# A Shifting Balance: Ideological Sources in Climate News

MPSA 2025

Sylvan Zheng (NYU)  Hye Young You (Princeton)

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# Motivation


The New York Times
E.P.A. Severely Limits Pollution From Coal-Burning Power Plants
New regulations could spell the end for plants that burn coal, the fossil fuel that powered the country for more than a century.
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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
New EPA Emissions Rules Squeeze Coal Plants
The measures, which come as power demand surges, will force coal plants to adopt costly technology or close

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- NYT: Harold Wimmer, president of the American Lung Association
- WSJ: Frank Macchiarola, senior vice president of the American Petroleum Institute
- Both articles cover the same event, but the cited sources may generate different narratives of the event

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  - Trump presidency: overemphasis on 2016 Clinton email scandal (Watts, 2017)
  - Newspaper employees themselves increasingly questioning this norm (Sullivan 2022, Bennet, 2023)

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  - Cohort replacement effect; newer, younger journalists especially after 2018
  - But also modest within-journalist change

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  - Clear division of source types: fossil fuel companies vs environmental advocacy groups

# Source Extraction

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- 77K sources (mean 5.7 per article)
- 4K unique organizations
- Roughly split between: 40% **politicians** and bureaucrats, 40% **advocacy groups and businesses**, 20% academics
- Manual validation of extraction and categorization using crowdworkers (90+% accuracy).

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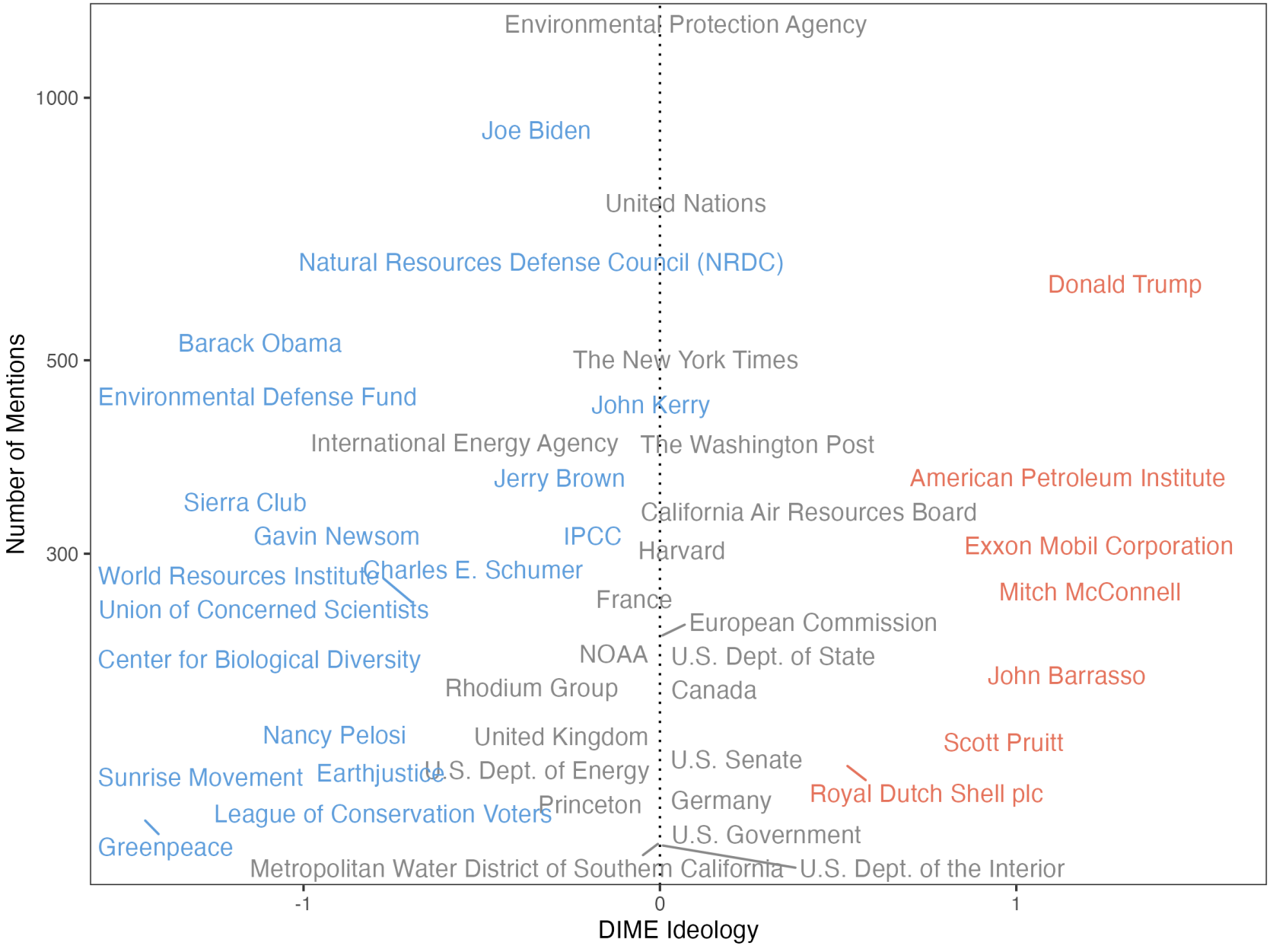
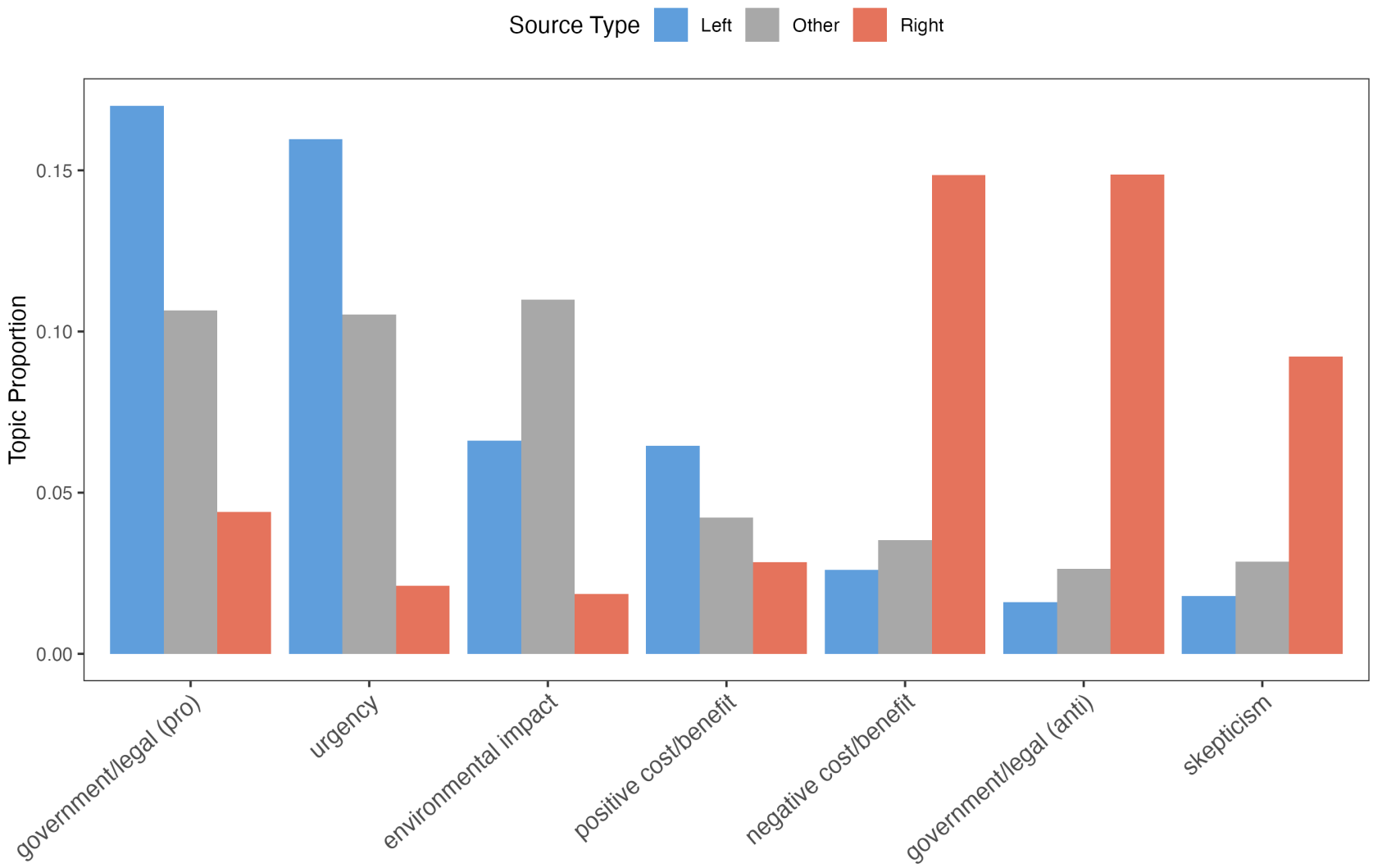
  - LLM categorization (environmental advocacy vs. fossil fuel interest)
  - Matching to DIME data
  - DIME imputation using LLMs and pairwise comparisons
- Academics, bureaucrats, and non-US entities excluded

# Top 50 Sources



# Content Analysis



# Left and Right-Leaning Sources Over Time

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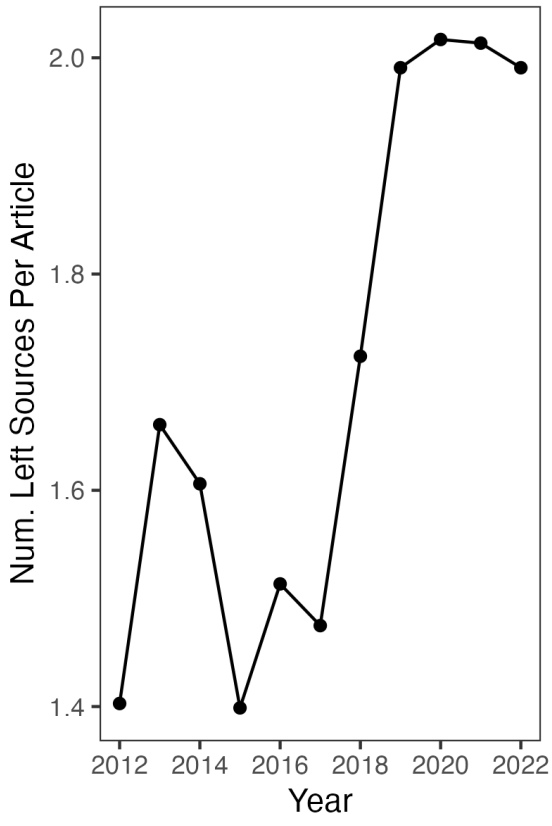


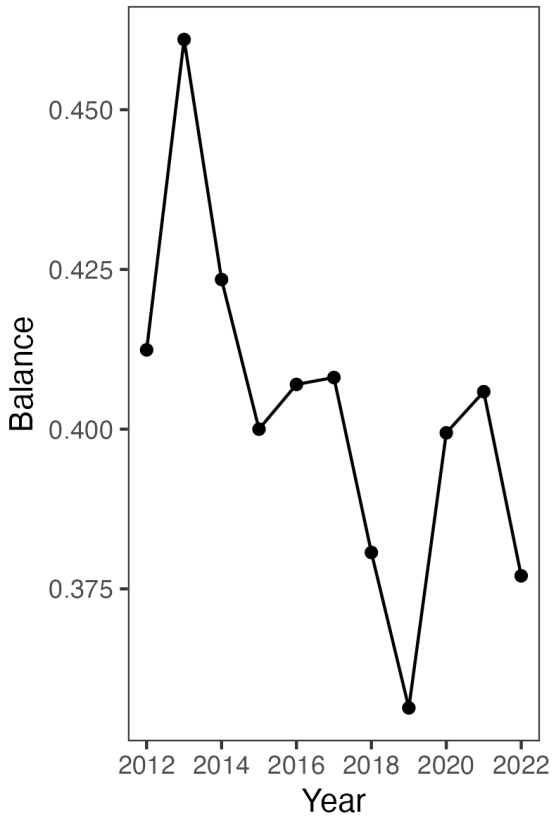


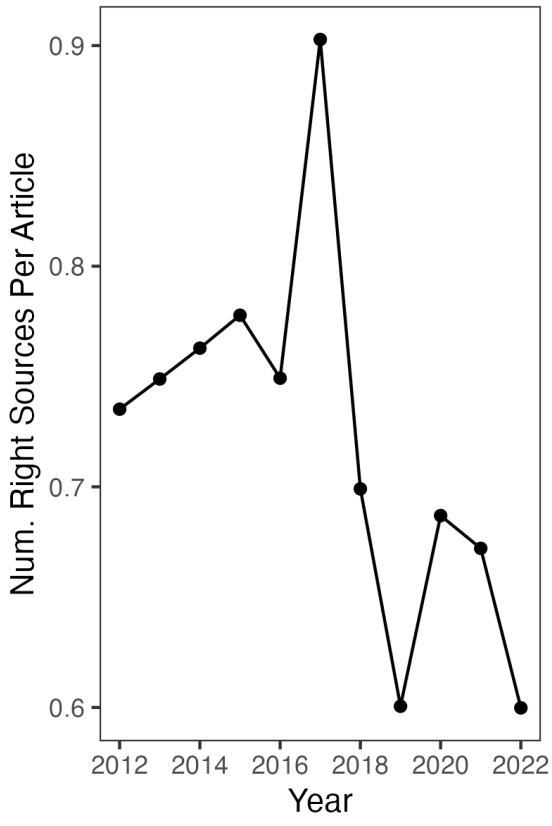

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- **Journalist reaction (within)**: Journalists at the individual level changed citation behaviors to produce fewer balanced articles

# Testing Mechanisms: Journalist Replacement

We assign each journalist to a cohort: the first year they are observed in our sample

- Estimate:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \gamma_k + \delta_t + \lambda_s + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

- The specification allows us to leverage variation in the citation patterns of journalists in different cohorts within the same year and newspaper

- Reference group: 2012 cohort

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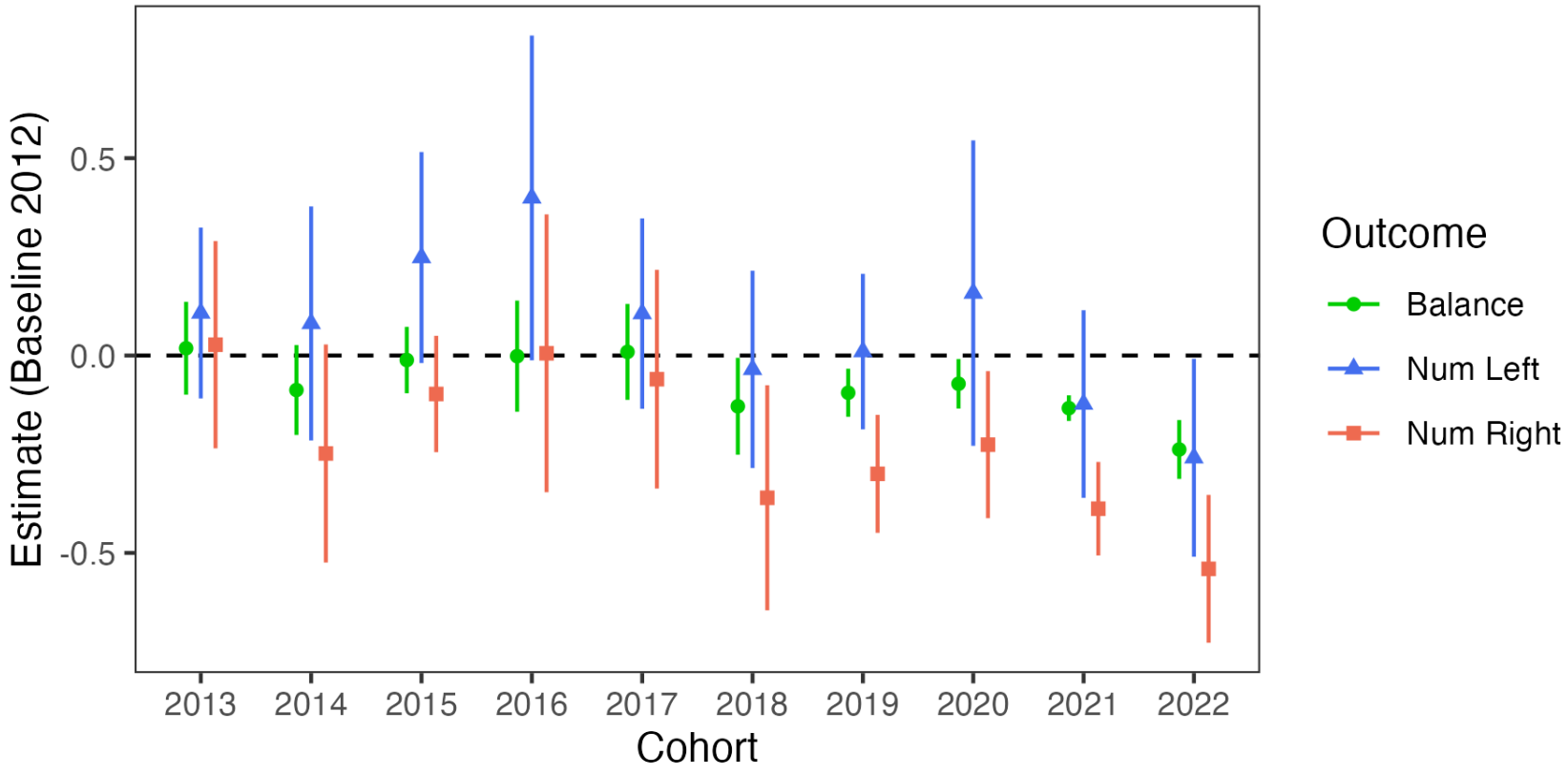

# Testing Mechanisms: Journalist Reaction

We include journalist fixed effect to estimate the extent to which there was within-journalist change in citation patterns

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \delta_t + \rho_j + \epsilon_i \tag{2}$$

- $Y_i$ is the article level dependent variable, $\delta_t$ is a year fixed effect, $\rho_j$ is a journalist fixed effect,
- The specification allows us to compare the average within-journalist changes in balanced article production against the 2012 baseline

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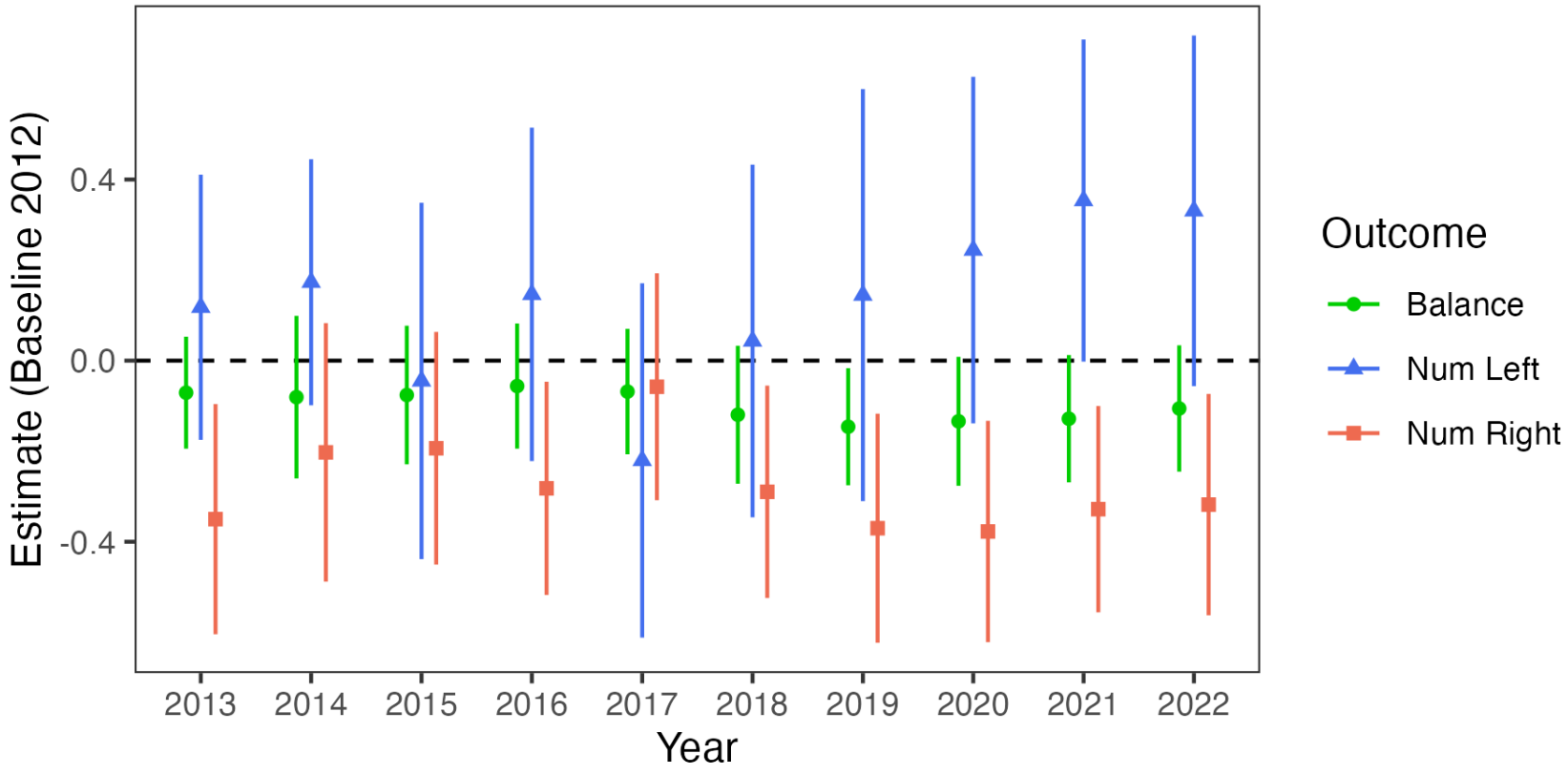

# Thank you!

- Balance norm in journalism is increasingly contested
- News production about climate policy become less balanced over time
- Changes driven by both across-journalist (cohort effect) and within-journalist dynamics

saz310@nyu.edu