

RICE UNIVERSITY

**Partisan Bias in Economic Perceptions: How Political and
Economic Contexts Condition the Strength of the Partisan
Screen**

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE



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Abstract

For more than 50 years, the study of party identification (PID) in cross-national research has been disputed in the study of comparative political behavior. These debates are wide-ranging but boil down to the nature of PID is conceptualized. There are some who argued that PID is an identity while there are others who treat it as an attitude. Consequently, there are disagreements about the nature and applicability of this concept in comparative contexts. In this dissertation, I seek to move beyond these debates by focusing on the one aspect of PID that has reached a scholarly consensus: the function of PID as a perceptual screen through which individuals perceive realities.

To do this, I first develop a theory of partisan bias drawn from psychological theory of motivated reasoning to describe the “partisan screen” at the individual level. Specifically, I argue that the key mechanism in developing a partisan screen is through the selective exposure to favorable information. Subsequently, I use this individual level theory to identify the contextual variables most likely to condition the strength of that screen for typical individuals in different contexts. Importantly, these factors are derived directly from my individual model of partisan bias – that is, I seek to identify the parameters of that theoretical model that vary across contexts. This approach means that empirical results about the impact of contexts speak directly to the veracity of the underlying individual-level theory.

My empirical results reveal that selective exposure is indeed a key mechanism that partisans use to develop partisan screens in perceiving the economy. Since my theory suggests that voters need to identify a set of “trusted sources” that consistently deliver the partisan messages in order to develop partisan screen, a key contextual variable that would explain the variation in the strength of that screen needs to capture the how easy it is for individuals to identify these “trusted” sources. Thus, I develop a compelling new measure of the identifiability of partisan media for different parties at different times and show that it does have a strong causal effect on the strength of the partisan screen.

Acknowledgments

Writing a dissertation and earning a Ph.D. in Political Science are not easy to achieve. If it is only through my effort, I am sure that I would not be able to complete this dissertation and earn the degree that I have sought for the past 6 years. Looking back at my journey in graduate school, I realize that I owe a great deal of gratitude to many people and it is only because of them that I can be who I am today.

First and foremost, I thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for saving me and giving me purpose in my life. It is only through His grace that this dissertation can be completed and I could not thank Him enough for being my good shepherd that guides me through difficult times. I have experienced His guidance every moment and He is the one who let me finish my degree. I will keep on trusting Him for my future and for my life.

Second, I would like to thank the love of my life, Citra Rahardjo, for being the world's best wife. She has never failed to support me since I started graduate school in 2012 and she never ever doubt my ability to achieve my dream. I am very fortunate to have her in my life and I will be forever grateful for her presence in my life. This dissertation is dedicated to her.

Perhaps the most important person that has helped me in my career as an aspiring political scientist is none other than my advisor and mentor, Randy Stevenson. He is one of the most intelligent person I've met in my life and his constant guidance through my graduate school is one of the key reasons behind the completion of this dissertation. I am very fortunate to be working with him and I believe we will continue our collaborations in the future.

I would also like to thank Bob Stein for not only serving in my committee, but also for his generosity in his time and resources to support my studies and research. Many thanks to John Alford and Phil Kortum as well for their willingness to take time out of their busy schedules to serve on my committee. The support of my peers has also been critical for my studies and progression in my research. I am especially thankful to Andrew Menger, Mathias Tromborg, Jaehoo Park, and Bernardo Perez for being incredible officemates at different stages of my stay at Rice University.

Other than folks at Rice University, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge Matt Winters from UIUC for being my first mentor that introduce me to the political science research. It is through his guidance that motivated me to pursue a PhD in political science and I am very thankful for his early support in my undergraduate years.

Finally, I would like to give thanks to my parents for their unending support and love. Their support has been essential throughout my life, especially during my academic journey in the US. I am also fortunate to be a part of another wonderful family. I am so thankful for all the support the Rahardjo family has provided me over the years and to encourage me to pursue my dreams.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation

Since its introduction by the Michigan school 50 years ago, party identification (PID) has played an important, if not paramount, role in Political Scientists' explanation of political attitudes and behaviors. However, it also has been a matter of dispute among scholars that tried to study it comparatively as no consensus has been reached on the true nature of the concept. For example, scholars working in the Michigan tradition argued that PID is primarily a social identity that is relatively immutable throughout one's life (Campbell et al 1960; Green et al 2002), while scholars in the revisionist approach argued that PID is simply a form of attitude that changes according to one's political preferences and evaluations of the political environment (Fiorina 1981; MacKuen et al. 1989; Achen 1992).

Furthermore, some European scholars have even claimed that the very concept of PID simply does not exist in the parliamentary setting where there are little incentives for voters to deviate from their party preference in favor of a candidate from another party (Berglund et al 2005). Thus, a split of PID and actual vote is unlikely and there is hardly any difference between PID and vote choice (Holmberg 1994; Thomassen and Rosema 2008). As a result, there are widespread disagreements about the stability, measurement, and applicability of the concept of PID in comparative contexts.

One of the reasons why there is a lack of consensus is because of the fact that PID is a multi-faceted concept with elements that touch not only on individuals' political preferences, but also on social identification, cognitive processing, and even biological predisposition. So, it is rather a difficult task for anyone trying to study partisanship cross-nationally if they continue to debate its conceptualization, measurement, or applicability in a cross-national study. There is one element, however, that is central to almost all account of PID (regardless of how one conceptualizes it) that could potentially be more useful – the partisan screen.

Building on Campbell et al's (1960) definition that partisan screen is "a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation", countless scholars have documented the influence of partisan screen on information processing and opinion updating at the individual level in both the US and other countries. In the US for example, many researches have shown that Republicans and Democrats diverge in their perceptions of politically relevant factual information (Bartels 2002; Gaines et al 2007), evaluations of politicians (Goren 2002; Lebo and Cassino 2007), and evaluations of retrospective economic conditions (Bartels 2002; Gerber and Huber 2010; Lavine et al 2002).

Similarly, in Britain and Denmark, scholars found that people are more likely to give positive views of the economic situation if the party they identified with are in government (Tilley and Hobolt 2011) and tend to respond more favorably to an issue frame if sponsored by the party they identified with (Slothuus and de Vreese 2010). Furthermore, several studies have also shown that partisan screen even exists in new democracies, especially in

post-communist countries where partisans of the ruling parties express higher levels of support for the political system and satisfaction with democracy relative to partisans of the oppositions and non-partisans (Paskeviciute 2008; Back and Teorell 2008). In sum, there is a consensus among scholars studying partisanship cross nationally that individuals tend to view political realities based on their partisan predispositions, across different political contexts regardless of whether it is conceptualized and measured differently or whether it is stable over time.

Despite the ubiquity of the partisan screen, it is also the case that the strength of this screen varies rather dramatically among individuals. For example, some scholars had found evidence that individuals' level of political sophistication (Taber and Lodge 2006), strength of prior attitudes (Taber et al 2009), and partisan ambivalence (Lavine et al 2012) can mediate the effect of partisanship on political attitudes and behaviors. While there is some theorizing on the sources of variation on the individual level, little attention has been given to the way in which political contexts might impact the strength of the partisan screen for typical individuals in those contexts (e.g., between the typical German and Dane), or differences in the extent of partisan screen across party identifiers within a given national setting (e.g., between Conservative and Liberal Democrats identifiers in UK).

1.2 Aim of the Dissertation

Thus, this dissertation aims to contribute to this literature by empirically examine whether there are variation in the strength and direction of the partisan screen at both the party and contextual-level and provide some theoretical explanations for these variations.

Again, this dissertation is not about resolving the debate about the concept or measurement of PID, or even comparing the intensity of partisanship cross-nationally or even across parties in the same context. Instead, it will move beyond these debates by focusing on the one aspect of PID that has reached a scholarly consensus (regardless of how one conceptualizes it): the function of PID as a perceptual screen through which individuals perceive realities in ways that are favorable to their partisan orientation. Therefore, this dissertation is an attempt to answer the following questions: (1) how different political contexts might impact the strength of the partisan screen for typical individuals in those contexts and (2) why are there differences in the strength and direction of the partisan screen across party identifiers within a given context.

To do so, I will first systematically measure the variations in the strength and the direction of the partisan screen across parties, countries, and over time by focusing specifically on how the partisan screen impacts individuals' perceptions of the economy. Second, I provide several contextual theories in terms of political and economic institutions that explain the variation in the strength of partisan screen at both the party level within a given context and across contexts, and test them empirically. Importantly, these potential contextual factors are identified directly from my individual model of partisan bias – that is, I ask “given my theory of partisan bias, what parameters of that theoretical model can vary across contexts and what specific contextual variables might move them?” This theoretical approach means that my empirical results about the impact of contexts speak directly to the veracity of the underlying individual level theory.

1.3 Establishing the Causal Ordering between Partisanship and Perceptions

Before discussing the definition and the procedure of measuring the partisan screen across contexts, I first address the potential endogenous relationship between individuals' partisanship and their perceptions of the economy. This is an important task because in this dissertation, I propose a theory in which differences in the strength of the partisan screen (as applied to economic perceptions) across contexts is a function of differences in corresponding political and economic institutions. As such it relies on a particular causal ordering of partisanship and economic perceptions: partisanship impacts perceptions but not the other way around. Of course, some (especially political scientists familiar with the European literature on partisanship) could reasonably object to this assumed ordering. That is, it is entirely possible that partisanship shifts in response to an individual's perceptions of economic circumstances, making it the result of economic perception, not the cause (Erikson et al 1998; Fiorina 1981; Wattenberg 1998).

Therefore, it is crucial to carefully establish the temporal (and causal) ordering of partisanship and perceptions. To do so, I employ multi-wave panel data taken from the 1997-2001 British Election Panel Study to investigate and compare the magnitude of the effect of party identification on individuals' economic perceptions to the effect of economic perceptions on partisanship.

To reiterate my point from the introduction, the purpose of this dissertation is not to resolve the debate on the nature of partisanship and its impact on individuals' behaviors and perceptions. It is clear that by arguing and demonstrating that the partisan screen exists and varies by context, I will be operating from the assumption that individuals' partisan

identification has an effect on their perceptions, and not the other way around. However, since there are multiple claims that reciprocal causation can be a potential problem, the effects of party identification on perceptions and behaviors may be exaggerated. As a result, this section simply tries to examine the veracity of this criticism by exploring the magnitude of the direction of influence between partisanship and perceptions and vice versa.

Below, I briefly discuss the debate between two different conceptualizations of party identification by focusing on the competing arguments about the causal ordering between partisanship and perceptions. Specifically, I will focus on whether partisanship is an unmoved mover or a “running tally”. Next, I describe my panel data and methodology; followed by the modeling procedures and discussion of the results.

1.3.1 Partisanship as an Unmoved Mover

In the original definition formulated by the Michigan School in the 1960s, party identification was conceptualized as a stable, long-term psychological attachment that influences vote choice, political orientations, and positions on policy issues (Campbell et al 1960). It is usually formed early during childhood socialization by parents and relatives, reinforced by social identities, and only changeable in periods of major political realignments (Miller 1991; Miller and Shanks 1996).¹ It is conceivable that “short-term” factors such as specific policy proposals, evaluations of the economy, or personal qualities of the candidates could tempt the partisan identifiers to defect from their parties. However,

¹ Such realignments include having new voters entering the electorate, resulting in new cleavages (Beck 1974) and cross-cutting cleavages (Sundquist 1983), or having replacements in the social group coalitions that

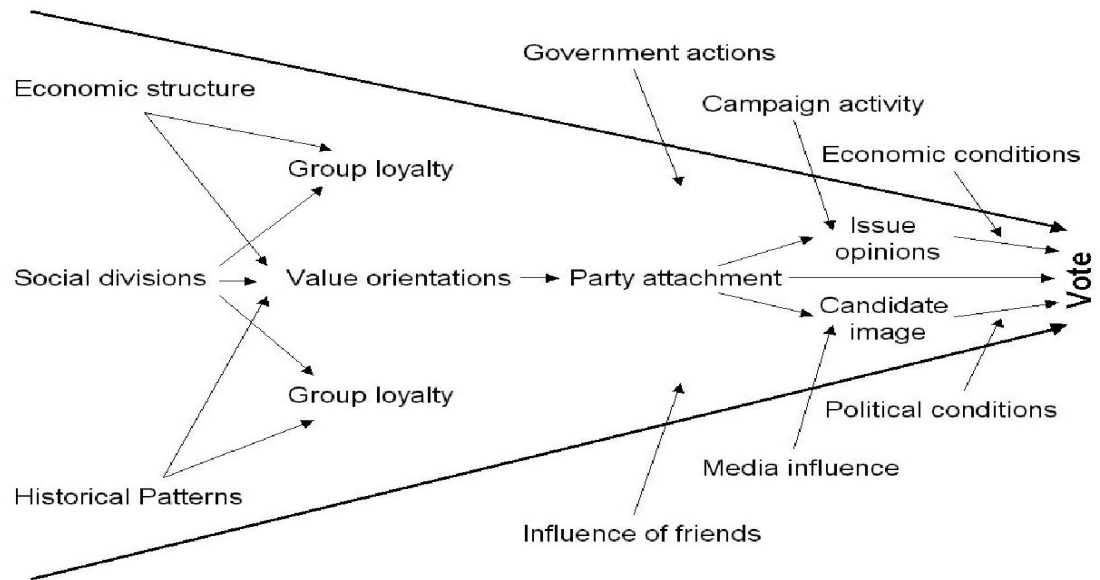
most authors working in this Michigan framework do not believe that both the short-term factors and the defections will erode the psychological attachment and identity (Markus and Converse 1979; Green et al 2002). Those “defectors” (i.e. those who vote for the party that he/she does not identify with) are going to return “home” instead once the short-term factors have disappeared (Bartle and Bellucci 2009).

By having the view that partisanship is a stable force in individuals’ political lives, one implication is that partisanship is defined as a mover, meaning it affects political attitudes and opinions such as issue positions, policy evaluations, and leaders’ popularity. Since individuals’ sense of belonging to a political party is established at an early age before any formation of political preferences (Jennings and Niemi 1974), party identification creates a sort of perceptual screen that allow individuals to see what is favorable to his/her partisan orientation throughout their lives (Sniderman et al 1991; Rahn 1993; Brader and Tucker 2001). Even in the case when this identity is unable to account for all the variations in attitudes and opinions, the influence of partisanship on perception of political realities will be “so great that only rarely will the individual develop a set of attitude forces that conflict with this allegiance” (Campbell et al 1960).

With party identification occupying such a central role in explaining attitudes and behaviors, one could think of it as being located at the very center of the funnel of causality, which is a conceptual framework that lays out the relative influence of all the possible causal pathways to vote choice (see Figure 1.1). We can see that party identification is both rooted in the slowly changing group membership (i.e. value orientations and social divisions), thus largely considered to be “unmoved”, and also is a cause (or “mover”) of

variables located closer to the end of the funnel such as issue opinions, candidate image, and economic conditions.

Figure 1.1: The Michigan School's Funnel of Causality (Campbell et al 1959)



1.3.2 Partisanship as a Running Tally

Most scholars who are critical of the Michigan model admit that party identification is a mover and they agree that it has a strong effect on behavior and attitudes. But, they are unwilling to commit that it is unmoved and totally exogenous to the specific short-term policy preferences and evaluations (Thomassen and Rosema 2009; Miller and Shanks 1996). They argued that the original conception developed by the Michigan School had exaggerated the impact of partisanship on behaviors by not taking into account the potential reciprocal causation between them (Holmberg 2007). To them, the Michigan model has placed too much emphasis on the effect of party identification on behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions and has not considered the possibility that its formation can also

be attributed by the very same attitudes and perceptions that it claims to influence (Franklin and Jackson 1983; MacKuen et al 1989; Achen 1992). As a result, these scholars view party identification as a political variable that is influenced by political factors such as ideological beliefs, economic fluctuations, and evaluations of government and candidates' performance. Partisanship is not simply an identity that is fixed during childhood socialization. Rather, it is an endogenous variable that is amenable to the ever-changing political environment.

Perhaps the most influential revisionist critique of the Michigan School was developed in Morris Fiorina's *Retrospective Voting in American National Elections* (1981). In this book, Fiorina introduced the idea of the "running tally" of retrospective evaluations and argued that "a citizen's [party] ID waxes and wanes in accord with his/her perception of societal conditions, political events, and the performance of incumbent officeholders" (Fiorina, 1981). While the Michigan School treated party identification as a stable, psychological, and identity-based, Fiorina saw it as potentially "volatile, rational, and policy-based with a clear endogenous position in the funnel of causality" (Holmberg 2007).

This reconceptualization of the concept has created somewhat of a shift in the paradigm about the relationship between partisanship and behaviors for subsequent researchers. If party ID is a running tally of retrospective behavior, then it is clear that enduring psychological attachments between self and party (Thomassen and Rosema 2009; Butler and Stokes 1969), or between self and fellow group members (or in this case, fellow partisans) (Green et al 2002) are unlikely to materialize. Rather, partisanship is treated as an attitude, defined simply as a positive or negative disposition towards an object, which is the

party (Bartle and Bellucci 2009). This attitude can be a product of issue preferences including ideological positions (Adams 2001; Adams and Merrill 2005), retrospective evaluations of party performance on some valence issues (Fiorina 1981; MacKuen et al 1989; Achen 1992; Clarke et al 2004) or even Bayesian priors that represent “a summary measure of voters’ experiences and information about the performance and policy offers of the parties” (Pappi 1996).

In sum, partisanship is not an unmoved mover. It may be a mover, but to conceive of it as an exogenous variable affecting political perceptions while not being affected at all by those same perceptions is perhaps an exaggeration. There is nothing fixed about partisan identification and childhood socialization has a diminishing effect throughout one’s life.

1.3.3 Hypotheses

Taken together, the discussion above provides a number of theoretical expectations of the relationship between partisanship and perceptions, especially with regards to retrospective economic perceptions. The expectation is that, depending on the position one takes about the nature of partisanship, perception of the economy can either be a cause or an effect of partisanship. If we adopt the definition of partisanship as an unmoved mover, then we would expect that the perception of the economy is determined by the partisanship of the individuals, meaning those who identify with the government are more likely to view the economy more favorably than those who identify with the opposition.

In contrast, if we believe that partisanship is a “running tally” of behaviors and perceptions, then it is the perception of the economy that impacts partisanship. Thus, we

can expect that a good economic perception will lead an individual to identify with the party in the government and poor economic perception will cause her to identify with the parties not in the government. Since I will be operating from the assumption that it is partisanship that influences perceptions and not the other way around in this dissertation, I hypothesize that after taking the temporally-connected relationship between partisanship and economic perceptions into account, the estimated effects of economic perceptions on partisanship will be drastically reduced. This means that economic perceptions are significantly influenced by partisanship, which means that the direction of influence is disproportionately from party identification to economic perceptions rather than the other way around.

1.3.4 Modeling Procedure

Based on the hypotheses above, I use panel data and build a set of structural equation models (SEM) fitted using Maximum Likelihood to determine the magnitude and direction between economic perceptions and partisanship. In this analysis, I model economic perceptions as a function of partisan identification and partisan identification as a function of economic perceptions. This section will only described the model in terms of economic perceptions as the dependent variable, but the same method can be applied to the models where party ID is the outcome variable. Usually, the typical way of modeling the effect of “partisan screen” on economic perceptions (with controls excluded) is:

$$(1.1a) \quad \text{Econ}_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{PID}_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

and the model of partisanship as a “running tally” is

$$(1.1b) \quad PID_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Econ_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

for $i = 1, \dots, N$ individuals, where $Econ_{i,t}$ is an individual i 's retrospective evaluation of the economy at time t , $PID_{i,t}$ is an individual i 's partisan identification at time t , β_0 is the intercept, and $\epsilon_{i,t}$ is the unobserved residual. Also, I assume that $E(\epsilon_{i,t} | Econ_{i,s}) = 0$, which is the standard zero conditional mean assumption required when T is small. This means that the expected value of the error term $\epsilon_{i,t}$, given the explanatory variables for all time periods (indicated by the subscript s), is zero (Wooldridge 2006; Evans and Pickup 2010).

However, this cross sectional model is often inadequate for making causal inferences because it does not allow us to track changes and stabilities of the variables over time. Based on a long-established literature on the stability of political attitudes such as economic perception over time (Bartels 2000; Green et al. 2002), we can expect prior economic perceptions to be a strong predictor of current perceptions. In the cross sectional model where data for only one time point exists, such as the one specify in equation (1.1a), the effect of past perceptions on current perceptions is likely to be contained within $\epsilon_{i,t}$ and the estimate of β_1 will be biased upwards since it is essentially capturing both the effect of party identification on current perceptions and the effect of past perceptions on current perceptions.²

² If past perceptions also condition current party identification for a given individual, then $E(\epsilon_{i,t} | Econ_{i,s}) \neq 0$ for $s = t + 1$ and the zero conditional mean is violated. This is thus, the source of endogeneity.

To control for the stability of economic perception, I need panel data that contains two or more observations of the same individuals at different points in time. I can then specify dynamic models such as:

$$(1.2) \quad \text{Econ}_{i,t} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \text{Econ}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_2 \text{PID}_{i,t} + \delta_{i,t}$$

where $\text{Econ}_{i,t-1}$ is the retrospective evaluation of the economy for individual i at time $t - 1$, γ_1 is an estimate of the stability of economic perception from one time to the next, and $\delta_{i,t}$ is the error term. Nevertheless, even though this model can now control for the stability of the economic perceptions and produces a more accurate estimate of its relationship with partisan identity, another problem is introduced with the use of panel data (Anderson and Hsiao 1981; Evans and Pickup 2010; Dickerson 2016). Specifically, the error term, $\delta_{i,t}$ can now be decomposed into two components:

$$(1.3) \quad \delta_{i,t} = \lambda_i + \sigma_{i,t}$$

where λ_i is an unobserved individual-specific time-invariant effect, and $\sigma_{i,t}$ is the time varying idiosyncratic disturbances for individual i at time t . Again, it is assumed that:

$$E(\lambda_i) = E(\sigma_{i,t}) = E(\lambda_i, \sigma_{i,t}) = 0 ;$$

and,

$$(1.4) \quad \sigma_{i,t} = \rho \sigma_{i,t-1} + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

$$(E(\epsilon_{i,t}) = 0 \text{ and } 0 \leq |\rho| < 1).$$

The effect λ_i is the heterogeneity in the means of the $\text{Econ}_{i,t}$ series across individuals, which means that it represents the unmeasured characteristics that make an

individual more or less likely, on average, to view the economy in a certain way (Evans and Pickup 2010). By having this effect in the error term, the coefficient for party ID will most likely still be biased since the zero conditional mean assumption is violated.³

To correct for these biases, researchers have developed a wide variety of tools such as fixed effect estimators (Angrist and Pischke 2009; Wooldridge 2006), generalized method of moment estimation (Arellano and Bond 1991; Blundell and Bond 1998), and the AH estimator (Anderson and Hsiao 1981). In this analysis, I rely on AH estimator because it has been shown to be the most reliable in a number of studies in the econometric panel-data literature (Evans and Pickup 2010; Dickerson 2016).

The AH estimator corrects for this bias by first, eliminating the individual effect λ_i from the model by first differencing the equation (1.2) and (1.3). Specifically:

$$\begin{aligned}
 (1.4) \quad & \text{Econ}_{i,t} - \text{Econ}_{i,t-1} \\
 &= [\gamma_1 \text{Econ}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_2 \text{PID}_{i,t} + \lambda_i + \sigma_{i,t}] - [\gamma_1 \text{Econ}_{i,t-2} + \gamma_2 \text{PID}_{i,t-1} + \lambda_i + \sigma_{i,t-1}] \\
 &= \gamma_1 (\text{Econ}_{i,t-1} - \text{Econ}_{i,t-2}) + \gamma_2 (\text{PID}_{i,t} - \text{PID}_{i,t-1}) + \sigma_{i,t} - \sigma_{i,t-1}
 \end{aligned}$$

Thus, $\Delta \text{Econ}_{i,t} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \Delta \text{Econ}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_2 \Delta \text{PID}_{i,t} + \Delta \sigma_{i,t}$

Nevertheless, equation (1.4) may still suffer from some bias since the lagged-difference outcome ($\Delta \text{Econ}_{i,t}$) is correlated with the differenced error term ($\Delta \sigma_{i,t}$) through their respective components (i.e. $\text{Econ}_{i,t-1}$ and $\sigma_{i,t-1}$). Consequently, as

³ Since $E(\lambda_i | \text{Econ}_{i,t-1}) \neq 0$, the assumption that $E(\lambda_i | \text{Econ}_{i,s}) = 0$ for all s does not hold. Thus, the presence of λ_i is going to bias γ_1 and in turn, will bias the estimate of γ_2 (Greene 2002).

$\text{COV}(\text{Econ}_{i,t-1}, \sigma_{i,t-1}) \neq 0$ and $E(\Delta\sigma_{i,t} | \Delta\text{Econ}_{i,t-1}) \neq 0$, the zero conditional mean assumption will again be violated.

One solution to remove this correlation is to instrument the lagged-differenced outcome with some larger lag of that outcome that is not correlated with $\sigma_{i,t}$ or $\sigma_{i,t-1}$ (Anderson and Hsiao 1981; Evans and Pickup 2010; Dickerson 2016). Typically, the AH estimator uses the second lag of the outcome (*i. e.* $\text{Econ}_{i,t-2}$) as the instrument for the lagged-difference outcome and to test for the suitability of this instrument, it is necessary to demonstrate that $\text{COV}(\Delta\text{Econ}_{i,t-1}, \text{Econ}_{i,t-2}) = 0$.⁴ These analyses will be done in the next section where I show that the second lagged outcome variables are exogenous to the model and therefore, are appropriate instruments. With that being said, we can then estimate:

$$(1.5a) \quad \Delta\text{Econ}_{i,t} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \Delta\text{Econ}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_2 \Delta\text{PID}_{i,t} + \Delta\sigma_{i,t}$$

$$(1.5b) \quad \Delta\text{PID}_{i,t} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 \Delta\text{PID}_{i,t-1} + \gamma_2 \Delta\text{Econ}_{i,t} + \Delta\sigma_{i,t}$$

using $\text{Econ}_{i,t-2}$ as an instrument for $\Delta\text{Econ}_{i,t-1}$ in equation 1.5a and $\text{PID}_{i,t-2}$ as an instrument for $\Delta\text{PID}_{i,t-1}$ in equation 1.5b.

However, the two equations above do not allow for the direction of the contemporaneous relationship between economic perceptions and partisanship to be tested simultaneously. To do so, I employ a simultaneous equation modeling (SEM) extension of the AH estimator in order for $\Delta\text{Econ}_{i,t}$ and $\Delta\text{PID}_{i,t}$ to be non-recursive and

⁴ In model where PID is the outcome variable, we need to demonstrate that $\text{COV}(\Delta\text{PID}_{i,t-1}, \text{PID}_{i,t-2}) = 0$.

contemporaneously related.⁵ This will estimate the effect of current partisanship on current assessments of the economy controlling for both the past assessment of the economy and the non-recursive relationship between current partisanship and current perceptions. At the same time, the model will also estimate the effect of current perception of the economy on current partisanship controlling for both past partisanship and the possible non-recursive relationship between current partisanship and current perceptions of the economy.⁶ Furthermore, in specifying the SEM, I allow correlations between $(\sigma_{i,t} - \sigma_{i,t-1})$ and $(\sigma_{i,t-1} - \sigma_{i,t-2})$ in order to account for the “stability” coefficients that connects each of the repeated measures over time (Wheaton et al 1977) and reliably compares the direction of the relationship between party ID and economic perceptions across multiple panel studies.

1.3.5 Data

The data for this study is taken from the 1997-2001 British Election Panel Study (BEPS), which is an extension from the 1997 British Election Study. Respondents were first surveyed in the 1997 study and then in 1999, and again in 2000. The economic perceptions at lags 0, 1, and 2 were operationalized using the question: “How do you think the general economic situation in Britain has changed over the last 12 months?” Responses were coded as: 1=got a lot worse, 2= got a little worst, 3= stayed the same, 4= got a little better, and 5= got a lot better. As for the party identification variable, it was created using responses to

⁵ This approach is similar to the one adopted in Evans and Pickup’s (2010).

⁶ This model entails two important identifying restrictions. First, past partisanship does not influence current economic perceptions once the effect of current economic partisanship on current economic perceptions is controlled. Similarly, past economic evaluation does not influence current partisanship once I control for the effect of current economic evaluation on current partisanship.

the question: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, or what?” This variable was coded 1= Labour party and 0= all other parties.

1.3.6 Analyses and Results

First, I estimate equations (1.5a) and (1.5b) separately using the AH estimator and the results are presented in Tables 1.1 and 1.2. The tables also show the results of estimating the effect of partisanship on economic perceptions without controlling for past values of economic perceptions (equation 1a in Table 1) and the effect of economic perceptions on partisanship without controlling for past values of partisanship (equation 1b in Table 1.2).

Table 1.1: Economic Perceptions as a Function of Partisanship⁷

No control for lagged economic perceptions (equation 1a)			Control for lagged economic perceptions (equation 5a)		
DV = Econ _t	Coefficient	Robust Std. Error	DV = ΔEcon _t	A&H Coefficient	Robust Std. Error
Econ _{t-1}	-	-	ΔEcon _{t-1}	0.002	0.02
PID _t	0.33***	0.04	ΔPID _t	0.22***	0.07
Intercept	3***	0.02	Intercept	-0.17***	0.02
N	2346		N	2160	

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

⁷ For both tables 1 and 2, t= year 2000, t-1=year 1999, and t-2= year 1997.

Table 1.2: Partisanship as a Function of Economic Perceptions

No control for lagged economic perceptions (equation 1b ⁸)			Control for lagged economic perceptions (equation 5b)		
DV = PID_t	Coefficient	Robust Std. Error	DV = ΔPID_t	A&H Coefficient	Robust Std. Error
PID_{t-1}	-	-	ΔPID_{t-1}	0.15***	0.009
$Econ_t$	0.45***	0.05	$\Delta Econ_t$	0.03***	0.007
Intercept	-1.63***	0.16	Intercept	0.0042	0.007
N	2346		N	2185	

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

When past perceptions of the economy are not controlled for, I found the estimated effect of current partisanship on current economic perceptions to be 0.33 and statistically significant. Similarly, the estimated logistic coefficient of current economic perception on current partisanship is 0.45 and it is statistically significant as well, when past partisanship is not controlled for. However, since unobserved individual-specific time invariant effects (i.e. λ_i) are likely to be present, these estimates are likely to be inflated.

Furthermore, there are strong theoretical reasons to believe that current economic perceptions and current partisan preferences are in part, functions of past economic perceptions and past partisanship. Hence, I introduce lagged variables for both economic perceptions and partisanship, and then utilize an AH estimator (with the second lag as the instruments) to conduct first-difference transformations with the purpose of eliminating

⁸ Logistic regression is used for equation 1.1b.

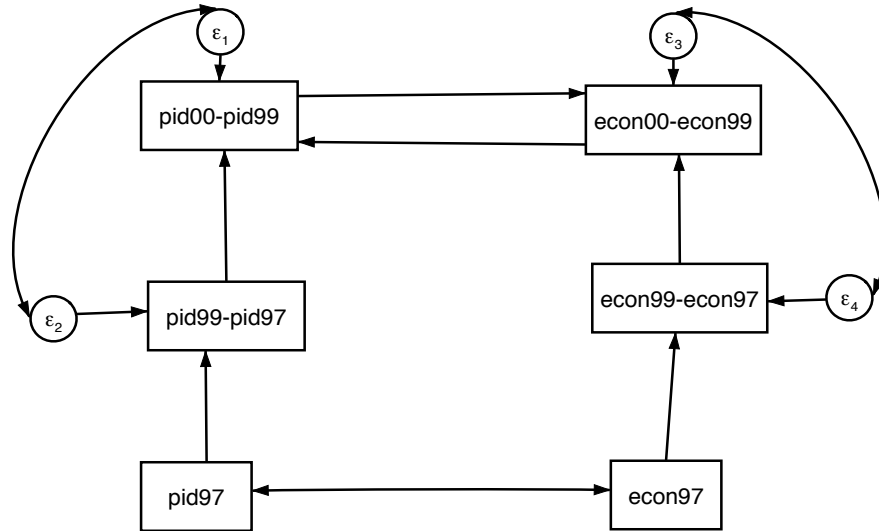
individual effects from the model. The results of these AH estimators are shown in the last columns of Tables 1.1 and 1.2.

Once the lag of party identification is included in the partisanship model (see last column of Table 1.2), I find that although the estimated effect of current economic perceptions on current partisanship remains significant, the coefficient decreases 93% from 0.45 to 0.03. In contrast, while the effect of current partisanship on current perceptions of the economy remains significant even after controlling for past economic assessment (see last column of Table 1), the coefficient only decreases by 33% from 0.33 to 0.22. The results also reveal that past economic perceptions have no influence on current perceptions once the partisan conditioning of the economy is accounted for. This is similar to the results reported in Evans and Pickup (2010) where “presidential approval, partisanship, and vote choices influence economic perceptions more strongly than they are shaped by economic perceptions.”

The picture that emerges from these results is clear: there is an endogenous relationship between partisanship and perceptions since individuals’ economic assessments are formed by their partisanship and that these economic assessments do have an independent effect on partisanship. However, since these analyses were done using two separate models, I have no way of determining the direction of causality between current economic perceptions and partisanship. To remedy that, I estimate the SEMs as depicted in Figure 1.2. This approach will enable me to estimate the effect of economic assessments on partisanship controlling for the effect of both past and current partisanship on current economic assessment, as well as the effect of partisanship on economic assessments

controlling for the effect of both past and current economic assessments on partisanship simultaneously.

Figure 1.2: Structural Equation Model ⁹



The SEM depicted in Figure 1.2 relies on the fact that the second lags (i.e. 1997 in this case) are exogenous to the model and hence, can be used as instruments. Also, I allow non-zero covariance between variables measured at the same time to uncover the cross-lagged effects (Evans and Andersen 2006), as well as covariance between the same variable that is measured at different time periods in order to account for the “stability coefficient” that connects each of the variables that are measured at different time periods (Heise 1970; Wheaton et al 1977).

⁹ Note: $t=2000$, $t-1=1999$, $t-2=1997$, $(\sigma_{i,t} - \sigma_{i,t-1})$ is represented as ϵ_1 and ϵ_3 , while $(\sigma_{i,t-1} - \sigma_{i,t-2})$ is represented as ϵ_2 and ϵ_4 . Also, only correlated error terms are shown in this diagram.

Table 1.3: Structural Equation Model of Party ID and Economic Perceptions

	SEM	
	Coefficient	OIM Std Err
$\Delta econ_{00-99} <- \Delta pid_{00-99}$	-0.34*	0.14
$\Delta econ_{00-99} <- \Delta econ_{99-97}$	-0.03	0.14
$\Delta econ_{99-97} <- econ_{97}$	0.13	101
$\Delta pid_{00-99} <- \Delta econ_{00-99}$	-0.02	0.01
$\Delta pid_{00-99} <- \Delta pid_{99-97}$	0.15***	0.05
$\Delta pid_{99-97} <- pid_{97}$	-0.24	1.44
$\epsilon (\Delta econ_{00-99} <--> \Delta econ_{99-97})$	-0.44***	0.03
$\epsilon (\Delta pid_{00-99} <--> \Delta pid_{99-97})$	-0.062***	0.006
$\epsilon (\Delta pid_{99-97} <--> pid_{97})$	-0.01	0.304
$\epsilon (\Delta econ_{99-97} <--> econ_{97})$	-1.04	94.2
N= 1909		

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

$\Delta econ_{00-99} = econ_{00} - econ_{99}$; $\Delta econ_{99-97} = econ_{99} - econ_{97}$; $\Delta pid_{00-99} = pid_{00} - pid_{99}$; $\Delta pid_{99-97} = pid_{99} - pid_{97}$

Table 1.3 shows the result of the SEM that has the second lags (i.e. year 1997) as the instrument. First, it demonstrates that the covariance of the errors – $\epsilon (\Delta pid_{99-97} <--> pid_{97})$ and $\epsilon (\Delta econ_{99-97} <--> econ_{97})$ – are each not significant. This indicates that $econ_{97}$ and pid_{97} are exogenous and can be used as an instrument for $\Delta econ_{99-97}$ and Δpid_{99-97} respectively. Second, the model shows that economic perceptions have no contemporaneous effects on partisanship, once the contemporaneous effect of partisanship

and past economic perceptions on current economic perception is controlled for. On the other hand, partisanship has a contemporaneous effect on economic perceptions, even after controlling for the contemporaneous effects of economic perceptions and past partisanship on current partisanship. This indicates that the direction of influence stems from partisanship to economic perceptions and not the other way around.

Furthermore, I also find that past economic assessments do not determine current economic assessments once partisanship is controlled for. The role of partisanship in influencing individual's perceptions of the economy is so large that changes in economic perceptions are simply a function of changes in partisanship. These results are consistent with those found in the last section in which I estimated the models of economic perceptions and partisanship separately using AH estimator. In sum, there is strong evidence that perceptions of the economy are largely a function of partisanship but partisanship is not a function of economic perceptions.

The analyses using separate AH estimators and SEM support the contention that individuals' partisan identity influence their economic perceptions but not the other way around. In particular, I find that although the contemporaneous effect of economic perceptions on partisanship is still significant once I control for the lagged partisanship, it has a larger decrease in its coefficient relative to the contemporaneous effect of partisanship on economic perceptions, after the lagged economic perceptions are accounted for. This finding is further corroborated in the SEM where the effect of present partisanship on present economic perception is significant even after controlling for the effect of both present and past perceptions, but the contemporaneous effect of economic

perceptions on partisanship is insignificant once the effect of both present and past partisanship are accounted for. What this reveals is that the direction of the relationship stems from partisanship to perceptions of the economy.

In summary, this section of the dissertation shows that although one could conceive of the possibility that partisanship is the result of economic perceptions and not the cause, the data from the 1997-2001 British Election Panel Study reveals the relationship to be otherwise. Individuals' economic assessments are so dependent on partisanship that shifts in economic assessments are formed (or at least influenced) by changes in their partisan identity. This result also corroborates the theory that partisanship is an unmoved mover given the dominance of partisan conditioning in individuals' political attitudes. Therefore, treating partisanship as an exogenous variable that is not affected by other political variables is perhaps a reasonable position to take.

1.4 Overview of the Chapters

After establishing the causal ordering between partisanship and economic perceptions, I now proceed to explain why the strength of the partisan screen varies between individuals who support different parties, live in different countries, and participate at different times and in different elections. In Chapter 2, I define what partisan bias is and develop an individual-level theory of partisan screen that draws on psychological theories of motivated reasoning. In particular, I argue that the key mechanism that explains the development of the partisan screen is attributed to the tendencies of partisans to engage in selective exposure to favorable information. Next, I describe the empirical

strategy that I use to measure this concept using individual-level data from more than 130 election surveys covering more than 100 parties in 16 countries over the last 25 years. In brief, this procedure generates measures of the strength of the partisan screen by estimating a separate statistical model of economic perceptions for each of the countries at a particular point in time. The estimated random coefficient parameters for each partisan category are then used to produce measures of the strength and direction of the partisan screen for each party in a given context. Finally, I produce an extensive map of the strength of the partisan screen across parties, countries and over time.

Chapter 3 begins by exploring the different sample strategies that different individuals use to receive information about the economy. This has an important implication in identifying the contextual feature that would enable partisans to sample information that is consistent with their predispositions. I then construct a new measure of identifiability of the partisan media (IPM) of different parties in different countries (and different years) that captures the extent to which partisans are able to identify a set of “trusted sources” that will consistently deliver a partisan message. Given that IPM is a direct implication out of my individual-level theory, its impact on the strength of the partisan screen across contexts would speak directly to the validity of selective exposure as the main mechanism of partisan bias.

Before building a statistical model to estimate the effect of IPM, Chapter 4 introduces several covariates that might potentially be confounders to the relationship. These covariates are included because they are the common cause to both the IPM and the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions. These variables are: (1) parties’

role in/out of the government, (2) the extent of how salient the economy are to the parties, (3) the parties' ideological positions on an economic dimension, and (4) the ideological families of the parties.

In the penultimate chapter, I create several statistical models to examine the causal effect of IPM as well as the other covariates on the strength of the partisan screen. I ran several model specifications such as a pooled, within, and between estimations to determine whether IPM is a significant predictor, controlling for all the covariates that might confound the relationship. Furthermore, this chapter also undertakes an equally important task for any comparativists of capturing any higher-level interactions among contextual or institutional settings (Franzese, 2003) by examining how the impact of IPM differs across parties' roles in the government and ideological families. In other words, I address how different contextual factors interact to determine the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy.

Chapter 2

Defining and Measuring the Strength of the Partisan Screen at the Individual-Level

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I seek to vastly expand the evidentiary basis that partisan bias varies by context and explore why such variations exist. To do so, I first draw on the psychological theories of motivated reasoning to develop an individual-level theory of partisan bias and to formally define the “partisan screen” at the individual level. Specifically, I argue that the selective exposure to favorable information is the key mechanism for most individuals to develop a partisan screen. Once the individual-level model is fleshed out, I move on to describe the empirical strategy for mapping the variation in the partisan screen across parties, countries, and over time. I use more than 130 election surveys covering 100 parties in 18 Western Democracies over the last 20 years.

2.2 Defining the Partisan Screen

Partisanship has long been known to have an important role in shaping how people respond to information and form political perceptions. According to the authors of *The American Voter*, “identification with a party raises a perceptual screen through which the individual tends to see what is favorable to his partisan orientation” Campbell et al (1960).

As a result, different partisans are going to respond to the same set of factual political information in a distinct, and potentially, biased manner. Building on this definition, countless works (be it survey or experimental works) have documented partisanship's influence on information processing and opinion updating at the individual level (Kernell and Mullinix 2013; Markus and Converse 1979; Stokes 1966; Taber and Lodge 2006; Zaller 1992). For example, Republicans are more likely than Democrats to think that the deficit increased during the Clinton administration, while Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say that unemployment rose during the Bush era.

While *The American Voter* did not explicitly spell out the mechanisms that underlie the partisan screen, several more recent works have analyzed the phenomenon within the framework of social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Green et al 2002; Huddy 2002). These scholars argued that individuals derive part of their self-concept through identification and psychological attachment with social groups such as religious groups, ethnic groups, and political parties. Such group identifications occur in an intergroup context where individuals are driven by a desire of "positive distinctiveness" that is satisfied through social comparisons that heighten the differences between groups. As a result, the comparisons of in-group and out-group are characterized by perceptual exaggerations that favor the in-group (in this case, the party with which they identified) and underrate the out-group (Lavine et al 2012).¹⁰ One could then imagine that identification with the group will be heightened when the group is under threat and so during these periods, we might expect strong partisan screens.

¹⁰ This implies that the partisan screen would not work in a one party state in which there is no significant out-group.

Therefore, under the lens of social identity theory, partisanship could potentially produce a partisan screen through an emotional mechanism that is manifested in the affective biases found in the group differentiation between the in-group and the out-group. Specifically, since the group members have an affective motivation in evaluating information through the lens of “us versus them” (Maio and Esses, 2001), they will view messages from their in group to be more favorable as their fellow group members are part of their social identity. Likewise, members who have a strong group attachment will also view the out-group as a threat to their identity, and subsequently, evaluate information from them unfavorably. They will either discount the information about the out-group or treat that information in a way that will show their in-group superiority. In other words, it is through the need for affection of group identity (i.e. a desire to satisfy their affection for the in-group and animosity for the out group) that influences the way people evaluate information, especially if the information is attributed the in-group or the out-group. Therefore, we can expect stronger partisan screen in situation of group threat and weaker partisan screen in situation with no clear outgroup.

While social identity theory provides some insight about the emotional factors that influence how one views the political world, in this dissertation, I adopt an approach that enables me to explain when and how partisanship influences citizens’ political behaviors regardless of how partisanship is conceptualized. Specifically, I need to take into account the nature of partisanship in contexts where it is defined as an attitude (for example, issue preferences in terms of ideological positions or retrospective evaluations of party performance on some valence issues), and also in contexts where it is defined as an

identity. As such, I adopt a cognitive approach, derived from the theory of motivated reasoning that could potentially takes into account the different conceptualization and ultimately allow me to explain the differences in the strength of the partisan screen among individuals across contexts.

The theory of motivated reasoning argues that all individuals are driven by specific motives or goals when attending and processing information. The term “goals” and “motivations” are used interchangeably because motivation signifies striving toward some goals. I adopt the definition that motivation is a “cognitive representation of a desired endpoint that impacts evaluations, emotions and behaviors” (Fishbach and Ferguson 2006), which means that “goal” and “motivation” are conceptual synonyms. While one can have many goals (or motivations), which can be organized hierarchically (where pursuing on one goal serves higher-order goals), or temporally (where one goal serves other long-term goals), most research on political motivated reasoning follows the lead of Taber and Lodge (2006) by focusing on two primary motivations: “directional” and “accuracy” goals.¹¹

These two goals are distinctly different; directional goals motivate individuals to “apply their reasoning powers in defense of a prior, specific conclusion”, and “accuracy” goals drive individuals to “seek out and carefully consider relevant evidence so as to reach a correct or otherwise best conclusion” (Kunda 1990), but they are not mutually exclusive. It is possible that individuals desire to reach accurate conclusions and defend their prior views at the same time. Nonetheless, even though many have found that the relative strength of these motives vary across individuals and circumstances (Baumeister & Newman 1994;

¹¹ Examples of higher-order goals are maintaining positive self-image, defending self-preservation (Hart et al 2005), and achieving group belongingness and attachment (Baumeister and Leary 1995)

Ditto & Lopez 1992; Groenendyk 2013), one can argue that partisan motivated reasoning serving directional goals is likely to be more pervasive relative to the accuracy goals (Druckman et al 2013; Gaines et al. 2007; Lavine et al 2012; Taber and Lodge 2006). Thus, it is through this directional partisan motivated reasoning framework that I will construct my individual-level theory.

There are two main mechanisms in which individuals engage in directional goals, specifically in partisan motivated reasoning. First, identification with a party prompts them to preferentially seek out information that is favorable to their own party and unfavorable toward other parties (i.e. confirmation bias). Second, in the event of encountering information that is not in-line with their priors, they can counter-argue information that casts their party in an unfavorable light (i.e. disconfirmation bias) by engaging in fact-avoidance by failing to change their beliefs even after the facts have changed, or updating their beliefs in accordance with reality but interpret these beliefs in ways that allow prior opinions to remain unaffected.

Clearly, many research have shown that not all individuals (or even partisans) are capable of either performing the mental gymnastic to successfully defend their existing beliefs in the face of dissonant information or recognizing specific issues and positions and compare them to their predispositions. So, Zaller (1996) suggested that people do not reject individual messages per se, but rather limit their exposure to the messages that are inconsistent with their predisposition. What they instead will do is to select only the media sources that they expect to provide favorable information or simply picking messages from trusted sources; not from all the messages that are available in the environment. As a result,

I will only focus on selective exposure to favorable information and argue that it is the main mechanism that drives the development of the partisan screen.

In general, individuals who engage in selective exposure are seeking to reduce anxiety arising from being confronted with information that are contradictory to their predispositions and bolster their partisan allegiance at the same time (Iyengar and Hahn 2009). Based on this mechanism, there is no reason to determine exactly what the nature of PID is in order to explain how it is going to be used as a perceptual screen through which individuals perceive realities in ways that are favorable to their partisan orientation. If PID is a form of identity, then partisans are going to seek out information that shed favorable light to their in-group members. Similarly, if PID is a form of attitude, then partisans will seek information that confirmed preexisting attitudes. As such, I can employ this mechanism to determine the strength of partisan screen in contexts where partisanship is conceptualized differently. Below, I provide a detailed account on the mechanisms in which selective exposure create partisan screen by examining some of the requirements that are needed for it to occur and the constraints that might limit its effect in influencing the way partisans evaluate information.

2.3 Selective Exposure as a Function of Partisan Screen

Research on motivated reasoning showed that individuals' preexisting attitudes and preferences have significant effect on the selection of messages (Baumeister and Newmann 1994; Kunda 1990; Lodge and Taber 2005). This finding is rooted in the classical work of Festinger's (1957) whose theory of cognitive dissonance suggests that individuals select

attitudinally congruent message during information processing and avoid exposure to information, which they have reason to believe, may create dissonance with their priors. Thus, this process has been labeled in the literature as confirmation bias because of the assumed tendency in seeking confirming information (Meffert et al 2006).¹² One example of such behavior in political decision-making is found in an experiment conducted by Iyengar and Hahn (2009) where the Republicans preferred to read about a story when it was attributed to Fox News and Democrats preferred to read the same story when it was attributed to CNN. Hence, this form of selective exposure is based on source cues; individuals prefer to encounter information from favored sources.

Another form of selective exposure is not so much about selecting favorable sources (or avoiding unfavorable sources), but focuses instead on selecting the issue information to which one attends. This theory is based on Krosnick's (1990) argument that as people develop interest in a set of issues, they will develop attitudes about these issues that are personally important to them. Further, attaching personal importance to an issue motivates them to think and talk about the issue and so, in turn, provides incentives, to acquire more information about the issue. For example, if a voter's vote choice is based significantly on economic issues because they deem the state of the economy is personally important, then that voter will tend to seek information that reveals the parties' positions/performances on the economy (Iyengar et al 2008).

¹² In his original conceptualization, Fiestinger argued that selection of information would occur only when people are motivated to avoid information that might exacerbate their levels of dissonance. He did not explicitly offer the idea that people prefer to expose themselves with information consonant to their own views, regardless of whether they are experiencing dissonance, which surprisingly, has been the focus of subsequent research (Holbrook et al 2005). However, as seeking confirmatory information and avoiding dissonant information can be categorized as a form of selectivity, my definition of confirmation bias refers to the exposure of information that supports a "preselected alternative" and achieves the confirmation sought.

In summary, there are two different forms of selective exposure. The first – source selectivity—is based on cues that the source gives on whether the information will be viewed favorably by the people. The second – issue selectivity—is based on message content, which means that people prefer to receive information on issues they care about. Such selective exposures however, require some knowledge from the individuals on the cues that the source gives. For the first form, people are required to derive from the source whether the messages that they are going to encounter are consistent with their attitudes. For the second form, people are required to have the ability to extract from the source whether the messages contain the issues that they care about. If the individuals are unable to recognize the cues that the source gives, then they are unable to successfully expose themselves to the information that is consistent with their beliefs and to the messages that they care about.

2.4 The Partisan Screen in Perceiving the Economy

To measure the levels of partisan screen in individuals' views of the economy, I use the theory of selective exposure explained above to define “partisan screen” at the individual level and subsequently utilize this theory to identify the contextual factors that condition the strength of that screen. First of all, for individuals to form their perceptions about the state of the economy, they need to have the ability to observe economic outcomes by obtaining information about the economy in some way. They can either get that information through their personal economic experience or through the media. Nevertheless, in most modern democracies, media has become the dominant source in

which people gather economic information and shape the way they form their opinion about the economy (Mutz 1998). Thus, most political information, including economic messages, is ultimately mediated (Stevenson and Duch 2013).

Given this, the way individuals form their opinion about the state of the economy is a function of the mediated messages that are received.¹³ Since the literature has shown that the media message about the state of the economy can be thought of as a distribution over the range of possible messages (Stevenson and Duch 2013), then for someone to have no partisan screen, he/she will draw a sample of messages where each message is sampled with equal probability (i.e. random sampling from the distribution of media message). In this case, the differences in the messages sampled across individuals are merely reflections of the natural variation contained in the distribution of media message.

On the other hand, if the messages are non-randomly sampled from the distribution of media messages, then the differences across individuals are not simply attributable to estimation uncertainty. For simplicity, consider the perceptions that individuals have about a single, uni-dimensional economic indicator that can take some value on the real line (e.g., change in unemployment, growth or inflation). Suppose that a voter sample of messages about inflation was not a random selection but resulted from his/her lack of exposure to messages that portrayed the inflation rate too negatively. If this lack of exposure is caused by his identity as an incumbent partisan, then there is a standard non-random selection problem in inflation messages that results in his aggregated perceptions of the economy

¹³ Here I omit the accept/reject part of the model as I am using selective exposure as the main mechanism in which individuals' partisanship determines their perception of the economy. This is similar to a theory proposed by Zaller (1996) where he argued that individuals do not reject individual messages per se, but rather limit their exposure to the messages that are inconsistent with their predisposition by selecting only the media sources that they expect to provide favorable information.

being non-randomly assigned (Stevenson and Duch 2013). Thus, we would expect that when there is a partisan media and individuals who selectively attend to media based on their partisanship, different voters would have a different political and economic outlook if they selectively choose different partisan messages. Thus, this non-random sampling of messages is what I described as the partisan screen.

2.5 Map of the Strength and Direction of the Partisan Screen

Using the theory of motivated reasoning (more specifically, the mechanism of selective exposure) in explaining how PID influences individuals' evaluations of the economy, one can simply expect that those who identified with the government or the chief executive's party are more likely to be exposed to information that portray good economic conditions, and those who do not identify with the government are going to be exposed to information that shows otherwise regardless. Again, regardless of how one conceptualizes the nature of PID, individuals are still going to view political information in light of their partisanship. If PID is a form of social identity, then partisans are going to selectively choose favorable information that portrays the success of their fellow group members in order to obtain positive psychological benefit of sharing the group success (Tajfel and Turner 1979).

As such, those that identify with the government are more likely to have optimistic economic outlook than those who identify with the party out of power. Similarly, if PID is an attitude, government partisans are also going to view the economy favorably because they selectively choose sources of information that will bolster their predisposition (whether in terms of ideological positions or prior evaluation of government's performance). Thus, no

matter what the conceptualization of PID is, partisan screen can exist when its mechanism operates through individuals' selective exposure to favorable information.

Since the theoretical quantity that I want to measure (the partisan screen) is a causal effect (i.e. it is the impact of one variable on the other), I obtain data on the two variables that comprise this relationship: perception of the economy and partisanship. To measure the variation on the strength and direction of the partisan screen across parties in different countries and over time, I use survey data from Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and European Social Survey (ESS) (See Appendix 2.1 for a listing of all the mass surveys that are used in the dissertation). Below I outline the process in which I produce the estimates of the strength of the partisan screen for each party in each of the surveys.

To measure individuals' party identification, I used questions about closeness to the party in the CSES and ESS. I include "leaners" in the partisans' category since the literature has found that leaners behave much like the partisans than to independents (Theodoridis 2015). For the economic perceptions variable, both the CSES and ESS ask two different questions, each with different question wordings and answer categories. For the CSES, the question on economic perceptions is of the following general form: "Would you say that over the past twelve months, the state of the economy in [country] has gotten better, stayed about the same, or gotten worse?" while ESS asks: "On the whole how satisfied are you (on a 1-10 scale) with the present state of the economy in [country]?".

To improve the consistency of partisan bias estimate, I specify the model with several variables to control for the impact of other important factors. The variables are usually covariates that predict both the outcome (economic perceptions) and treatment

(party identification). This is to ensure that the estimates reflect the true relationship between partisanship and economic perceptions. Based on the comparative and country-specific literature on partisanship and economic perceptions, the most common predictors for both economic perceptions and party identifications are ideology, measured using left-right placement of the individuals.

2.6 Estimating the Statistical Models

In estimating the impact of partisanship on perceptions of the economy using the CSES data, I estimate for each election survey, a logistical model of economic perception where the indicator capturing PID enters the model as a set of dummies while controlling for the other confounders.¹⁴ For example, if the PID variable contains 3 categories, I create a set of 2 dummy variables $PID_{1i}, \dots, PID_{2i}$ that are coded $PID_{ji} = 1$ if respondent i 's PID is coded as category j and 0 otherwise. For surveys in the ESS, I also let the indicators capturing PID to enter the model as a set of dummies, but in this case, I use a linear regression to estimate the economic perception since the dependent variable is measured using 1-10 satisfaction scale (see equation 2.1).

$$(2.1) \quad econper_{ij} = \alpha + \sum_{j=1}^{J-1} \beta_j pid_{ij} + \lambda lr_{ij}$$

Notice that since only one $pid_{ji} = 1$ if the respondent chooses that category, $\beta_j pid_{ij}$ will equal β_j for the chosen category and 0 for all other categories. Thus, for any respondent

¹⁴ In this model, the outcome is a binary variable coded 1 when a respondent perceives the economy to be getting better and 0 otherwise.

that chose, for example, category 1 for PID, the model, after controlling for the confounders, will be:

$$(2.2) \quad \text{econper}_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 + \lambda \text{lr}_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}$$

This makes it plain that I have set up the model so that the estimates of the effect of party identification for any respondents are the shifts in the intercept of the linear regression. More generally, since the party ID variable in an economic perception model is categorical (ordinal or nominal) and enters the model as a set of dummies (or a set of indicator variables for the PID categories), then for any given respondent, the predicted probability of perceiving good economy in the logistic model or the estimate for being more satisfied with the economy by one unit in the regression model, is just the sum of a grand mean (i.e., α) that applies to all respondents and deviations from that mean that are specific to the party ID variable (e.g., β_j in equation 2.1), controlling for the left-right position of the individuals.

In fact, equation (2.2) has a very familiar form. Specifically, it looks very much like the specification of a hierarchal, multilevel, or error components model with one random effect. Indeed, if I replace β_j with u_j , and stipulate that u_j is normally distributed random variables with zero mean and variance to be estimated, I would have the textbook normal-linear error components model for one random effect indexed by j as shown below.

$$(2.3) \quad \text{econper}_{ij} = (\alpha + u_j) + \lambda \text{lr}_{ij} + \epsilon_{ij}$$

$$u_j \sim N(0, \sigma_u^2)$$

$$\epsilon_{ij} \sim N(0, \sigma_{\epsilon_i}^2)$$

Thus, it is clear the two formulations are equivalent if we simply add to equation (2.1) the stipulation that $\beta_j \sim N(0, \sigma_j^2)$ -- that is, making this equation a random intercept model in which the coefficients for the indicators of PID are identically distributed.¹⁵ This, of course, just illustrates the well understood fact that random intercept models are equivalent to random coefficients models in which the slope coefficients on an appropriately defined set of indicators are drawn from a common distribution. Thus, the strength and direction of the partisan screen is the deviation of random coefficient (β_j) of

¹⁵ We can think of this random intercept as “substantively defined” and contrast them to the more common “grouped-unmeasured variables” interpretation of this effect. In the latter case, categories represent groups of individuals who share some label (e.g., a country, a year, a classroom) that stands in for a set of unmeasured variables that the researcher suspects operate at the relevant level but that are not known or are too costly to measure. In contrast, a substantively defined random intercept is constructed from measured substantive variables like party ID or income. There is nothing in the mathematics of these models that recognizes this distinction and one is free to define groups via “labels” or substantive variables. A related issue concerns one usual justification from random intercept models – that one’s sample of, say, classrooms is a sample out of a larger set of classrooms and so estimating the parameters of the population of classrooms (e.g., the variance of typical classroom average test scores over classrooms) from the sample of classrooms (each with an average test score) is a reasonable thing to do.

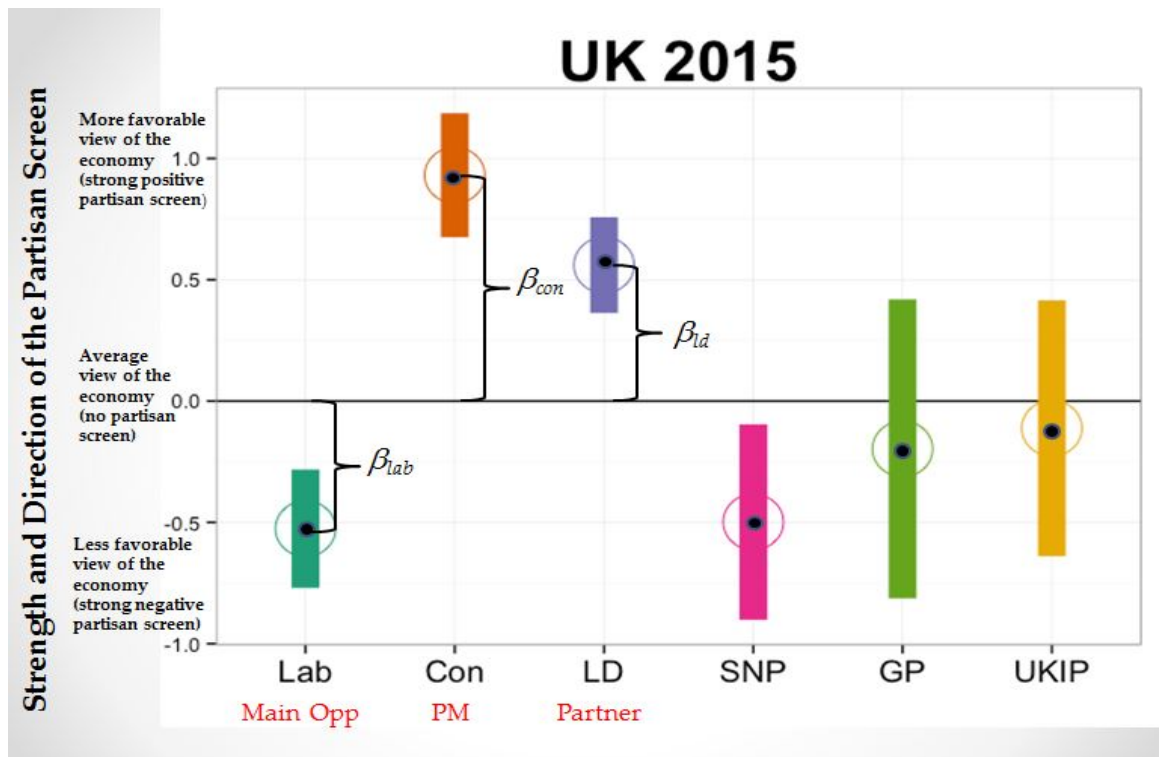
This line of reasoning makes less sense for substantively defined random intercept. For example, if we have four categories of party id in a variable and specify a pid random intercept, the pid categories play the same role here as classrooms in the previous example. It is, of course, odd to treat these four pid categories as a sample out of a larger population of pid categories. So this motivation for the random intercept fails in this case. An alternative motivation makes more sense. It is less common and relies on the representation of the problem as a set of random coefficients on a set of dummy variables. In this case, one thinks of the effect of each of these dummy variables (e.g. of being a Democrat or Republican) on the chances of perceiving good economy as being random, but drawn from a distribution. When thought about in this way, there is little reason to raise an objection. A seemingly more onerous assumption, however, is that the distribution for the coefficient on the Democrat dummy is the same as the one for the Republican dummy. Though even here, the restriction is less onerous than it seems when one remembers that the mean of this distribution is zero – and justified as such because these are intercept shifts from an overall grand mean. Thus, the operative restriction is that the variance in the effects of being Democrat on perceiving good economy is the same as the variance in the effects of being Republican.

each of the PID category from the average. An additional advantage of estimating this as a random effect model is that it shrinks estimates for parties with small number of responses toward the mean, reducing the random variation due to small samples.

2.7 Cross Party and National Variations in the Strength of the Partisan Screen

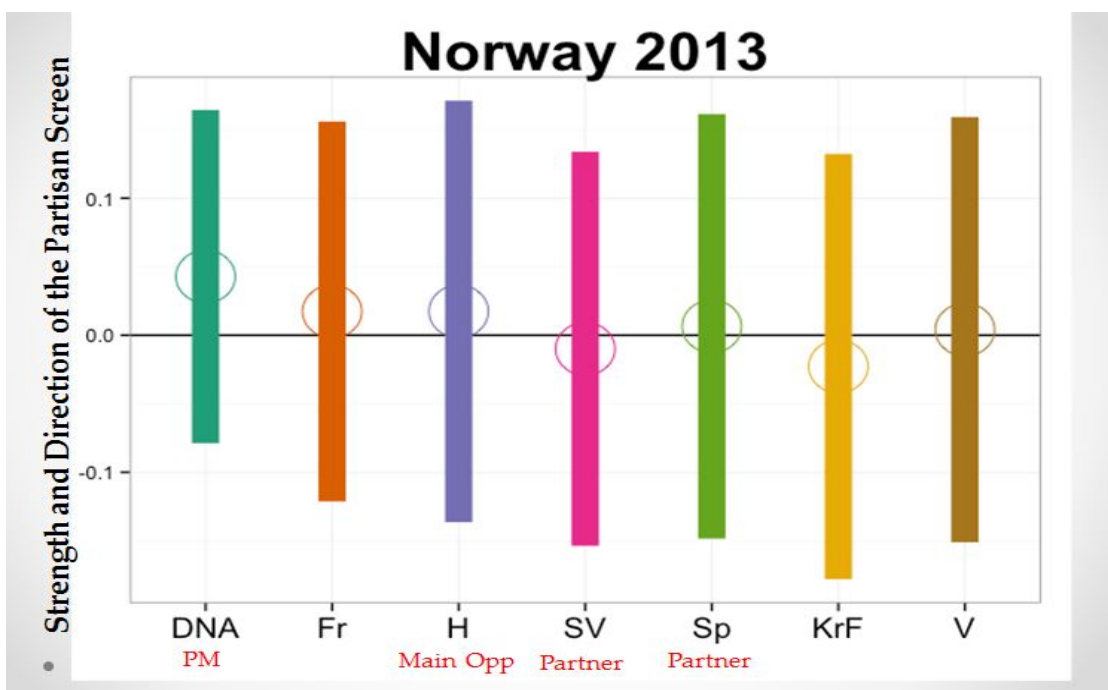
To illustrate the statistical model described above in empirical data, Figure 1 shows the variation in the strength and direction of the partisan screen across different partisans in UK 2015. Note that the horizontal line at 0 along the y-axis indicates the grand mean (α) defined here as “no partisan screen”. Deviations (β_j) from this mean in the positive directions indicate more favorable view of the economy (strong positive partisan screen) while deviations from this mean in the negative directions indicate less favorable view of the economy (strong negative partisan screen). The dot for each party represents the magnitude of β_j while the vertical bars indicate the 95 percent confidence interval around the estimates. Based on the results in Figure 2.1, it is clear that the typical identifiers of the Conservative (i.e. the PM party) have more favorable view of the economy relative to the mean and other identifiers while typical identifiers of Labour have a less favorable view of the economy relative to the other identifiers. Typical voter of the Liberal Democrats (i.e. coalition partner) also have a more favorable view of the economy than the average, but the magnitude of the strength of its partisan screen is smaller than the Conservatives.

Figure 2.1: The Strength and Direction of the Partisan Screen in UK 2015



However, there are also instances where the strength and direction of the partisan screen does not vary across different partisan identifiers within a given context. For example, Figure 2.2 shows that the strength and direction of the partisan screen for 7 different partisan identifiers in Norway's 2013 election. These do not vary from each other and from the average. Substantively, this means that regardless of whom the voters identify with (even if they identify with the PM's party or the main opposition), their partisanship do not play a role in influencing their perception of the economy.

Figure 2.2: Strength and Direction of the Partisan Screen in Norway 2013



In all, I conducted similar analyses in 16 Western Democracies from 1996 to 2015 that includes 113 different political parties. The map of the strength and direction of the partisan screen for all of these cases are shown in Appendix 2.2. Generally, the map makes it clear there is a great deal of variation in the strength and direction of the partisan screen across different party identifiers within the same country, across countries, and over time. One general pattern that emerges is that the strength of partisan screen is strongest for partisans who identify with either the chief executive's party and with the main opposition party and weakest among those that identify with smaller parties or coalition partners. However, in some instances (i.e. in the Netherlands and Norway), the strength of the partisan screen for chief executive party identifiers is not as strong as it is in other contexts such as in the UK or Spain. Similar patterns also exist among those that identify with the

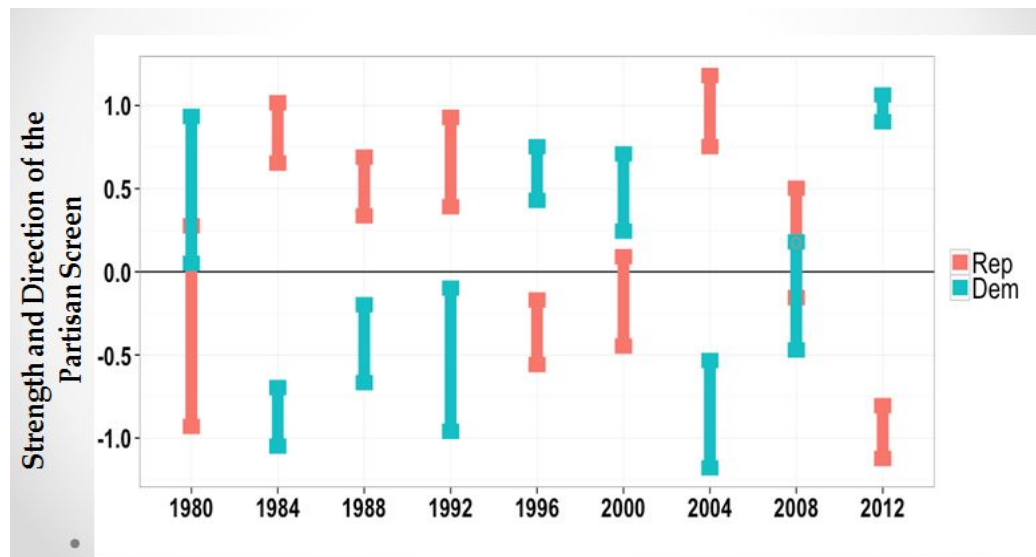
opposition parties, where the strength of partisan screen for these parties are greater in Poland and Germany compared to Sweden and Norway (see Appendix 2.2).

2.8 Overtime Variation within a Context

Besides having variation in the strength of partisan screen cross nationally and across different parties within a national context, Figure 2.3 below suggests that at least in one context for which we have data, there is variation over time. In the United States for example, I observe that those who identify with the incumbent government tend to have a more positive perception about the economy than those who do not. While there are instances where partisanship plays a very strong role in determining one's economic perception, there are also times when its role is negligible. Specifically, Figure 2.3 shows that in both the 1980 and 2008 elections, both the Republican and Democrat identifiers do not have a systematically different outlook about the economy as their intercepts are not statistically different from each other.

Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that in 1980 and 2008, the US was experiencing bad economic condition that it muted the impact of partisanship in economic perception. On the other hand, when the state of the economy is not as dire, partisanship is able to play a more significant role in shaping economic perception in such a way that different partisan identifiers will have starkly different perceptions about the economy.

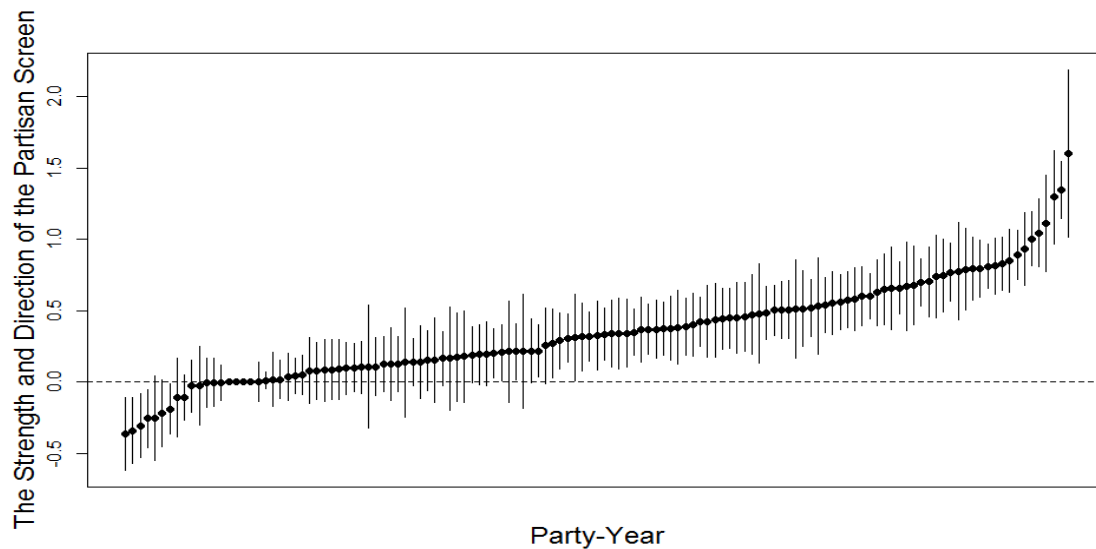
Figure 2.3: Over-Time Variations in the United States



To further illustrate the variation in the strength and direction of the partisan screen across contexts and over time, I order the estimates of the strength and direction of the partisan screen of the chief executive identifiers from smallest on the left to largest on the right (there are 130 estimates here corresponding to each of the party-year in my sample) as shown in Figure 2.4. The line rising from lower left to the upper right quadrants of the graph indicates the point estimates of the strength of the partisan screen for the chief executive party, while the vertical bar represents the 95% confidence intervals around that estimate. Generally, I found a substantial variation in the strength of the partisan screen among these different chief executive identifiers. Specifically, I found that in 79 out of 130 cases, the direction of the partisan screen is statistically different from 0 (i.e. the average) in the positive direction, 46 are not statistically different from 0, while only 5 cases where the direction of the partisan screen is statistically different than the mean in the negative direction. This means that in the majority of my cases, the identifiers of the chief executive

have more favorable view of the economy relative to the average within their specific context, which is generally consistent with what prior literature has confirmed.

Figure 2.4: Strength of the Partisan Screen for Chief Executive Identifiers



In sum, the finding presented in this dissertation is one of the first comprehensive evidence of the partisan screen at the individual level across a large number of countries over an extended period of time. Furthermore, I have also established that the strength and direction of the partisan screen varies significantly across different parties, countries, and over time. Therefore, in the next chapter, I am going to identify several contextual factors that account for these differences.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter argues that one possible ways to explain how partisanship serves as a perceptual screen, regardless of how one conceptualizes the nature of partisanship, is

through the theory of motivated reasoning (especially through the mechanism of selective exposure). This means that as individuals possess some directional goals in evaluating information (i.e. maintaining consistency between what is being perceived in reality and predispositions), they will select information that are favorable based on the cues that the source gives and ignore information that are unfavorable.

Based on the extensive survey data that I have collected and analyzed, I find that the strengths and direction of the partisan screen vary rather dramatically across parties, contexts, and over time. This means that in some contexts or in some period of time, partisanship does not play a role in influencing individuals' view of the economy while in some contexts or a particular point of time, partisanship does matter. In the subsequent chapters, I will identify some of the contextual factors that are derived from the individual-level model that account for these variations and conduct extensive statistical analyses to examine their robustness.

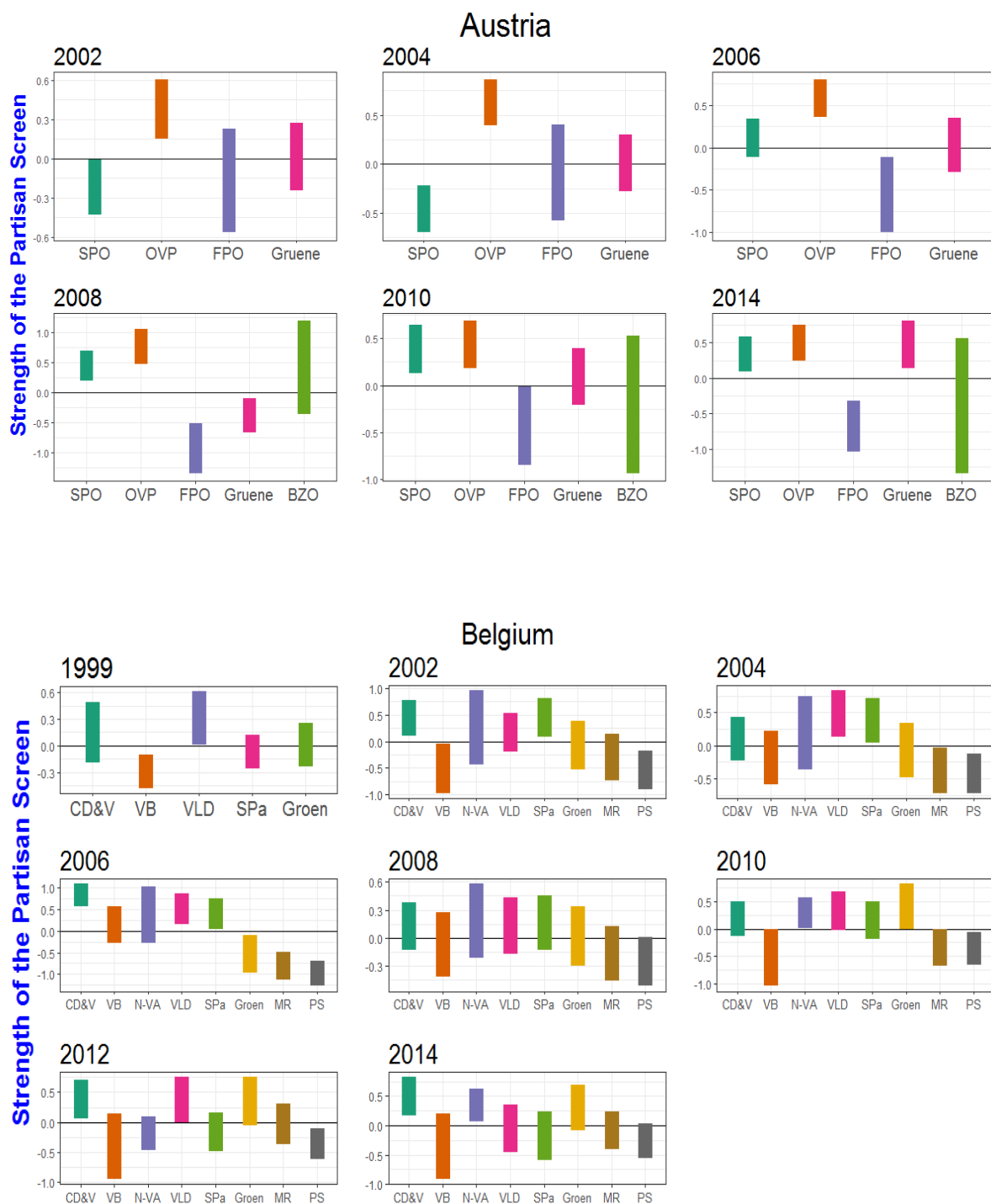
In the next chapter, I develop a rather compelling new measure of the identifiability of partisan media for different parties in different countries and in different times that provides explanations to the variations I found across parties, contexts, and over time. Crucially, this measurement is a direct implication out of the individual-level theory explained in this chapter, which means that the impact of identifiability of partisan media on the strength and direction of the partisan screen speaks directly to the veracity of the underlying individual level theory, which is the selective exposure to favorable information.

Appendix 2.1: List of Surveys

Country	Year	Data Source
Austria	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2014	ess and cses
Belgium	1999, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Denmark	1998, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Finland	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
France	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess
Germany	1998, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Greece	2002, 2004, 2008, 2010, 2012	ess and cses
Ireland	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2011 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Italy	2002, 2004, 2012	ess
Netherlands	1998, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Norway	1997, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Poland	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Portugal	2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
Spain	1996, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006,	ess and cses

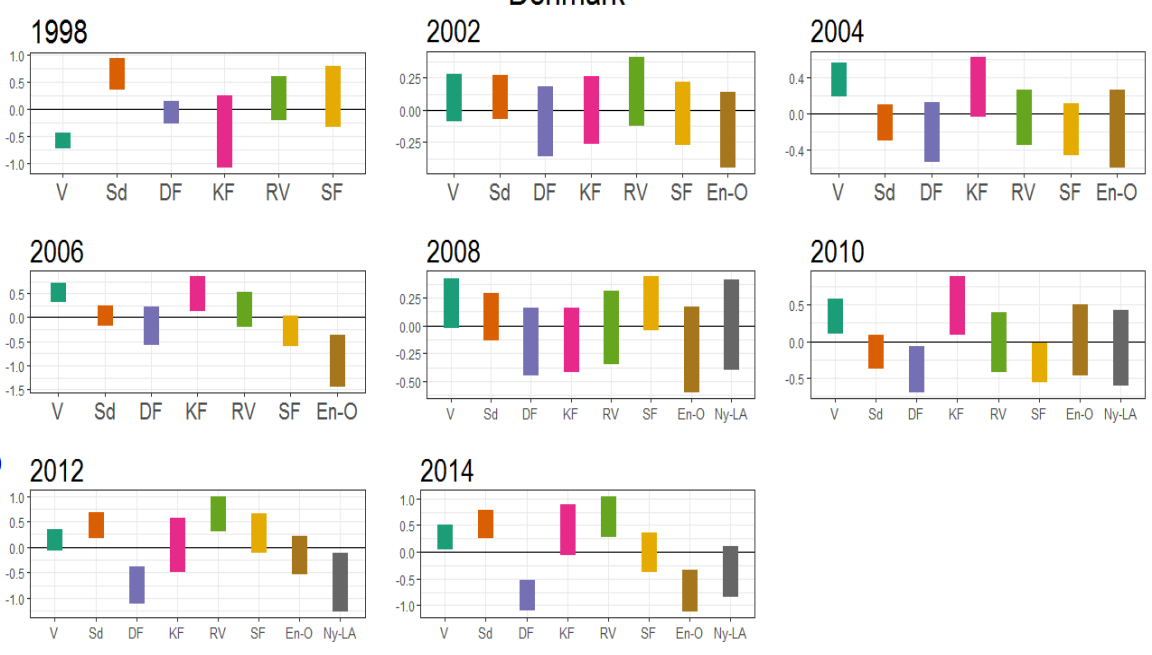
	2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	
Sweden	1998, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
UK	1997, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014	ess and cses
USA	1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012	anes

Appendix 2.2: Extensive Map of the Strength and Direction of the Partisan Screen



Strength of the Partisan Screen

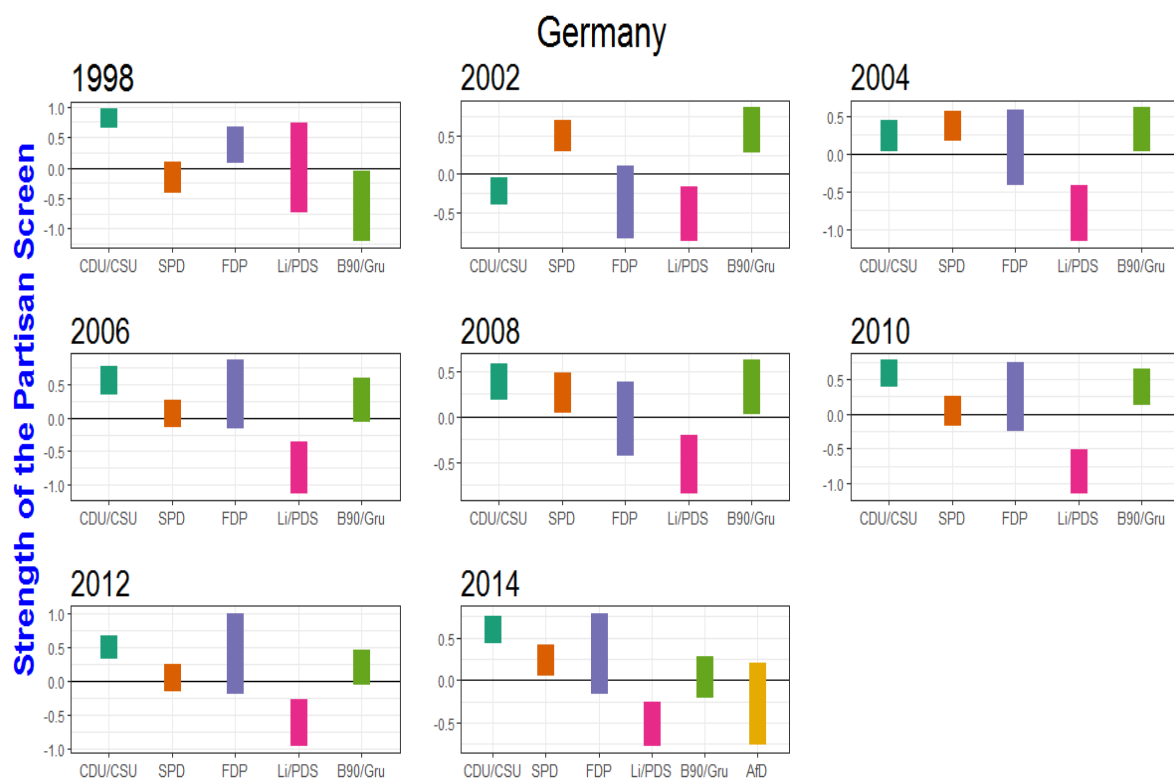
Denmark

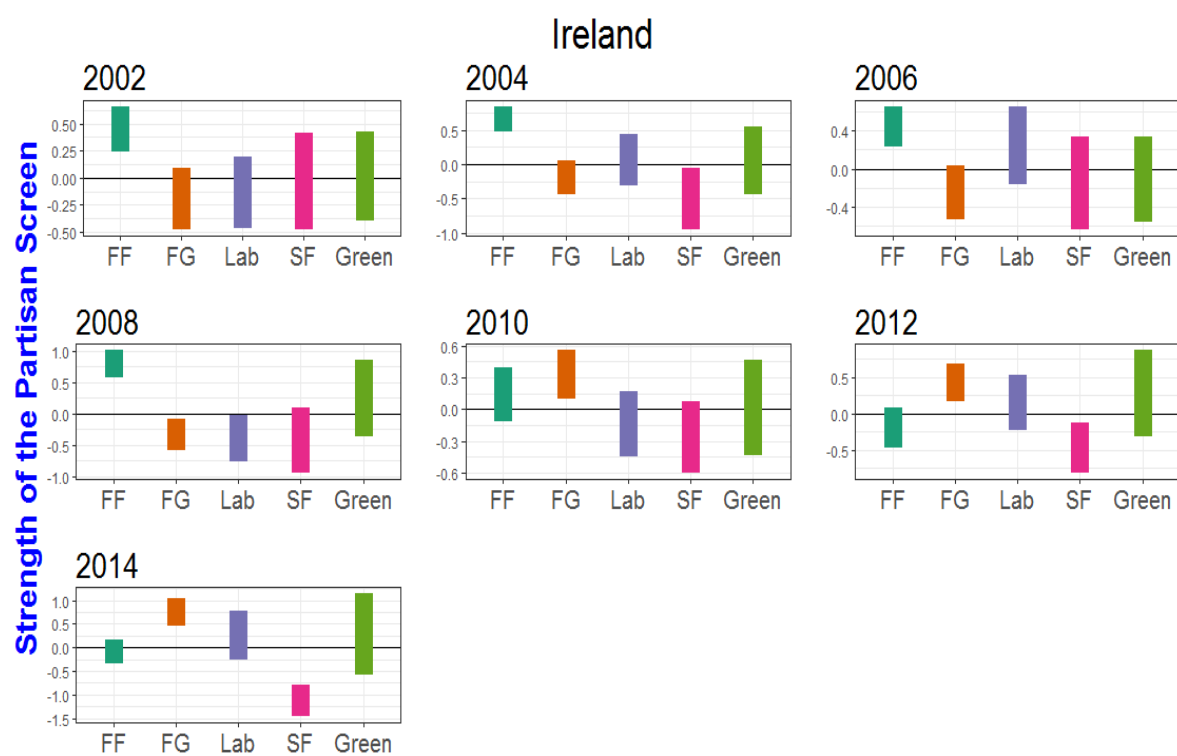
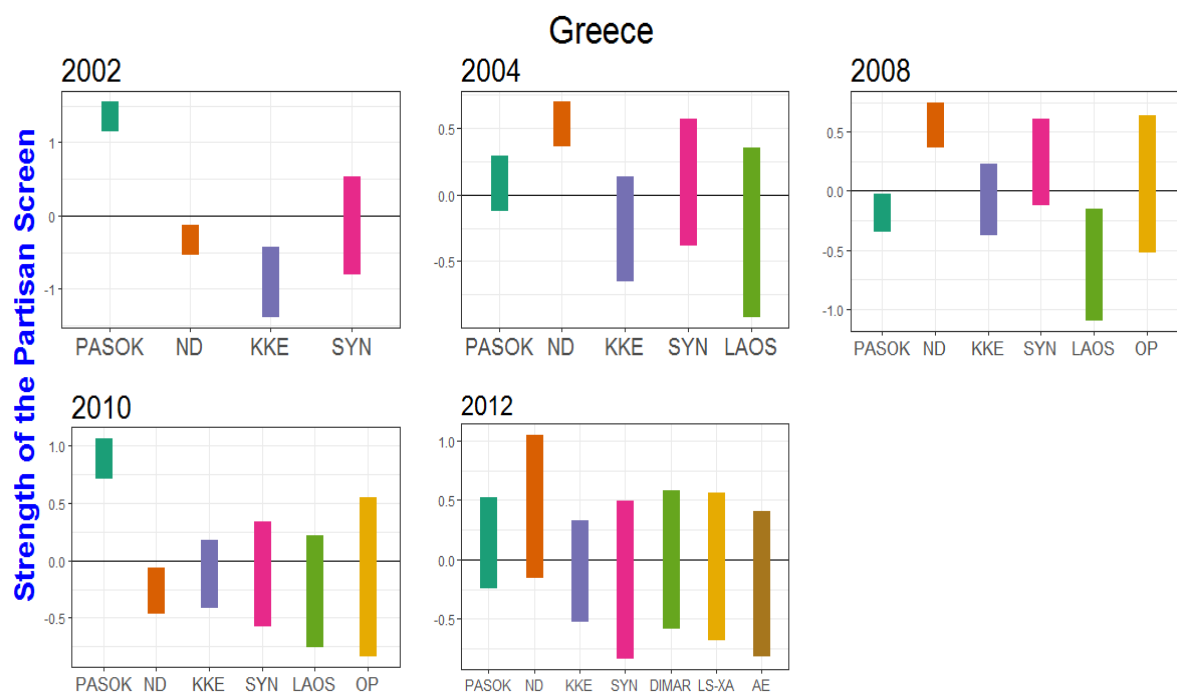


Finland

Strength of the Partisan Screen

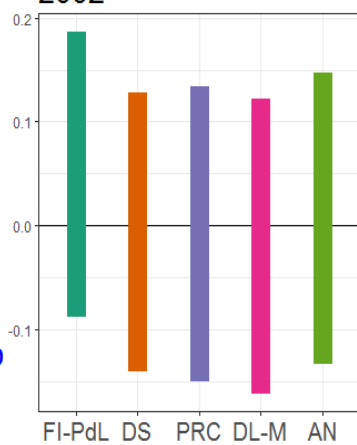






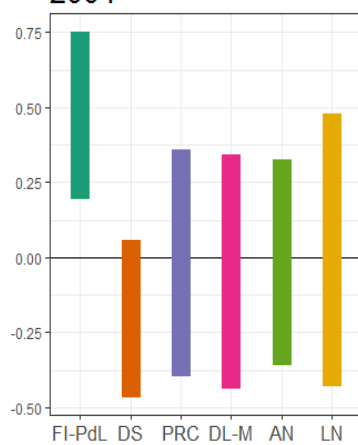
Strength of the Partisan Screen

2002

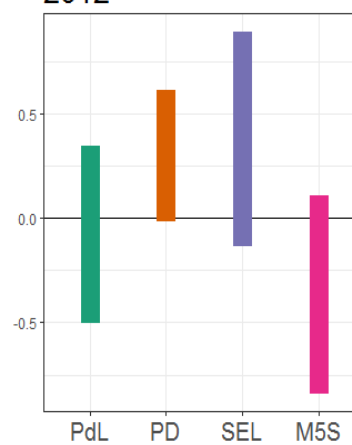


Italy

2004

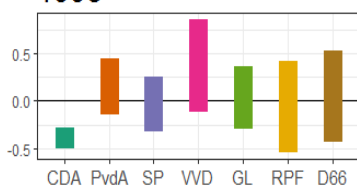


2012



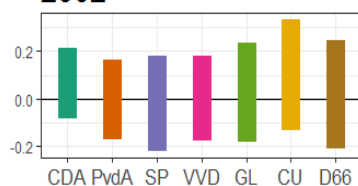
Strength of the Partisan Screen

1998

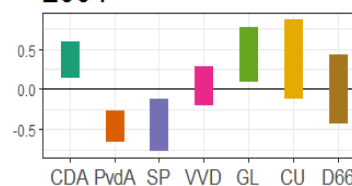


Netherland

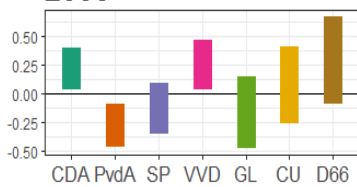
2002



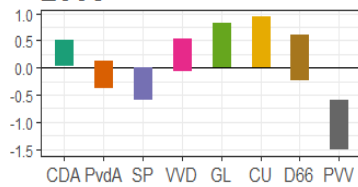
2004



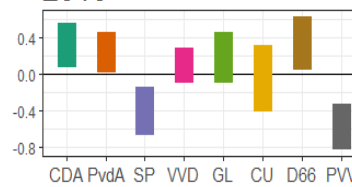
2006



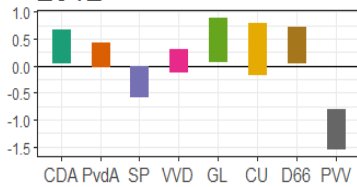
2008



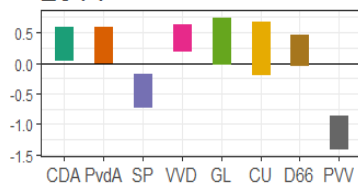
2010

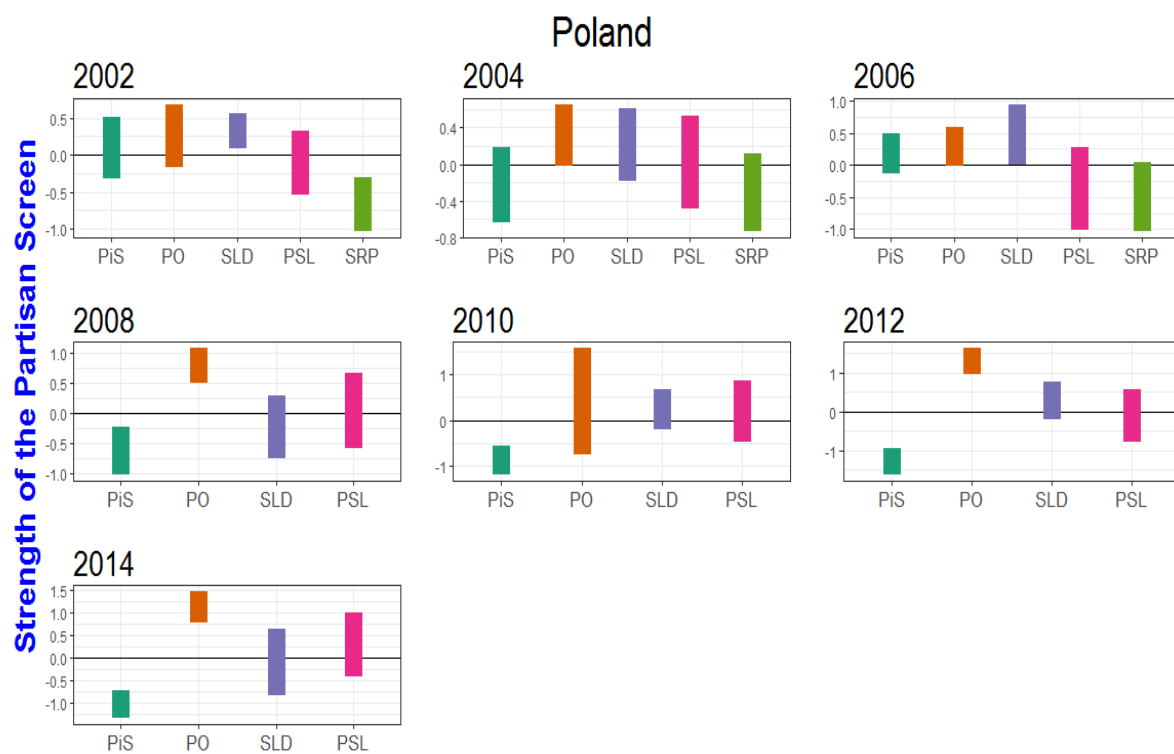
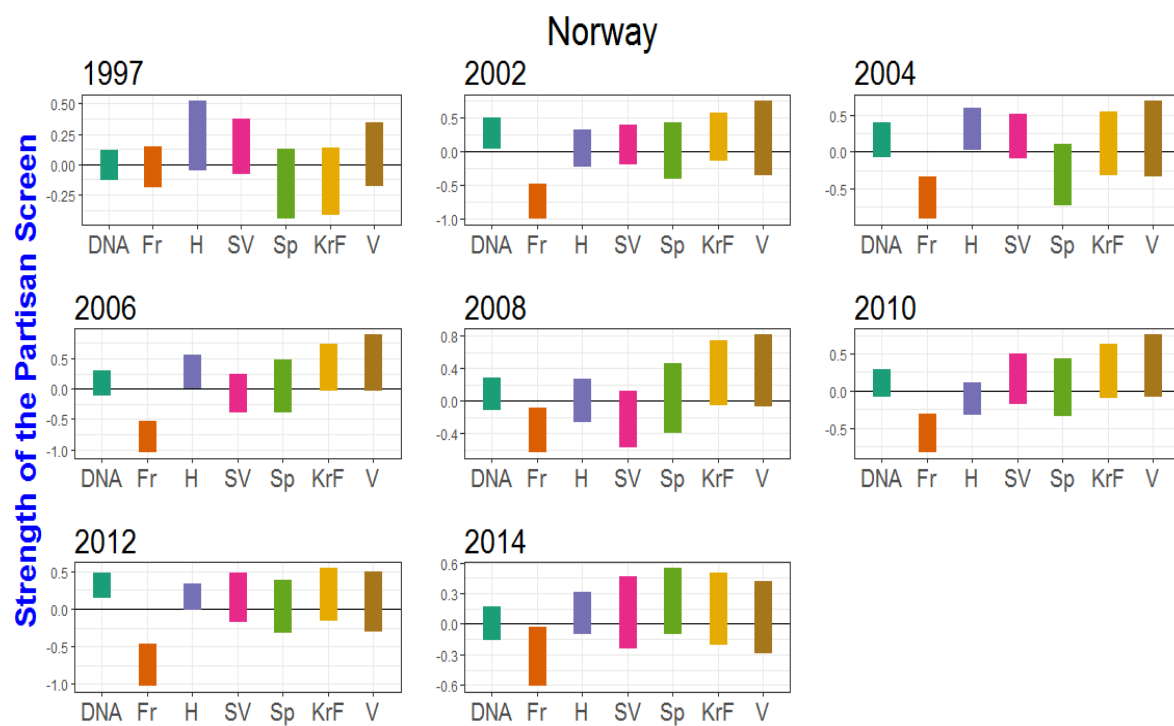


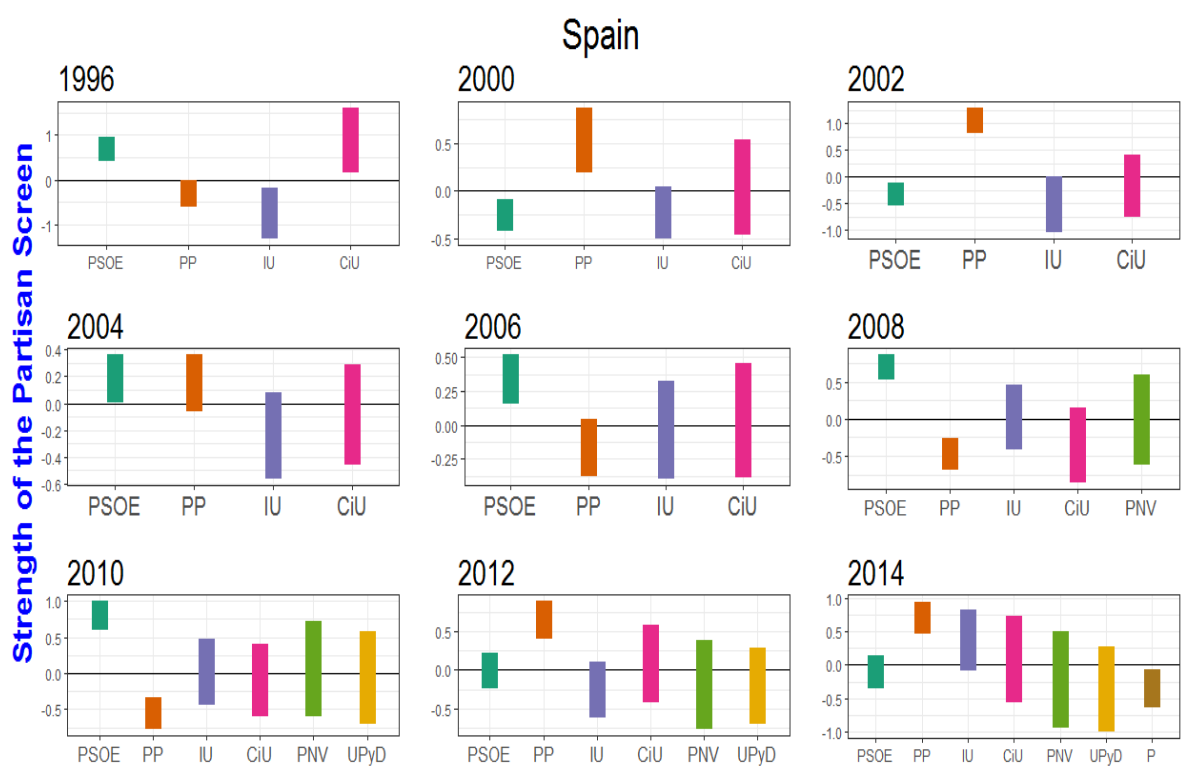
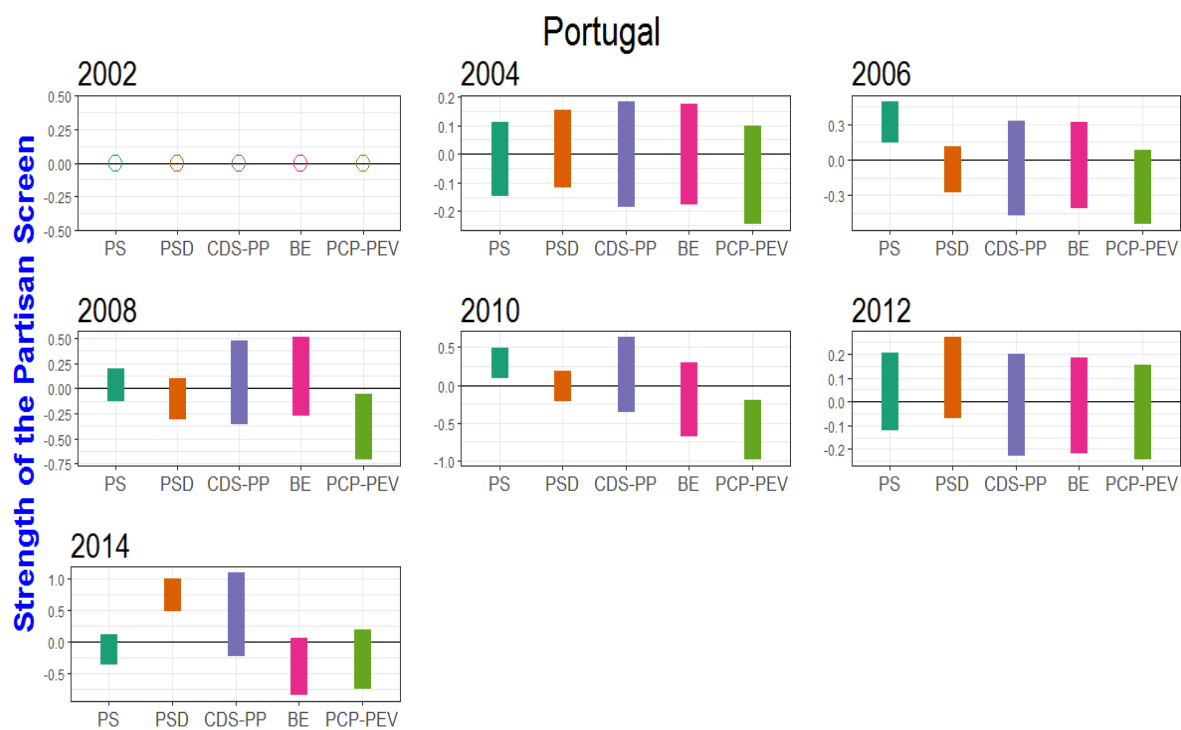
2012

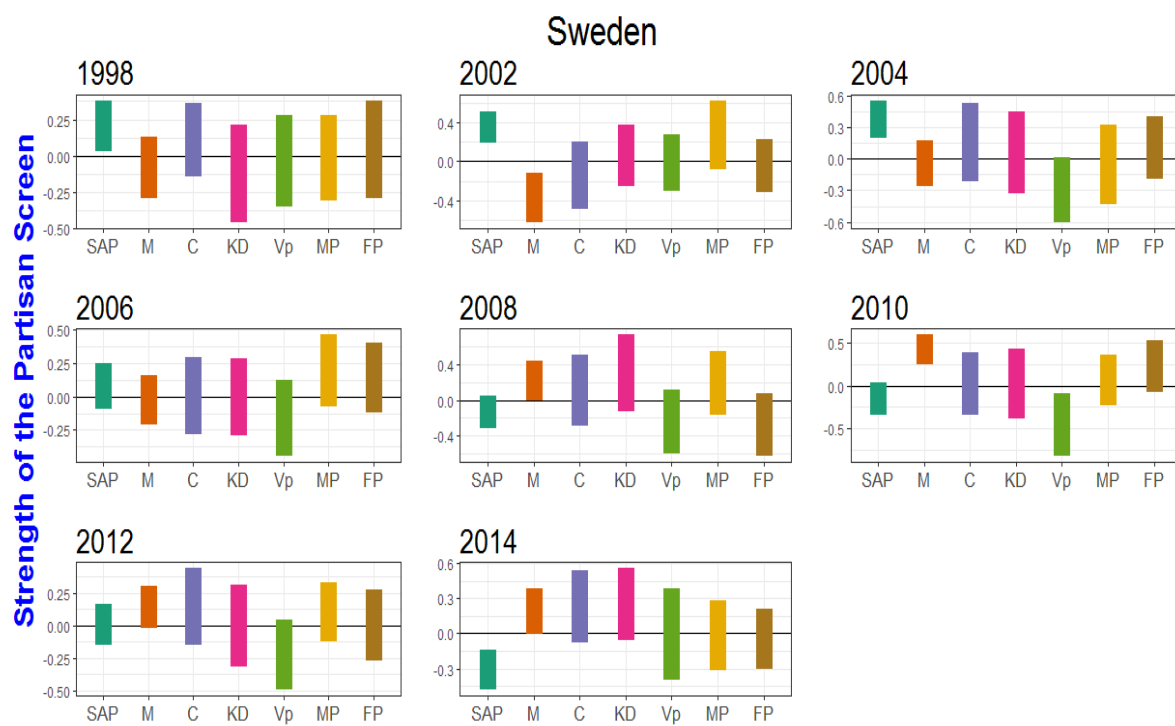


2014









Chapter 3

A Contextual Theory of the Partisan Screen: The Identifiability of the Partisan Media

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed the extent to which the strength of the partisan screen (specifically, in individuals' views of the economy) differs rather dramatically between individuals who support different parties, live in different countries, and participate at different times and in different elections. In particular, I found that while some contexts seem to produce very high levels of partisan bias in perception of ostensibly objective facts, others produce very little. Given my individual-level model explains the strength and direction of the partisan screen is through the mechanism of selective exposure to favorable information, my goal in this chapter is to use that theory to identify some of the contextual factors that may account for the variations in the strength of the partisan screen that we have observed. If selective exposure to favorable information is the main mechanism driving partisan bias, what parameters of my theoretical model can vary across contexts and what specific contextual variables might move them? In other words, what are the contextual factors that could determine the ease with which individuals engage in selective exposure to favorable information?

In this chapter, I identify a particular important contextual factor, which I call the "identifiability of the partisan media" (IPM). This factor is derived directly from the

individual-level model discussed in Chapter 2. This concept motivates a measure of IPM that captures how easy it is for partisans to identify a partisan set of trusted sources in the media environment. This measure is similar to the concept of media-party parallelism developed by Seymour-Ure (1974) but moves beyond it in several ways discussed below. In the following sections, I define more clearly, given my theory, what the concept of the identifiability of partisan media is; explain why it is a contextual implication of my individual level theory of selective exposure to favorable information; and propose an operationalization of that using the European Media Systems Surveys conducted by Popescu et al (2010 and 2013). Finally, I examine the relationship between this measure and my estimates of the strength of the partisan screen across countries and parties that were produced in Chapter 2.

Recall that for individuals to form their perceptions about the state of the economy, they need to have the ability to observe economic outcomes by obtaining information about the economy through either personal economic experience or the media. However, with the rise of cable news and the Internet, coupled with the modernization of the economy, Mutz (1998) argued (and showed) that in Western Democracies, the influence of mediated information dominated the influence of personal experience on the economic perceptions of citizens. In contemporary democracies, most people form their impressions and understanding of politics based on the information they get from the mass media and as a result, the mass media has played a significant role in shaping individuals' political attitudes and behaviors (Gunther and Mughan 2000).

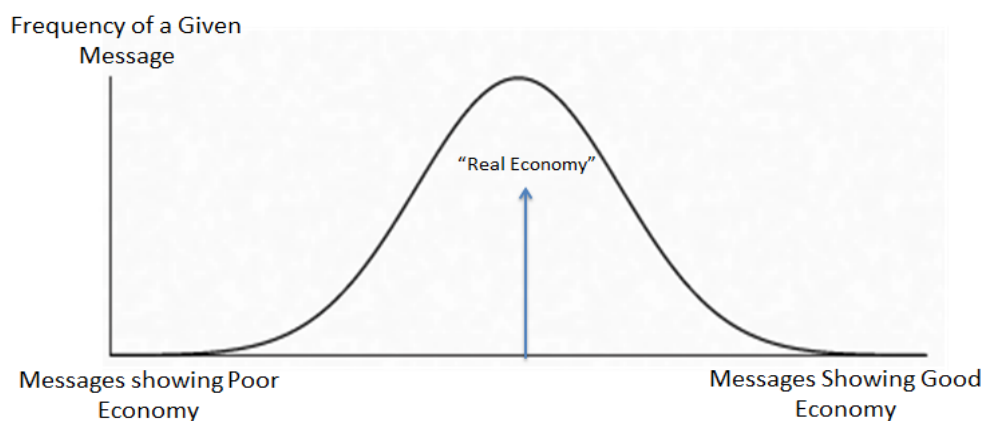
Since messages from the media are inherently partial, framed, and disputable (Toka and Popescu 2012), the “observable economy” that voters use to inform their perceptions of the economy should be treated as a “frequency distribution of messages” that are available in the media environment (Duch and Stevenson 2013). With this conception of a distribution of available media messages about the economy, I can think of the strength of the partisan screen for any individuals as closely connected to strategies that one employs to sample from distribution of the media messages that provide information about the economy. With that theoretical conception of the process of perception formation (sampling out of the available relevant messages), I can then identify the contextual factors that may affect the ease with which individuals can select media messages likely to be favorable to their parties – a feat accomplished by only selecting messages from specific sets of trusted sources (Zaller 1996).

3.2 Understanding the Partisan Screen in terms of Sampling Strategies of Media Messages

In the model of attitude formation (Zaller 1996; Lodge and Taber 2005), individuals’ perception about the economy is a function of the mediated economic messages they receive. Also, with the fact that the media message about the state of the economy, or even specific aspects of it such as the rate of inflation or unemployment, can be thought of as a frequency distribution over the range of possible messages (Duch and Stevenson 2013), I can categorize the way individuals sample media messages about the economy into two broad strategies. They can either engage in random sampling or non-random sampling from the distribution of the economic messages.

Suppose the distribution of economic messages in which individual can sample from the media environment is collapsed to a single dimension as shown in Figure 3.1. The y-axis indicates the frequency of a given message and the x-axis indicates the range of all the possible economic messages that could be portrayed by the media. Also, I stipulate that the center of the distribution is the “real economy”.¹⁶ In this specific environment, most of the media sources are portraying a moderate view of the economy (neither good nor poor) with a few of them containing messages that portray either good or bad economy.

Figure 3.1: Illustration of the Media Environment on the State of the Economy

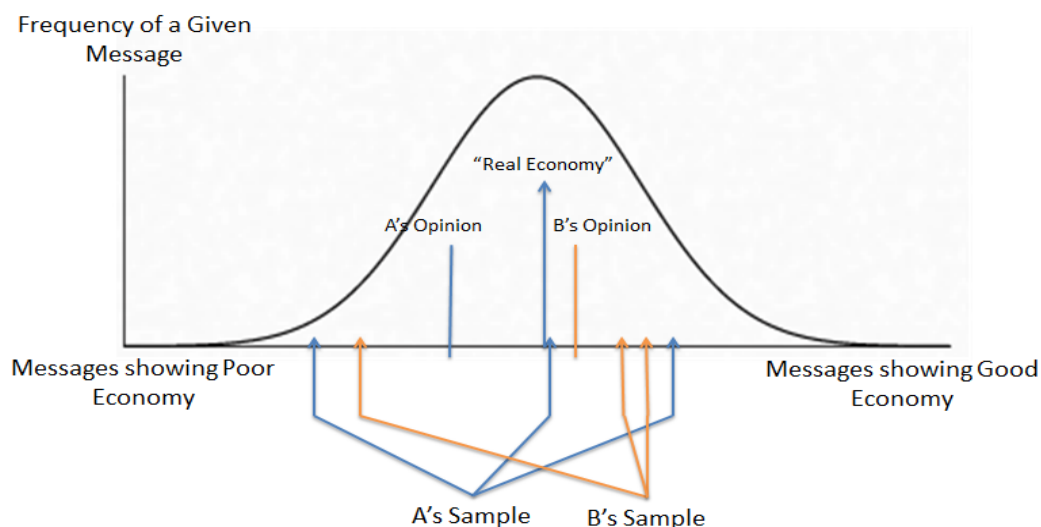


Suppose that two individuals (i.e. voters A and B) were to sample the messages from this distribution of the economic messages randomly and form their opinion by simply averaging the messages that they each received as shown in Figure 3.2. In this case, we observe that voter B is more optimistic about the economy than voter A. However, since

¹⁶ This “real economy”, according to Duch and Stevenson (2013), exist and fixed for some jurisdiction over any interval of time. However it is unobservable and only nosily reflected in the distributions of the mediated economies. My theory does not depend on the existence of the “real economy”. But if all media are systematically biased, that bias will not contribute to the partisan screen – which is about differences across different media sources.

the sampling selection is random, the difference in the economic perceptions is simply a reflection of the natural variation of the economic messages contained in the distribution of the media sources (Duch and Stevenson 2013). There is nothing deliberate on the part of voter B in selecting a specific set of messages about the economy. Therefore, I identify individuals who have no partisan screen as those that employ equal probability in the sampling of media sources. The implication of this sampling strategy is clear. If the distribution of messages is unbiased (meaning it does not portray the economy in one way or another), then as individuals sample more messages out of this distribution, their views will be unbiased and closely matched the distribution of the mediated economy.

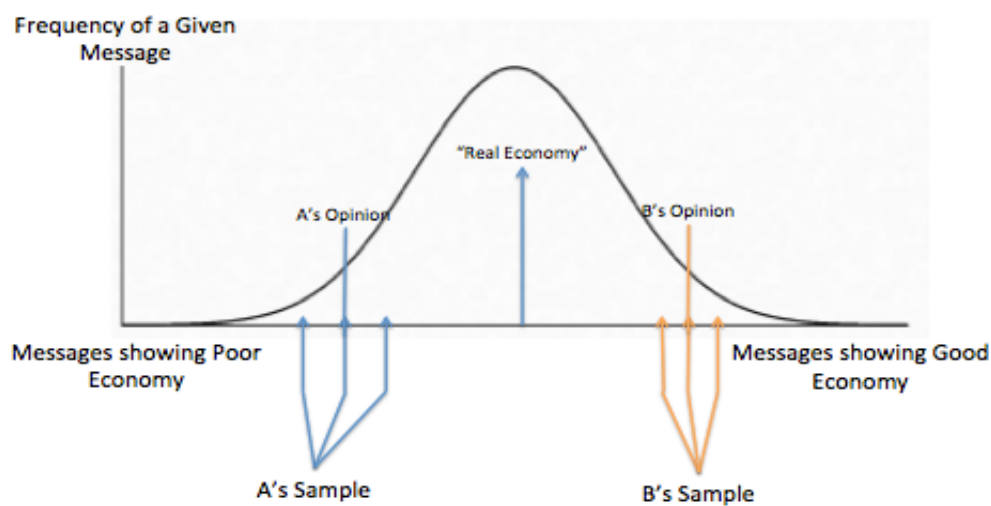
Figure 3.2: Random Sampling of Economic Messages



On the other hand, when individuals are sampling the media messages non-randomly (i.e. sampling with unequal selection probabilities), then the difference of opinions about the state of the economy cannot be attributed to the natural variation of the economic messages contained in the distribution of the media sources. Figure 3.3

illustrates this case when the same two individuals (voters A and B) both sampled three economic messages non-randomly. In this scenario, voter B is consistently sampling positive economic messages while voter A is consistently sampling negative economic messages. Again, if we assume that individual perceptions of the economy are formed as the simple average of the messages sampled from the distribution of the media sources, voter B would have a better opinion about the economy than voter A. Nevertheless, the difference in the perceptions of the economy here cannot be attributed to the natural variation of the economic messages contained in the distribution of media sources. Rather, it is because of Voter B's rejection of the media messages that portrayed the economy too negatively and Voter A's rejection of media messages that portrayed the economy positively. Therefore, I identify the mechanism that produces the partisan screen as non-random sampling of messages from the distribution of all available messages.

Figure 3.3: Non-Random Sampling of Economic Messages



3.3 How to Reliably Sample Partisan Messages?

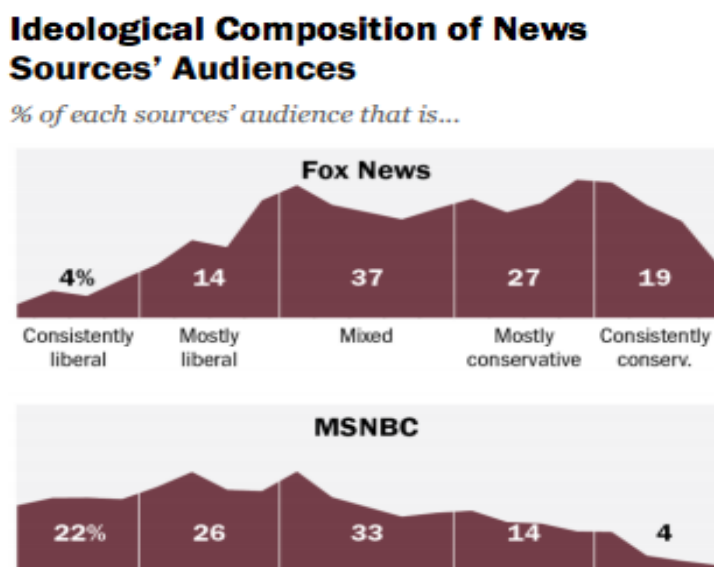
In order to reliably sample partisan messages, there are certain requirements that individuals need to have. First, they need to recognize whether the messages they receive are either consistent or inconsistent with their partisan predispositions, and then accept or reject them. If they encounter messages that are consistent, these messages are accepted and become part of the sampled messages from which the opinions are formed (Zaller 1992). On the other hand, if they received inconsistent messages, the messages are rejected and do not become part of the sampled messages.

Clearly, the ability to identify whether a certain message is consistent to one's political predispositions requires a certain level of political knowledge. These people are usually those who have high levels of habitual news reception and as such, they have the ability to recognize whether a particular message is favorable to their parties. However, many people, including the partisans, are not sufficiently informed in making such judgment (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Zaller 1996).

Instead, what most people do is to simply identify reliable sources that consistently provide favorable messages about their parties and then sample the messages out of these sources. Such activity requires less cognitive resources since it does not require the individual to recognize specific messages and compare them to their partisan predispositions, but only to identify "trusted" sources. This trend is reflected most prominently in the US where most Democrats and liberals turn to (and trust) MSNBC for their news consumption, while most Republicans and conservatives rely on Fox News for their source of political information (see Figure 3.4). When the news outlets serve as the

“mouthpiece” of their favored parties, Democrats and Republicans can trust MSNBC and Fox respectively to provide messages that are favorable to their partisanship to such an extent that they do not need to identify any specific messages that these outlets are purported and determine whether they are consistent with their predispositions. They are required to just recognize that Fox is a mouthpiece of the Republicans and MSNBC for the Democrats.

Figure 3.4: Composition of News Sources’ Audiences (Source: Pew Research Center)



Based on the discussion thus far, the mechanism in which individuals develop partisan screen is no longer described simply as non-random sampling of messages. Rather, it is more accurate to describe it as the process of non-random sampling of messages from a set of trusted media sources. Given the homogeneity in the ideological and partisan composition of the outlets’ audiences, it is likely that these sources would report political (or in this case, economic) news with a partisan spin. For example, even a report of the

ostensibly “objective” piece of economic news such as unemployment rate, different news outlets can report and interpret the number very differently (Duch and Stevenson 2013). Therefore, since there is a great deal of variation in the way economic news are reported and framed in the media environment, the way individuals sample messages that fit their predispositions is to sample them out of a set of trusted sources that will consistently deliver partisan messages. For individuals with partisan screen in perceiving the economy, they are going to sample economic messages out of the sources that are known to be favorable to their partisan predispositions. In particular, we would expect that a partisan who identifies with the incumbent government to sample from media sources that produce mostly positive economy messages relative to sources that produce mostly negative economic messages.

On the other hand, a partisan who identifies with the opposition would tend to sample messages from sources that produce mostly negative economic messages relative to sources that produce mostly positive economic messages. Eventually, this non-random selection of media messages will produce a non-random assignment of aggregated perceptions of the economy across different partisans, with incumbent identifiers, on average, having better perceptions of the economy than opposition identifiers. Subsequently, the more widespread this process among incumbent and opposition identifiers (or more generally, all partisan identifiers) in sampling economic messages, the stronger the partisan screen will be. In the next section, I explain how variation in the distribution and the availability of partisan sources can systematically alter the strength of the partisan screen across contexts.

3.4 Contextual Variations in the Distribution of Media Sources

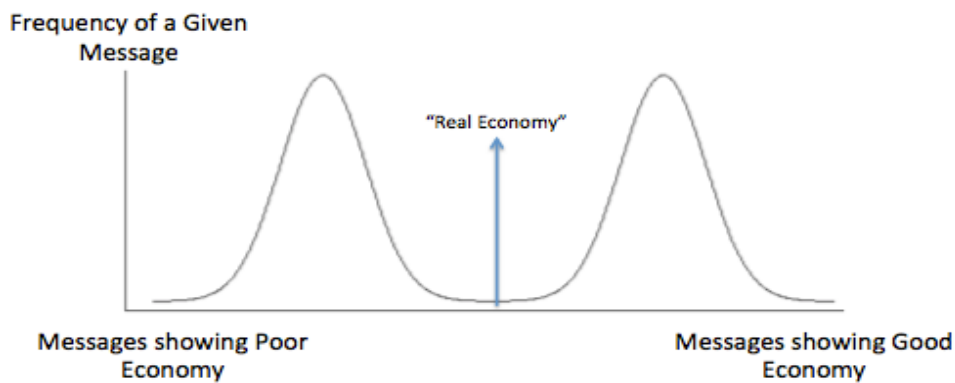
Since the partisan screen results from the tendency to select messages from trusted sources, the contextual implication of this mechanism is apparent. In particular, I ask: given that the mechanism of developing the partisan screen in perceiving the economy is through the selective sampling of messages from available media sources, what parameters of that process can vary across contexts and what specific contextual variables might move them?" In other words, what distributions of media sources allow individuals to easily engage in non-random selection of economic messages based on the content of messages?

If an individual is placed in a context similar to the one portrayed in Figure 3.1, he/she will be situated in an environment where most of the media sources will produce messages that portray the economy to as it (objectively) is. If that individual is a government partisan who looks for sources that reliably produce positive economic messages, he/she will have fewer media sources available from which to consistently sample information relative to other environment in which government partisans have many such sources. Consequently, in such an environment, it will be more difficult for this individual to only sample partisan sources.

Suppose that there are other individuals who are living in a media environment where the distribution of the media source is depicted in Figure 3.4. In this environment, the distribution of the media sources in portraying the state of the economy is bimodal where the peaks of the distribution are located in both the media sources that provide both the poor and good economic messages. A government or opposition partisans would have greater access to sources that would confirm their predispositions and as a result, have an

easier time identifying the set of sources that provide more optimally congenial information than those situated in the environment depicted in Figure 3.1. Furthermore, the economic messages portrayed in this context are distinguishable across different outlets, which could heighten the potential for partisan-motivated selective exposure and eventually create a stronger partisan screen relative to the context shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.5: Illustration of a Polarized Media Environment on the State of the Economy



In sum, the contextual implications from the individual-level theory of the partisan screen suggest that for most voters to develop a strong partisan screen in perceiving the economy, they need to be able to identify a set of “trusted sources” easily that will consistently deliver partisan messages that are distinct from the sources that are considered “untrustworthy”. So for government partisans, they need to identify the media sources that will provide good economic messages and for opposition partisans, they need to do likewise for sources that contain bad economic messages. In some media environments, such consistently partisan sources that are distinct from each other are easy to find and well resourced (i.e. as depicted in Figure 3.5). However, in other contexts where

such sources do not exist (i.e. see Figure 3.1), partisans have to consume mediated information that is more balanced, which could cause their development of the partisan screen to be weaker.

3.5 Identifiability of Partisan Media as the Opportunity Structure for Selective Exposure

To capture the different distributions of the media sources and how easy it is for partisans to identify media outlets that serve as the mouthpiece of their parties, I develop a concept of the identifiability of the partisan media (IPM) to operationalize the opportunity structure for selective exposure for different parties in different countries (and different times). By opportunity structures for selective exposure, I refer to the availability of different media outlets and media contents, and the ease for individuals to identify which of these media sources are considered trustworthy (Skovsgaard et al 2016). This is an important concept because media use is not only influenced by individual abilities and motivations, but also by the opportunities provided by the media environment (Aalberg et al 2010; Althaus et al 2009; Luskin 1990). As a result, differences in the opportunities for selective exposure across media environments should have significant impacts on the degree of selective exposure in contexts with different media environments.

In the following sections, I will first expound on the concept of IPM based on the literature of media-party parallelism developed in the political communication literature. Following that, I utilize the European Media System Surveys conducted by Popescu et al to operationalize the IPM using 127 media outlets for 100 parties across 17 Western European countries. Finally, in Chapter 5, I estimate the effect of this measure along with other

contextual measures such as the roles of parties, parties' saliency of the economy etc. on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. Ultimately, since the IPM is a contextual variable that creates the opportunity structure for the individuals to engage in selective exposure (meaning, it is a direct implication from my individual-level theory of the partisan screen), the relationship between the IPM and the strength of the partisan bias in perceiving the economy will speak directly to the veracity of selective exposure as the main mechanism of the partisan screen.

3.5.1 Literature on Media-Party Parallelism

In the earlier study of political communication, countless works had documented the profound effect of mass media on political behaviors and attitudes such as political trust (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; Norris 2000), political knowledge (Aarts and Semetko 2003; Tichenor et al 1970) and cognitive mobilization (Norris 2000; Robinson 1976). However, most of this research has mainly focused on the individual-level factors such as political interest and political sophistication within a single country as the mediating variables that moderate the effects of media exposure on political attitudes. As noted by Althaus et al (2009), previous research in political communication has treated people as “atomized individuals unaffected by their immediate surrounding”, and as a result, it overlooks the impact of contextual and systemic factors in mediating the effect of media exposure on political behaviors (Aarts et al 2012).

Nevertheless, with the dramatic increase in political information through new media technology in the last 20 years, we finally see a number of works that began to analyze the

cross-national and over-time variations in the media consumption patterns. In particular, scholars have identified several contextual and system-level variables that could mediate the relationship between media exposure and political attitudes, and also found that individuals' political behaviors vary rather significantly across different media systems. For example, Prior (2007) showed that with the rise in new technology and the expansion of media outlets through cable television and the Internet, media consumers now have more opportunities to select and avoid media contents based on their personal interests or preferences. Inevitably, such transformations from low to high choice media environments have triggered changes in the news consumption, learning about politics, and electoral volatility (Aarts et al 2012), and it is "not so much because people are different today, but rather because the media environment is different" (Prior 2007). Similarly, Shehata and Stromback (2011) argued that the effects of education and political interest on news exposure are conditional upon the characteristics of media environment, and that it matters whether a given context is more or less newspaper-centric. In fact, Elvestad and Blekesaune (2008) discovered that about "6.5 percent of the variance in newspaper reading can be explained as systematic variation between countries" after controlling for a variety of individual-level factors. In sum, the literature in political communication agrees that media context plays a significant role in determining individuals' political behavior and attitudes.

The one specific feature of the media context that is especially relevant in structuring the ease for individuals to engage in selective exposure to favorable political information is the presence of media-party parallelism in the media environment. This particular concept was originated by Seymour-Ure (1974) when he argued that press-party

parallelism is present if there are ties between newspapers and political parties. Such parallelism is the strongest when each newspaper support or endorse a party that is “highly visible in the leader columns and in the editorial parts of newspaper – but sometimes also in the news items themselves” (Van Kempen 2007). Since the emergence of more TV channels as the source of political information, I will examine the parallelism for both the newspaper and television outlets, which will be termed more broadly as the media-party parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

Generally, media-party parallelism can be defined as the degree of overlap between the “political alignments and media alignments in a country” (Horwitz and Nir 2015). When a particular media outlet favors a certain party, or has been historically sponsored or associated with that party, the parallelism is considered high. What then are some of the possible consequences of media party parallelism? Recent works have documented at least two implications of the overlap in political system and news content on political attitudes. First, media outlets that contain clear partisan viewpoints can act as political mobilizer by reinforcing and mobilizing political opinions and partisanship (Van Kempen 2006). Second, parallelism can also acts as an “equalizer” by providing those with weak partisan attachment to the political parties with the opportunity to be repeatedly exposed to partisan sources, which eventually would lead to crystallization of stronger partisan preferences (Horwitz and Nir 2015).

3.5.2 Media-Party Parallelism as Political Mobilizers

First, the partisan media can be instruments of political mobilization, which is

expressed in increased political participation and stronger party-political attitudes. At the individual-level, the reasoning for this can be traced back to the research on why media exposure will lead to an increased in the strength of partisanship. There are at least two plausible mechanisms for this association. First, a strong orientation toward a particular party creates a strong motivation to either keep the newspapers in the home or to continue watching the TV channels that are favorable to that party (Rokkan and Torsvik 1970). Second, repeated exposure to such sources with favorable coverage to one's political party will provide reinforcing messages for maintaining the orientation and strengthen the attachment to that party (Mutz 2002; Newton and Brynin 2001; Norris et al 1999).

Such reinforcement however, does not only take place at the individual level, but at the contextual level as well. In a context with high media-party parallelism, individuals would have an easier time engaging in selective exposure to like-minded views. On the other hand, in contexts with less media-party parallelism, individuals are more likely to be exposed to sources that contain both favorable and unfavorable messages. This means that contexts with high parallelism between the media and the political party offers little chance for viewers to be exposed to political messages that are contradictory to their partisanship since most of the media outlets are "openly supportive of a certain party or viewpoint" (Horwitz and Nir 2014).

As such, voters would find it easy to identify a set of "reliable" sources in this context. In light of this, given the mechanism in determining the strength of the partisan screen is through the ability for individuals to engage in selective exposure to favorable information, I would argue that the strength of the partisan screen is higher in contexts

where there is a high media-party parallelism.

3.5.3 Media-Party Parallelism as Political Equalizers

Besides reinforcing partisan predispositions, media-party parallelism may also be operating as a mediator between socioeconomic status and partisanship. Countless studies have shown that those who possess high socioeconomic status are more likely to participate in politics, have greater partisan attachment, and more knowledgeable about politics than those with lower status (Van Kempen 2007; Shehata 2010; Horwitz and Nir 2014). However, these studies also suggest that exposure to both partisan newspapers and television could increase the level of political participation and strengthen the attachment to the party. Hence, the degree of parallelism between the media and the party is likely going to affect the existing gap in the strength of the partisan bias between people of lower and higher socioeconomic status.

When there is low media-party parallelism, individuals who are less knowledgeable and less interested in politics will find it difficult to identify “trusted sources” that serve as mouthpieces of their parties since there are less convergence between party messages and news outlets. In this context, the effect of news exposure on partisan attachment or partisan bias is “unequalizing” since people who have the cognitive and motivational resources are at a greater advantage than people with fewer resources to discern through the media to get favorable information out of it. As a result, the presence of low parallelism is going to exacerbate the differences in the strength of the partisan bias among individuals across different socioeconomic status

On the other hand, in a context with high parallelism, viewers across socioeconomic status can easily identify the media outlet that serve as a mouthpieces of their respective parties. In this case, individuals are able to selectively choose favorable news sources to receive political information much easier and as a result, they will consistently receive reinforcing messages that are favorable to their partisanship. In fact, several researchers have argued that people with less cognitive resources are more likely to obtain higher gains in partisan attachment from the partisan news sources than those with more resources (Baum and Jamison 2006; Prior 2005).

To summarize, media-party parallelism is a contextual factor that mobilizes and reinforces stronger party-political attitudes by creating a favorable opportunity structure for individuals to be selectively exposed to media outlets that are favorable to their partisan predispositions. It could also acts as an equalizer by strengthening the partisan attachment for those who are weak partisans or for those who are less knowledgeable and interested in politics. Hence, the parallelism between news media and political party allows individuals, regardless of their political interest or knowledge, to be exposed to partisan news and develop a stronger partisan screen. Since different contexts have different degree of media-party parallelism, I can then test how these variations affect the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy at the party level and hypothesize the following:

H1: The stronger the parallelism between the media outlets and a particular party, the stronger the partisan screen for the typical individual who identify with that party.

3.5.4 Previous Measures of Media-Party Parallelism

To operationalize the level of media-party parallelism across different parties, I need to have the data from different political parties and media outlets and a measure that determines the political balance and diversity of viewpoints of media outlets across countries and over time. However, although the empirical research of political communication can be dated back as far as the 1930s, there has never been a strong comparative tradition (Aalberg and Curran 2012). Most research is focused on single-country approach and there is a tendency to assume the research findings in one country can be applied to the others (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995). As a result, there is a dearth of comparative research that examines the relationship between media system characteristics and political structures.

Nevertheless, there is one comprehensive research to date that compares media system at the country level that is useful in my attempt to operationalize the media-party parallelism: the Hallin and Mancini's "models of media and politics" (2004). In their seminal study of comparative media system research, they compare media systems in 18 Western Democracies and conduct a systematic approach to analyze the differences and similarities in the relationship between media and politics across these countries. According to them, there are three categories of media-party parallelism that can be identified within the advanced Western Democracies. They are: the "Mediterranean or Polarized Pluralist Model" (High Parallelism), the "North/Central European or Democratic Corporatist Model" (Moderate Parallelism), and the "North Atlantic or Liberal Model" (Low Parallelism). These rankings are based on a historical assessment on whether the press or the media outlets

were at one time aligned with a particular party and whether the viewpoints and editorial slant of these news sources continue to reflect the same particular political viewpoint at the present time.

In the Mediterranean Model (i.e. Greece, Portugal, Spain), which has a high parallelism between the media and political party, coverage of news are highly partisan because of the later historical development of democracy in the region (Horwitz and Nir 2014). As a result, the mass media is seen as a means of “ideological expression and political mobilization” (Hallin and Mancini 2004). On the other hand, in a low parallelism context such as the North Atlantic model (i.e. the UK, Ireland), both the newspaper and television coverage are more neutral because of their strong commitment to norms of impartiality, political neutrality, and objectivity (Esser et al 2012; Skovsgaard 2016). Finally, the Northern European Model (i.e. Austria, Sweden, and the Netherlands) is situated in between the Mediterranean Model and the North Atlantic Model on the spectrum of media-party parallelism since it combines both the professionalism in the news reporting as well as the historical tendencies of the media outlets to support a particular ideology or political parties in the past. With that being said, since differences in the media systems create a structural bias in favor of specific political information environments, there will also be significant cross national differences in the media consumption, news exposure, and news attention (Aalberg et al 2012; Aarts et al 2012).

The categorization of media and politics constructed by Hallin and Mancini however, is only applicable at the country-level and will not be at the appropriate unit of analysis to test the hypothesis above. What I need instead is a data at the party-level that measure the

extent of media-party parallelism by portraying how favorable are each of the media outlets within a country to a specific political party. This data will not only measure the level of media-party parallelism for each of the parties in my data, but it will also be used to construct an “identifiability of the partisan media” index indicating how easy it is for the partisans to identify a set of “trusted sources” that will consistently deliver partisan messages in the media environment. Subsequently, this index will serve as the contextual implication to the individual-level theory of selective exposure to favorable information being the main mechanism in explaining the strength of the partisan screen.

3.6 Identifiability of the Partisan Media as a Measure of Parallelism at the Party-Level

To construct the identifiability of the Partisan Media (IPM) index and to investigate the hypothesis presented above, I use the 2010 and 2013 European Media Systems Survey (EMSS) conducted by Toka and Popescu. This survey contains data from 100 parties and 127 media outlets across 17 Western European countries and it asked 838 experts of the political news and mass media in the respective countries to give their assessments of political balance and diversity of viewpoints in their countries’ mainstream media (Popescu et al 2010; Popescu and Toka 2012).

These experts were asked to select, for each media outlet (both printing press and television channels), which political parties the outlet’s reporting agrees with most often. They would then asked to give an assessment of the intensity of partisan commitments in each media by answering the question: “How far is the political coverage of each of the following media outlets influenced by a party or parties to which it is close?” This gives a

measure of how partisans each of the media outlets are with respect to each party, and also the number of “mouthpieces” a particular party has in the media environment.

I then calculate the IPM measure of each party based on the following formula:

$$(3.1) \quad \text{IPM}_p = \sum_l (Y_l * Z_{p,l})$$

where Y_l is the audience share (circulation) of outlet l ¹⁷, and $Z_{p,l}$ is the percentage of experts that think that outlet l favors party p . It is clear that $Z_{p,l}$, which captures the affinity between a party and the mainstream media outlets in a given country, is an important component in determining the intensity of the media bias toward a specific party.

However, Y_l , which represents the audience share or the level of circulation, is also an equally important component in determining how easy it is for partisan news consumers to identify their “trusted sources”. Specifically, the level of circulation of a news outlet would suggest how well resourced and accessible it is to the consumers. This means that a highly circulated newspapers or TV channels are both accessible to their audience and also have the ability to generate higher revenue source to maintain their operation and reach wider segments of the population. Furthermore, higher circulation outlet is better resourced to do original reporting and commentary on a greater share of newsworthy events. As such, parties with high IPM will have a large number of highly circulated outlets that are favorable to them.

To further illustrate the procedure of calculating the IPM index for each party, I briefly provide a description of how I apply equation (3.1) to each of the main Austrian

¹⁷ The EMSS Survey does not provide the circulation data in its 2013 wave. As a result, I use the outlets’ circulation in 2010 for the sample of media outlets in 2013.

parties in 2010. Austria is a multi-party parliamentary system with a center left (SPO) and a center right (OVP) party consistently forming the government since 2007, with the Greens on the left and the Freedom Party (FPO) on the right playing the role of the opposition parties in the parliament. There were nine media outlets that were included in the 2010 EMSS survey: five TV channels and four newspapers. These nine outlets were identified as the most widely circulated in their respective country's media system.¹⁸ Unlike other developed countries in Western Europe, Austria is still a country where print editions of newspapers are still highly relevant. In fact, about 73% of adult population read newspapers on a daily basis (Aicholzer et al 2014; Haselmayer et al 2017). As such, newspapers are still considered an important source of political news.

To calculate the IPM index for each of the parties, I applied the formula shown in equation 3.1 by summing the percentage of experts who think each of the nine mainstream media outlets were favorable to the parties, weighted by the outlets' level of circulation. By construction, the IPM index for a given party ranges from 0 to 100, with a higher index indicating greater availability of media in the country that is favorable to the party. To begin, I show the IPM index for the FPO in Figure 3.6. The y-axis indicates the percentage of experts that think each of the media outlets on the right (listed by their share of circulation) are favorable to the FPO. Generally, Neue Kronen Zeitung, which is the largest circulated newspaper (and the news outlet) in Austria, is the only media outlet that serves as the mouthpiece of the FPO given that more than 40% of the experts believe that it provided favorable coverage to the FPO. At the same time, there were only about 10% and 5% of the

¹⁸ The TV channels are: ORF1, ORF2, ATV, Austria 9 TV, Puls 4, and the newspapers are: Der Standard, Die Presse, Neue Kronen Zeitung, and Kleinie Zeitung.

experts who regarded ATV and ORF1 respectively to be favorable to the FPO. Using the equation 3.1, the IPM index of FPO in 2010 is 14.8. Compare that to the IPM index of the OVP, which is 24.4, -- significantly larger than the FPO's (see Figure 3.7). This is because rather than having only one "mouthpiece" in the media system, the OVP can rely on multiple outlets such as Die Presse, Kleine Zeitung, and the two largest TV channels (i.e. ORF1 and ORF2) to provide favorable coverage consistently. As such, the media environment in Austria in 2010 is far more favorable to the OVP than to the FPO.

Figure 3.6: Identifiability of Partisan Media Index of the FPO in 2010

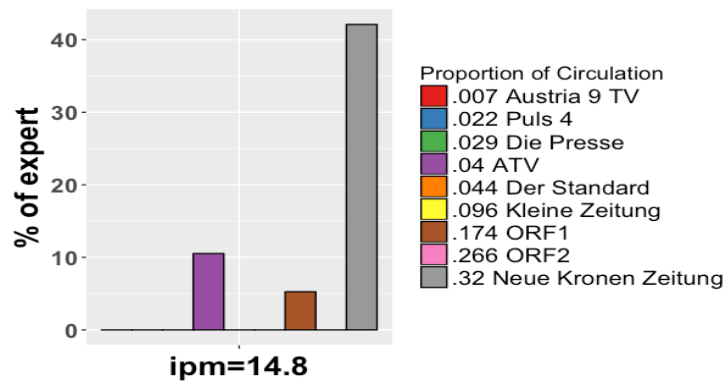
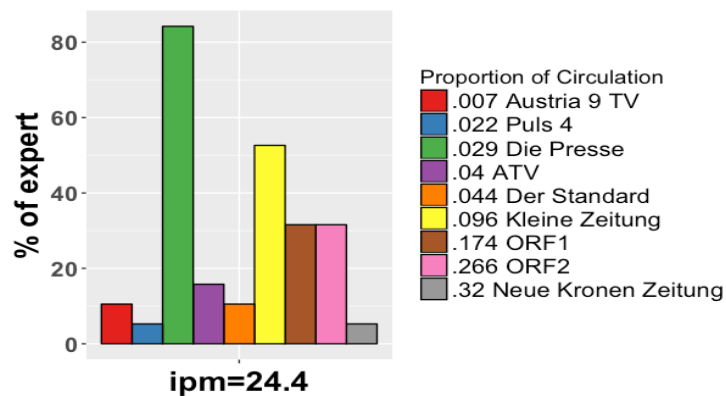


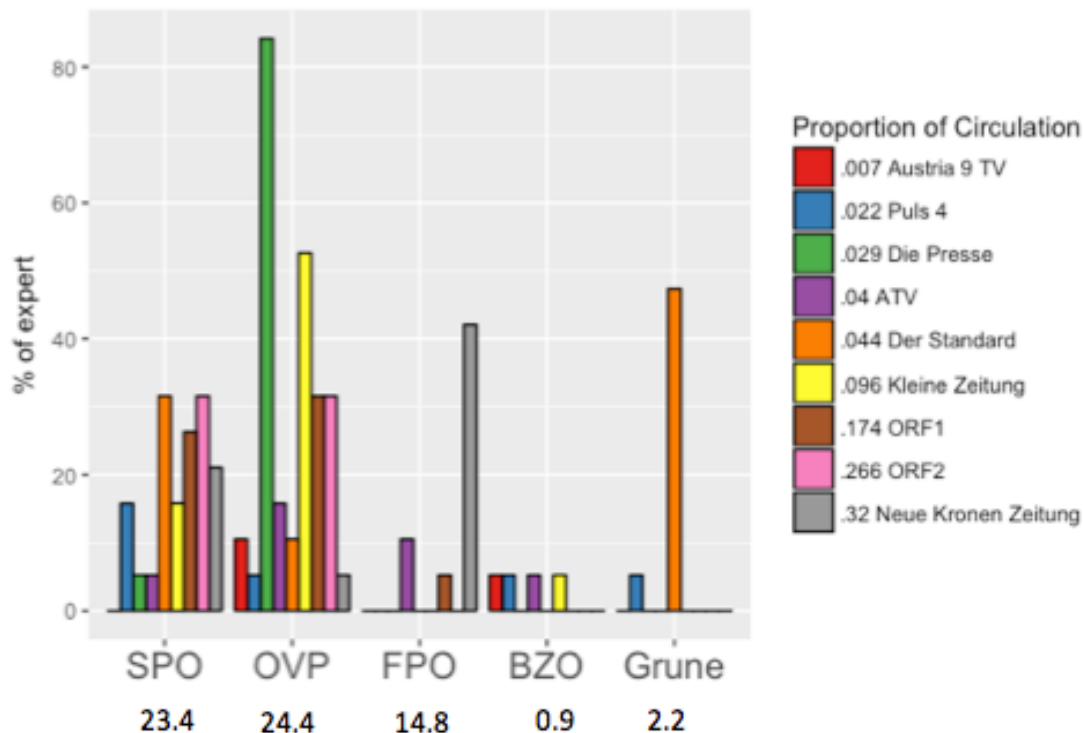
Figure 3.7: Identifiability of Partisan Media Index of the OVP in 2010



Subsequently, I calculate the IPM index for each of the other parties in Austria in 2010 and found both the OVP and the SPO to have the highest score, followed by the FPO, Grune, and the BZO (see Figure 3.8). This is not surprising given that both the SPO and OVP are traditionally the two largest parties in Austria and had often formed the government.

With that said, the Austrian media environment in 2010 is far more favorable to the bigger parties and as a result, enable their partisans/supporters to easily identify their set of “trusted sources” relative to those who identified with either the FPO, the BZO, or the Grune. Consequently, since the ability to easily identify the mouthpiece of their parties is the key mechanism to develop the partisan screen, the identifiers of both the SPO and the OVP were likely to have a stronger partisan screen than the identifiers of the other parties.

Figure 3.8: Identifiability of Partisan Media Index in Austria 2010



One concern about this measure of the IPM is the validity of the experts' assessment of the relationship of the media and party. In particular, the experts' assessment on how favorable the media outlets are to the parties might not reflect the distributions of voters' partisan preferences for outlets. To validate this measure, however, we can utilize a survey question that asked partisans their frequency of use of different media outlets from the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) in 2009 to examine whether experts' evaluations of the media's partisanship corresponds to the actual media habits of the partisans themselves.

First, with regards to print media, I found a consistent pattern between the partisans' preferences for media and the experts' assessments. For example, since about 40% of the experts think that *Neue Kronen Zeitung* is favorable to the FPO, I would expect the FPO identifiers to have the highest frequency of use for this newspaper among all the partisans. Indeed, based on the voter survey conducted by Austrian National Election Studies in 2009 (see Table 3.1), only about 20% of FPO voters have never read *Neue Kronen Zeitung* and 44% do daily, which is much more than any other party. I also found similar results with regards to *Die Presse* as the voter survey showed that it is a newspaper that is much preferred by OVP identifiers compared to others (see Table 3.2). This is consistent with the experts' assessment of *Die Presse* being the mouthpiece of the OVP.¹⁹

¹⁹ Since *Die Presse* is a small circulation paper, the raw numbers of different partisans using it are smaller compared to other outlets. Thus, the small sample size might result in statistical noise that contributes to relatively high proportion of readership among the Greens.

Table 3.1: Readership of Neue Kronen Zeitung by Partisan Identifications

Frequency of Use	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Grüne	BZÖ
daily	92 (32.5)	60 (21.7)	49 (44.1)	7 (10.1)	19 (40.4)
a few times a week	49 (17.3)	24 (8.7)	13 (11.7)	6 (8.7)	8 (17)
less often	64 (22.6)	64 (23.1)	27 (24.3)	16 (23.2)	11 (23.4)
never	78 (27.6)	129 (46.6)	22 (19.8)	40 (58)	9 (19.2)

Note: Number in parentheses refers to the percentage of respondent who identify with that party.

Table 3.2: Readership of Die Presse by Partisan Identifications

Frequency of Use	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Grüne	BZÖ
daily	4 (1.4)	18 (6.5)	2 (1.8)	5 (7.3)	0 (0)
a few times a week	4 (1.4)	14 (5.1)	6 (5.4)	4 (5.8)	2 (4.3)
less often	23 (8.1)	25 (9)	10 (9)	14 (20.3)	2 (4.3)
never	252 (89.1)	220 (79.4)	93 (83.8)	46 (66.7)	43 (91.5)

Note: Number in parentheses refers to the percentage of respondent who identify with that party.

Besides the print media, I also compare experts' assessment of partisan bias in some of the television channels with the pattern of usage by partisan identifiers from the election study. For both ORF1 and ORF2, which are the two highest circulated TV stations in Austria, they are considered to be pro SPO and OVP by the experts and thus, would be expected to garner most of their viewership from identifiers of these two parties. Indeed when I examine the frequency of viewership for a daily news program broadcasted in ORF1 and ORF2 called Bundesland Heute (see Table 3.3), I found that more than 30% of both SPO and OVP identifiers watch it daily, a significantly higher proportion than any other identifiers.

So far, I have shown that there is a positive relationship between experts'

assessment of how partisan is a media outlet and the partisans' preferences in using the outlet. This means that if the experts view the outlet to be favorable to a party, then the identifiers of that party would prefer to use that outlet much more than the other identifiers. Conversely, when the experts view a media outlet to have no partisan flavors, then it is highly likely that there is any variation in the frequency of use across different partisans. To illustrate this point, Table 3.4 shows that for a low circulation TV station named Puls4, which is not a partisan media according to the experts, it has a somewhat mixed viewership across different partisan groups. There is no one group that dominates the viewership of this TV station.

In sum, since I found that there are consistency between what the experts perceived of the media and what the preferences of the partisans in selecting their media sources, I have a relatively high confidence in the accuracy of the experts' assessment from the EMSS survey to measure the identifiability of the partisan media. These "subjective" measures can thus be used to construct the IPM for all the parties in my sample.

Table 3.3: Viewership of Bundesland Heute (ORF1 & ORF2) by Partisan Identifications

Frequency of Use	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Grüne	BZÖ
daily	87 (30.7)	91 (32.9)	20 (18)	11 (15.9)	7 (14.9)
a few times a week	73 (25.8)	76 (27.4)	22 (19.8)	8 (11.6)	10 (21.3)
less often	42 (14.8)	44 (15.9)	32 (28.8)	13 (18.8)	10 (21.3)
never	81 (28.6)	66 (23.8)	37 (33.3)	37 (53.6)	20 (42.6)

Note: Number in parentheses refers to the percentage of respondent who identify with that party.

Table 3.4: Viewership of Puls4 by Partisan Identifications

Frequency of Use	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	Grüne	BZÖ
daily	4 (1.4)	4 (1.4)	4 (3.6)	1 (1.5)	1 (2.1)
a few times a week	24 (8.5)	16 (5.8)	11 (9.9)	2 (2.9)	4 (8.5)
less often	30 (10.6)	42 (15.2)	16 (14.4)	14 (20.6)	8 (17)
never	225 (79.5)	215 (77.6)	80 (72.1)	51 (75)	34 (72.3)

Note: Number in parentheses refers to the percentage of respondent who identify with that party

3.7 Relationship between the IPM and the Strength of the Partisan Screen

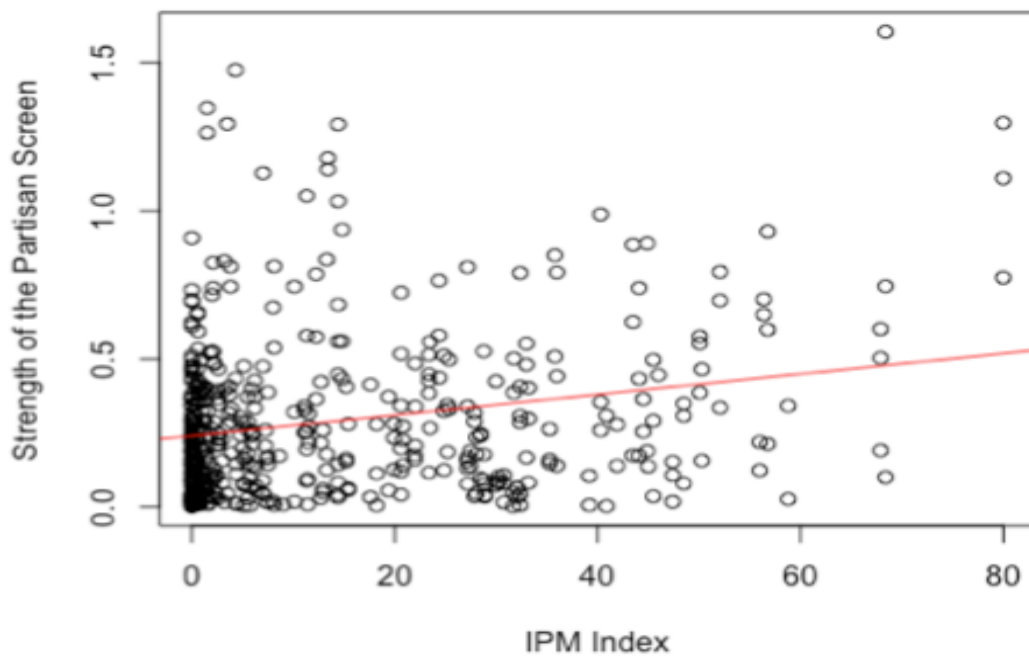
Finally, before establishing the causal relationship between the strength of the partisan screen and the IPM index, which will be analyzed using appropriate statistical models in Chapter 5, I first examine a simple empirical association (if any) between the two variables. Specifically, I calculate the IPM index for the 100 parties²⁰ in the sample and determine whether they are positively related (as expected) to the strength of the partisan screen for typical party supporters. Note that the strength of the partisan screen used in this analysis and subsequent chapters are based on ESS surveys where the estimates are calculated using the linear regression. Figure 3.9 plots the relationship between the absolute strength of the partisan screen estimated for each party in the previous chapter and the IPM measure for that party²¹ and the relationship shown is in the predicted

²⁰ The IPM score and distributions of experts' assessments of how favorable are the media outlets to each of the parties across countries in 2010 and 2013 are provided in Appendix 3.1 and 3.2.

²¹ Although the IPM measure is not available for the years in which the estimates for the strength of the partisan screen are available, it is highly unlikely for the media system to change frequently from year to year. As such, I assume the IPM to remain constant for 2 years before and after the measure is taken. In total, I have 436 observations of party-year in the sample.

direction with a statistically significant slope coefficient, which is in line with my expectation.

Figure 3.9: IPM Index and the Strength of the Partisan Screen



3.7.1 IPM and the Strength of the Partisan Screen by Parties' Roles

In the previous section, I showed that there is a positive relationship between the identifiability index of the parties and their strength of the partisan screen. In this section, I examine this particular relationship across different roles parties have in the government. As explained in Chapter 4, the role parties' play in the government could have significant impacts on how they are going to be covered by the media. Consequently, it is likely to determine how easy it is for their respective partisans to identify trusted sources in the media environment. One such role is the position of the chief executives' where parties holding this role tend to be in the position to have greater influence of the economy. As a

result, the relationship between the IPM index and the partisan screen for the chief executives' parties might be strengthened.

Figure 3.10: IPM Index and the Strength of the Partisan Screen for the Chief Executives

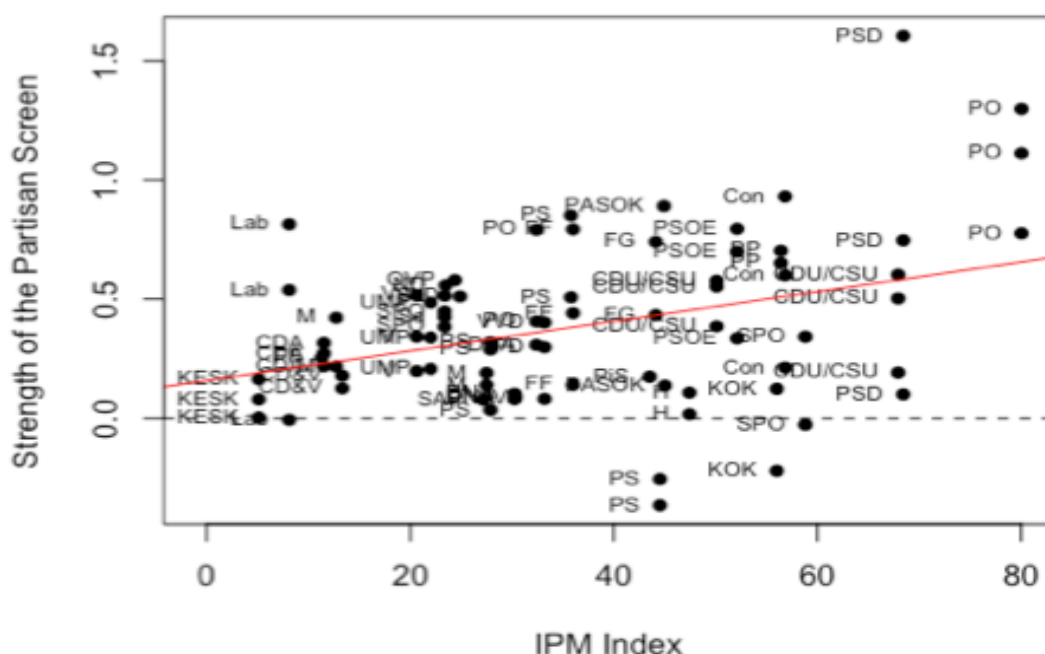
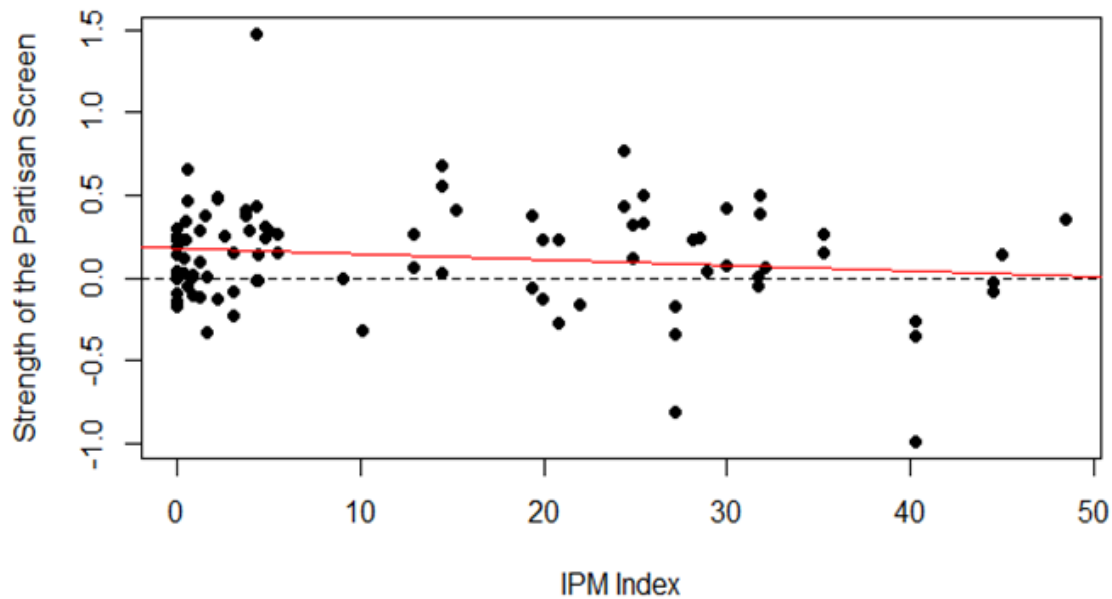


Figure 3.10 shows the relationship between the IPM Index of the chief executives' parties from 17 countries over 10 year period and their strength of the partisan screen. The relationship between the two is positive and also stronger relative to the one shown in Figure 3.8. On the other hand, when I focus on the parties that are serving as coalition partners (see Figure 3.11), the relationship is not in the predicted direction and the slope coefficient is not statistically significant. What this reveals is that the relationship between the IPM index and the strength of the partisan screen is conditional upon the role parties' play in the government where the parties holding the prime minister having the stronger relationship. In the next chapter, I will discuss how this party-level variable affects both the

opportunity structures for partisans to engage in selective exposure and their ability to identify their set of trusted sources on economic messages.

Figure 3.11: IPM Index and the Strength of the Partisan Screen for the Coalition Partners



3.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present one contextual factor that is a direct implication of the individual level model of the partisan screen. In particular, I argue that at the individual-level, the partisan screen in perceiving the economy is developed when individuals engage in selective exposure to favorable information by identifying a set of trusted sources that will consistently deliver partisan messages and sample most of their information about the economy from those sources. When these sources are the mouthpiece of their parties, then a strong partisan screen is developed. As shown in Chapter 2, this screen varies rather dramatically across different parties, countries, and over time and this chapter provides a contextual factor that explains this phenomenon.

My contextual theory of the identifiability of partisan media argues that in some media environments, such “trusted” sources are distinct from sources that are “untrustworthy”, easy to find, and well resourced. But in other environments, such sources are more difficult to identify. As such, partisans must consume mediated information that is more balanced (a fact that could retard the development of their partisan screen). This theoretical expectation is expressed in the general hypothesis relating the parties’ identifiability of the partisan media to their respective strength of the partisan screen. The initial results in this chapter reveal a trend that this particular measure of the partisan media does correlate positively with the strength of the partisan screen across contexts but this relationship is conditional upon the role parties’ play in the government. In the following chapter, I will introduce four other contextual factors that could potentially act as confounders to this relationship.

Appendix 3.1: IPM Index across Parties in 2010 and 2013

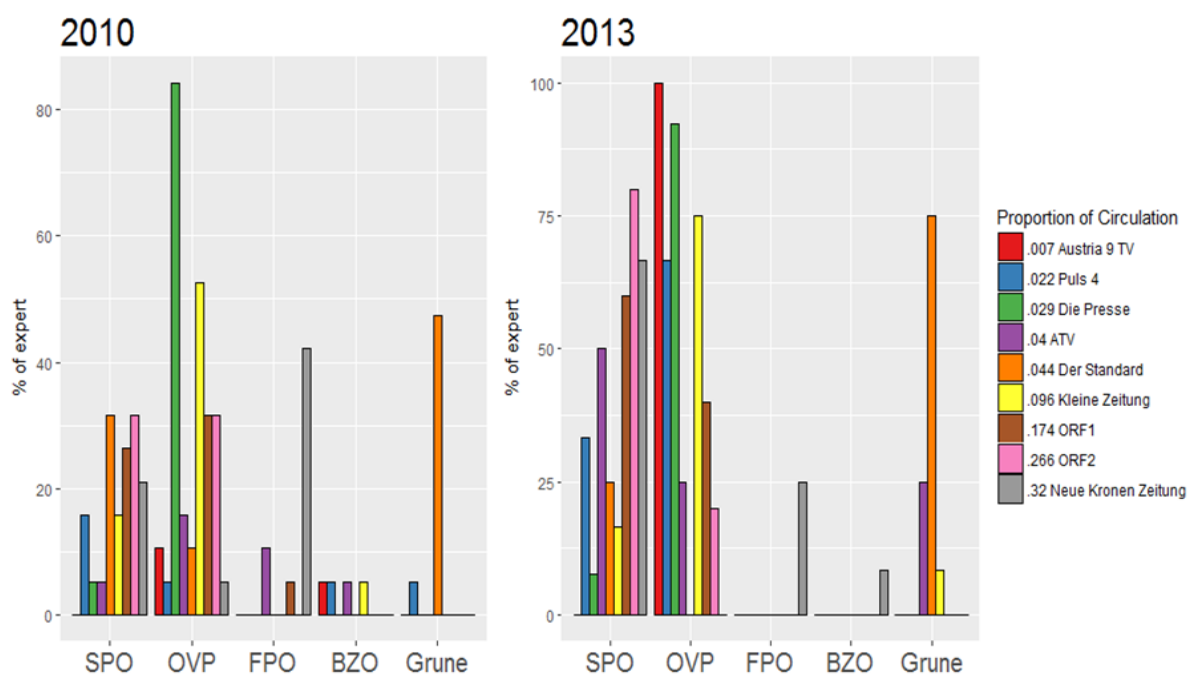
Country	Party	IPM Index	
		2010	2013
Austria	OVP	24.4	25.4
	Gruene	2.2	5.12
	SPO	23.4	58.8
	FPO	14.8	8
	BZO	0.87	2.6
Belgium	Groen	0.61	0.39
	PS	40.3	44.5
	MR	27.2	44.5
	VLD	24.9	19.4
	SPa	15.2	22
	CD&V	13.3	31.8
	VB	1.7	1.3
	N-VA	5.5	25.2
Denmark	DF	7.5	3.8
	RV	7.4	0.58
	KF	2.2	17.6
	V	20.6	41.9
	En-O	0	0
	Ny-LA	11.4	0
	Sd	14.4	23.4
Finland	SSDP	28.9	30
	SFP	0.81	0
	KESK	5.12	7
	VIHR	5.49	4.8
	VAS	1.69	0
	KOK	32.1	56
	KD	0	0
	Ps	0.35	2
France	PS	15.4	35.8
	MoDem	1.5	2.5
	PRG	0	0.45
	V	1.25	1.8
	PCF	0	0.45
	NC	1.6	7.23
	FN	0	1.5

	UMP	22	50.3
	SPD	12.9	28.1
	FDP	2.6	3.7
Germany	B90/Gru	1	0.2
	Li/PDS	2.1	0
	CDU/CSU	50.1	67.9
	Con	45.5	56.8
Great Britain	SNP	0	0
	LD	6	14.4
	Lab	8.1	28.8
	KKE	0	0
	LAOS	0	0
Greece	OP	0.49	0
	SYN	1.8	8.6
	PASOK	44.9	45
	ND	23.5	46
	SF	0.63	7
	FF	36	11.3
Ireland	FG	11.1	44.1
	Green	0	0
	Lab	5.9	35.3
	M5S		0
Italy	PdL		48.5
	SEL		0
	PD		33.2
	CDA	11.5	7.3
	PvdA	19.9	25.2
	GL	1.4	2.1
Netherlands	CU	0.55	0
	PVV	11.3	4.56
	SP	0.4	0.95
	VVD	28.5	42.1
	D66	3.9	8
	H	18.2	47.4
	DNA	30.2	32.4
	V	6.2	5.7
Norway	Fr	12.2	10.1
	KrF	0	0
	Sp	0	0
	SV	3	4.4
Poland	SLD	2.6	2.3
	PO	32.4	80

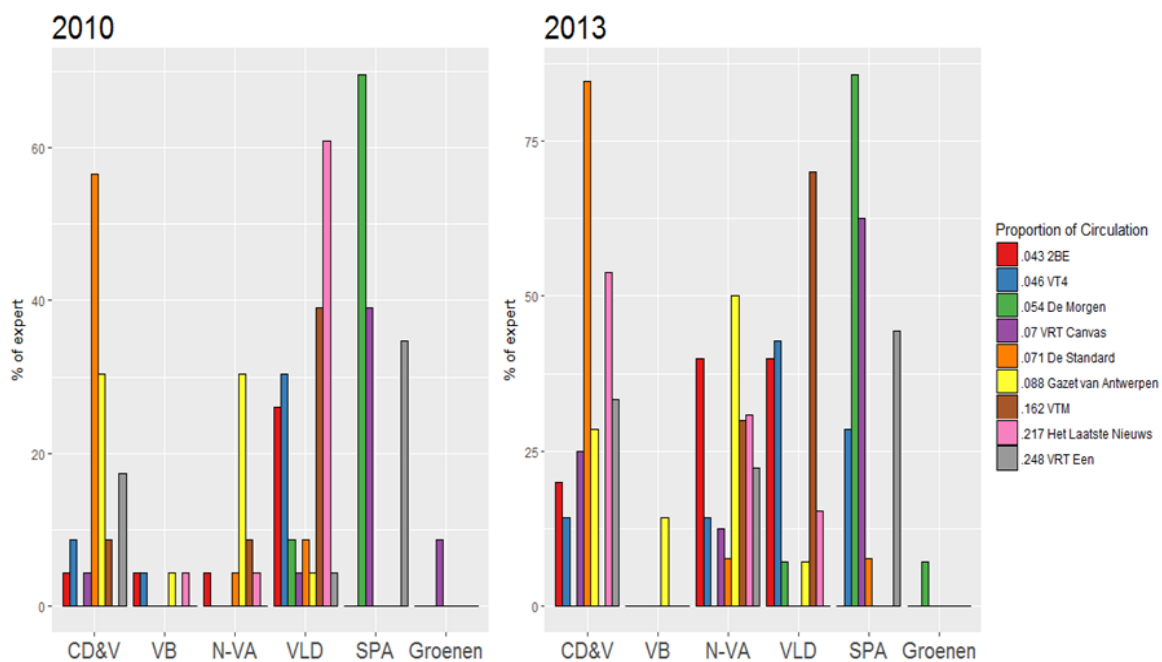
	PSL	0	1.2
	PiS	43.5	14.4
Portugal	PS	27.9	20.6
	BE	0.22	3.2
	CDS-PP	6.3	4.3
	PSD	30.8	68.4
	PCP-PEV	0.63	3.5
Spain	PSOE	52.1	39.2
	CiU	0.86	1.3
	PNV	0.48	0
	PP	33	56.4
	IU	0	0.55
	UPyD	1.64	2.6
Sweden	KD	0	0
	FP	20.8	31.7
	MP	1	0
	C	0.33	0
	M	12.7	27.5
	SAP	27.2	40.9
	Vp	0	0

Appendix 3.2: Experts' Assessments of Partisan Media in 2010 and 2013

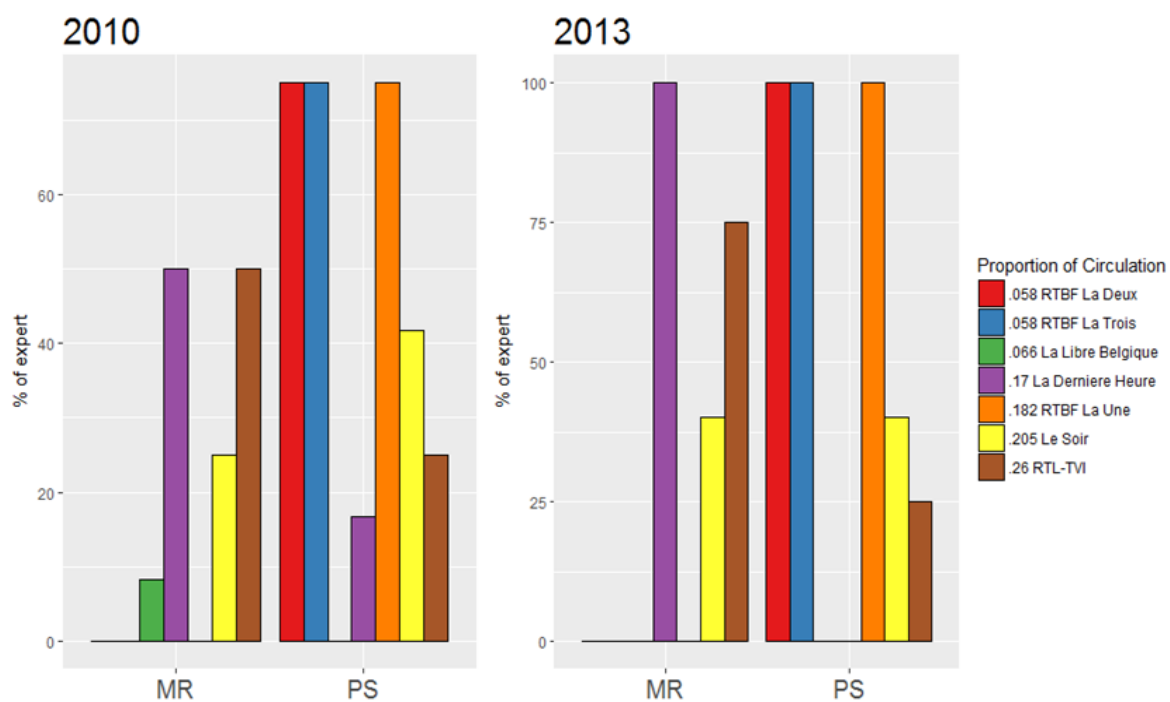
Austria



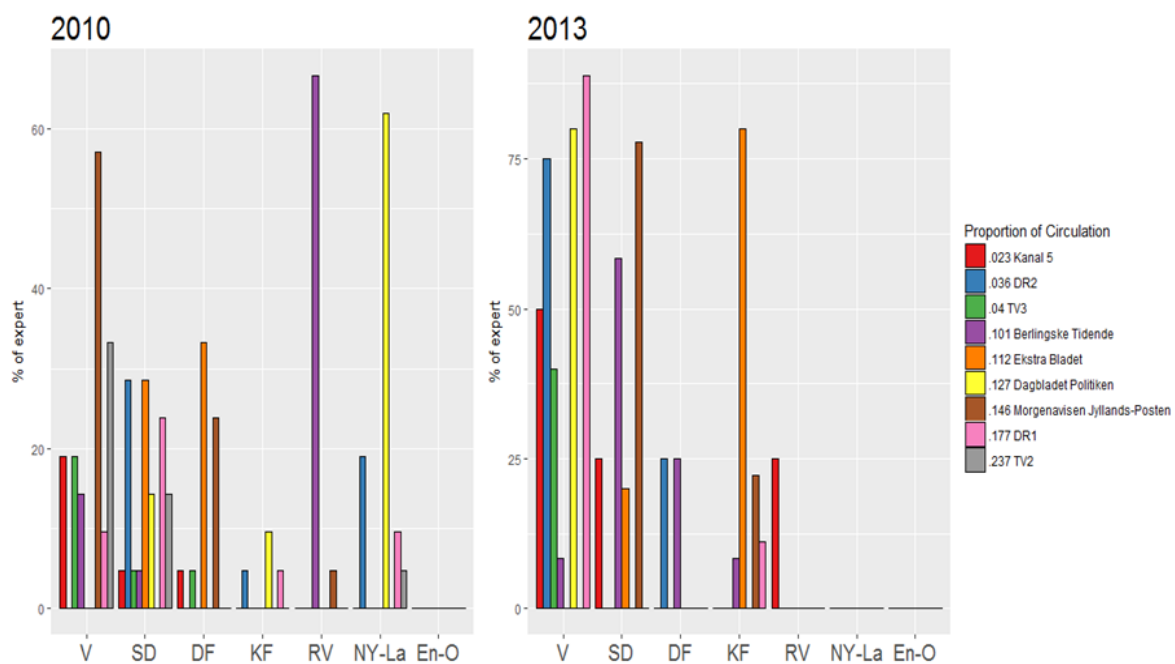
Belgium-Flemish



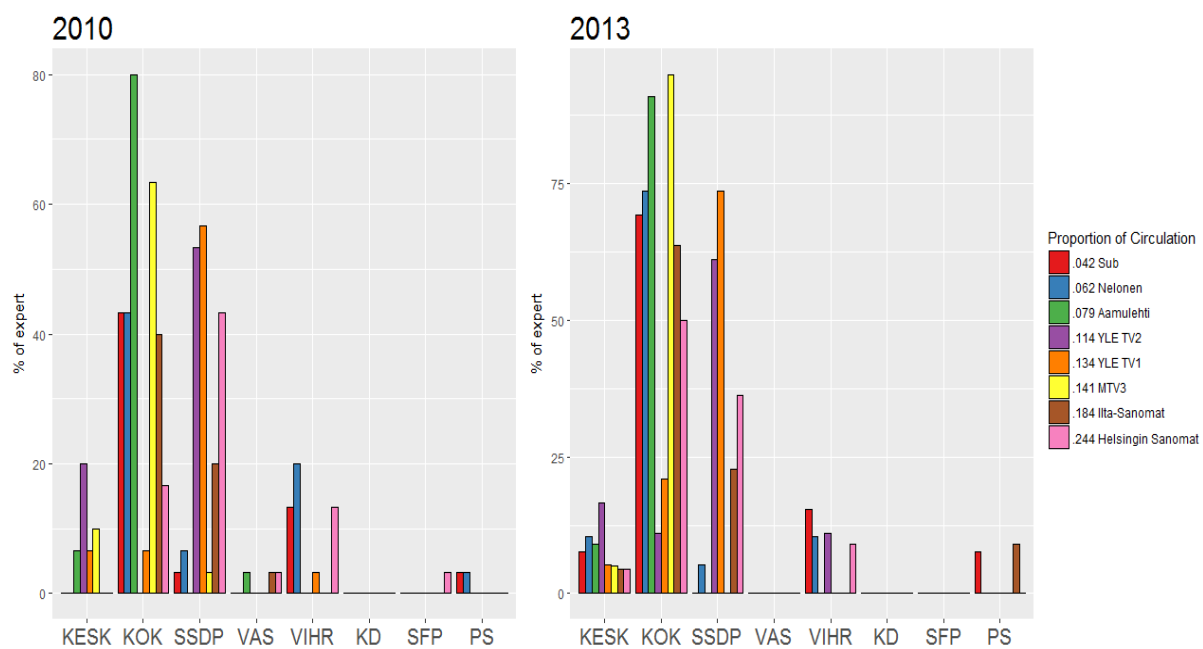
Belgium-French



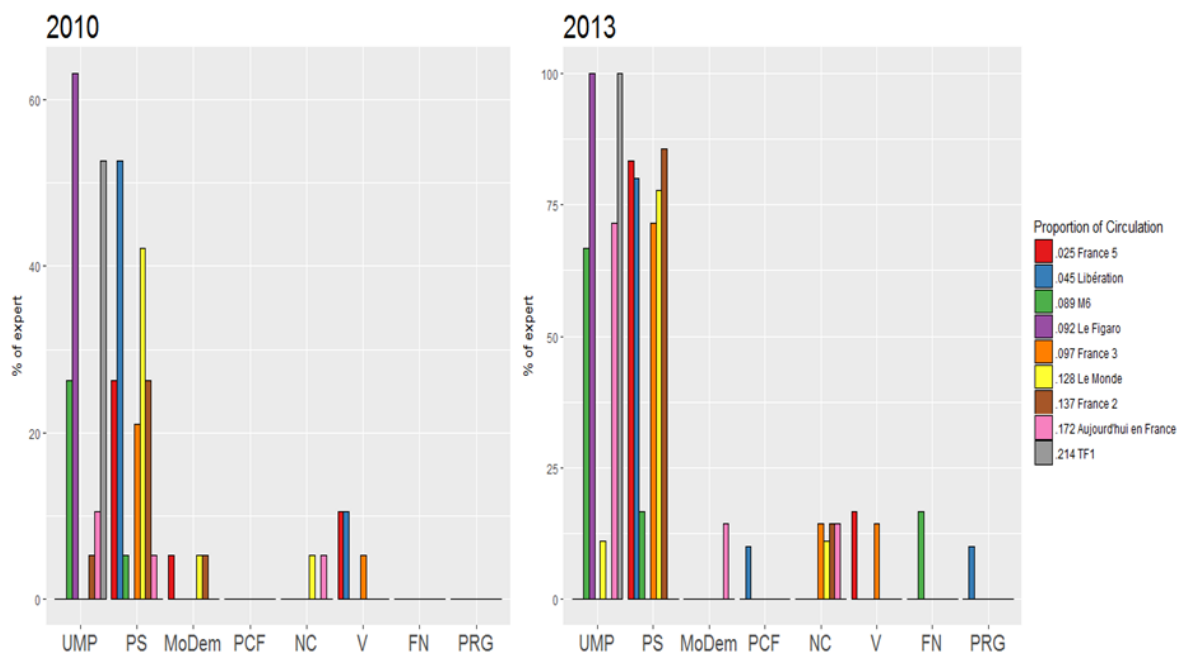
Denmark



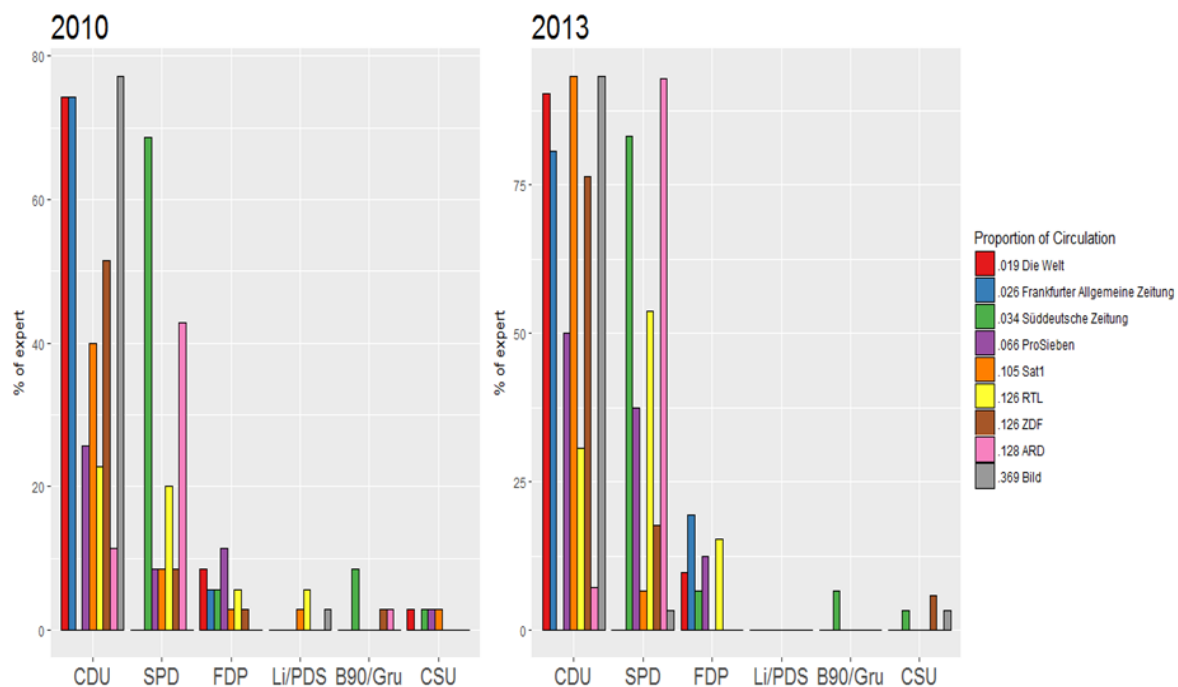
Finland



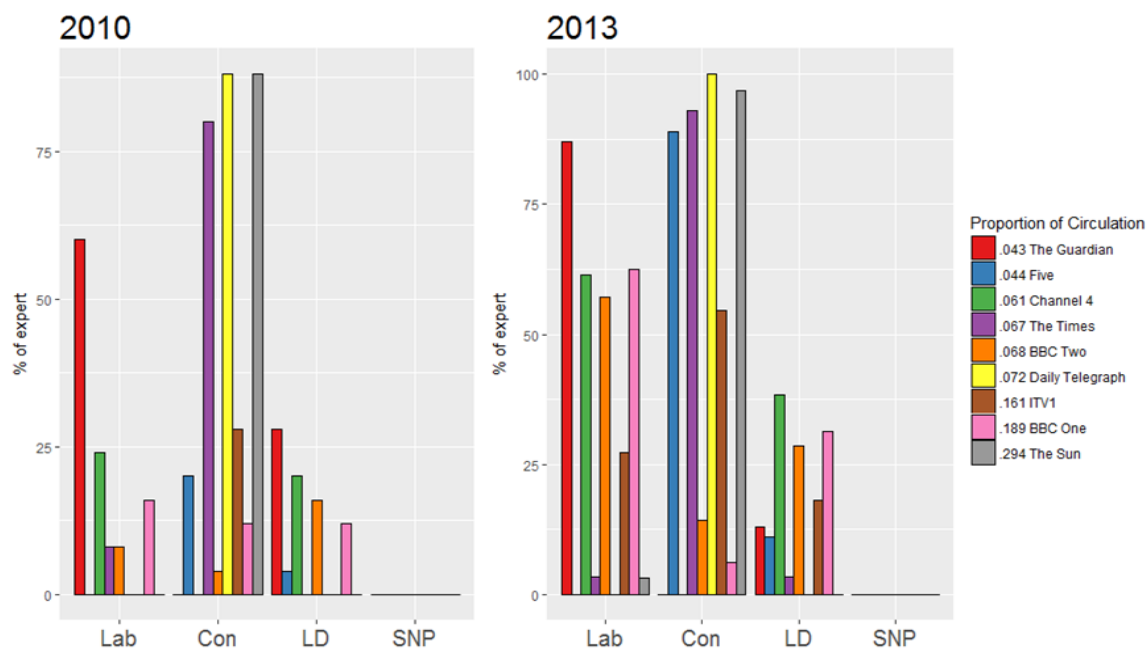
France



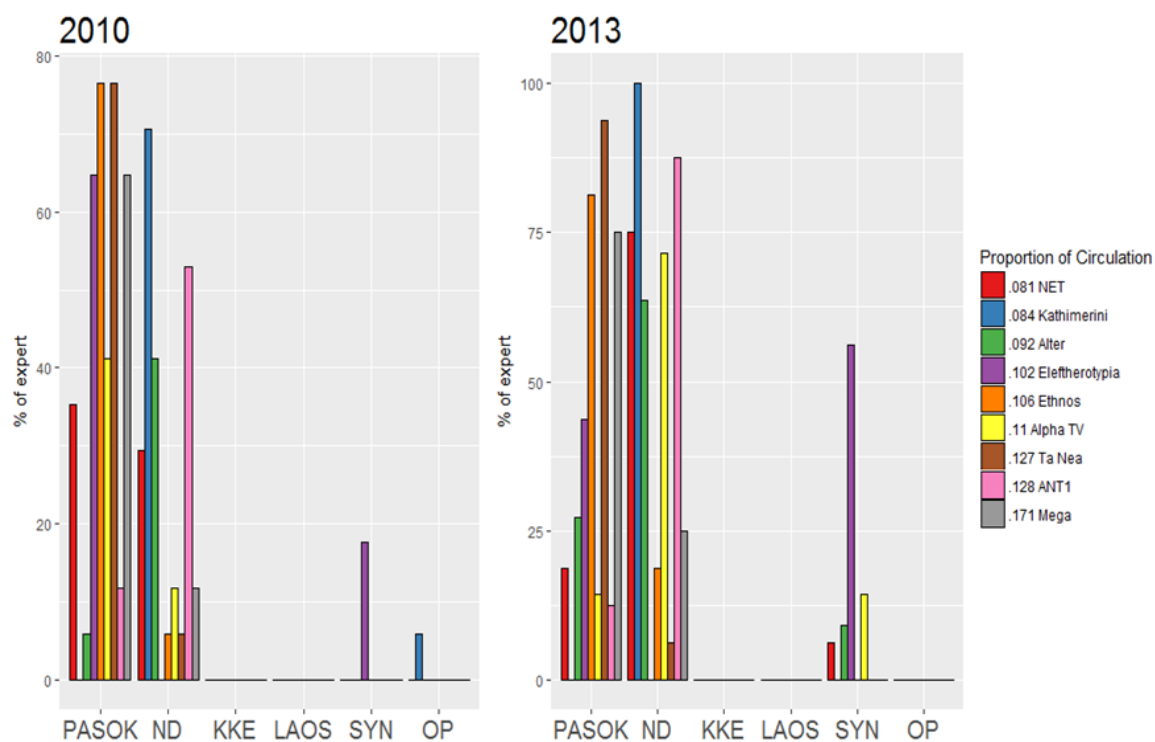
Germany



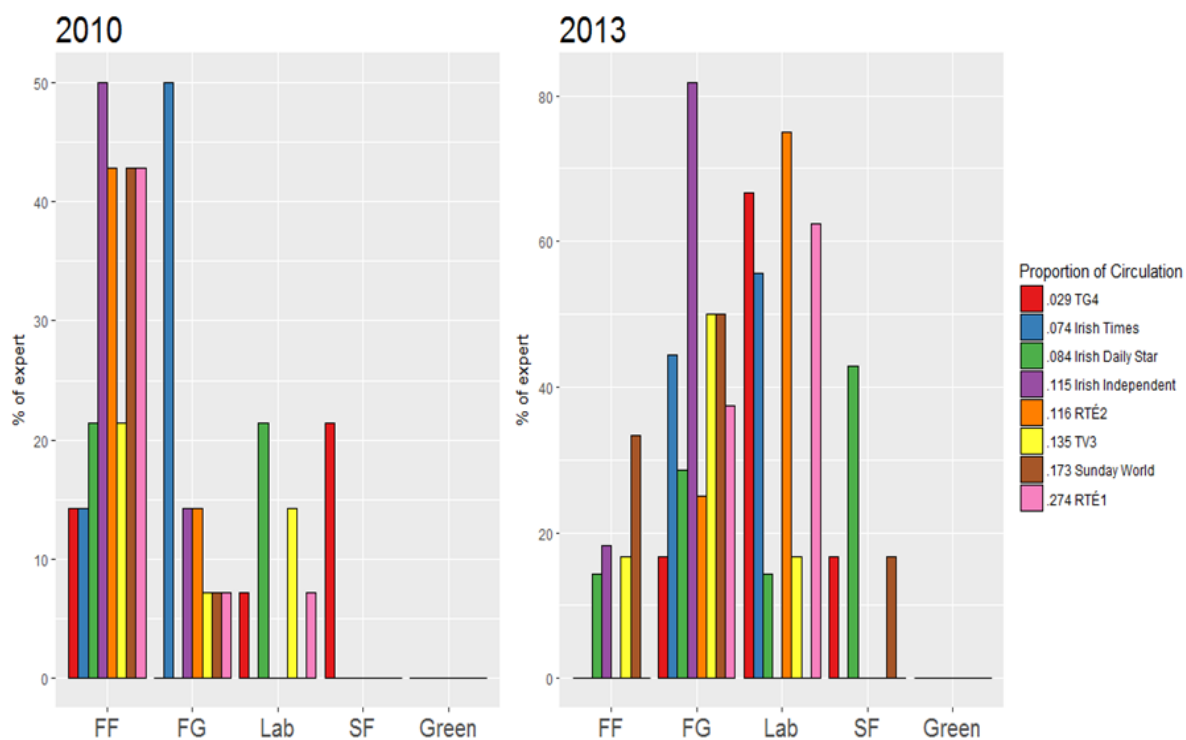
Great Britain



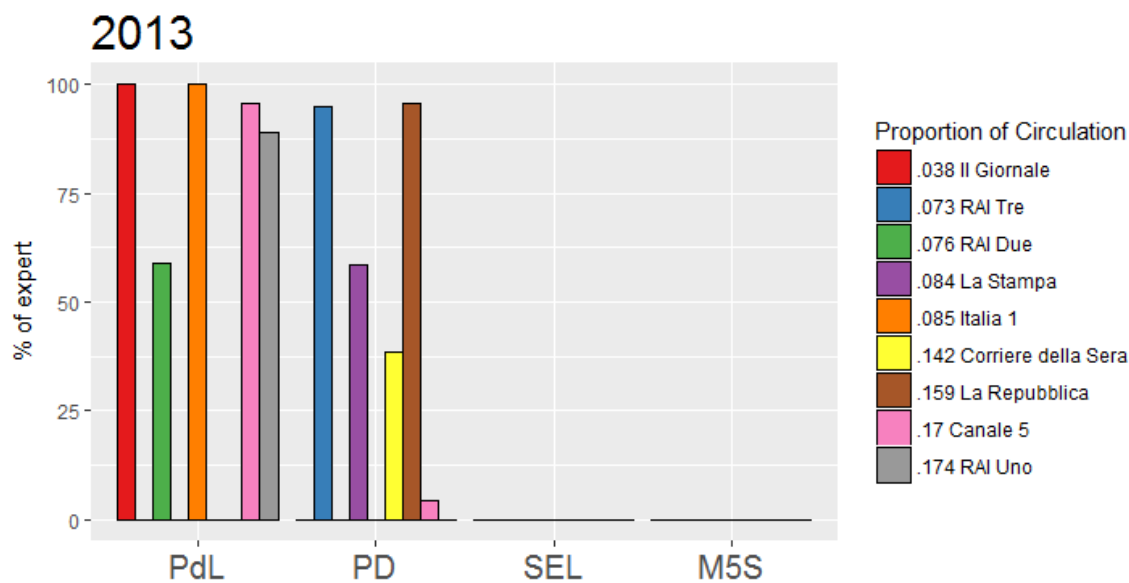
Greece



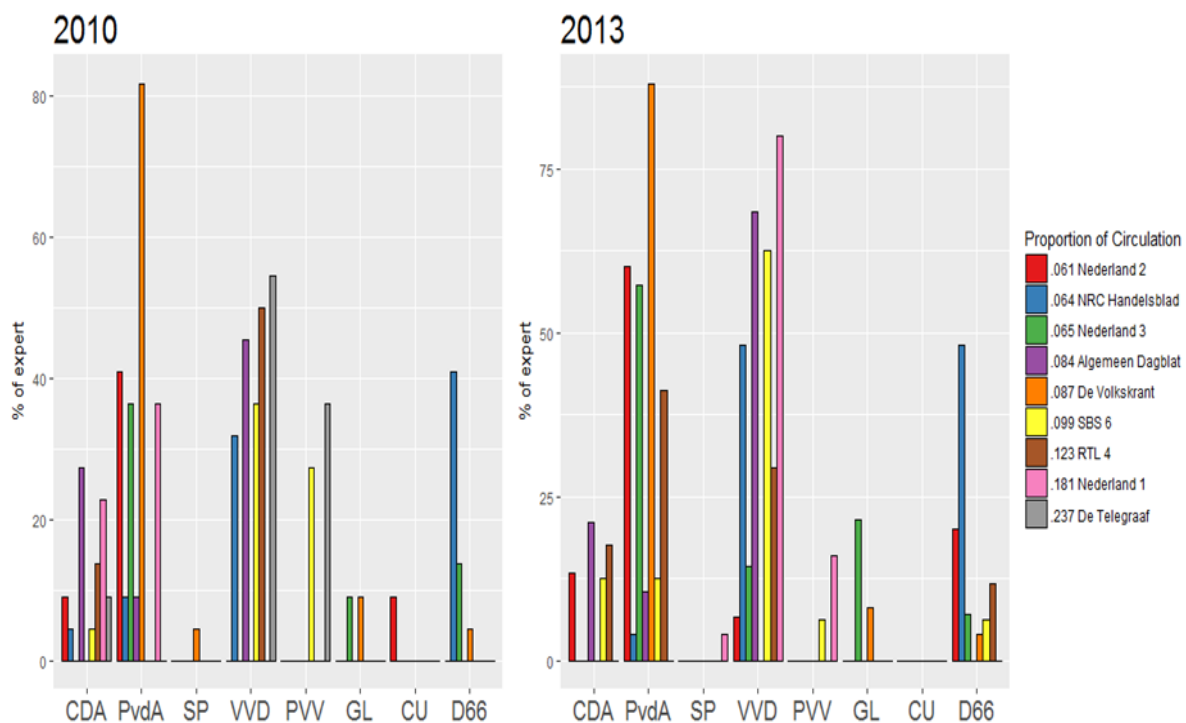
Ireland



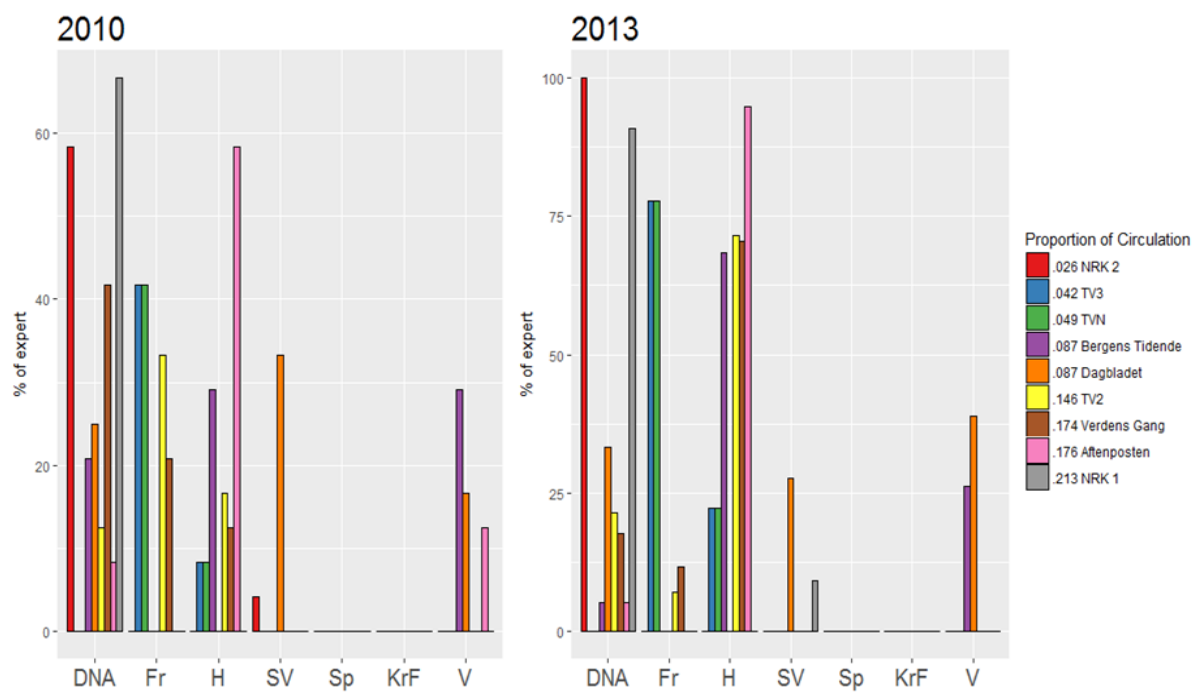
Italy



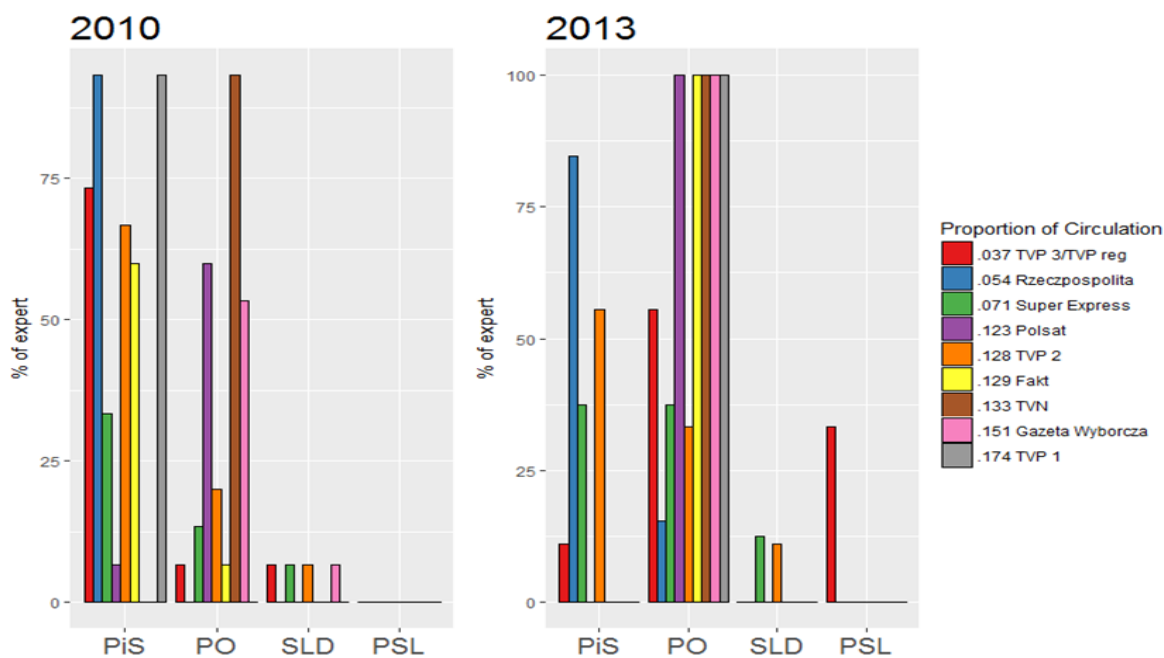
Netherlands



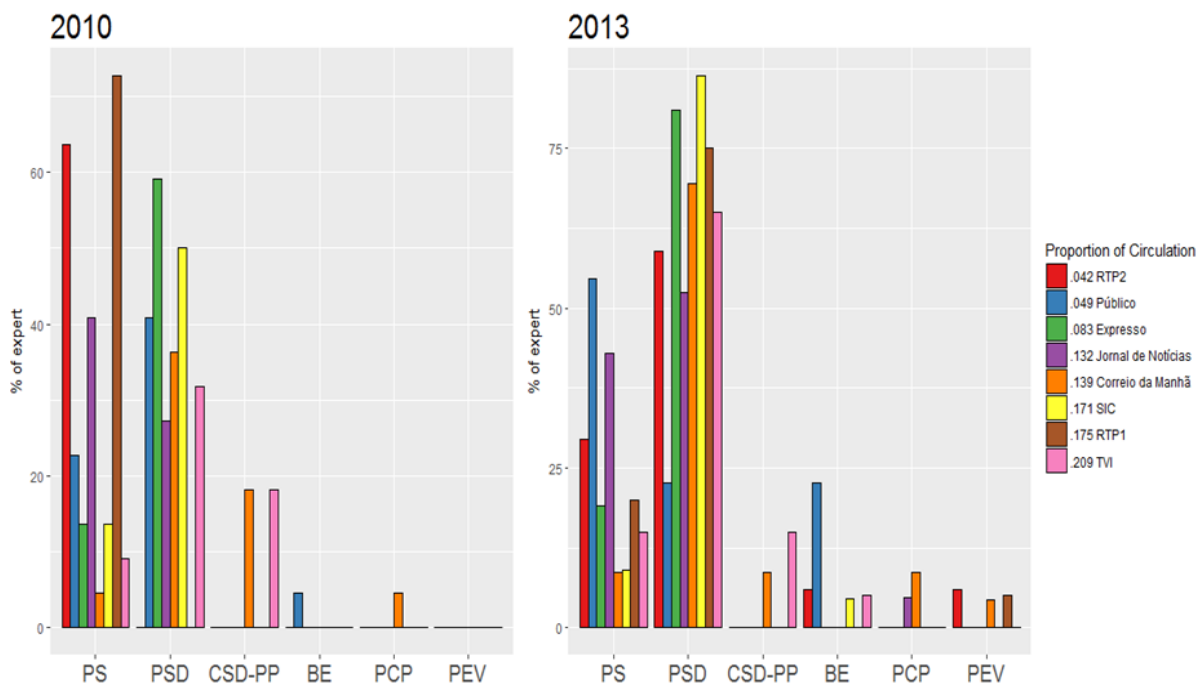
Norway



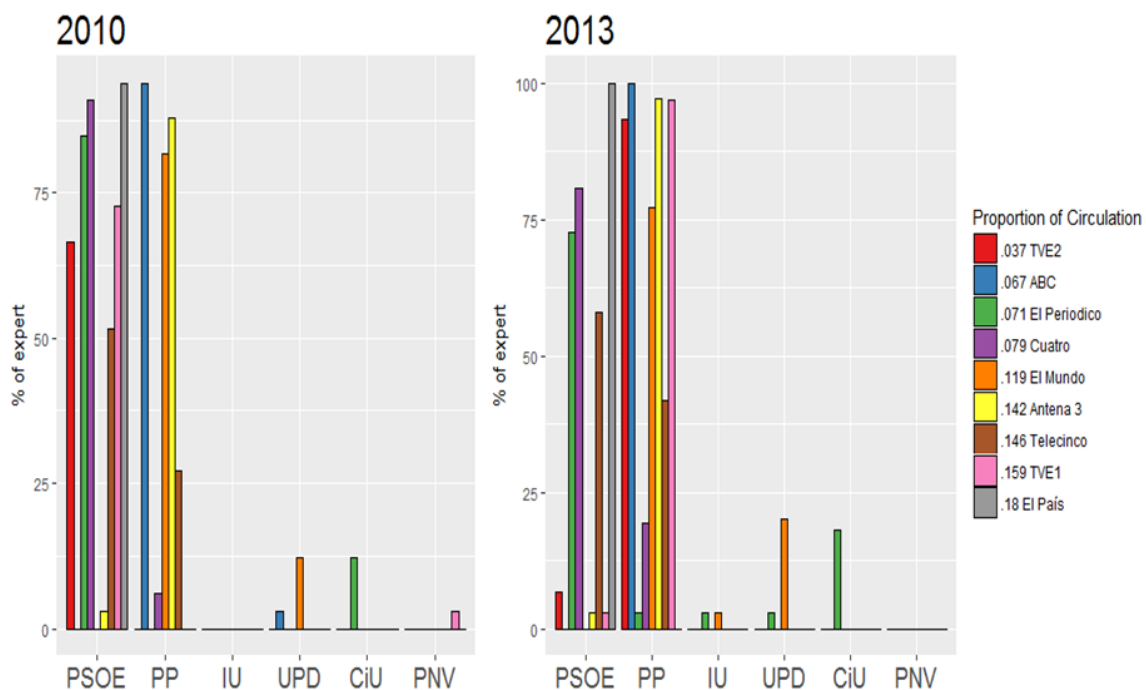
Poland



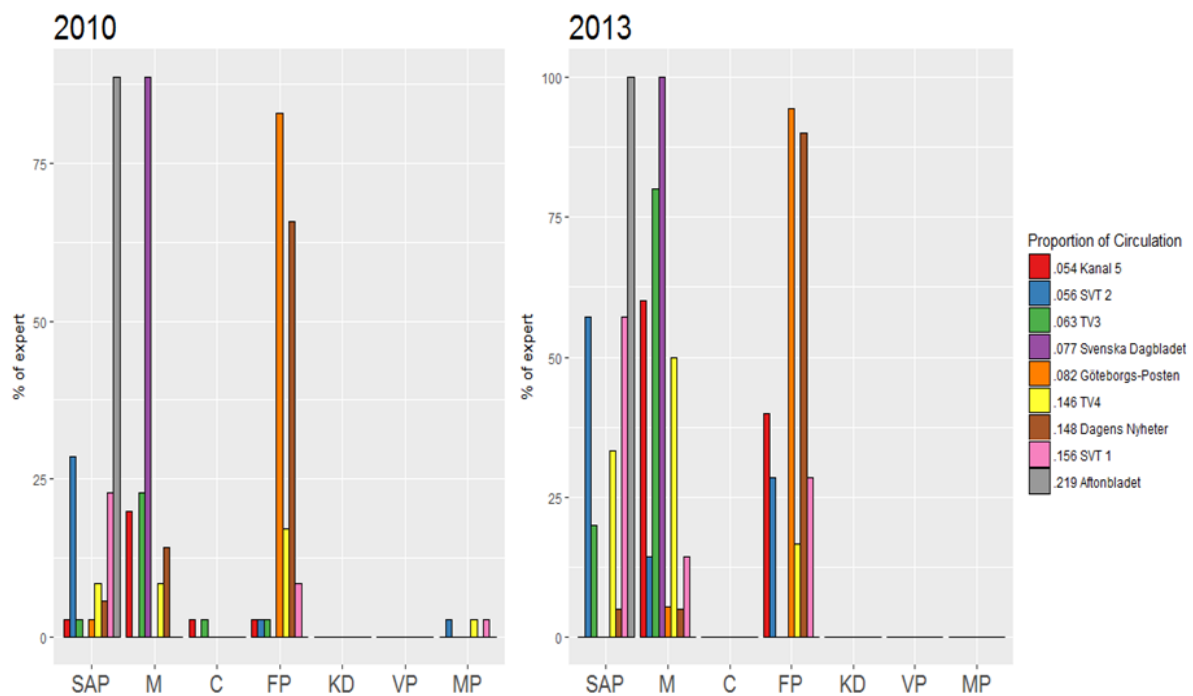
Portugal



Spain



Sweden



Chapter 4

Identifying Control Variables

4.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, I developed an individual level theory of partisan bias using a psychological theory of motivated reasoning and argue that the main mechanism of the partisan screen at the individual level is through the selective exposure to favorable information. One important contextual implication out of this individual-level theory that I identify in Chapter 3 is identifiability of partisan media (IPM), which measures how easy it is for partisans to engage in selective exposure by identifying a partisan set of “trusted sources” in the media environment.

Correlation analysis shows that IPM does indeed have a positive relationship with the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy, but the causal ordering between the two are not yet established. In order to accurately specify a statistical model that allows a causal relationship to be inferred, I need to identify and control a set of variables that could act as potential confounders to the relationship in order to eliminate any spurious associations between the main independent variable and dependent variable.

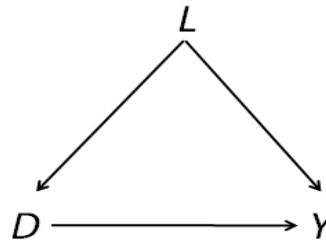
In this chapter, I discuss some of the covariates that I include in the statistical model in order to improve the consistency of the causal effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen. Since I will be using the “selection on observables” as my identification

strategies, there will be some sets of covariates that need to be controlled for in order for the treatment assignment (i.e. the IPM) to be conditionally independent of the potential outcomes (Keele 2015). In the following sections, I briefly explain the necessary criteria that a covariate needs to meet in order to be included in the model specification, followed by a thorough discussion of why the covariates that I have identified fit these criteria. To preview, these covariates are: (1) parties' role in/out the government, (2) the extent of how salient the economy are to the parties, (3) the parties' ideological positions on an economic dimension, and (4) ideological families of the parties.

4.2 Threats to Identification

In an observational study, one of the key threats to model specification is the presence of confounding due to a common cause to both the dependent and independent variables (Keele and Stevenson 2014). Figure 4.1 illustrates a causal diagram of confounding (or spurious relationship). This diagram implies that D causes Y, but L is a common cause of both D and Y. If L is ignored or unobserved, then the total effect of D on Y will not be identified. Thus, in order for me to identify and estimate the total effect of D on Y, I need to identify all the possible common causes of D and Y. Once this is achieved, I can then assume that the treatment (D) is independent of the outcome (Y), conditional on the observed covariates (L). Given this set of covariates, statistical adjustment methods such as regression analyses can be applied to make the conditional independence hold.

Figure 4.1: Confounding Due to a Common Cause



To test the effect of identifiability of the partisan media on the strength of the partisan screen in economic perception, a set of covariates could be the common cause for both these variables are needed to be included in the model specification. In the next sections, I explain why the four covariates that I identified: (1) role of parties' in/out of the government, (2) saliency of the economy to parties, (3) parties' ideological position on a left-right continuum, and (4) party families, could have substantial impact on both the identifiability of the partisan media and the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy.

4.3 Role of Parties

Perhaps the most apparent cause for both the dependent and the main independent variables are the different roles parties play in (and out of) government. A party can be in the government by either holding the chief executive's (prime minister) seat, or serving as a coalition partner. When a party is not in the government, it is regarded as the main opposition or just as an opposition. Generally, there are two mechanisms in which parties' roles can affect both the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy and the IPM. They are (1) distribution of policy-making responsibility and (2) pattern of contention

for policy-making responsibility in the future. For a party in government, the mechanism is through the distribution of responsibility while for a party out of the government, the mechanism is through the pattern of contention for future administrative responsibility.

4.3.1 Distribution of Policy-Making Responsibility

When a party is in the government, it has an administrative responsibility in shaping the economic outcome of the country (Duch and Stevenson 2008; Powell and Whitten 1993). However, voters are unlikely to attribute these responsibilities equally to all the parties that are in the government. There is ample evidence in the literature of electoral accountability that institutional arrangements affect voters' ability to attribute responsibility for economic conditions across different parties. In particular, systems with complex institutional structures such as coalitional government can blur the lines of responsibility and make it difficult for voters to attribute credit or blame to different parties that are in the government (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 1999; Powell and Whitten 1993).

The literature proposes different answers to how voters overcome this difficulty. Some argue that voters do not discriminate between government parties (including the coalition partners) and thus, hold all parties in the government equally responsible for the economy (Hobolt et al 2013; Tilley et al 2008). However, more recent work on coalition policy-making and voter perceptions of coalition governments reveal that coalition parties do not share equal responsibility for their coalition policy decisions and voters do not hold them equally accountable (Angelova et al 2016). In particular, voters tend to hold the biggest party in the government most responsible for policy outcomes and they largely

attribute the performance of the economy to the party of the chief executive or the Prime Minister (Anderson 2000; Duch and Stevenson 2008).

The reason behind this is that the parties of the Prime Minister often control the ministry in charge of the economy or finance and they tend to have important agenda powers that shape final coalition decisions (Martin and Vanberg 2014; Saiegh 2009). Subsequently, when voters evaluate which parties are to blame or reward for the state of the economy, they tend to discount junior coalition partners' importance in shaping the state of the economy and their responsibilities for the economic outcomes. As a result, party's size and ministerial roles are crucial for responsibility attribution.

If voters attribute different level of policy-making responsibility to each party in shaping the economic outcomes, then several hypotheses follow: first, since parties holding the chief executive position have larger share of administrative responsibility for economic performance relative to the junior partners, I argue that the partisan screen for the typical identifiers of the chief executive's party is stronger than the screen of the typical identifiers of the junior partner's party. Since the chief executive are more responsible in determining the outcome of the economy and has more "stake" in producing favorable economic conditions, the partisanship of those who identify with the chief executives' parties is going to be more salient in evaluating the economy than those who identify with parties that hold junior partner positions in a coalition government.

Furthermore, on the account that the parties of the chief executive and the junior partners are considered parties that form the government, individuals who identify with these parties are more likely to have a positive partisan screen (more favorable views of the

economy) relative to those who do not identify with the government's parties (i.e. those who identify with the oppositions parties or non-identifiers/independents).

Second, the roles parties play in the government could also have an effect on how much visibility they will receive in the media environment. When a party is holding the Prime Minister position, it is perceived by the media to be the most responsible for the economic outcome and the media could tie the economic performance to the party. As a result, the PM's party will receive greater coverage in the media than the parties holding the junior partner positions. Consequently, partisans of the Prime Minister's party are likely to find it easier in identifying the media outlets that serve as their "mouthpiece" in the media environment relative to partisans of the junior partners. I am not testing this assertion directly in this dissertation but this section is to explain why the roles a party might have in the government is a common cause of both the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy and the IPM. Therefore, it needs to be included as a control variable in the model specification.

4.3.2 Pattern of Contention for Future Policy-Making Responsibility

So far, I have addressed how voters attribute responsibility across different parties in the government and explain how a party's role in the government might have an impact on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. In this section, I address a scenario where a party is out of the government and how its role as either the main opposition or just a minor opposition could determine the strength of its partisan screen. Clearly, parties out of government rarely have any administrative responsibility in

implementing economic policies and voters are unlikely going to attribute reward or blame to them for the outcome of the economy. Thus, the distribution of policy-making responsibility that voters perceived are not the appropriate mechanism that explains the development of the partisan screens for identifiers these parties. Instead, I apply the theory of contention in future policy-making responsibility that was developed by Duch and Stevenson (2008) to account for how identifiers of the oppositions develop their partisan screen.

According to the theory of pattern of contention, voters have some knowledge about the extent to which different parties are in competition for significant shares of policy-making responsibility in the future. Even in a complex multi-party coalitional system, voters are relatively well informed in forming sensible expectations on the viability of different parties that can compete for the chief executive position. In fact, only with the ability to form such expectations that voters are able to assess whether their parties are able to assume significant future administrative responsibility and shape the economic outcomes. If the parties of these voters are currently not in the government but are in contention with the incumbent to provide an alternative government, then these voters are much more likely to evaluate the current state of the economy based on their partisan predisposition than those who identify with other opposition parties that are not in viable contentions.

Based on the differences in the viability of providing alternative governments, I hypothesize that the partisan screen in perceiving the economy for those who identify with the parties that are in contention with the incumbent, which I label as the main opposition,

is stronger than the partisan screen of those who identify with oppositions that are not viable in providing such competition, which I classify as minor opposition. In particular, the main opposition identifiers are going to have stronger negative views of the economy relative to the identifiers of minor opposition parties or to the independents. Partisanship becomes a more important factor in determining how these identifiers perceive the economy since their parties are not merely opposing the incumbent's performance, but they are also in the position to provide an alternative (and better) economic scenario in the future. There is a possibility however, that the main opposition could be incorporated into the government as a partner to form a grand coalition (for example, Germany in 2005). In this context, there will be no main opposition since the parties that are not in the government are not in viable contentions to provide alternative governments. In Appendix 4.1, I provide a detailed classification of all the possible roles for all the parties in my sample using data on government coalitions from the Parliament and Government Composition Database (ParlGov).

Similar to the parties in government, whether a party is the main opposition or just a minor opposition could also have an impact on how much coverage it gets in the media. If a party were the main opposition, it would see itself as an alternative to the current government and is more likely to be vocal in criticizing the performance of the incumbent. Consequently, the media outlets that favor this particular party is more likely to cover the economy much more negatively than the outlets that are favorable to minor opposition parties that are not in the contention to form the government. With that said, the identifiers of the main opposition are more likely to find it easier in identifying their set of

“trusted” sources in the media environment than the identifiers of minor opposition parties.

To summarize, a party’s role in or out of the government can be a common cause of the strength of the partisan screen and the IPM, which renders its necessity to be included in the model specification. Also, based on the discussion above about how the role could impact the strength of the partisan screen, I hypothesize the following:

H2a: The typical identifier of the chief executive’s party is more likely to exhibit stronger positive partisan screen (more favorable view of the economy) than the typical individual identifying with parties holding the junior partners’ positions.

H2b: The typical identifier of the main opposition is more likely to exhibit stronger negative partisan screen (less favorable view of the economy) than the typical individual identifying with minor oppositions.

4.4 Saliency of the Economy

Besides the role of parties in and out of the government, another common cause for both the strength of the partisan screen and the IPM that needs to be included as a control variable is the level of saliency the economy has to the parties. Originally, the theory of saliency was mainly used as an alternative to Downs’ (1957) spatial theory of party competition. In Downs’ theory, parties compete with each other by taking different positions on common issues. However, some scholars such as Budge et al (2001), Klingemann et al (2006), and Riker (1993) argued that it is unrealistic for parties to compete on every issue. Instead, they adopted the saliency theory by contending that parties rarely

provide different alternatives to a given issue; rather, they try to direct the electorate's attention on the issues that are advantageous for themselves (Dolezal et al 2014).

Consequently, parties would compete by downplaying issues that they deem unimportant and emphasizing issues that are salient to them. How parties position themselves on issues is of lesser importance than emphasizing on issues that they deem to be salient.

When parties engage in such behavior, voters are unlikely to find parties in direct opposition with each other on a particular set of issues. Instead, these parties choose to emphasize one issue (e.g. free market economics) or another set of policies (e.g. interventionist economics), which are only indirectly in opposition. With respect to the issue of economy, it is unlikely that any party wants to achieve a "poor" economy. There is only one viable issue position (which is a good economic condition) that parties have the choice to emphasize or not. There are certain parties that do not think that having a good economic condition is of paramount priority. If this is the case, those parties are probably going to omit this particular issue from their manifesto and instead, stress on other issues such as environmental or immigration policies.

From this perspective, it is apparent that the way parties view the importance of the economy will have an impact on how strong the partisan screen their typical voters is likely to have when perceiving the economy. Specifically, if the economy is such a salient issue that it becomes one of the top priorities for a particular party, then that party would seek to direct their voters' attention to the economy and strive to convince them that it is more competent than their opponents in this specific policy area (Budge 1982). Once voters view the economy to be personally salient and believe that their parties are more competent in

handling the economy than the other parties, it is likely that they would develop a strong partisan screen where partisan predisposition becomes an important driver in evaluating the state of the economy.

On the other hand, if a party does not treat the economy as a salient issue and choose not to emphasize it to its voters, then the voters are unlikely to develop a strong partisan screen in perceiving the economy. The reason for this can be two-fold. First, it is not in the interest of the party strategists to be primarily concerned about distinguishing their policies from those of rivals on issues they deem to be minor. Second, it is also not a priority for the partisans to rate their party's policy competence higher than that of its competitors on issue that are not salient personally and to the party. Thus, a party that heavily emphasizes the economy as an electoral strategy is likely to produce a strong partisan screen among its voters.

Besides having a substantial impact on the strength of the partisan screen, the extent to how salient the economy is to the party can also be considered as a cause to how identifiable the partisan media is in the media environment. When a party "owned" the issue of the economy and tries to emphasize it to its voters, it can utilize its "mouthpiece" in the media to intervene in the selection of the political information and shape how the public perceives the party on that particular issue (Helbling and Tresch 2011). These media outlets would then seek to disseminate as much information as possible about the economy since the more often the news media mention an issue, the more salient it will be to the population (Canes-Wrone and de Marchi 2002; Edwards et al 1995). At the same time, once the economy is personally salient, individuals would be motivated to seek out information

that are favorable to their partisanship and find it easier in identifying a set of “trusted” sources that could consistently provide confirmatory messages. Thus, the saliency of the economy could theoretically have an impact on how identifiable partisan media is.

In sum, since the saliency of the economy to a party is a common cause to both the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy and the identifiability of the partisan media (IPM), it has to be included in the model specification that seeks to establish causal relationship between the strength of the partisan screen and the IPM as a potential confounder. Based on the discussion above I hypothesize that:

H3: The more salient the economy is to a particular party, the stronger the partisan screen in perceiving the economy for the typical individual identifying with that party.

4.4.1 Measures of Saliency

To measure how salient the economy is to all the relevant parties in my dataset, I utilize the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) to derive parties' economic preferences from their respective election manifestos. The manifesto is especially useful because it contains text published by political parties with a purpose of competing for votes in an election. Furthermore, it also serves as indicators of the parties' policy preferences at a given point in time (Volkens et al 2014). CMP measures how salient different issues are to different parties by programming every quasi sentence in the manifesto into 56 different categories, grouped in 7 policy areas. Since there is no general “economy” category readily available in the CMP, I created one by aggregating different relevant categories within the economy domain and used it as a measure of saliency.

Subsequently, the percentages of sentences coded into this category are then used to measure the saliency of the economy to different parties across time.²² I construct the “economy” category by aggregating 15 policy categories (coded per401 to per415 in the CMP) with Table 4.1 illustrates how the saliency of the economy measured using this aggregation differs across German parties in 2009. Generally, among all the active parties in Germany 2009, the CDU/CSU has the strongest emphasis on the economy, followed by the FDP, and then the SPD. On the other hand, Green party has the least proportion of its manifesto dedicated to the economy, making it the party in Germany that places the least importance to the economy. Appendix 4.1 provides the measurement of economic saliency for all the parties in my sample.

Table 4.1: Saliency of the Economy among German Parties in 2009

Party	Economic Saliency (%)
CDU/CSU	30.66
SPD	26.31
FDP	30.53
Li/PDS	18.39
B90/Green	16.9

²² In some countries, CMP does not provide the data to calculate the economic saliency of the parties for the year 2014. To get a measurement or more specifically, prediction of economic saliency for these parties, I regress the latest measure that the manifesto provide for that particular party with the measure of economic saliency measured by the Chapel Hill survey in 2014 (variable: *LRECON_Salience*). Appendix 4.1 specifies the cases in which I use the predicted values of manifesto score in 2014 using the Chapel Hill’s measure.

4.5 Ideology

Finally, the last factor that is both a common cause for both the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy and the IPM is the ideological differences among the parties. Ideology is a multi-faceted concept that touches on different aspects of party's policy preferences, history, and affinity. As such, I use two measures to capture the different aspects of ideology. First, I use policy positions of parties on a general economic dimension to reflect how far or close parties are to each other in terms of economic preferences. Second, I use party family classification to capture the extent to which parties share common identity and goals with other parties. In the following sections, I explain what these two variables are and justified why they can be considered as potential confounders that should be included in my model specification.

4.5.1 Ideological Position on an Economic Dimension

The concept of an "ideological position" can be portrayed using the metaphor of "left-right" where a variety of policy positions are summarized into a more aggregated policy dimension. The purpose of this metaphor is to provide voters with policy-based means to orient themselves to the parties. By doing so, voters have a framework to evaluate how close a specific party is to its competitors in terms of policy terms and determine how close parties are to each other generally (Fortunato et al 2016; Todosijevic 2004). Hence, when this metaphor is used with respect to economic dimension, parties are placed along an economic ideology left-right scale (for example, planned vs. free market

economy) and their respective positions on this scale would reflect their preferences along this continuum.

Theoretically, the position in which a party places itself on an economic left-right scale could have an impact on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. In particular, if parties positioned themselves in relative proximity to each other on this dimension, it will then be difficult for voters to distinguish any differences in the economic policies between them. As a result, they are unlikely to exhibit a strong partisan screen in perceiving the economy (McGrath 2016). In this scenario, partisan identification is not an important factor in evaluating the economy since there are very little distinctions among different parties with regards to their economic preferences. On the other hand, when there is a relatively large distance in the ideological positions on the economic spectrum among different parties, voters would be able to sort out these parties and distinguish differences in economic policies among them much easily. As a consequence, partisanship becomes a more important driver for voters when evaluating the state of the economy.

Besides having an impact on the strength of the partisan screen in evaluating the economy, how parties positioned themselves along economic dimension could also have an effect on the magnitude of IPM. Recall from Chapter 3 that there are two characteristics of a highly identifiable partisan media. First, the messages contain in the media sources are distinct from each other. Second, these sources have high degree of parallelism with the parties that they are perceived as the mouthpieces of the parties in the media environment. When there are significant distances among different parties on economic ideologies, it is

likely that the economic messages contain across different media outlets would be distinguishable from each other, thus, increasing the identifiability of the partisan media. On the other hand, if parties do not distinguish themselves enough on economic ideology, it is highly probable that the economic messages portray by their respective “mouthpieces” in the media environment will not be much different from each other. As a result, the identifiability of partisan media is lower in these circumstances than the scenario where parties are much more distinguishable on economic ideology.

Based on this discussion, the ideological distance among parties on the economic dimension can be considered as a common cause for both the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions as well as the IPM. Thus, it should be included as a control variable in the model that seeks to estimate the causal effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. With that being said, I hypothesize that:

H4: The larger the distance between a party and its competitors on an economy dimension, the stronger the partisan screen in perceiving the economy for the typical individual identifying with that party.

4.5.2 Measuring Ideological Distance

To measure the distance between a party and its competitors, I utilize the Chapel Hill expert surveys (Polk et al 2017) to estimate parties’ position in terms of their ideological stances on economic issues. The survey asks more than 300 political scientists specializing in political parties and European politics to rate each political party in Europe, their respective

positions on a left-right economic dimension (i.e. variable *LRECON* coded in the survey). On this dimension, parties on the economic left would prefer the government to play an active role in the economy, while parties on the economic right would emphasize a reduced economic role for the government.

I construct the ideological distance of each of the parties from their competitors based on the distance between their economic position and the average position for all the parties in a given context (see equation 4.1).

$$(4.1) \quad \text{dist}_{jp} = |\text{ideo}_{jp} - \hat{\text{ideo}}_j|$$

Here, I calculate the distance between party p from its competitors in context j (i.e. dist_{jp}) by taking the absolute difference between its position on the economic left-right scale (ideo_{jp}) and the average position of all active parties in context j (country-year) on the same scale ($\hat{\text{ideo}}_j$). This means that how far or close a party is in terms of economic ideology from its competitors is based on the distance between its positions on an economic dimension from the average position of all the parties in a specific country at a particular year. Appendix 4.1 provides the measurement of economic ideological distance for all the parties in my sample

4.5.3 Party Families

Besides ideological positions on the economic left-right scale, grouping of parties into different “family” could also have an impact on both the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy and IPM. The classification of parties across countries and over

time into the notion of party “family” is an alternative approach used to measure how different or similar parties are to each other. Instead of using ideological distance on a particular policy to measure proximity of parties, the party family approach looks at the historical origins and sociological developments of the parties to determine how close a party is from its competitors.

Party families are identified based on their core identities that are derived from the parties’ origins and sociological cleavages (Mair and Mudde 1998). This approach dates back to Rokkan’s (1970) study that based categorization of parties on four “critical cleavages” that were the product of national and industrial revolutions in the 19th Century. From these critical cleavages, scholars such as von Beyme (1985) and Seiler (1980) identified around eight to ten different party families that shared the same origins and development. These groupings include workers’ parties, populist parties, Christian democrats, agrarian parties, communist parties etc.

Taking this classification into consideration, how much shared history and affinity a party has with its competitors could have an impact on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. Similar to the ideological distance between parties on the economy, when parties are classified in the same ideological or party family, it is likely that they would have little differences in policies’ preferences since they are mobilized along the same “side” of the same cleavage (Rokkan 1980). As a result, their voters are unable to distinguish any differences in economic policies between the parties easily and are unlikely to rely on their partisan identity to evaluate the state of the economy.

Likewise, the classification of parties into different families could also have similar

effect on the identifiability of the partisan media. When parties are classified under different families, sociological theory suggests that these parties did not develop out of the same general movement and mobilized on the same side of the cleavage. As a result, parties in different families would develop rather different policies and/or ideologies and would make it easier for their respective “mouthpieces” in the media to distinguish policies’ differences among them and report contrasting messages to the voters. Consequently, voters are able to sort out different media outlets according to their partisan orientation and could easily identify their set of trusted sources that consistently delivered partisan messages on economic issues. Thus, a party that does not share common origins or sociological development with its competitors is likely going to have a high identifiability in the partisan media.

To sum up, party’s classification into ideological “family” based on common origins and development is a common cause to both the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy and the identifiability of the partisan media (IPM). Based on its role as a potential confounder, I include it as one of the control variables in the model that seeks to estimate the causal effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy (see Chapter 5 for the model specifications).

4.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to identify a set of confounding variables that are potential threats to my identification strategy. In particular, under the selection on observables strategy, one needs to control for all the covariates that predict the outcome

and treatment in order to make the treatment assignment “as-if” random. In this dissertation, since I aim to estimate the causal impact of the identifiability of partisan media on the strength of the partisan screen in economic perception, I identify four factors that could predict these two variables. In chapter 5, I provide empirical evidence that the identifiability of partisan media does indeed have a significant effect on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy after controlling for these four confounders. These results speak directly to the veracity of selective exposure to favorable information as the dominant mechanism in explaining partisan screen.

Appendix 4.1: List of Control Variables²³

Country	Year	Party	Role	Saliency of the Economy (%)	Ideological Distance	Party Family
Austria	2006	SPO	Main Opposition	17.47	2.25	Socialist
		OVP	PM	14.32	1.75	Christian Democrats
		FPO	Opposition	12.92	0.25	Nationalist
		Gruene	Opposition	12.41	2.48	Ecological
	2008	SPO	PM	15.62	1.98	Socialist
		OVP	Partner	8.53	2.23	Christian Democrats
		FPO	Opposition	12.77	0.38	Nationalist
		Gruene	Opposition	7.6	2.4	Ecological
		BZO	Opposition	13.66	2.67	Nationalist
	2010	SPO	PM	15.62	1.98	Socialist
		OVP	Partner	8.53	2.23	Christian Democrats
		FPO	Opposition	12.77	0.38	Nationalist
		Gruene	Opposition	7.6	2.4	Ecological
		BZO	Opposition	13.66	2.67	Nationalist
	2014	SPO	PM	22.62	2.94	Socialist
		OVP	Partner	22.38	0.66	Christian Democrats
		FPO	Opposition	6.96	0.24	Nationalist
		Gruene	Opposition	12.86	2.94	Ecological
		BZO	Opposition	20.64*	1.46	Nationalist
Belgium	2006	CD&V	Opposition	13.29	0.37	Christian Democrats
		VB	Opposition	7.75	1.93	Ethnic/Regional
		N-VA	Opposition	11.87	1.93	Ethnic/Regional
		VLD	PM	17.36	2.68	Liberal
		SPa	Partner	8.28	2.57	Socialist
		Groen	Opposition	8.95	3.56	Ecological
		MR	Partner	19.32	2.3	Liberal
		PS	Partner	22.17	2.03	Socialist
	2008	CD&V	PM	13.29	0.36	Christian Democrats
		VB	Opposition	7.75	2.9	Ethnic/Regional
		N-VA	Opposition	11.87	2.76	Ethnic/Regional
		VLD	Partner	17.36	2.56	Liberal
		SPa	Opposition	8.28	1.84	Socialist

²³ These measures are not available for all the years in which the estimates for both the IPM and the strength of the partisan screen are available. However, since these are variables at the party-level, they are highly unlikely to change frequently from year to year. As such, I assume these variables to remain constant for two years before and after their measures are taken. In total, I have 436 observations of party-year in the sample.

		Groen MR PS	Opposition Partner Partner	8.95 19.32 22.17	2.7 2.58 2.46	Ecological Liberal Socialist
	2010	CD&V VB N-VA VLD SPa Groen MR PS	PM Opposition Opposition Partner Opposition Opposition Partner Partner	21.11 11.59 14.78 11.04 20.43 12.47 21.67 25.36	0.36 2.9 2.76 2.56 1.84 2.7 2.58 2.46	Christian Democrats Ethnic/Regional Ethnic/Regional Liberal Socialist Ecological Liberal Socialist
	2012	CD&V VB N-VA VLD SPa Groen MR PS	Partner Opposition Opposition Partner Partner Opposition Partner PM	21.11 11.59 14.78 11.04 20.43 12.47 21.67 25.36	0.78 0.68 3.38 2.98 2.02 2.82 2.78 2.42	Christian Democrats Ethnic/Regional Ethnic/Regional Liberal Socialist Ecological Liberal Socialist
	2014	CD&V VB N-VA VLD SPa Groen MR PS	Partner Opposition Opposition Partner Opposition Opposition Partner PM	21.64* 15.63* 22.14* 24.64* 24.14* 21.14* 24.64* 24.14*	0.78 0.68 3.38 2.98 2.02 2.82 2.78 2.42	Christian Democrats Ethnic/Regional Ethnic/Regional Liberal Socialist Ecological Liberal Socialist
Denmark	2006	V Sd DF KF RV En-O	PM Main Opposition Opposition Partner Opposition Opposition	37.15 25.26 6 25.71 11.36 8.07	2.5 0.5 0.62 3.37 1.62 3	Liberal Socialist Nationalist Conservative Liberal Communist
		V Sd DF KF RV En-O Ny-LA	PM Main Opposition Opposition Partner Opposition Opposition Opposition	37.21 19.66 0 20.66 11.54 20.79 16.67	1.97 1.3 0.33 2.7 1.24 4.3 4.06	Liberal Socialist Nationalist Conservative Liberal Communist Liberal
	2010	V Sd DF KF	PM Main Opposition Opposition Partner	33.48 30.18 2.02 22.53	1.97 1.3 0.33 2.7	Liberal Socialist Nationalist Conservative

Finland		RV	Opposition	19.69	1.24	Liberal
		En-O	Opposition	31.26	4.3	Communist
		Ny-LA	Opposition	32.19	4.06	Liberal
	2012	V	Main Opposition	33.48	2.46	Liberal
		Sd	PM	30.18	0.94	Socialist
		DF	Opposition	2.02	0.34	Nationalist
		KF	Opposition	22.53	2.76	Conservative
		RV	Partner	19.69	1.66	Liberal
		En-O	Opposition	31.26	3.84	Communist
		Ny-LA	Opposition	32.19	4.26	Liberal
	2014	V	Main Opposition	23.14*	2.46	Liberal
		Sd	PM	21.39*	0.94	Socialist
		DF	Opposition	15.36*	0.34	Nationalist
		KF	Opposition	22.21*	2.76	Conservative
		RV	Partner	22.86*	1.66	Liberal
		SF	Partner	18.64*	2.53	Communist
		En-O	Opposition	19.23*	3.84	Communist
		Ny-LA	Opposition	23.89*	4.26	Liberal
	2006	KESK	PM	29.67	0.3	Agrarian
		KOK	Main Opposition	12.78	2.67	Conservative
		SSDP	Partner	20.85	1.69	Socialist
		VAS	Opposition	12.31	2.78	Communist
		VIHR	Opposition	11.47	1.33	Ecological
		KD	Opposition	17.99	0.31	Christian Democrats
		SFP	Partner	16.98	2.4	Ethnic/Regional
	2008	KESK	PM	29.67	0.38	Agrarian
		KOK	Partner	12.78	2.69	Conservative
		SSDP	Opposition	20.85	1.31	Socialist
		VAS	Opposition	12.31	2.91	Communist
		VIHR	Partner	11.47	0.51	Ecological
		KD	Opposition	17.99	0.21	Christian Democrats
		SFP	Partner	16.98	2.49	Ethnic/Regional
		Ps	Opposition	11.67	0.61	Agrarian
	2010	KESK	PM	18	0.38	Agrarian
		KOK	Partner	19.5	2.69	Conservative
		SSDP	Opposition	52.54	1.31	Socialist
		VAS	Opposition	19.77	2.91	Communist
		VIHR	Partner	17.34	0.51	Ecological
		KD	Opposition	18.81	0.21	Christian Democrats
		SFP	Partner	22.22	2.49	Ethnic/Regional
		Ps	Opposition	14.69	0.61	Agrarian
	2012	KESK	Main Opposition	18	0.43	Agrarian
		KOK	PM	19.5	3.21	Conservative
		SSDP	Partner	52.54	1.57	Socialist

France		VAS	Partner	19.77	3.35	Communist
		VIHR	Partner	17.34	0.57	Ecological
		KD	Partner	18.81	0.43	Christian Democrats
		SFP	Partner	22.22	2.32	Ethnic/Regional
		Ps	Opposition	14.69	0.9	Agrarian
	2014	KESK	Main Opposition	22.04*	0.43	Agrarian
		KOK	PM	25.09*	3.21	Conservative
		SSDP	Partner	23.14*	1.57	Socialist
		VAS	Partner	21.47*	3.35	Communist
		VIHR	Partner	17.89*	0.57	Ecological
		KD	Partner	16.63*	0.43	Christian Democrats
		SFP	Partner	18.64*	2.32	Ethnic/Regional
		Ps	Opposition	17.89*	0.9	Agrarian
	2006	UMP	PM	18.61	2.45	Conservative
		PS	Main Opposition	15.95	2.41	Socialist
		PCF	Opposition	11.33	3.92	Communist
		V	Opposition	11.49	1.67	Ecological
		FN	Opposition	17.14	2.08	Nationalist
		UDF	Partner	19.86	1.2	Conservative
	2008	UMP	PM	18.61	1.31	Conservative
		PS	Main Opposition	15.95	1.8	Socialist
		PCF	Opposition	11.33	3.46	Communist
		V	Opposition	11.49	1.57	Ecological
		FN	Opposition	17.14	2.26	Nationalist
		MoDem	Opposition	19.86	0.98	Conservative
	2010	UMP	PM	24.37	1.31	Conservative
		PS	Main Opposition	26.64	1.8	Socialist
		PCF	Opposition	24.77	3.46	Communist
		V	Opposition	18.23	1.57	Ecological
		FN	Opposition	22.56	2.26	Nationalist
		MoDem	Opposition	21.31	0.98	Conservative
		NC	Partner	13.89	0.76	Conservative
		PRG	Opposition	32.32	0.37	Communist
	2012	UMP	Main Opposition	24.37	2.46	Conservative
		PS	PM	26.64	1.04	Socialist
		PCF	Opposition	24.77	3.7	Communist
		V	Opposition	18.23	1.62	Ecological
		FN	Opposition	22.56	1.04	Nationalist
		MoDem	Opposition	21.31	1.58	Conservative
		NC	Opposition	13.89	2.01	Conservative
		PRG	Partner	32.32	1.12	Communist
	2014	UMP	Main Opposition	24.37	2.46	Conservative
		PS	PM	26.64	1.04	Socialist
		PCF	Opposition	24.77	3.7	Communist

		V	Opposition	18.23	1.62	Ecological
		FN	Opposition	22.56	1.04	Nationalist
		MoDem	Opposition	21.31	1.58	Conservative
		NC	Opposition	13.89	2.01	Conservative
		PRG	Partner	32.32	1.12	Communist
Germany	2006	CDU/CSU	PM	31.91	1.79	Christian Democrats
		SPD	Partner	27.43	1.67	Socialist
		FDP	Opposition	31	3.6	Liberal
		Li/PDS	Opposition	15.89	4.12	Communist
		B90/Gru	Opposition	17.41	1.03	Ecological
	2008	CDU/CSU	PM	30.66	1.4	Christian Democrats
		SPD	Partner	26.31	1.59	Socialist
		FDP	Opposition	30.53	3.59	Liberal
		Li/PDS	Opposition	18.39	3.59	Communist
		B90/Gru	Opposition	17.8	0.72	Ecological
	2010	CDU/CSU	PM	30.66	1.4	Christian Democrats
		SPD	Main Opposition	26.31	1.59	Socialist
		FDP	Partner	30.53	3.59	Liberal
		Li/PDS	Opposition	18.39	3.59	Communist
		B90/Gru	Opposition	17.8	0.72	Ecological
	2012	CDU/CSU	PM	28.79	1.2	Christian Democrats
		SPD	Main Opposition	24.74	1.2	Socialist
		FDP	Partner	29.93	3.28	Liberal
		Li/PDS	Opposition	18.08	3.47	Communist
		B90/Gru	Opposition	16.9	1.22	Ecological
	2014	CDU/CSU	PM	28.79	1.2	Christian Democrats
		SPD	Partner	24.74	1.2	Socialist
		FDP	Opposition	29.93	3.28	Liberal
		Li/PDS	Opposition	18.08	3.47	Communist
		B90/Gru	Opposition	16.9	1.22	Ecological
Greece	2008	PASOK	Main Opposition	20.29	1.14	Socialist
		ND	PM	34.45	3.81	Christian Democrats
		KKE	Opposition	14.5	3	Communist
		SYN	Opposition	17.86	2	Communist
		LAOS	Opposition	19	2.25	Nationalist
	2010	PASOK	PM	19.33	2.21	Socialist
		ND	Main Opposition	37.12	2.67	Christian Democrats
		KKE	Opposition	16.18	3.33	Communist
		SYN	Opposition	2.38	2.42	Communist
		LAOS	Opposition	22.46	2.49	Nationalist
	2012	PASOK	Partner	22.45	1.38	Socialist
		ND	PM	52.27	3.05	Christian Democrats
		KKE	Opposition	8.06	3.95	Communist
		SYN	Opposition	12.07	2.62	Communist

Ireland	2006	FF	PM	19.69	1.27	Conservative
		FG	Main Opposition	22.19	1.87	Christian Democrats
		Lab	Opposition	15.43	1.23	Socialist
		SF	Opposition	16.07	3.03	Special Issue
		Green	Opposition	15.88	2.33	Ecological
	2008	FF	PM	19.69	2.95	Conservative
		FG	Main Opposition	22.19	3.33	Christian Democrats
		Lab	Opposition	15.43	0.67	Socialist
		SF	Opposition	16.07	2.05	Special Issue
		Green	Partner	15.88	0.89	Ecological
	2010	FF	PM	53.53	2.95	Conservative
		FG	Main Opposition	29.73	3.33	Christian Democrats
		Lab	Opposition	30.38	0.67	Socialist
		SF	Opposition	29.67	2.05	Special Issue
		Green	Partner	19.24	0.89	Ecological
	2012	FF	Main Opposition	53.53	2.39	Conservative
		FG	PM	29.73	3.76	Christian Democrats
		Lab	Partner	30.38	0.76	Socialist
		SF	Opposition	29.67	1.49	Special Issue
		Green	Opposition	19.24	0.39	Ecological
	2014	FF	Main Opposition	24.21	2.39	Conservative
		FG	PM	25.43	3.76	Christian Democrats
		Lab	Partner	19.83	0.76	Socialist
		SF	Opposition	13.56	1.49	Special Issue
		Green	Opposition	13.98	0.39	Ecological
Italy	2012	PdL	Opposition	38.57	2.19	Conservative
		PD	PM	4.4	0.23	Liberal
		SEL	Opposition	10.37	4.09	Communist
		M5S	Opposition	30.32	1.38	Special Issue
Netherlands	2006	CDA	PM	15.42	0.84	Christian Democrats
		PvdA	Main Opposition	11.15	1.16	Socialist
		SP	Opposition	8.67	3.61	Communist
		VVD	Partner	19.52	3.17	Liberal
		GL	Opposition	6.38	2.72	Ecological
		CU	Opposition	11.6	0.59	Christian Democrats
		D66	Partner	14.59	0.5	Socialist
	2008	CDA	PM	23	1.64	Christian Democrats
		PvdA	Partner	18.02	1.29	Socialist
		SP	Opposition	20.72	3.36	Communist
		VVD	Opposition	20.7	3.42	Liberal
		GL	Opposition	11.05	1.86	Ecological
		CU	Partner	19.8	0.14	Christian Democrats
		D66	Opposition	19.11	0.64	Socialist
		PVV	Opposition	19.03	0.37	Nationalist

	2010	CDA	PM	23	1.64	Christian Democrats
		PvdA	Partner	18.02	1.29	Socialist
		SP	Opposition	20.72	3.36	Communist
		VVD	Opposition	20.7	3.42	Liberal
		GL	Opposition	11.05	1.86	Ecological
		CU	Partner	19.8	0.14	Christian Democrats
		D66	Opposition	19.11	0.64	Socialist
		PVV	Opposition	19.03	0.37	Nationalist
	2012	CDA	Partner	16.95	2.01	Christian Democrats
		PvdA	Opposition	17.68	1.32	Socialist
		SP	Opposition	17.93	3.54	Communist
		VVD	PM	24.32	3.79	Liberal
		GL	Opposition	11.04	1.88	Ecological
		CU	Opposition	20.81	0.43	Christian Democrats
		D66	Opposition	19.8	2.01	Socialist
		PVV	Opposition	11.87	0.01	Nationalist
	2014	CDA	Main Opposition	16.95	2.01	Christian Democrats
		PvdA	Partner	17.68	1.32	Socialist
		SP	Opposition	17.93	3.54	Communist
		VVD	PM	24.32	3.79	Liberal
		GL	Opposition	11.04	1.88	Ecological
		CU	Opposition	20.81	0.43	Christian Democrats
		D66	Opposition	19.8	2.01	Socialist
		PVV	Opposition	11.87	0.01	Nationalist
Norway	2006	DNA	PM	20.13	1.37	Socialist
		Fr	Opposition	33.5	2.63	Special Issue
		H	Main Opposition	26.39	2.73	Conservative
		SV	Partner	14.85	3.37	Communist
		Sp	Partner	24.95	1.47	Agrarian
		KrF	Opposition	13.27	0.13	Christian Democrats
		V	Opposition	15.96	0.73	Liberal
	2008	DNA	PM	15.81	1.37	Socialist
		Fr	Opposition	28.59	2.63	Special Issue
		H	Main Opposition	20.49	2.73	Conservative
		SV	Partner	15.89	3.37	Communist
		Sp	Partner	19.3	1.47	Agrarian
		KrF	Opposition	11.93	0.13	Christian Democrats
		V	Opposition	16.73	0.73	Liberal
	2010	DNA	PM	15.81	1.37	Socialist
		Fr	Opposition	28.59	2.63	Special Issue
		H	Main Opposition	20.49	2.73	Conservative
		SV	Partner	15.89	3.37	Communist
		Sp	Partner	19.3	1.47	Agrarian
		KrF	Opposition	11.93	0.13	Christian Democrats

		V	Opposition	16.73	0.73	Liberal
	2012	DNA	PM	15.81	1.09	Socialist
		Fr	Opposition	28.59	2.66	Special Issue
		H	Main Opposition	20.49	2.41	Conservative
		SV	Partner	15.89	3.34	Communist
		Sp	Partner	19.3	0.34	Agrarian
		KrF	Opposition	11.93	0.41	Christian Democrats
		V	Opposition	16.73	1.9	Liberal
	2014	DNA	Main Opposition	19.89*	1.09	Socialist
		Fr	Partner	17.39*	2.66	Special Issue
		H	PM	21.39*	2.41	Conservative
		SV	Opposition	17.39*	3.34	Communist
		Sp	Opposition	16.39*	0.34	Agrarian
		KrF	Opposition	13.89*	0.41	Christian Democrats
		V	Opposition	17.39*	1.9	Liberal
Poland	2006	PiS	PM	13.1	2.09	Conservative
		PO	Main Opposition	31.17	4.08	Liberal
		SLD	Opposition	21.76	0.58	Socialist
		PSL	Opposition	17.24	0.59	Agrarian
		SRP	Opposition	35.07	2.92	Agrarian
	2008	PiS	Main Opposition	28.03	1.07	Conservative
		PO	PM	21.65	2.53	Liberal
		SLD	Opposition	21.76	0.67	Socialist
		PSL	Partner	17.24	0.07	Agrarian
	2010	PiS	Main Opposition	14.54	1.07	Conservative
		PO	PM	21.98	2.53	Liberal
		SLD	Opposition	18.76	0.67	Socialist
		PSL	Partner	13.19	0.07	Agrarian
	2012	PiS	Main Opposition	14.54	1.91	Conservative
		PO	PM	21.98	1.32	Liberal
		SLD	Opposition	18.76	1.85	Socialist
		PSL	Partner	13.19	1.5	Agrarian
	2014	PiS	Main Opposition	17.64*	1.91	Conservative
		PO	PM	22.89*	1.32	Liberal
		SLD	Opposition	18.39*	1.85	Socialist
		PSL	Partner	20.14*	1.5	Agrarian
Portugal	2006	PS	PM	28.05	0.36	Socialist
		PSD	Main Opposition	31.64	2.56	Socialist
		CDS-PP	Opposition	23.62	3.86	Christian Democrats
		BE	Opposition	18.8	3.24	Communist
		PCP-PEV	Opposition	26.88	3.54	Communist
	2008	PS	PM	28.56	0.13	Socialist
		PSD	Main Opposition	23.01	2.87	Socialist
		CDS-PP	Opposition	26.93	4.03	Christian Democrats

Spain	2010	BE	Opposition	14.45	3.13	Communist
		PCP-PEV	Opposition	28.24	3.63	Communist
		PS	PM	28.56	0.13	Socialist
		PSD	Main Opposition	23.01	2.87	Socialist
		CDS-PP	Opposition	26.93	4.03	Christian Democrats
	2012	BE	Opposition	14.45	3.13	Communist
		PCP-PEV	Opposition	28.24	3.63	Communist
		PS	Main Opposition	27.5	0.083	Socialist
		PSD	PM	42.87	3.25	Socialist
		CDS-PP	Partner	29.11	2.42	Christian Democrats
	2014	BE	Opposition	33	3.92	Communist
		PCP-PEV	Opposition	40	4.25	Communist
		PS	Main Opposition	26.39*	0.083	Socialist
		PSD	PM	26.14*	3.25	Socialist
		CDS-PP	Partner	24.39*	2.42	Christian Democrats
	2006	PSOE	PM	20.84	0.45	Socialist
		PP	Main Opposition	21.09	3.55	Conservative
		IU	Opposition	17.12	2.91	Communist
		CiU	Opposition	25.08	2.17	Ethnic/Regional
	2008	PSOE	PM	20.84	0.8	Socialist
		PP	Main Opposition	21.09	3.36	Conservative
		IU	Opposition	17.12	2.97	Communist
		CiU	Opposition	25.08	2.2	Ethnic/Regional
		PNV	Opposition	27.92	1.86	Ethnic/Regional
	2010	PSOE	PM	28.87	0.8	Socialist
		PP	Main Opposition	29.83	3.36	Conservative
		IU	Opposition	24.33	2.97	Communist
		CiU	Opposition	29.43	2.2	Ethnic/Regional
		PNV	Opposition	35.66	1.86	Ethnic/Regional
		UPyD	Opposition	22.22	0.33	Liberal
	2012	PSOE	Main Opposition	28.87	0.18	Socialist
		PP	PM	29.83	3.38	Conservative
		IU	Opposition	24.33	2.51	Communist
		CiU	Opposition	29.43	2.71	Ethnic/Regional
		PNV	Opposition	35.66	2.05	Ethnic/Regional
		UPyD	Opposition	22.22	1.71	Liberal
	2014	PSOE	Main Opposition	26.7	0.18	Socialist
		PP	PM	30.5	3.38	Conservative
		IU	Opposition	22.2	2.51	Communist
		CiU	Opposition	29.43	2.71	Ethnic/Regional
		PNV	Opposition	35.44	2.05	Ethnic/Regional
		UPyD	Opposition	22.22	1.71	Liberal

Sweden	2006	SAP	PM	21.63	2.18	Socialist
		M	Main Opposition	25.29	2.48	Conservative
		C	Opposition	25.8	1.81	Agrarian
		KD	Opposition	24.19	1.48	Christian Democrats
		Vp	Opposition	29.56	4.03	Communist
		MP	Opposition	21.38	2.07	Ecological
		FP	Opposition	24.19	2.03	Christian Democrats
	2008	SAP	Main Opposition	21.63	2.04	Socialist
		M	PM	25.29	2.03	Conservative
		C	Partner	25.8	1.82	Agrarian
		KD	Partner	24.19	1.6	Christian Democrats
		Vp	Opposition	29.56	4.25	Communist
		MP	Opposition	21.38	1.83	Ecological
		FP	Partner	24.19	2.1	Christian Democrats
	2010	SAP	Main Opposition	17.38	2.04	Socialist
		M	PM	26.69	2.03	Conservative
		C	Partner	26.48	1.82	Agrarian
		KD	Partner	16.29	1.6	Christian Democrats
		Vp	Opposition	7.87	4.25	Communist
		MP	Opposition	21.38	1.83	Ecological
		FP	Partner	16.92	2.1	Liberal
	2012	SAP	Main Opposition	17.38	1.64	Socialist
		M	PM	26.69	2.6	Conservative
		C	Partner	26.48	2.6	Agrarian
		KD	Partner	16.29	2.12	Christian Democrats
		Vp	Opposition	7.87	3.69	Communist
		MP	Opposition	21.38	1.55	Ecological
		FP	Partner	16.92	2.41	Liberal
	2014	SAP	Main Opposition	11.05	1.64	Socialist
		M	PM	15.65	2.6	Conservative
		C	Partner	22.63	2.6	Agrarian
		KD	Partner	9.51	2.12	Christian Democrats
		Vp	Opposition	10.28	3.69	Communist
		MP	Opposition	8.25	1.55	Ecological
		FP	Partner	8.72	2.41	Liberal
UK	2006	Lab	PM	12.83	0.37	Socialist
		Con	Main Opposition	12.21	2.19	Conservative
		LD	Opposition	16.35	0.48	Liberal
	2008	Lab	PM	21.18	0.85	Socialist
		Con	Main Opposition	17.46	2.8	Conservative
		LD	Opposition	21.48	0.8	Liberal
	2010	Lab	PM	21.18	0.85	Socialist
		Con	Main Opposition	17.46	2.8	Conservative
		LD	Opposition	21.48	0.8	Liberal

2012	Lab	Main Opposition	22.89	1	Socialist
	Con	PM	27.38	3	Conservative
	LD	Partner	17.42	0.28	Liberal
2014	Lab	Main Opposition	22.89	1	Socialist
	Con	PM	27.38	3	Conservative
	LD	Partner	17.42	0.28	Liberal
	SNP	Opposition	32.4	1.53	Ethnic/Regional
	GP	Opposition	13.3	2.86	Ecological

*These measures are prediction estimates based on the Chapel Hill survey.

Chapter 5

Empirical Analysis of a Contextual Theory of the Partisan Screen

5.1 Introduction

Recall that in Chapter 2, I showed an extensive map that revealed substantial variation in the strength and direction of the partisan screen in economic perceptions across different parties, countries, and over time. Empirically, I build this map of variation in the partisan screen by estimating the impact of party identification on individuals' views of the economy in a well-defined individual model in each of the hundreds of national election studies as shown in Appendix 2.1. This particular theory argues that partisans are often engaged in motivated reasoning through the mechanism of selective exposure to favorable information. With this individual theory at hand, I then interrogate it to identify several contextual variables in both Chapters 3 and 4 that are most likely to condition the strength of that screen for typical individuals across different parties and over time. Given that these variables were the direct implications out of my individual-level model, their causal effects on the strength of the partisan screen would be able to speak to the validity of selective exposure as the main mechanism in explaining the strength of the partisan screen.

In this final chapter, I present the empirical analyses that test all the hypotheses about the effects of the contextual variables that I have formulated in Chapters 3 and 4 on the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions. Specifically, I use the estimates

from my individual-level model as the dependent variable in a second stage analysis where the various contextual factors that I argue should condition the level of partisan bias in perceiving the economy enter the model as a set of predictors. Furthermore, I would also examine the possibility of the interactions between these variables that could affect the strength of the partisan screen. To recap, these contextual variables are the identifiability of partisan media, roles of parties, saliency of the economy to the parties, extremity of the party along an economic dimension, and party families (see Appendix 5.1 for descriptive statistics of these variables).

5.2 Variations in the Strength of the Partisan Screen in Economic Perceptions

Before specifying the models that examine the causal effects of these variables on the strength of the partisan screen, I first explore the grouping structure in my dependent variable (i.e. the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy) and determine where the sources of its variations come from. As discussed extensively in Chapter 2, this variable is a causal effect of partisanship on the economic perception and it is constructed by calculating the deviation of the random coefficient associated with each of the party categories from the average view of the economy of all the parties within a country at a given year. By doing so, all the unmeasured factors at the country-level that could potentially cause the strength of the partisan screen for all parties within the same country in all the years to increase or decrease are already accounted for.

When I estimate the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy for each party by calculating the deviations of their respective random coefficients from the

country's mean, all the differences in the average strength of the partisan screen across all the countries are eliminated. As a result, there are only two potential grouping structures left in the estimates. First, the likely source of variations in the strength of the partisan screen can be attributable to differences over years for all the parties in all the countries. Second, the variations can also be found in differences across all parties in all the countries at a given time. As a result, it is highly possible that there are year-effect and party-effect that drive the variations that I observe in the strengths of the partisan screen.

If there were a year effect in the grouping structure, then the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy for all parties in all countries would vary together from year to year. That means that there are factors that are associated with a particular year that would either enhanced or diminished the effect of partisanship in perceiving the economy regardless of partisan stripes or geographical contexts. For example, during the global financial crisis in 2008 and 2009, economy was much more salient in the minds of voters relative to other years. Thus, it is likely that the strengths of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy for all parties in all countries were greater during this period of time relative to other periods. On the other hand, a party effect refers to the factors that cause a party's screen in all countries to strengthen or weaken in all years. These are features that are particular to a specific party that can vary across parties within or across countries, but are usually consistent over time. For example, the CDU/CSU in Germany has a highly circulated media outlet that serves as its mouthpiece in the media environment throughout the years but the Green does not have such feature. As a result, identifiers of

CDU/CSU are much more likely to exhibit stronger partisan screens than those who identify with the Greens at any given point of time.

Based on the discussion above, one could argue that the variation in the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy can be accounted by both the factors that are associated with a particular year for all parties in all countries (i.e. year-effect) and the factors that are specific to a particular party in all countries at a specific point of time (party-effect). So, which of these two account for a greater variance in the strength of the partisan screen? One way to formally parse the variance explained by year and party is to draw on recent work on hierarchical modeling that specify a linear regression model with crossed random effects in which the grouping of years and parties enter the model as part of the error components. Equation (5.1) illustrates such model.

$$(5.1) \quad \text{partisanscreen}_{jt} = \alpha + u_t + u_j + \epsilon_{jt}$$

$$u_t \sim N(0, \sigma_t^2)$$

$$u_j \sim N(0, \sigma_j^2)$$

$$\epsilon_{jt} \sim N(0, \sigma_\epsilon^2)$$

In this model, u_t refers to all the grouped- unmeasured variables at the year-level that are different over year but constant across all parties in all countries, u_j refers to the grouped- unmeasured variables at the party-level that are different across parties in all countries but is consistent over time, and ϵ_{jt} is the residual error that captures all the unmeasured idiosyncrasies of all parties in all countries over all the years. Furthermore, all the three

error components specified above are distributed normally with a mean zero and the unknown variances of the distributions of the random effects (i.e., σ_t^2 , σ_j^2 , and σ_ϵ^2).

Why is this model useful for my goal of partitioning the variance explained among party-effect and year-effect? The reason is that in the crossed random effects model, the estimates of the variances that I obtain can be used to calculate the share of the variance in the outcome variable that is attributable to each random effect – and since any covariates are not included in the model and each random effect captures the two grouping structures that might account for the variance in the dependent variables, this effectively parses the variance in my outcome variable, which is the strength of the partisan screen, among those two groups. Specifically, Gray (2012) shows that the variance partition coefficient (VPC) for a given variable or a group that represents a set of unmeasured variables at a particular level, which in this set up can be defined as the percentage of the overall variance in the dependent variable that is explained by X – is equal, in the case of the equation (5.1), to:

$$(5.2) \quad \text{VPC}_{\text{year}} = \frac{\sigma_{\text{year}}^2}{\sigma_{\text{year}}^2 + \sigma_{\text{party}}^2 + \sigma_{\epsilon}^2} \quad \text{and}$$

$$\text{VPC}_{\text{party}} = \frac{\sigma_{\text{year}}^2}{\sigma_{\text{year}}^2 + \sigma_{\text{party}}^2 + \sigma_{\epsilon}^2}$$

Note that the VPC for any variable will always be less than one and the sum of the VPC's across all variables will account for all the variations in Y since the residuals are also included in the calculation. Based on the formula in equation (5.2), I calculate the VPC for both the party and year grouping and determine the proportion of the variance in the

strength of the partisan screen that is explained by the variation over time (measured by years) and the variation across parties in all countries over all time. Table 5.1 shows the estimate of α , σ_t^2 , σ_j^2 , and σ_ϵ^2 using the model specified in equation 5.1.

Table 5.1: Crossed Random Effect Model without Covariates

D.V.= Strength of the Partisan Screen	
α (constant)	0.29*** (0.02)
σ_t^2 (year-effect)	0.034*** (0.015)
σ_j^2 (party-effect)	0.14*** (0.015)
σ_ϵ^2 (residuals)	0.2*** (0.0078)
Standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.001	

Table 5.1 shows the estimate of a crossed random-effect model that contains the year, party, and party-year specific errors. Note that the constant α refers to the average strength of the partisan screen, which means that based on its construction, the mean differences between the strength of the partisan screen for each party from the average screen within their respective country-year is 0.29. Using the VPC formula above, I found that the year-effect accounts for 9.1% of the variation in the strength of the partisan screen while the party-effect accounts for 37.4% of the variation. This indicates that differences across parties have more explanatory powers than differences over years in explaining the variation in the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. Substantively, seeing that the distribution of all the error terms are normal with a mean zero, I could also

calculate the distribution of the strength of the partisan screen over years and across parties respectively. Since the constant for both the year and party random effect is the same, the estimated distributions of the strength of partisan screen for both the year and party random effect are centered at 0.29 with their respective error-specific terms as the variances.

Figure 5.1: Estimated Distribution of Party and Year Random Effects

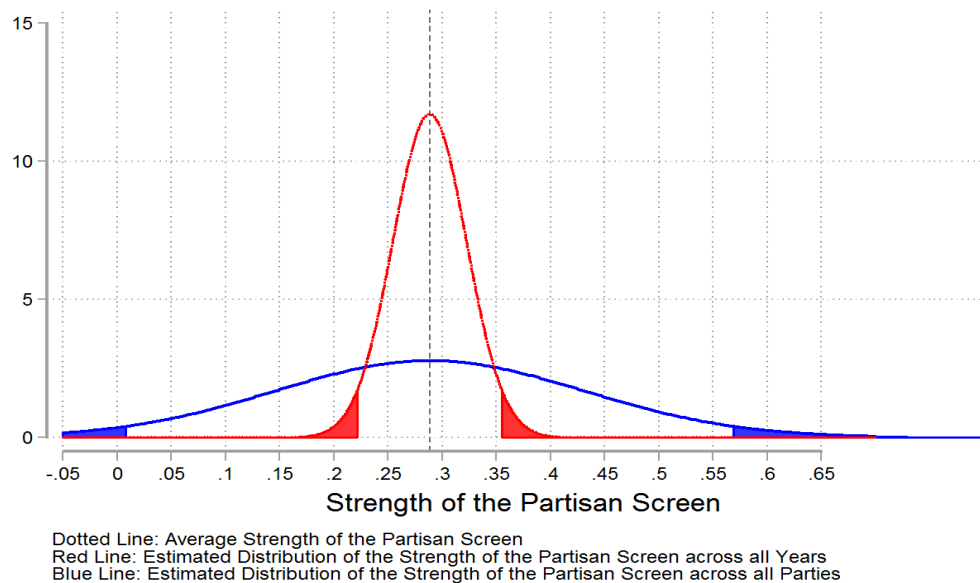


Figure 5.1 shows the estimated distribution of the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions across all parties and over all years. Based on these distributions, there is a 95% chance that the strength of the partisan screen over all years falls between 0.22 and 0.36 while there is a 95% probability that such screen in economic perceptions across different parties in all countries and all years falls between 0.016 and 0.56. Therefore, there is a much greater spread across party relative to the spread over time,

which again confirm the finding that variables at the party-level would be better predictors in explaining the variation in the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy.

5.3 Accounting for an Estimated Dependent Variable in a Regression Model

Since most of the variance is attributed to factors at the party-level, I include a set of party-level variables that are already identified in Chapters 3 and 4 into the second-stage model and test their respective causal effects on the dependent variable. However, the dependent variable at this stage is constructed as a causal effect of partisanship on economic perceptions that I estimate in the first stage analysis. Consequently, the variation in the sampling variance of the observations on the dependent variable (i.e. the difference between the true value of the dependent variable from its estimated value) is likely to induce heteroscedasticity, which compels researchers to account for the uncertainty around those estimates.

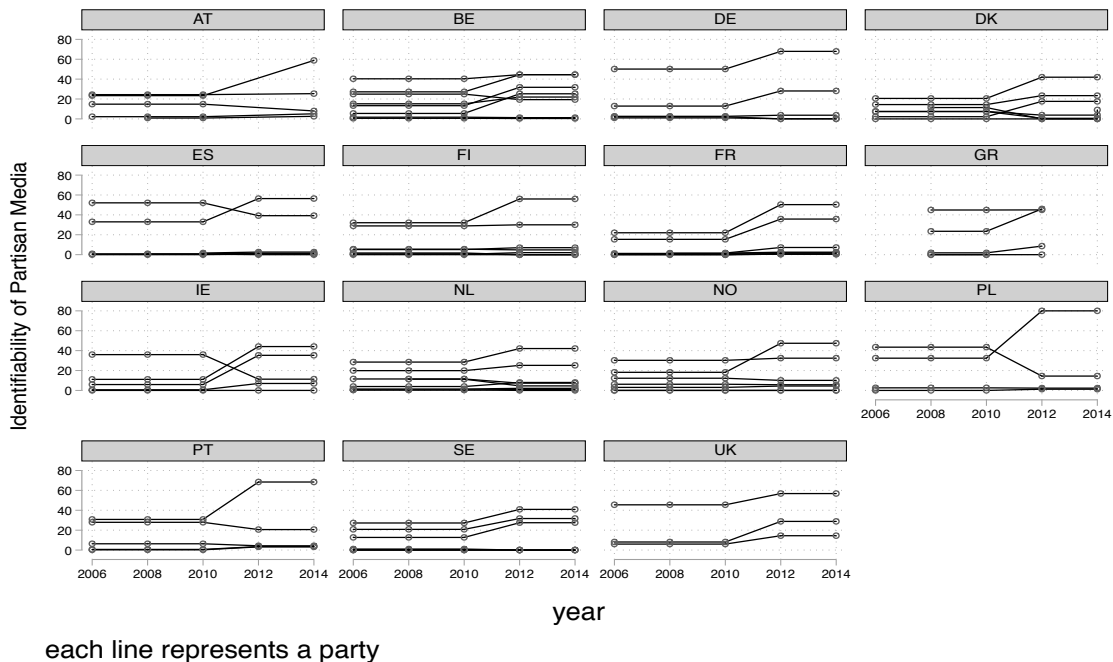
Traditionally, the common procedure is to use the inverse standard error of the estimates of the dependent variable or the weighted least square in the analysis (King 1997). But, according to Lewis and Linzer (2005), this approach can produce incorrect estimates of uncertainty because the error that is estimated at the second stage is treated as if it comes from estimation uncertainty when some of it is inherent in the stochastic process of the second-stage model (Duch and Stevenson 2005). Consequently, there will be inefficient estimates and underestimated standard errors (Lewis and Linzer 2005). What Lewis and Linzer suggested (and showed through a series Monte Carlo experiments) instead, is to use standard errors that are robust to unspecified forms of heteroscedasticity.

This approach is able to produce reliable estimates of the parameter uncertainty and as a result, I will adopt this suggestion in subsequent analyses.

5.4 Effect of Identifiability of Partisan Media on the Strength of the Partisan Screen

I begin the analysis on the impact of IPM, which is the main variable of interest, on the strength of the partisan screen by first examining its variations across parties and over time. Based on Figure 5.2, it is apparent that differences across parties rather than over years are driving the variations in IPM. This is similar to the variations that I found in the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy.

Figure 5.2: Variations of IPM across Parties and Over Time



Next, I conduct a simple bivariate regression analysis to estimate the causal effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions. In this analysis, since I am

interested in the strength and not the direction of partisan screen, I take the absolute value of the partisan screen that I estimated from the individual-level model as the dependent variable in this bivariate model.

Table 5.2: Bivariate Regression model of IPM and the Strength of Partisan Screen

	D.V= Absolute Strength of the Partisan Screen
IPM	0.00282** (0.000854)
Constant	0.248*** (0.0155)
N	436
R ²	0.036

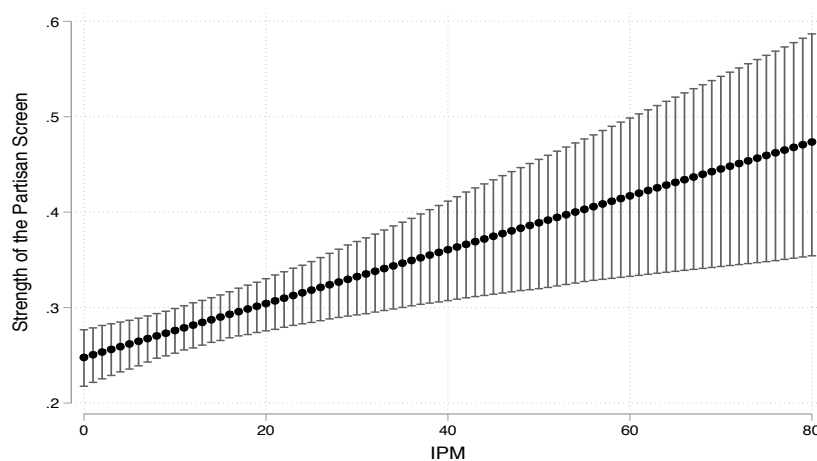
Robust std. errors in parentheses

** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 5.2 shows that the estimate of IPM is positive and statistically significant, which mean that the more identifiable a partisan media is, the stronger the partisan screen for the typical individuals identifying with that party. Although the coefficient for IPM is 0.0028 and it seems rather miniscule, that is just the increase in the strength of the partisan screen for every one-unit increase in IPM. Thus, to have a better depiction of this relationship, I plot the predicted values of the strength of the partisan screen across all levels of IPM in Figure 5.3. Since this is a normal-linear regression model, it is not surprising that there is a positive linear relationship between the IPM and the strength of the partisan screen. What this simple bivariate analysis indicates is that when partisans are able to identify a set of trusted sources that would consistently provide partisan messages in the

media environment, their strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy is likely to increase. This lends credence to the veracity of selective exposure to favorable information as a mechanism that explain the strength of the partisan screen at the individual-level since IPM is a direct contextual implication out of this theory.

Figure 5.3: Predicted Values of the Strength of the Partisan Screen by IPM



5.5 Controlling for Parties' Roles

In the subsequent sections, I start to build the model by including the covariates that I had identified from the previous chapter one at a time. The first covariate is to include the roles of the party into the model and test whether hypotheses H2a and H2b hold. When I add the roles of parties (i.e. PM, Partner, Main Opposition, and Minor Opposition) to the model specified in Table 5.2, there is one important caveat that I need to acknowledge. In the bivariate model above, notice that the dependent variable is the absolute strength of the partisan screen. However, the hypotheses on roles made it clear that the roles party

play, whether it is in or out of the government, will not only influence the absolute strength, but also the directional expectation of the partisan screen.

Furthermore, using the absolute value will also reduce or eliminate the true differences between a pair of parties that have different directions in their respective partisan screen. For example, a party that has a negative partisan screen of -1 would have a true difference of 3 units with a party that has a positive partisan screen of 2. However, this difference is reduced to only 1 unit when the direction of the screen is ignored (i.e. when only the absolute strength is used). Because of this problem, simply using the absolute strength of the partisan screen as the dependent variable will not suffice. As such, I ran three different models, each with different dependent variable: absolute strength of partisan screen, positive strength of partisan screen, and negative strength of partisan screen.²⁴ Note that the dependent variable in model (3) is the strength of the negative partisan screen, meaning that the coefficients in this model indicate the change in the strength of negative partisan screen for one unit increase in the independent variables.

Table 5.3: Strength of the Partisan Screen across Roles

	(1) Absolute Screen	(2) Positive Screen	(3) Negative Screen
IPM	0.00353** (0.00116)	0.00394** (0.00133)	0.00293 (0.00222)
Main Opposition	Base Category	-0.237*** (0.0395)	Base Category
Minor Opposition	0.144**	-0.0772 ⁺	0.138

²⁴ Positive partisan screen refers to more favorable view of the economy relative to the average view of the economy among all partisans and independents within a country in a particular year. Conversely, negative partisan screen refers to less favorable view of the economy relative to the average.

	(0.0489)	(0.0448)	(0.0914)
PM	0.145**	Base Category	-0.102
	(0.0437)		(0.0695)
Partner	0.0549	-0.0733 ⁺	-0.0527
	(0.0454)	(0.0431)	(0.0824)
Constant	0.131**	0.273***	0.201*
	(0.0483)	(0.0462)	(0.0917)
N	436	254	182
R ²	0.08	0.24	0.05

Robust SE in parentheses

+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

For all the three models shown in Table 5.3, I include the IPM variable and a set of dummy variables that capture the four different roles a party might hold. In model (1), where the dependent variable is the absolute strength of the partisan screen, I found that the IPM remains in the expected direction and statistically significant, meaning that after controlling for the various roles party might have in or out of the government, the identifiability of partisan media still has a positive effect on the absolute strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. With regards to the effect of roles, note that the coefficients are intercept shifts from the base category (i.e. the main opposition) and thus, the estimates reported in the table must be interpreted in relation to that base category.

Overall, the results show that parties holding the positions of prime minister, coalition partners, and minor oppositions all have a stronger partisan screen relative to the main opposition, with the Prime Minister's party having the largest strength. However, as mentioned above, using the absolute value of as the dependent variable does not take into account the true difference in the strength of the partisan screen for parties whose respective screens are in different directions. As a result, I construct two additional models,

one with positive partisan screen as the dependent variable, and the other with negative partisan screen as the dependent variable.

When the dependent variable is positive partisan screen (see Model 2 in Table 5.3), I found that the IPM remains a positive and statistically significant effect in predicting a positive partisan screen in perceiving the economy. Furthermore the dummy coefficient of the main opposition, minor opposition, and partners are all in negative direction with varying degree of statistical significance. This means that parties holding these three roles would have a weaker positive partisan screen in perceiving the economy relative to the party holding the prime minister. This is in line with hypothesis H2a in Chapter 4 where I argue that identifiers of the prime minister's party would have a stronger positive partisan screen than identifiers of the coalition partners.

The findings are less clear though for predicting the strength of negative partisan screen. First, from Model (3) in Table 5.3, I found that IPM is still in the predicted direction but loses its significance. Second, the coefficients on the dummy variables indicating different roles party have out of the government are not in the expected direction. Specifically, the strength of the negative partisan screen for minor opposition identifiers is stronger relative to those who identify with the main opposition. This is not in line with hypothesis H2b from the previous chapter where I argue that the main opposition identifiers should have a stronger negative partisan screen than the minor opposition because of the viability of their parties in providing an alternative government.

What could explain the unexpected finding in model (3)? Perhaps the way the main opposition is categorized and the inability of its partisans to appropriately identify their

party's role in a given context that might explain why minor opposition identifiers have a bigger negative screen than the main oppositions' identifiers. As discussed in the previous chapter, a party is classified as the main opposition if it is perceived as a viable alternative to the incumbent. Based on the theory of pattern of contention, when this party is currently not in government but is widely perceived as a competitor to the incumbent in providing an alternative government, then the identifiers of this party are much more likely to evaluate the current state of the economy based on their partisan identification than those who identify with the minor opposition parties that are not in viable contentions.

Nevertheless, to distinguish between the main opposition from those that are only the minor oppositions, it is presumed that voters are able to identify the appropriate "role" their respective parties have when they are out of government. In particular, identifiers of the main opposition are aware that their parties are in contention to provide alternative government and have the potential to shape future economic outcomes while those who identified with minor oppositions parties are presumed to recognize the fact that their parties are not viable competitors to replace the incumbent and are unlikely to assume future administrative responsibility. Thus, the question out of this assumption is as follow: what contextual factor that would allow voters to recognize the differences between these two roles?

5.5.1 Effective Number of PM as a Measure of the Pattern of Contention

One potential contextual feature that might answer this question is the competitiveness of the chief executive's position, measured by the number of viable

competitors for the position. In a context where the competition is fought by a large number of viable parties, voters living in that context are likely to have past experiences of having different parties occupying the prime minister's position. These voters are then likely to treat their parties (that are currently out of power, but have served as PM in the past) as viable contenders for future PM position given the opportunity of many parties in the past to assume such role.

On the other hand, those who are in an environment where the position of chief executive is not as competitive (i.e. only fought by a small number of parties) are less likely to have the experience of having their PM coming from a variety of parties. Consequently, they are less likely to be optimistic about the viability of their parties (who are out of government but have served as PM in the past) of competing and returning to the PM position relative to those who are in a system where there are more instances of PM coming from different parties.

This distinction has an important implication in determining the effect of the parties' roles as either the main opposition or just the minor oppositions on the strength of negative partisan screen. If a party is categorized as the main opposition and is situated in a context that has produced multiple PM from a large number of parties over recent years, then its identifiers are more likely to perceive their parties of having greater viability to form alternative government in the future than identifiers of the main opposition in a system that produces PM from relatively small number of parties. Subsequently, the effect of being the main opposition on producing negative partisan screen in perceiving the economy is larger in contexts where there are a large number of competitors for the PM position. In

fact, there is an interactive effect between the number of viable contenders for the chief executive and being the main opposition on the strength of negative partisan screen.

Similar interactions can also exist with regards to parties that are out of government but do not have the viability of providing alternative to the incumbent or have served as the PM in the past 30 years (i.e. minor oppositions). In a context where multiple viable alternatives to the PM exists, identifiers of the minor oppositions are less likely to be optimistic about their party's chance to compete with the incumbent than those who are situated in a system where there is less number of viable competitors to the PM. As a result, the effect of being a minor opposition with small viability of forming future government on developing negative partisan screen in perceiving the economy decreases as the number of viable contenders for the PM position increases. This is in contrast to the interactive effect that is affecting the main opposition where the larger the number of viable alternative to the PM, the bigger the effect of the role on the strength of negative partisan screen.

To operationalize the number of viable alternatives to the incumbent, I calculate the effective number of Prime Minister in each of the countries in my sample from 1983 to 2013. Although this measure does not capture all of the various aspects of competition to the position of PM, it provides a proxy to how "permissive" a political system is in producing competitive candidates for the position. This number is calculated based on the historical record of service in the PM role during the duration of each cabinet²⁵ from 1983 to 2013. For all the cabinets during this period, I calculate the percentage of the cabinet that each

²⁵ Changes in cabinet are defined when there are either: (1) changes in the set of parties holding cabinet membership, (2) changes in the PM, or (3) general elections.

party has served as its PM and normalize this number in order for the sum of the proportions of all the parties competing within a country in a given cabinet to be one. This percentage indicates the share of the PM-holders during the period that is held by each party in each country. I then utilize the well-known formula developed by Laakso and Taagapera (1979) to calculate the effective number of PM in each country by taking the reciprocal of the sum of the squared proportions of each party.

5.5.2 Interactions between the Effective Number of PM and Roles out of the Government

Since I have argued that the effects of being the main opposition or minor opposition on the strength of negative partisan screen are conditional on the number of viable alternatives to the incumbent, I include a variable measuring the effective number of PM and interacts it with the role. Table 5.4 shows the regression results for the two models that estimate both the effects of the main opposition and minor opposition parties on the strength of negative, conditional on the effective number of PM.

Table 5.4: Interactive Model of Effective Number of PM and Roles out of Government

	(1) Negative Partisan Screen	(2) Negative Partisan Screen
IPM	0.00444** (0.0016)	-0.000255 (0.00153)
Minor Opposition	0.758*** (0.194)	
Main Opposition		-0.804*** (0.166)
Effective Number of PM	0.238** (0.086)	-0.0192 (0.0318)

Minor Opposition*Effective Number of PM	-0.262** (0.0939)	
Main Opposition*Effective Number of PM		0.367*** (0.0822)
Constant	-0.372* (0.175)	0.363*** (0.0749)
N	182	182
R ²	0.11	0.1

Robust SE in parentheses

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

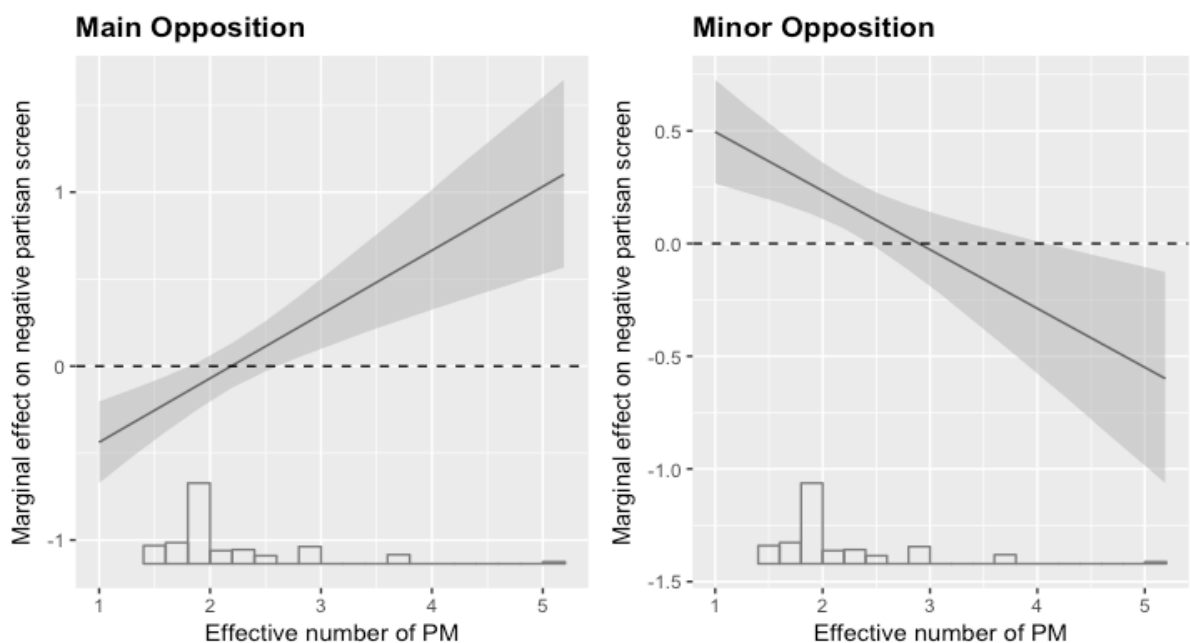
The results show that the sign of both the interactions term are in expected directions and statistically significant, indicating that effect dependencies exist in the relationships between the roles of main opposition and minor opposition on the strength of negative partisan screen in perceiving the economy. However, as Brambor et al. (2006) showed, the statistical significance and substantive magnitude of the interaction effects from a regression outputs cannot be interpreted directly. Thus, in order to facilitate the interpretation of the interaction coefficients, I plot the marginal effect of both the roles of being the main opposition and minor opposition on the strength of negative partisan screen in Figure 5.4 for the entire empirical range of the conditioning variable (i.e. effective number of PM) using the coefficients estimated in Model 1 and 2 in Table 5.4.

From the left-hand side of Figure 5.4, it is clear that as the effective number of PM increases, the marginal effect of a party being the main opposition on developing a strong negative partisan screen in economic perceptions among its identifiers increases. This is consistent with the expectation that as the number of viable contenders to the PM increases (measured using the effective number of PM in the last 30 years as a proxy), identifiers of the main opposition is more likely to presume that their party is a viable

contender and could potentially assume administrative roles in the future. As a result, partisan identification becomes an important component in driving these partisans' view of the economy.

On the other hand, the marginal effect of being the minor opposition on the strength of negative partisan screen decreases as the effective number of PM increases. Again, this is consistent with the expectation that parties perceived as the minor oppositions would find it difficult to prove themselves as viable alternatives to the incumbents in an environment where there are large competitors for the same position. Consequently, partisanship becomes less prominent in individuals' formation of economic perceptions.

Figure 5.4: Marginal Effect of Main Opposition and Minor Opposition on the Strength of Negative Partisan Screen as Effective Number of PM Increases

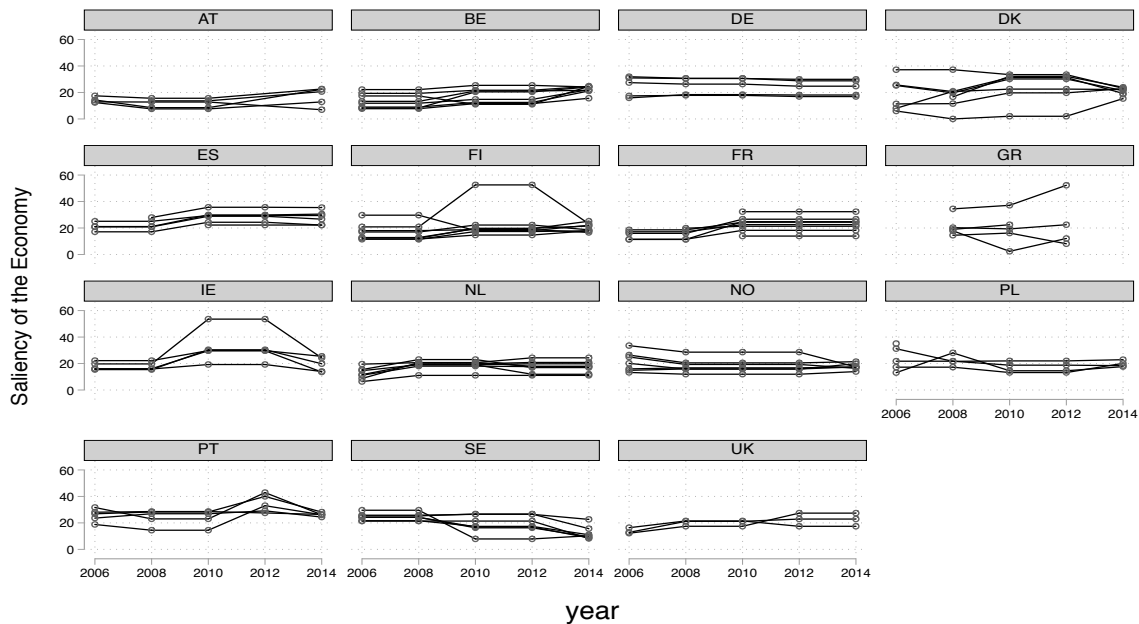


The inclusion of effective number of PM as a conditional variable to the relationship between the parties' roles out of the government on the strength of negative partisan screen can be an explanation to the contrary finding that I found in Model (3) from Table 5.3. Omitting this variable would fail to account for any effect dependencies by ignoring that both being a main opposition or minor opposition could have different effects on the strength of negative partisan screen depending on size of the effective number of PM.

5.6 Adding Saliency of the Economy into the Equation

In addition to the parties' roles, I include the level of saliency economy has to the parties as the second control variables in the model and at the same time, test the validity of hypothesis H3. Before exploring its relationship with the strength of the partisan screen, I first plot the variations in the level of saliency economy has for each parties in all the countries over all the years in my sample. In general, saliency of the economy varies considerably across parties within and across countries but not over time (except for a few cases in Finland, Ireland, and Greece). Similar to both the IPM and strength of the partisan screen, the source of differences in the saliency of the economy to parties are attributed mostly at party-level and are mainly not affected by any secular trends. Parties do not, for most cases, change their emphasis of the economy from year to year.

Figure 5.5: Variations of the Saliency of the Economy across Parties Over Years



Note: Each line represents a party

Table 5.5 reports the result of three linear models predicting the impact of how salient economy is to the party on the strength of partisan screen in perceiving the economy. In two out of the three models, the estimates are not statistically significant and their directions are not consistent with what hypothesis H3 suggested. Instead of strengthening the partisan screen, I found that as the economy becomes more salient to a party (based on its manifesto), its strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions becomes weaker. In fact, the negative effect becomes statistically significant when party's roles and IPM are included in the model (see Model 3). What are some explanations to this contradictory finding? Perhaps, given that relatively few voters actually read the manifesto, it is unlikely that the party's statements in the manifesto are the basis for partisans to form their perceptions of the economy. At the same time, the purpose of manifesto is also not strictly used as a document to directly inform voters about the party's issue positions or

preferences (Eder et al 2017). As a result, the level of saliency economy has to the voters might be different from how the party's elites view the importance of the economy.

Table 5.5: Effect of Saliency of the Economy on the Strength of the Partisan Screen

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Absolute Screen	Absolute Screen	Absolute Screen
Saliency of the Economy	-0.0013 (0.0014)	-0.0025 (0.0015)	-0.0031* (0.0015)
Main Opposition		-0.178*** (0.046)	-0.148*** (0.043)
Minor Opposition		-0.12*** (0.037)	-0.012 (0.044)
PM		Base Category	
Partner		-0.18*** (0.039)	-0.099* (0.041)
IPM			0.0037** (0.0011)
Constant	0.31*** (0.033)	0.46*** (0.05)	0.34*** (0.056)
N	436	436	436
R ²	0.002	0.06	0.09

Robust SE in parentheses

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

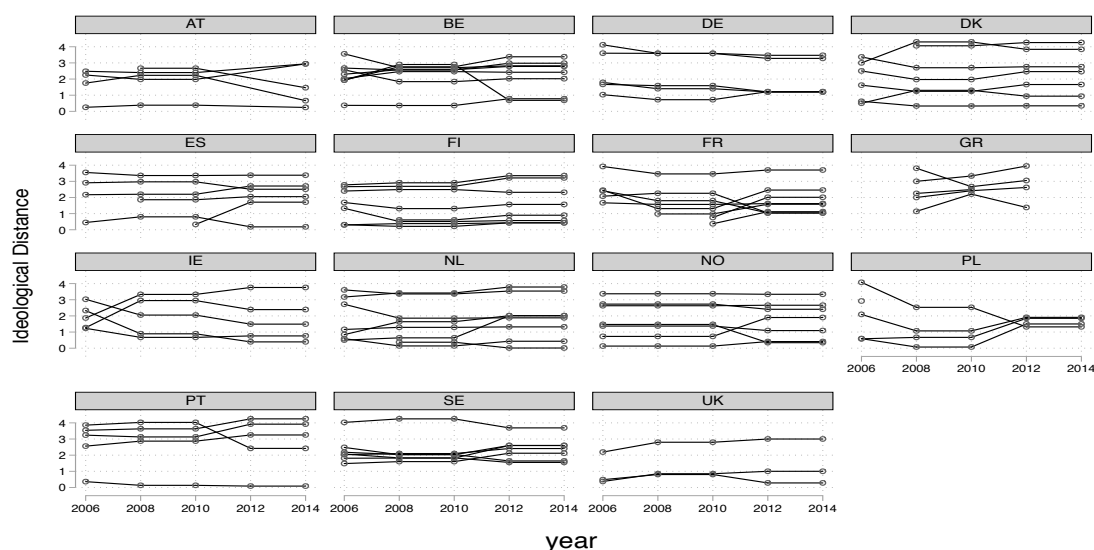
5.7 Ideology and the Strength of the Partisan Screen

Finally, the last set of covariates that could potentially affect both the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions and IPM is the economic ideology that a party has. Recall that in Chapter 4, I use two different measures that capture different elements of ideology: (1) the ideological distance on an economic dimension, and (2) party family

classification. Similar to all the variables that I have discussed in this chapter, I first plot the variations of these two variables for all parties in all countries over time.

Figure 5.6 shows that most of the variations in ideological distance on an economic dimension are found across parties rather than over time, meaning that in most cases, parties' position on the economy rarely changes over time. Again, this is similar to the variations in both the IPM and saliency of the economy. Note that ideological distance here measures the distance of a party's position on a general left-right economic dimension from the average position of all parties within a country at a given year. As such, the larger the distance a party has, the more "extreme" its position is in terms of the economy relative to the other parties in a given context.

Figure 5.6: Variations of Ideological Distance across Parties and Over Time

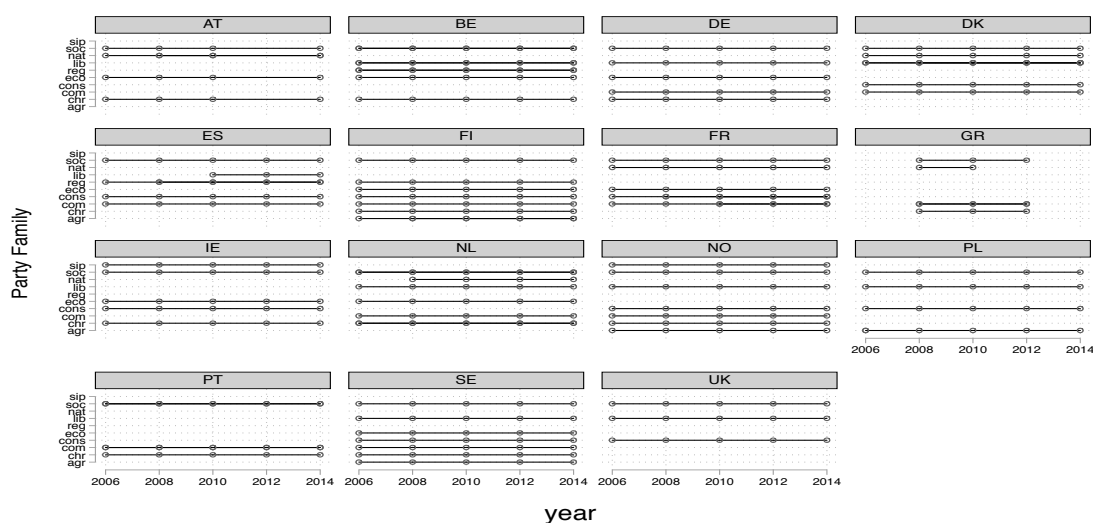


Note: Each line represents a party

With regards to party family, the only variations that I found are across parties (see Figure 5.7). None of the parties in my sample change their membership to a particular

classification of parties over time. This is not surprising given that the notion of party family is derived from the historical origin and sociological development of the parties and thus, it is highly unlikely that a party would ever change its identity.

Figure 5.7: Variations of Party Family across Parties and Over Time



Note: Each line represents a party

To test the hypotheses on the effect of ideology on the strength of the partisan screen, I ran two models shown in Table 5.6 that estimate the effects of ideological distance and party families where in one model, the IPM is excluded, and another that includes the IPM. In both of these models, I found that the coefficient for ideological distance is not in the expected direction as what hypothesis H4 predicts and is also statistically insignificant. Based on these results, it is clear that ideological distance on an economic dimension, based on the “extremity” of a party relative to the average economic position, is not a predictor of the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. In fact, the negative

coefficients, even though are not statistically significant, would suggest extremity to decrease, and not increase the strength of the partisan screen.

On the other hand, I found that party families do have some effects on the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions. Based on the estimates of the dummy categories of different party families from the two models shown in Table 5.6, both the Nationalist and “Special Issues” parties have stronger partisan screen relative to the Socialists. Furthermore I also found some variations in the strength of partisan screen across other party families when IPM is included in the model. In particular, when IPM is not included (i.e. model 1), the strength of the partisan screen for all the party families in my sample apart from the Nationalist and “Special Issues” are indistinguishable from one another. Yet, when IPM is included, the Christian Democrats, Communist, Ecological, and Liberal parties are all found to have stronger partisan screen relative to the rest of party families. This suggests that there might be some interactions between the party families and IPM in affecting the strength of the partisan screen. This possibility will be examined in subsequent sections.

Table 5.6: Effect of Ideologies on the Strength of the Partisan Screen

	(1)	(2)
	Absolute Screen	Absolute Screen
Ideological Distance	-0.0073 (0.013)	-0.02 (0.013)
Agrarian	-0.071 (0.044)	0.035 (0.049)
Christian Democrats	0.062 (0.037)	0.11*** (0.033)
Communist	0.0077	0.14***

	(0.044)	(0.053)
Conservative	0.067	0.071
	(0.047)	(0.046)
Ecological	-0.027	0.087*
	(0.033)	(0.04)
Ethnic / Regional	-0.051	0.063
	(0.04)	(0.046)
Liberal	0.06	0.098*
	(0.045)	(0.044)
Nationalist	0.36***	0.45***
	(0.084)	(0.084)
Socialist		
	Base Category	
Special Issues	0.27**	0.36***
	(0.086)	(0.085)
IPM		0.0046***
		(0.0011)
Constant	0.26***	0.16***
	(0.03)	(0.03)
N	436	436
R ²	0.15	0.2

Robust SE in parentheses

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

5.8 The Full Model

Since I have examined the effects of all the covariates on the strength of the partisan screen, I now include a full set of potential confounders in a single model and conduct several multivariate analyses to appropriately estimate the effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. Besides conducting a pooled regression model, I also ran a between and within group analyses to determine whether the directional relationship of the independent variables from the pooled model remain the same when the source of variations in the data is isolated to changes from year-to-year or to differences across all parties in all countries at a given time.

In a pooled model from Table 5.7, the effect of IPM is positive and statistically significant on the strength of the partisan screen. This means that even after controlling for all the possible confounders to the relationship, I still find strong causal relationship between a party's IPM and its strength of partisan screen in perceiving the economy. Given that IPM measures how easy for partisans to identify their set of "trusted" sources in the media, such a strong positive relationship indicates the veracity of the theory of selective exposure to favorable information as a mechanism to how individuals develop partisan screens in evaluating the economy. On the other hand, both the saliency of the economy to the party and party's ideological distance from the average position on an economic dimension are not significant predictors of the partisan screen while only certain roles and party families possess some effects on the strength of the partisan screen.

The pooled model also reveals the extent to which the unexplained variances in the strength of the partisan screen at both the party-level as well as at the year-level are remained after specifying a set of relevant predictors into the model (see Model 2). In general, the inclusion of these covariates cause all the unexplained variances that are attributable to differences across parties at a given year (σ_j^2), differences for all parties over years (σ_t^2), and differences across all parties over all years (σ_e^2) to decrease (see Table 5.1 for the unexplained variances before any covariates are introduced). Given that most of the covariates are factors that varies across parties but constant over years, it is unsurprising that the unexplained variance at the party-level (σ_j^2) has the biggest decreases of 32% (from 0.14 estimated in Table 5.1 to 0.09) while the unexplained variance that is attributable to

differences over years for all parties (σ_t^2) only decrease by 14.7% (from 0.034 estimated in Table 5.1 to 0.029).

Furthermore, since the observations in my data are at the party-year level, I can also examine whether the effect of IPM remains in the expected direction when differences across parties and over time are eliminated. To do so, I first ran a between-effect model to control for differences in the average strength of the partisan screen across all parties in different years. In this case, rather than including all the observations of the same party at different years, I collapse all the variables over years in order to have the average value of IPM, strength of the partisan screen, economic saliency etc. for each parties. In this instance, any variations that a party has over years are eliminated. When I ran a between effect model shown in Table 5.7, I found that the coefficient for IPM is still positive and significant at $p < 0.1$ level. This shows that IPM still has a positive impact on the strength of the partisan screen even after any differences that might occur within all the parties over time are accounted for.

Second, I conduct a within effect analysis to examine whether the effect of IPM is still in the expected direction when any differences across parties at a given time are eliminated. In this model, I am only interested in the variations of the variables within a party over years, which means that any effects the independent variables have are based solely on these variations. From Model (4) in Table 5.7, I found that although IPM loses its significance, its coefficient is still in the expected direction. Interestingly, the effect of ideological distance become significant in this model but its coefficient is not in the expected direction. What this reveals is that when a party becomes more extreme over

time, its identifiers is less likely to base their evaluations of the economy on their partisan identifications. Finally, since party's membership in an ideological family does not vary over time, the party family variables are not included in this model.

Table 5.7: Pooled, Between, and Within Party Effects on the Absolute Strength of the Partisan Screen

D.V= Absolute Strength of the Partisan Screen	(1) Pooled	(2) Pooled with Random Effect	(3) Between Effect	(4) Within Effect
IPM	0.0038** (0.0013)	0.0028* (0.0011)	0.0038 ⁺ (0.0022)	0.0017 (0.0015)
Main Opposition	-0.13*** (0.042)	-0.16*** (0.039)	0.027 (0.2)	-0.18*** (0.041)
Minor Opposition	-0.07 (0.044)	-0.098* (0.047)	0.02 (0.11)	-0.063 (0.071)
PM	Base Category			
Partner	-0.1* (0.042)	-0.098* (0.044)	-0.099 (0.091)	-0.015 (0.061)
Saliency of the Economy	-0.0018 (0.0016)	-0.0018 (0.0016)	-0.0013 (0.0026)	-0.0026 (0.0021)
Ideological Distance	-0.015 (0.013)	-0.022 (0.014)	-0.00165 (0.019)	-0.076*** (0.026)
Agrarian	0.025 (0.05)	0.0084 (0.07)	0.092 (0.086)	
Christian Democrats	0.095** (0.034)	0.085 (0.053)	0.12* (0.055)	
Communist	0.11* (0.052)	0.1 (0.064)	0.064 (0.074)	
Conservative	0.068 (0.045)	0.071 (0.052)	0.038 (0.07)	
Ecological	0.055 (0.039)	0.04 (0.063)	0.033 (0.054)	
Ethnic / Regional	0.043 (0.044)	0.038 (0.072)	0.056 (0.074)	
Liberal	0.086 ⁺ (0.044)	0.081 (0.053)	0.081 (0.06)	

Nationalist	0.42*** (0.086)	0.41*** (0.072)	0.38*** (0.1)	
Socialist				Base Category
Special Issues	0.35*** (0.086)	0.34*** (0.096)	0.28*** (0.069)	
Constant	0.29*** (0.065)	0.34*** (0.068)	0.2 (0.13)	-3.56*10 ⁻¹⁰ (0.0084)
σ_j^2 (party-random effect)		0.097*** (0.015)		
σ_t^2 (year-random effect)		0.029*** (0.014)		
σ_ϵ^2 (residuals)		0.19*** (0.008)		
N	436	436	100	436
R ²	0.23		0.39	0.1

Robust SE in parentheses for Model (1), (3), and (4) while SE in parentheses for Model (2)

⁺ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

5.8.1 Interactions between Roles and IPM

In the final two sections of this chapter, I investigate the possible interactive effects between IPM and other covariates on the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions. First, as revealed by the plots in Figure 3.9 and 3.10 from Chapter 3, the relationship between IPM and the strength of the partisan screen varies considerably between parties holding the Prime Minister's position and parties serving as coalition partners. This observation suggests that an interactive effect between IPM and parties' might exist in determining the strength of the partisan screen.

Table 5.8: Interactive Model between IPM and Roles on the Strength of the Partisan Screen

	D.V= Absolute Screen
IPM	0.0067*** (0.0019)
Main Opposition	0.042 (0.11)
Minor Opposition	0.06 (0.066)
PM	Base Category
Partner	0.015 (0.067)
Saliency of the Economy	-0.002 (0.0016)
Ideological Distance	-0.017 (0.013)
Party Family Dummies	Included
Main Opposition*IPM	-0.0057 ⁺ (0.0034)
Minor Opposition*IPM	-0.0072** (0.0026)
PM*IPM	Base Category
Partner*IPM	-0.0039 (0.0026)
Constant	0.2* (0.077)
N	436
R ²	0.24

Robust SE in parentheses

⁺ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table 5.8 reports the result of a model that predicts the strength of the partisan screen using an interaction between IPM and the roles parties' play. Overall, all the interactive coefficients between roles and IPM are negative relative to the coefficient indicating the interaction between PM and IPM as the reference. This suggests that the

effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen is biggest for the PM relative to other roles. To further illustrate this effect graphically, I plot the substantive effect of IPM across all values of IPM in my data, on the strength of the partisan screen for both the PM and coalition partners.

Figure 5.8: Substantive Effects of IPM on the Strength of the Partisan Screen by Roles

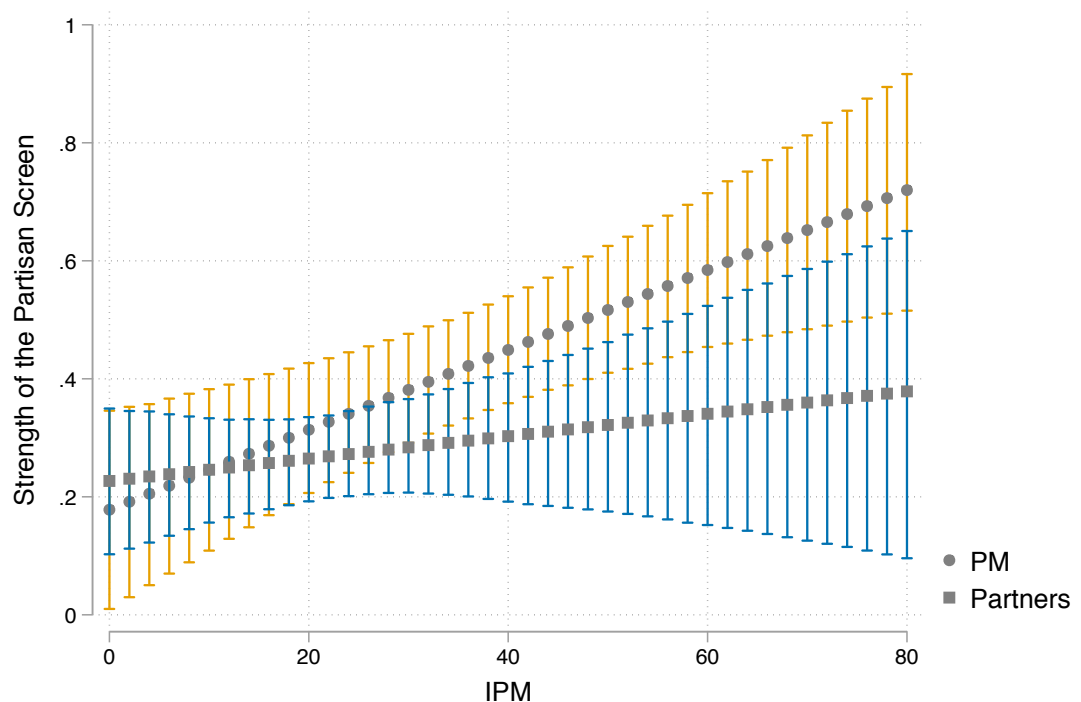


Figure 5.8 shows that in general, IPM has a positive impact on the strength of the partisan screen for both parties holding the PM position as well as the parties serving as coalition partners. However, the effect of IPM is much more pronounced for the PM relative to the partners. Specifically, when IPM is less than 20, the strength of the partisan screen for these two roles are relatively indistinguishable. But, as the value of IPM increases, the strength of the partisan screen for PM's parties becomes much stronger than the screen for

parties serving as the coalition partners. What this means is that identifiers of the Prime Minister's parties are going to exhibit stronger partisan screen than identifiers of the coalition partners as the ability to identify "trusted" sources in the media becomes easier.

5.8.2 Interactions between Party Families and IPM

Besides parties' roles in the government, their membership in an ideological family could also interact with IPM in affecting the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions. This speculation arises in Table 5.6 when an inclusion of IPM creates statistical difference in the strength of the partisan screen between the Socialist and the Christian Democrats. Based on this finding, I construct a model to test whether the effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen varies between these two parties.

This analysis would have an important implication on how partisans of different ideological families develop their partisan screen in perceiving the economy. If there is an interactive effect between party families and IPM (i.e. the effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen is stronger for one particular ideological family compared to the other families), then it is likely that considerable variation exists in the way selective exposure acts as the main mechanism in developing partisan screen across different ideological families. Thus, to investigate this possibility, I model the strength of the partisan screen that includes all the covariates that I have identified as potential confounders and also all the variables that capture the interactions between the ten different categories of party families and IPM. In this section, I focus exclusively on the differences between the Socialist and the Christian Democrats.

Table 5.9: Interactions of Party Families and IPM on the Strength of the Partisan Screen²⁶

	D.V= Absolute Screen
IPM	0.0028 (0.0019)
Christian Democrats	0.032 (0.05)
Socialist	Base Category
Saliency of the Economy	-0.0022 (0.0016)
Ideological Distance	-0.016 (0.013)
Roles ¹ Dummies	Included
Christian Democrats*IPM	0.0036 ⁺ (0.002)
Socialist*IPM	Base Category
Constant	0.32*** (0.073)
N	436
R ²	0.24

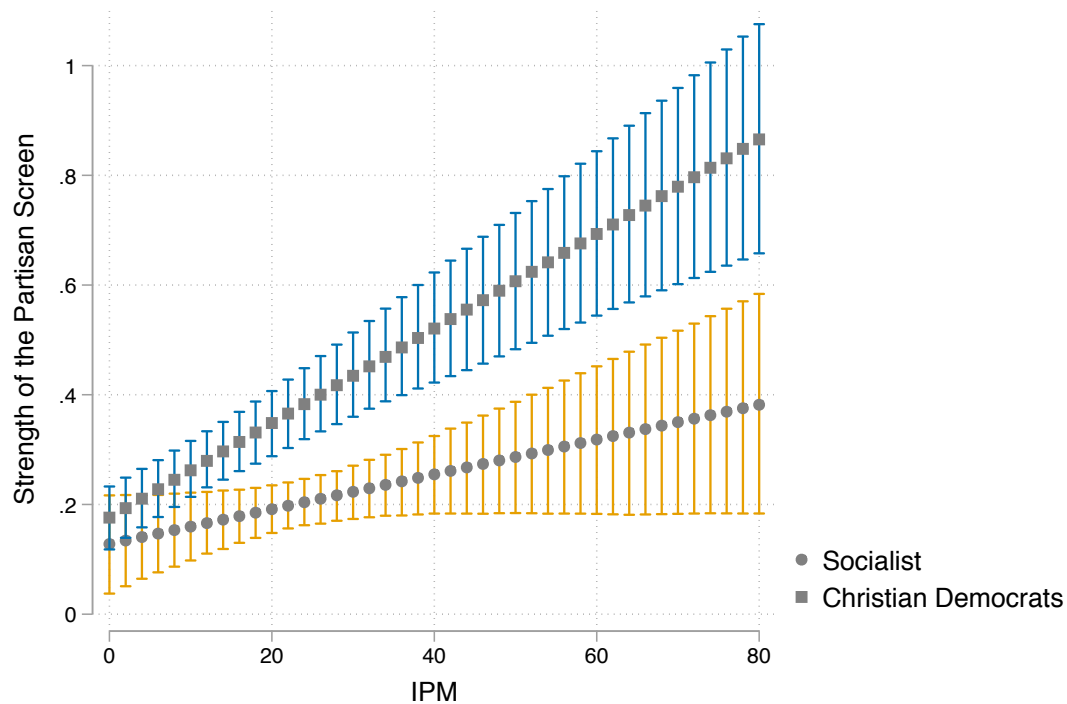
Robust SE in parentheses

⁺ p<0.1, *** p<0.001

The results shown in Table 5.9 suggest that there might be an interactive effect between party families (i.e. Socialist and Christian Democrats) and IPM on the strength of the partisan screen. Although the coefficient for IPM and the two party families are not significant, the interaction between the Christian Democrats and IPM is more statistically more positive than the interaction between the Socialist and IPM at p<0.1 levels. This means that the effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen is greater for the Christian Democrats relative to the Socialists.

²⁶ I include all the party families in the model but only the results for Socialist and Christian Democrats are displayed.

Figure 5.9: Effect of IPM on the Strength of the Partisan Screen by Party Families



Similar to Figure 5.8, I plot the substantive effect of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen in economic perceptions across the range of IPM in my sample for both the Socialist and the Christian Democrats in Figure 5.9. On average, the IPM has a positive effect on the strength of the partisan screen for these two party families but the effect is much larger for the Christian Democrats relative to the Socialist. As IPM becomes larger, the difference in the strength of the partisan screen between the Socialist and Christian Democrats becomes bigger with the Christian Democrats experience far larger marginal increase than the Socialist. This result reveals an interesting pattern in the way partisans in different party families engage in the selective exposure to favorable information. In particular, Christian Democrats are likely going to exhibit stronger partisan screen when they have greater opportunity to be exposed to favorable information in the media relative

to the Socialists. A presence of highly identifiable Socialists' media outlets would not be able to generate the same strength of the partisan screen among its viewers relative to the equally identifiable Christian Democrats' media outlets.

5.9 Summary

To conclude this chapter and the dissertation, I provide a recap of what this empirical chapter means in relation to the general understanding of the partisan screen. In the beginning of this dissertation I stipulated that the partisan screen in perceiving the economy at the individual-level is developed through individuals' tendency to engaged in motivated reasoning by selectively exposed themselves to favorable information. Using extensive data from 16 countries over 20 year period, I found that there are indeed significant variations in the strength and direction of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy across different parties, countries, and over time. Subsequently, I use that individual level theory to derive several contextual factors that could explain the variations that I discover. This chapter provides a thorough empirical analysis on those variables that are predicted to condition the level of partisan bias across parties and over time and the results make a relatively strong empirical case for the veracity of selective exposure to information as a key mechanism in developing the partisan screen.

First, the IPM, which is a concept that measures directly the ease of individuals to engage in selective exposure, is a significant predictor of the strength of the partisan screen across different model specifications. In particular, after including all the covariates that might confound the relationship, the IPM still has a positive and significant impact on the

strength of the partisan screen in perceiving the economy. Second, even after I account for all the unmeasured factors that might change over time or even the factors that differ across parties using both the between and within effect estimators, the impact of IPM on the strength of the partisan screen is still in the expected direction .

There are also several interesting findings about the relationship between other contextual variables on the strength of the partisan screen that are discussed in this chapter. For example, the parties holding the PM position are likely to exhibit stronger partisan screen than the parties serving as the coalition partners. Furthermore, the roles parties have in the government also have an interactive effect with the IPM on the strength of the partisan screen as the effect of IPM is stronger for the PM relative to the partners. This finding is not surprising given the obvious fact that the PM is more responsible for the economic outcome than the partners. On the other hand, things are not as straightforward when measuring the differences in the strength of the partisan screen between the leading oppositions and minor oppositions. This is because for voters to identify which party is a leading opposition or not, they need to identify which set of parties are in contention with the incumbent and which ones are not. Therefore, I include the effective number of PM over the last 30 years as a context-level variable to capture the ease to which voters are able to identify the set of parties that are in viable contentions for future PM positions. Only after this variable is included that I found that parties regarded as the leading opposition do have a stronger negative partisan screen in economic perceptions than parties that are not regarded as viable competitors for future PM position.

Besides party's role in and out of the government, I also found that both the level of how important economy is to the parties and parties' ideological positions on an economic dimension is not significant predictors of the strength of the partisan screen. On the other hand, different party families do exhibit differences in the strength of the partisan screen. In particular, parties that belong to the Nationalist and "Special Issues" category have a stronger partisan screen in perceiving the economy relative to parties in other categories. Party families also have interactive effects with IPM on the strength of the partisan screen with the IPM having a stronger effect for the Christian Democrats relative to the Socialists.

5.10 Conclusion

This dissertation is driven by a motivation to study partisan screen cross-nationally since it has proved to be an area of consensus among scholars who disagree on the conceptualization and applicability of the concept of partisan identification in comparative contexts. While the literature has documented a simple descriptive fact that partisans' views of "facts" often differ in ways that reflect partisan biases (e.g., supporters of incumbents usually see a better economy than supporters of the opposition), most of the existing explanations have focused on individual-level factors rather than contextual differences as potential explanation behind this finding. For example, scholars such as Taber and Lodge (2006) and Taber et al (2009) have argued that political sophistication and strength of prior attitudes are key components in determining the strength of the partisan screen. While a considerable amount of work has been done in explaining why the strength of the partisan screen varies across individuals, little attention has been given to explain

variation at the contextual level. Therefore, this dissertation seeks to fill this gap by providing several contextual theories that would account for the variation in the strength of the partisan screen, with respect to perceiving the economy, across different parties, countries, and over time. In particular, I explain why there are some contexts that seem to produce very high levels of partisan bias in perception of ostensibly objective facts, while there are others that produce very little.

5.10.1 Contributions of the Dissertation

This dissertation begins by vastly expanding the evidentiary basis of my observation that partisan bias in perceiving the economy varies by context. I do this by building a map of typical levels of partisan bias using more than 130 election surveys covering more than 100 parties in 18 countries over the last 20 years. Next, I draw on psychological theories of motivated reasoning to develop an individual-level theory of partisan bias in economic perceptions and to explain the mechanism that produce the “partisan screen” at the individual level. With this individual theory in hand, I then interrogate it to identify the contextual variables most likely to condition the strength of that screen for typical individuals in different political and economic contexts. This is a similar approach to what Duch and Stevenson (2008) used when studying economic voting comparatively. In particular, they build an individual level model of a behavioral phenomenon of interest and using it to identify the contexts that could condition that behavior (i.e. economic voting).

After estimating the average strength of the partisan screen (as applied to views of the economy) using mass surveys, I use those estimates as the dependent variable in a

second stage analysis that attempts to identify the contextual factors that seem to enhance or depress the strength of the partisan screen. Since these contextual variables are derived directly from my individual-level theory, the empirical results about the impact of these variables on the strength of the partisan screen would speak directly to the veracity of the underlying mechanism that explains the development of the partisan screen among individuals. In other words, since IPM is derived directly out of my individual-level model, its strong and positive relationship with the strength of the partisan screen enable me to deduce that the selective exposure to favorable information is indeed a key mechanism for partisans to develop a partisan screen in evaluating the state of the economy.

5.10.2 Future Works

In the final section of my dissertation, I ask what could be improved in extending the approach to studying partisan bias cross nationally that I have developed here. First, my dissertation proposes a theory in which differences in the strength of the partisan screen in evaluating the state of the economy across parties, countries, and over time is a function of differences in corresponding political and economic institutions. This assertion relies on the assumption that the causal ordering is that partisanship impacts economic perceptions but not the other way around. Although I have addressed this issue in Chapter 1 by utilizing structural equation model in solving the endogeneity problem using a panel data from the 1997-2001 British Election Panel Study, I plan to conduct similar analyses using a much more extensive panel data that spans over a longer time period across different contexts.

Second, I propose that selective exposure to favorable information, not selective interpretation is the key mechanism in which individuals develop a partisan screen in evaluating the economy because it is less cognitive demanding. Although the impacts of my contextual variables speak directly to the veracity of this proposal, I hope to defend this assumption with a thorough empirical exploration of the question in the future works. Specifically, I intend to design a set of experiments in which subjects are given information about the future trajectory of the economy from different sources (e.g. party leaders versus central bank or some outside and possibly a partisan source) or are given contradictory messages from different sources so that I can examine how they respond differently to these different kinds of treatments.

Finally, I plan to conduct automated text analyses to determine both the tone and the distribution of economic messages of media sources across countries. In this dissertation, I argue that the strength of the partisan screen is in part determined by the availability of easily identifiable, consistently partisan sources of information. Without such sources, voters cannot easily differentiate partisan sources and find it difficult to selectively expose themselves to different economic messages. To get a better measure of variance in the availability of partisan sources, I intend to conduct a large-scale text analysis of media messages in a number of different countries. I will use this analysis to build measures of how differentiated partisan messages are across media sources in different contexts.

Appendix 5.1: Descriptive Statistics of the Contextual Variables

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Min	Max
Strength of the Partisan Screen	436	0.025	0.38	-1.35	1.3
IPM	436	14	17	0	80
Role	436	2.47	0.97	1	4
Saliency of the economy	436	20.6	7.7	0	53.5
Ideological Distance	436	2	1.1	0.01	4.3
Party Family	436	5.4	2.7	1	10

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