The RiLe Index of Party Ideology - A Reductio
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The RiLe Index based on the data from the Manifesto Project is one of the most widespread measures of parties' political or ideological positions. Despite being subject to criticism from various authors, it does not seem to have lost in popularity or reputation. Even in 2020 a paper can get published in the *American Political Science Review* that rests its main argument on this index. There may be a variety of reasons for the continued popularity of this index: (1) that it gives the "right" results, (2) that its construction is conveniently simple and easy to understand, (3) alternatives often involve complicated substantial and methodological considerations that seem intransparent to most applied researchers, and (4) criticisms usually are buried in appendices of methodological papers that propose alternatives.

The paper addresses this situation as it highlights the (implicit) assumptions that justify the construction of the RiLe index and demonstrates some paradoxical implications of these assumptions: The better the fit between these assumptions and reality, the more the RiLe index both exaggerates and occludes the actual movements of political parties. The consequences of these distortions are illustrated by a re-analysis of recent publications. While the MarPor data are an invaluable and irreplaceable source of information about parties' political positions, the RILE index is clearly not best way to make use of them.

1 Introduction

Political positions of parties play a central role in many areas of research in comparative politics. In contemporary research on the formation and duration of coalition governments,

political positions of potential coalition member parties play a vital role (e.g. Laver and Hunt 1992). Also, the full potential of spatial models of voting can be realised only if measures of candidates' and parties' political positions are used that are independent of the voters' perceptions. Without such independent measures, spatial analyses of voting may fall victim to projection effects in voters' assessment of the positions of candidates and parties (Brody and Page 1972; Wilson and Gronke 2000; Merrill et al. 2001).

For the purpose of an independent reconstruction of parties' political positions various methods have been discussed in recent years. The reconstruction of political positions from political texts usually starts with the identification of semantic or grammatical units, such as words (Laver and Garry 2000; Laver et al. 2003; Slapin and Proksch 2008), sentences or "quasi-sentences" (Budge et al. 1987, 2001; Volkens et al. 2010), and proceeds with classifying these units into politically relevant categories and concludes with counting the occurrence of these political categories. Word count approaches have gained some popularity during the last couple of years, owing to the recent availability of easy-to-use software for automatically generating such word counts. While some argue that word-count based reconstruction of political positions are at least competitive to sentence-classification based reconstructions (Laver and Garry 2000; Laver et al. 2003), the word-count approaches have not yet gained the same acceptance in the political science community as sentence-based approaches. One reason may be the wide availability of the data produced by the *Manifesto Project*, which are based on the categorisation of quasi-sentences.

The contribution of the Manifesto Project (Budge et al. 1987, 2001; Volkens et al. 2010, 2013) to the reconstruction of political positions from political texts, in particular party manifestos – documents published by or on behalf of parties on occasion of elections – can hardly be overstated. Nevertheless, the Manifesto Project data have not yet been brought to their full potential. They are most widely used in the condensed form of the RiLe index, which summarises the many political topics uncovered, recorded, and coded by the Manifesto Project and its precursors. This condensation of the rich Manifesto Project data is motivated by the notion of an all-encompassing ideological left-right dimension, but there is more to find in manifestos and more to find in Manifesto Project data than that.

The RiLe Index has been criticised by various authors (Lowe et al. 2011; Elff 2013: e.g.) but is still in wide use. A list of literature that employs this measure is likely to fill several pages, recent examples are Abou-Chadi and Stoetzer (2020), Spoon and Klüver (2019), or Böhmelt et al. (2016). A similar index is also used to construct a domain-specific scale based the European Manifesto Project, e.g used in Adams et al. (2014). Given the attractive simplicity of its construction and its widespread use it is of great importance to ask whether this or similar measures are prone to be biased. This is the question that the paper addresses.

The paper starts with a brief discussion of the theoretical background of manifesto research. It then describes the construction of the RiLe Index. A fourth section examines the performance of a RiLe-type index of left-right positions under the core assumption on which mani-

festo research is based: that parties express or represent their political positions by selectively emphasising political topics. A conclusion summarises the findings and spells out their implications.

2 Theory: Rhetoric, position and selective emphasis

When politicians make public speeches they usually claim what good they have done for country and people or what good they plan to do, whether this means increasing prosperity, defending public security or upholding morality. Also, it has often been claimed that many voters do not so much care about where parties or candidate stand on issues, but rather how parties or candidates have performed in office. These observations or assumptions have given rise to the concept of *valence issues* (Stokes 1963) and to the "valency and saliency" theory of party competition (Robertson 1976; Budge and Farlie 1983a). This theory also is said to have guided the coding of electoral platform by the Manifesto Research Group and the Comparative Manifestos Projects. The view that this theory purports has been concisely summarised by Ian Budge (in Budge et al. 2001: 82):

1. *Party strategists see electors as overwhelmingly favouring one course of action on most issues. Hence all party programmes endorse the same position, with only minor exceptions.*

2. *Party strategists also think that electors see one party as more likely that the others to carry through the favoured course of action.*

3. *Hence each party has a set of issues that 'belong' to it, in the sense that the centrality of these issues in an election will increase its vote.*

4. *A party therefore emphasises its 'own' issues in its election programme, in an attempt to increase the salience of these for voters. It emphasises 'rival' issues less or not at all.*

5. *Policy differences between parties thus consist of contrasting emphases placed on different policy areas.*

This view also seems to have been corroborated by the fact that the electoral platforms coded by the Manifesto Research Group (MRG) and the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) mostly contain positive references to policy goals and hardly ever negative references. Prima facie, assumptions such as these are necessary to justify the relatively low proportion of coding categories employed by the MRG/CMP that explicitly oppose a specific objective or state of affairs. Also, in Budge's view the "valency and saliency theory" is well corroborated both by results of analyses of the manifesto data and by results of other scholars (Budge et al. 2001: 82–83). However, some critical reflections may lead to the conclusion that, on the one hand, these assumptions *contradict* rather than justify the use of MRG/CMP data to

determine parties' genuine political or ideological positions — quite in contrast to the common use of these data to assign left-right positions to political parties. On the other hand, these assumptions are neither completely plausible nor are they necessary to justify the use of the MRG/CMP coding procedures for manifesto texts.

The first assumption explicitly states that all party platforms endorse the same position while the other assumptions state that differences between platforms of different parties come about by different nuances of this common position. Further, these nuances are mainly instrumental, so as to gain the most votes by emphasising one's own strengths by virtue of "issue ownership." If these assumptions were true, then electoral platforms and party programmes might be used to explain and predict election results (Budge and Farlie 1983b), but using them to reconstruct genuine political/ideological positions of various political parties would be a hopeless endeavour, as there would not be any differences in the positions to begin with.

Unless one stretches the meaning of the concept of valence issue to a degree that its delimitation to the concept of position issue vanishes, one can hardly state that the most issues are valence issues without being challenged by numerous and prominent counterexamples. For example, both supporters and opponents of legalised abortion may frame their arguments as the positive affirmation of certain values, culminating in the phrases "pro-life" and "pro-choice", but rhetoric devices aside, the contrasting positions on issues like this are more than just different emphases of different items from the same bundle of consensual values. Even if one grants that most parties, extremist parties aside, mention subsets of the same set of basic values in their manifestos, this does not mean that they all endorse essentially the same position. That explicitly confrontational statements are avoided by parties does not rule out that different ideological positions are expressed in manifestos by differences in the emphasis of these values.

That political or ideological positions are reflected in the selective emphasis of certain policy objectives and policy principles does not mean that *all* of those objectives are positional in nature. Whether such valence objectives can be used in the construction of scales of political positions is an open question. If such valence objectives can be "owned" in the sense of issue-ownership and if issue-ownership derives from past successes in government, there is little reason to expect that the emphasis of these objectives has any systematic relation with the political/ideological position of parties. E.g after the Great Depression the US Democrats could perhaps claim "ownership" of the "valence issue" economic growth, while in Germany it is often believed that the CDU/CSU has a claim to ownership of this issue. Yet one can even doubt whether the ownership of a "valence issue" by another party will lead a party to avoid it. E.g. if the British Conservative might claim ownership of the economic growth issue, Labour might not really afford to ignore it in its manifestos but may as well try to make up for the lack of ownership by emphasising that they care for economic growth as least as much as the Conservatives. On the other hand, if the valence objectives are truly consensual, than they

should be emphasised more or less by all parties independent from their position. What then could drive variation in their emphasis might be the urgency of social, economic or political problems connected to this goal. In other words, the emphasis of valence objective would indeed reflect the *salience* of the policy area which they belong to: Economic growth then is likely to be emphasised in times of recession (Laver 2001).

3 The construction of the RiLe Index

The construction of the RiLe Index builds on the data set created by the Manifesto Project and its predecessors. The creation of this data set from the party manifestos collected the project rests, on (1) segmenting of each manifesto text into "quasi-sentences", (2) sorting each quasi-sentence into one of more than 50 categories that are interpreted as referring to *Nationalisation* (per413), *Incentives* (per402), or *Freedom and Human Rights* (per201), etc, (3) counting the number of quasi-sentences for each category and each manifesto, and (4) computing from these counts the percentages of the manifesto texts that fall in each category.

To create the RiLe Index from these percentages, each of the categories is grouped into the set of "leftist" political topics or objectives, into a the set of "rightist" political topics or objectives, or remains ungrouped. For example the categories *Free Enterprise*, *Law and Order*, but also *Freedom, Human Rights* are sorted into the set of "right emphases", while for example *Nationalisation*, and *Decolonisation*, but also *Democracy* and *Peace* are sorted into the set of "left emphases". Topics such as *Productivity* or *Culture*, but also *Keynesian Demand Management*, *Social Justice* or even *Marxist analysis* are included into neither of both sets. For each manifesto, the total sums of percentages of "right emphases" and of "left emphases", respectively, are computed and, finally the difference between these sums is used as the RiLe Index value for each manifesto (Budge and Klingemann 2001: 22). By construction, the RiLe Index ranges from −100, if all quasi-sentences in a manifesto are "leftist" emphases, to 100, if all quasi-sentences are "rightist emphases".

The RiLe Index does not give different weights to the various topic categories as none of the percentages are weighted when the "leftist" and "rightist" sums are formed. Arguably the index treats the "leftist" and "rightist" topic categories as if they were each a single "meta-category". It is also arguable that the RiLe Index does not make distinctions between topic categories as to the *degree* to which they are to be considered "leftist" or "rightist", that is, they are all as "radical" or "moderate" as the other topic in the same set. Also the construction suggests that that all political topics discriminate to the same degree between different, "left" and "right" ideological positions in so far as their emphasis vary to the same degree with party's positions – that all topics have the same "elasticity" with respect to the positions.

Another aspect of the construction of the RiLe Index is that it does not distinguish between the direction of the political topics – their "leftist" or "rightist" nature – and the salience of broader policy areas such as economics, culture and society, or foreign and international

relations. (Laver 2001) suggests what could be called a "saliency corrected" RiLe Index (see also Laver and Garry 2000): If the construction of the RiLe Index is expressed as

$$RiLe = R - L$$

where R is the sum of all percentages of emphases of "rightist" topics and L is the sum of all percentages of emphases of "leftist" topics, then the corrected RiLe Index is constructed according to the equation

$$RiLe^* = 100\frac{R - L}{R + L}$$

Of course, if *all* political topics, without exceptions, belong to either the set of "leftist" topics or the set of "rightist" topics then $RiLe$ and $RiLe^*$ will not differ because $R + L$ is equal to the sum of *all* quasi-sentences in a manifesto. It is of course also possible that $R + L$ does not equal the total number of all quasi-sentences in a manifest, but the overall categories are comprehensive to such a degree that the sum $R + L$ is independent from the salience of any particular policy area. In that case, the original RiLe Index and its corrected variant only differ in the range of their possible values.

4 Performance the RiLe Index under different conditions

In the literature of item response modelling one calls the item characteristic curve of a test or survey item the curve that describes the relation between the values of a latent ability or, more generally, a latent trait and the probability of a successful completion of a test item or a positive response to a survey item. Similarly the following paragraphs discuss the characteristic curves of the emphases of the political topics and of the RiLe Index. These characteristic curves depend on the functional form in which parties' left-right positions influence the emphases of political topics in their manifestos.

The assumptions that motivate the construction of the RiLe Index are not specific enough to suggest a particular functional form. Therefore its derivation require the application of additional principles. First, one can assume that political topics have locations and parties have positions on a left–right dimension and that the emphasis of a topic is the higher, the closer the objective and a party's positions are on this dimension (Elff 2013). Alternatively, one can assume that both topics and parties have directions so that emphasis increases with the product of the intensity of the direction of the topics and the intensity of the direction of a party (Rabinowitz and MacDonald 1989). The second principle is that of mathematical simplicity of the link between emphases and expected percentages, which suggests a "softmax" or conditional logit form:

$$E(P_{ij}) = 100\frac{\exp(\eta_{ij})}{\sum_k \exp(\eta_{ik})} \tag{1}$$

where i is an index number for the party manifesto and j is an index number for the policy topic. This softmax functional form makes sure that the expected percentage values stay between 0 and 100 and sum to 100 for each manifesto.

Under the assumption that emphases are related to distances, η_{ij} is given by

$$\eta_{ij} = -\beta_j(x_i - \alpha_j)^2$$

where x_i is the position that the party takes in manifesto i, α_j is the location of the political topic, and β_j (which is assumed to be positive) is the "elasticity" of the emphasis of the topic with respect to party's positions. For "leftist" topics α_j is negative, for "rightist" topics it is positive.

If instead it is assumed that emphases are directional, η_{ij} is given by

$$\eta_{ij} = \alpha_j x_i$$

Again, for "leftist" topics α_j is negative and for "rightist" topics it is positive.

In the following it is examined how the distribution of the values of the RiLe Index varies with parties' actual positions under different variants of the distance related specification. The results of a similar examination under the directional specification are shown in the appendix and not discussed in much detailed in the following, since they are very similar. The performance evaluation of the RiLe Index is based on simulated manifesto data, were the positions of a party on a left-right dimension ranges from -2 to $+2$. For each party position, 500 simulated percentages of policy topic emphases are created, where the number of political topics ranges between 2 and 10 the locations of which are also varied. The simulations are created from counts with a multinomial distribution. The size parameter of the multinomial distributions in all settings is 100, which corresponds to a manifesto with 100 quasi-sentences, the probability parameters correspond to the expected values of the percentages as in equation (1)

In the first simulation setting there are only two political topics, which have the locations -1 and $+1$ on the left-right axis. One could interpret this setting to correspond to the situation where all "leftist" political topics and all "rightist" political topics are indistinguishable so that summing their percentages does not lead to a loss of information. The precision parameter for both topics is $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$.

The left-hand panel in figure 1 shows how the expected percentage of the "leftist" objective and the "rightist" objective changes as the position of a party moves from -2 to $+2$. The right-hand panel shows for each position of the party the average value of the RiLe Index (solid lines) and the lower 2.5 and 97.5 percentiles of the distribution of the RiLe Index (i.e. 95 percent of the index values). The diagrams in the figure suggests that the RiLe index is relatively sensitive to changes or differences in parties positions if they are between -1 and
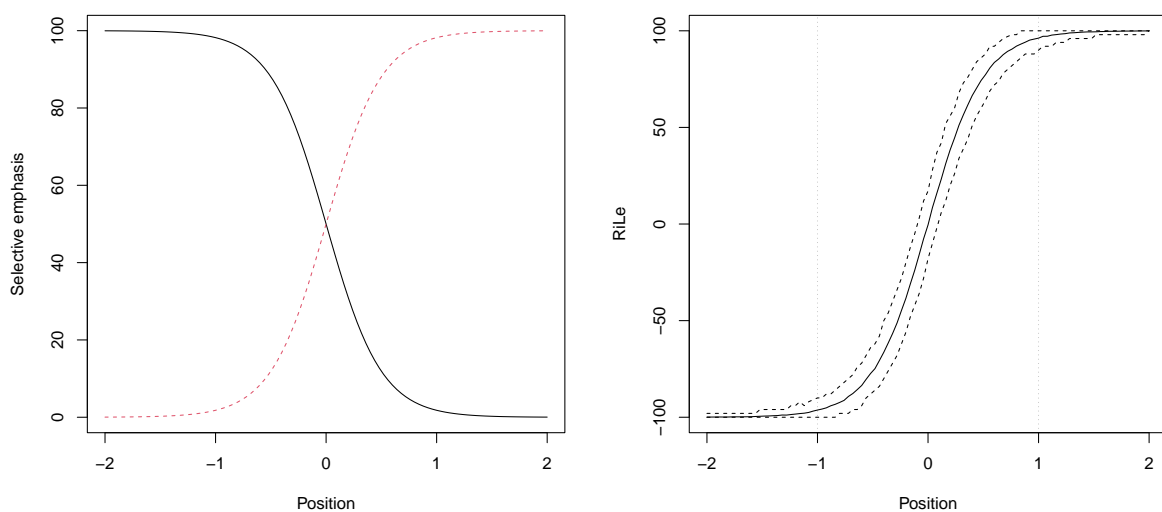
Figure 1: Selective emphases and RiLe Index distribution with two political topics located at $\alpha_1 = -1$ and $\alpha_2 = +1$ and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)

+1 but relatively insensitive to differences or changes in positions outside the range from -1 to $+1$.

Figure 2 illustrates the performance with ten instead of two political topics, where the locations of the political topics are clustered around -1 and $+1$. While the characteristic curves of the emphases of the policy topics shown in the left-hand panel of the figure differ quite markedly from those in the left-hand panel of Figure 1, the curve in the right-hand panel of both figures are almost indistinguishable. While it may perhaps be not surprising that the sensitivity of the RiLe Index to positions is not different form Figure 1, it is remarkable that the dispersion of the RiLe values in Figure 2 is almost the same as in Figure 1. That is, having more political topics on which the RiLe Index is constructed improves neither its (in-)sensitivity to certain positional differences nor its precision.

The figure suggests that the RiLe Index is particularly sensitive to differences and changes in positions between the locations of these leftist and rightist political topics of which it is constructed. This means that the RiLe Index is more sensitive to more extreme positions if it is composed of more extreme topics. Figure 3 shows that this is not the case. In this figure the locations of the political topics are clustered around -2 and $+2$. Contrary to what one may expect, the selective emphasis of the political topics is even less sensitive to more extreme positions of the parties and so is the RiLe Index, which appears to be most sensitive to positions between $-\frac{1}{2}$ and $+\frac{1}{2}$. Otherwise, the RiLe Index makes it appear as if parties' positions are rather polarised.

Figure 4 illustrates a situation that is the opposite of the situation illustrated by Figure 3. Here the locations of the political topics are all close to the centre, clustered around $-\frac{1}{10}$ and
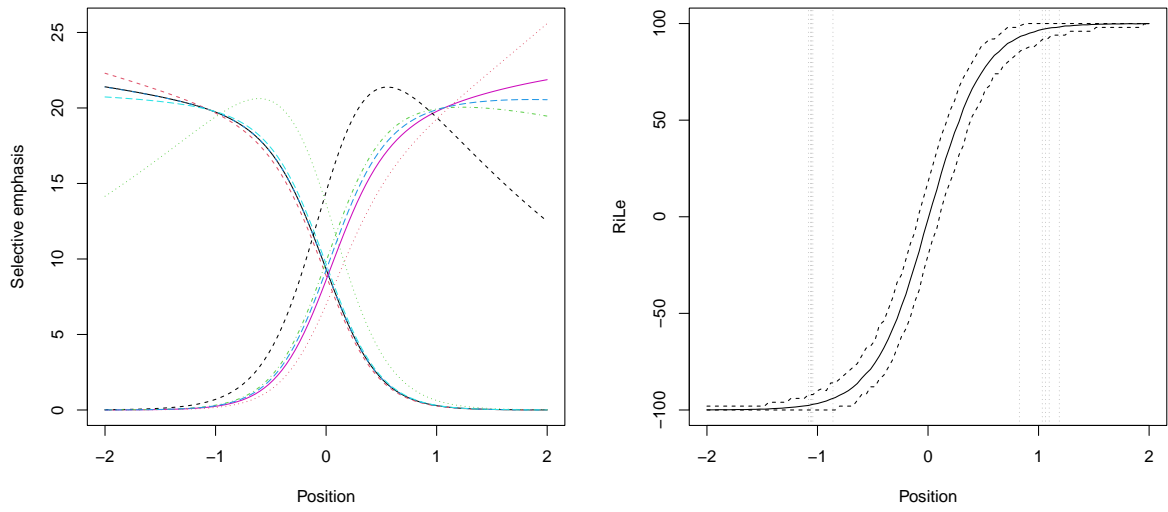
Figure 2: Selective emphases and RiLe Index distribution with ten political topics located around −1 and +1 and unit precision $\beta_j = 1$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)
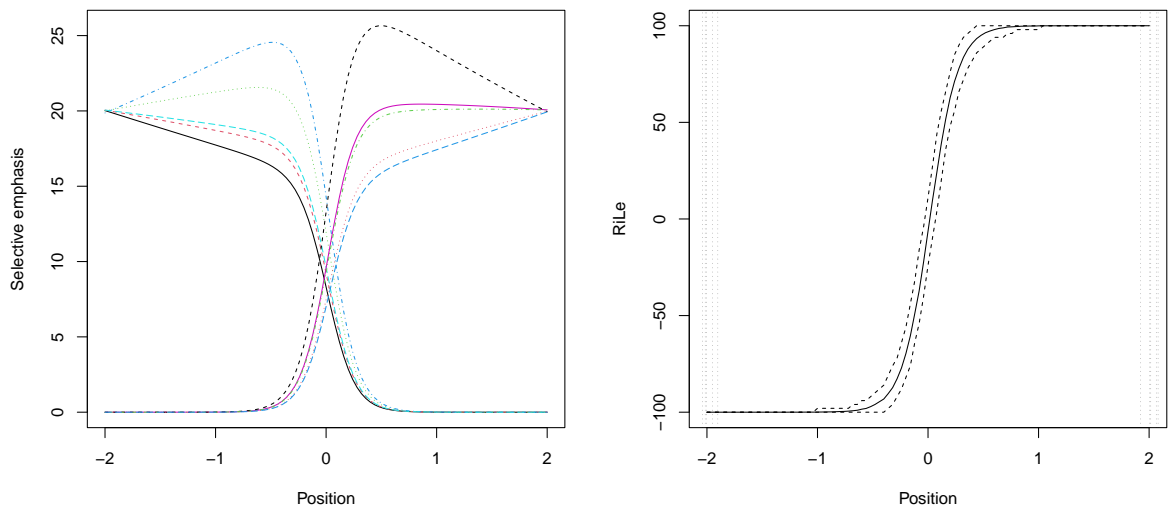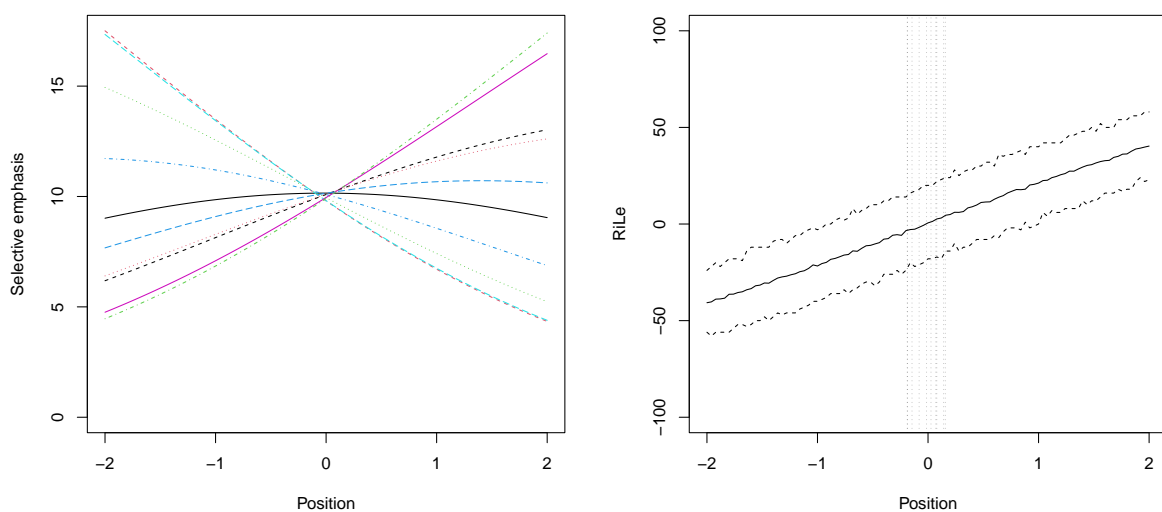

Figure 3: Selective emphases and RiLe Index distribution with ten political topics located around −2 and +2 and unit precision $\beta_j = 1$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)

Figure 4: Selective emphases and RiLe Index distribution with ten political topics clustered around $-\frac{1}{10}$ and $+\frac{1}{10}$ and unit precision $\beta_j = 1$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)

$+\frac{1}{10}$. Now both selective emphases and the RiLe index appear to be sensitive to both centrist and extreme positions. However this more "balanced" sensitivity comes at a price of a loss in precision—the values of the RiLe Index show substantially more variance for each position—and of the positions looking less polarised as in Figure 3: The values of the RiLe Index now range only between −50 and +50.

Neither very extreme locations nor very centrist locations of the policy objectives seem to lead to an acceptable performance of the RiLe Index. Thus the question arises whether the index performs better if the political topics from which it is constructed are a mix of centrist, moderate *and* extreme ones. A first cut on an answer is given by figure 5 where the locations of the political topics are evenly distributed between −2 and +2. The left-hand panel shows that the selective emphasis of each of the political topics varies differently with the political positions of the parties, depending on the location of the policy topic on the left-right dimension. In this situation, the selective emphasis of a particular policy topic appears to be more informative of a party's political position than if all political topics have either extreme, moderate or centrist locations. The right-hand panel suggest that the sensitivity of the RiLe Index is a bit more balanced than in the situation described by Figure 1 or Figure 3 as it varies both with centrist positions and more extreme positions. Yet still it is less sensitive to more extreme positions around −2 or +2. Obviously, this is a consequence that the index cannot have values greater than +100 or less than −100.

If the elasticity parameter is greater than in Figure 5, one may expect that the selective emphases of the various political topics are more informative about parties' positions as the emphases vary more strongly with them. One may also expect that the RiLe Index gains in
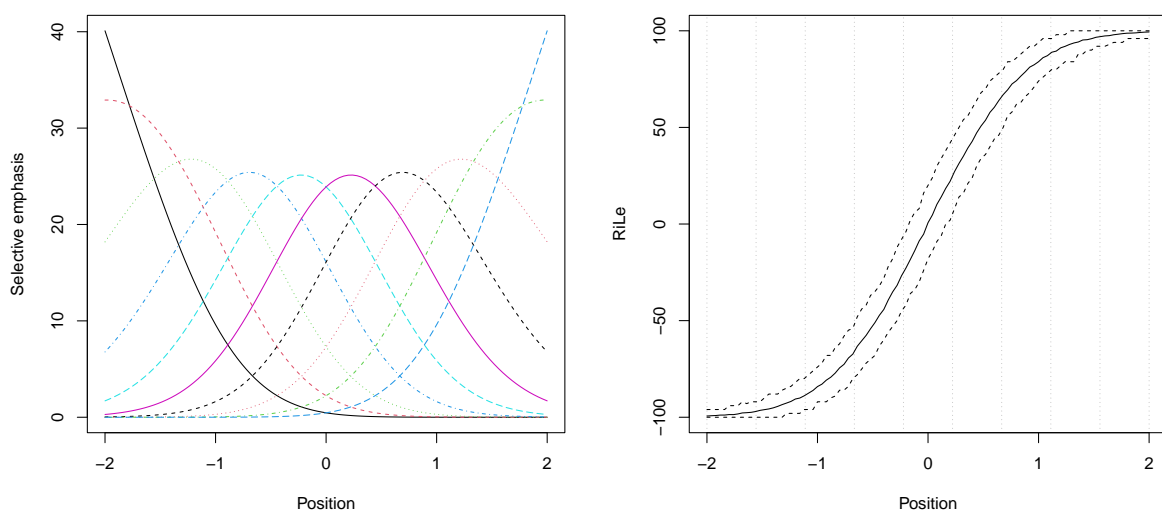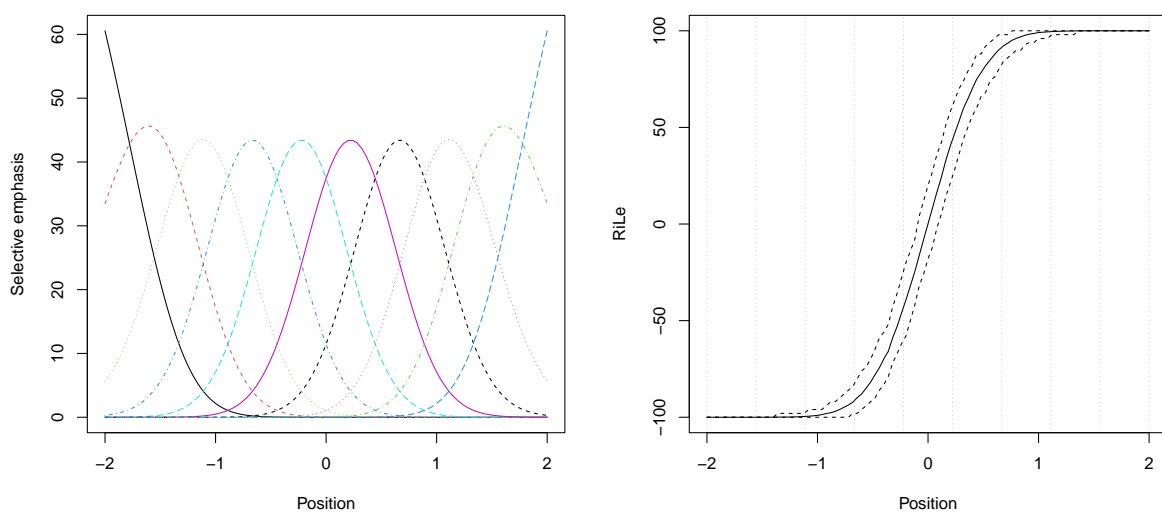
Figure 5: Selective emphases and RiLe Index distribution with ten political topics evenly distributed between −2 and +2 and unit precision $\beta_j = 1$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)

precision and perhaps improves in sensitivity to parties' positions. Figure 6 corroborates the first expectation, but refutes the second one. The figure shows the characteristic curves of the political topics and the characteristic curve of the RiLe Index under the condition that the elasticity parameter is larger than in the previous figure, namely 3 instead of 1. Indeed, the selective emphasis of the political topics varies more than in the previous figure, as the left-hand panel of the figure indicates. The right-hand panel however shows that the RiLe Index is less sensitive to non-centrist positions when the precision parameter is greater. That is, the gain in terms of the sensitivity of the selective emphases of the individual political topics does not lead to an overall improvement of the RiLe Index. While its variance for specific positions seems to be smaller with $beta_j = 3$ than with $beta_j = 1$ it is more biased in terms of its sensitivity to centrist positions.

Figure 6: Selective emphases and RiLe Index distribution with ten political topics evenly distributed between -2 and $+2$ and a greater precision $\beta_j = 3$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)

5 Conclusion

The RiLe Index is constructed by subtracting the percentages in which political topics considered as "leftist" from the percentages in which political topics that are considered as "rightist" are emphasised in party manifestos. The index thus does make distinctions between political topics that are more moderate or more extreme in content. The preceding analyses explore how the RiLe Index performs if the emphasis of political topics indeed express parties' positions on a (latent) left-right dimension. The analyses yield important and somewhat paradoxical results:

- The more extreme the locations of the political topics the more extreme appear the positions of the parties as measured by the RiLe Index, even if they are moderately non-centrist. It is then very sensitive to differences of positions on the centre of the left-right dimension but very insensitive to differences of positions at the extreme ends of the dimension.

- The more centrist the locations of the topics, the more centrist appear the oppositions over all. With very centrist locations of the topics, even positions at the extremes of the left-right dimension appear quite moderate. While the index is as sensitive to positional differences at the centre of the political space as it is to positional differences at the extremes, the index values contain considerably more noise than if the locations of the topics are more extreme.

12

- If the distribution of the locations in the political space is relatively even, then the selective emphasis of each of the topics is quite informative about parties' positions in the neighbourhood of the locations, but this does not carry over to the RiLe Index values computed from the emphasis percentages: The stronger the individual emphasis percentages of the policy topics vary with parties' positions, the more is the RiLe Index biased towards extreme positions. That is, an improvement in the "precision" of the characteristic curves of the individual political topics does not lead to an improvement of the index from which it is composed.

The performance of the RiLe Index seems rarely to be satisfactory and to depend on the location of the topics and on the elasticity of the selective emphasis on parties' positions, properties that are hard to detect without explicit modelling the relation between parties' positions and the selective emphasis of political topics. Unfortunately, without such explicit modelling (e.g. Elff 2013) and instead using the RiLe Index it is quite likely that one's results are highly biased.

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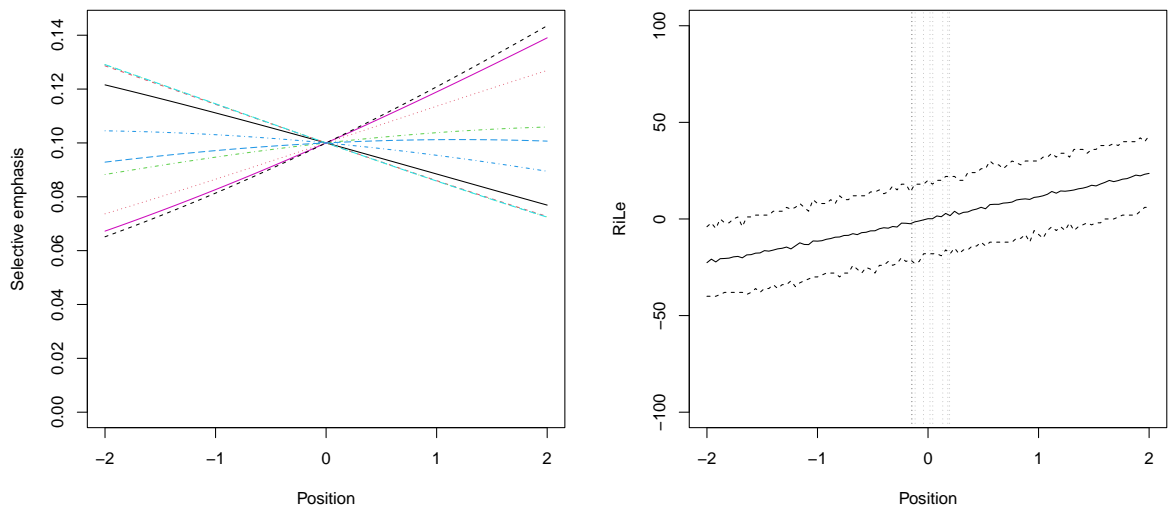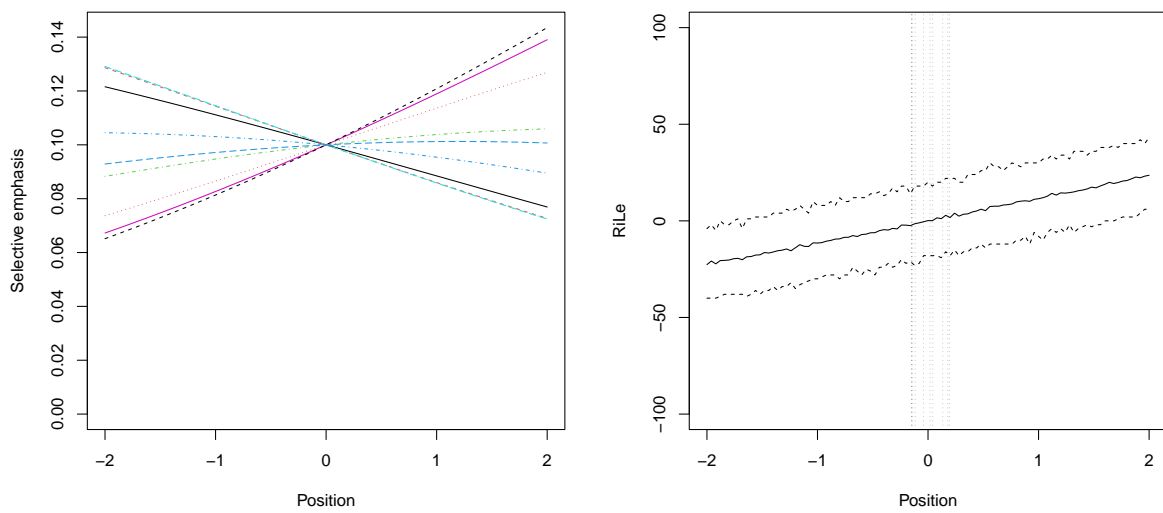
Appendix: Results under the assumption of directional emphasis
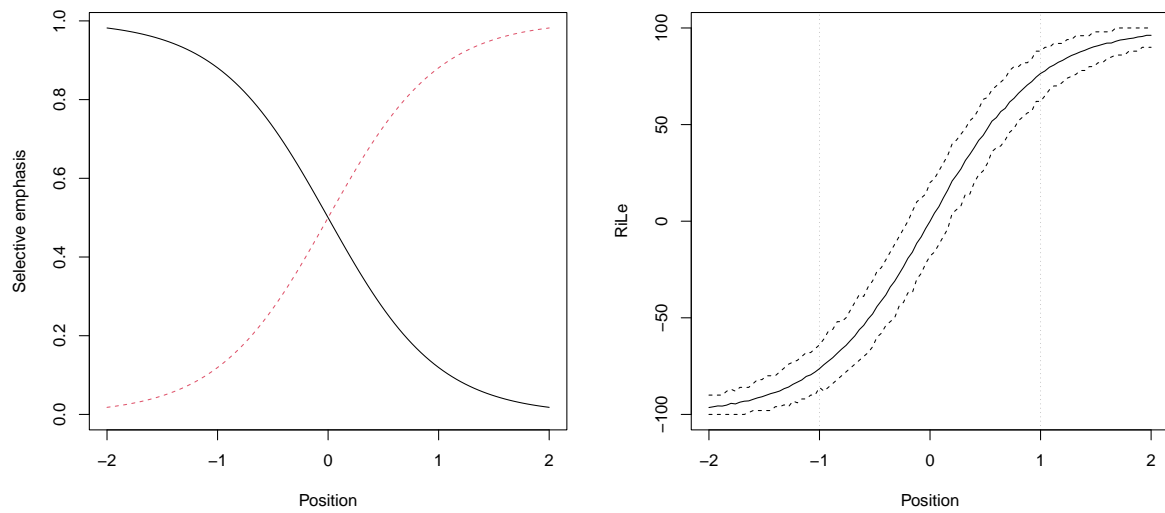
Figure 7: Selective emphases of two political topics and RiLe Index distribution with directional intensity parameters $\alpha_1 = -1$ and $\alpha_2 = +1$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the values of the intensity parameters.)
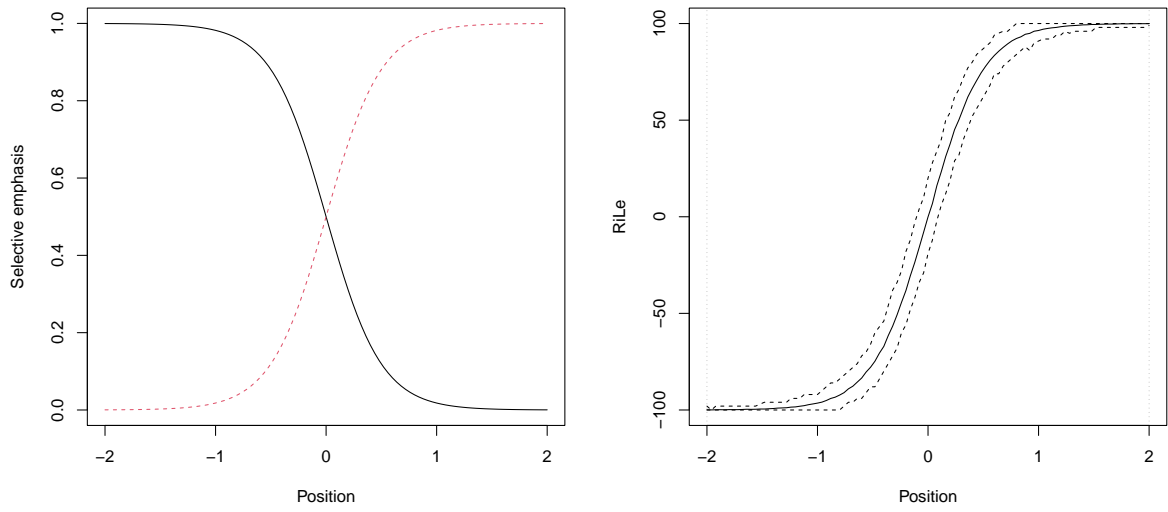
Figure 8: Selective emphases of two political topics and RiLe Index distribution with directional intensity parameters $\alpha_1 = -2$ and $\alpha_2 = +2$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the values of the intensity parameters.)
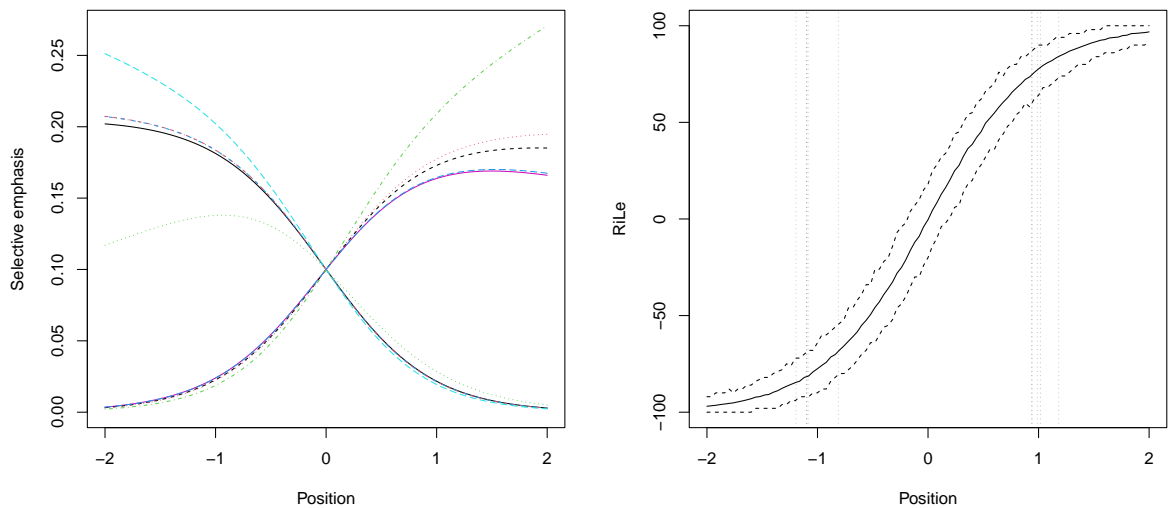
Figure 9: Selective emphases of ten political topics and RiLe Index distribution with directional intensity parameters clustered around -1 and $+1$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the values of the intensity parameters.)
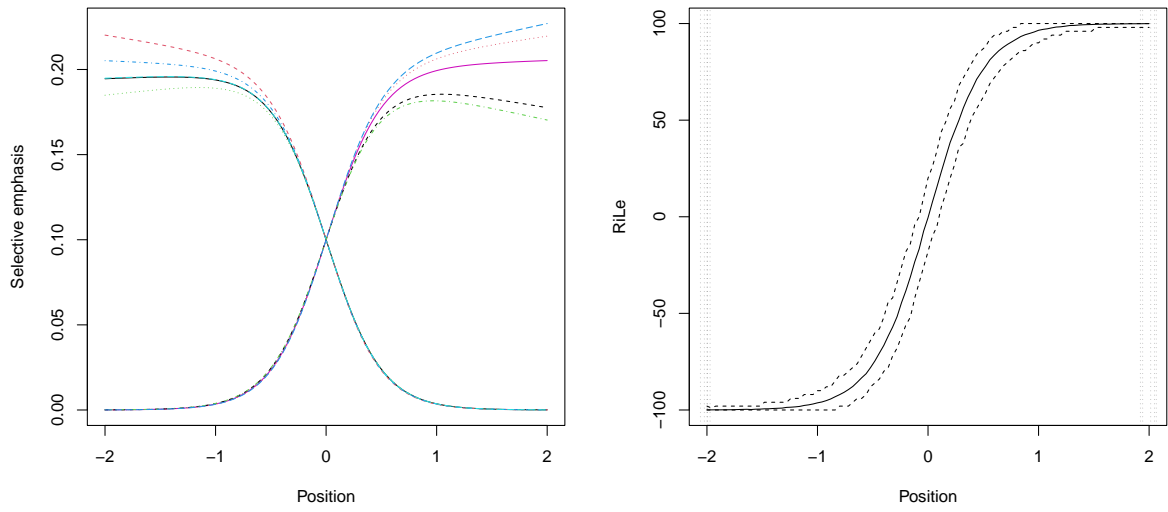
Figure 10: Selective emphases of ten political topics and RiLe Index distribution with directional intensity parameters clustered around -2 and $+2$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the values of the intensity parameters.)

Figure 11: Selective emphases of ten political topics and RiLe Index distribution with directional intensity parameters clustered around $-\frac{1}{10}$ and $+\frac{1}{10}$. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the values of the intensity parameters.)

Figure 12: Selective emphases of ten political topics and RiLe Index distribution with directional intensity parameters evenly distributed beteen −2 and +2. (The dotted lines in the right-hand panel represent the values of the intensity parameters.)

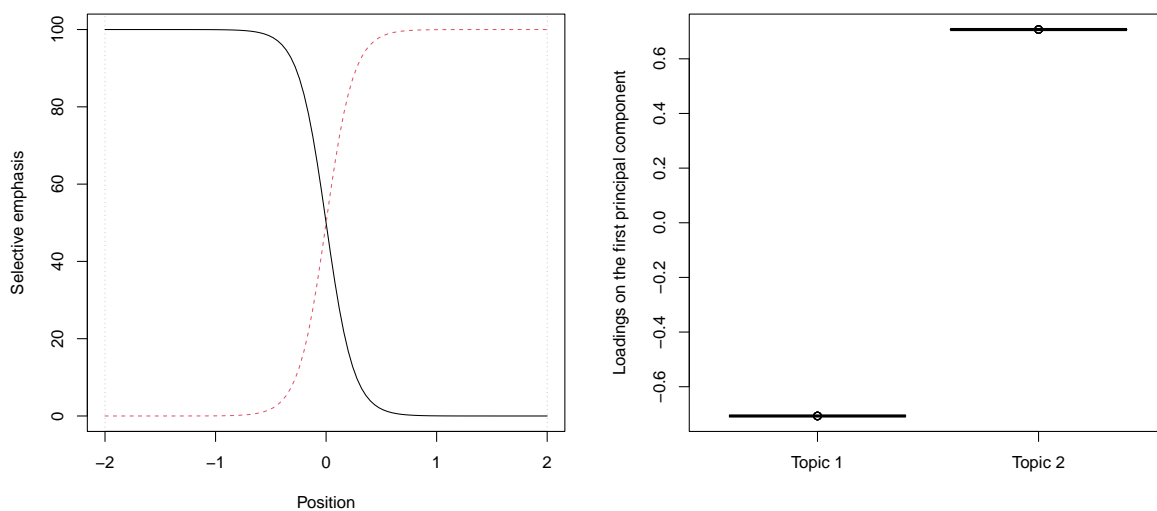# Appendix: Performance of PCA when applied to selective emphases
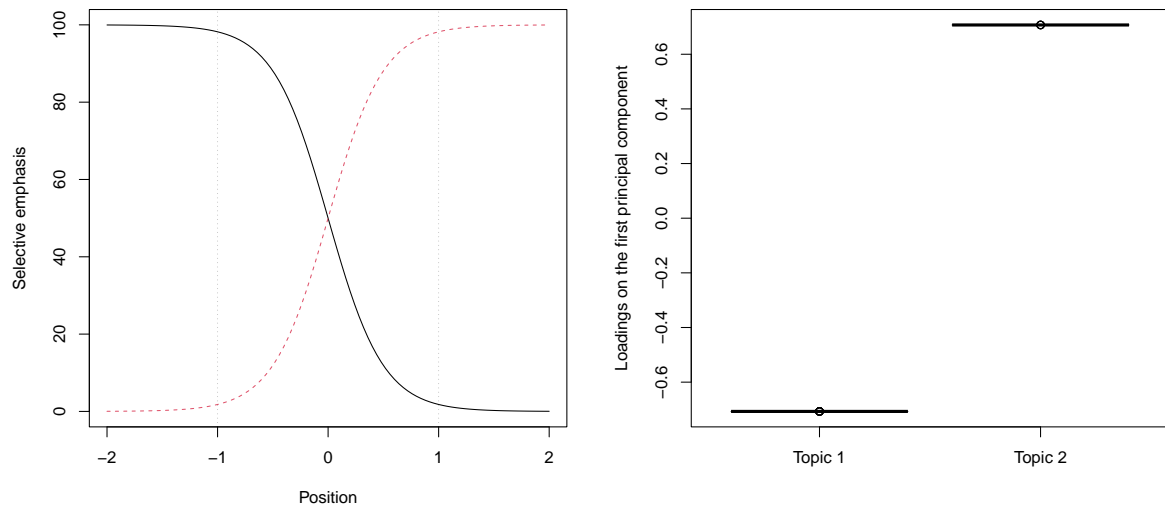
Figure 13: Selective emphases and principal components results with two political topics located at $\alpha_1 = -1$ and $\alpha_2 = +1$ and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$. (The dotted lines in the left-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)
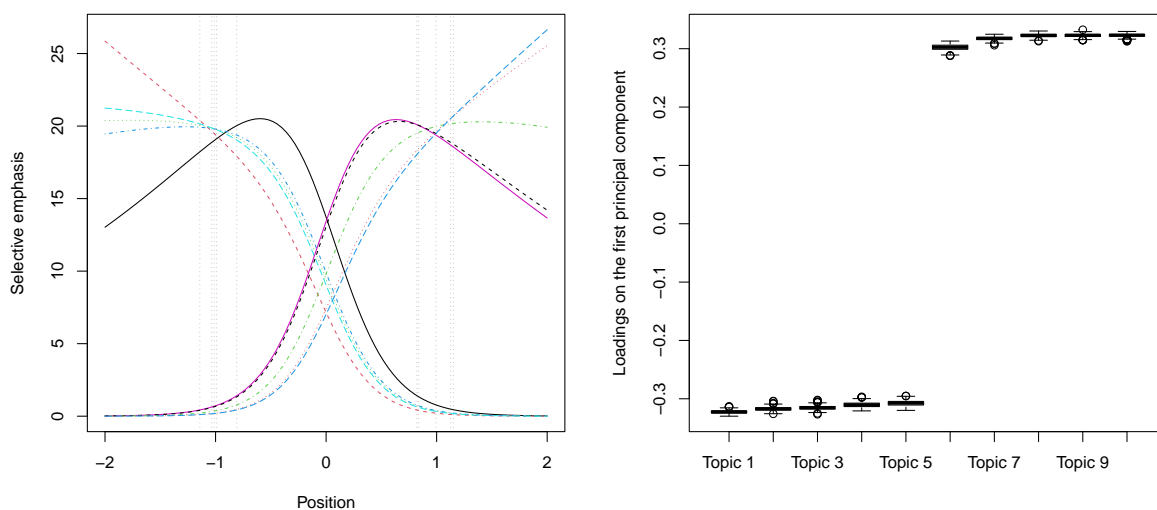
Figure 14: Selective emphases and principal components results with two political topics located at $\alpha_1 = -2$ and $\alpha_2 = +2$ and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$. (The dotted lines in the left-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)
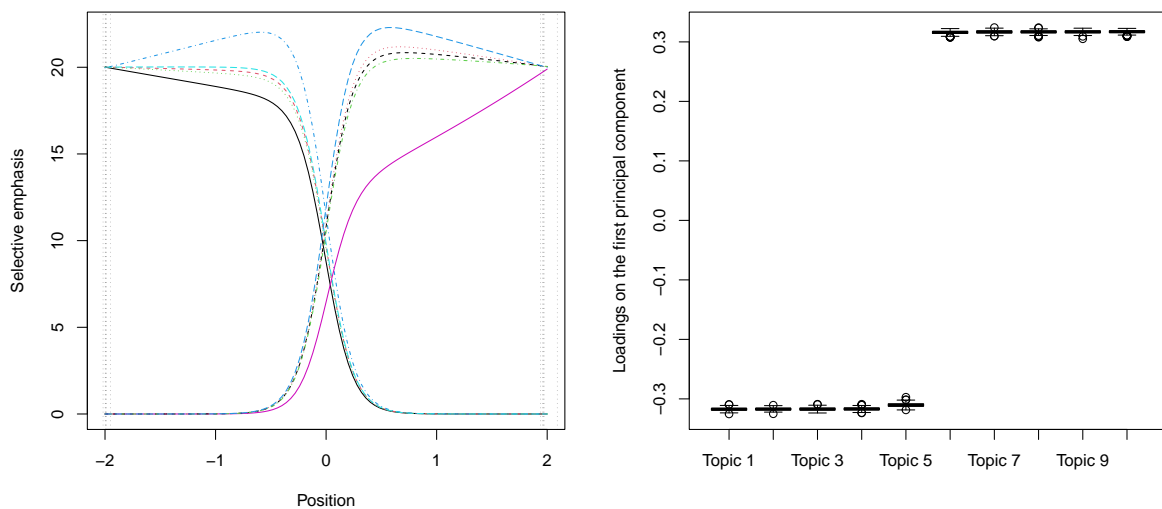

Figure 15: Selective emphases and principal components results with ten political topics clustered around $\alpha_1 = -1$ and $\alpha_2 = +1$ and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$. (The dotted lines in the left-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)

Figure 16: Selective emphases and principal components results with ten political topics clustered around $\alpha_1 = -2$ and $\alpha_2 = +2$ and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$. (The dotted lines in the left-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)
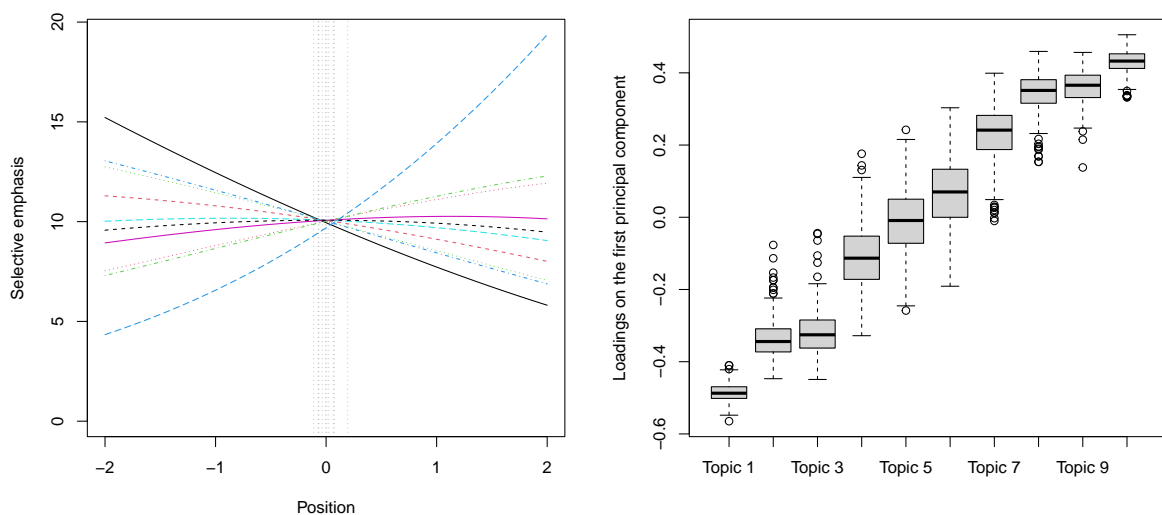

Figure 17: Selective emphases and principal components results with ten political topics clustered around $\alpha_1 = -\frac{1}{10}$ and $\alpha_2 = +\frac{1}{10}$ and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$. (The dotted lines in the left-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)
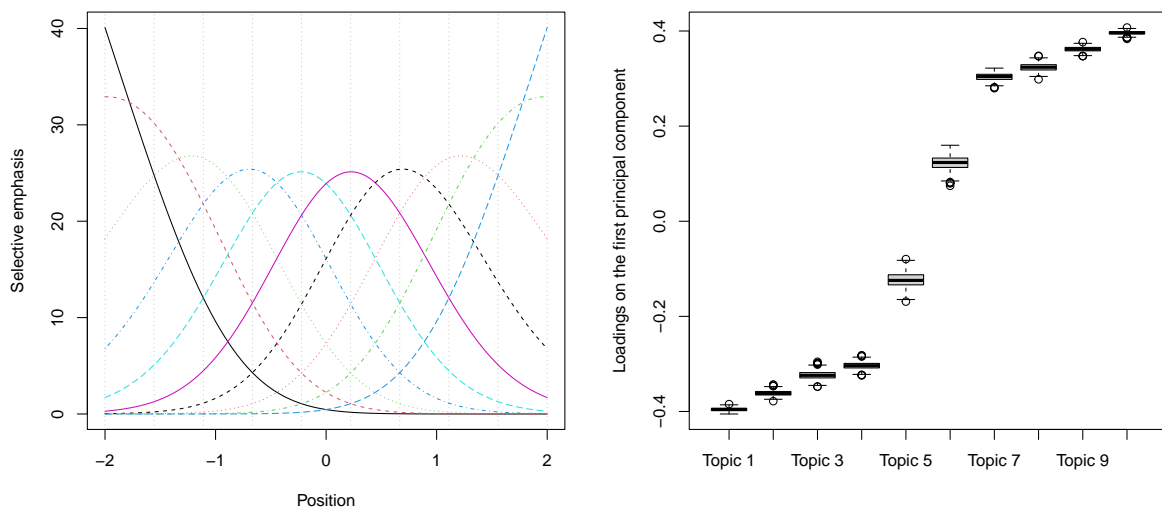
Figure 18: Selective emphases and principal components results with ten political topics evenly distributed between −2 and +2 and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 1$. (The dotted lines in the left-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)
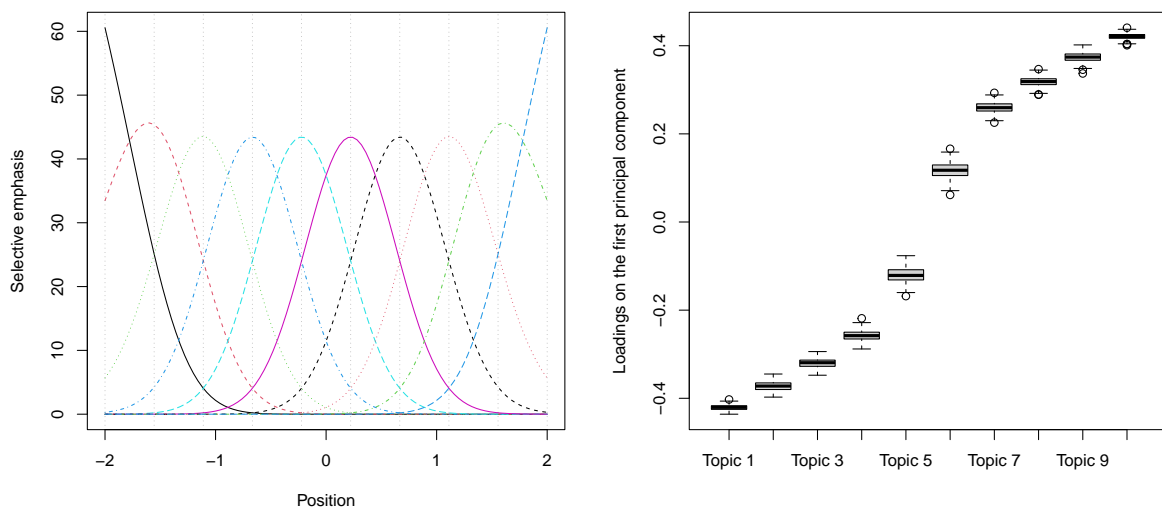

Figure 19: Selective emphases and principal components results with ten political topics evenly distributed between −2 and +2 and unit precision $\beta_1 = \beta_2 = 3$. (The dotted lines in the left-hand panel represent the locations of the political topics.)