

# **Framing Social Threats:**

## **Analyzing Topics and Sentiments**

### **in 30 Years of Swiss Media Coverage of Extremism**

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Venice Seminar, 19 November 2024

# Research Aims

To assess the “social construction of a social problem” (Benson and Saguy 2005) over time

- To analyze the coverage of extremism in Swiss media from 1994 to 2024, focusing on its prevalence, topics, and sentiments;
- To identify the influence of disruptive social events

—> The media sets limits on which definition of a problem prevails

# Arguments

- Different media frames govern the coverage of extremism over time
- Disruptive social events make some frames more salient
- Sentiments change over time in response to disruptive social events

# Definition of extremism

- Broad understanding of extremism
- Keyword search
  - Extremism
    - and variations thereof (such as extremist)
    - includes left-wing, right-wing and religious extremism
  - Radicalisation
    - and variations thereof (such as radicalized)
  - Terrorism
    - and variations thereof (such as terrorist, terror)
  - Political violence
    - includes religious violence

# Motivation & Research Questions

# Motivation

- So far research has extensively focused on the media coverage of
  - immigration (Erhard et al. 2022),
  - climate change (Ylä-Anttila et al. 2021) and
  - health (Best and Arseniev-Koehler 2023)
- The analysis of media coverage of extremism has mainly focused on selected events (Dooremalen and Uitermark 2021; Jenkins 2019) or specific forms of extremism (Bicer 2022; Bail 2012)
- Media framing of extremism has potentially wide-reaching consequences
  - in shaping public opinions (Freedman 2017)
  - and affecting individual behaviors (Makkonen et al. 2020)

# Focus on Switzerland

- Switzerland has not witnessed any major terrorist attack

Yet,

- the country has invested heavily in counter-radicalization strategies to pre-empt potential threats, both domestic and international
- Extremist groups have been active in Switzerland
- Switzerland has a rich and extensive media landscape
- Switzerland has a large immigrant population

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- How salient were these frames? What drives the salience of the frames?



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- How do the sentiments relate to the frames?

(3) How are frames and sentiments affected by disruptive social events (terrorist attacks, policy initiatives)?

# Key Mechanisms

# Framing

(adapted from Kelling and Monroe 2023; Helbling 2014; Kriesi et al.2012)

Identity- realted	Moral- universal values	Utilitarian				Leisure
IDENTITY	MORALITY	SECURITY	POLITICS	LEGALITY	ECONOMICS	LEISURE

- Based on the typology of Habermas (1993) of identity, moral-universal and utilitarian arguments
- Leisure is central to understanding wider debates about identity, postmodernity and globalization (Spracklen 2011)

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IDENTITY	MORALITY	SECURITY	POLITICS	LEGALITY	ECONOMICS	LEISURE
national identity, traditions, Islamisation, religion, racism, antisemitism	fairness and equality, human rights, moral politics, misinformation, freedom of press	terrorism, crime and violence, political stability, civil wars, political coups	internal and external politics, political parties, political demonstrations	laws and regulations, national action plans, legal processes	poverty, economic growth, labour market, financial center	literature, movies, art, soccer and other sports

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# Synchronization and opinion clustering

- Synchronization
  - media outlets, regardless of their political orientation, might simultaneously amplify similar concerns and sentiments (Adam et al. 2019)
- Opinion clustering
  - after stressor events a reassessment leads to the formation of opinion clusters, creating distinct groupings within the broader society (Helbing 2012).
  - out-group hostility increases after stressor events (Czymara and Gorodzeisky 2024)

# Data & Methods

# Data corpus

## 1. Swissdox

- provides access to most Swiss print and online news outlets
- collection through Swissdox API

## 2. Criteria for inclusion

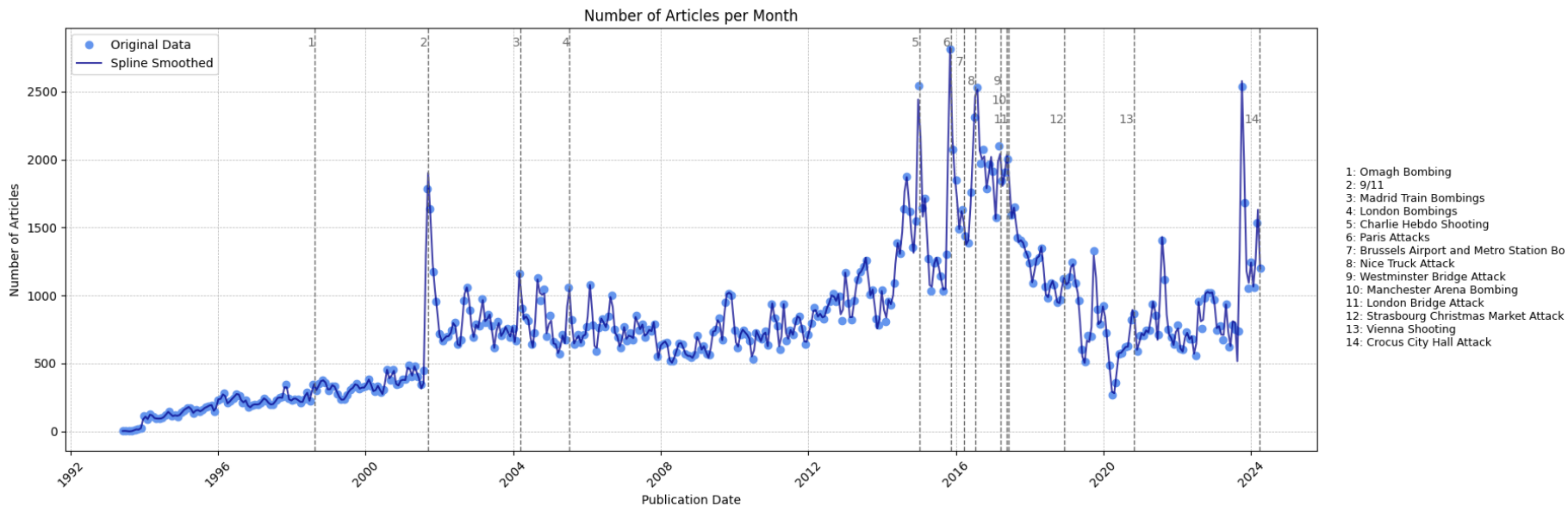
- high-quality media with a large circulation (in German language)
- print and online versions of the newspapers and magazines as well as newssites
- broad political spectrum

## 3. Result

- 15 newspapers (print and online) across the political spectrum
- key words search yields to 286,660 valid articles (after pre-processing) between January 1994 and September 2024



# Number of Articles per Month (1994-2024)



# Topic Modelling and Sentiment Analysis

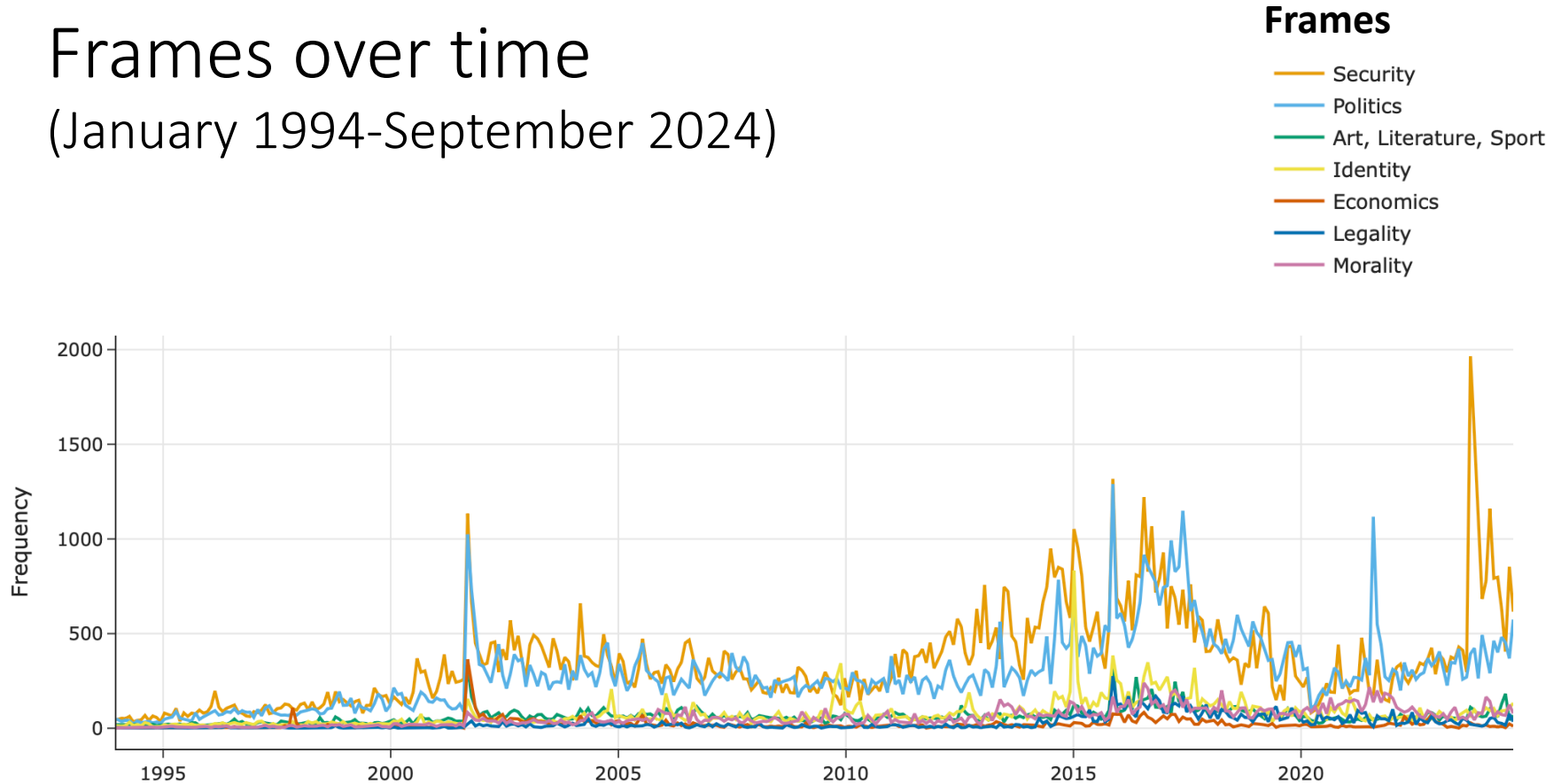
- Topic model
  - BERTopic (Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers), combines contextual understanding of language and applies semantic similarity between word vectors (Grootendorst 2022)
  - requires a post hoc operations to connect model output to meaningful sociological concepts
- Sentiment analysis
  - Bert-base multilingual sentiment model determines the emotional tone behind a text
  - human annotation of a random sample to validate the findings
  - Compare with lexicon of words models (SentiWS, GermanVADER)

# Findings

Descriptives

# Frames over time

(January 1994-September 2024)

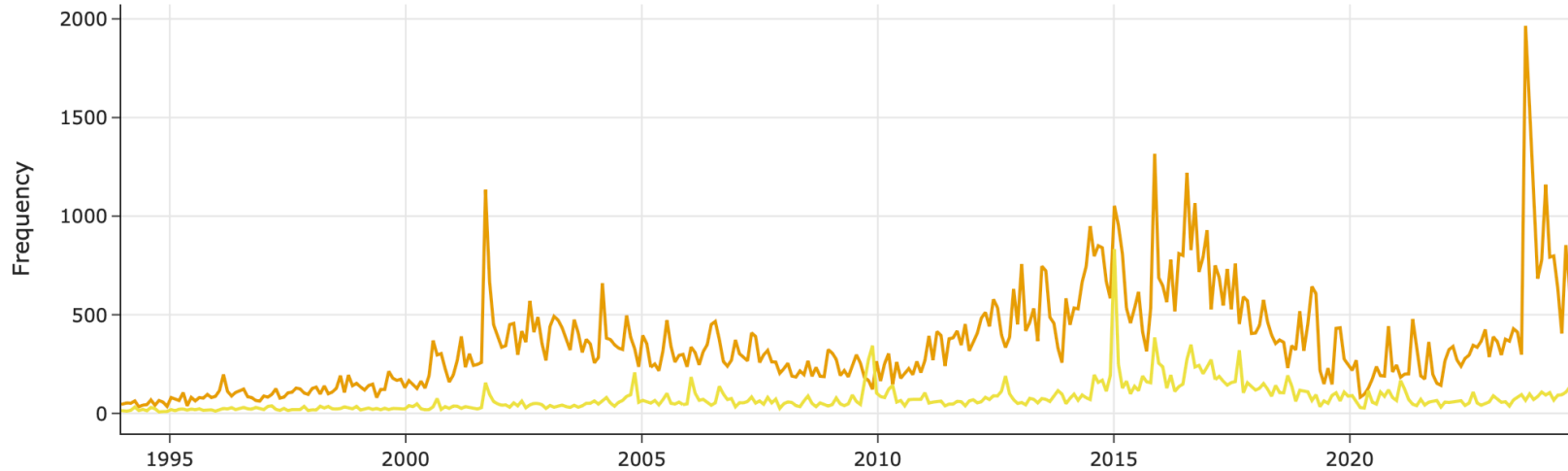


# Frames over time

(January 1994-September 2024)

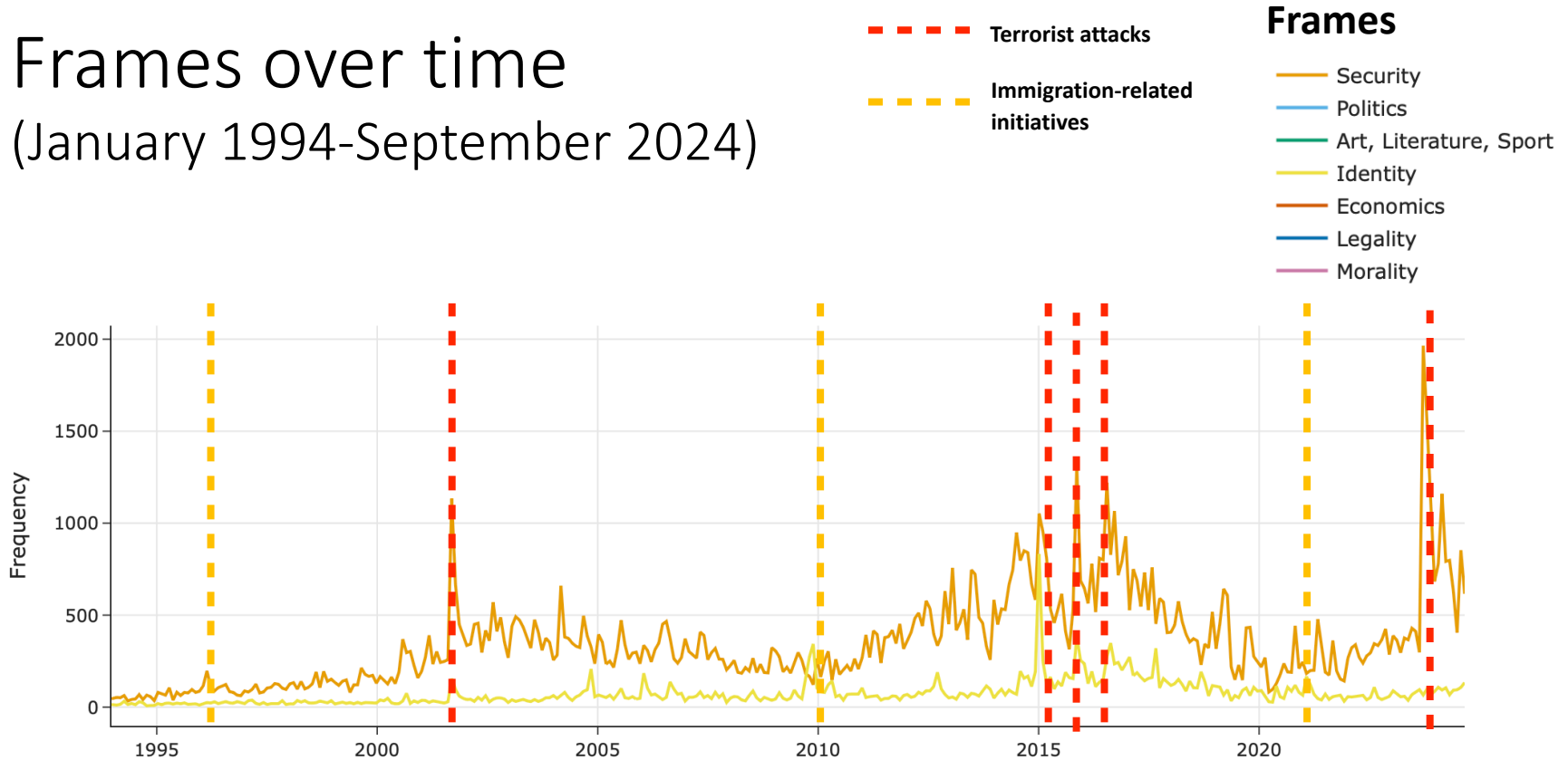
## Frames

- Security
- Politics
- Art, Literature, Sport
- Identity
- Economics
- Legality
- Morality



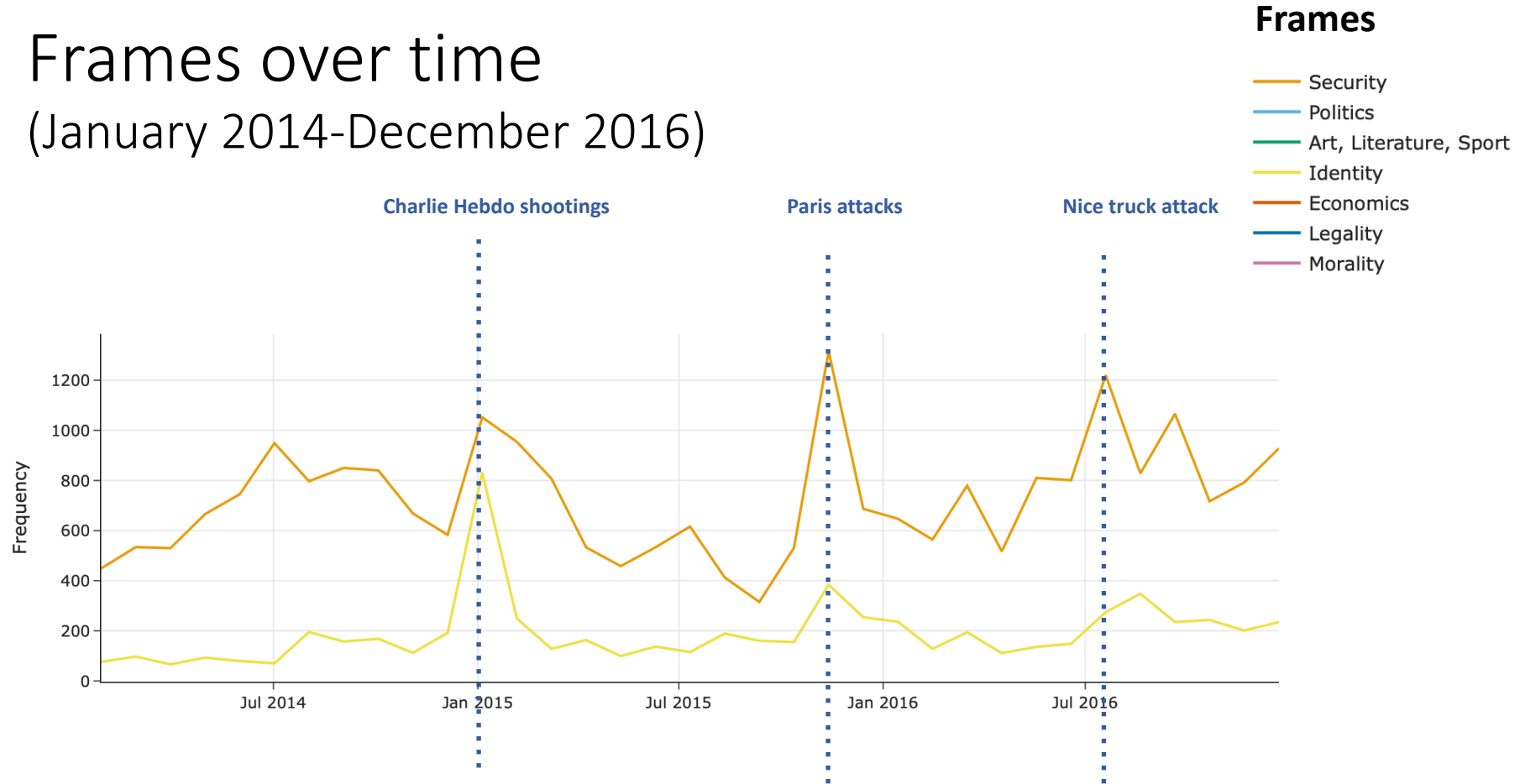
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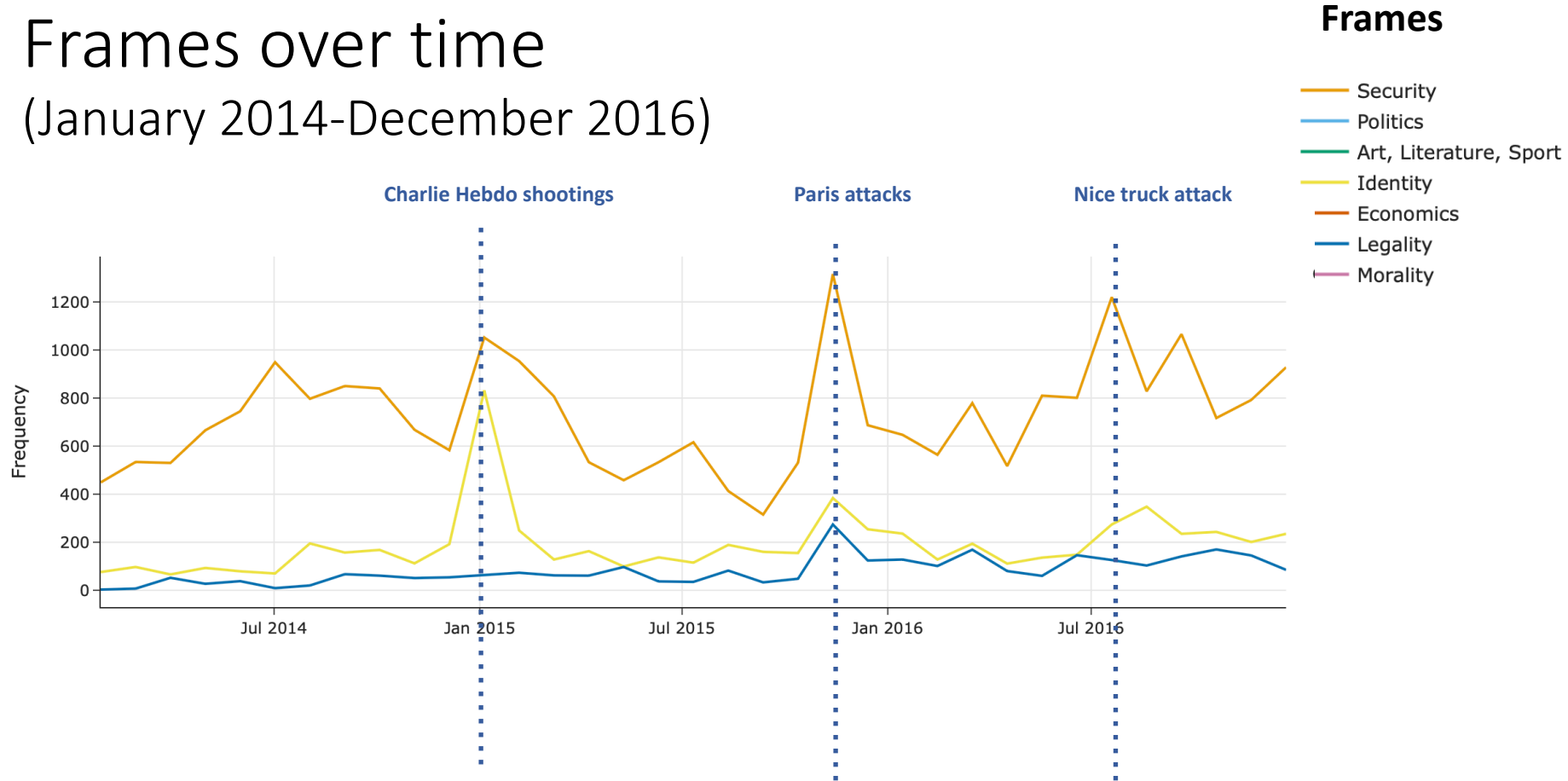
# Frames over time

(January 2014-December 2016)



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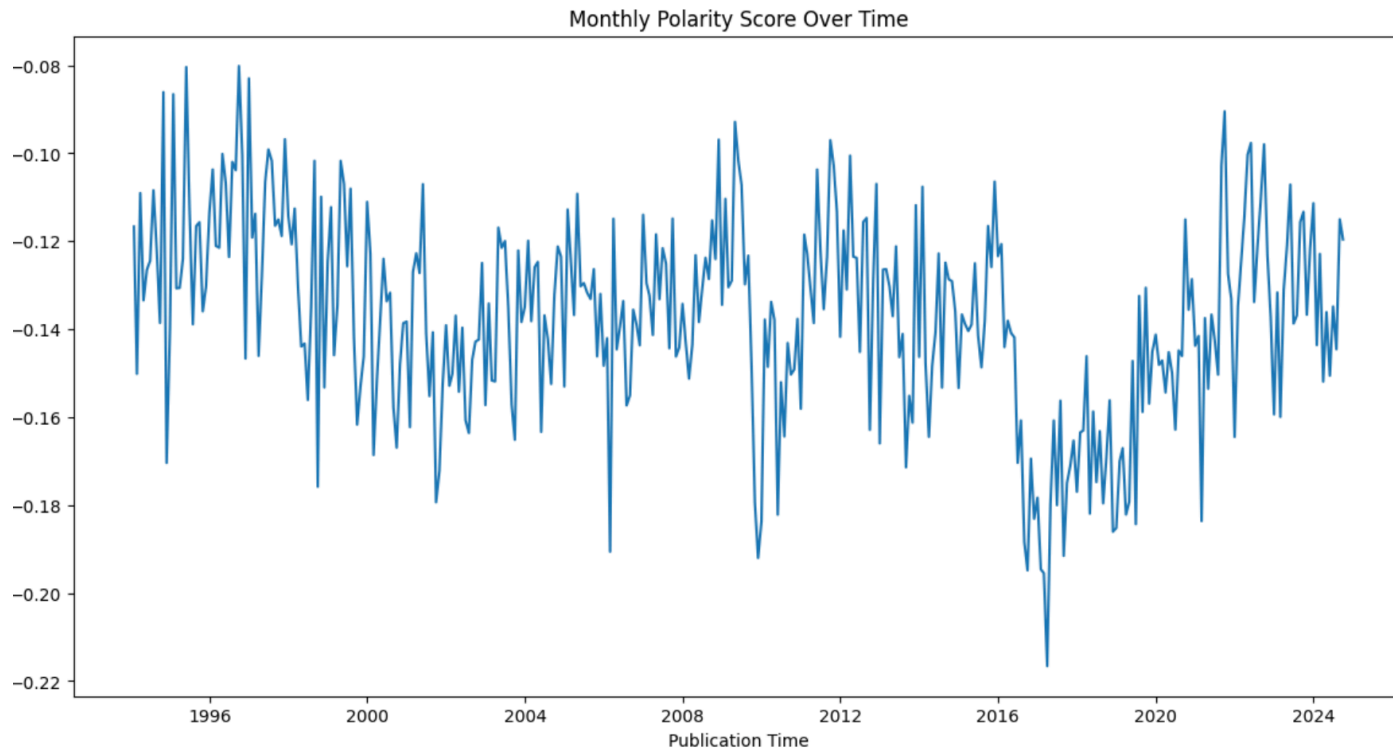




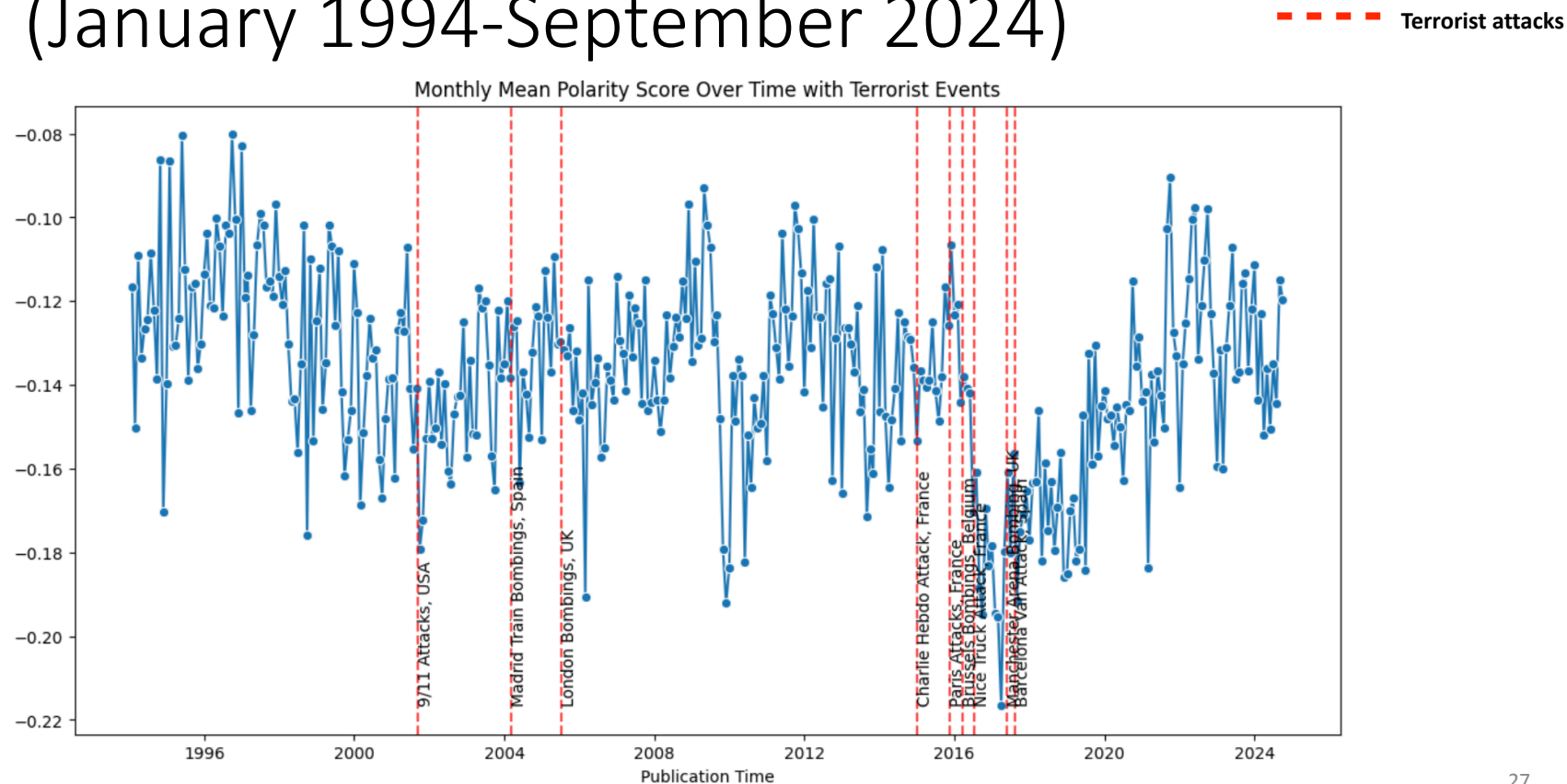
# Example of Association of Topics to Frames

Identity-related	Moral-universal values	Utilitarian				Leisure
IDENTITY	MORALITY	SECURITY	POLITICS	LEGALITY	ECONOMICS	LEISURE
Pegida	Verlust der Pressefreiheit in der Türkei	Russisch-Ukrainischer Krieg	War on terror	Terrorgesetz	Tourismus	Netflix
Koranverbrennung in Schweden	Menschenrechtsverletzungen in der Türkei	Bataclan Terror Attacke	Italienische Politik rund um die Mafia	Prozess gegen den Dschihadisten von Bümpliz	BIP prognosen	Buch von Perter Sloterdijk
Burkaverbot in Nizza	Moralität von Tierversuchen	Oklahoma City Bombing	Wahlen in der Schweiz	Angklage gegen Trump	Ölpreis	Walter Laqueur Krieg dem Westen
Genozid in Rwanda	Propaganda, Falschinformationen	Foreign Fighters aus der Schweiz	Nato Allianz	Festnahme Durow Pawel	Hungersnot, Entwicklungshilfe	Andreas Thiel, Arosa Humorfeival

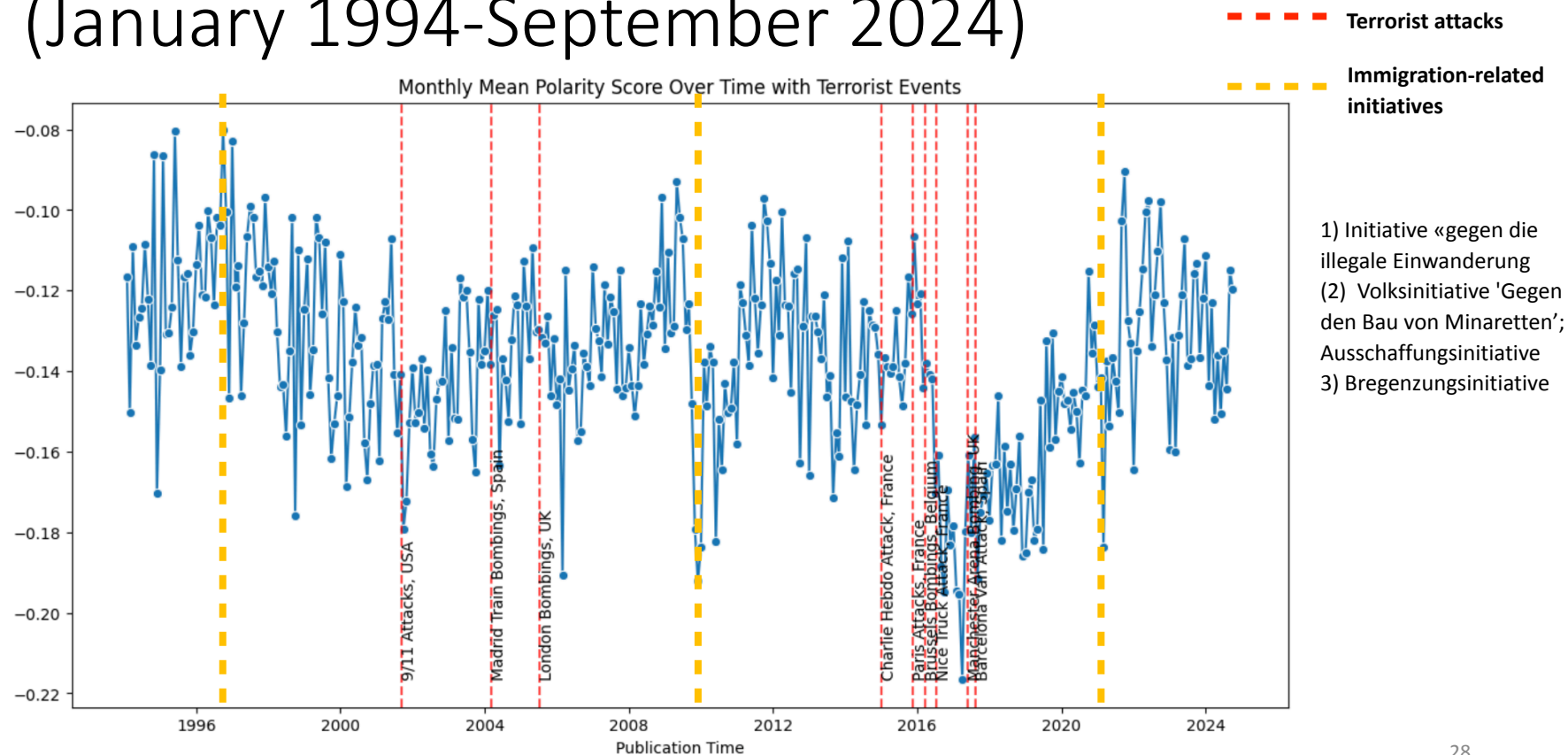
# Sentiments over time (January 1994-September 2024)



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# Sentiments over time (January 1994-September 2024)



# Outlook

# Conclusions: topics

- Media frames of extremism coverage center on utilitarian, identity-related, and moral-universal frames (Kelling & Monroe 2023; Helbling 2014; Kriesi et al. 2012)
  - Security and politics frames are especially salient
  - Economic issues seems to be the least prominent
  - Legal issues are also under-represented, but becoming more important
- Identity frames seem to be sensitive to terrorist attacks and immigration-related policy initiatives

# Conclusions: sentiments

- Sentiments seem to be sensitive to terrorist attacks and immigration-related policy initiatives
- Sentiments in the coverage of extremism over time vary little between newspapers of different political leaning (see also Hurtado 2019)
- Online versions of newspapers show more variability in sentiments than print versions

# Thank You

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