



Selective Exposure and Hostile Media Perceptions in Election Campaigns

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Theoretical Background: Selective Exposure & Hostile Media



Selective exposure

- People select news which are consistent with their political beliefs
 - Since Lazarsfeld et al. a dominant paradigm to explain exposure to and perception of news in election campaigns, supported also by current experimental (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Iyengar et al., 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2012; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009, 2011) and observational (Stroud, 2008; Wicks et al., 2013) research
- If partisans select news which agree with their beliefs, they should report the news coverage to be friendly to their beliefs

Hostile media

- Partisans perceive news coverage as hostile to their beliefs
 - Pioneered by Vallone et al. (1985) and demonstrated frequently thereafter (Hansen & Kim, 2011)
 - Also prevalent in the context of election campaigns (for example Beck, 1991; Dalton et al., 1998; Huye & Glynn, 2010; Schmitt-Beck, 1994), mostly *relative* hostile media perceptions (Gunther et al., 2001)
- Partisans should report the news coverage to be hostile to their beliefs.

- ① 'Real world' estimates of the prevalence and magnitude of selective exposure and hostile media perceptions during two German general election campaigns
- ② Addressing the contradicting predictions of the selective exposure and hostile media paradigms
 - Magnitude and direction of selective exposure and bias perceptions vary **between** media outlets
 - Varying effects are associated **within** media outlets
 - Stronger selective exposure → friendly media perceptions
 - Weaker selective exposure → hostile media perceptions

UNIVERSITÄT HOHENHEIM



Method, Measures, & Statistical Analysis



German Bundestag elections 2009 & 2013

Data Source:

- Representative survey data from rolling cross section surveys in the run-up to the elections, German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES)
- Geographically stratified random selection of telephone numbers and selection of respondents within households via last-birthday-method

2009

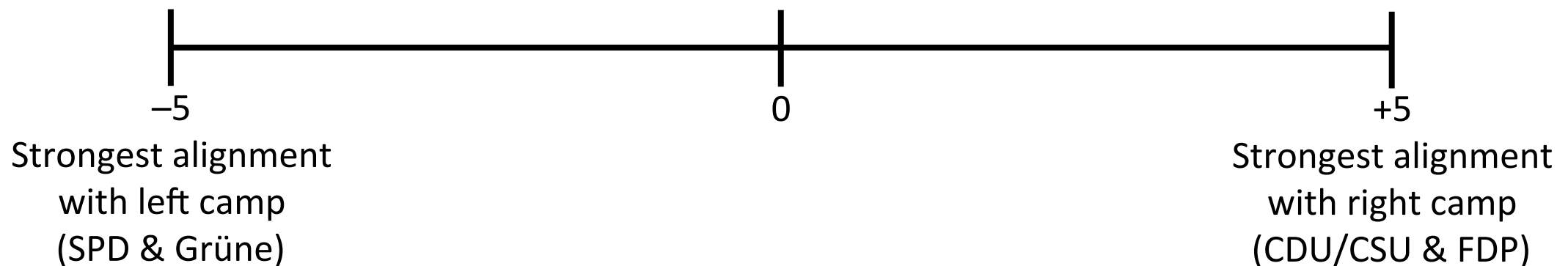
- Field time: 8 weeks
- Total interviews: n = 6008
- AAPOR Response Rate: 19.6%

2013

- Field time: 11 weeks
- Total interviews: n = 7882
- AAPOR Response Rate: 15.5%

IV of interest: Left-right party alignment score

- Consists of *party identification*, attitudes towards *government of the political camp*, attitudes towards the *political parties* and attitudes towards the *top candidates*



Important control or moderator variable: Political interest

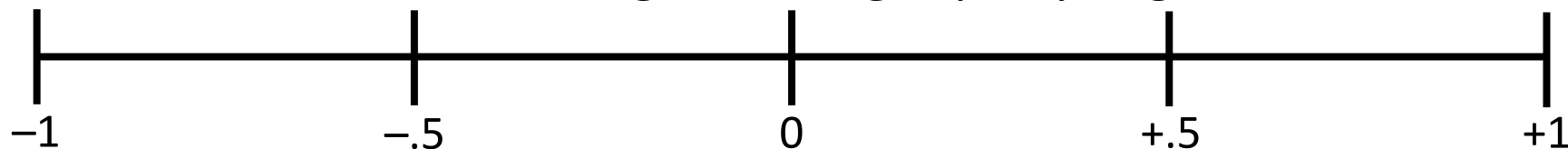
- Mean score of two items (general political interest and interest in current campaign), -2 to 2.

Selection:

- Media outlets used for political information during last 7 days
 - TV news of 4 most important broadcasters (ARD, ZDF, RTL, Sat.1)
 - National tabloid BILD
 - Up to 2 newspapers (national newspapers taz, FR, SZ, FAZ, Welt; generic: local or regional newspaper & online news (only 2009))

Bias Perception:

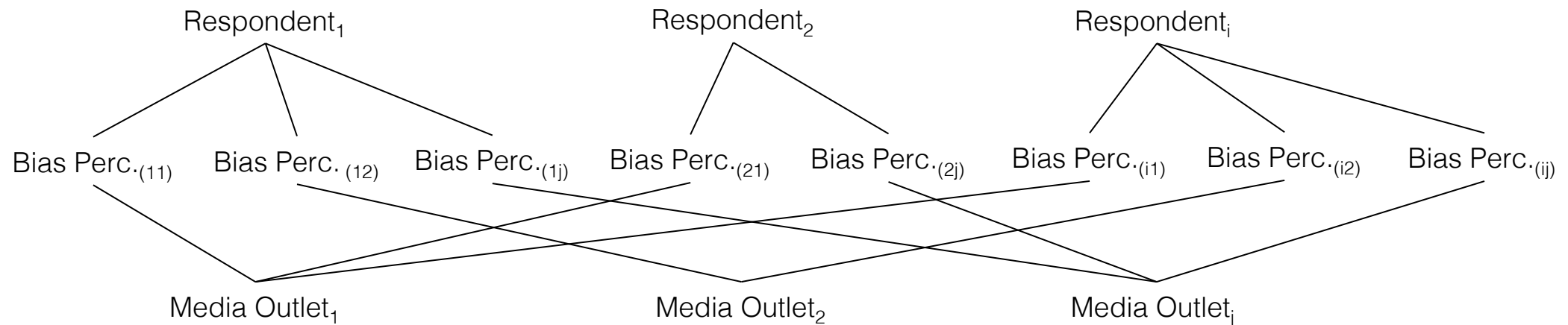
- For all selected outlets, 3 political parties favored by news coverage
- Bias differential according to left-right party alignment



Strongest bias
in favor of left camp
(SPD & Grüne)

Strongest bias
in favor of right camp
(CDU/CSU & FDP)

Cross-classification of DV observations in both respondents and media outlets



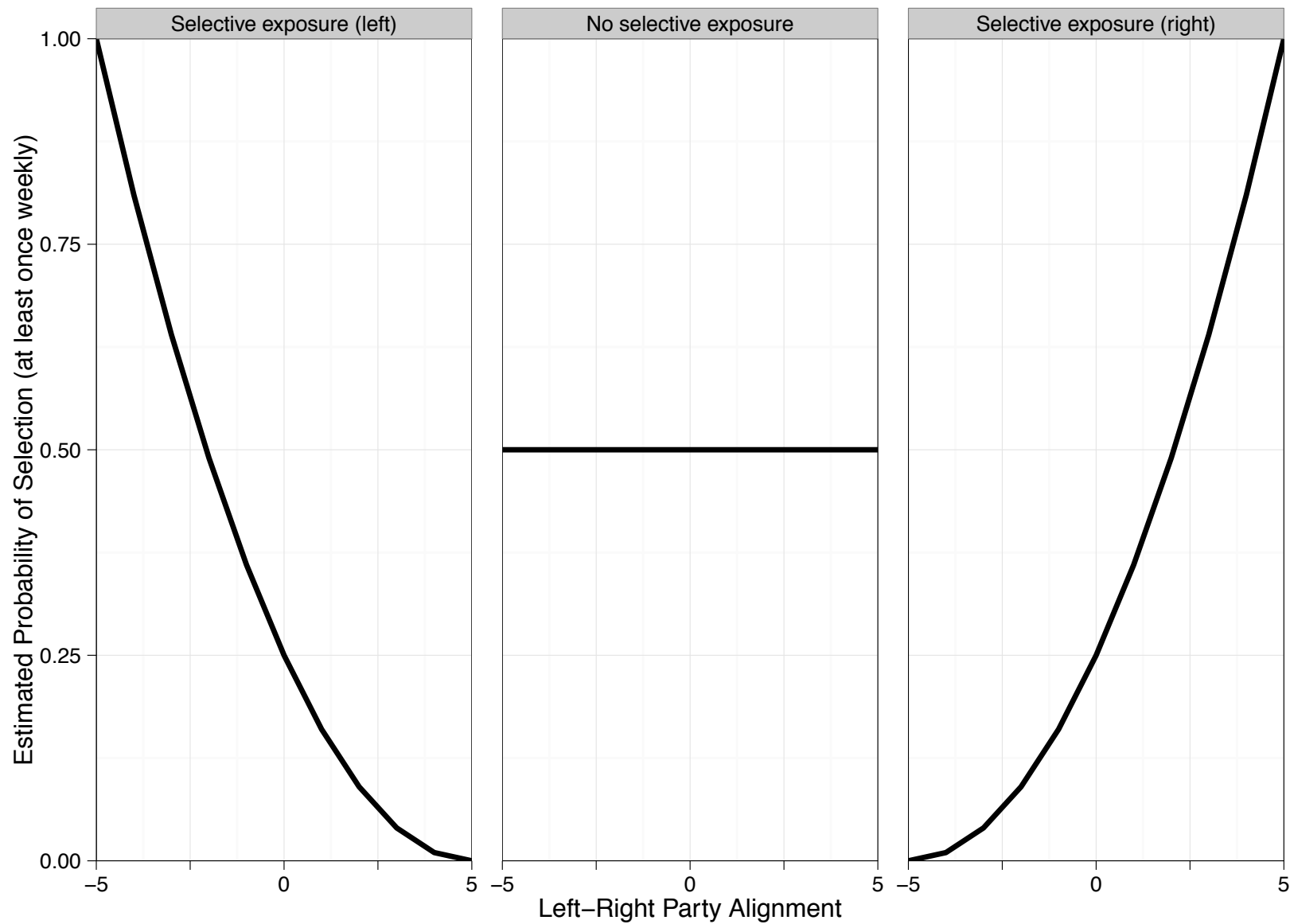
1. Estimation of effects of respondents' characteristics which vary between media outlets
2. Investigation of the relationship of the varying effects within media outlets



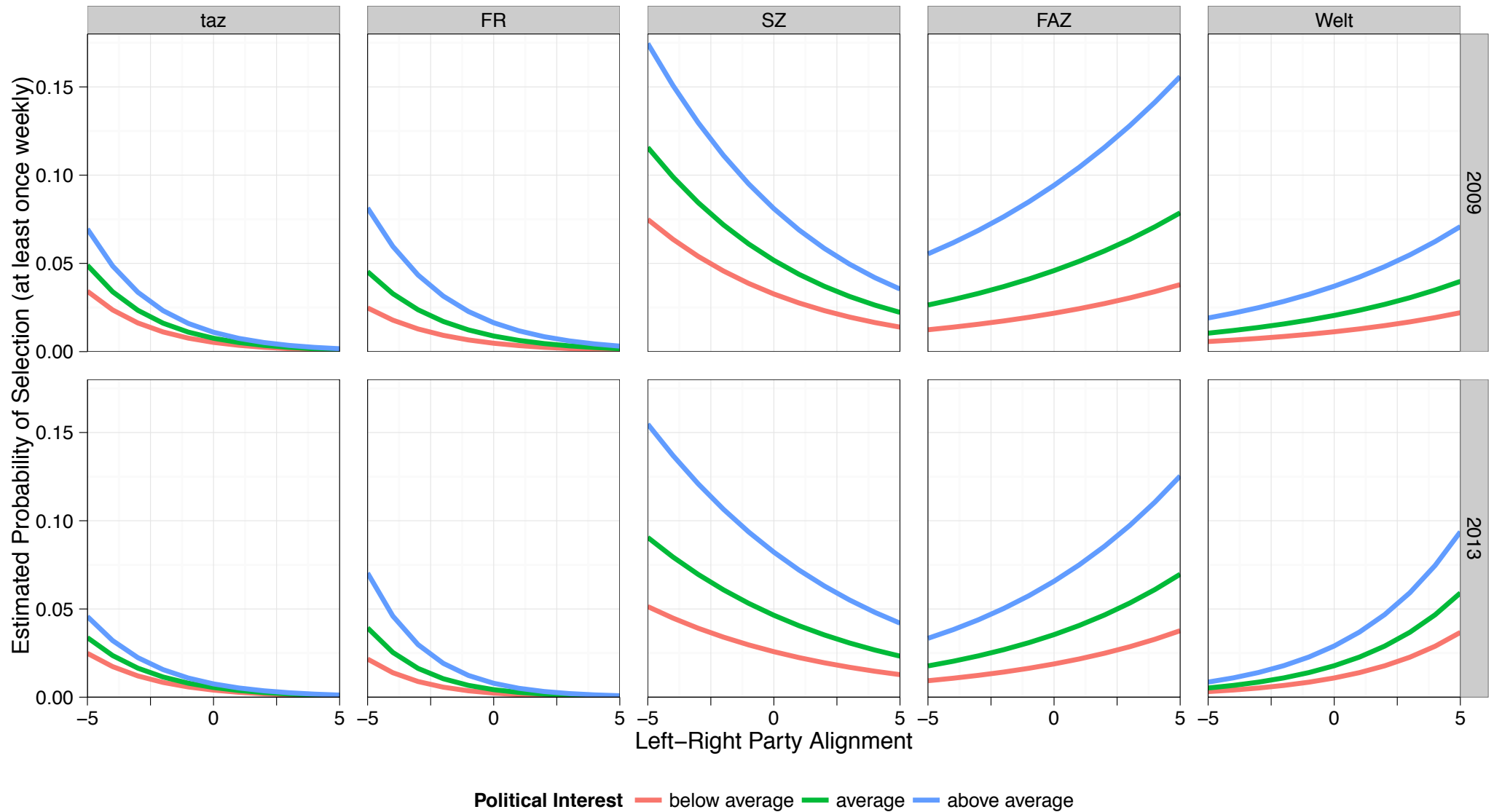
Results



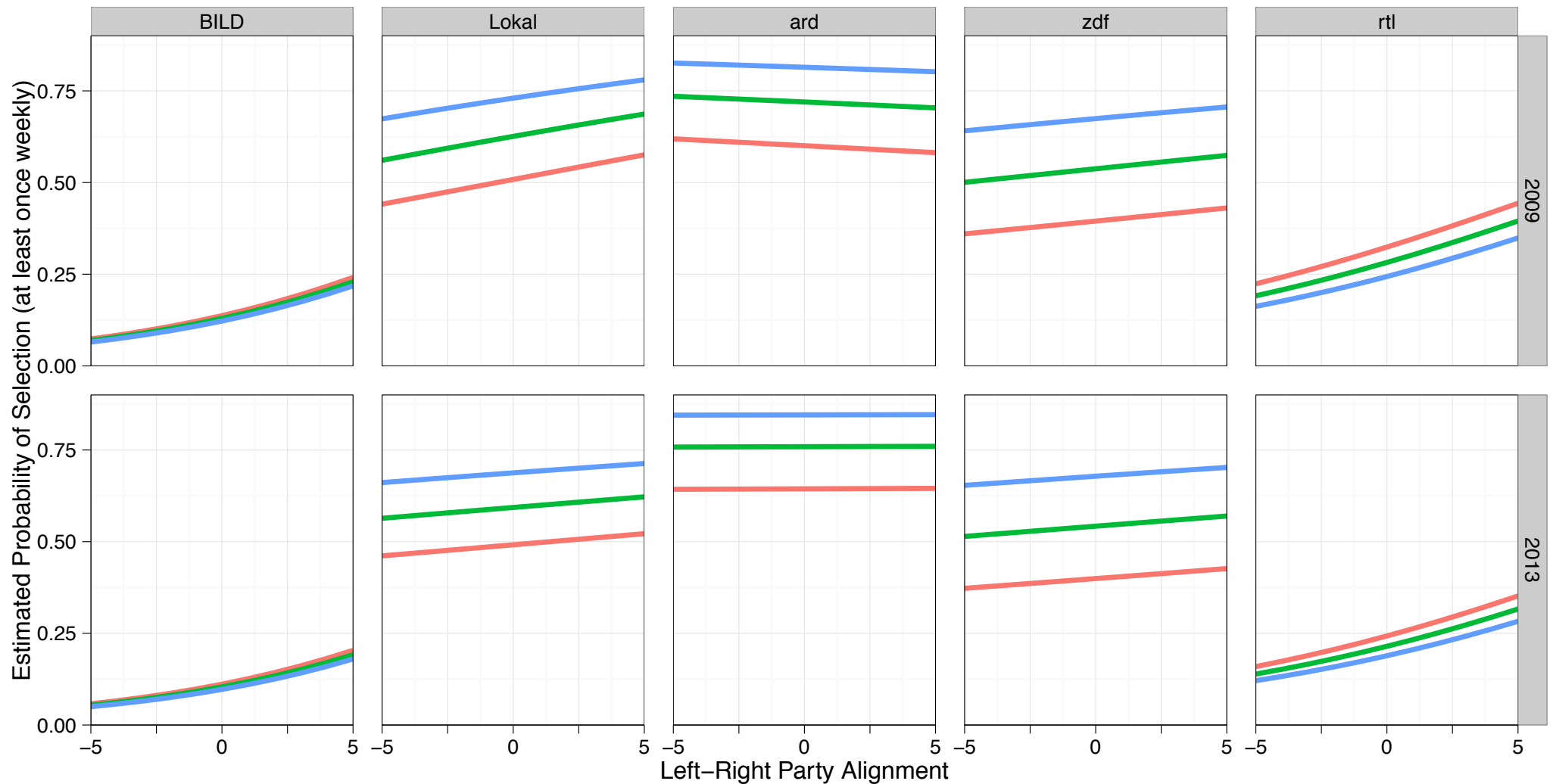
Media Selection: Idealized Results



Media Selection: Empirical Results (I)



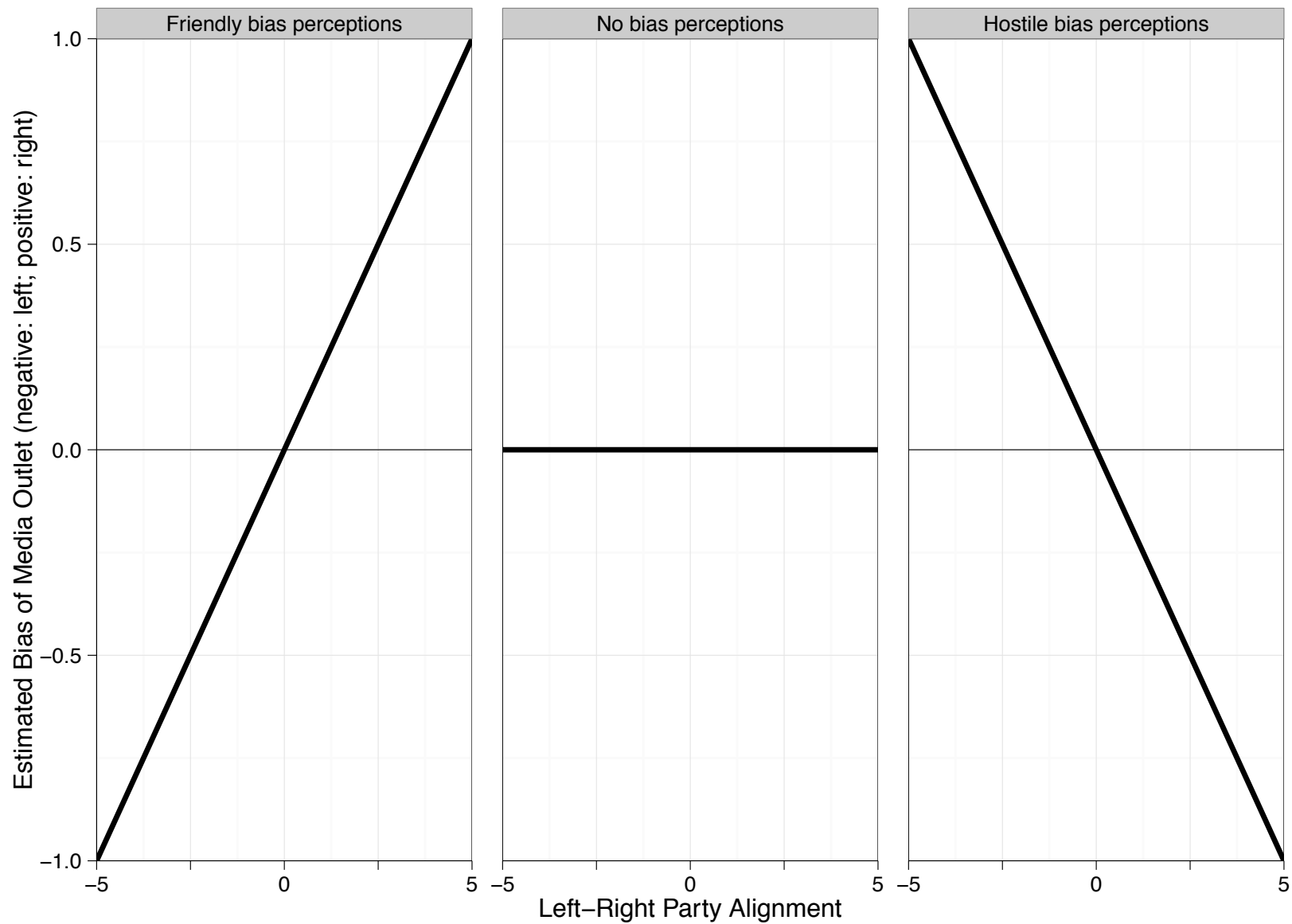
Media Selection: Empirical Results (II)



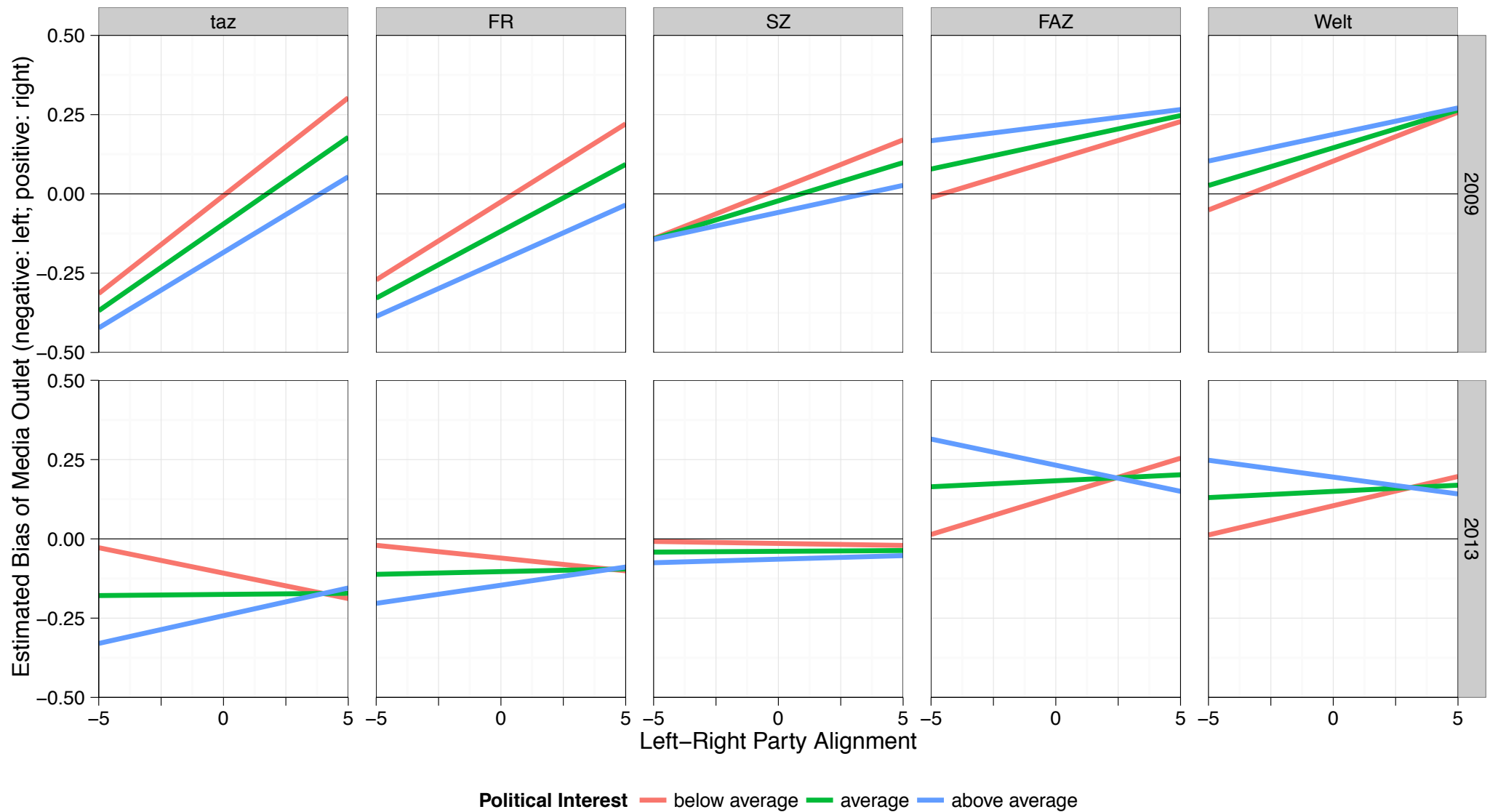
Note
Not shown: Sat.1, Online news

Political Interest — below average — average — above average

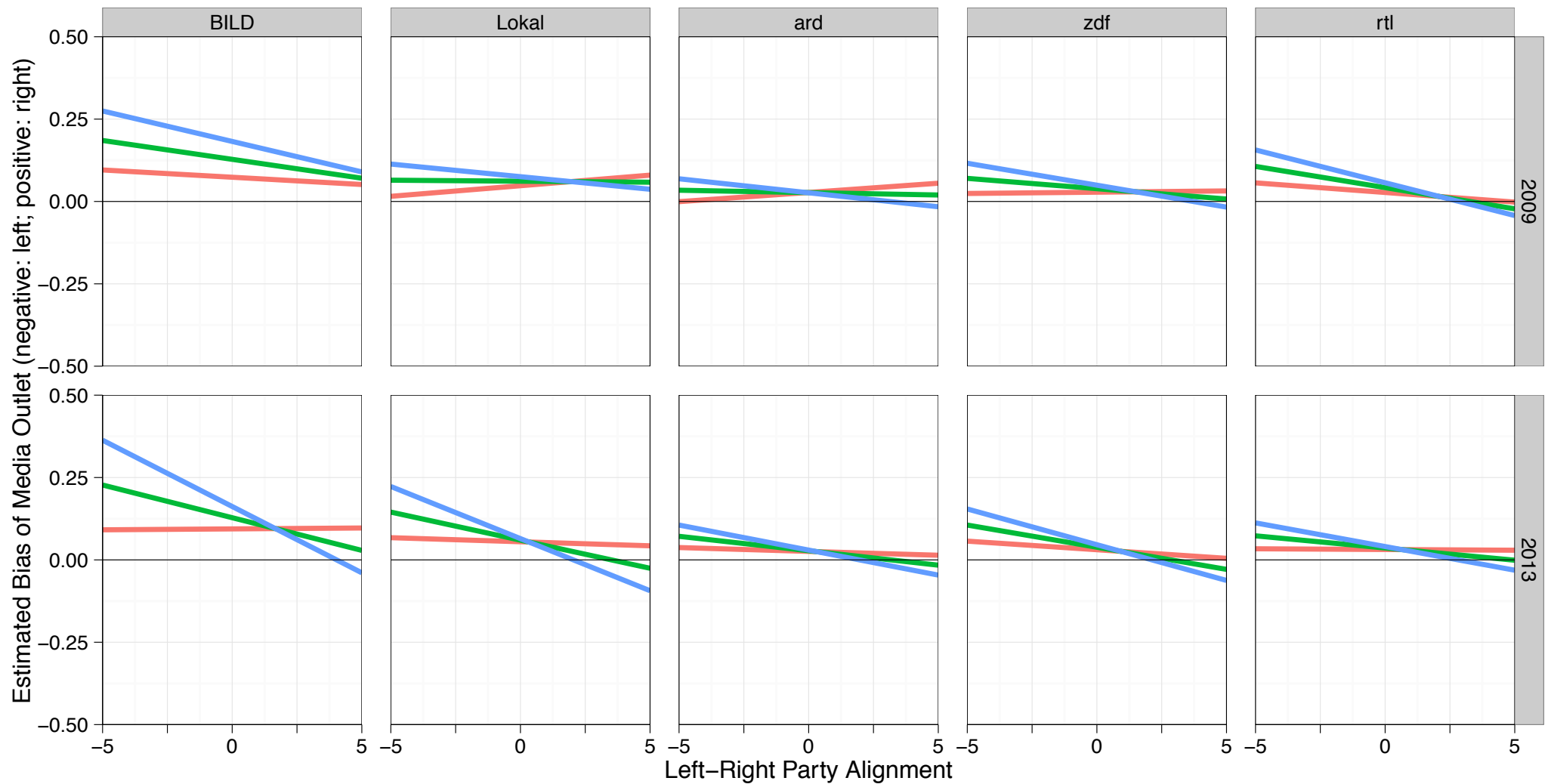
Bias Perception: Idealized Results



Bias Perception: Empirical Results (I)



Bias Perception: Empirical Results (II)

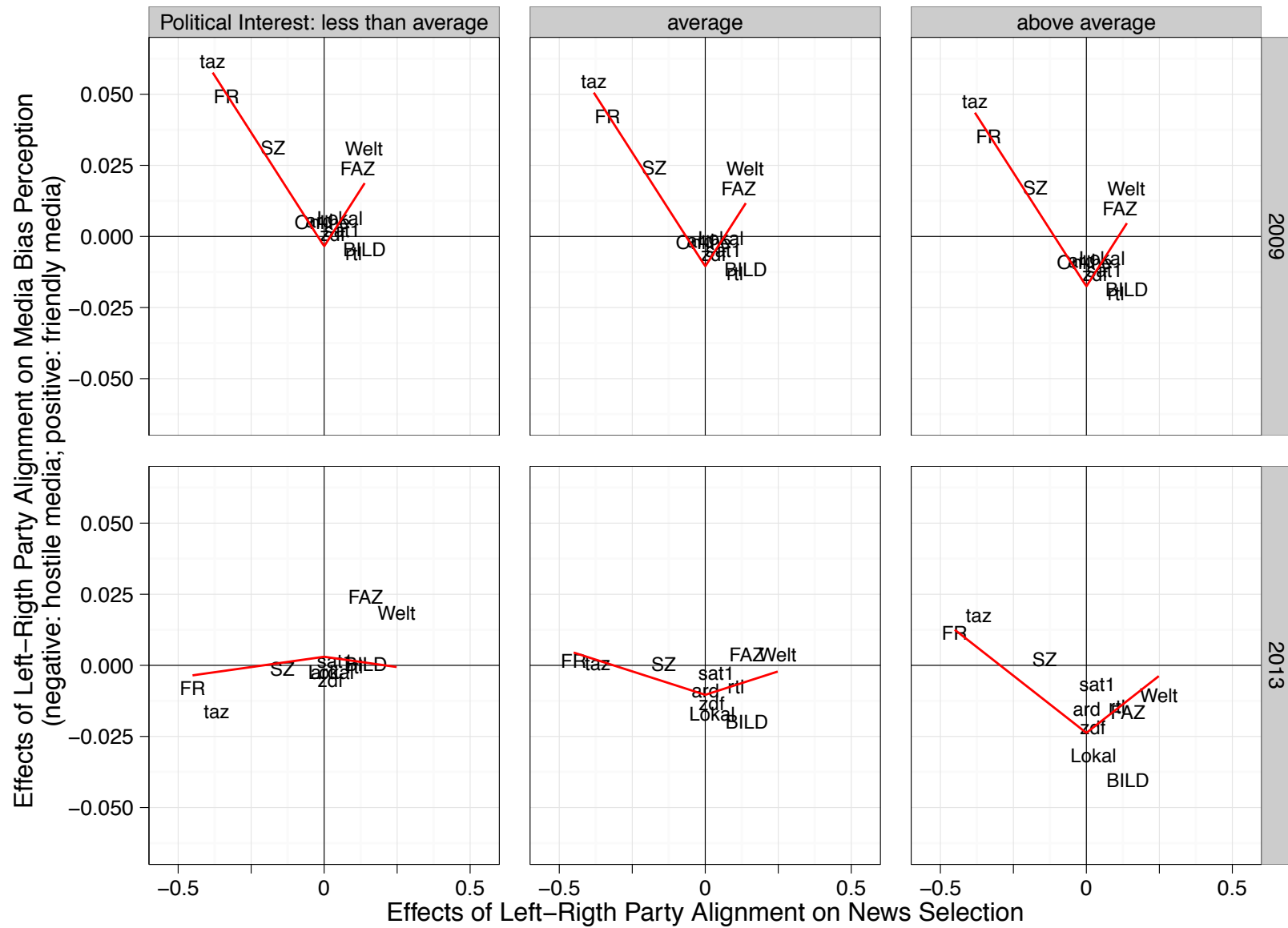


Note

Not shown: Sat.1, Online news

Political Interest — below average — average — above average

Results: Media Selection and Bias Perception





Discussion



Selective exposure:

- Evidence for selective exposure to national newspapers (quality press and tabloid BILD) and RTL news
- Broad reach of local/regional newspapers and public TV broadcasters across the political spectrum

Bias perceptions:

- Some evidence for friendly media perceptions (quality press in 2009)
- Some evidence for relative hostile media perceptions among the highly involved, but of limited magnitude

Selective exposure & bias perceptions:

- Some support for the proposed pattern of both phenomena within media outlets (2009 and among the highly involved in 2013)

Limitations:

- Cross-sectional survey design: no causal claims, “de facto selectivity” (Sears & Freedman, 1987, p. 198)
- Limitations of media outlet sample, especially (politically aligned) internet sources

Strengths:

- Credible ‘real world’ estimates for prevalence and magnitude of selective exposure and hostile media perceptions during two German national election campaigns
- Empirical test of a proposal to reconcile the contradicting conclusions of two prominent paradigms
- Instant replication for two elections, but further replications needed

**Universität Hohenheim
Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft
Marko Bachl**

**www.komm.uni-hohenheim.de/bachl
marko.bachl@uni-hohenheim.de**



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Appendix



Independent variables

| | 2009 | | | 2013 | | |
|---|-------|------|------|-------|------|------|
| | M | SD | n | M | SD | n |
| <i>Components of left-right party alignment score</i> | | | | | | |
| <i>Party identification differential</i> | 0.03 | 2.88 | 5326 | -0.01 | 2.93 | 6990 |
| Attitude towards right camp government | 0.18 | 3.64 | 5859 | 0.03 | 3.61 | 7676 |
| Attitude towards left camp government(*) | 0.12 | 3.35 | 5873 | -0.46 | 3.39 | 7694 |
| <i>Government left-right differential</i> | 0.15 | 2.99 | 5905 | -0.22 | 2.96 | 7730 |
| Attitude towards CDU | 1.11 | 2.83 | 5910 | 1.13 | 2.82 | 7708 |
| Attitude towards CSU | 0.06 | 2.92 | 5814 | 0.15 | 2.92 | 7582 |
| Attitude towards CDU/CSU | 0.60 | 2.72 | 5917 | 0.65 | 2.72 | 7722 |
| Attitude towards SPD(*) | -0.76 | 2.48 | 5903 | -0.99 | 2.37 | 7706 |
| Attitude towards FDP | 0.30 | 2.77 | 5878 | -1.17 | 2.71 | 7683 |
| Attitude towards Grüne(*) | -0.64 | 2.66 | 5898 | -0.54 | 2.64 | 7700 |
| <i>Party left-right differential</i> | -0.13 | 1.65 | 5930 | -0.51 | 1.69 | 7745 |
| Attitude towards top candidate CDU | 2.20 | 2.51 | 5954 | 2.12 | 2.81 | 7780 |
| Attitude towards top candidate SPD(*) | -1.04 | 2.41 | 5817 | -0.49 | 2.71 | 7661 |
| Attitude towards top candidate FDP | 0.24 | 2.86 | 5850 | -0.67 | 2.57 | 7226 |
| Attitude towards top candidate Grüne(*) | -0.24 | 2.53 | 5663 | -0.08 | 2.64 | 7489 |
| <i>Top candidate left-right differential</i> | 0.31 | 1.47 | 5973 | 0.26 | 1.64 | 7796 |
| <i>Left-right party alignment score</i> | 0.08 | 1.96 | 6003 | -0.13 | 2.02 | 7863 |
| <i>Political interest / involvement</i> | | | | | | |
| Political interest in general | 0.42 | 1.05 | 6006 | 0.45 | 1.00 | 7882 |
| Interest in current campaign | 0.14 | 1.17 | 5999 | 0.10 | 1.11 | 7870 |
| Political interest score | 0.28 | 0.98 | 6008 | 0.28 | 0.92 | 7882 |

Notes

n is the number of cases with valid responses for a given item. Total number of cases are $n_{2009} = 6008$ and $n_{2013} = 7882$.

All items for the left-right party alignment score range from -5 to 5.

(*) Items which refer to the left political camp are reversed coded.

The political interest items range from -2 (low interest) to 2 (high interest).

Selection of media outlets and perceived media bias

| | 2009 | | | 2013 | | |
|---------------------------|-------------|------------------|------|-------------|------------------|------|
| | Selection % | Perceived bias M | SD | Selection % | Perceived bias M | SD |
| <i>Television news</i> | | | | | | |
| ARD | 71 | 0.03 | 0.20 | 74 | 0.03 | 0.23 |
| ZDF | 54 | 0.04 | 0.21 | 54 | 0.04 | 0.23 |
| RTL | 29 | 0.03 | 0.22 | 22 | 0.03 | 0.20 |
| SAT.1 | 12 | 0.02 | 0.17 | 09 | 0.03 | 0.18 |
| <i>Newspapers</i> | | | | | | |
| Local/regional newspapers | 62 | 0.07 | 0.29 | 59 | 0.07 | 0.31 |
| BILD | 14 | 0.12 | 0.30 | 11 | 0.12 | 0.33 |
| SZ | 6 | -0.05 | 0.34 | 6 | -0.05 | 0.34 |
| FAZ | 6 | 0.21 | 0.37 | 4 | 0.20 | 0.37 |
| Welt | 3 | 0.17 | 0.30 | 2 | 0.17 | 0.33 |
| taz | 1 | -0.19 | 0.38 | 1 | -0.25 | 0.35 |
| FR | 1 | -0.23 | 0.42 | 1 | -0.16 | 0.37 |
| Online news | 3 | 0.07 | 0.32 | | | |

Notes

Full newspaper titles: SZ: Süddeutsche Zeitung; FAZ: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung; Welt: Die Welt; taz: Die tageszeitung; FR: Frankfurter Rundschau.

“Online news” were not included in the 2013 survey.

$n_{2009} = 6003$; $n_{2013} = 7863$.