

Online Appendix

Authoritarian Media and Diversionary Threats

Ala' Alrababa'h

Lisa Blaydes*

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*Ala' Alrababa'h is a Ph.D. candidate in political science at Stanford University. Lisa Blaydes is Professor of Political Science at Stanford University and Senior Fellow at the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

Appendix A: Topic Labels

Topic Label	Highest Proabbility Terms	Expected Proportion
Diplomacy	relation, visit, state, delegation, meeting, foreign	0.05
Conspiracies & Plots	people, resistance, Zionist, enemy, conspiracy, interference	0.05
Russia	Russia(n), Moscow, united, Foreign, Lavrov	0.04
Announcements	first, public, SANA, yesterday, <i>thawrah</i> , Damascus	0.04
Isis	terrorism, organization, Syria, ISIS, state, armed	0.04
Ba'th Party	nation (<i>watan</i> ; <i>qawm</i>), party, Arab, leadership, people, Ba'th	0.04
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, president, nation, enemy	0.03
Israel & Palestine	Israel, Palestine, occupation, strip (Gaza), Jerusalem, settler	0.03
United States	America, United, States, president, Washington, military	0.03
Bureaucracy	council, project, work, public, manage, minister	0.03
Regional Politics	state, Arab, Israel, peace, decision, conference	0.03
National Unity	nation, Syria, martyrs, army, sons, people, land, victory	0.03
Economy	economy, Syria, sector, trade, invest, tourism	0.03
Speeches	said, politics, states, should, change, discuss, people	0.03
Foreign Fighters	Newspaper, British, Tunisian, French, intelligence	0.03
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, kill, America, injure, city	0.03
Fighting Terrorism	terror, source, army, armed, organization, destruction, kill	0.03
Temperature	[regions in Syria], degree, temperature, increase, averages, high, low	0.02
Assad	president, mister, Assad, Bashar, Arab, Syria	0.02
Finance	money, public, firm, Lira, bank, dollar	0.02
Iran	Iran, state, region, Islam, Tehran, nuclear	0.02
Gulf	Saudi, Egypt, Qatar, regime, gulf, opposition, kingdom	0.02
Victims	aid, humanitarian, crisis, support, hungry, camp	0.02
Culture & Sports	culture, Syria, world, exhibition, modern, sport	0.02
Religion	religion, Islam, Patriarch, peace, Christian, Muslim	0.02
Media	media, ask, truth, channel, report, events, news	0.02
Europe	Europe, union, France, nations, Germany, nuclear	0.02
Natural Resources	oil, water, project, electricity, station, gas	0.02
Capitulation	Aleppo, city, people, army, terrorism, reconciliation, Homs	0.02
Education	university, education, student, study, higher, public	0.02
Terrorist Attacks	armed, group, terrorist, elements, fire	0.02
Turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, party, government, regime, development	0.02
Accident	bombing, crime, children, civilian, assault	0.02
Election Winners	[winners' names], regional, doctor, MP, council, committee	0.02
Elections	election, constitution, people, presidency, council, candidate	0.01
Legislation	article, law, decree, ruling, number, court	0.01
Yemen	Yemen, enemy, Saudi, army, raid, bombing	0.01
Weather	[regions in Syria], agriculture, reach, rain, season	0.01
Transport	Jordan, sea, fly, border, transport, airport	0.01
Communication	add, call, say, information, electronic, details	0.01

Table 1: Topic labels, highest probability terms for each topic, and their expected proportion

Appendix B: Change in topics around the revolution

We use the following regressions to demonstrate the change in means in topic prevalence for selected topics following the Syrian uprising.

Table 2: Decline of Historically Common Topics in *Al-Thawra*

	Israel & Palestine (1)	Assad (2)	Diplomacy (3)	Bureaucracy (4)
Uprisings (March 15, 2011)	-0.035*** (0.001)	-0.028*** (0.001)	-0.049*** (0.001)	-0.018*** (0.001)
Intercept	0.054*** (0.001)	0.041*** (0.001)	0.074*** (0.001)	0.041*** (0.001)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3: Rise of New Topics in *Al-Thawra*

	Conspiracies & Plots (1)	National Unity (2)	Terrorist Attacks (3)	Fighting Terrorism (4)
Uprisings (March 15, 2011)	0.050*** (0.001)	0.031*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.001)	0.043*** (0.001)
Intercept	0.012*** (0.001)	0.013*** (0.001)	0.010*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4: Changing Focus on International Actors in *Al-Thawra*

	Iran (1)	Russia (2)	Gulf (3)	Turkey (4)
<i>Uprising</i> (March 15, 2011)	0.007*** (0.001)	0.056*** (0.001)	0.030*** (0.001)	0.017*** (0.001)
Intercept	0.021*** (0.001)	0.010*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.008*** (0.001)

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Appendix C: Arabic Text and Topic Model Details

Darwish and Magdy (2013) identify several challenges when conducting text analysis with Arabic. These challenges relate to the Orthography and Morphology of the language, the use of dialects, text decorations, abbreviations, switching languages, and the use of “Arabizi” (in which Arabic in words are written using Latin letters).

Since the newspaper articles are written in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), many of these challenges do not apply in this case. Specifically, text decorations, abbreviations, the switching of languages, or the use of “Arabizi” apply when using social media data but not MSA. And even though some words used in the local dialect (Levantine in this case) may occasionally make it to the newspaper, this should not be a major concern because all the articles are from a Syrian source. So we would not expect different ways of writing a word (that come from several dialects) to make it into the newspaper.

Orthographic and Morphologic challenges are more relevant in this case. Specifically, Darwish and Magdy discuss the use of diacritics (markings that appear above/below letters to alter pronunciation), kashidas (elongations of characters) and ligatures (encoding multiple characters as single ones), and spelling mistakes or spelling variations. The news media rarely uses diacritics, and the R library that we use to process the texts (`arabicStemR` (Nielsen 2017)) removes diacritics and kashidas. Further, as the letter alef is the one that has the largest number of variations (and is most often spelled with the wrong variation), `arabicStemR` standardizes these different spellings.

The most important morphological challenges with Arabic texts relate to the use of prefixes, suffixes, and stopwords. Linguists and computer scientists have used several ways to deal with prefixes and suffixes, including attempting to find all possible prefix and suffix combinations, using light stemming, and deep word stemming. `arabicstemR` relies on light stemming, in which a list of common prefixes and suffixes are removed. It also uses an existing list of 258 stopwords which it removes from the text.

All in all, `arabicStemR` removes the following: unicode characters except for Arabic ones, Arabic numbers, diacritics, punctuation, new line indicators, prefixes, suffixes, and a default list of Arabic stopwords. It also standardizes different forms of the letter Alef (A) before finally transliterating the text. Since the default list of stopwords may not be exhaustive, we also removed any words that appeared in at least 90% of the documents. The resulting topic model provides the output in transliterated Arabic, which we translated into English.

As we show later in the appendix, models that had fewer than 40 topics tended to group distinct topics together, while models that had more than 40 topics tended to separate the same issue into several topics, which is why we decided on 40 topics. The main paper shows top proportion words in each topic while Table 5 shows sample titles from the topics. We used the top terms to label the topics.

Structural topic modeling allows for the inclusion of covariates as metadata. We included an indicator for the beginning of the 2011 revolution, which we view as having started in the Damascus protests on March 15, 2011.

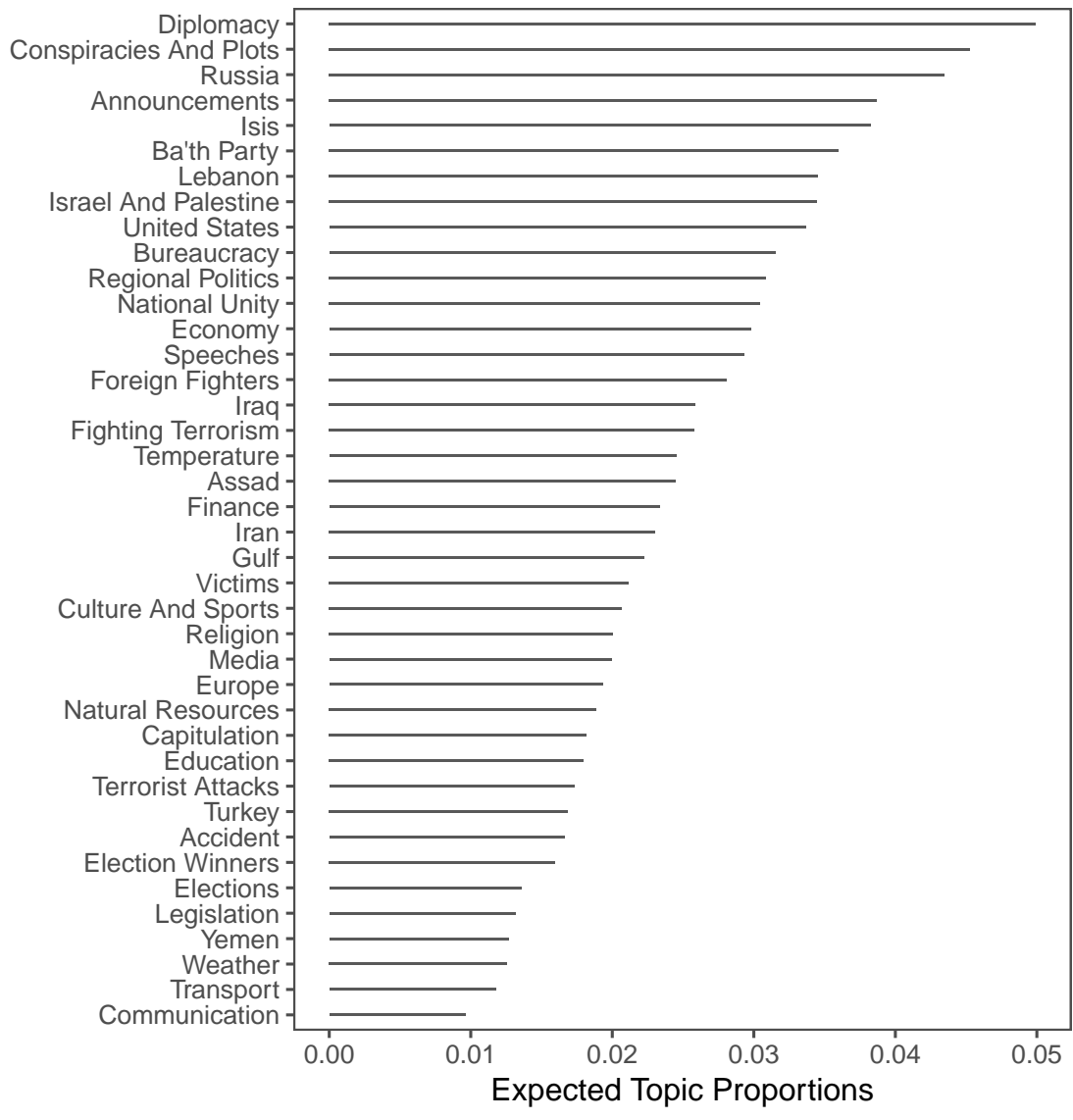


Figure 1: Expected topic proportions for each of the topics identified in *Al-Thawrah*

Topic Label	Example Title
Diplomacy	[Minister of media] Bilal discusses the areas of cooperation with the Bulgarian foreign minister
Conspiracies And Plots	The Palestinian Liberation Army: the mercenaries of evil who are conspiring against Syria will only reap failure and humiliation
Russia	Russian foreign ministry: foreign intervention in Syria is unacceptable and the solutions are carried out by Syrians without foreign imposition
Announcements	The first Qadi in Damascus: Tomorrow, Wednesday, is the first day of Eid al-Fitr
Isis	ISIS massacres would not have occurred without continued support from Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar
Ba'th Party	Stalhi (Central Committee of Ba'ath): Important steps for cultural movement of the [Ba'ath] party
Lebanon	The Lebanese opposition calls for vigilance and caution against the Israeli plans
Israel And Palestine	Arrests in the West Bank.. and the occupation forces announce new plans for demolition of houses in Jerusalem
United States	An American research center: Trump's provocative actions put America at risk
Bureaucracy	[cabinet] approves three draft laws and stress the importance of the Russia visit
Regional Politics	Thawrah publishes the Arab peace initiative project
National Unity	Funeral of four martyrs from security forces. Families: they responded to the call of duty to preserve the unity and dignity of the nation
Economy	Dardari examines with the CEO of Movenpick ways to promote investment in tourism
Speeches	Addressing the Parliament... President Assad: Steps to support national unity and getting rid of chaos is a national, moral, and ethical duty...
Foreign Fighters	The arrest of the son of a Tunisian security official who was heading to Syria to join terrorist organizations
Iraq	15 dead and 57 injured in separate attacks in Iraq
Fighting Terrorism	The army kills dozens of terrorists in Rif Hama and Idlib.. and destroys their machines and headquarters in Aleppo and Daraa
Temperature	The temperature is below average levels by 10 degrees
Assad	President Assad congratulates Croatia, Slovenia, and Mozambique for their national holidays
Finance	105 million Liras traded in the Damascus Financial Market
Iran	Iran: Major countries play with the crisis of terrorism to find problems and seek to ignite sedition
Gulf	From the center of the event... the extra Arabian money [is] invested in Cholera, weapons, and fighting
Victims	Halqi (PM): the government will not allow any citizen to lack food or medicine
Culture And Sports	Syria raises its tally to 27 medals, including 7 gold, at the Olympic gains in Athens
Religion	Bishop Hanna [calls for the] return to human values and renouncing violence
Media	Al-Jazeera continues to misrepresent facts and its witnesses use fake names to fabricate news on Syria
Europe	European shares fall and oil reaches 77 dollars (a barrel)
Natural Resources	Promising resources of 25 million cubic meters of additional drinking water per year for Damascus
Capitulation	Regularizing the status of 253 armed men who surrendered in a number of governorates
Education	Instructions for enrollment and date [set] for technical examination of teacher preparation institutes
Terrorist Attacks	More than 40 gunmen surrender themselves and their weapons to the specialized authorities in Baba Amr
Turkey	He described [Erdogan] as immoral and corrupt.. Kilicdaroglu: All that matters for Erdogan is stealing the money of Turkish people
Accident	9 dead in two accidents on the Homs-Palmyra road
Election Winners	President Assad issues a decree that includes the names of the winners of parliamentary elections for the second legislative session
Elections	Parliamentary elections... 9970 candidates.. and easing the process of obtaining [election] card
Legislation	President Assad issues the new fundamentals of trials law.. the second part
Yemen	Saudi aggression escalates its crimes in Yemen by resorting again to cluster bombs
Weather	Rain across most of the provinces
Transport	An increase in the shipping movement at the port of Tartous.. 40 vessels loading and unloading.. goods for local market and transit
Communication	Eid markets.. major participation through the early morning hours

Table 5: Topic labels and example titles each topic

Appendix D: Trends in Other Topics

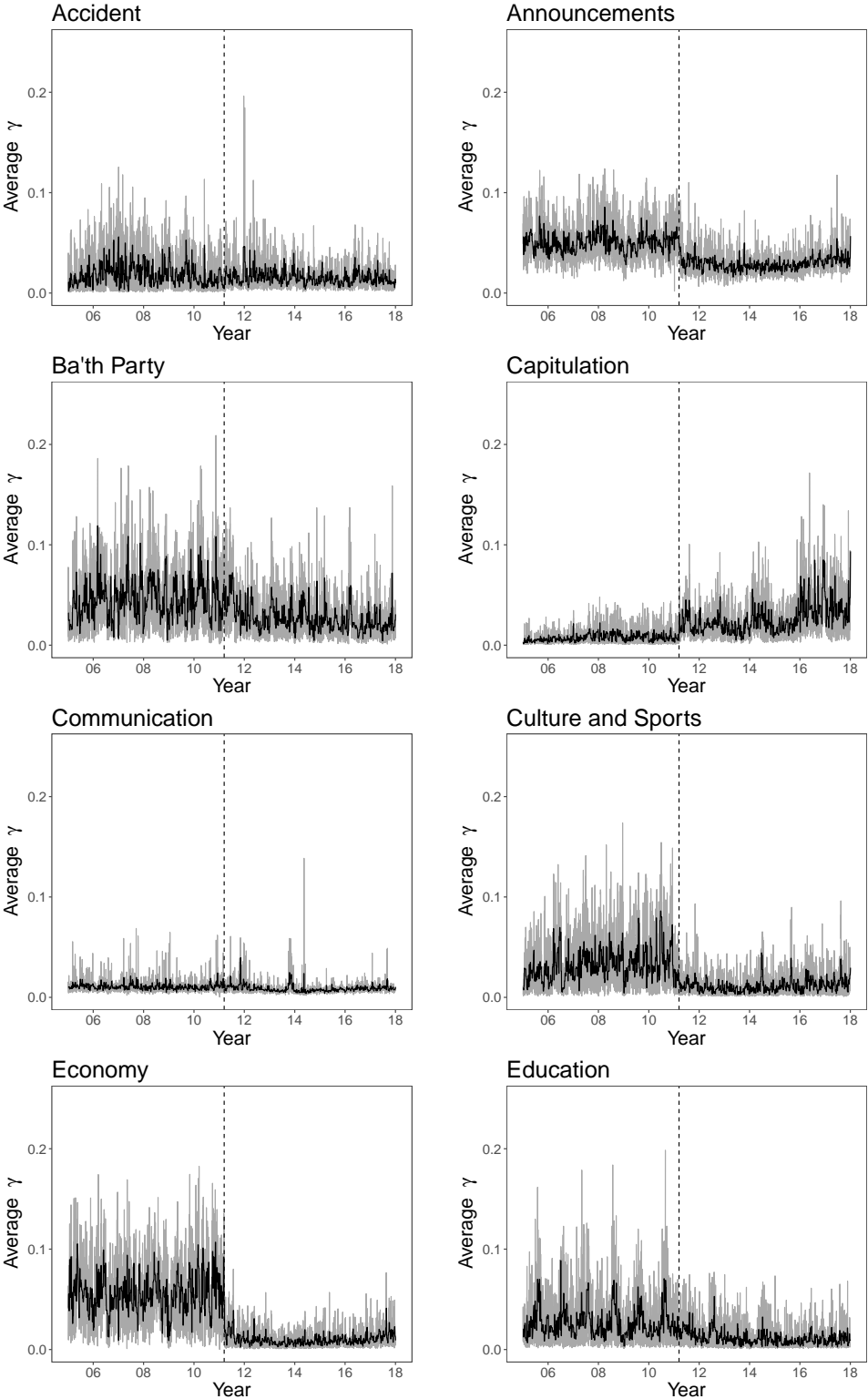


Figure 2: Trends in other topics in *Al-Thawrah*

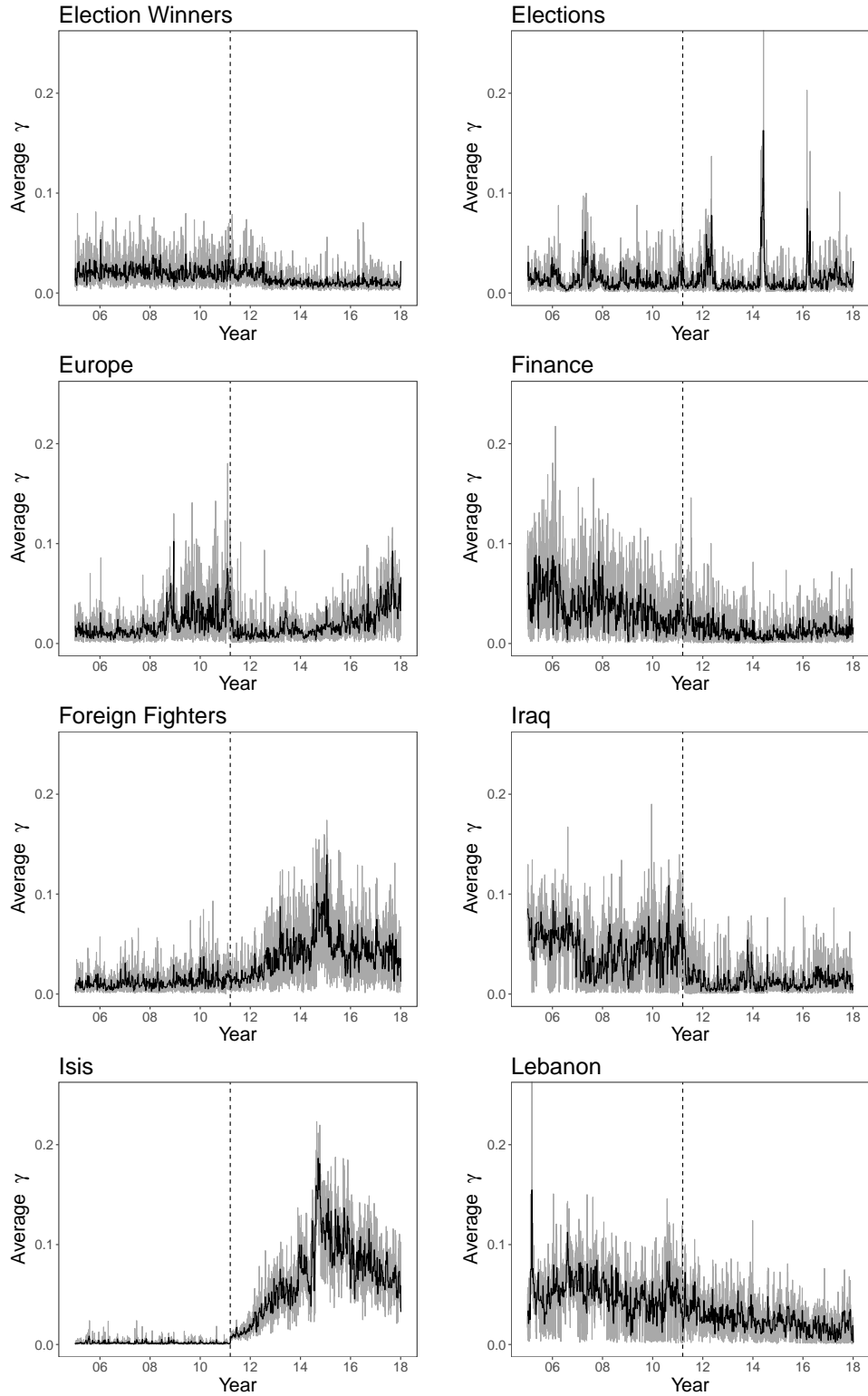


Figure 3: Trends in other topics in *Al-Thawrah*

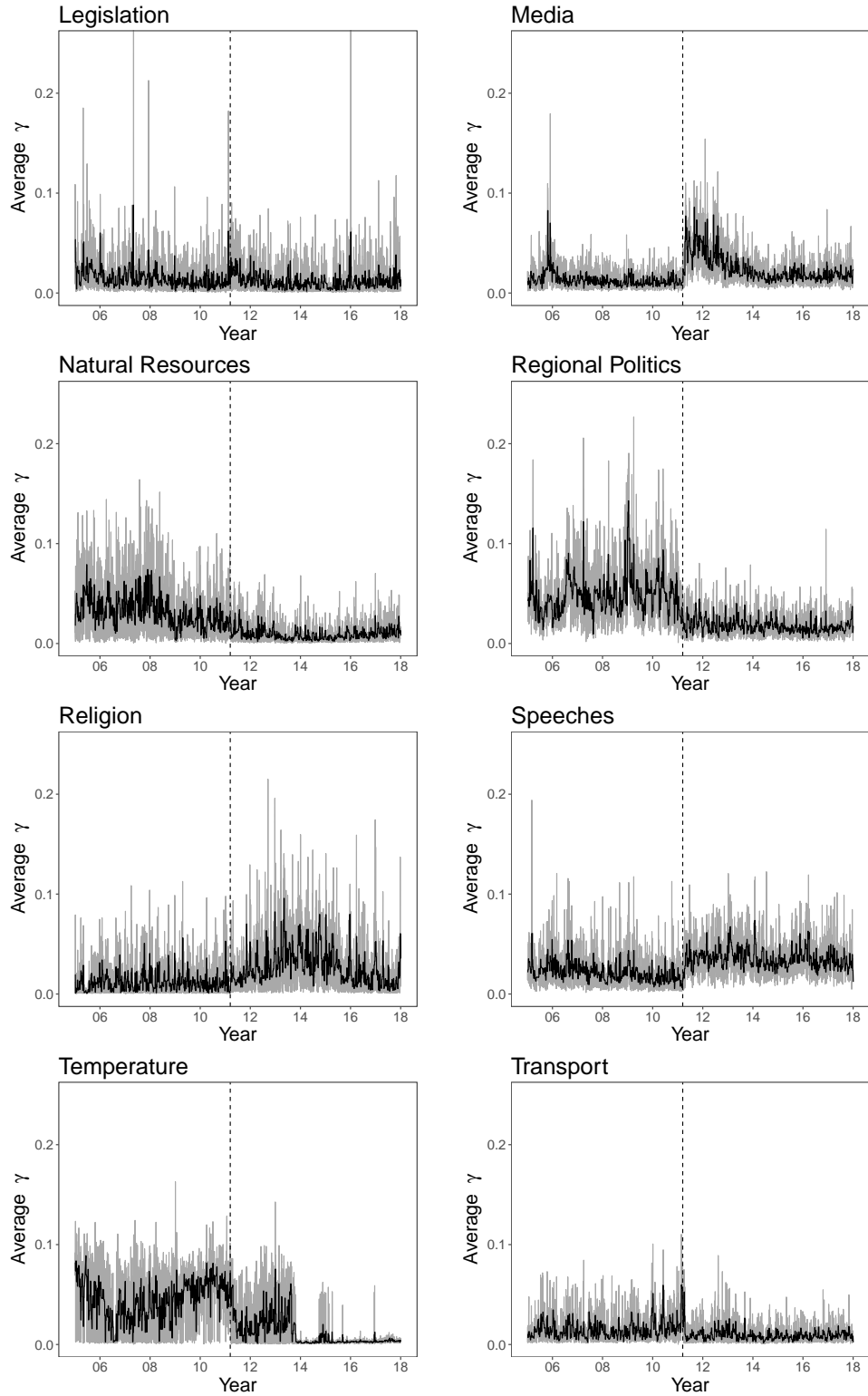


Figure 4: Trends in other topics in *Al-Thawrah*

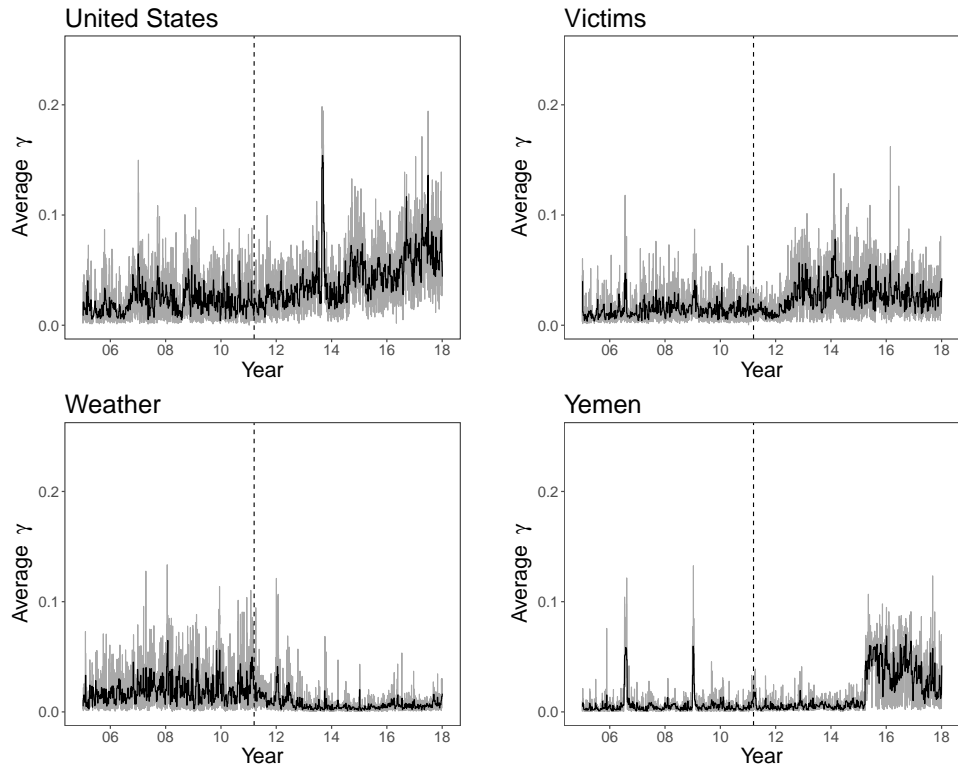


Figure 5: Trends in other topics in *Al-Thawrah*

Appendix E: Different numbers of Topics

We decided to conduct the analysis in the main paper with the results from topic modeling with 40 topics because this number of topics created a good balance between enough detail without being too disaggregated. In this section, we show the robustness of the main results by describing the results when conducting structural topic modeling with 20, 25, 30, 35, 45, and 50 topics. We also show the results from structural topic modeling with 40 topics but without using the beginning of the Syrian revolution as a covariate.

20 topics

Topic Label	High Probability Terms	Expected Proportion
diplomacy	president, relations, mister, visit, meeting, foreign	0.09
economy and development	council, public, economy, project, sector, investment	0.07
conspiracies and plots	Syria, people, terrorism, Zionist, resistance, conspiracy	0.07
Russia and intl community	Russia, foreign, united, nations, security, council	0.07
ISIS	terrorism, organization, ISIS, group, armed	0.06
Assad and nation	nation, president, people, party, leadership, Assad	0.06
US and Iran	America, united, states, Iran, world	0.06
Media and education	media, university, culture, public, education	0.05
Israel and Palestine	Israel, Palestine, occupation, Jerusalem, land	0.05
national unity	nation, Syrian, martyrs, son, state, people	0.05
accidents and deaths	car, road, said, city, transport	0.04
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, America, kill, injure	0.04
speeches	said, president, states, discussion, politics	0.04
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, army	0.04
victims	citizen, Aleppo, terror, aid, humanitarian, nation	0.04
terrorism	terrorism, terror, army, armed, group, destroy	0.04
Gulf and religion	Saud, Islam, Tunisia, Qatar, religion	0.03
legislation	article, law, declaration, council, number, legislation	0.03
turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, government, party, people, justice	0.03
temperature and weather	region, degree, temperature, south, north, governorate	0.03

Table 6: Topic labels, highest probability terms, and expected proportion for $n = 20$ topics

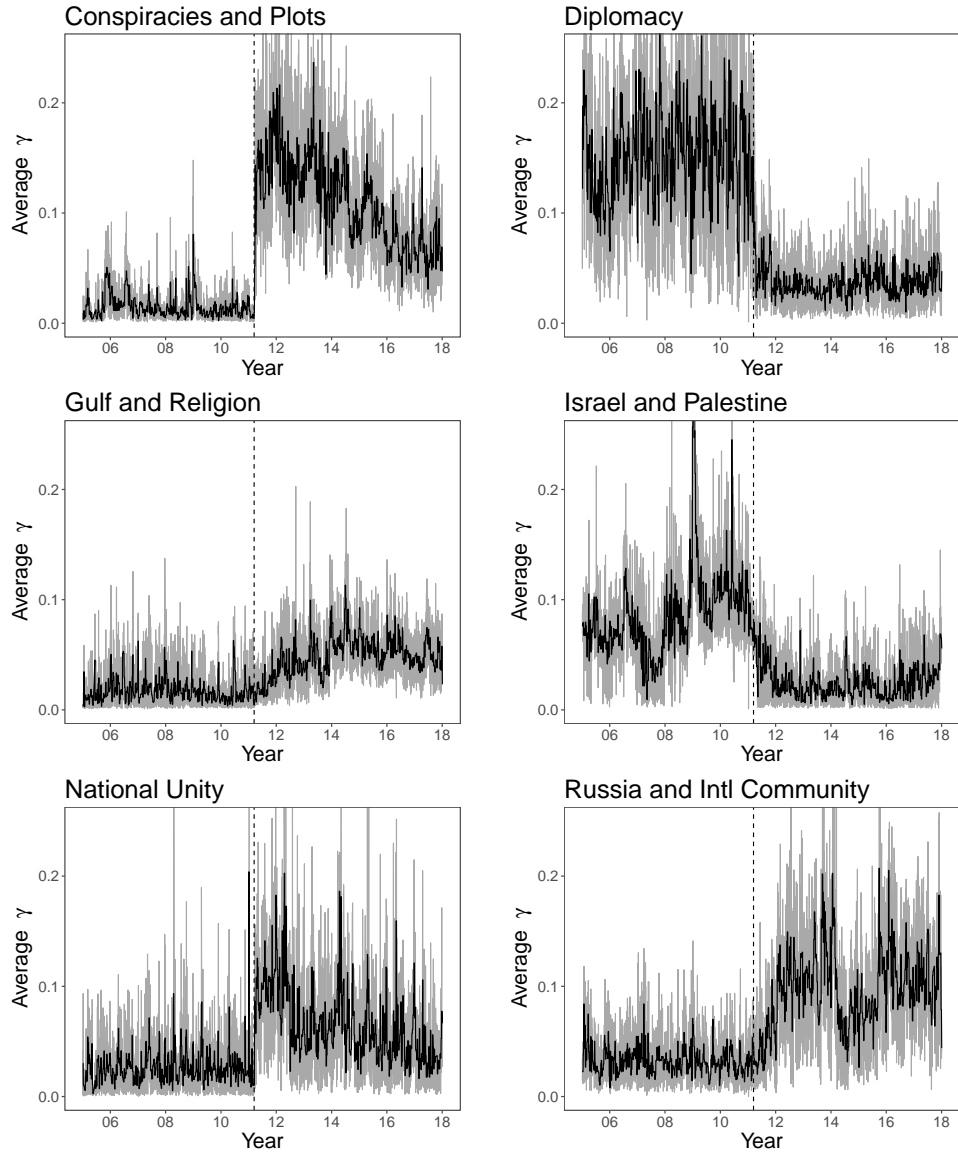


Figure 6: Trends in topics with $k = 20$ topics

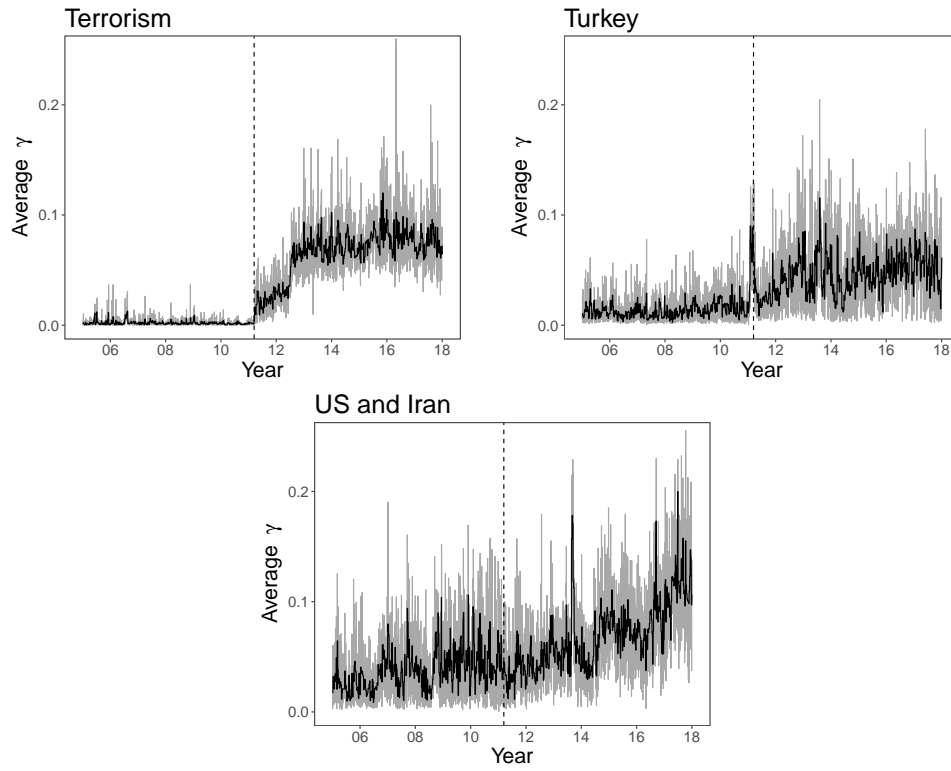


Figure 7: Trends in topics with $k = 20$ topics

25 topics

Topic Label	High Probability Terms	Expected Proportion
diplomacy	president, relations, mister, visit, meeting, foreign	0.09
Russia and Iran	Syria, Russia(n), states, foreign, Iran, Iranian	0.07
conspiracies and plots	Syria, people, terrorism, Zionist, resistance, conspiracy	0.06
economy and development	council, public, economy, project, sector, investment	0.05
Assad and nation	nation, president, people, army, Assad, martyrs	0.05
ISIS	terrorism, organization, ISIS, group, armed	0.05
party politics?	nation, work, economy, meeting, politics, citizen, party	0.05
United States	America, united, states, military, Washington, Obama	0.04
Israel and Palestine	Israel, Palestine, occupation, Jerusalem, land	0.04
europa	France, Europe, Britain, Tunisia, first	0.04
bureaucracy	council, public, project, minister/ministry, committee	0.04
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, army	0.04
Media	media, culture, public, union, first	0.04
attacks	armed, group, security, citizen, terrorist	0.04
Intl community and victims	nations, united, humanitarian, organization, aid, rights	0.03
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, America, kill, injure	0.03
speeches	said, president, states, discussion, politics	0.03
Education	university, education, public, governorate, students, study	0.03
Gulf	Saud, Qatar, politics, Gulf, world	0.03
temperature and weather	region, degree, temperature, south, north, governorate	0.03
Turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, government, party, people, justice	0.03
religion	Islam, religion, Patriarch, Muslim, Christian, Sheikh	0.03
Yemen and terrorism	army, organization, military, terror, ISIS, Yemen,	0.02
terrorism	terrorism, terror, army, armed, group, destroy	0.02
legislation	article, law, declaration, council, number, legislation	0.02

Table 7: Topic labels, highest probability terms, and expected proportion for n = 25 topics

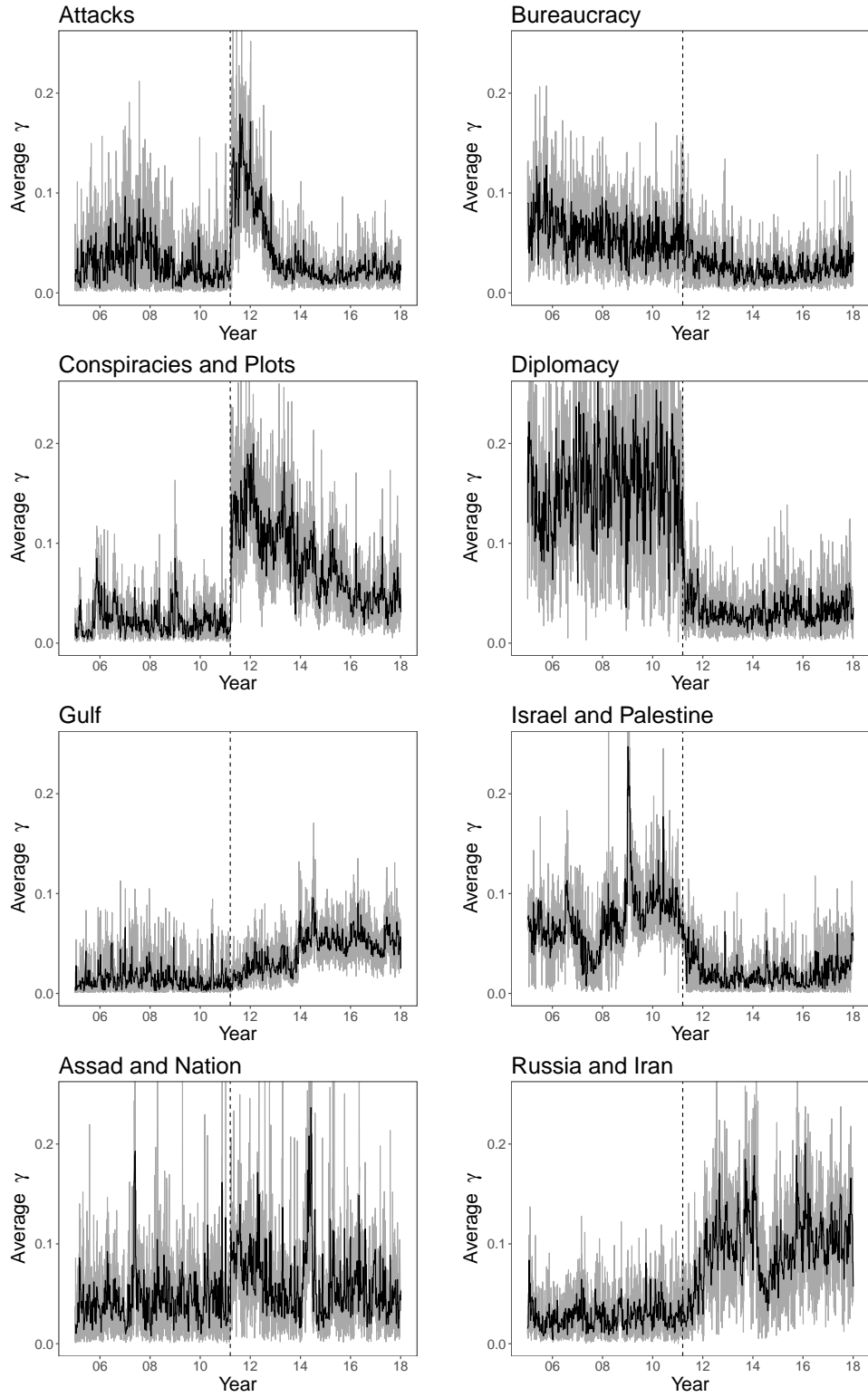


Figure 8: Trends in topics with $k = 25$ topics

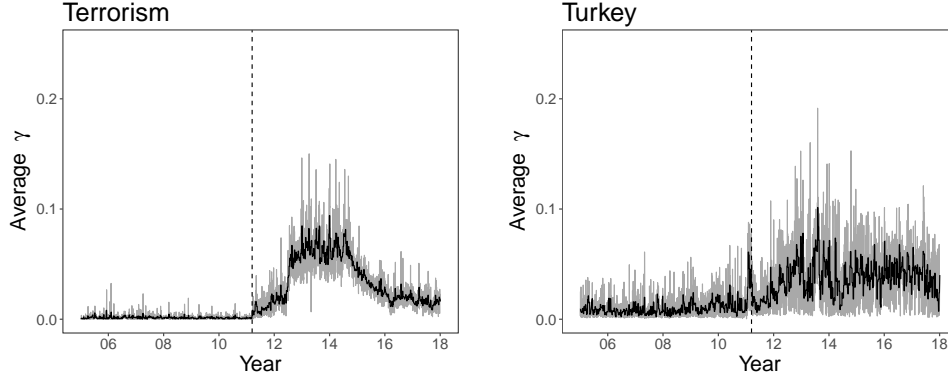


Figure 9: Trends in topics with $k = 25$ topics

30 topics

Topic Label	High Probability Terms	Expected Proportion
Russia	Syria, Russia(n), states, foreign, crisis, politics	0.07
diplomacy	president, relations, mister, visit, meeting, foreign	0.07
conspiracies and plots	Syria, people, terrorism, Zionist, resistance, conspiracy	0.05
ISIS	terrorism, organization, ISIS, group, armed	0.05
bureaucracy	council, public, project, minister/ministry, committee	0.05
Europe	France, Europe, Britain, Tunisia, first	0.04
Assad and nation	president, nation, party, people, leadership, Asad, Baath,	0.04
regional politics	states, Arab, Israel, Palestine, occupation, decision, rights	0.04
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, army, nation, government	0.04
Assad and visits	president, mister, Arab, Asad, Damascus	0.04
national unity	nation, army, martyrs, sons, people, security	0.03
culture	culture, Syrian, Arab, participate, conference, youth, tourism	0.03
US and Gulf	America, Saud, united, states, Washington, Qatar, Obama	0.03
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, America, kill, injure	0.03
Israel and Palestine	Israel, Palestine, occupation, Jerusalem, land	0.03
speeches	said, president, states, discussion, politics	0.03
victims	citizen, aid, people, serve, humanitarian	0.03
attacks	armed, group, security, citizen, terrorist	0.03
finance	trade, Lira, bank, dollar, money, economy, billion	0.03
natural resources	agriculture, company, water, oil, production, project, electricity	0.03
temperature	region, degree, south, temperature, increase	0.03
media	media, ask, truth, report, investigation, channel	0.03
terrorism	terrorism, terror, army, armed, group, destroy	0.03
religion	Islam, religion, Patriarch, Muslim, Christian, Sheikh	0.02
Turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, government, party, people, justice	0.02
education	university, education, public, governorate, students, study	0.02
weather	governorate, city, rural, areas, [names of regions]	0.02
legislation	article, law, declaration, council, number, legislation	0.02
elections	election, constitution, council, people, committee, democrat	0.02
Yemen	Yemen, enemy, Saud, military, plane, bombing	0.02

Table 8: Topic labels, highest probability terms, and expected proportion for $n = 30$ topics

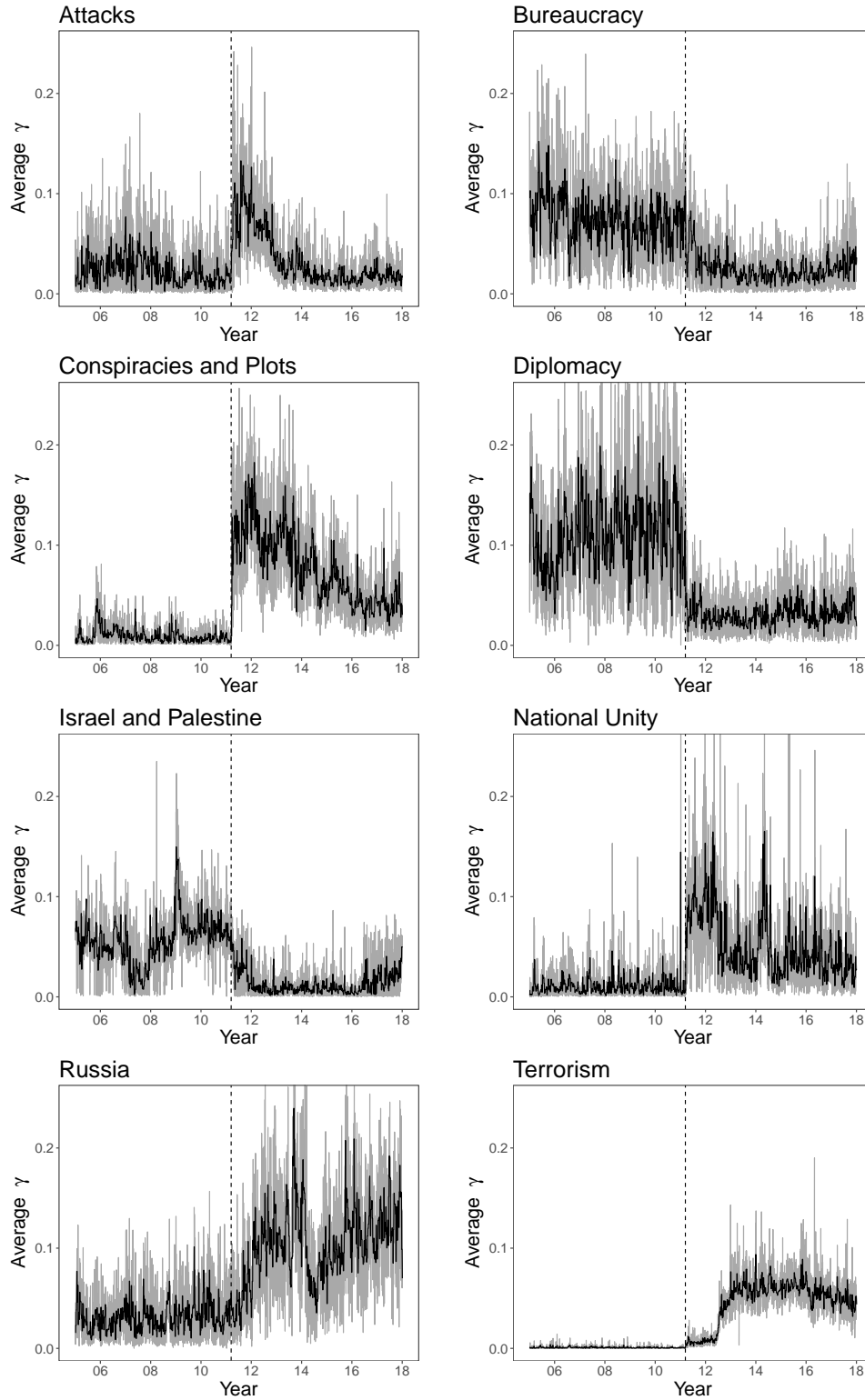


Figure 10: Trends in topics with $k = 30$ topics

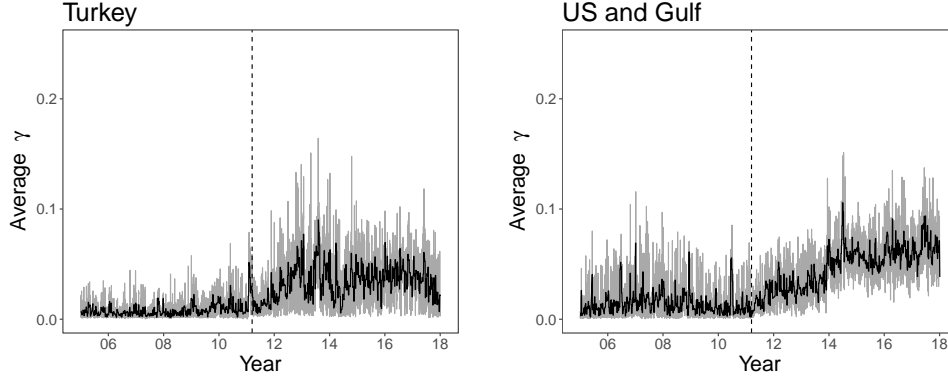


Figure 11: Trends in topics with $k = 30$ topics

35 topics

Topic Label	High Probability Terms	Expected Proportion
diplomacy	president, relations, mister, visit, meeting, foreign	0.06
Russia	Syria, Russia(n), states, foreign, crisis, politics	0.06
conspiracies and plots	Syria, Arab, people, conspiracy, Zionist, intervention, resistance	0.04
Israel and Palestine	Israel, Palestine, occupation, Jerusalem, land	0.04
ISIS	terrorism, organization, ISIS, group, armed	0.04
United States	America, united, states, president, Washington, Obama, military	0.04
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, army, nation, government	0.04
events	nation, politics, discussion, community, conference, meeting, economy	0.03
Assad	arab, president, people, Assad, Palestine, occupied, Bashar, mister	0.03
bureaucracy	council, public, project, minister/ministry, committee	0.03
national unity	nation, army, martyrs, sons, people, security	0.03
culture	culture, Syria, Arab, Damascus, public, issue	0.03
accident	[areas in Syria], hospital, road, fire	0.03
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, America, kill, injure	0.03
foreign fighters	news, Saud, Britain, Tunisia, Qatar, intelligence, radical	0.03
economy	economy, industry, investment, trade, company, projects	0.03
gulf	politics, US, Saudi, west, region, israel, Gulf	0.03
terrorism	terrorism, terror, army, armed, group, destroy	0.03
temperature	region, degree, south, temperature, increase	0.03
finance	trade, Lira, bank, dollar, money, economy, billion	0.03
victims	citizen, aid, people, serve, humanitarian	0.03
Assad and visits	president, mister, Arab, Asad, Damascus	0.02
speeches	said, president, states, discussion, politics	0.02
Turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, government, party, people, justice	0.02
religion	Islam, religion, Patriarch, Muslim, Christian, Sheikh	0.02
media	media, ask, truth, report, investigation, channel	0.02
Baath party	party, leadership, Ba'th, union, nation, region	0.02
attacks	armed, group, security, citizen, terrorist	0.02
education	university, education, students, teach	0.02
Europe	Europe, France, Union, Germany, Paris	0.02
transportation	Jordan, chemical, plane, sea, use, Libya, border, transport	0.02
communication	information, communication, center, network, add, electronic	0.02
legislation	article, law, declaration, council, number, legislation	0.02
elections	election, constitution, people, presidency, council, committee	0.02
Yemen	Yemen, enemy, Saud, military, plane, bombing	0.01

Table 9: Topic labels, highest probability terms, and expected proportion for $n = 35$ topics

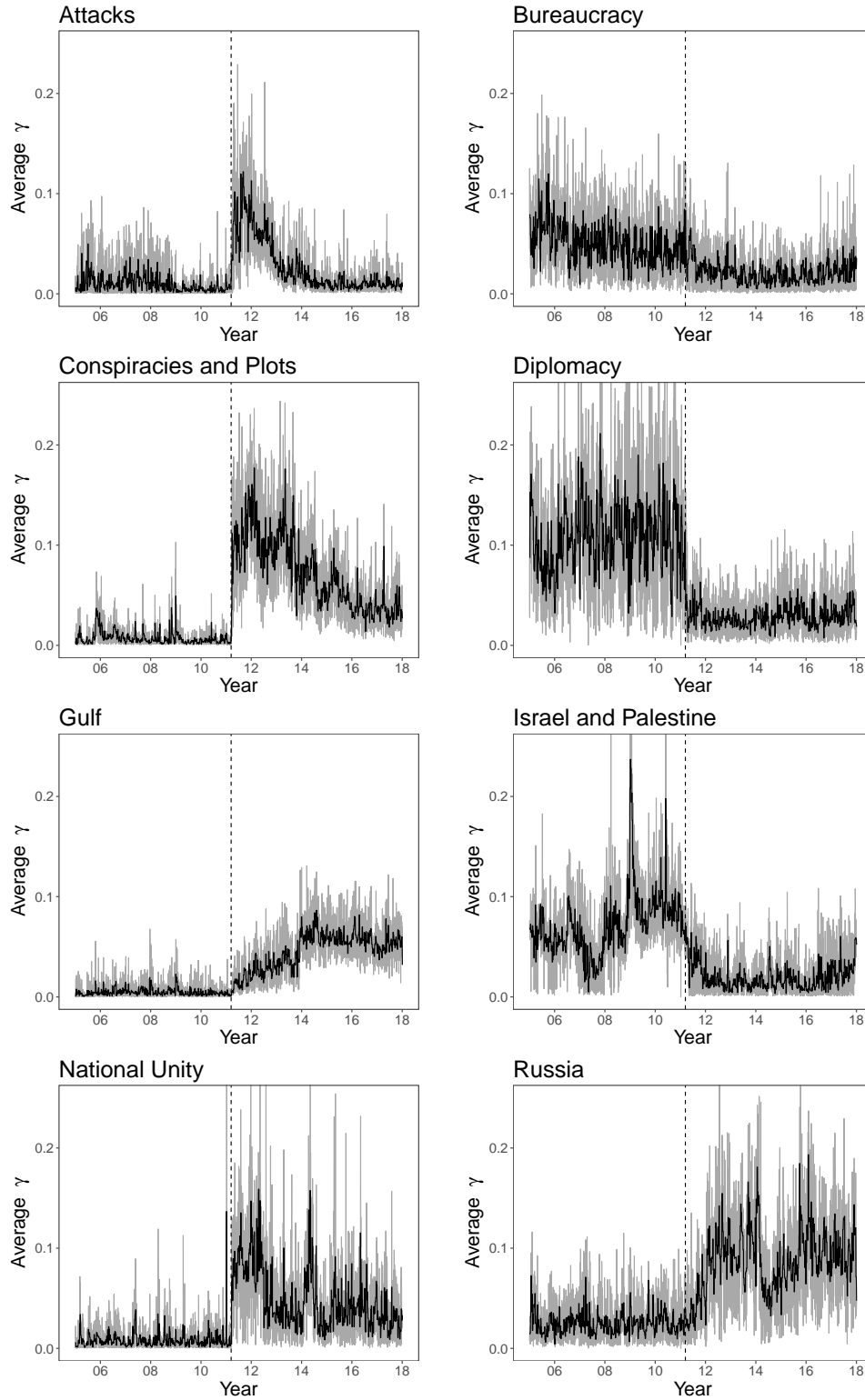


Figure 12: Trends in topics with $k = 35$ topics

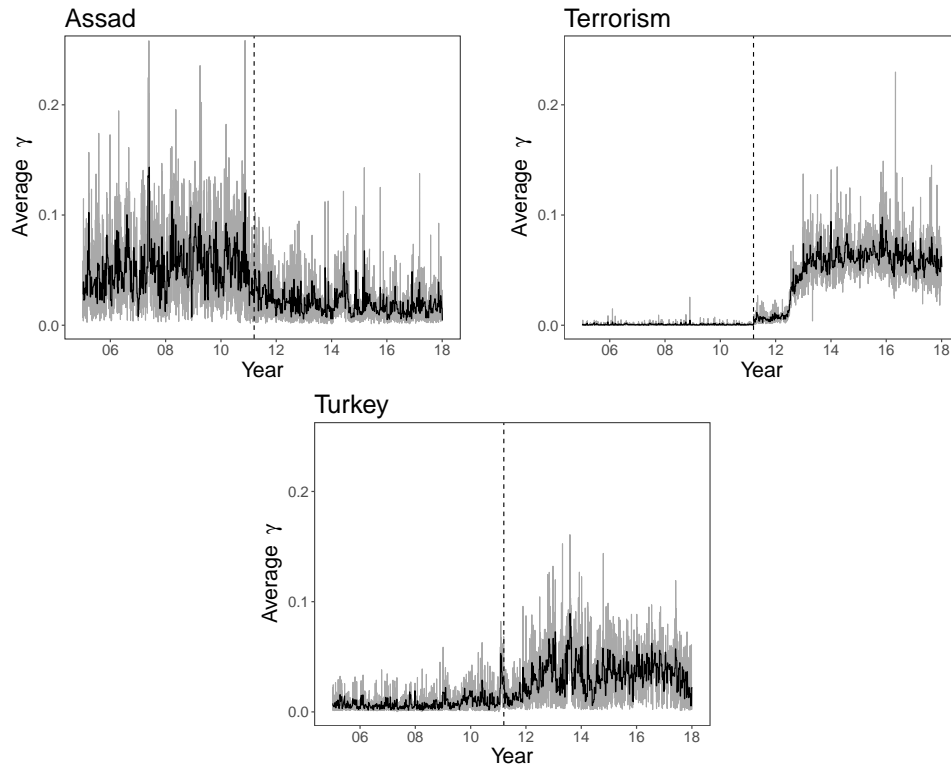


Figure 13: Trends in topics with $k = 35$ topics

40 topics with no covariates

Topic Label	High Probability Terms	Expected Proportion
diplomacy	relations, isit, state, delegation, meeting, foreign, people	0.05
conspiracies and plots	Syria, Arab, people, conspiracy, Zionist, intervention, resistance	0.05
Russia	Syria, Russia(n), states, foreign, crisis, politics	0.04
announcements	public, first, SANA, day, thawrah	0.04
ISIS	terrorism, organization, ISIS, group, armed	0.04
Ba'th party	nation, Arab, party, work, leadershi, people, union	0.04
Israel and Palestine	Israel, Palestine, occupation, Jerusalem, land	0.03
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, army, nation, government	0.03
United States	America, united, states, president, Washington, Obama, military	0.03
bureaucracy	council, public, project, minister/ministry, committee	0.03
regional politics	Arab, Israel, peace, decision, united, nations, Palestine	0.03
national unity	nation, army, martyrs, sons, people, security	0.03
economy	economy, industry, investment, trade, company, projects	0.03
speeches	said, politics, states, should, change, discuss, people	0.03
foreign fighters	Newspaper, British, Tunisian, French, intelligence	0.03
terrorism	terrorism, terror, army, armed, group, destroy	0.03
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, America, kill, injure, security	0.03
temperature	region, degree, south, temperature, increase	0.02
assad	president, Assad, mister, Bashar, people, public, nation	0.02
finance	public, money, Syrian, Lira, company, bank, economy	0.02
Iran	Iran, region, Islam, Tehran, politics	0.02
Gulf	Saud, Egypt, Qatar, Gulf, opposition, brother	0.02
victims	aid, humanitarian, camp, red, refugee, provide	0.02
culture	culture, Syria, world, exhibition, Arab, ceremony, history	0.02
religion	religion, Islam, Patriarch, Muslim, Christian, Sheikh	0.02
media	media, ask, truth, channel, report, rights	0.02
Europe	Europe, union, France, Germany, nuclear	0.02
natural resources	water, oil, company, electricity, gas, project, energy	0.02
capitulation	Aleppo, city, people, army, security, reconicilation, armed	0.02
education	university, education, students, teach	0.02
attacks	armed, group, terrorist, car, fire, security, citizen	0.02
Turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, government, party, people, justice	0.02
attacks and accidents	explosion, crime, children, civilian, assault	0.02
election winners	president, mister, Asad, Bashar, Damascus, people, leader, general	0.02
elections	election, constitution, people, president, candidate, democrat	0.01
legislation	article, law, declaration, council, number, legislation	0.01
Yemen	Yemen, enemy, Saud, military, plane, bombing	0.01
weather	governorate, agiculture, regions, season	0.01
transportation	Jordan, sea, flying, borders, transport, airport, ship	0.01
communication	added, said, communicate, details, electronic	0.01

Table 10: Topic labels, highest probability terms, and expected proportion for n = 40 topics

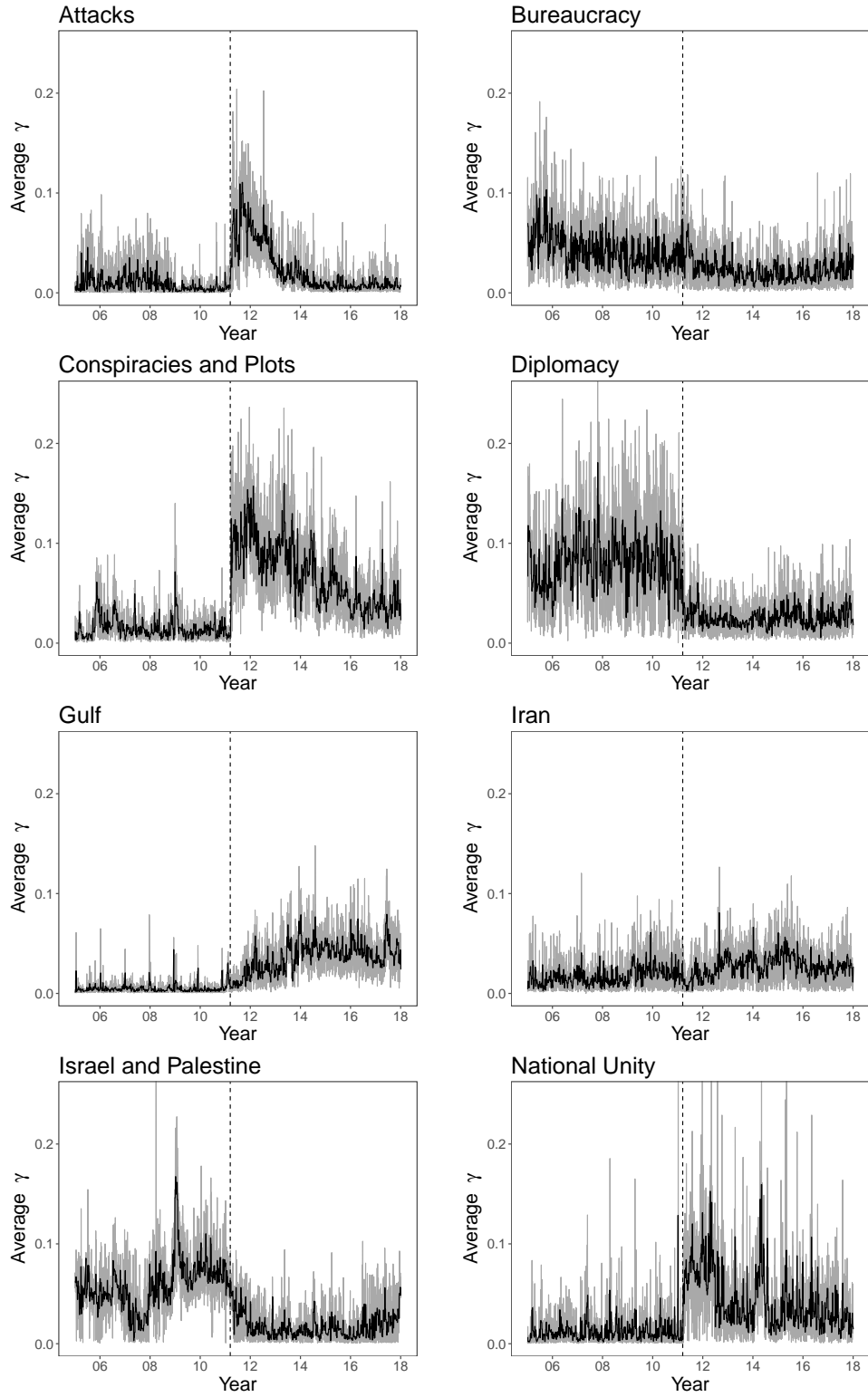


Figure 14: Trends in topics with $k = 40$ topics

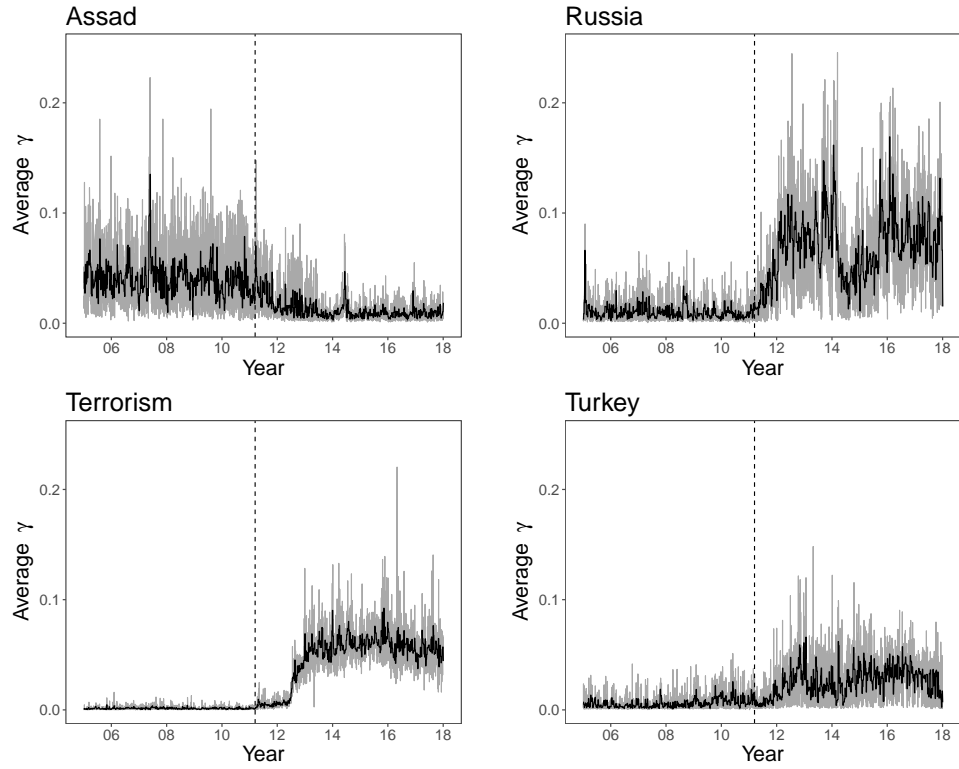


Figure 15: Trends in topics with $k = 40$ topics

45 topics

Topic Label	High Probability Terms	Expected Proportion
diplomacy	president, relations, mister, visit, meeting, foreign	0.05
Russia	Syria, Russia(n), states, foreign, crisis, politics	0.04
conspiracies and plots	Syria, Arab, people, conspiracy, Zionist, intervention, resistance	0.04
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, army, nation, government	0.03
ISIS	terrorism, organization, ISIS, group, armed	0.03
Gulf	Saud, politics, Qatar, west, terror, Gulf, region	0.03
announcements	first, public, SANA, yesterday, thawrah, Damascus	0.03
Ba'th party	nation, party, politics, people, work, discussion, leadership, meeting	0.03
United States	America, united, states, president, Washington, Obama, military	0.03
bureaucracy	council, public, project, minister/ministry, committee	0.03
economy	economy, industry, investment, trade, company, projects	0.03
Iran	Iran, region, politics, nuclear, Islam	0.03
Assad	president, Asad, mister, Bashar, Syria, people	0.03
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, America, kill, injure	0.03
terrorism	terrorism, terror, army, armed, group, destroy	0.03
temperature	region, degree, south, temperature, increase	0.02
regional politics	state, Arab, conference, meeting, decision, league, peace	0.02
speeches	said, president, states, discussion, politics, Asad	0.02
national unity	nation, army, martyrs, sons, people, security	0.02
culture	culture, Syria, Arab, youth, participate, exhibit	0.02
Israel and Palestine2	Palestine, Israel, occupation, Golan, people, Zionist	0.02
finance	Syria, public, money, Lira, bank, economy, trade, billion, prices	0.02
foreign fighters	news, British, Saudi, arms, discover, intelligence	0.02
international community	nations, investigation, united, decision, security, committee, report	0.02
religion	Islam, religion, Patriarch, Muslim, Christian, Sheikh	0.02
victims	aid, humanitarian, camp, refugee, provide	0.02
election winners	[winners' names], mister, sheikh, president, public	0.02
Israel and Palestine3	Israel, Palestine, occupation, president, Hamas, resistance	0.02
capitulation	Aleppo, city, people, army, terrorism, reconciliation, Homs	0.02
attacks	armed, group, terrorist, car, fire, security, citizen	0.02
natural resources	water, oil, company, electricity, gas, project, energy	0.02
education	university, education, students, teach	0.02
media	media, ask, truth, report, investigation, channel	0.02
Israel and Palestine	occupation, Palestine, Israel, Jerusalem, settler	0.02
Turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, government, party, people, justice	0.02
Europe	Europe, Union, Germany, Czech, dollar	0.01
attacks2	terrorism, crimes, explosion, kill, assault	0.01
legislation	article, law, declaration, council, number, legislation	0.01
transportation	Jordan, chemical, plane, sea, use, Libya, border, transport	0.01
Yemen	Yemen, enemy, Saud, military, plane, bombing	0.01
Arab uprisings	Egypt, Tunisia, security, protest(tazahar), people, protest(ehtejaj)	0.01
weather	governorate, agriculture, [names of regions], farmer, season	0.01
sports	China, India, Korea, Brazil, Africa, world, Asia, sport	0.01
elections	election, constitution, people, presidency, council, committee	0.01
communication	added, said, communicate, details, electronic	0.01

Table 11: Topic labels, highest probability terms, and expected proportion for $n = 45$ topics

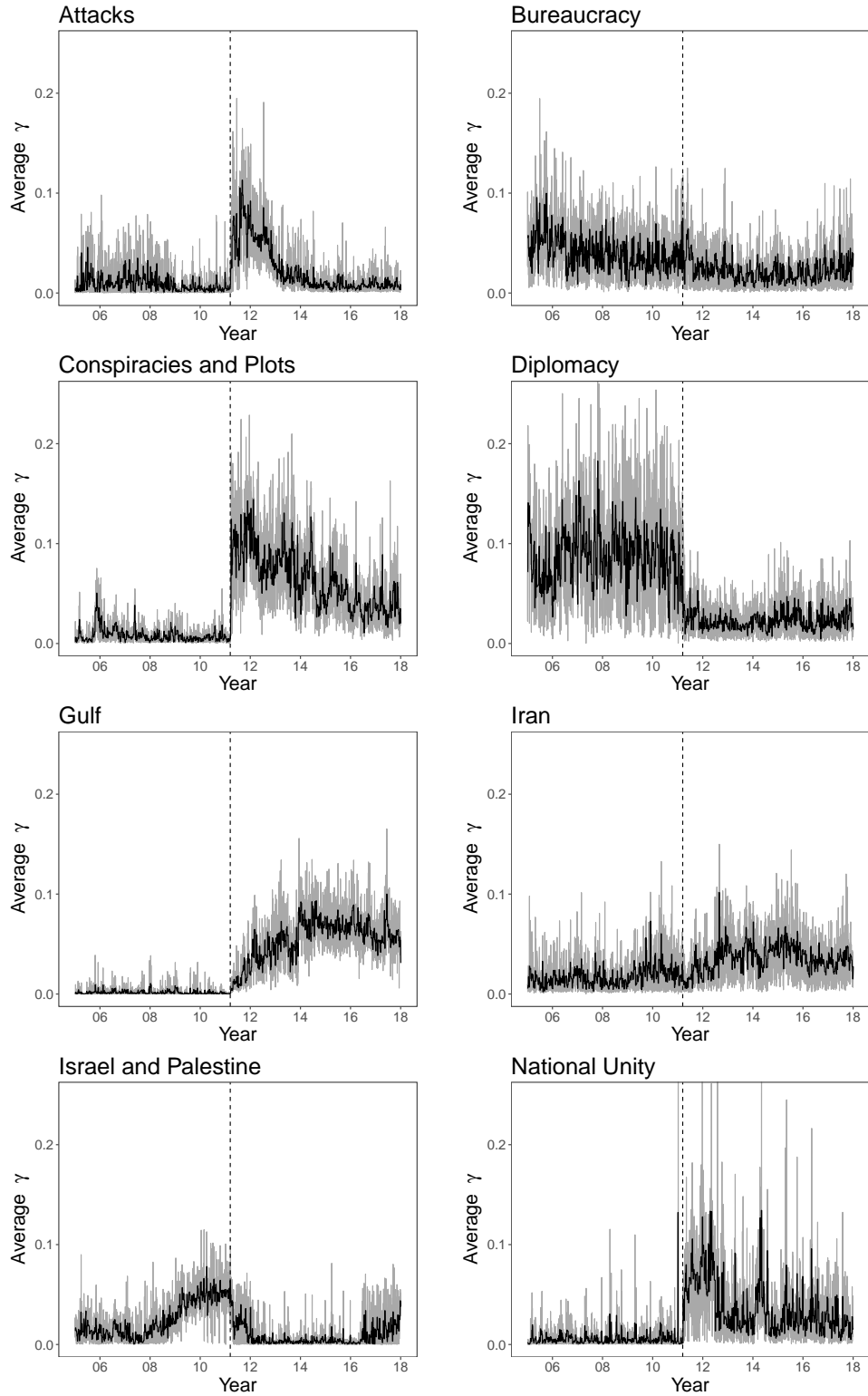


Figure 16: Trends in topics with $k = 45$ topics

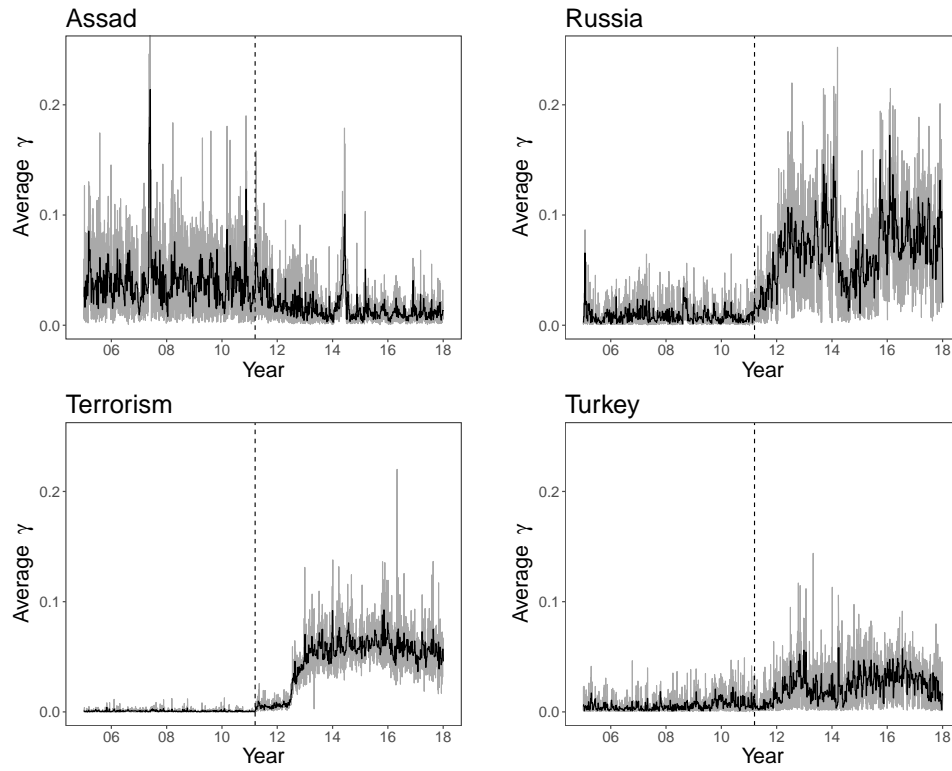


Figure 17: Trends in topics with $k = 45$ topics

50 topics

Topic Label	High Probability Terms	Expected Proportion
diplomacy	president, relations, mister, visit, meeting, foreign	0.04
terrorism2	terrorism, states, terrorist, armed, Saudi, west, group, support	0.04
conspiracies and plots	Syria, Arab, people, conspiracy, Zionist, intervention, resistance	0.04
Russia	Syria, Russia(n), states, foreign, crisis, politics	0.03
ISIS	terrorism, organization, ISIS, group, armed	0.03
Lebanon	Lebanon, resistance, Israel, army, nation, government	0.03
Ba'th party	nation, party, politics, people, work, discussion, leadership, meeting	0.03
United States	America, united, states, president, Washington, Obama, military	0.03
international community	nations, investigation, united, decision, security, committee, report	0.03
Iraq	Iraq, Baghdad, America, kill, injure	0.03
Israel and Palestine2	Israel, Palestine, occupation, Jerusalem, city, occupied	0.03
speeches	Syria, states, said, committee, day	0.03
terrorism	terrorism, terror, army, armed, group, destroy	0.03
Syrian opposition	politics, discussions, crisis, nation, government, opposition, foreign	0.02
national unity	nation, army, martyrs, sons, people, security	0.02
temperature	region, degree, south, temperature, increase	0.02
Israel and Palestine	Israel, Palestine, occupation, people, enemy, Zionist	0.02
bureaucracy	council, public, project, minister/ministry, committee	0.02
regional peace	peace, region, east, Europe, middle, union, foreign, Israel	0.02
economy	economy, industry, investment, trade, company, projects	0.02
Assad diplomacy	Syria, nation, people, president, participate, Arab	0.02
Iran	Iran, region, politics, nuclear, Islam	0.02
religion	Islam, religion, Patriarch, Muslim, Christian, Sheikh	0.02
Assad	president, Asad, mister, Bashar, Syria, people	0.02
culture	culture, tourism, Syria, Arab, youth, participate, exhibit	0.02
finance2	Lira, public, Syrian, money, bank, company, prices	0.02
investigations	investigation, report, information, crime, chemical, committee	0.02
regional politics	Arab, Palestine, Iraq, Kuwait, president, brotherly, Qatar	0.02
education	university, education, students, teach, study	0.02
accidents	Aleppo, road, security, turn off, fire	0.02
attacks	armed, group, terrorist, car, fire, security, citizen	0.02
public services	citizen, work, nation, government, services, economy	0.02
natural resources	water, oil, company, electricity, gas, project, energy	0.02
Turkey	Turkey, Erdogan, government, party, people, justice	0.02
media	media, ask, truth, report, investigation, channel	0.01
victims	aid, humanitarian, camp, refugee, provide	0.01
parliament	assembly, law, project, enemies, ministers, session, people	0.01
foreign fighters	news, British, Saudi, arms, discover, intelligence	0.01
illnesses	children, hospital, case, doctor, injured, child	0.01
finance	dollar, public, million, billion, oil, Europe, economy	0.01
Arab uprisings	Egypt, Tunisia, security, protest(tazahar), people, protest(ehtejaj)	0.01
legislation	article, law, declaration, council, number, legislation	0.01
Yemen	Yemen, enemy, Saud, military, plane, bombing	0.01
elections	election, constitution, people, presidency, council, committee	0.01
election winners	[winners' names], mister, sheikh, president, public	0.01
weather	governorate, agriculture, [names of regions], farmer, season	0.01
transportation	Jordan, chemical, plane, sea, use, Libya, border, transport	0.01
sports	China, India, Korea, Brazil, Africa, world, Asia, sport	0.01
communication	added, said, communicate, details, electronic	0.01
courts and trials	court, article, adjudicate, deny, lawyer	0.00

Table 12: Topic labels, highest probability terms, and expected proportion for $n = 50$ topics

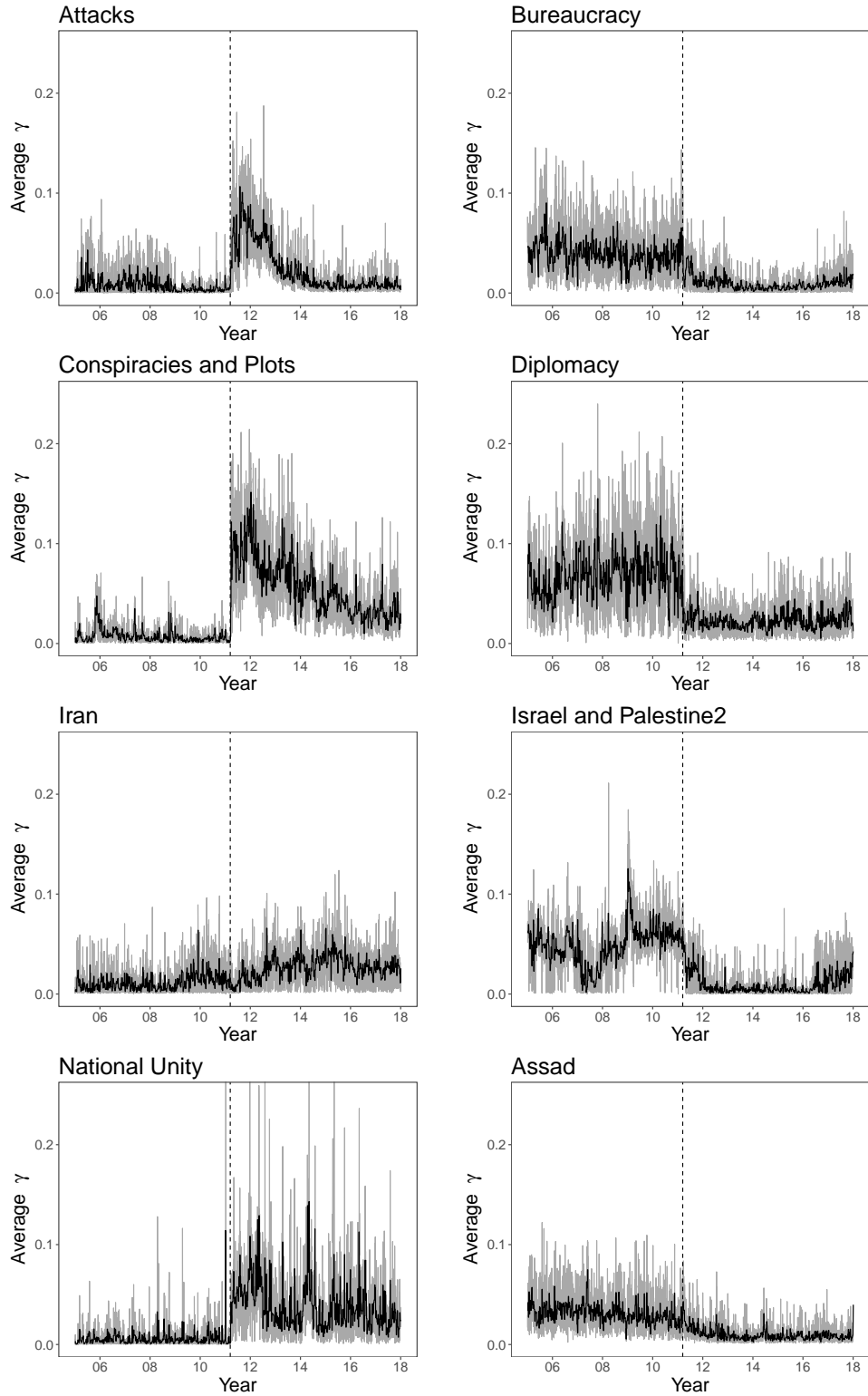


Figure 18: Trends in topics with $k = 50$ topics

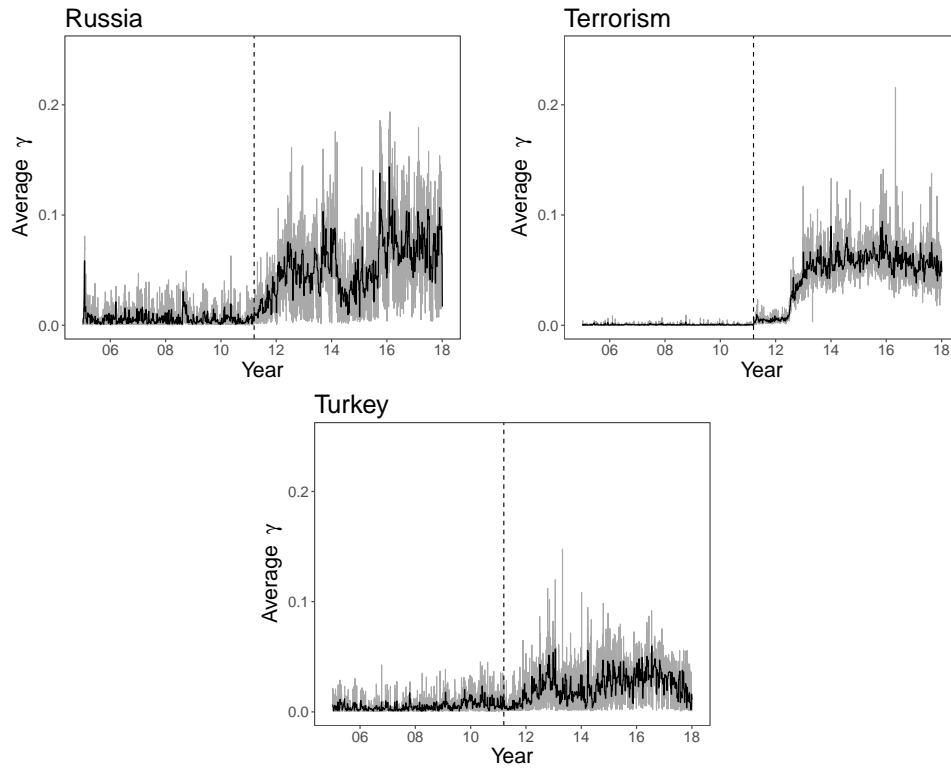


Figure 19: Trends in topics with $k = 50$ topics

Appendix F: *Al-Thawrah* topics without covariates

In the following three tables, we replicate the regressions that show how topic probabilities have changed in *Al-Thawrah* following the revolution but using the results from structural topic modeling with no covariates.

	Israel and Palestine	Assad	Diplomacy	Bureaucracy
Revolution (March 15, 2011)	-0.04***	-0.03***	-0.05***	-0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
(Intercept)	0.06***	0.04***	0.08***	0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
R^2	0.39	0.28	0.43	0.16
Adj. R^2	0.39	0.28	0.43	0.16
Num. obs.	3961	3961	3961	3961
RMSE	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.02

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 13: Decline of Historically Common Topics

	Conspiracies and Plots	National Unity	Attacks	Terrorism
Revolution (March 15, 2011)	0.05***	0.03***	0.01***	0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
(Intercept)	0.02***	0.01***	0.01***	0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
R^2	0.42	0.19	0.10	0.58
Adj. R^2	0.42	0.19	0.10	0.58
Num. obs.	3961	3961	3961	3961
RMSE	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.02

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 14: Rise of New Topics

	Iran	Russia	Gulf	Turkey
Revolution (March 15, 2011)	0.01***	0.06***	0.03***	0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
(Intercept)	0.02***	0.01***	0.00***	0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
R^2	0.08	0.47	0.49	0.28
Adj. R^2	0.08	0.47	0.49	0.28
Num. obs.	3961	3961	3961	3961
RMSE	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.02

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 15: Changing Focus on International Actors

In the following three tables, we rerun the regressions with no covariates but after including year fixed effects.

	Israel and Palestine	Assad	Diplomacy	Bureaucracy
Revolution (March 15, 2011)	-0.03	0.00	-0.03	-0.00
(Intercept)	0.05	0.04	0.07	0.06
R^2	0.55	0.32	0.45	0.24
Adj. R^2	0.55	0.32	0.45	0.23
Num. obs.	3961	3961	3961	3961
RMSE	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 16: Decline of Historically Common Topics

	Conspiracies and Plots	National Unity	Attacks	Terrorism
Revolution (March 15, 2011)	0.09	0.05	0.06	0.00
(Intercept)	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00
R^2	0.62	0.29	0.55	0.85
Adj. R^2	0.62	0.29	0.54	0.85
Num. obs.	3961	3961	3961	3961
RMSE	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.01

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 17: Rise of New Topics

	Iran	Russia	Gulf	Turkey
Revolution (March 15, 2011)	-0.01	0.02	-0.00	-0.00
(Intercept)	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00
R^2	0.18	0.57	0.62	0.38
Adj. R^2	0.17	0.56	0.62	0.37
Num. obs.	3961	3961	3961	3961
RMSE	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.01

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 18: Changing Focus on International Actors

Appendix G: Peace talks with year dummies

This table replicates the results from peace talks in the main paper after including year fixed effects.

	1989/12-1991/10	1992/07-1993/09	1994/04-1994/12	1995/05-1995/11	1995/12-1996/02	1999/12-2000/01
Peace Talks	-0.06*** (0.02)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.02)
Intercept	0.28*** (0.01)	0.28*** (0.01)	0.28*** (0.01)	0.28*** (0.01)	0.28*** (0.01)	0.28*** (0.01)

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 19: Coverage of Israel in Tishreen during peace talks with year fixed effects

Appendix H: Permutation tests

Below, we take the actual estimates from the relationship between peace talks and coverage of Israel in *Tishreen* and compare them to the null distribution. We do so by randomly assigning a random start date for the treatment from the duration covered by *Tishreen* (January 3, 1987 until December 31, 2002). Then we take the X number of days following this start date, where X represents the duration of each of the 6 rounds of peace talks discussed in the paper. We repeat this procedure 10,000 times to generate a null distribution of the estimate, then we compute a p-value by calculating the proportion of simulated coefficient estimates that are at least as small as the actual observed estimate.

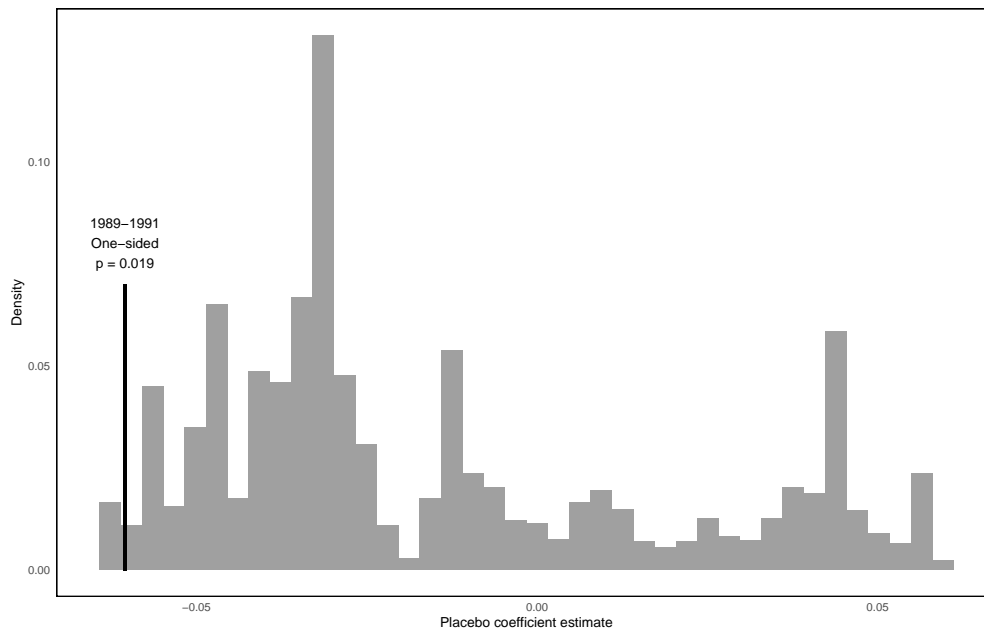


Figure 20: The histogram shows the simulated null distribution of the estimates for the first period of peace talks (December 27, 1989 to October 30, 1991).

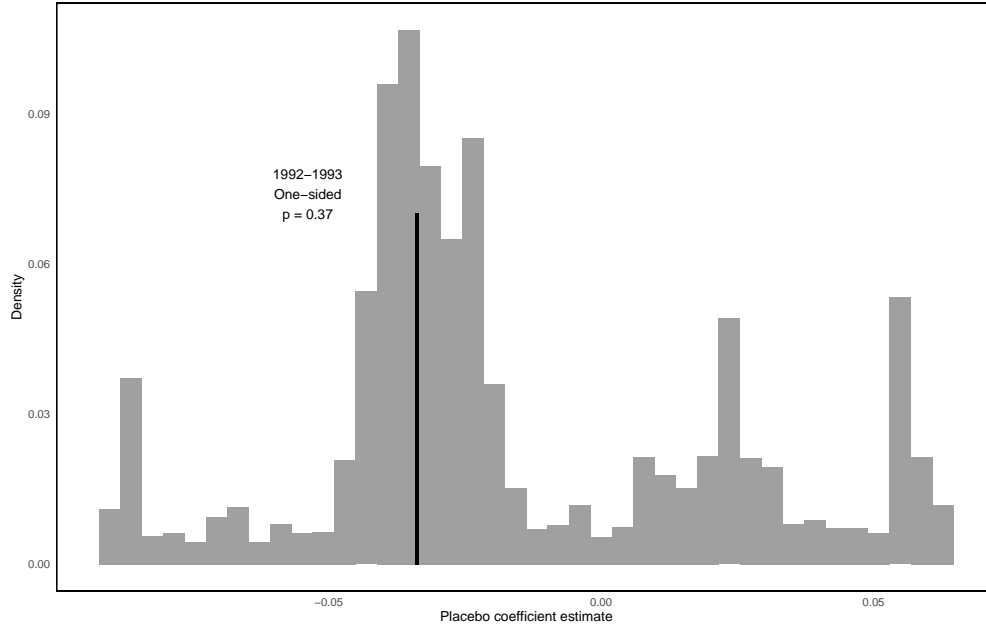


Figure 21: The histogram shows the simulated null distribution of the estimates for the second period of peace talks (July 2, 1992 to September 13, 1993).

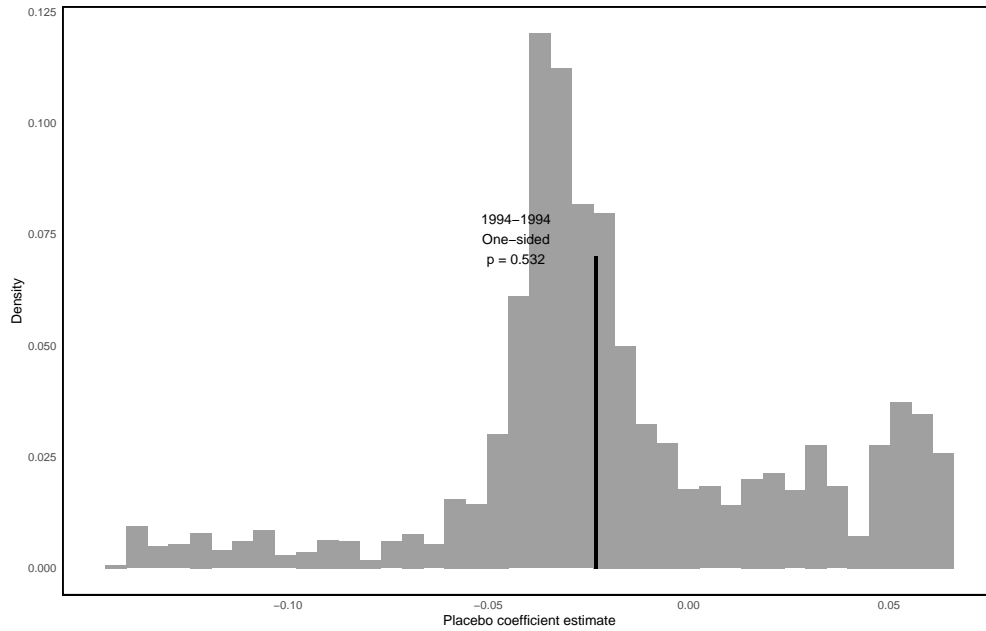


Figure 22: The histogram shows the simulated null distribution of the estimates for the third period of peace talks (April 30, 1994 to December 23, 1994).

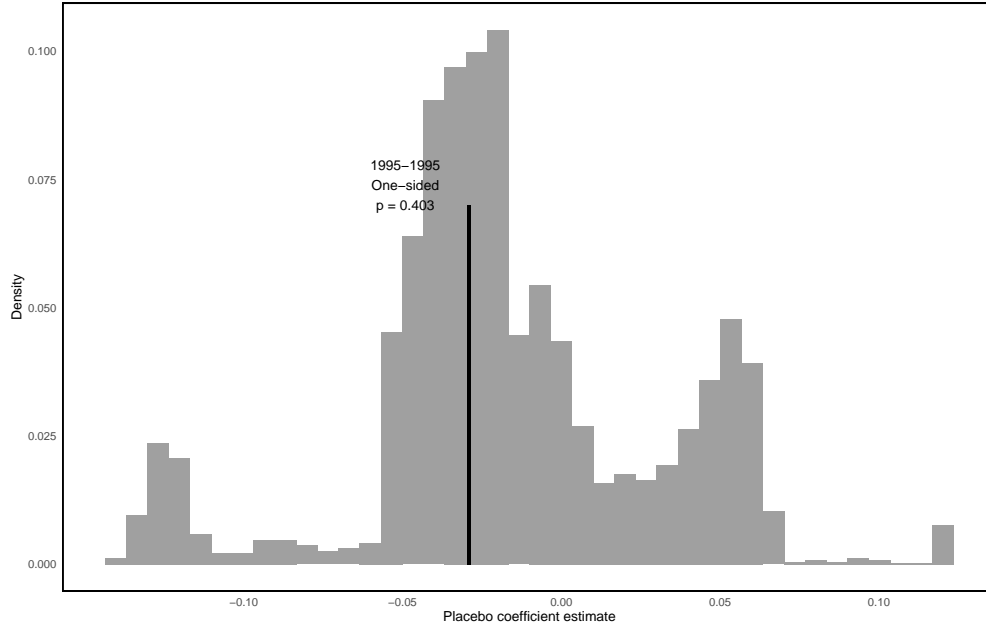


Figure 23: The histogram shows the simulated null distribution of the estimates for the third period of peace talks (May 24, 1995 to November 04, 1995).

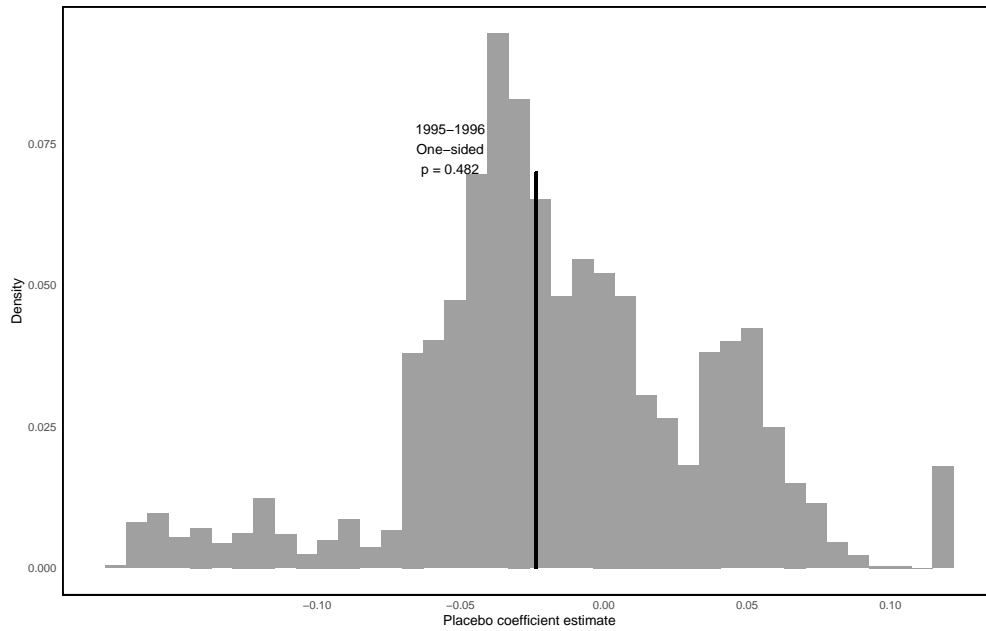


Figure 24: The histogram shows the simulated null distribution of the estimates for the third period of peace talks (December 11, 1995 to February 25, 1996).

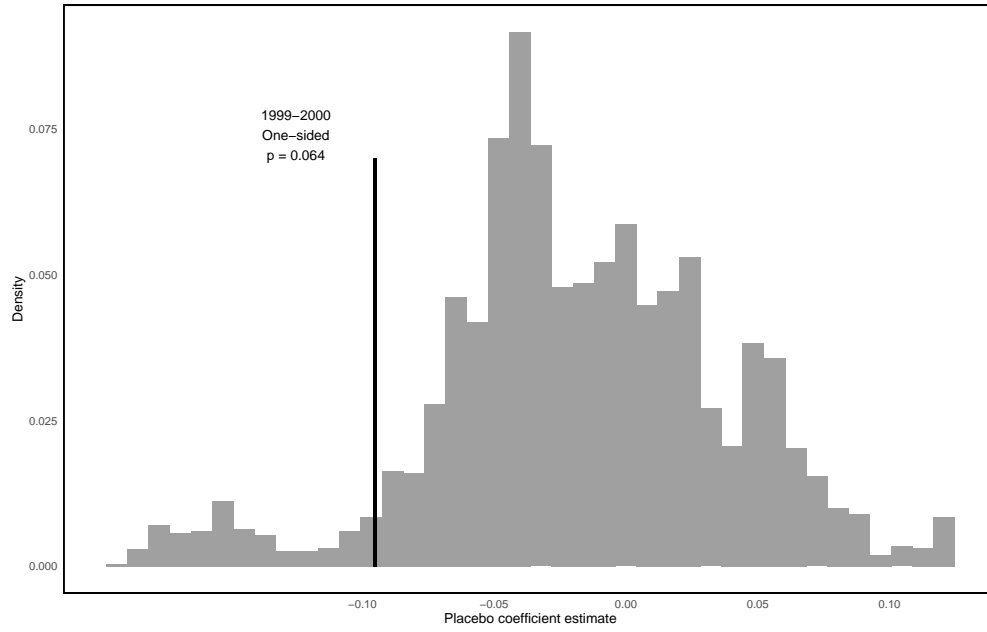


Figure 25: The histogram shows the simulated null distribution of the estimates for the third period of peace talks (December 08, 1999 to January 11, 2000).

Appendix I: Substituting threats for Assad’s cult of personality

In the paper we show that during peace talks, *Tishreen* has reduced mentions of Israel. This leads to the question: What does the regime replace the Israeli threat with? We have coded the number of pictures of Assad that appeared on the front page of *Tishreen*. In this table, we run the following regression:

$$\text{headlines on Israel} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{pictures of Assad}$$

Where headlines on Israel the number of front-page headlines that discuss Israel and pictures of Assad is the number of Assad’s pictures on the front page. Note that between 1987 and 2002, the number of Assad images hovers around one per day. Some days, however, saw as many as five images of president on a single front page. The inverse relationship between Israel headlines and Assad images suggests that diversionary threats and indicators of the Assad personality cult may have served as substitutes.

	Model 1	Model 2
Assad Pictures	-0.49***	-0.44***
	(0.04)	(0.03)
Intercept	4.72***	4.07***
	(0.04)	(0.10)
Year FE	No	Yes

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Table 20: Relationship between coverage of Israel and pictures of Assad on *Tishreen* front page

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