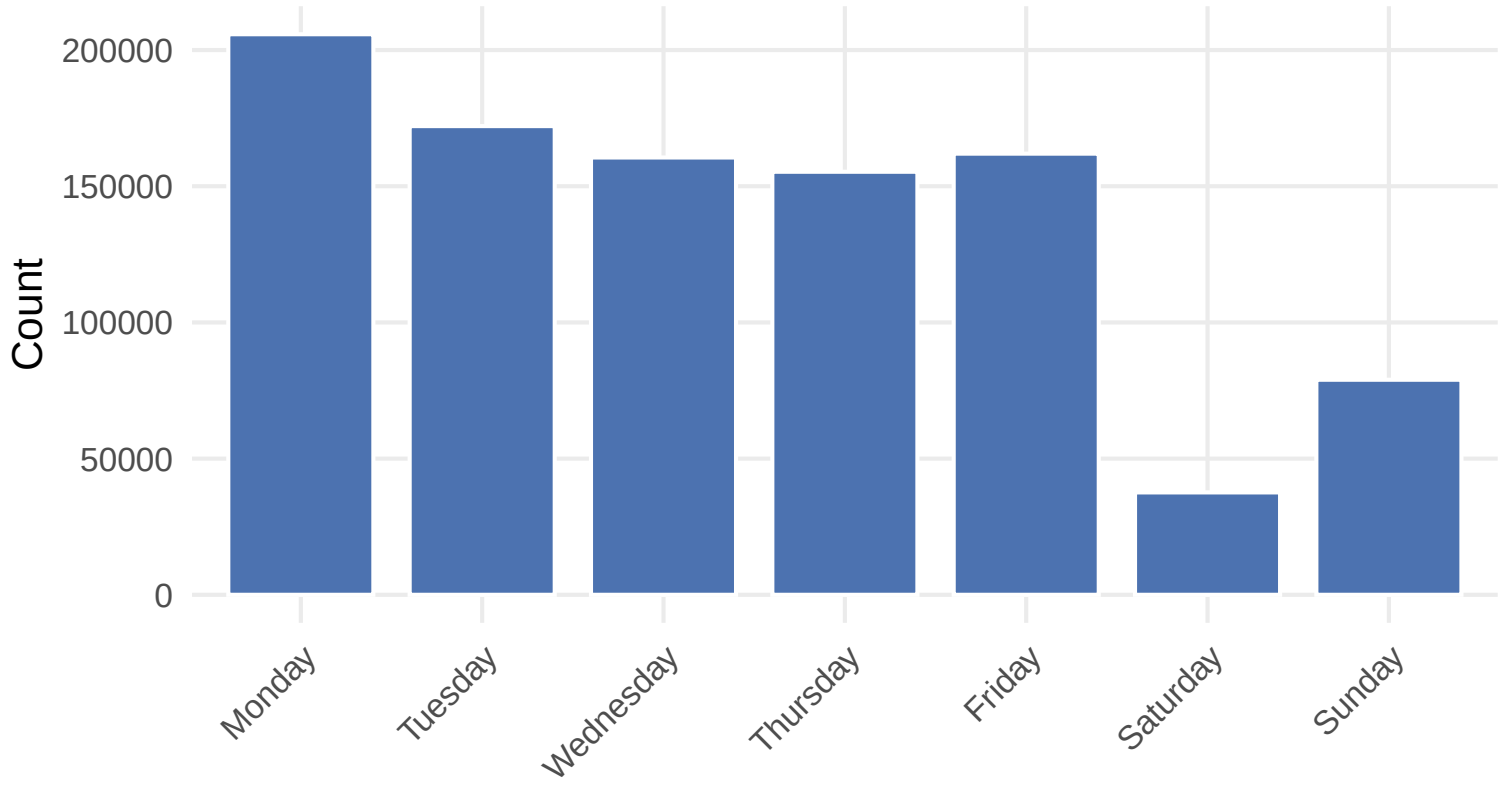
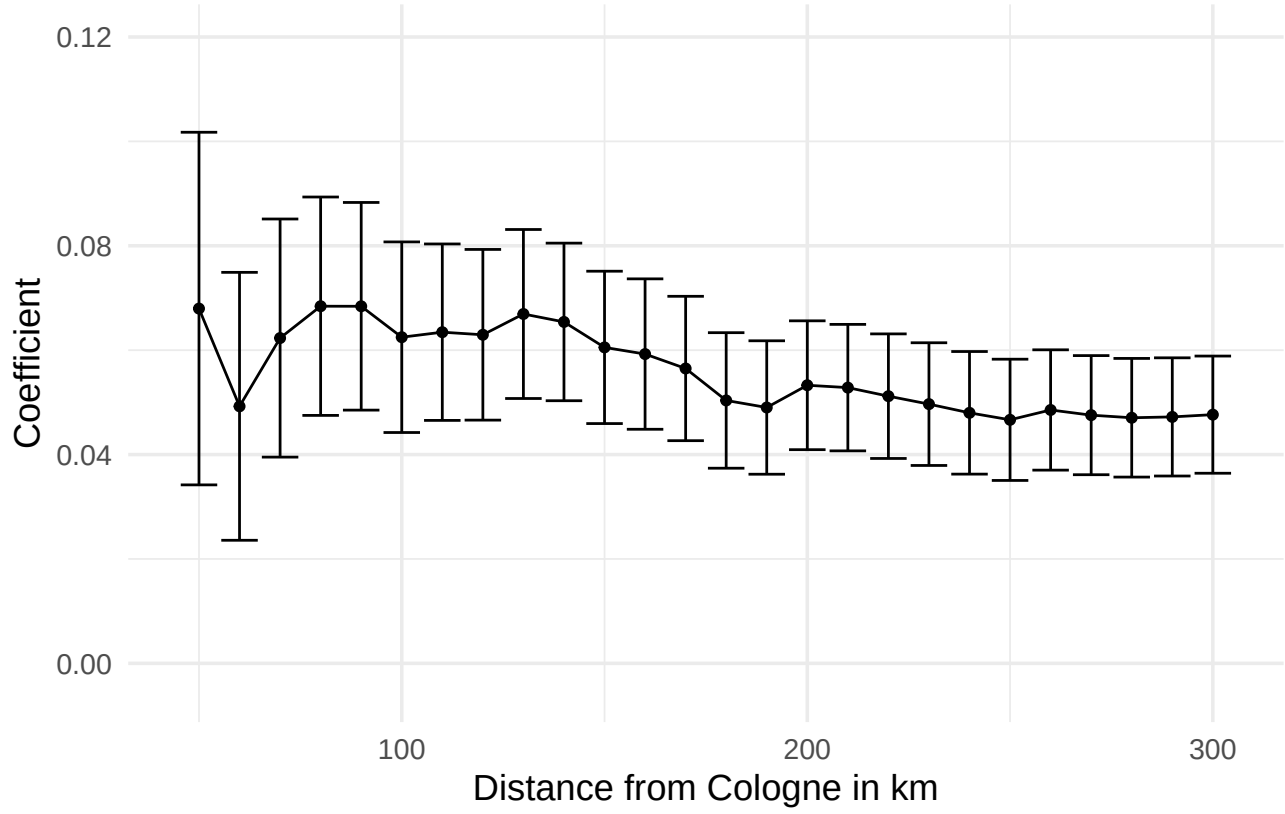


Figure 2: The figure shows the number of police press releases published by weekday.

Study I: Distance from Cologne

Back

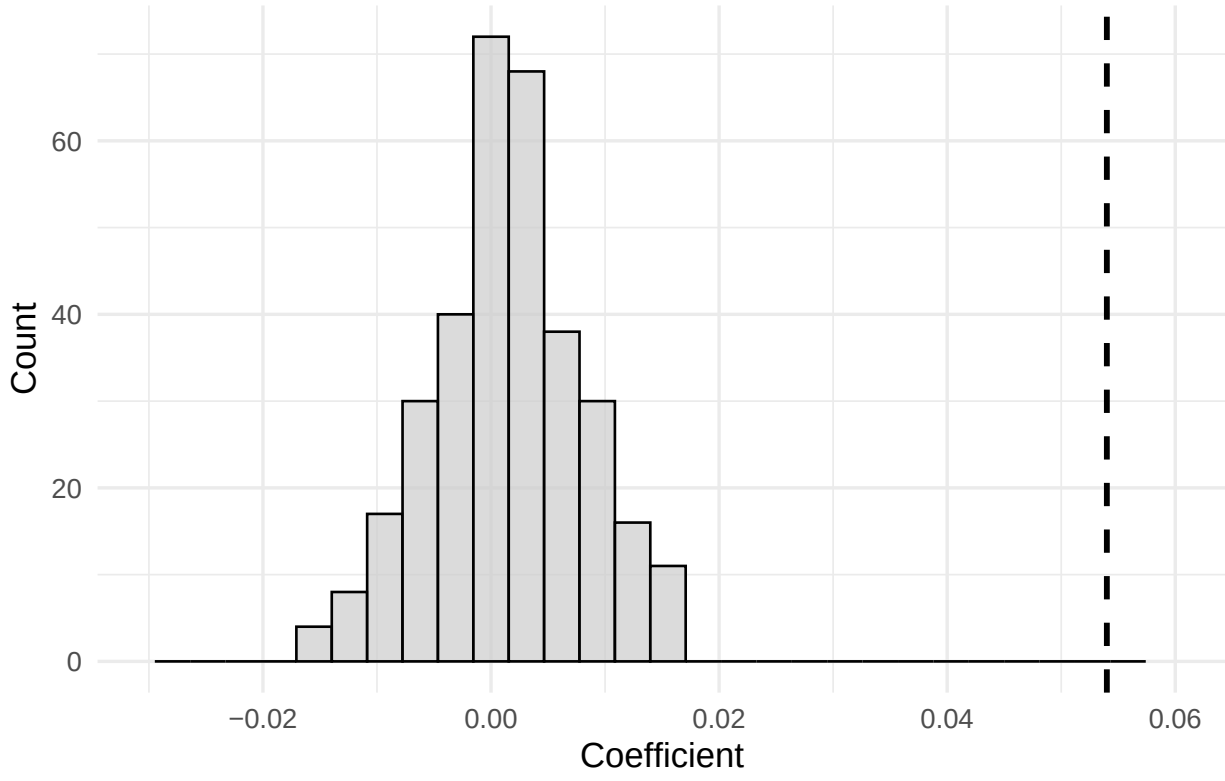
Figure 3: Distance from Cologne



Notes: We re-estimate the specification from column (1) subsetting the data to all observations within *dist* km from Cologne. Radius around Cologne is indicated on the x-axis. To calculate radii, we use distance between centroids for each municipality and centroid of Cologne. The y-axis shows the respective coefficient estimate on that subset with corresponding 95% confidence intervals.

Study I: Placebo Treatments

back



Notes: Distribution of placebo t-statistics. We replace the actual 2015/16 NYE date with each day between January and November 2015. We then re-estimate the main specification in the $\pm$30-day window around these placebo cutoffs and record the coefficient on the `post` indicator. The dashed red vertical line marks the true NYE 2015/16 coefficient. The two-sided randomisation p-value is the proportion of placebo statistics whose absolute value is at least as large as the true statistic.

Study II: Heterogeneity by Local Politics

back

Table 6: Heterogeneity by local politics

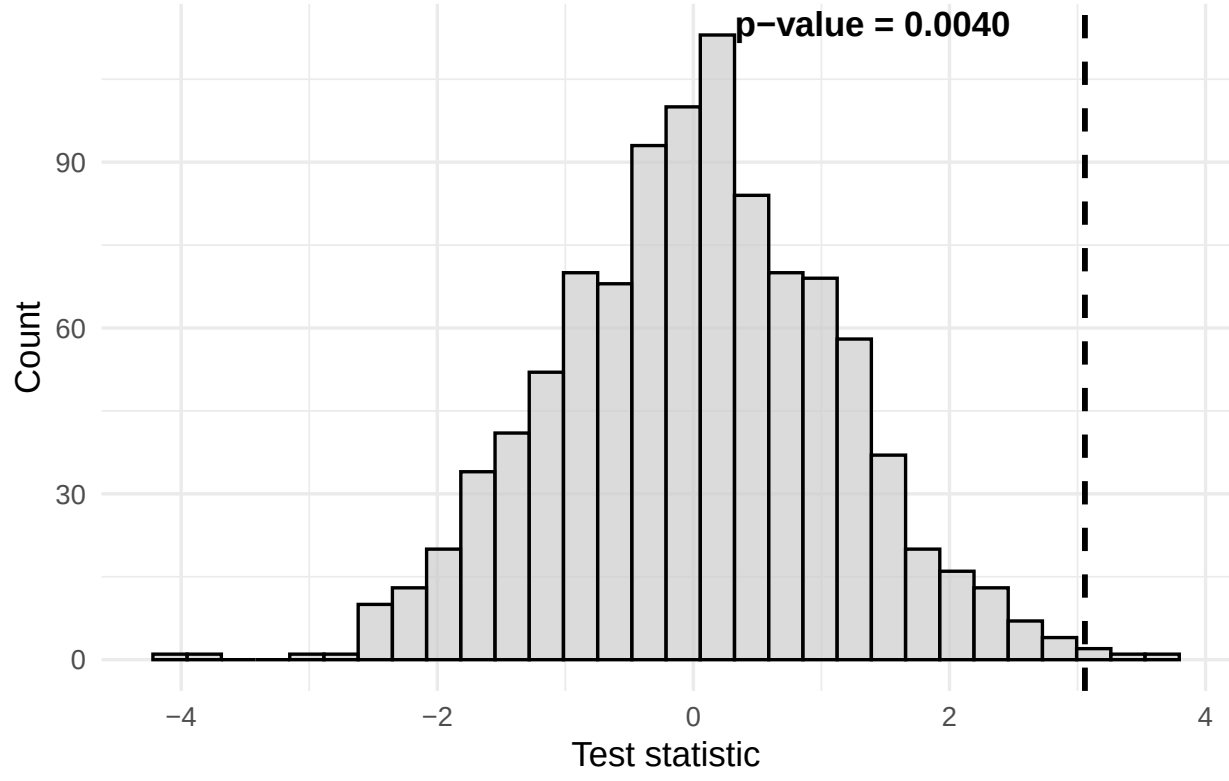
	Out-group cue (0/1)	
	(1)	(2)
Pre-Election	-0.016	0.144***
	(0.019)	(0.046)
Pre-Election × AfD vote share	0.004**	
	(0.002)	
Pre-Election × Left combined vote share (SPD + Greens + The Left)		-0.003**
		(0.001)
R^2	0.037	0.040
Observations	2,189	2,189
State x Election fixed effects	✓	✓

Notes: Results from OLS regressions where the outcome is a binary indicator for the presence of out-group cues in a police press release. The unit of observation is the individual press release. *Pre-election* equals 1 for releases issued in the days before a given state election; releases on election day are excluded. The analysis uses a bandwidth of ±2 days around state elections. Each column reports a separate interaction between *Pre-election* and either AfD vote share or the Left combined vote share (SPD + Greens + The Left), with all measures taken from the

Study II: Placebo Treatments

back

1,000 fake Sundays $\rightarrow$ findings are unlikely to be driven by random chance or day-of-the-week effects ($p = 0.003$).



Notes: Distribution of placebo *t*-statistics. We replace the actual election date of every state with a *Sunday* drawn at random 1,000 times. We then re-estimate the main specification in the $\pm$2-day window around these placebo cutoffs and record the *t*-statistic on the `pre` indicator. The dashed red vertical line marks the true-election *t*-statistic. The two-sided randomisation *p*-value is the proportion of placebo statistics whose absolute value is at least as large as the true statistic.

Study II: Party of Minister of the Interior

back

Table 7: Heterogeneity by party of state minister of the interior

	Out-group cue (0/1)	
Party of interior minister	CDU/CSU	SPD
	(1)	(2)
Pre-Election	0.037**	0.024*
	(0.013)	(0.013)
R^2	0.013	0.047
Observations	808	1,410
State x Election fixed effects	✓	✓

Notes: Results from OLS regressions where the outcome variable is a binary indicator for the presence of out-group cues in a police press release. Police press releases are the unit of observation. Pre-election is a binary indicator that equals one for press-releases issued before a given state election. We use a bandwidth of 2 days around state elections. The sample is split by

Study II:Competitive Elections

back

[htbp]

Table 8: Heterogeneity by competitiveness of a given election

	Out-group cue (0/1)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pre-Election	0.029	0.033	0.141*	-0.070
	(0.017)	(0.218)	(0.079)	(0.067)
Pre-Election × Margin of victory (winner minus runner-up, in p.p.)	4.38×10^{-5}			
	(0.002)			
Pre-Election × Competitiveness index (1 – MoV)		-0.004		
		(0.232)		
Pre-Election × Herfindahl–Hirschman Index of vote-share concentration			-0.494	
			(0.329)	
Pre-Election × Effective Number of Parties (1 / HHI)				0.022
				(0.016)
R^2	0.035	0.035	0.036	0.036
Observations	2,218	2,218	2,218	2,218
State x Election fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓

Notes: Results from OLS regressions where the outcome is a binary indicator for the presence of out-group cues in a police press release. The unit of observation is the individual press release. *Pre-election* equals 1 for releases issued in the two days before the relevant state election; releases on election day are excluded. The analysis uses a bandwidth of ±2 days around state elections. Moderators are election-level measures of electoral competitiveness computed from official vote shares across seven categories (including a residual *Other* so shares sum to 100): (i) the winner–runner-up vote-share gap in percentage points; (ii) a normalized competitiveness index defined as one minus that margin divided by 100; (iii) the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index, the sum of squared proportional party vote shares; and (iv) the Effective Number of Parties, the inverse of the Herfindahl–Hirschman Index. All models include state×year fixed effects and standard errors clustered at

Study II: Other Etnicity Cues

back

Table 9: Other ethnicity cues

	In-group (German) cue	No ethnicity info.
	(1)	(2)
Pre-Election	-0.0003	-0.029**
	(0.006)	(0.013)
R^2	0.018	0.037
Observations	2,218	2,218
State x Election fixed effects	✓	✓

Notes: Results from OLS regressions where the outcome variables are binary indicator for the presence of (1) German in-group cues or (2) no cues about nationality/ethnicity in a police press release. Police press releases are the unit of observation. Pre-election is a binary indicator that equals one for press-releases issued before a given state election. We use a bandwidth of 2 days around state elections. Standard errors are clustered at the state-election level. Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

Study II: Pre-Election Fridays/Saturdays

back

Table 10: Difference in Daily Report Counts on Pre-Election Fridays/Saturdays

	Daily count of press releases		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Pre-Election Fri/Sat (0/1)	0.767	1.50	1.50
	(3.01)	(2.11)	(1.79)
Observations	14,797	14,797	14,797
State fixed effects		✓	✓
Year fixed effects		✓	✓
Weekday fixed effects			✓

Notes: Results from an OLS regression where the outcome variable is the total count of police press releases on a given day. The unit of observation is a state-day (Friday or Saturday). The analysis compares the Fridays and Saturdays immediately before a state election to all other Fridays and Saturdays in the sample period. Pre-Election Fri/Sat is a binary indicator equal to one for the days immediately pre-

Study II: Crime Types

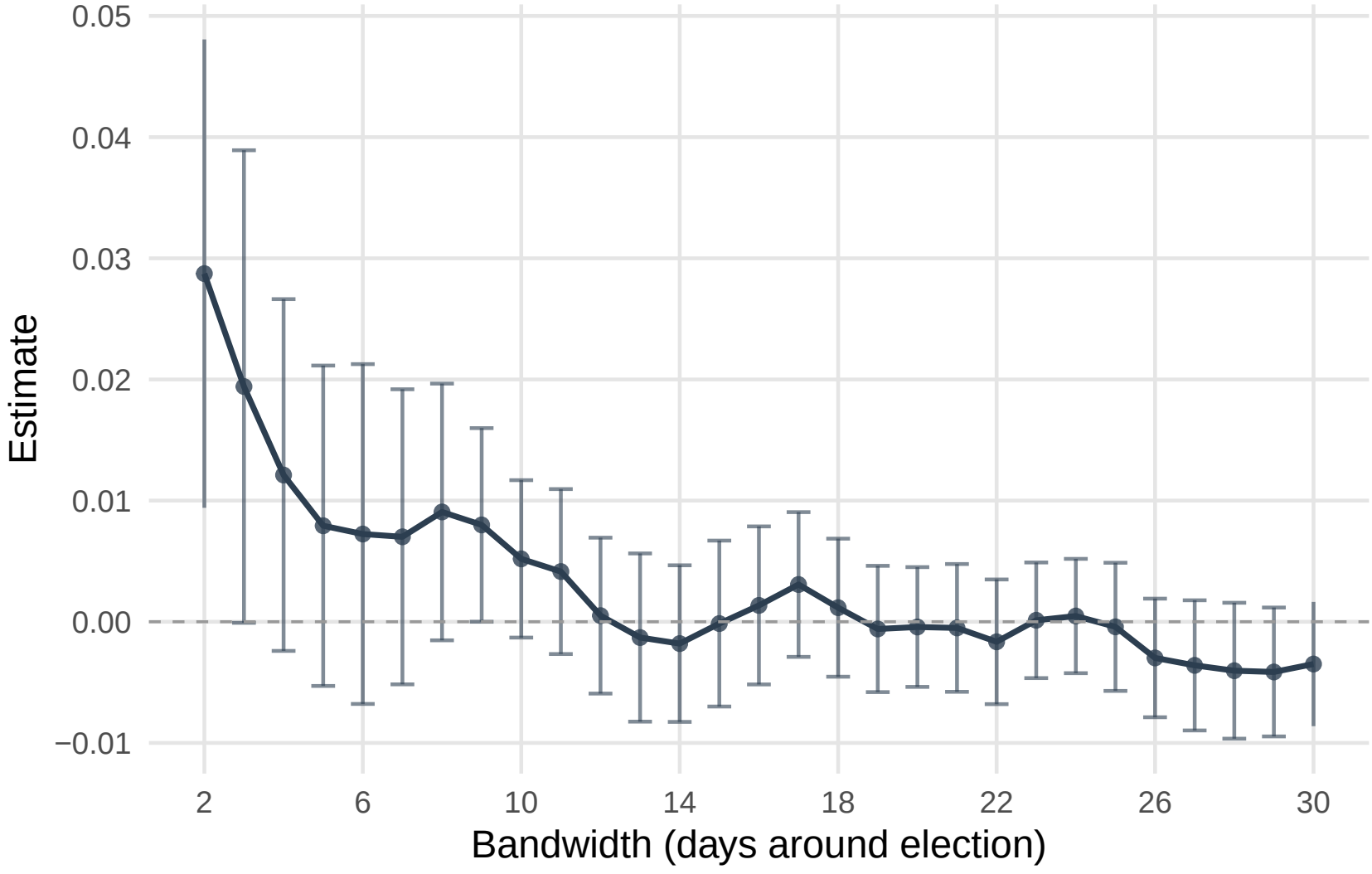
Back

Table 11: Type of crime

	Other (0/1)	Property crime (0/1)	Violent crime (0/1)
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Pre-Election	0.014	-0.023	0.010
	(0.013)	(0.021)	(0.018)
R^2	0.018	0.021	0.025
Observations	2,218	2,218	2,218
State x Election fixed effects	✓	✓	✓

Notes: Results from OLS regressions where the outcome variables are binary indicators for different types of crime in a police press release: (1) other crimes, (2) property crimes, (3) violent crimes. Police press releases are the unit of observation. Pre-election is a binary indicator equal to one for press releases issued before a given state election. Standard errors are clustered at the state-election level. Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1.

Study II: Varying the bandwidth



Notes: The figure shows the results from the main specification for varying bandwidths between 2 and 30 days.

Does this work?

Back

We do not find any correlational evidence that a higher share of out-group reporting is associated with increased trust in the police

Table A.23: Out-Group Crime Reporting and Public Perceptions

	Trust in Police (binary)	
	(1)	(2)
Share of out-group press releases	0.036	0.037
	(0.055)	(0.054)
True foreign crime share (PKS)	-0.005	0.0008
	(0.011)	(0.015)
Crime Clearance Rate (PKS)		-0.015
		(0.018)
Total Crimes in County (PKS)		-0.009
		(0.010)
R^2	0.025	0.025
Observations	2,063	2,063
State fixed effects	✓	✓

Notes: OLS linear probability models at the respondent level (sample restricted to respondents without migration background); the outcome is binary – High trust in police coded 1 for 'sehr großes/großes Vertrauen'; Share of out-group reports = 2020 county share of police press releases containing out-group cues; all columns include state fixed effects and controls for age, gender, and education; SEs clustered by county; Column (1) additionally controls for the overall county-level share of foreign crime suspects (PKS 2020); Column (2) further adds the county crime clearance rate (Aufklärungsquote) and total crimes (PKS 2020); all PKS variables are standardized; significance: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.