

The Impact of Equal Parenting Time Laws after Divorce on Intimate Partner Violence: Evidence from Spain

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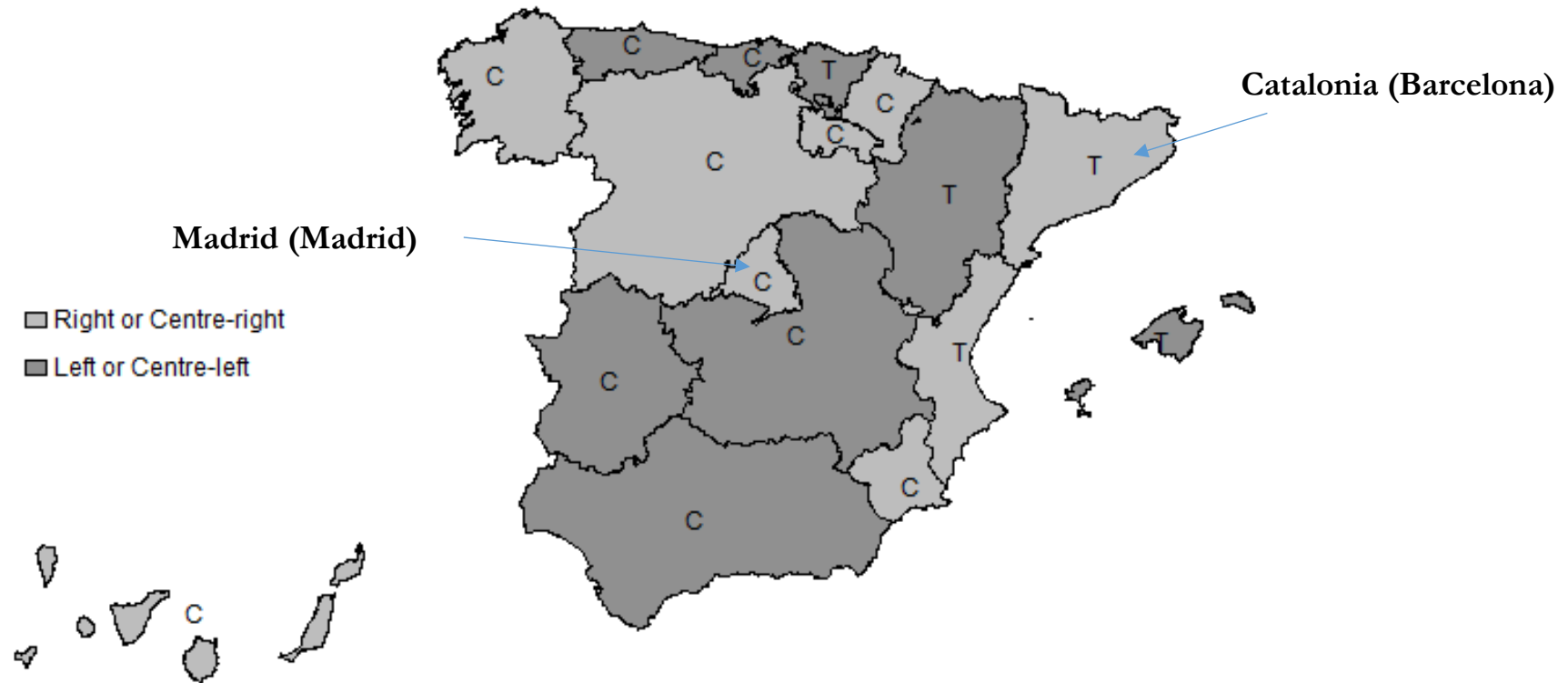
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Spain pro EPT laws

- **EPT = Joint Physical Custody** (equal time with children post-divorce), different from **Joint Legal Custody** (shared decision-making, e.g., schooling).
- In Spain, **joint legal custody was already the norm**, allowing for a clean test of **EPT reforms**.
- **Spanish Law 15/2005** made EPT possible but only:
 - With mutual parental agreement
 - If the General Attorney issued a favorable report
 - In practice, this gave **veto power** to one parent (typically the mother) – EPT <10%
- **Five regions** (Aragón, Catalunya, Valencia, Basque Country, Balears) passed **own EPT laws** between 2009–2011, overriding national rules due to their distinct civil codes.
 - **17 regions total**: 5 reform vs. 12 non-reform, with reforms **staggered over time**—ideal for causal identification.
- These reforms **increased fathers' bargaining power** by shifting custody decisions from unilateral maternal control to joint determination.

Reform regions at both sides of the political spectrum

Political party the year of reform (2010 for non-reform regions)



How do we identify the effects (**event-study DiDiD**)

- **Approach:** Compare changes in IPV rates before and after joint custody laws:
 - Between **women with and without children**
 - In **regions that passed the law** vs. those that didn't
- **Treatment group:** Women in stable relationships (married or cohabiting) **with children** in the 5 reform regions
- **Control group:** Similar women **without children**
- **Key assumption:** In the absence of the law, trends in IPV differences between mothers and non-mothers would have been **similar across all regions**

Data

- Three datasets
 - **Survey on Violence Against Women** (waves 1999, 2002, 2006, 2011, 2015) – 27,757 obs. Couples together at least 5 years (“surprised by the reforms” – no selection into marriage) – 6% respond *sometimes/often* to at least 1 question
 - **Data on all female homicides** (Government Office of Gender Based Violence): by current partner versus former partner (2006-2016).
 - **Reports by victims and decisions by specialized courts.** 2007-2014. Statistics from the Spanish Judiciary . All cases reported, withdrawn by the victim, court rulings.
 - Analyses across the 3 datasets tell a consistent story

Survey on Violence against Women (27,757 women surveyed): Questions

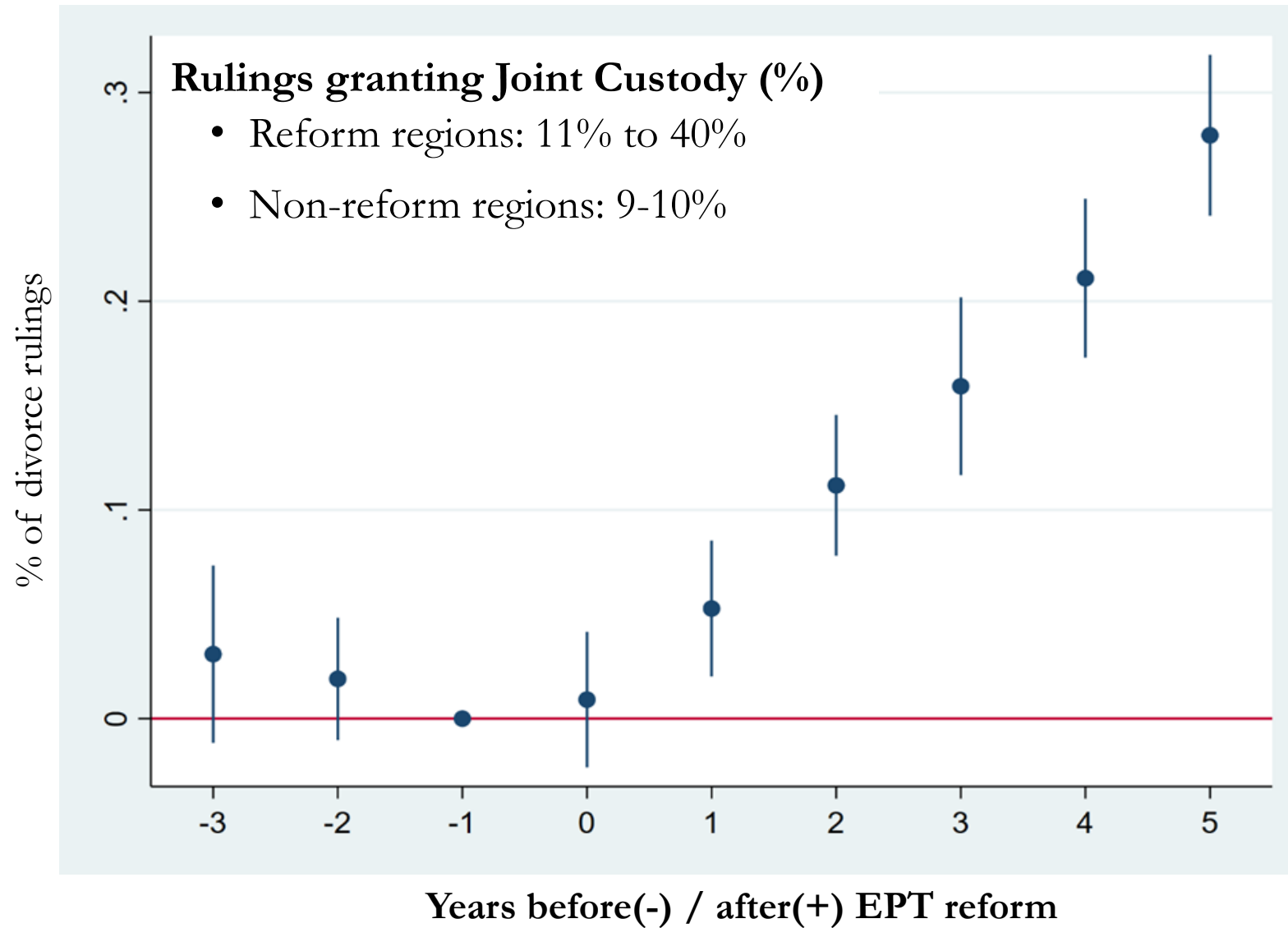
Physical	"He has threatened you to do physical harm"
	"Has he scared or intimidated you on purpose (for example shouting and breaking things, looking at you in a certain way)?"
	"Has he slapped you or thrown something that could hurt you?"
	"Has he pushed you, grabbed or pulled your hair?"
Sexual	"Has he forced you to have sex with him when you did not want to?"
	"Have you had sex without wanting to because you were afraid of what might happen to you?"
	"He has forced you to perform some other sexual practice that you did not want?"
	"Has he tried to force you to have sex against your will?"
Psychological-control	"Try / tried to prevent you from seeing your family in the last 12 months"
	"He insulted you and made you feel bad"
	"He refuses / refused to give you enough money for the household expenses"
	"Expects / expected for you to ask for permission before going on your own to certain sites such as a hospital or health center, a cultural or sports center, etc."

Theoretical predictions

- **Separation is a high-risk period** for intimate partner violence (IPV); femicide often follows earlier abuse (NIJ, 2005; Campbell et al., 2003, 2007).
- **EPT laws can reduce or increase IPV:**
 - May **reduce** IPV if fathers feel more custody rights—less male backlash.
 - May **increase** IPV if women fear losing custody—less bargaining power.
- **Mixed evidence:** Women's empowerment can raise IPV in traditional settings (Angelucci & Heath, 2020; Heath, 2014).
- **Spain** combines a developed economy with **traditional family dynamics** (UD, 2005).

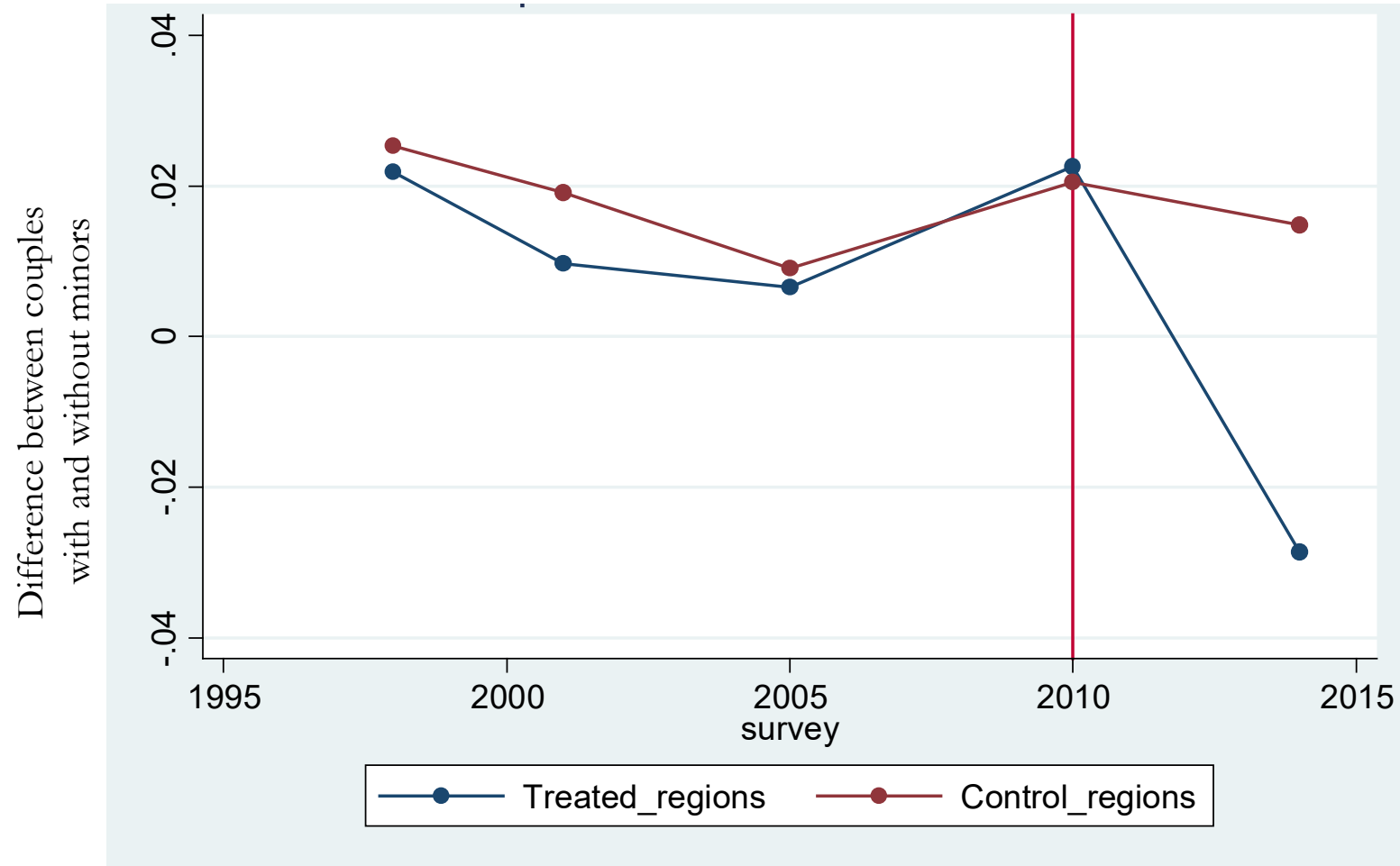
Findings

1st - EPT increased fourfold in treated regions in just 5 years

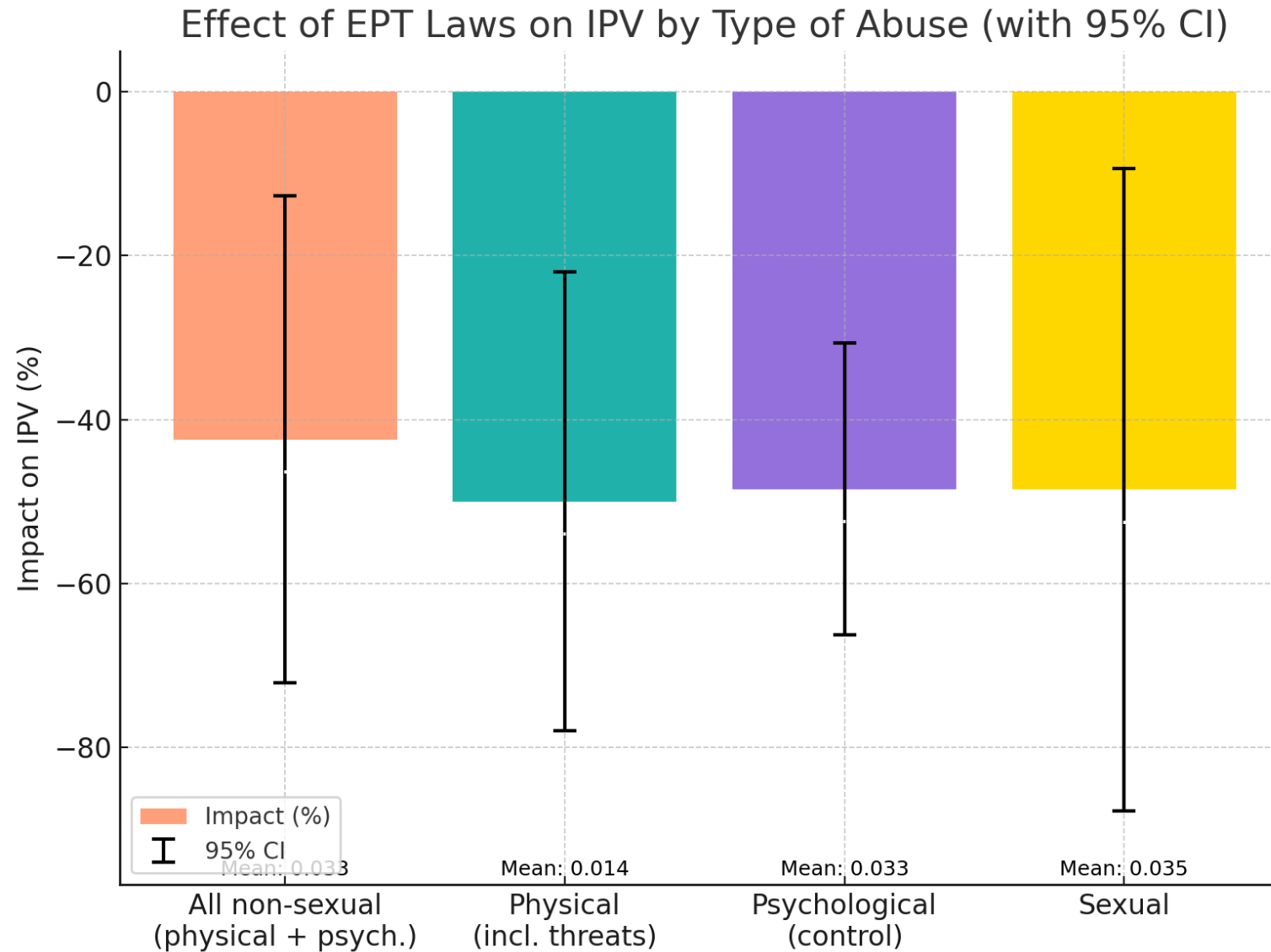


2nd - IPV fell 40% in treated regions post reform

Non-extreme Violence (Minors/non-Minors)
Treated *versus* Control Regions



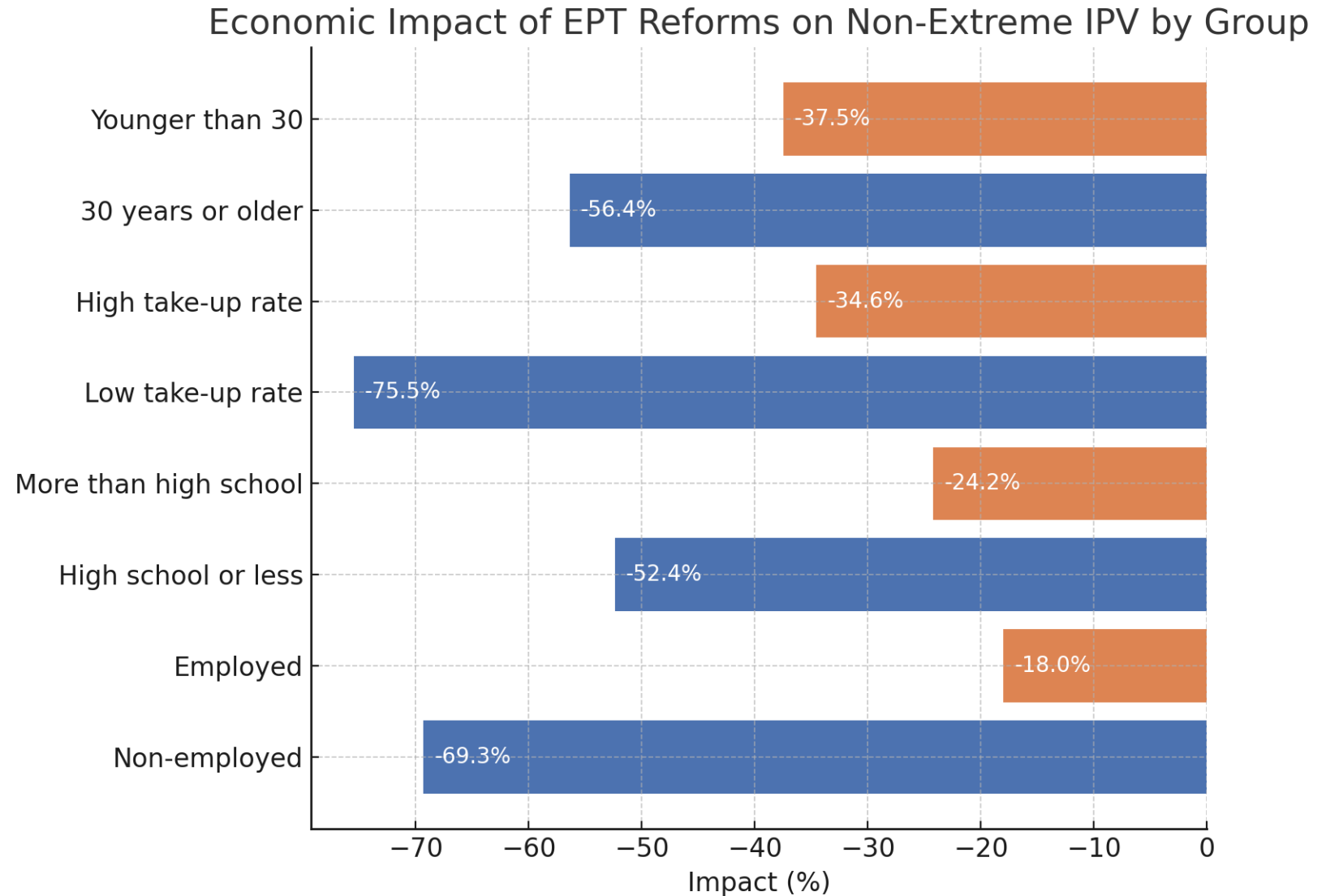
3rd – EPT lowered all types of abuse



4th – Validation exercise: results larger for the expected groups

Effects are **larger** for groups
of women **more likely to
divorce** and **more likely to
request sole custody** before
reforms:

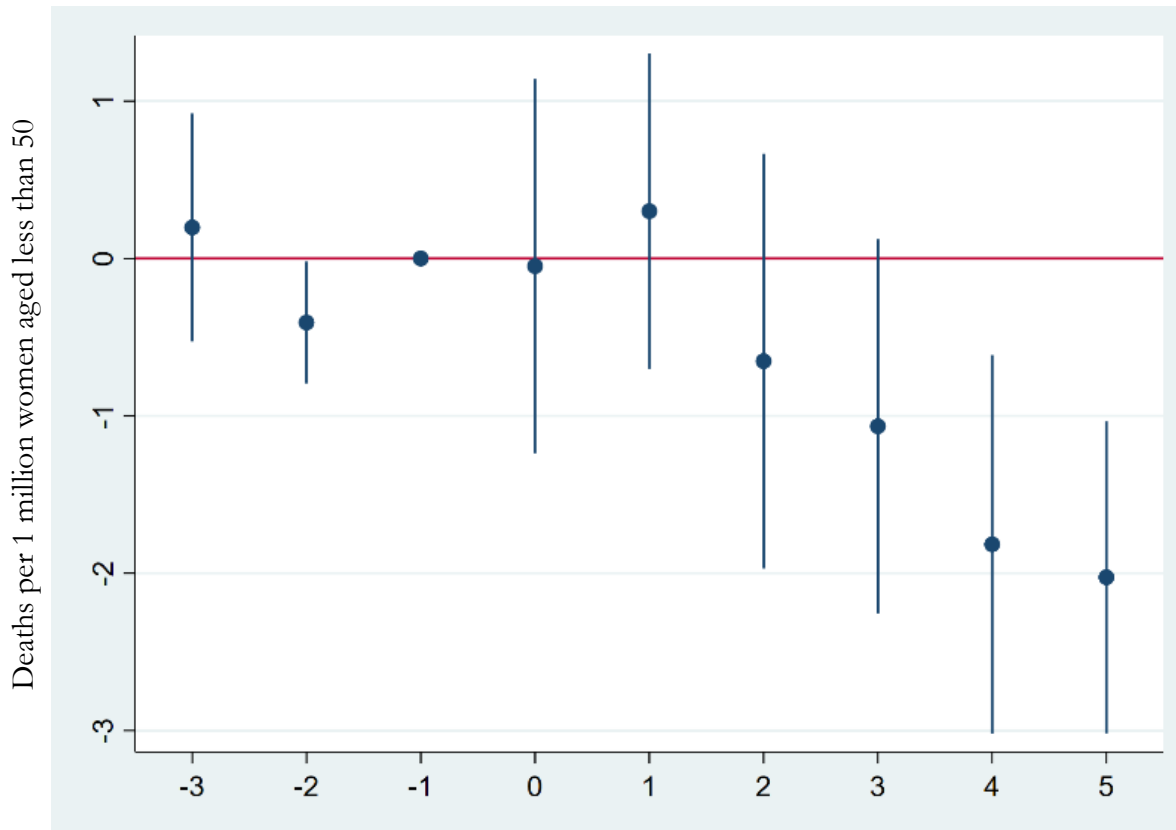
*older / less-educated / non-
employed / residing in provinces
with low EPT take-up rates*



5th - 8% reduction of the number of female homicides committed by current partners (not by previous partner).

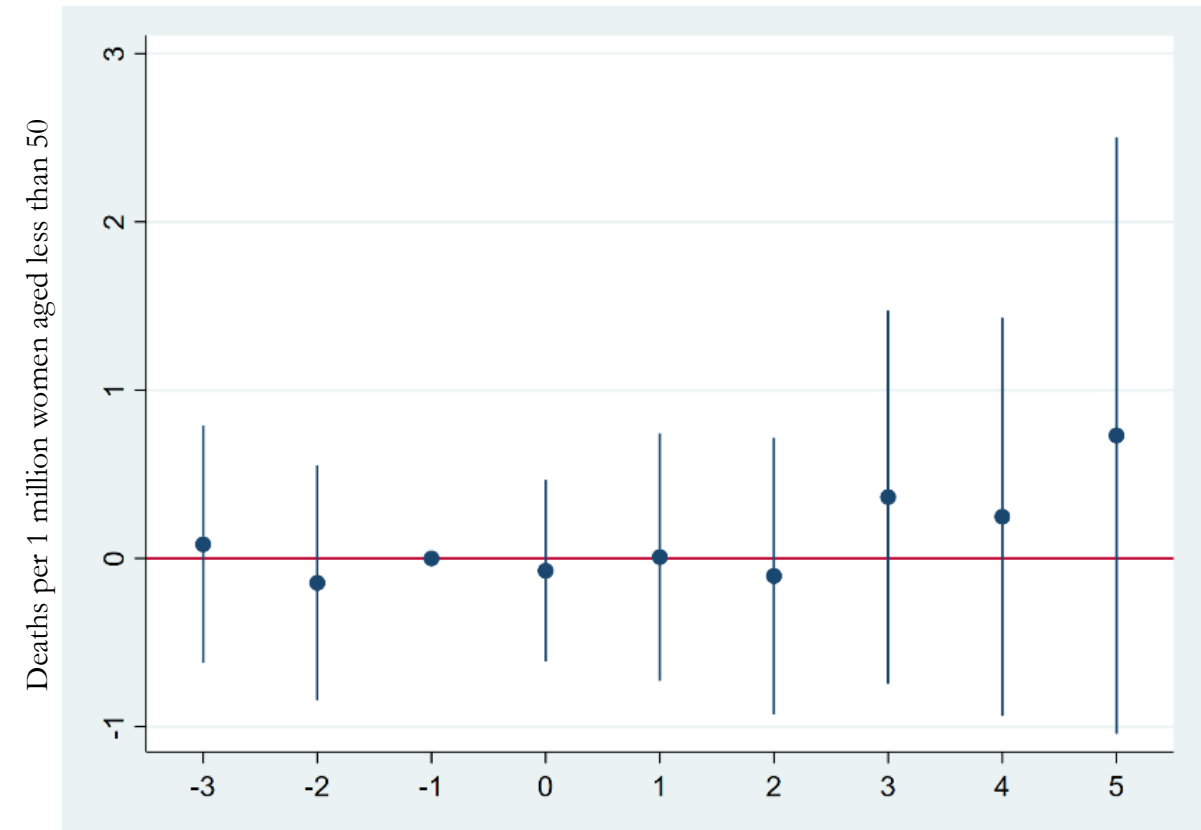
Extreme Violence: Female Homicides by Intimate Partners

Panel A. Committed by the current partner



Years before(-)/after (+) EPT reform

Panel B. Committed by the ex-partner

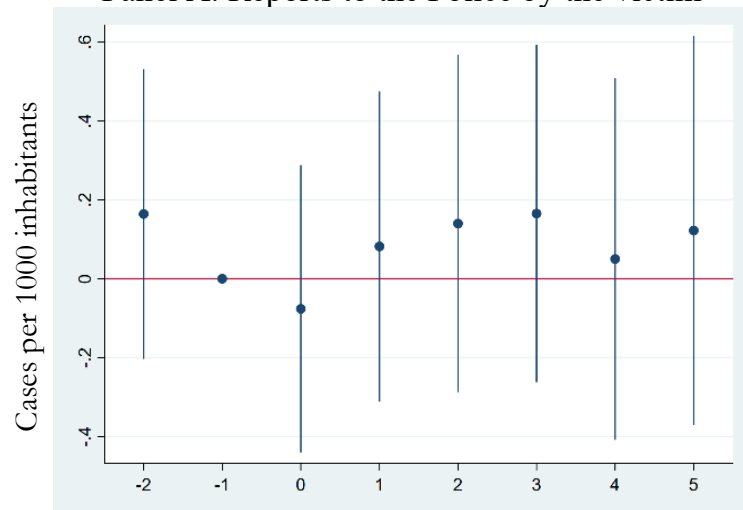


Years before(-)/after (+) EPT reform

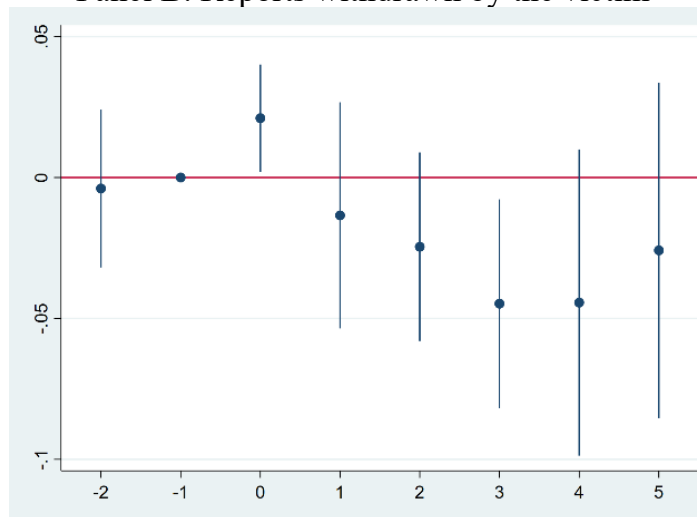
EPT decreases homicides by current but not ex-partner

- Suggests **reduction** in IPV is **explained** by (less) *male backlash* effect, not the non-IPV condition:
 - **Non-IPV condition** applies to **previous partner** as well.
 - Use of IPV as threat not to leave (*male backlash*) applies to **current partner** only.

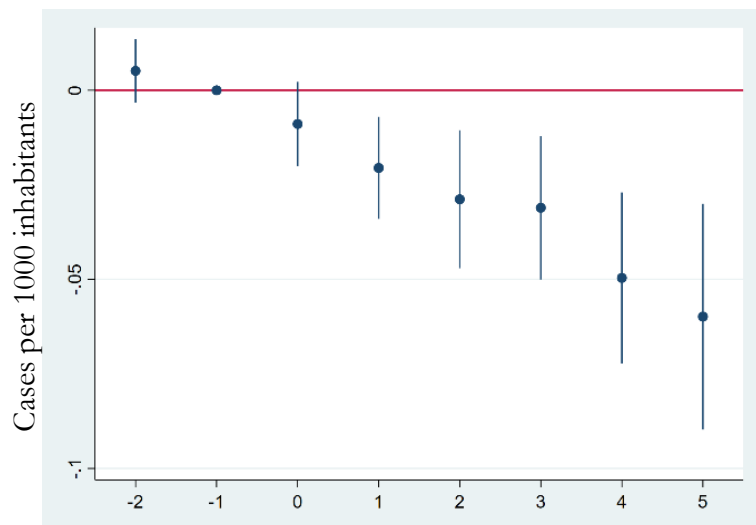
Panel A. Reports to the Police by the victim



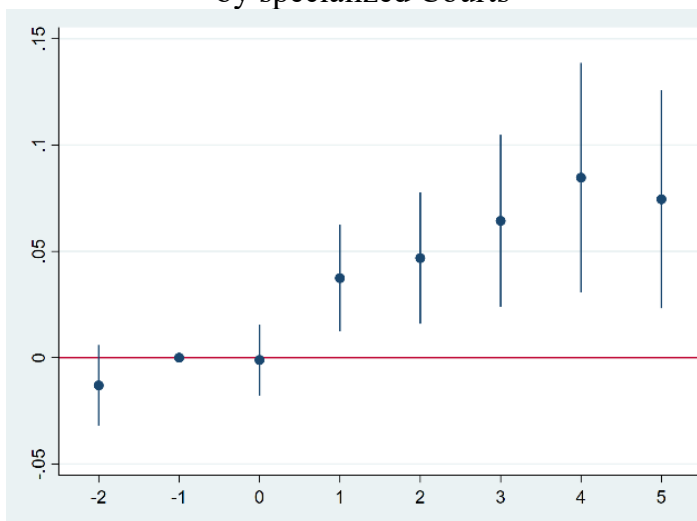
Panel B. Reports withdrawn by the victim



Panel C. Guilty verdicts by specialized Courts



Panel D. Cases dismissed or with non-guilty verdict by specialized Courts



**6th – Evidence
suggestive of
strategic use of
courts**

Alleged **victims withdraw fewer cases** (-5%), but those end up being **dismissed** by courts or with a **non-guilty verdict** with a **higher probability** (23%) – strategic behavior / non-violence condition

Conclusions

- **Joint custody laws** shifted custody from a maternal default to a joint decision → **4x increase in joint custody**
- **IPV fell by over 40%, female homicides by 8%**
- Results align with **male backlash theory**: EPT may reduce violence by giving fathers more perceived control
- Strongest effects for couples likely to divorce and where mothers previously sought sole custody
- **Court and police data** suggest some mothers used IPV claims strategically to retain sole custody
- Echoes broader evidence linking **male economic decline to increased IPV** (e.g., Alonso-Borrego & Carrasco, 2017; Tur-Prats, 2019; Arenas-Arroyo et al., 2021)

Thank you!

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