

When Party and Issue Preferences Clash: Selective Exposure and Attitudinal Depolarization

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Abstract

Preference-driven selective exposure does not always have to reinforce existing party and issue preferences and lead to attitudinal polarization. Because voters and parties are unlikely to agree on all issue preferences, selective exposure at the information selection stage can expose voters to counterattitudinal information. When party and issue preferences clash, voters are forced to reconcile this mismatch. Instead of polarization, existing preferences can be weakened. We test these assumptions with data from an information board experiment conducted during two real election campaigns in Germany. Participants encountered information about 5 parties and 13 issues in the form of short headlines that could be selected for further reading. The results suggest that (1) prevalent selective exposure for preferred parties and issues exists, exposing voters to a mix of consonant and dissonant information, that (2) the processing of dissonant, counterattitudinal information requires additional cognitive resources, and that (3) issue position congruency of participants and parties affects the extremity of party evaluations and the confidence in vote decisions. In short, selective exposure does not always lead to attitudinal reinforcement and polarization.

Proposal

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Introduction

Selective exposure and the reinforcement of existing predispositions during political campaigns has been a familiar theme and common belief in research at least since *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944). While the empirical evidence for selective exposure especially in psychological research has long been considered decidedly mixed (Sears and Freedman 1967, Frey 1986), the current consensus is that the phenomenon of selective exposure has consistent if moderate support especially for political information (Hart et al. 2009). In recent years, the topic has received renewed attention, mostly due to the proliferation of additional information channels that facilitate selective exposure. This development has clearly caught the attention of researchers as several new studies attest (for a recent review, see Stroud 2011).

The argument for selective exposure is fairly simple and intuitively convincing. Voters with strong predispositions have a motivation to defend their attitudes and preferences. Many recent studies in political communication focus on partisan and issue preferences as the motivation for information selection, and they find clear support for this assumption (e.g. Chaffee et al. 2001, Kim 2009, Stroud 2011). While these studies make a valuable contribution, they are missing one crucial aspect: political messages usually involve *both* partisan sources and issue information. This creates a triangular constellation that resembles Heider's (1958) classic balance theory. If a voter's party and issue preferences are perfectly aligned or "balanced," preference-driven selective exposure should do what it is believed to do, reinforce existing attitudes and lead to attitudinal polarization. If, however, the preferred party takes an opposed position on an important issue (or vice versa), an apparently confirmatory selection bias responding to

an issue or party cue can easily lead to the encounter of conflicting, counterattitudinal information. This will often become clear to a voter only *after* such information has been selected and the cognitions are out of balance. In short, the damage is done. In multiparty systems with several parties and a range of different political issues, such an outcome should be far from unusual.

What happens when the preferred party takes a position that a voter does not like, or when a disliked party takes a strongly supported position? Unless a voter can ignore such a mismatch, the conflicting information needs to be reconciled in one way or another. It will probably require the adjustment of at least one of the preferences for party or issue, a cognitively demanding process.

The consequences for individual attitudes and preferences should be the opposite of what is commonly expected to be the outcome of selective exposure. Instead of attitudinal polarization, preferences should rather become weaker and less extreme. If a voter has to make a decision, he or she will probably require more time and have less confidence in that decision. In some instances, it might even lead to the defection from the preferred party. In short, preference-driven selective exposure can lead to the encounter of both congruent and conflicting information. While the former should reinforce existing preferences and lead to attitudinal polarization, the latter should have the opposite effects.

Theory

Information Selection

Election campaigns supply voters with an enormous quantity of political information, much more than any voter can reasonably process. This gives voters the opportunity and in fact makes it necessary to direct their attention to a subset of the

information. The process of information selection is thus a crucial first step when investigating information processing and the attitudinal consequences of campaign messages at the individual level. In the literature, the term selective exposure is not clearly defined and used quite liberally for a number of different aspects that are better kept distinct.

From a psychological perspective, selective exposure usually focuses on how readers or viewers select information when given a choice, and how they perceive this information (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk 2006). The classic explanation for selective exposure is cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957). In order to prevent or minimize dissonance caused by information that challenges existing decisions and beliefs, individuals are assumed to *select* congruent or consonant information and to *avoid* incongruent or dissonant information. The evidence has always been very mixed. As is often the case with psychological processes, any effect depends on a large variety of individual and contextual factors (e.g. Sears and Freedman 1967, Frey 1986, Hart et al. 2009).

The modern version is motivated information processing. Individuals with strong predispositions are motivated to defend and reinforce their opinions (Ditto and Lopez 1992, Edwards and Smith 1996, Kunda 1990, Meffert et al. 2006, Taber and Lodge 2006). Dissonant information is not necessarily avoided but can rather induce adversely motivated people to engage in defensive mechanisms such as counterarguing. At the perceptual level, one striking and well supported expression of such motivated reasoning is the hostile media phenomenon. Those with strong predispositions or preferences tend to perceive media sources as hostile toward their own position (Vallone, Ross, and Lepper 1985). In particular neutral media content is perceived as

biased because partisans categorize or evaluate the same content differently (Schmitt, Gunther, and Liebhart 2004).

It should be noted that the careful assessment and evaluation of information is a process that goes beyond the initial and immediate information selection decision. Information selection is often based on automatic, split-second decisions in response to attention-catching headlines, pictures, and other heuristic cues. In that sense, it could be argued that selective exposure at this stage is merely the decision to pay more attention to information related to issues or candidates and parties that a voter cares about. Once information is assessed more carefully, other factors such as information quality and information utility come into play – which can even lead to the selection of counterattitudinal information (Fischer et al. 2005, Valentino et al. 2009). Consequently, it will be useful to distinguish between three different stages of information selection – source selection, information selection, information processing – as well as the mode of information processing – automatic vs. controlled (see Figure 1 for a more detailed representation).

[Figure 1 about here]

Source selection can be deliberate or *controlled*, for example in form of a newspaper subscription, but will often happen as haphazard or *automatic* “de facto” selection, for example if only one local newspaper is available (Sears and Freedman 1967). Given the increasing partisan polarization of even fairly mainstream (cable) media sources and political blogs in the U.S., this selection bias has received a lot of attention in the American literature (Bennett and Iyengar 2008, Coe et al. 2008, Iyengar and Hahn 2009, Lawrence, Sides, and Farrell 2010, Stroud 2011). However, this aspect will not be addressed here as no similar development for mainstream media channels

can be observed in the European context. The focus is rather on the second and third selection stage, both at the information level. Recent research suggests that in particular two factors play a major role at the information selection stage, partisan preferences for candidates or parties as well as issue preferences.

Partisan Selectivity. As mentioned above, the idea that voters select information that correspond to their existing partisan preferences can be traced back to the Columbia School (Lazarsfeld, Berelsen, and Gaudet 1944) and is commonly explained with Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance. Laboratory studies of information selection in the U.S. (e.g. Lau and Redlawsk 2006, Meffert et al. 2006) tend to find partisan selectivity in favor of preferred candidates to be quite prevalent. However, in a U.S.-based field study using (real) campaign information supplied on a CD-ROM, Iyengar et al. (2008) find only modest support for partisan selectivity ("anticipated agreement" in their parlance), while Meffert et al. (2006) and Redlawsk (2001) find a quite robust candidate bias in laboratory experiments using information boards.

Moving from the U.S. two-party system to the German multiparty system, the political context is decidedly different and voters' partisan preferences are more complex and differentiated that defy a simple dichotomy. All else being equal, this would imply rather more than less partisan selectivity, if given the choice. Another information board study indeed finds a very pronounced selection bias for preferred parties (Meffert and Gschwend 2011). The experimental findings for both types of political systems are corroborated by survey-based studies, for example by Chaffee et al. (2001) for the U.S. and Donsbach (1991) for Germany. Further support is offered by Garrett (2009), with the additional suggestion that selection bias applies mostly to congruent information, not the avoidance of incongruent information. Based on the evidence in the reviewed

studies, there is clear support for the notion that partisan preferences often drive information selection.

Issue Publics. The second selection bias takes issue preferences as the starting point. Kim (2009), for example, explicitly refers to the classic Converse (1964) argument about issue publics and investigates selectivity for issue information with both ANES survey data and a field experiment using behavioral (web use) tracking software. She shows that issue preferences affect especially information acquisition on the internet which in turn boosts domain-specific knowledge and leads to attitudinal and evaluative polarization. Using a similar issue public argument and also using behavioral (web use) tracking software, Iyengar et al (2008) come to a similar conclusion. They deliberately test both issue and partisan preferences and find much stronger evidence in favor of issue preferences. Thus, at least in the U.S. context, issue preferences appear to have a much larger impact on information selection than partisan preferences. But overall, the evidence for party and issue preference-driven selection biases is fairly strong and justifies the first two hypotheses:

H1: Information about preferred parties is more likely to be selected than information about opposed parties.

H2: Information about important issues is more likely to be selected than information about unimportant issues.

Information Processing

But what happens when motivated voters encounter congruent and incongruent information? For congruent information, the rather obvious answer is that it should reinforce existing attitudes and lead to attitudinal polarization. This should apply to both partisan and issue preferences. The much more interesting question is what happens after the encounter of conflicting, counterattitudinal information. Taber and Lodge (2006) and Taber, Cann and Kucsova (2009) draw on psychological research on motivated skepticism (Ditto and Lopez 1992, Edwards and Smith 1996) to argue that voters engage in a disconfirmation bias and discount challenging information by counterarguing. Focusing only on issue preferences, they offer convincing experimental evidence that voters invest cognitive resources to discount challenging information in order to protect and strengthen their existing attitudes. According to Taber and Lodge's (2006) motivated skepticism model, the three main components are the selection of congruent information (confirmation bias), the discounting of incongruent information (prior attitude effect), and the cognitive effortful discounting of counterattitudinal information (disconfirmation bias), for example by perceiving arguments and evidence that support the existing preferences as stronger than the evidence for the other side. As the present study will not be able investigate the precise cognitive mechanisms, it will be sufficient to note that counterattitudinal information will demand more time and cognitive effort to process.

H3: Voters require more cognitive resources to process information that leads to a clash of party and issue preferences than for information in which party and issue preferences match.

Consequences of Selective Exposure

As mentioned above, motivated information processing assumes that voters with strong political preferences acquire and process information in a way that maintains or even strengthens pre-existing preferences. As such, attitudinal polarization is a very common outcome of election campaigns (Beasley and Joslyn 2001), especially if voters can even turn negative information about their preferred candidate into additional support (Meffert et al. 2006). The general expectation is that attitudes and preferences will strengthen when exposed to campaign information. But there are limits to this process. Redlawsk, Civettini and Emmerson (2010) show that motivated information starts to break down when the amount of counterattitudinal information reaches a tipping point and starts to overwhelm the defensive mechanisms. At this point, counterarguing dissonant information does not work anymore. Our argument is even more straightforward. After information about preferred parties or issues is selected, a voter might encounter information in which issue and party preferences clash. If both party and issue are important, this information cannot be easily ignored or, if straight from the (party) source, cannot be argued away anymore. The most likely outcome is a careful reassessment and *weakening or depolarization* of preferences and attitudes. Vote decisions become more difficult and less confident. In the conflict is truly severe, it might even lead to the defection of the most preferred party.

H4: Processing information in which party and issue preferences clash leads to (a) attitudinal depolarization, (b) longer and (c) less confident decision processes, and (d) defections from the preferred party.

Data and Method

In order to test our hypothesis, we use experimental data that was collected during two German state election campaigns in early 2006.¹ Campaign information was presented on an information board that allowed the tracking of participants' information selection behavior. In total, 362 student participants completed the study either as part of a pilot study (n=94) or the main study (n=268). Because the design aspects relevant for the current analysis, in particular the information board task, were identical in both studies, the data is pooled for the analyses reported below.

Issue and Partisan Preferences.

At the start of the study, participants indicated their issue and partisan preferences. First they were asked to indicate their position on 14 different issues on a 7-point scale (and an additional "don't know" option) as well as how important each of these issues was for them personally. Thirteen of these issues can be matched to information presented on the information board (details described below). After answering the issue questions, participants were asked to rank order the five relevant parties, Christian Democrats (CDU), Social Democrats (SPD), Liberals (FDP), Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen), and Left Party (WASG/Die Linke).

Information Board Task.

Participants were instructed to play the role of a voter and prepare for the upcoming (real) state elections in one of the two German states Baden-Württemberg

¹ The main purpose of the experiment was to test the theory of strategic voting using manipulated polls and coalition signals as incentives. These manipulations (and any related design aspects) are not relevant for the present research question and will not be further described here.

and Rhineland-Palatinate by reading campaign information. After receiving some basic introductory information about the assigned state, the information board task or “campaign” began. Participants faced a sequential stream of 90 political headlines, with always six headlines simultaneously visible on the “front page” of the information board (Figure 2). By selecting a headline, participants could read the associated article.

[Figure 2 about here]

The information was perfectly balanced by issues and parties. For each of the five parties, it covered 13 different issues and policy positions as well as two prominent candidates. The 15 remaining articles, one on each screen, covered manipulated polls, generic but real polls, and information about each state’s current issues or political history. In order to assess and directly compare the impact of partisan and issue preferences on information selection, only the 65 issue-based articles are used in the subsequent analyses. The articles were based, as far as possible, on the actual election manifestos of the state parties and supplemented with information from the national parties if necessary. All the articles had the length of approximately 120 words.

Each of the 15 subsequent screens (“weeks”) with six headlines showed a perfect partisan balance with always one headline for each of the five parties. However, the order of the issues (and candidates) across the 15 screens and the order of the party headlines on each screen was randomized. The headlines changed at the fixed interval of 45 seconds even if participants were reading a selected article in a window covering most of the headline screen.

Matching of Information and Preferences

The 65 issue- and party-specific articles provide the opportunity to investigate selective exposure based on the party and issue preferences of each participant (while

ignoring the other, non-partisan articles). The unit of analysis in the subsequent analyses is each contact of a headline (or selected article) by a participant. With 65 headlines for 362 participants, there are 23,530 data points or potential choices in the stacked data set. In total, 7,362 articles were selected for reading.

Each headline and article was matched with the issue importance, issue position, and party ranking of each participant measured at the beginning of the experiment. Issue importance and party ranking were directly assigned to each article while issue position congruency takes into account the positions (if any) of party and respondent.² Party issue positions in the articles were content analyzed and measured on a three point scale (-1 = opposed, 0 = no or unclear position, +1 = supported) while participants' issue positions are based on a 7-point rating scale (-3 = strongly opposed, +3 = strongly supported). The two measures were multiplied to create an issue position congruency score where -3 indicates strong opposition to the issue position taken by the party and +3 indicating strong support for the issue position taken by the party. When a party and/or a participant did not take a position, the issue position congruency score is 0.

Measures of Information Processing

The information board task provided two dependent measures. First, it measured whether each headline was selected by a participant, and second (if an article was

² Due to the experimental setup of the information board with a randomized but perfectly balanced information supply and a monotonic ranking of the parties, the number of (issue) articles for each party in the data was identical (total n=4706 for each issue for 362 participants). The issue importance ratings, however, are based on participants' ratings and consequently exhibit a highly uneven distribution (completely unimportant: n=595; unimportant: n=2565; somewhat important: n=7485; important: n=8650; very important: n=4235).

selected for reading), the time a participant spent reading the information. The article readings times were adjusted for individual differences in reading speed by subtracting participants' average reading time across all articles from the reading time of each individual article (mean centering).

Measures of Final Attitudes and Decisions.

After the information board task was completed, participants voted for the party of their choice and were asked a wide range of questions about political attitudes and preferences. In order to test hypothesis 4 about the effects of the selected articles, three attitudinal and two behavioral measures were selected as dependent variables. The attitudinal measures include the *confidence* in the final vote decision (4-point scale ranging from highly uncertain to highly certain), the *rating* of the top ranked party (11-point rating scale ranging from -5 to +5), and the evaluative *polarization* between the rating of the top ranked and the lowest ranked party. The behavioral measures were the *decision time* it took each participant to cast a ballot after the ballot was shown (ranging between .13 second and nearly 100 seconds before a natural log transformation), and whether a participant's vote decision represents a *defection* from the top ranked party.

Results

Information Selection

Party and issue selectivity was assessed by regressing the selection measure of each headline on the party ranking and issue importance score of each respondent while controlling for the "week" of the campaign and the order of the headlines on each screen (to capture any time and order effects). The results reported in Table 1 indicate that all four factors have a statistically significant impact, but that only party ranking and issue importance do so in a substantively important way. Participants were 28

percentage points more likely to select an article about the top ranked party compared to one about the lowest ranked party. As Figure 3 shows, nearly every second article about the most preferred party was selected while less than every fifth article about the least preferred party was chosen. Participants were also 24 percentage points more likely to select an article about a highly important topic than an article about an entirely unimportant topic. These two main effects are not moderated any further by an interaction effect (not reported). Figure 3 summarizes both the observed and predicted effects.

[Table 1 and Figure 3 about here]

The two control variables suggest that selection proclivity did slightly decline over the course of the information board task and that top-listed headlines did have an advantage over headlines listed lower. Both effects, however, are substantively very small with predicted effect sizes of at most two percentage points.

In short, the results suggest that both party and issue selectivity matter for German voters, with a slight advantage for partisan selectivity. A direct comparison of both effects sizes has to take into account that the match of party preferences and headlines is more or less perfect (due to explicit party label cues) while the match of issue importance ratings with the headlines is far less precise (especially when issue references in headlines are very generic but issue position and importance questions are very specific). It is certain, however, that party preferences in the German multiparty system provide a strong motivation for partisan selectivity at the information level.

Issue Position Congruency

If party preferences and issue preferences independently drive information selection, the encounter of dissonant information is possible. Figure 4 reports the

relative frequency of encountering party position information at different levels of issue position congruency (by party ranking and overall). The most frequent case is the encounter of “neutral” information, that is, either party or voter (or both) do not take an issue position. But if issue positions are taken, both congruent and incongruent encounters take place. For the two top-ranked parties, congruent information is encountered somewhat more frequently than incongruent information, but the latter is far from a rare occurrence. The basic premise for our analysis, the potential encounter of both congruent and incongruent information, is given for both preferred and opposed parties.

[Figure 4 about here]

Information Processing

Information processing was assessed by regressing the relative reading time of selected articles on party ranking, issue importance, issue position congruency, and the interaction of party ranking and issue position congruency. The “week” of the information board was included to control for any time effect.

The results indicate that both party ranking and issue importance affected information processing by increasing the reading time for preferred parties and issues (Table 2). A one unit increase in issue importance is estimated to increase reading time by approximately half a second. The party ranking effect, however, is further moderated by issue position congruency and thus better visualized in a graph. As Figure 5 shows, participants spent on average nearly two seconds more on reading articles about the top ranked party than articles about the lowest ranked party. This suggests that, on average, selective exposure continues to operate at the information processing stage. In addition, issue position congruency matters. If the top ranked party takes a position

that is strongly opposed by the participant, the reading time of this counterattitudinal information is nearly 1½ seconds longer than average. Strong agreement with the party position, on the other hand, drops the average relative reading time to half a second. Information that merely confirms existing preferences can be processed faster. For the lowest ranked party, the opposite happens. Reading about a strongly opposed position matches the party preference and requires the shortest relative reading time (more than one second below average). When (unexpectedly?) encountering a strongly supported position, however, the reading time increased to less than half a second below average. In short, when party preferences and issue preferences are in conflict with each other, information processing requires additional time. The data does not allow us to assess what happens during this additional time, but participants clearly have to allocate additional cognitive resources to reconcile this conflicting information.

[Table 2 and Figure 5 about here]

Information Effects

Information effects were tested with three attitudinal and two behavioral measures, essentially by associating these outcome variables with the exposure to information during the information board task. The dependent variables were regressed on party ranking, issue position congruency, and the interaction of these two variables using OLS, logistic, or ordered logistic regression analysis as appropriate. Overall, the results support the expectations for the three attitudinal variables but fail the test with the two behavioral measures (Table 3).

[Table 3 about here]

Starting with the confidence in the final vote decision, the two main effects as well as their interaction were significant. The effect of issue position congruency is

moderated by party ranking in a pattern that corresponds to the pattern found for the reading time: issue position congruency is positively associated with confidence when reading about the top ranked party but has a negative effect for the lowest ranked party. Figure 6 visualizes the effect as the predicted probability of a highly confident voting decision. For the top ranked party, the probability increased from 24 percent for highly incongruent issue information to 35 percent for highly congruent information. For the lowest ranked party, on the other hand, the probability dropped from 28 percent for highly incongruent issue information to 22 percent for highly congruent information. If party preference and issue position do not match, confidence drops.

[Figure 6 about here]

The same pattern of results emerged for the final rating of the top ranked party. Here, the rating of the preferred party is associated with a .36 unit increase over the range of the issue position congruency variable while the rating declines by .22 units across issue position congruence for the lowest ranked party (Figure 7). Encountering information that conflicts with the partisan and issue preferences lowers the evaluation of the preferred party.

[Figure 7 about here]

This effect is even more pronounced for the final evaluative polarization between top ranked and lowest ranked party (Figure 8). When reading about the top ranked party, polarization in favor of the preferred party increased by .86 units across the range of issue position congruency. Reading articles about the lowest ranked party, on the other hand, was associated with a decrease in polarization by .72 units across the range of issue position congruency. The information has once more the expected effects on voters' party evaluations. It should be noted, however, that the rating and

polarization results are entirely based on post-information search measures without any control for initial party evaluations – measures that are not available in this study. The pattern of results nevertheless corresponds nicely to the expectations.

[Figure 8 about here]

For the two behavioral measures, the (natural log of) voting time and the defection from the top ranked party, the expectations are not supported. Especially for defection, there is not the slightest evidence for any information effect. According to these results, any effect of reading about the parties' issue positions on the behavioral measures is thus at best indirect through the rating of the parties.

Discussion

Our results suggest that party and issue preferences have very clear and systematic effects on information selection, information processing, and information effects in multiparty systems. The information selection behavior closely matched the partisan and issue preferences of the participants, offering strong support for the notion of selective exposure, if given the choice. The perfectly balanced stream of information in our study will rarely exist in real campaigns. As such, it is more useful for the assessment of selective exposure as a theoretical mechanism than as a descriptive assessment of actual voter behavior in real campaigns. But as a theoretical mechanism, the idea of selective exposure at the information level is strongly supported.

It is very clear that (issue-based) campaign information has rather complex and conditional effects that make any prediction of general issue information effects during campaigns highly suspect. Because information selection is driven independently by party and issue preferences, voters can easily encounter both congruent and incongruent information about parties. Only the rare voter whose issue positions are

perfectly aligned with his or her party preferences will avoid such encounters. Any argument that information selection by party and issue preferences necessarily introduces a confirmatory bias is thus misguided. If a voter and a party take different positions on one or more important issues, the information selection leads to the encounter of conflicting, counterattitudinal information and (likely) causes cognitive dissonance. Once voters are exposed to such information, they require additional cognitive resources to process and cope with this information. While our study design does not allow us to measure the content of these thoughts – an obvious task for subsequent studies – the evidence of increased reading time and from the attitudinal effects suggests that incongruent information, whether related to top ranked or lowest ranked party, introduces uncertainty and weakens the preference for the top ranked party, even if it does not appear to directly cause vote defections. It is not clear why the attitudinal effects are consistent and clear while the behavioral effects are not supported. It will be necessary to confirm these results with a more careful model specification that takes additional control variables into account.

Exposure to congruent information, on the other hand, increases confidence and attitudinal polarization, supporting the common assumptions about the effects of such information. But to understand individual campaign effects, both party and issue preferences of voters have to be taken into account.

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Table 1: Information Selection

	Information Selection		
	B	(RSE)	FD
Party Ranking	.34***	(.02)	.28
Issue Importance	.31***	(.03)	.24
Week	-.01**	(.00)	-.02
Headline Order on Screen	.02*	(.01)	.02
Constant	-2.29***	(.10)	
F(4,358)	135.91		
Participants	361		
Cases	23530		

Note: Entries are logistic regression coefficients, robust standard errors (in parentheses), and predicted effect sizes as first differences/percentage point changes (holding all other variables constant at mean values; simulated with the clarify module for Stata).

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

Table 2: Information Processing

	Relative Reading Time (sec.)	
	B	(RSE)
Party Ranking	.42***	(.06)
Issue Importance	.54***	(.09)
Issue Position Congruency	.12	(.09)
Ranking x Congruency	-.07*	(.03)
Week	-.09***	(.02)
Constant	-1.54***	(.38)
F(5,357)	17.12	
Participants	361	
Cases	7362	

Note: Entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses.

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

Table 3: Attitudinal and Behavioral Information Effects

	Attitudinal Effects			Behavioral Effects	
	Confidence ^a B (RSE)	Rating B (RSE)	Polarization B (RSE)	Vote Time ^b B (RSE)	Defection ^c B (RSE)
Party Ranking	.06* (.02)	.06** (.02)	.16*** (.03)	.01 (.01)	-.03 (.02)
Issue Position Congruency	-.05* (.03)	-.04* (.02)	-.12** (.04)	.01 (.01)	.03 (.03)
Ranking x Congruency	.03*** (.01)	.02*** (.01)	.07*** (.01)	-.01* (.00)	-.01 (.01)
F	8.15	10.14	19.25	3.63	.97
Participants	362	362	362	268	362
Cases	7362	7362	7362	5549	7362

Note: Entries are unstandardized OLS (^aordered logistic, ^clogistic) regression coefficients, with robust standard errors in parentheses. Constants or cut points not reported. Vote time represents the time a respondent required to make the vote decision (measured in 10 millisecond intervals and converted into a natural log) and was only measured in the main study. Rating represents the evaluation of the top ranked party, and polarization is the rating difference of top ranked and lowest ranked party.

^b Vote time is the natural log of the voting time in seconds (available only for participants in main study).

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

Figure 1: Selective Exposure at Different Information Selection Stages and Mode of Information Processing

	(Long-term) Source Selection	(Immediate) Information Selection	(Short-term) Information Processing
Automatic	<i>“De Facto” Selectivity</i> - Local Availability	<i>Heuristic Selection</i> - Partisan Cues - Issue Importance - Negativity	<i>Heuristic Processing</i> - Source Cues - Message Cues
Controlled	<i>Media Selection</i> - Subscriptions	<i>Information Search</i> - Processing Goal	<i>Information Content</i> - Processing Goal - Motivated Skepticism - Disconfirmation Bias

Figure 2: Front Page of Information Board

Landesanzeiger Rheinland-Pfalz

Letzte Meldungen vom Wahlkampf Wochen bis zur Wahl: 14

[FDP setzt sich für Adoptionsrecht für gleichgeschlechtliche Paare ein](#)

[Grüne wollen Chancen von gering Qualifizierten verbessern](#)

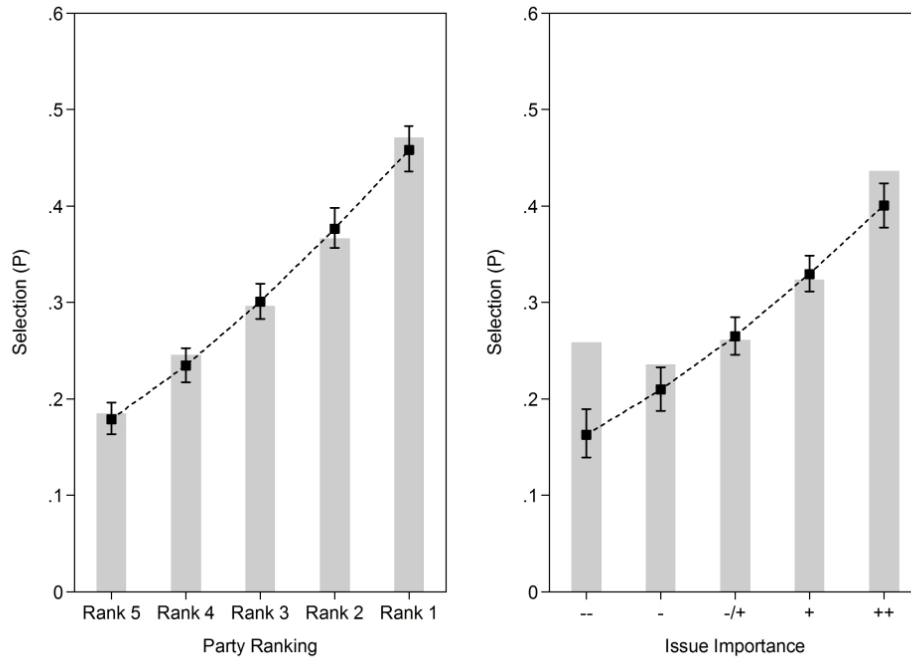
[Werdegang von Alexander Ulrich, Spitzenkandidat der Linkspartei](#)

[Umfrage: Zufriedenheit mit persönlicher finanzieller Lage überwiegt](#)

[Hartz IV-Reformen von SPD-Politikern verteidigt](#)

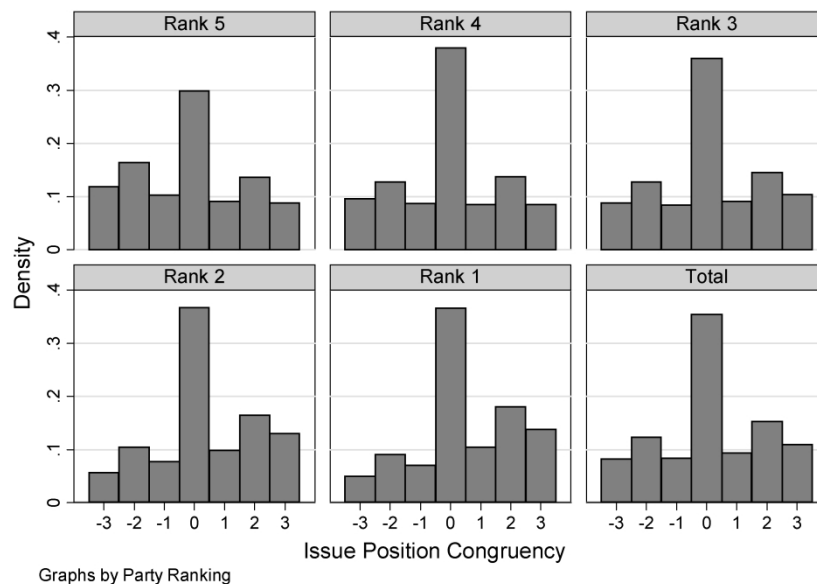
[CDU bekennt sich zur Sozialen Marktwirtschaft](#)

Figure 3: Information Selection by Party Ranking and Issue Importance



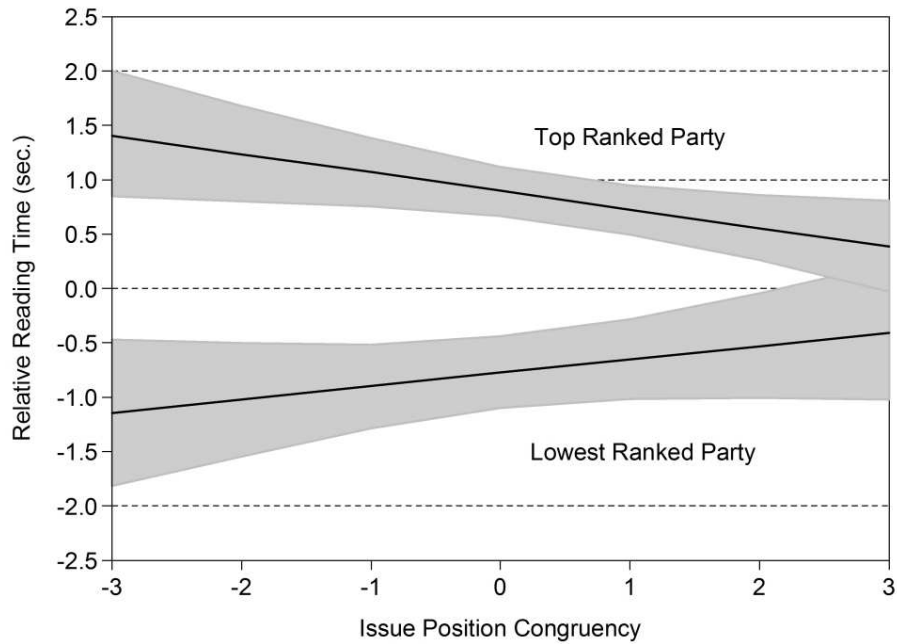
Note: Bars indicate the average *observed* proportion of articles selected within each party ranking category. Each case represents a headline-participant pairing (362 participants x 65 issue article headlines = 23,530 choice options). The black squares connected by a dashed line indicate the *predicted* selection probability and the spikes indicate the 95% confidence interval. Simulated results based on Table 1 and generated with the clarify module for Stata.

Figure 4: Issue Position Congruency by Party Ranking



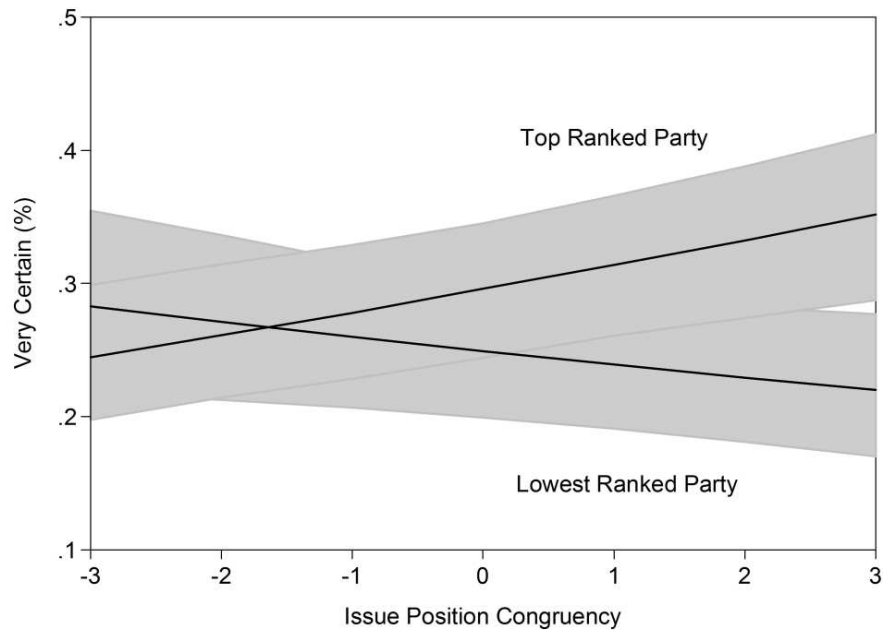
Note: Bars indicate the relative frequency (density) of encountering party position information at different levels of issue position congruency by party ranking.

Figure 5: Relative Reading Time



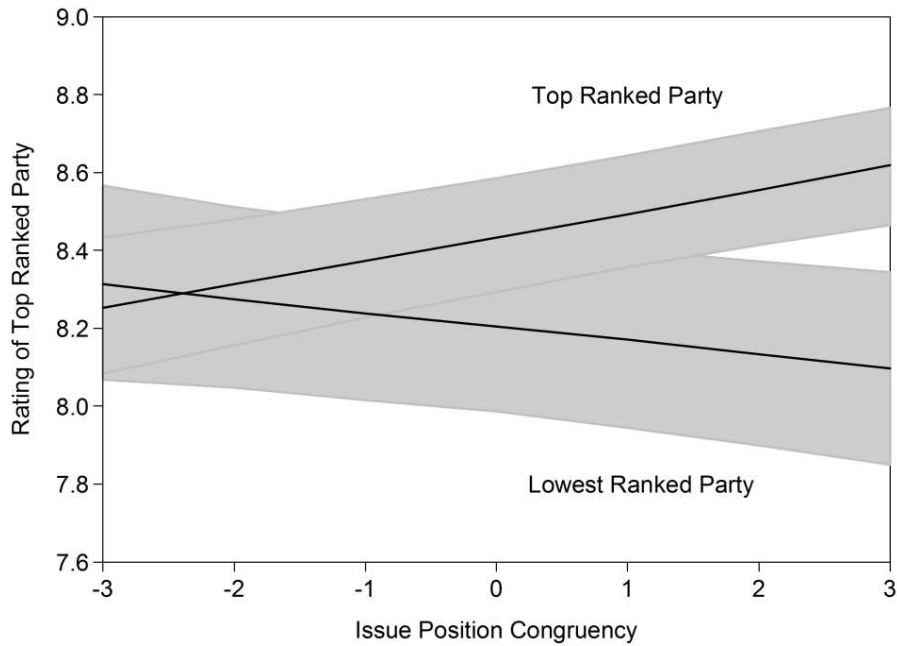
Note: Simulated results based on Table 2 and generated with the clarify module for Stata. Lines indicate the predicted relative reading time for articles of the top ranked or the lowest ranked party for different levels of issue position congruency. The grey areas indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 6: Confidence in Vote Decision



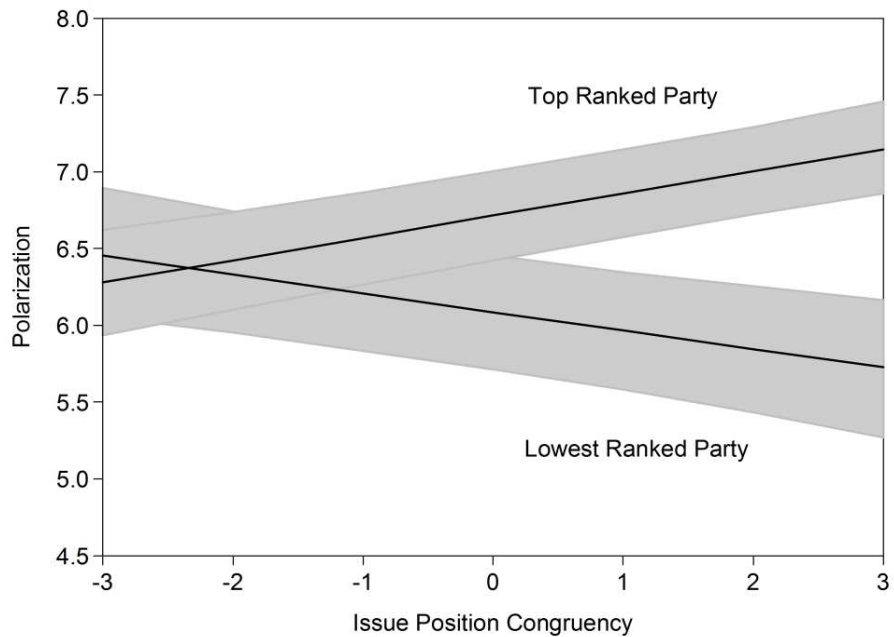
Note: Simulated results based on the confidence model in Table 3 and generated with the clarify module for Stata. Lines indicate the predicted probability of a "very certain" response associated with reading articles about the top ranked or the lowest ranked party for different levels of issue position congruency. The grey areas indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 7: Rating of Top Ranked Party



Note: Simulated results based on the rating model in Table 3 and generated with the clarify module for Stata. Lines indicate the predicted rating of the top ranked party associated with reading articles about the top ranked or the lowest ranked party for different levels of issue position congruency. The grey areas indicate the 95% confidence interval.

Figure 8: Evaluative Polarization between Top and Lowest Ranked Party



Note: Simulated results based on the polarization model in Table 3 and generated with the clarify module for Stata. Lines indicate the predicted polarization associated with reading articles about the top ranked or the lowest ranked party for different levels of issue position congruency. The grey areas indicate the 95% confidence interval.