Legal Aid in Child Welfare: Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial of Mi Abogado

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Introduction

- Foster Care: Substitute care for maltreated children
  - Across countries, approx. 5% of children spend some time in foster care
  - Average length of stay approx. 2 years

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  - Across countries, approx. 5% of children spend some time in foster care
  - Average length of stay approx. 2 years
- Broad Question: How do bureaucratic delays in foster care affect children?
- Today's Question: Does a legal aid program in Chile reduce length of stay and improve child outcomes?

Introduction

- Today's Question: Does a legal aid program in Chile reduce length of stay and improve child outcomes?
- Idea: Smart roll-outs of new programs
  - Experimental Policy Initiative & Randomization
  - Administrative Data
- Application: Mi Abogado ("My Lawyer")

Preview of Findings

- Substantial reduction in length of stay (cost-effective)
- No increase in re-abuse
- Substantial reduction in criminal justice involvement
- Suggestive evidence on educational outcomes (pending)

Plan

- Background
- Mi Abogado
- Randomization and Empirical Strategy
- Results
- Conclusion

Background: Legal Aid in Child Welfare

- Large concerns over bureaucratic delays (Miller, 2004; Farber et al., 2009; Miller et al., 2020)
- Large literature on negative correlation between length of stay and child wellbeing
- Little causal evidence on interventions aimed at speeding the time to permanency or legal aid
  - Orlebeke et al. (2016) RCT in Washington and Georgia for additional lawyer training finding faster times to permanency (within first six months of foster care)
  - Rashid and Waddell (2019) study staggered laws mandating lawyer representation and find increased speed to adoption (a 14% increase in adoption within one year of foster care entry)

Background: Chilean Child Protection System

- 10,700 children in protection system (foster families and residences) in Chile
- Maltreatment allegations: abuse (50%), neglect and prevention (49%)
- Average length of stay: 3 years (Julian et al., 2019)
- In 2019, 41% in institutional homes
- Highly critical report of residential care in 2017

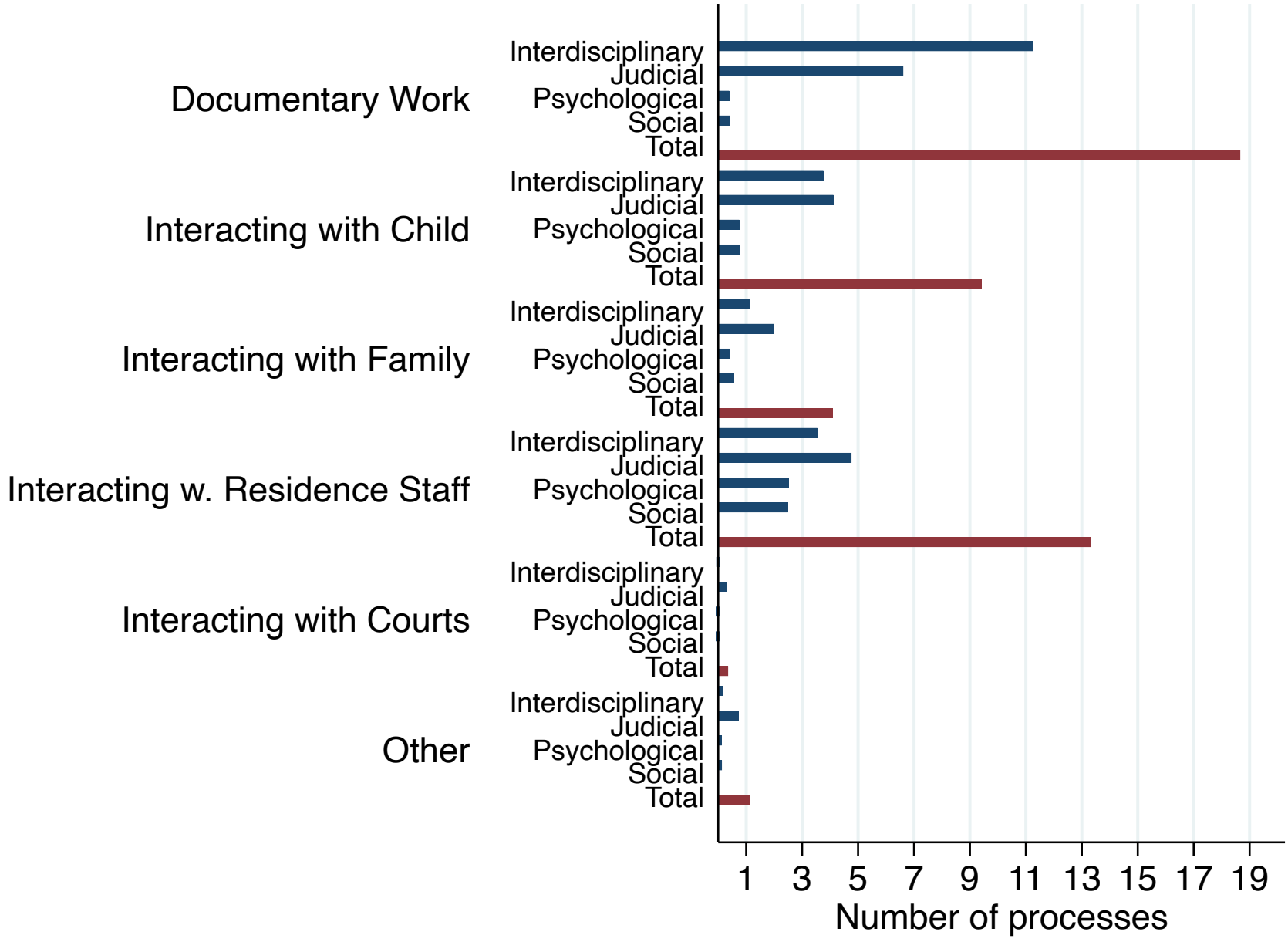
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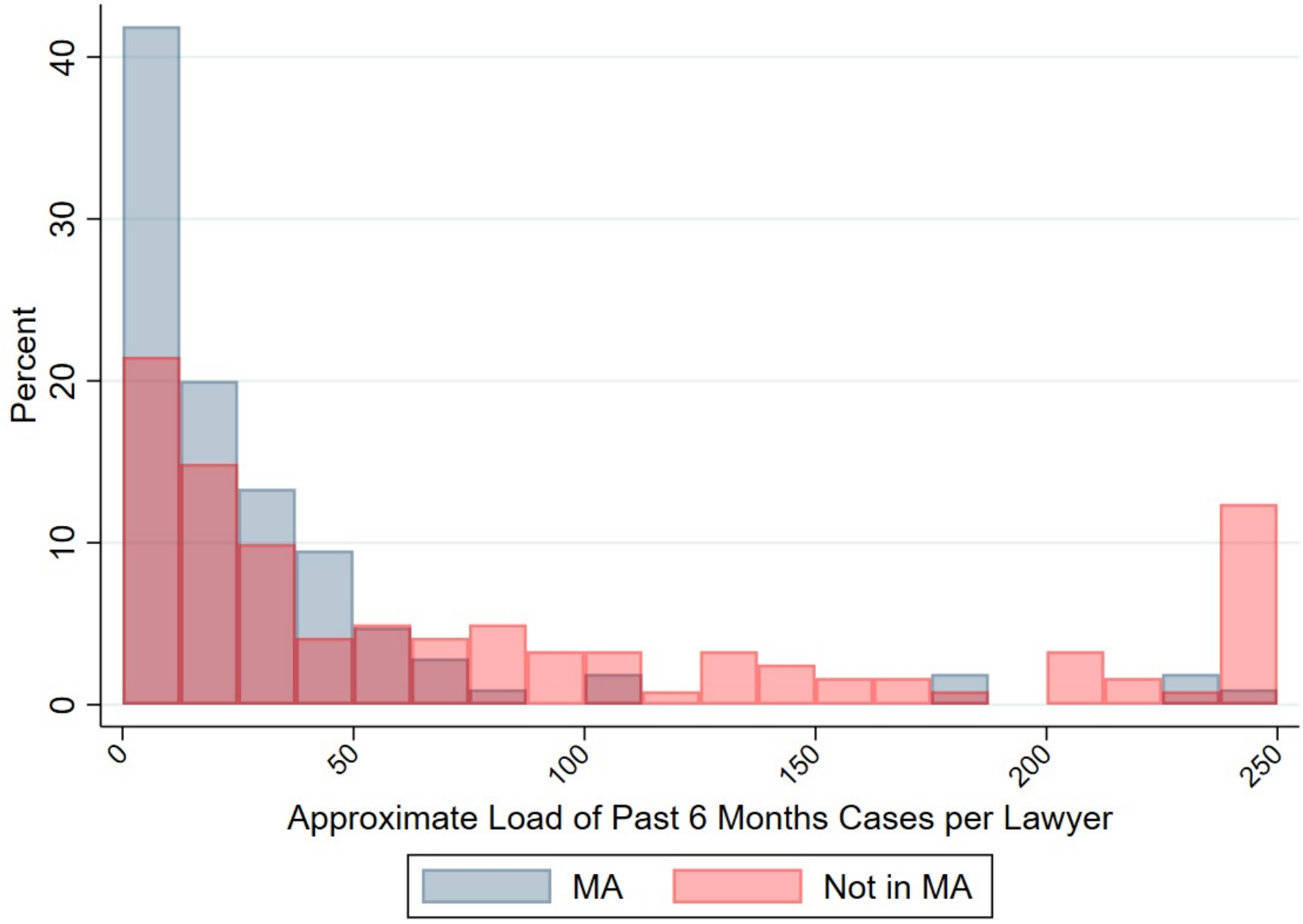
Mi Abogado Program

- Case management team: a lawyer, a psychologist and a social worker
- Lawyer represents the child in court and aims to promote "best interests of the child"
  - Smaller caseloads per lawyer
- Team facilitates access to services for children
  - Lawyer cost: over 90% of the program

Mi Abogado Tasks



Cases Assigned in Last 6 Months



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Experimental Design

- Capacity constraints, so randomize to roll out expansion of the program
- Children ages 6-18 in institutions in January/February 2019
- Strata: age groups and 4 regions
- (Main) Randomization on March 30 2019
- Out of 1871 eligible children, 581 were assigned to treatment
- Noncompliance due to lawyer assignment by judges

Pragmatic RCT



Map from https://fruitsfromchile.com/

4 largest regions in Chile

Region	N	Treated	Share
Santiago	623	200	0.32
Maule	451	413	0.92
Valparaíso	419	42	0.10
Bío Bío	378	28	0.07

Data Description

- Administrative data to track outcomes
  - Less costly
  - Updated daily
- Registry Data with social-security-equivalent number linkage
  - Child Welfare
  - Courts and Criminal Justice
  - Schooling

Child Welfare Data

- Dates of placement and placement changes
- Observe exit to family
- Key outcome is "Permanency" in a given quarter:
  - Returned home, living with kin outside the child protection system, or adopted
  - or turned 18 while living with family

Courts and Criminal Justice Data

- Crime reports where child is suspect
- Crime reports where child is victim
- Juvenile jail sentences (pending)
- Types (and cost) of crimes (pending)
- Outcome today: Number of crimes in a quarter

Schooling

- Attendance (monthly)
- Grades (yearly) percentiles of the grade distribution

Empirical Strategy

- Reduced form comparison of costs and outcomes
- Event Study for child i in quarter t:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta X_i + \sum_{q \neq -1} \gamma_q \mathbb{1}\{Q_t = q\} + \sum_{q \neq -1} \theta_q \mathbb{1}\{Q_t = q\} \times T_i + \varepsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

where T_i is an indicator for those in the treatment group

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- Will report IV to explore treatment effect dynamics

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  where T_i is an indicator for those in the treatment group
- Will report IV to explore treatment effect dynamics
- Standard errors are clustered at the child level.

Empirical Strategy

Overall program effect for child i:

$$Y_{it} = \mathrm{X_i}\boldsymbol{\beta} + \gamma T_i + \delta Post_t + \psi T_i Post_t + \varepsilon_{it}. \tag{2}$$

Standard errors are clustered at the child level.

Plan

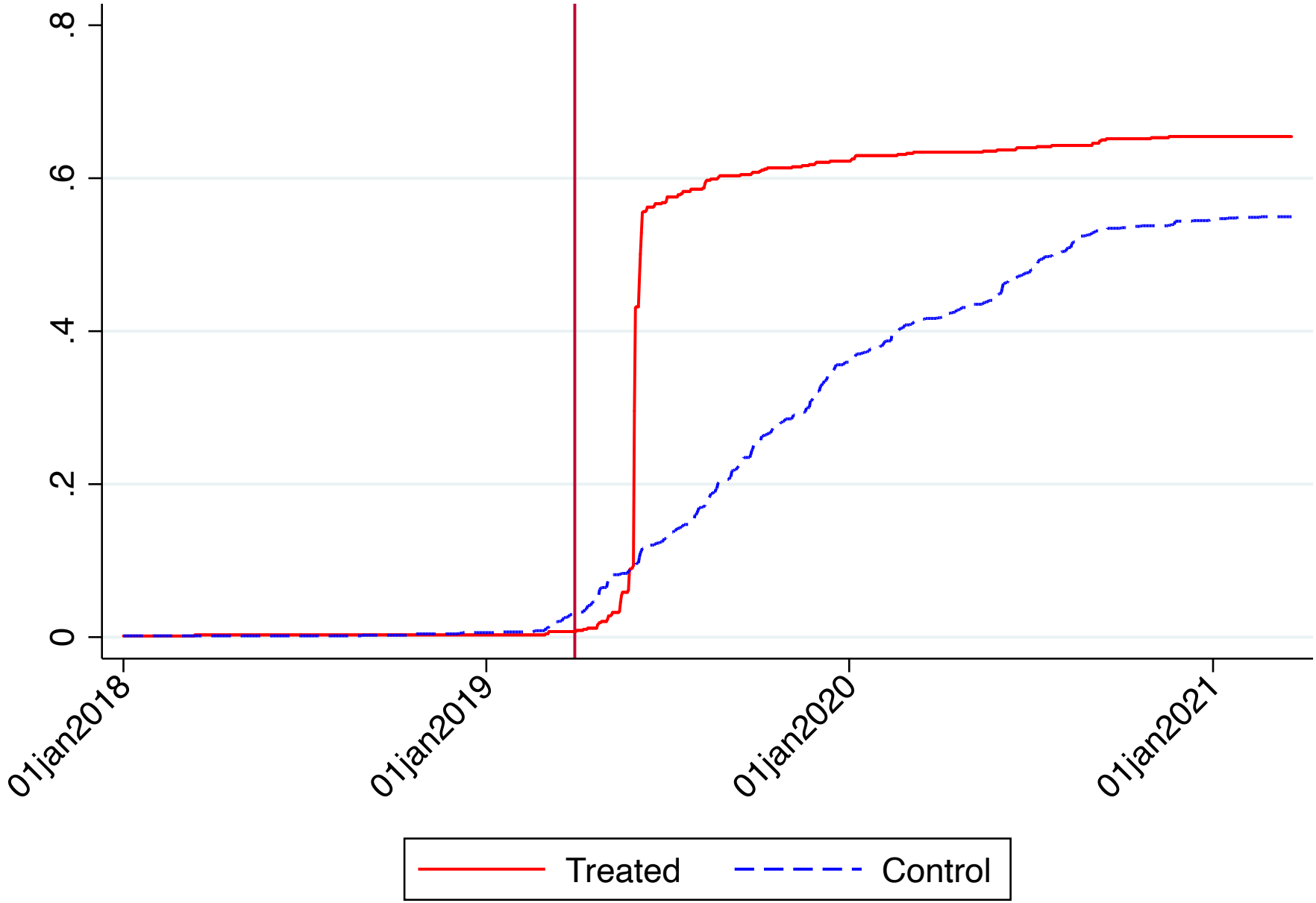
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Randomization Check

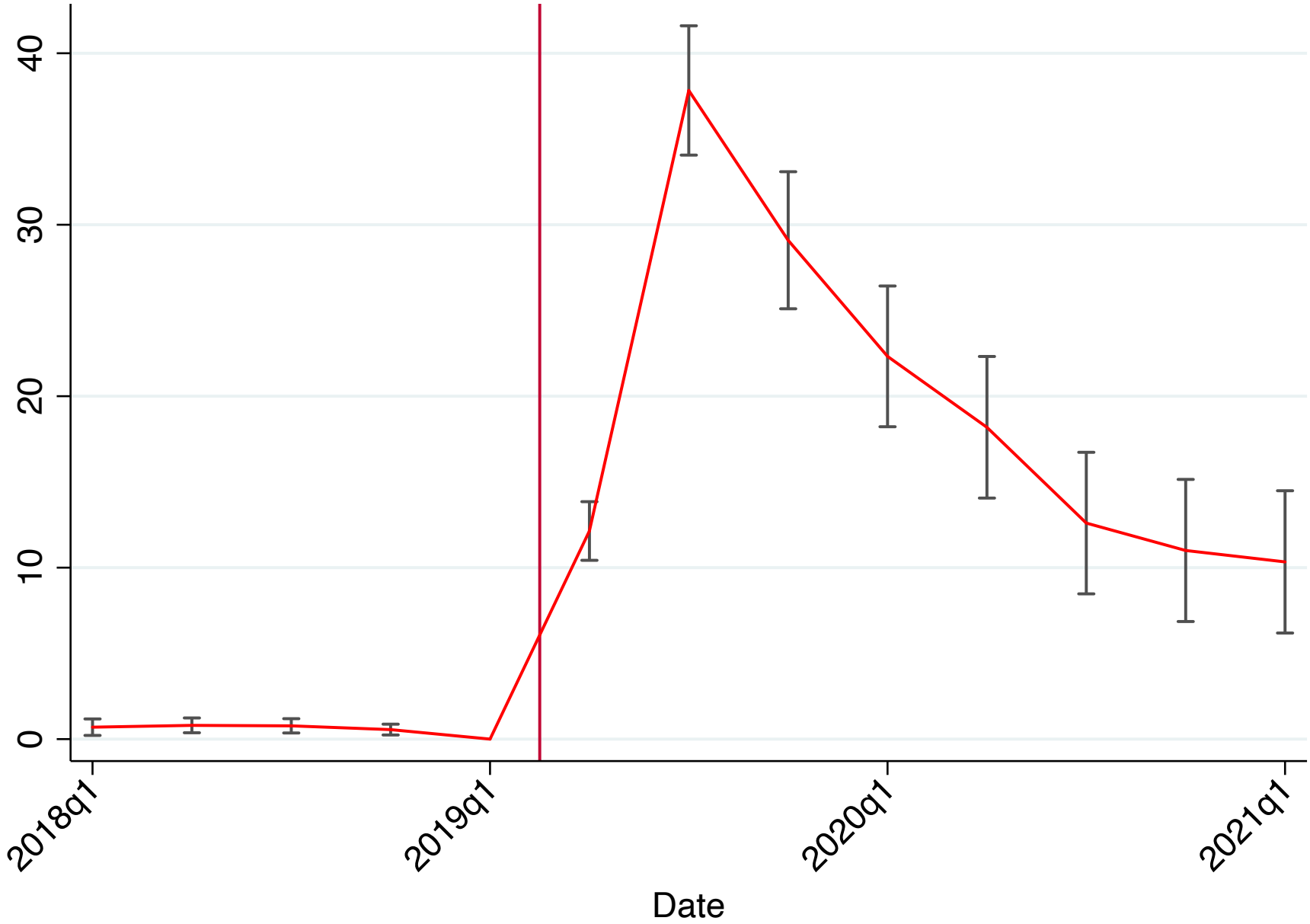
Table 1: Balance in Baseline Covariates

	N	Mean T	Mean C	SD	Dif	p
Writs/Qtr	1,871	2.891	2.732	22.027	0.159	0.126
Grades Percentile	1,616	27.448	25.878	23.747	1.570	0.235
Days had MA lawyer/Qtr (Program Data)	1,871	0.270	0.387	40.818	-0.117	0.269
Hearings/Qtr	1,871	0.208	0.191	4.187	0.017	0.228
Involvment in Crimes/Qtr	1,871	0.029	0.030	2.669	-0.001	0.353
Times Missing/Qtr	1,871	0.030	0.024	1.929	0.006	0.411
Times Victim of Abuse/Qtr	1,871	0.005	0.006	0.790	-0.001	0.205
Victim of Crimes/Qtr	1,871	0.041	0.036	2.803	0.004	0.578
School Percentage of Attendance	1,871	0.698	0.662	0.408	0.036	0.340
Days Living with a Family/Qtr	1,869	2.103	2.863	33.876	-0.760	0.845
Days Living In a Residence/Qtr	1,869	64.013	61.602	44.053	2.411	0.451

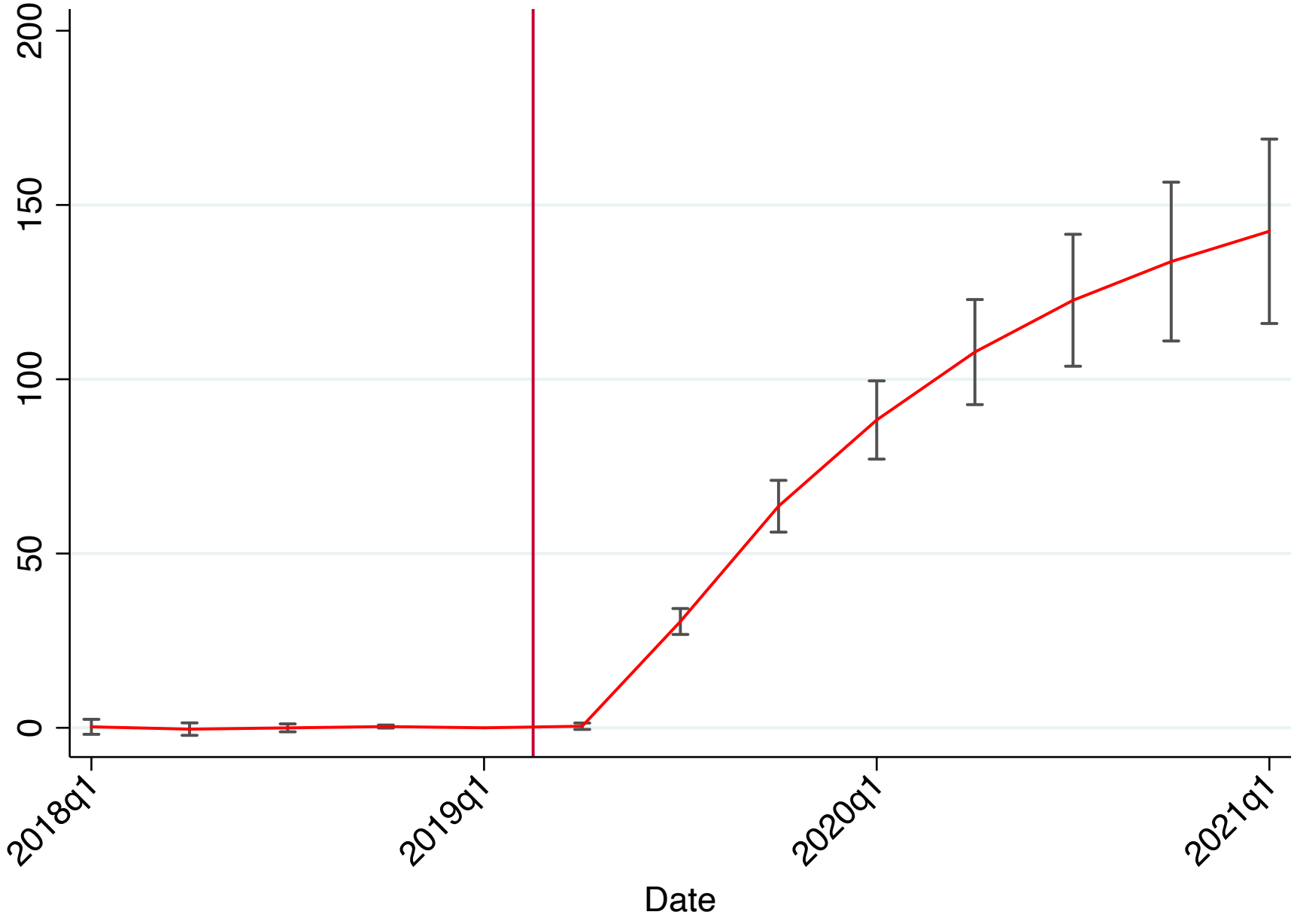
Participation in the Program by Experimental Group



Event Study: Days in Mi Abogado that quarter

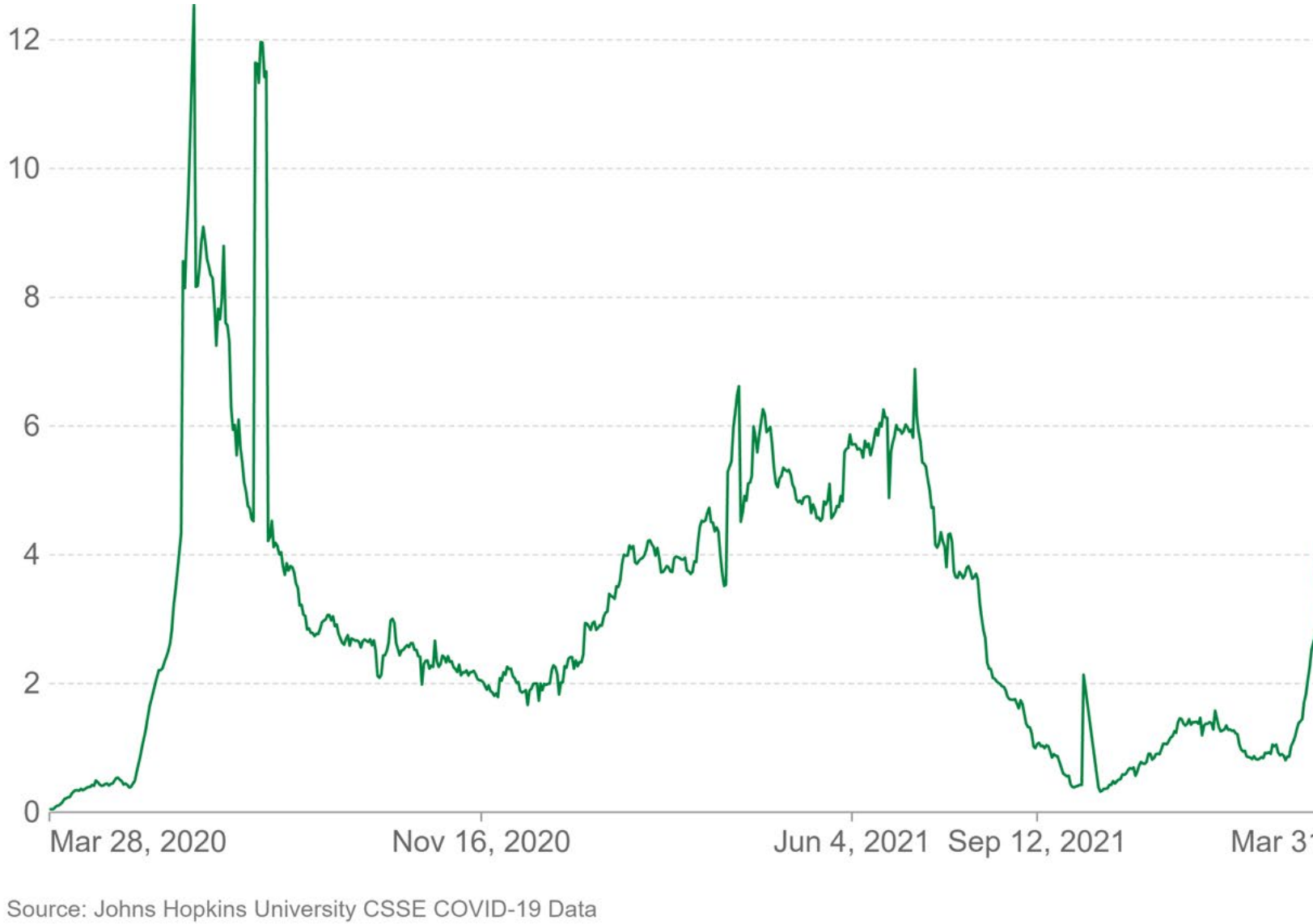


Event Study: Cumulative Days in Mi Abogado



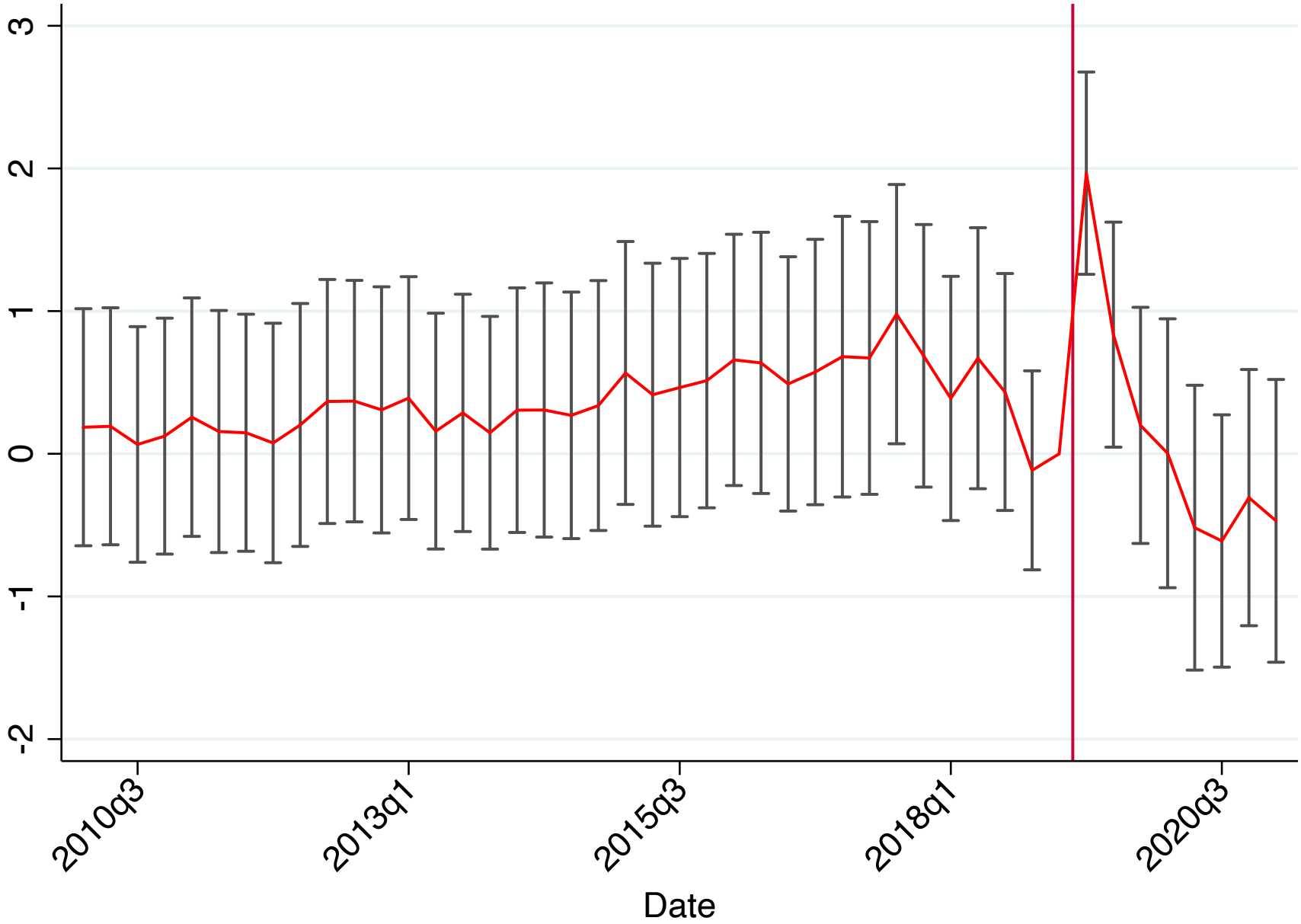
Obligatory COVID Acknowledgement

Deaths per million



Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data

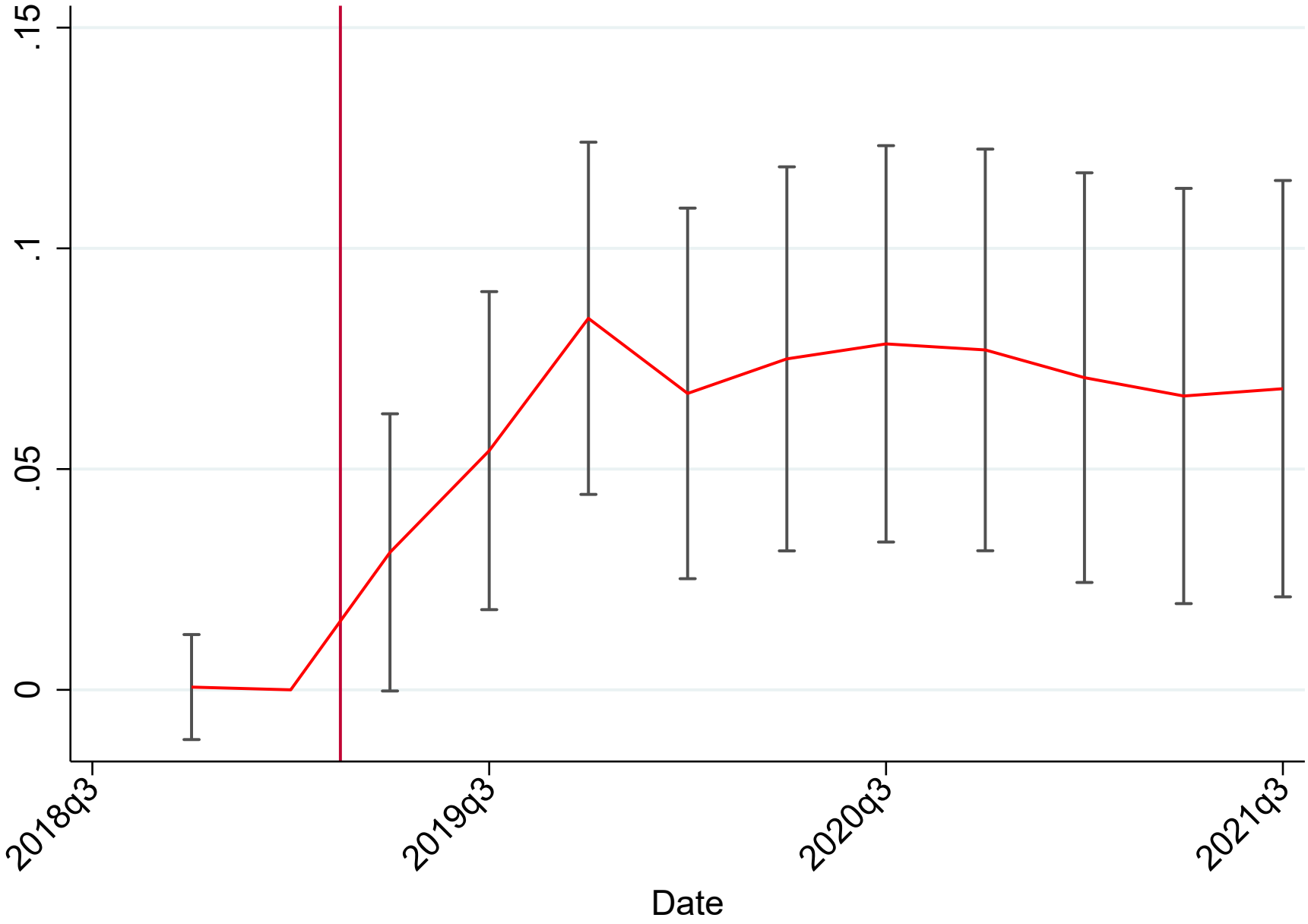
Writs



Recall: Child Welfare Data

- Key outcome is "Permanency" in a given quarter:
  - Returned home, living with kin outside the child protection system, or adopted
  - or turned 18 while living with family

Permanency

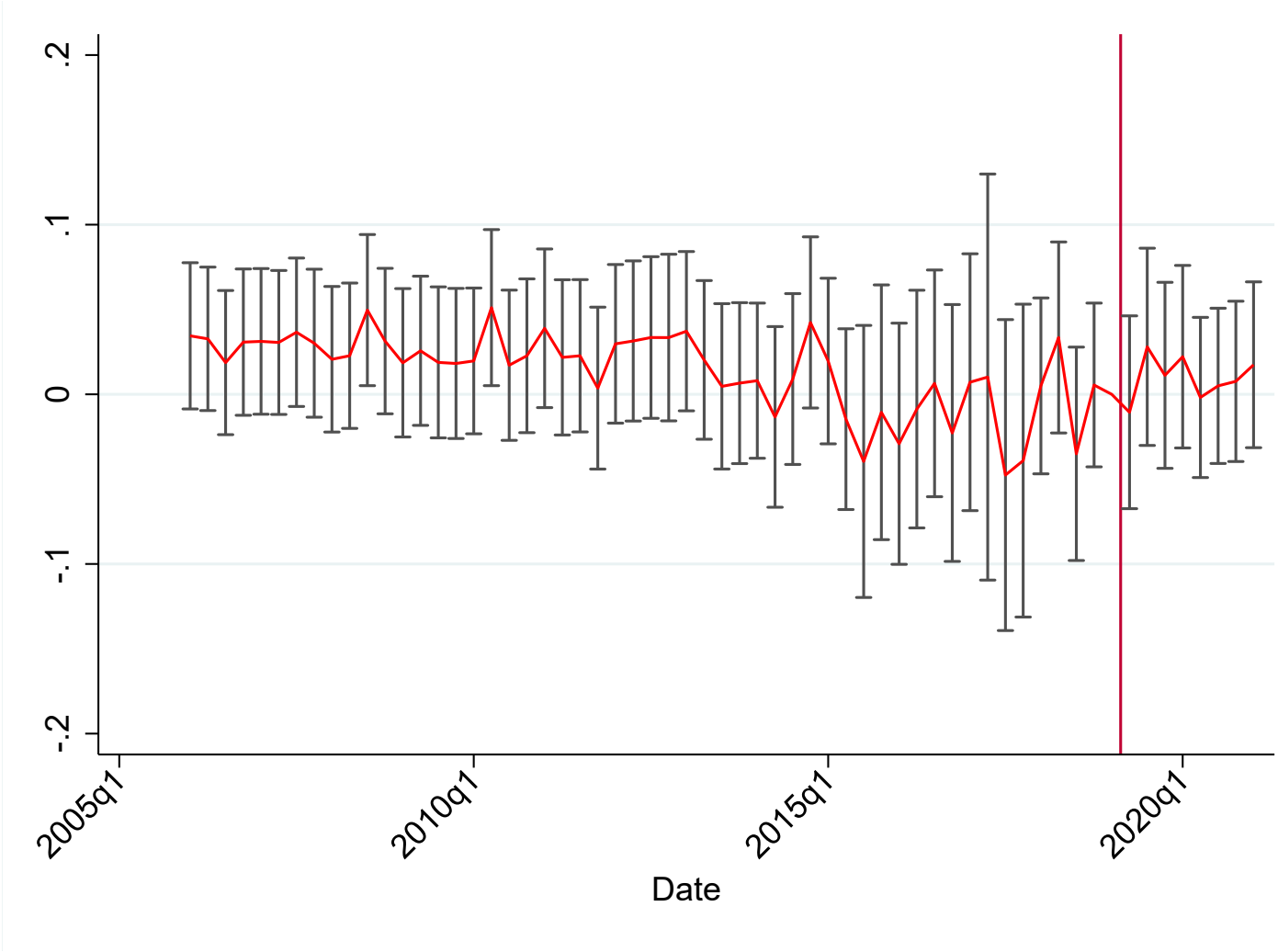


Permanency

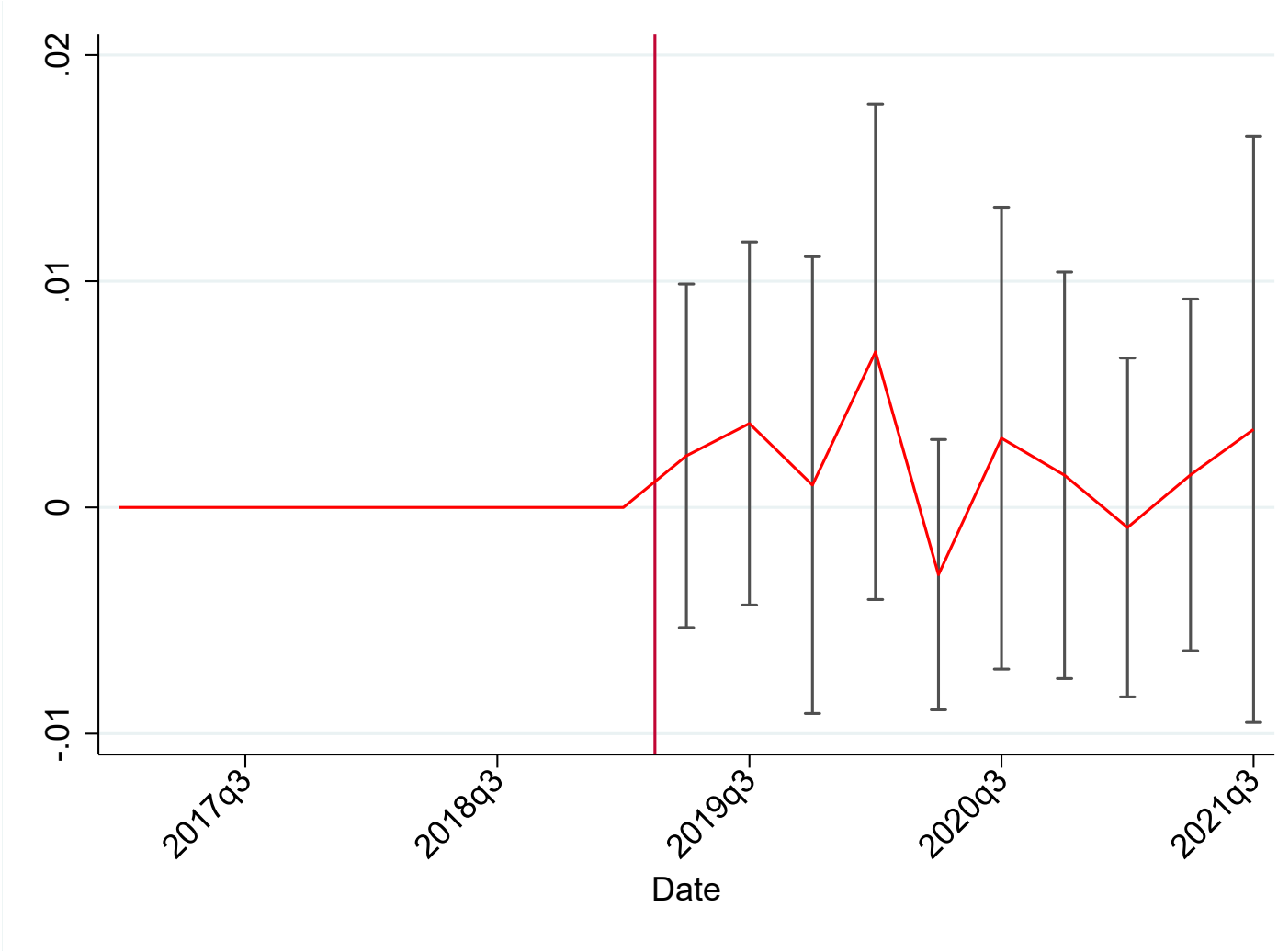
	(1) Dependent Variable: Ever Living w/ Family/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(2) Dependent Variable: Ever Living w/ Family/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT Controls.	(3) Dependent Variable: Ever Living w/ Family/Qtr. Females. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(4) Dependent Variable: Ever Living w/ Family/Qtr. Males. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(5) Dependent Variable: Ever Living in Residence/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(6) Dependent Variable: Ever Living in Residence/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT Controls.
Treatment x Post	0.066	0.067	0.045	0.089	-0.045	-0.045
	(0.019)***	(0.018)***	(0.025)*	(0.028)***	(0.024)*	(0.024)*
Treatment Group	-0.024	-0.023	0.003	-0.058	0.021	0.012
	(0.013)*	(0.012)*	(0.018)	(0.018)***	(0.021)	(0.013)
Post Randomization	0.214	0.193	0.246	0.173	-0.044	-0.044
	(0.011)***	(0.012)***	(0.015)***	(0.016)***	(0.014)***	(0.014)***
N	31,548	31,548	17,867	13,681	35,511	35,511
Control Group Mean	0.254	0.254	0.254	0.254	0.640	0.640

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

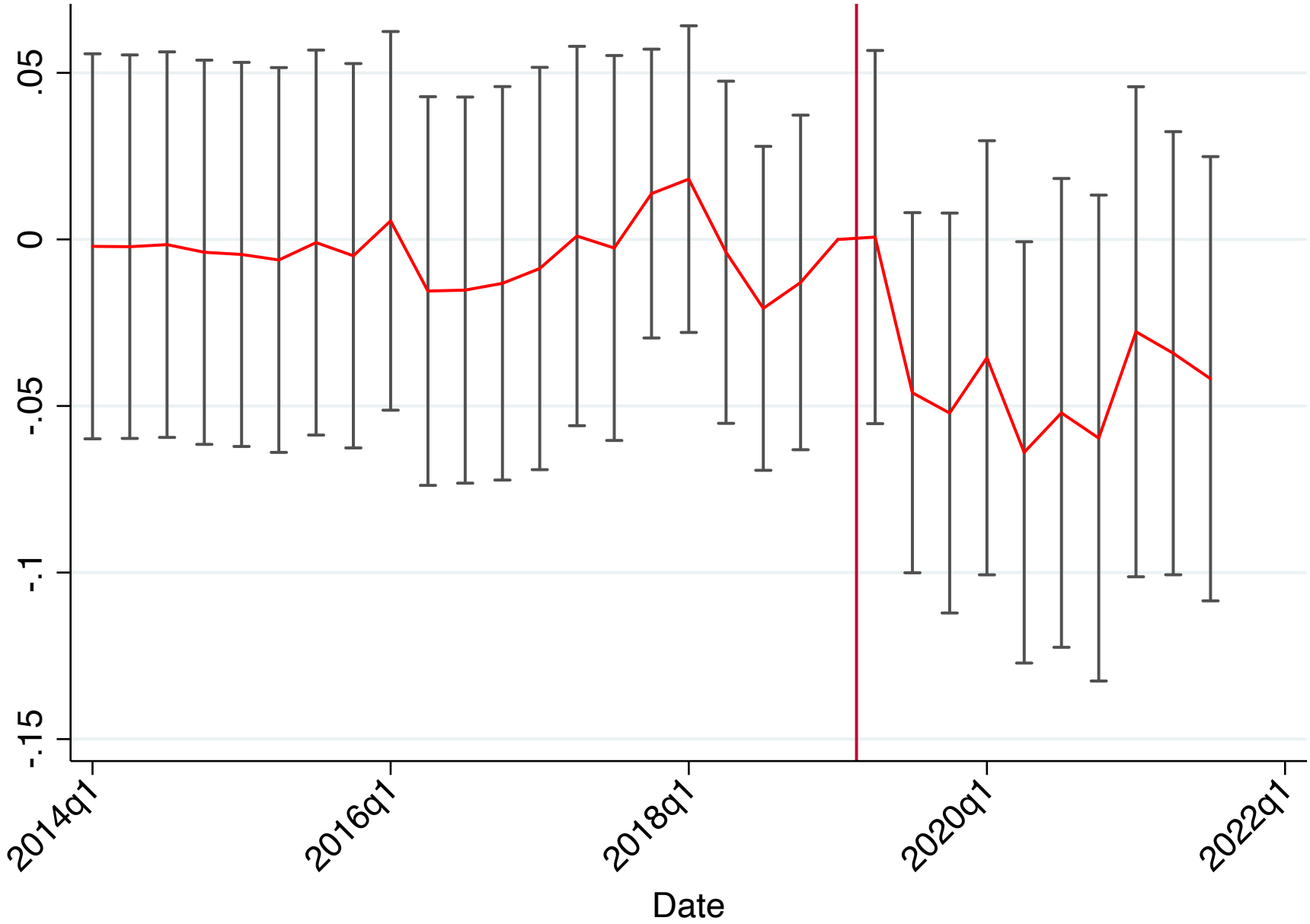
[New] Re-Entry? Child Protection Investigation



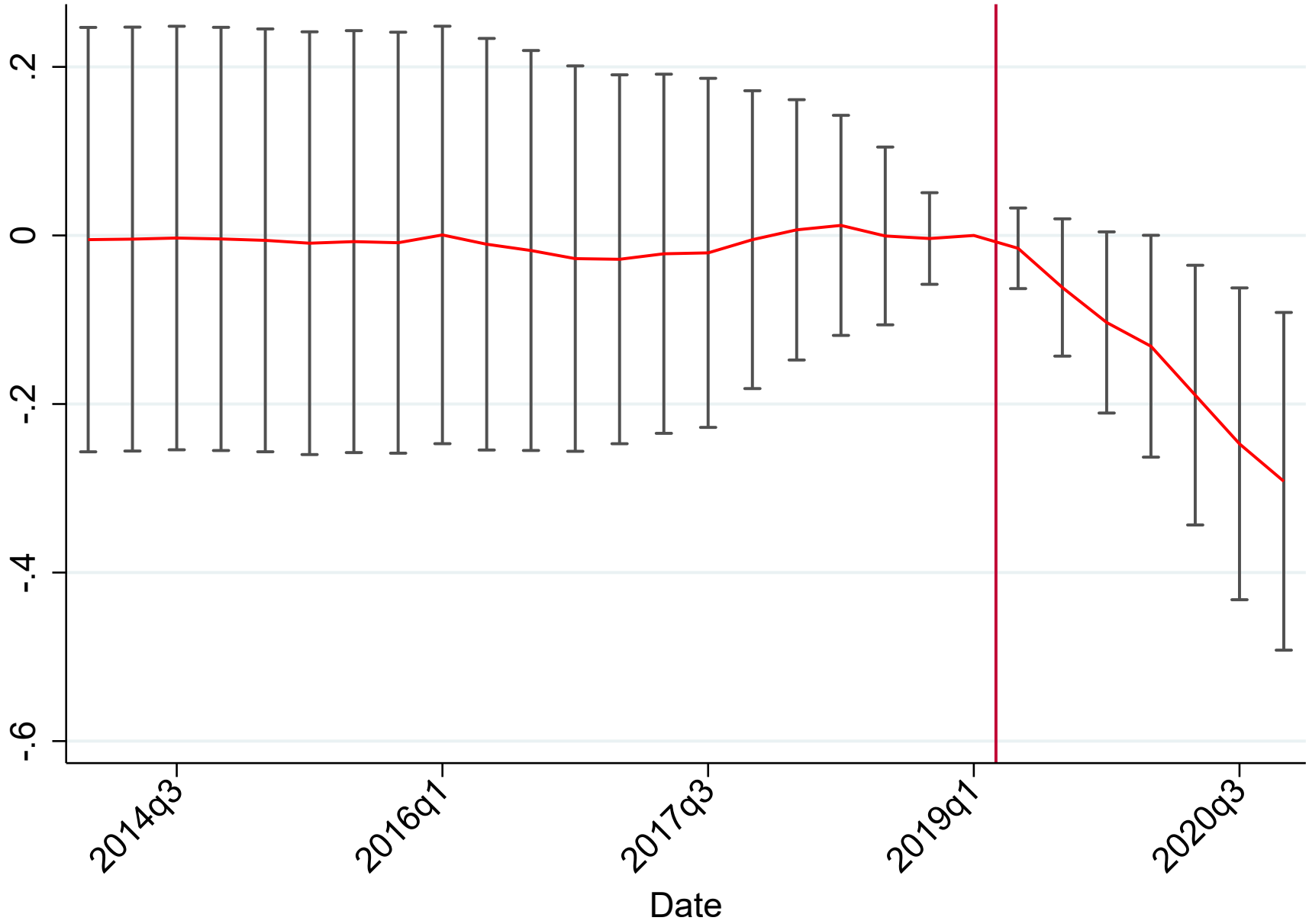
[New] Foster Care Re-Entry



Criminal Justice Involvement



Cumulative Criminal Justice Involvement



Criminal Justice Involvement

Table: Quarterly Crimes, by Sex

	(1) Dependent Variable: Crime Reports/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(2) Dependent Variable: Crime Reports/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT Controls.	(3) Dependent Variable: Crime Reports/Qtr. Females. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(4) Dependent Variable: Crime Reports/Qtr. Males. Model: Panel ITT No controls.
Treatment x Post	-0.032	-0.032	-0.010	-0.058
	(0.012)***	(0.012)***	(0.009)	(0.026)**
Treatment Group	0.010	0.012	0.025	-0.011
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.014)*	(0.018)
Post Randomization	0.089	0.089	0.043	0.149
	(0.009)***	(0.009)***	(0.006)***	(0.019)***
N	58,001	57,939	33,201	24,800
Control Group Mean	0.116	0.116	0.059	0.189

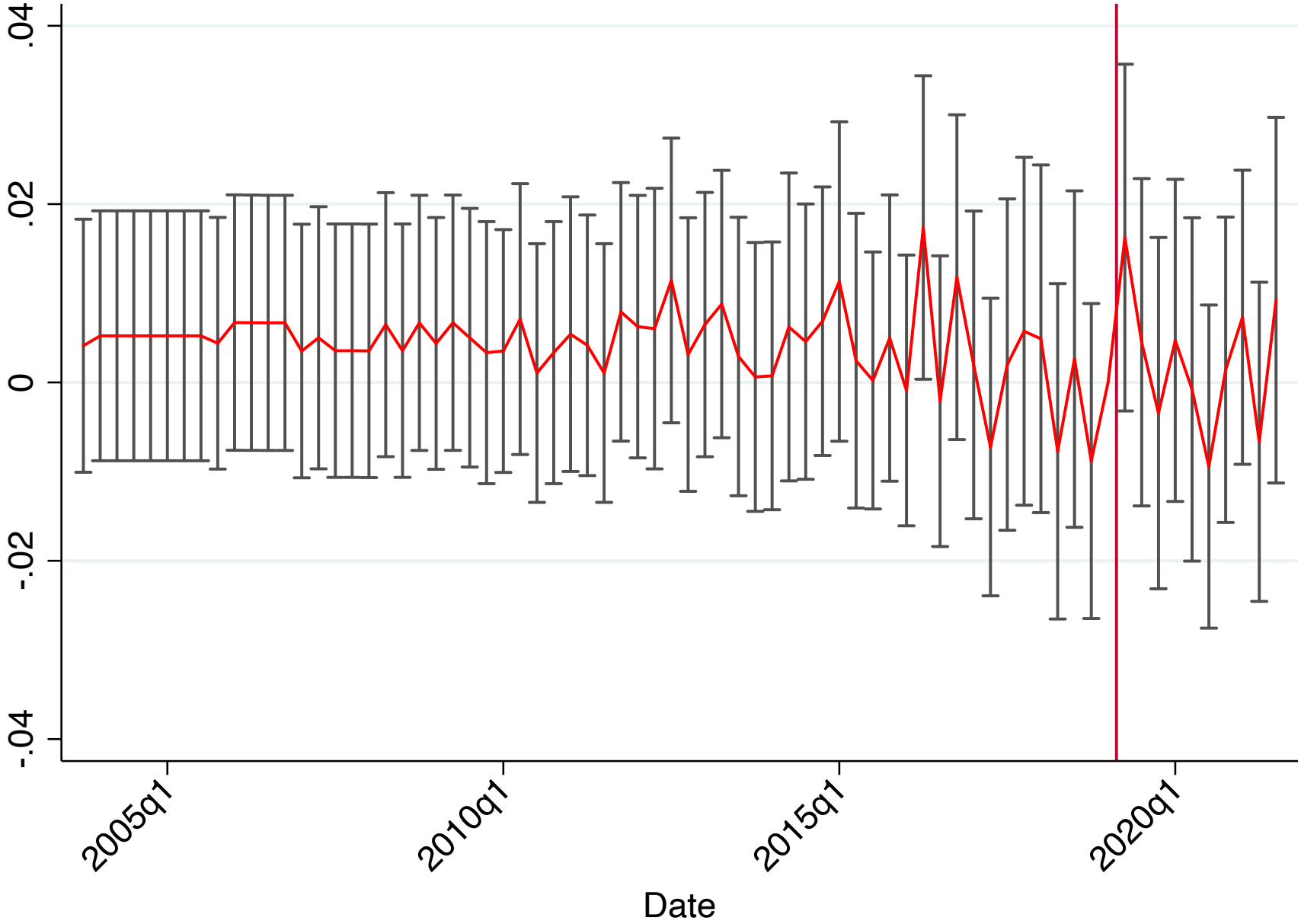
* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Crime Types

	(1) Dependent Variable: Property Crimes Reports/Qtr.: Model: Panel ITT Controls.	(2) Dependent Variable: Violent Crimes Reports/Qtr.: Model: Panel ITT Controls.	(3) Dependent Variable: Substance use. Crimes Reports/Qtr.: Model: Panel ITT Controls.
Treatment x Post	-0.011	-0.021	-0.001
	(0.004)***	(0.006)***	(0.001)**
Treatment Group	0.009	0.006	0.000
	(0.006)	(0.003)*	(0.000)
Post Randomization	0.015	0.049	0.002
	(0.003)***	(0.004)***	(0.000)***
N	57,939	57,939	57,939
Control Group Mean	0.023	0.061	0.003

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Reported Child Abuse



Missings (Presunta Desgracia) and Child Abuse

Table: Child Abuse

	(1) Dependent Variable: Times Missing/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(2) Dependent Variable: Times Missing/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT Controls.	(3) Dependent Variable: Child Abuses/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT No controls.	(4) Dependent Variable: Child Abuses/Qtr. Model: Panel ITT Controls.
Treatment x Post	-0.027	-0.027	-0.002	-0.002
	(0.015)*	(0.015)*	(0.002)	(0.002)
Treatment Group	0.001	0.002	-0.000	-0.000
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Post Randomization	0.116	0.116	0.012	0.012
	(0.011)***	(0.011)***	(0.002)***	(0.002)***
N	12,200,791	12,187,749	12,200,791	12,187,749
Control Group Mean	0.141	0.141	0.018	0.018

* $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Interpretation

- Participation in June 2019 is around 50% higher for the treatment group and then declines
- Substantial and sustained impacts on permanency and living in residences
- Substantial and sustained improvement in crime outcomes
- Suggestive evidence of improved school attendance
- No effect detected on grades (imprecise)

Cost-Benefit Analysis at 2 years

- ITT Costs over two years:
  - 148 more days receiving Mi Abogado services
  - MA average cost is $4.99 per day vs. $2.73 for non-MA

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  - 4.6 fewer days in public residences @ $67/day
  - 30.3 fewer days in private residences @ $28/day

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- ITT Costs over two years:
  - 148 more days receiving Mi Abogado services
  - MA average cost is $4.99 per day vs. $2.73 for non-MA
- ITT Savings over two years:
  - 4.6 fewer days in public residences @ $67/day
  - 30.3 fewer days in private residences @ $28/day
- Child protection costs fall as a result

Cost-Benefit Analysis at 2 years

Table 7: Cost Benefit Analysis

Program Costs	Dif	Mean T	Mean C	P-Value	Costs	DIF*Costs
MA	148.09	433.05	284.96	0.00	4.99	738.87
NoMA	-154.85	0.25	155.10	0.00	2.73	-422.54
Residence Costs	Dif	Mean T	Mean C	P-Value	Costs	DIF*Costs
Cread	-4.67	113.58	118.25	0.53	67.27	-314.21
Ocas	-30.37	279.79	310.15	0.07	28.35	-860.93

Preliminary Interpretation: Treatment Effect Dynamics

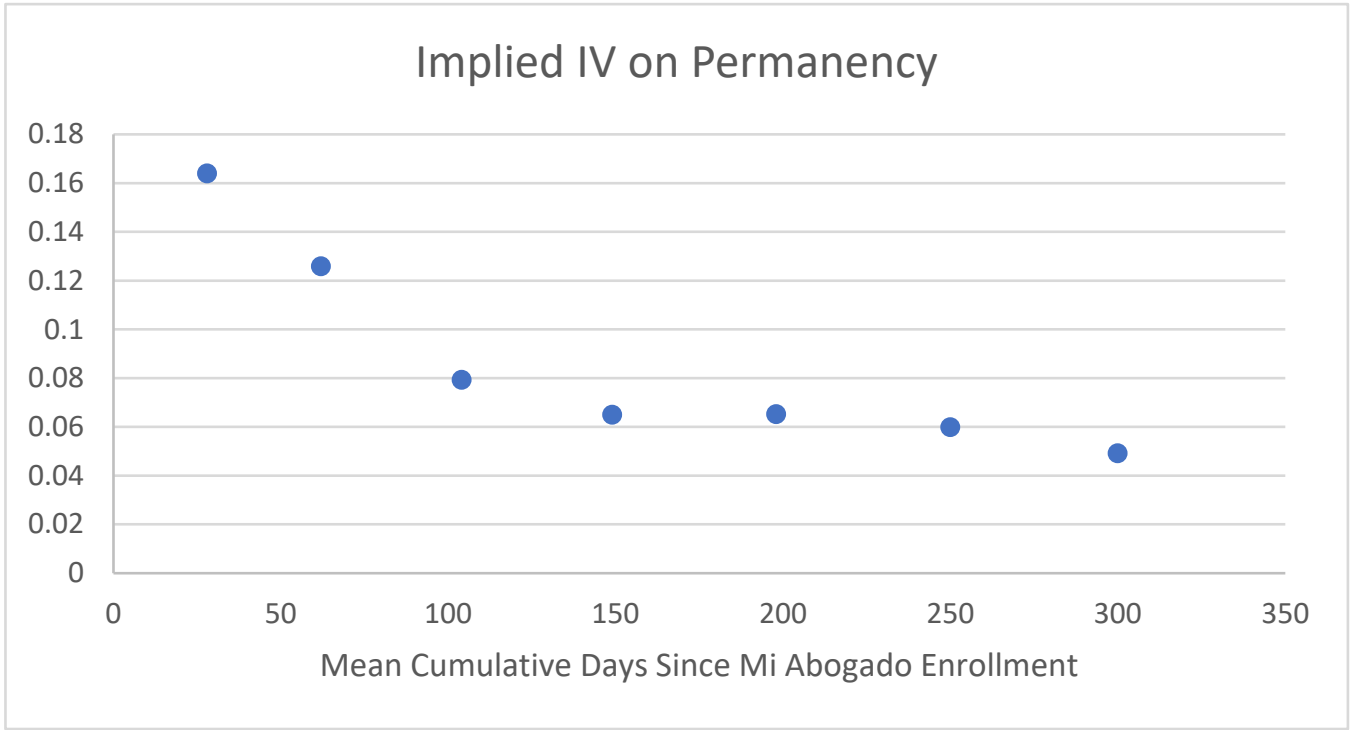
$$Y = f(\textit{Days since program enrollment}) \tag{3}$$

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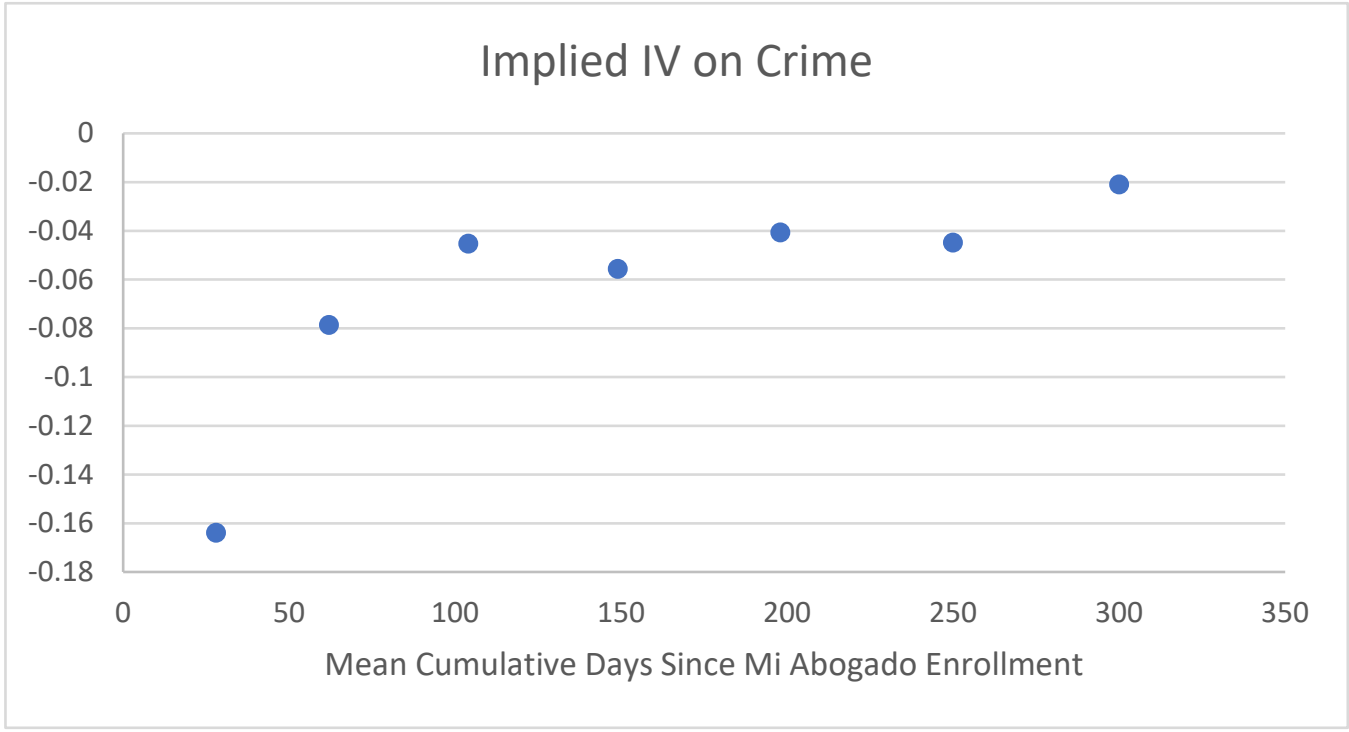
$$Y = f(\textit{Days since program enrollment}) \tag{3}$$

- By quarter: Difference in cumulative exposure
- By quarter: Difference in outcomes
- By quarter: Implied IV for different levels of exposure
- By quarter: Effects could vary over calendar time too...

Preliminary Interpretation: Treatment Effect Dynamics



Preliminary Interpretation: Treatment Effect Dynamics



Dynamics

Table: Cumulative (C) Participation and Outcomes

Quarter	Avg C Days Treat	Avg C Days Control	Avg C Days All	Event Study C Participation	Event Study Crimes	Event Study Living w. Family
2018q4	0.36	0.42	0.40	0.36	-0.01	0.00
2019q1	0.52	0.93	0.78	0.00	0.00	0.00
2019q2	4.54	4.49	4.51	0.46	0.00	0.03
2019q3	46.67	16.59	27.57	30.50	-0.05	0.05
2019q4	102.48	39.33	62.37	63.57	-0.05	0.08
2020q1	159.55	71.66	103.73	88.31	-0.04	0.07
2020q2	217.15	109.76	148.95	107.80	-0.06	0.07
2020q3	275.63	153.38	198.00	122.66	-0.05	0.08
2020q4	335.07	201.72	250.39	133.76	-0.06	0.08
2021q1	390.57	248.53	300.34	142.46	-0.03	0.07

Conclusion

- Mi Abogado sped the exit from institutions
- Suggests this population has significant barriers to use the judicial system even in a context where lawyers are formally assigned to cases
- Investing in legal aid and quality case management appears to improve child wellbeing

Going Forward

- More child protection outcomes (re-abuse, re-entry)
- More evidence on crime outcomes
  - Types of crime
  - Imprisonment (youth and adult)
- Mechanisms: Explore heterogeneity by Lawyer Quality or caseload
- Follow-on RCT for children in family foster care

Thank you!