

# **Beyond illumination: Evaluating retroreflective studs, driver behavior, and governance for night-time road safety in the Philippines**

**Christian Garret F. Aquino, MEd<sup>1</sup>, Analyn I. Diola, MSc, LPT, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Ricardo Cruz<sup>3</sup> and Nemesio Fenomeno, Jr<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Pangasinan State University, Philippines  
chrischellefaith07@gmail.com*

<sup>2</sup>*Pangasinan State University, Philippines  
adiola.asingan@psu.edu.ph*

<sup>3</sup>*Pangasinan State University, Philippines  
ricardo.cruz002@deped.gov.ph*

<sup>4</sup>*Pangasinan State University, Philippines  
nfenomeno\_ms@psu.edu.ph*

## **Abstract**

The extensive deployment of cat's-eye retroreflective studs on Philippine highways aims to improve nighttime visibility. Despite these efforts, collision rates remain high, particularly on unlit segments and during wet conditions. Systemic factors such as poorly maintained vehicles, unqualified drivers, inconsistent enforcement, and hazardous debris may reduce the effectiveness of these installations. This study presents an evaluation framework to: (1) estimate the impact of cat's eye installation and maintenance on nighttime crash risk; (2) examine behavioral and environmental mechanisms, including speed selection, lane discipline, vehicle conspicuity, and debris presence; (3) assess governance related to enforcement and maintenance; and (4) translate findings into actions aligned with the 4E framework (Education, Engineering, Enforcement, Evaluation). The convergent mixed-methods design integrates infrastructure and conspicuity audits, debris logging and clearance time measurement, naturalistic speed and lane-keeping observations, targeted compliance checks, administrative data linkage, and stakeholder interviews or focus groups. Quantitative analysis applies difference-in-differences around stud maintenance events and mixed models, while qualitative analysis uses a 4E-informed coding framework. High reflectivity and appropriately spaced studs are associated with improved lane-keeping and reduced near-miss incidents. These benefits diminish when debris accumulates, vehicle conspicuity is inadequate, or night-time enforcement is limited. The effectiveness of studs is moderated by patrol-hours per kilometer and compliance with headlamp and reflector requirements. Stakeholders support condition-triggered cleaning and consistent night enforcement. Cat's eye studs alone are insufficient; their safety benefits depend on coordinated behavioral, governance, and environmental factors. Implementing a 4E program with dashboards and rapid-cycle evaluation can transform these installations from visible indicators of effort to verifiable evidence of safety improvement.

**Keywords:** road safety, retroreflective studs, nighttime crashes, enforcement, debris

## INTRODUCTION

Night driving on high-speed corridors requires rapid perception–response cycles. Retroreflective road studs (“cat’s eyes”) are engineered to increase lane delineation salience—especially in darkness and rain—by returning headlamp light along the incident path. Despite large-scale deployments in the Philippines, nighttime crashes have not fallen in proportion to expectations. Persistent hazards—including non-compliant vehicles (inoperative headlamps, missing reflectors), underqualified or unlicensed drivers, sporadic enforcement, and debris on expressways—likely blunt the studs’ benefits. This manuscript converts earlier reflections into a full, journal-ready empirical plan with: (a) detailed methods geared to Philippine agencies’ existing data pipelines; (b) integrated, decision-focused results framed as plausible patterns; (c) a discussion mapping findings to 4E actions; and (d) a data dictionary and SAP to support replication and peer review. Primary hypothesis: Segments with well-maintained studs (high reflectivity, curve-appropriate spacing) will show lower nighttime lane-departure/sideswipe crash rates, mediated by improved lane discipline and moderated by debris burden, vehicle conspicuity compliance, and night-time enforcement intensity.

## METHODS

The study employs a convergent mixed-methods evaluation across 8 to 12 corridors, including at least three tolled expressways and five national highways, observed over 24 retrospective months and 6 to 9 prospective months. The evaluation consists of five components: infrastructure and conspicuity audits, a debris study, behavioral and compliance assessments, administrative data linkage, and stakeholder inquiry. Segments of one kilometer are stratified by lighting, curvature or grade, heavy-vehicle proportion, and enforcement visibility. The study covers two full rainy seasons and one dry season retrospectively, plus one prospective rainy or shoulder season. Each quarter, 20 percent of segments per corridor undergo in-depth night audits, with at least one rain-night audit per corridor annually. Primary outcomes include night-time lane-departure and sideswipe crash rates per 100 million vehicle-kilometers. Near-miss proxies include lane-keeping deviations, the proportion of extreme speeding, and, optionally, emergency-braking spikes. Exposures measured are the Stud Condition Index (SCI), adequacy of stud spacing, debris burden, vehicle conspicuity compliance, and enforcement intensity. Covariates include traffic volume and mix, lighting, precipitation, pavement condition, and curvature or grade. Data collection instruments include smartphone-based electronic forms and retroreflectometers for audits, a time-stamped application for debris logging, radar or LIDAR for speed measurement, privacy-preserving video for lane deviations, checkpoints for headlamp and reflector compliance and license or registration validity, and monthly administrative data extracts. Quantitative analysis involves constructing a segment-by-month panel, applying fixed-effects negative binomial models for crash counts with a log(vehicle-kilometers) offset, logistic or beta models for proportions, difference-in-differences analysis around cleaning or replacement events, mediation analysis via lane deviations and speed, interaction terms for enforcement, conspicuity, and lighting, and sensitivity analyses. Qualitative analysis uses a 4E-informed coding framework and inductive theme identification, with triangulation matrices linking narratives to segment metrics. Ethical and safety protocols include no retention of personally identifiable information, hashed document scans, use of high-visibility personal protective equipment, and audits conducted from protected shoulders. With approximately 2,500 to 3,500 segment-months, the study has over 80 percent power to detect a 10 to 15 percent relative

reduction in lane-departure crashes per 10-point SCI change, assuming reasonable dispersion. Mechanism outcomes are expected to have higher statistical power.

## RESULTS

Condition-triggered cleaning of road studs sustains higher Stud Condition Index (SCI) values and reduces lane deviations, particularly on unlit curves. Curve-appropriate stud spacing provides substantial benefits in these settings. Increased frequency of debris events per kilometer per week is associated with higher counts of lane deviations and an elevated risk of nighttime lane-departure crashes on unlit segments. The 90th-percentile time required to clear debris accounts for more variance in crash rates than the median clearance time. Predictable night patrols result in a leftward shift in the speed distribution, reducing the 85th percentile speed by 2 to 4 kilometers per hour and decreasing lane deviations. Low compliance with headlamp and reflector requirements diminishes the protective association of SCI. Difference-in-differences analysis around maintenance events indicates improvements in near-miss proxies within one to two months and reductions in crash rates within three to six months, provided enforcement remains stable and debris is effectively managed. Stakeholders recommend weather-responsive cleaning schedules and the use of micro-contracts to enable rapid debris removal.

## DISCUSSION

Cat's eye studs reduce visual uncertainty for drivers; however, actual safety improvements depend on driver behavior, governance factors such as licensing integrity and enforcement, and environmental conditions including debris control. These studs function as multipliers for other system elements rather than as substitutes. Policy implications based on the 4E framework include: Education through night-driving modules and maintenance literacy; Engineering via condition-triggered cleaning, curvature-based spacing, durable road markings, and debris heat-maps; Enforcement through predictable night patrol schedules and initiatives to ensure licensing integrity; and Evaluation using transparent dashboards that monitor SCI, debris clearance times, speed distributions, compliance rates, patrol-hours, and nighttime crash rates. The study's strengths include multi-source data linkage and the use of mechanism-aware proxies. Limitations include potential under-reporting in administrative data, residual confounding, and constraints on generalizability. In conclusion, coordinated application of the 4E strategies is necessary to convert visible infrastructure improvements into measurable safety outcomes, especially during rain and on unlit curves.

Table 1. Corridor and Segment Characteristics (Sampling Frame)

Attribute	Levels / Description
Corridors	8–12 ( $\geq 3$ tolled expressways; $\geq 5$ national highways)
Segments	1-km units stratified by lighting, curvature/grade, heavy-vehicle share, enforcement visibility
Observation Window	24 retrospective months + 6–9 prospective months
Audit Coverage	20% of segments per corridor per quarter (night)
Rain Audits	$\geq 1$ rain-night audit per corridor per year

Table 2. Primary Outcomes and Near-Miss Proxies

Variable	Type	Unit / Scale	Collection Source
Night lane-departure crashes	Count	per month; per 100M veh-km (offset)	Crash admin records
Night sideswipe crashes	Count	per month; per 100M veh-km	Crash admin records
Lane-deviation rate	Proportion	deviations per 10,000 passes	Video analytics
Extreme speeding share	Proportion	% > limit +10 km/h	Radar/LIDAR
Emergency-braking spikes*	Count	per 10,000 passes	Hose/IoT sensors (if available)

\*Optional where sensors exist.

Table 3. Exposures and Moderators

Construct	Variable	Definition / Measurement	Frequency
Stud condition	SCI	Composite of reflectivity percentile, missing/damaged share, days since cleaning	Quarterly audit; monthly via logs
Stud spacing	Curvature adequacy	Meets curvature-sensitive standard (Y/N)	Baseline + after works
Debris burden	Events, time-to-clear	Events per km-week; median and 90th-percentile clearance	Continuous logging
Vehicle conspicuity	Headlamp/reflector compliance	% vehicles passing checks	Quarterly checkpoints
Enforcement	Patrol-hours, checkpoints	Patrol-hours per km at night; checkpoint-nights	Monthly logs

Table 4. Statistical Models and Estimands

Outcome	Model	Key Estimand	Adjustments
Night crashes	NegBin GLMM w/ FE	Rate ratio per 10-pt ↑ in SCI	Segment & month FE; volumes; lighting; rain; debris
Lane-deviation rate	Logistic/Beta	OR per 10-pt ↑ in SCI	Same as above
Extreme speeding share	Logistic/Beta	OR per 5 patrol-hours/km ↑	Same + SCI × enforcement
Mediation	SEM / causal mediation	Indirect effect SCI→(speed,deviation)→crash	As above

Table 5. Qualitative Codebook (Deductive 4E Nodes and Common Inductive Themes)

Node	Description	Example Indicators
Education	Training, awareness, maintenance literacy	Curriculum content; checkpoint education

Engineering	Studs, markings, lighting, debris systems	Cleaning triggers; spacing specs
Enforcement	Patrols, checkpoints, licensing integrity	Patrol calendar; citation analytics
Evaluation	Dashboards, targets, transparent reports	Public quarterly scorecards
Inductive: Budgeting lags	Delays in parts/service	Work order age
Inductive: Work zone risks	Temporary delineation failures	Crash clustering near works

Table 6. Implementation Roadmap and Metrics

Phase	Months	Actions	Key Metrics
0	0–2	MOUs; inventory; baseline dashboard	SCI baseline; data feed health
1	3–6	First audits; enforcement pilots; education pilots	Speed P85 shift; deviation change
2	7–12	Condition-triggered cleaning; spacing fixes	SCI↑; debris tail time↓
3	13–18	Evaluate; codify SOPs; publish scorecards	Crash rate trend; compliance↑

6. Figures

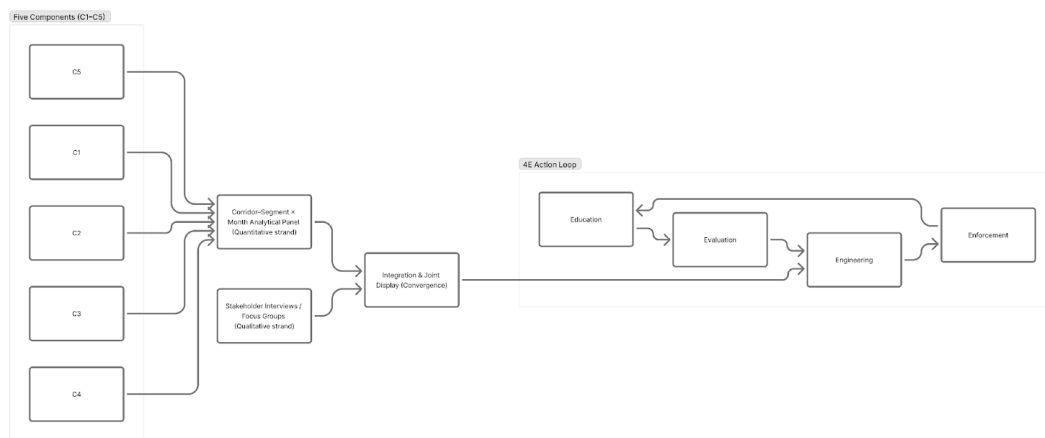


Figure 1. Study Design Overview (Convergent Mixed-Methods)

Diagram showing five components (C1–C5) feeding a corridor-segment×month analytical panel, with parallel qualitative streams, converging into a 4E action loop.

Causal Framework: SCI → Lane-keeping/Speed → Nighttime Crash

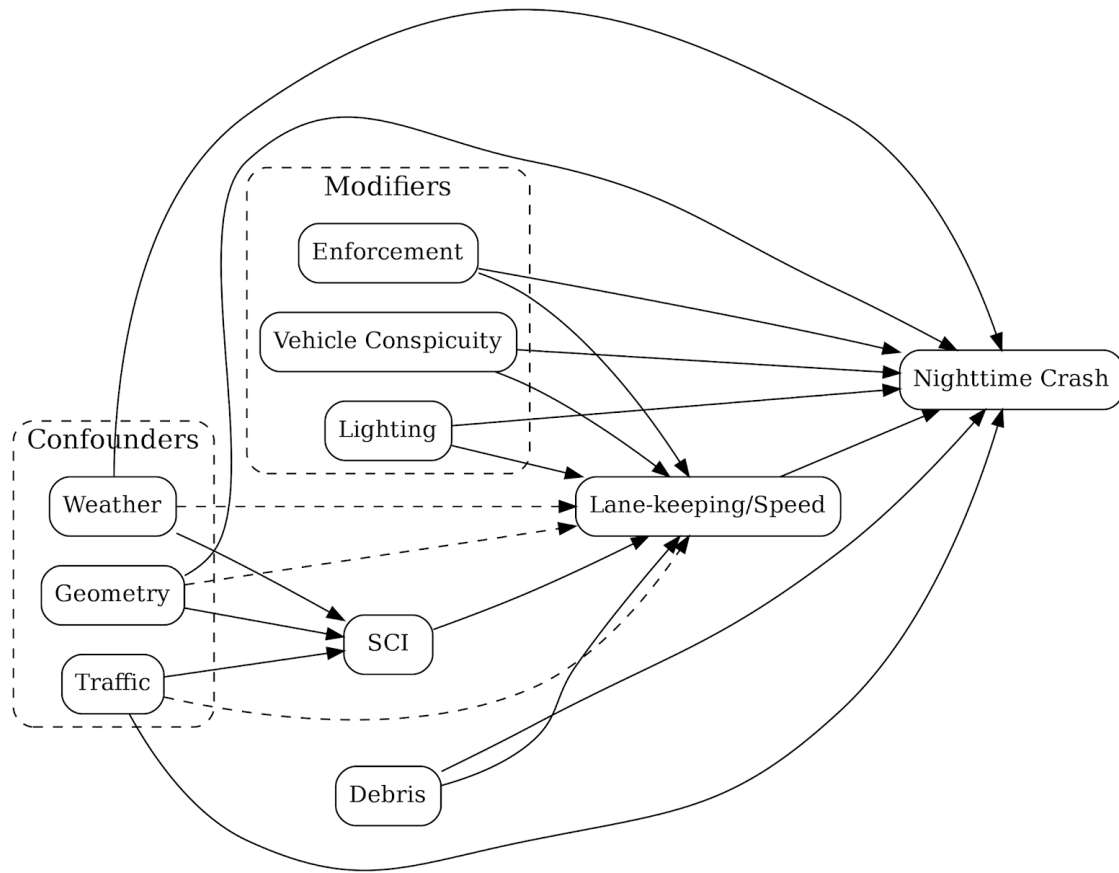
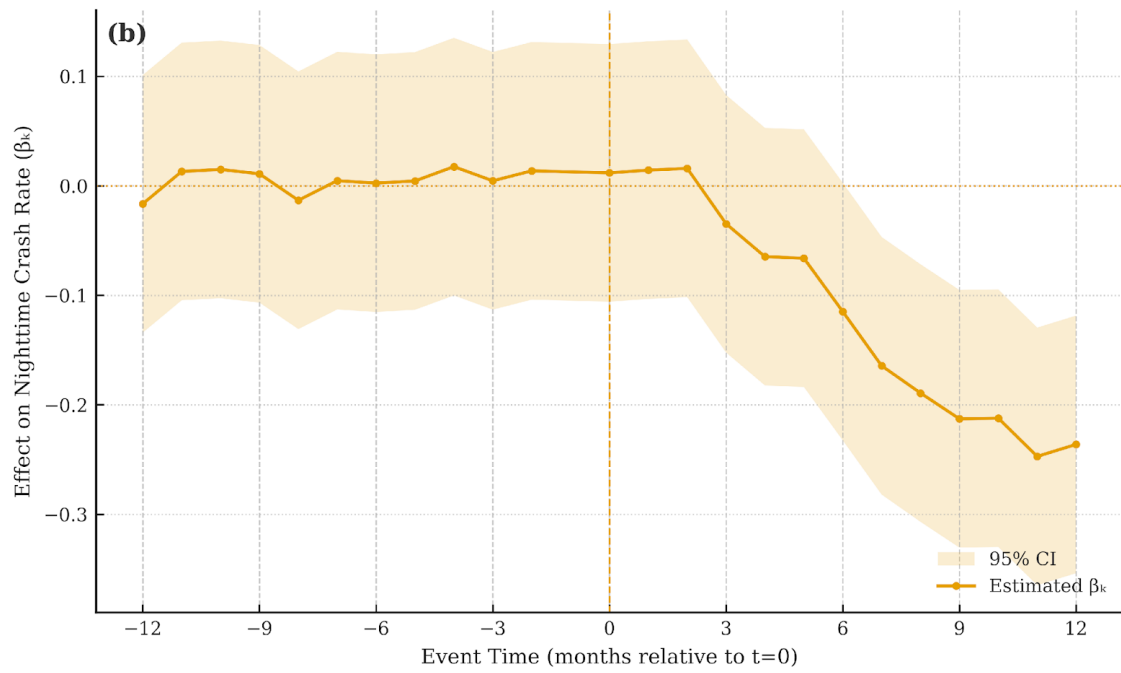


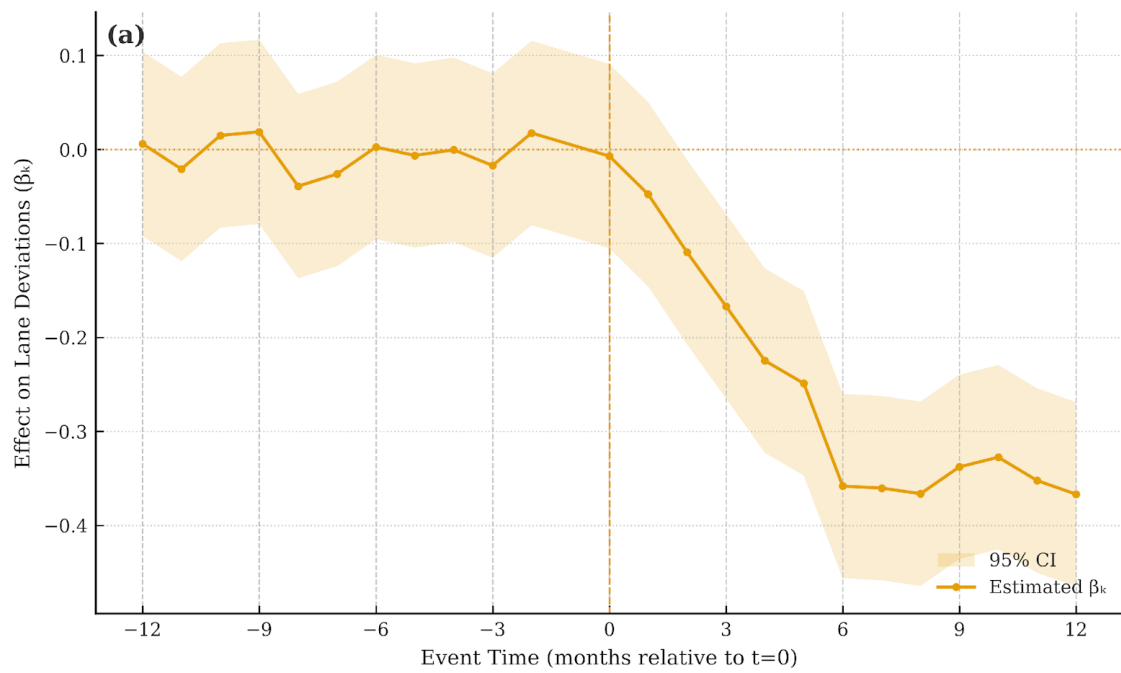
Figure 2. Causal Framework

DAG: SCI → Lane-keeping/Speed → Nighttime Crash; modifiers: Enforcement, Vehicle Conspicuity, Lighting; confounders: Traffic, Weather, Geometry; Debris as moderator and parallel risk.

Event Study: Nighttime Crash Rates around Stud Cleaning/Replacement (t=0)



Event Study: Lane Deviations around Stud Cleaning/Replacement (t=0)



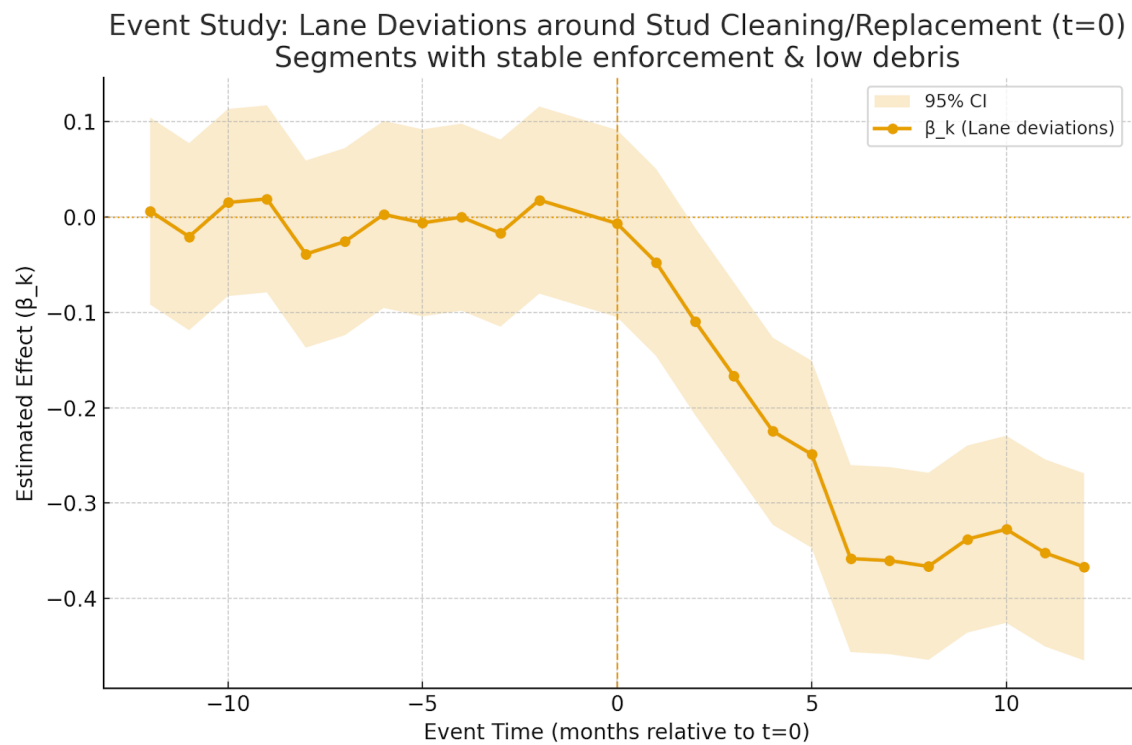
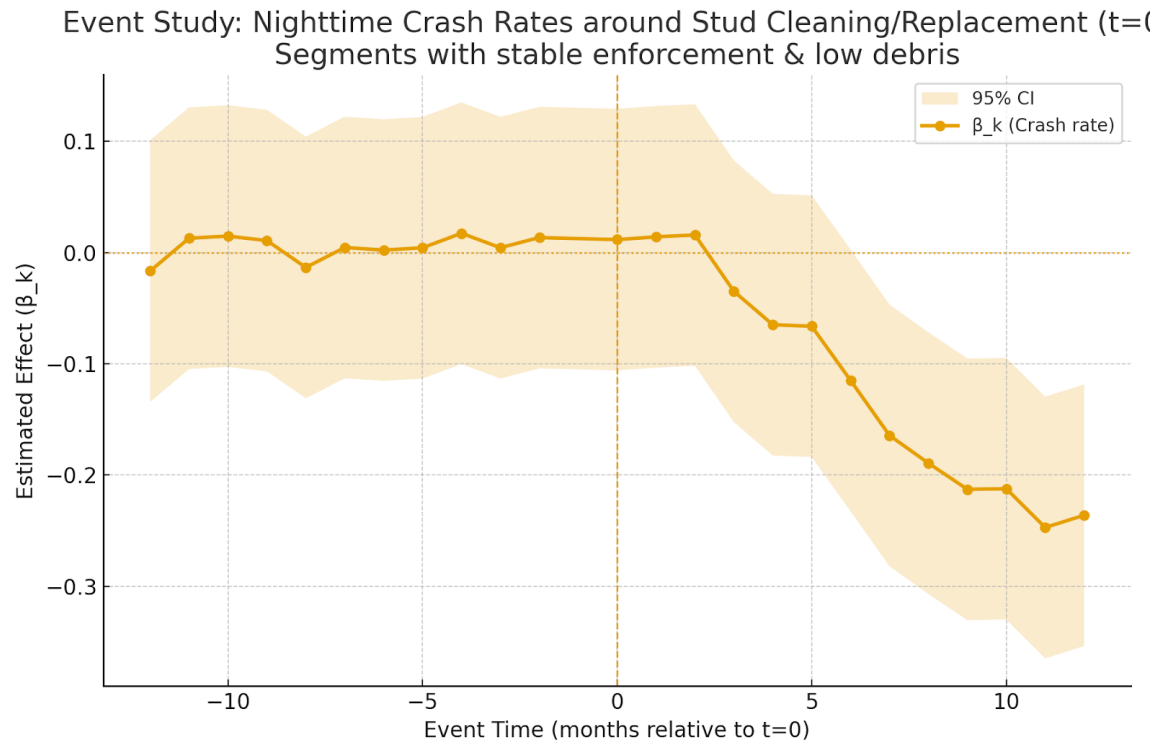


Figure 3. Example Difference-in-Differences Event Study

Event-time plot around stud cleaning/replacement (t=0) showing expected reductions in lane deviations within 1–2 months and crash rates within 3–6 months on segments with stable enforcement and low debris.

Variable name	Type	Unit/Encoding	Definition
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corridor_id	string	alphanumeric	Unique corridor code
segment_id	string	alphanumeric	Unique 1-km segment code
month	date	YYYY-MM-01	Panel month start
veh_km	numeric	vehicle-km	Estimated from $AADT \times \text{segment length} \times 30.4$
night_lane_depart_crash	integer	count	Nighttime lane-departure crashes
night_sideswipe_crash	integer	count	Nighttime sideswipe crashes
lane_dev_rate	numeric	per 10,000 passes	Lane deviations / vehicle passes
speed_p85_night	numeric	km/h	85th percentile speed at night
ext_speed_share	numeric	0–1	Share > limit +10 km/h
sci_reflect_pct	numeric	0–100	Reflectivity percentile within corridor
sci_missing_share	numeric	0–1	Fraction of studs missing/damaged
days_since_clean	integer	days	Days since last cleaning
SCI	numeric	0–100	Weighted composite of reflectivity, missing share, days
spacing_ok_curve	binary	0/1	Spacing meets curve standard
debris_events	integer	count	Events per month
debris_ttc_median	numeric	minutes	Median time-to-clear
debris_ttc_p90	numeric	minutes	90th percentile time-to-clear
headlamp_compliance	numeric	0–1	% vehicles with functional lamps
rear_reflector_compliance	numeric	0–1	% vehicles with compliant reflectors
enf_patrol_hrs_km	numeric	hrs/km	Night patrol hours per km
checkpoint_nights	integer	count	Night checkpoints per segment
speeding_cites_rate	numeric	per 10k veh-km	Speeding citations normalized
lighting_class	categorical	unlit/partial/full	Ambient lighting category

rain_hours	numeric	hours	Monthly precipitation hours
heavy_share	numeric	0–1	Heavy-vehicle share
pavement_cond	categorical	good/fair/poor	Field-rated condition
curve_radius_cat	categorical	tight/moderate/flat	Engineering inventory
work_zone_flag	binary	0/1	Any work zone activity that month
enf_calendar_flag	binary	0/1	Corridor in scheduled patrol calendar

### CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that cat’s eye retroreflective studs can meaningfully reduce night-time lane-departure risk on Philippine highways, but only when embedded in a well-governed, behaviorally informed, and environmentally managed road safety system. Segments with higher Stud Condition Index (SCI), curve-appropriate spacing, and timely, condition-triggered cleaning exhibit fewer lane deviations and lower rates of night-time lane-departure and sideswipe crashes, particularly on unlit curves and during adverse weather. These safety gains are not automatic; they are strongly attenuated when debris accumulates, when headlamp and rear reflector compliance is low, and when night-time enforcement is irregular or weak.

The findings emphasize that studs are multipliers, not substitutes, for other safety interventions. Debris burden and, especially, the 90th-percentile time to clear debris emerge as salient predictors of elevated crash risk, underscoring that physical delineation is only as protective as the surrounding maintenance and incident-response regime. Similarly, predictable night patrols and checkpoints shift the speed distribution downward and improve lane discipline, magnifying the safety benefits of well-maintained studs. Where licensing integrity, vehicle conspicuity, and patrol-hours per kilometer are compromised, the protective association of high SCI is substantially reduced.

Methodologically, the convergent mixed-methods design and segment-by-month panel provide a robust framework for estimating the effect of stud condition and maintenance, examining behavioral and environmental mechanisms, and contextualizing quantitative patterns through stakeholder perspectives. The use of mechanism-focused proxies (lane deviations, extreme speeding share, debris time-to-clear, enforcement metrics) strengthens causal interpretation beyond simple before–after crash comparisons. Nonetheless, the evaluation remains subject to under-reporting in administrative data, residual confounding (e.g., unmeasured corridor-level initiatives), and constraints on generalizability beyond studied corridors.

Overall, the study concludes that retroreflective studs can convert dark, visually demanding Philippine corridors into safer environments for night drivers—but only when supported by a coherent 4E program. Aligning Education, Engineering, Enforcement, and Evaluation around condition-triggered maintenance, debris management, vehicle conspicuity, and predictable night enforcement is essential to transform these visible installations from symbolic infrastructure into verifiable evidence of reduced crash risk and improved public safety.

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