

Mapping Hostility and Its Reception

Attacks Against Politicians in Germany, 2021–2025

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June 19, 2026 · EPSS 2026

Supported by DFG (#529544178)

Motivation

- **Hostility toward politicians** — widely salient; GLES: **78%** online abuse, **30%** threats (GLES 2023, 2025)
- Prior work on **consequences**, mostly from **self-reports** (Ponce 2019; Håkansson and Lajevardi 2024; Alizade et al. 2024)
- **Gap:** little systematic evidence on **police-recorded incidents** themselves, or on how politicians **take them up in communication**

The data

10,730 recorded incidents

- Federal government responses to *Kleine Anfragen*: lists of police-recorded offenses against politicians and party structures
- Per incident: **date, location, targeted party, criminal offense**; for a subset a short **narrative** of what happened

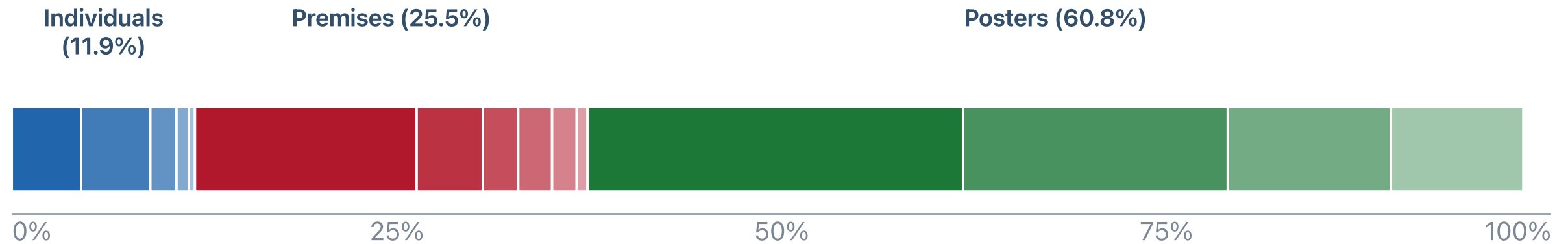
Linked sources

- Candidates & MPs (n = 2,929 federal; 1,266 state)
- GLES candidate studies 2021 + 2025 (N = 1,099)
- Facebook posts (n ≈ 430,000 from 337 politicians)

What does recorded hostility look like?

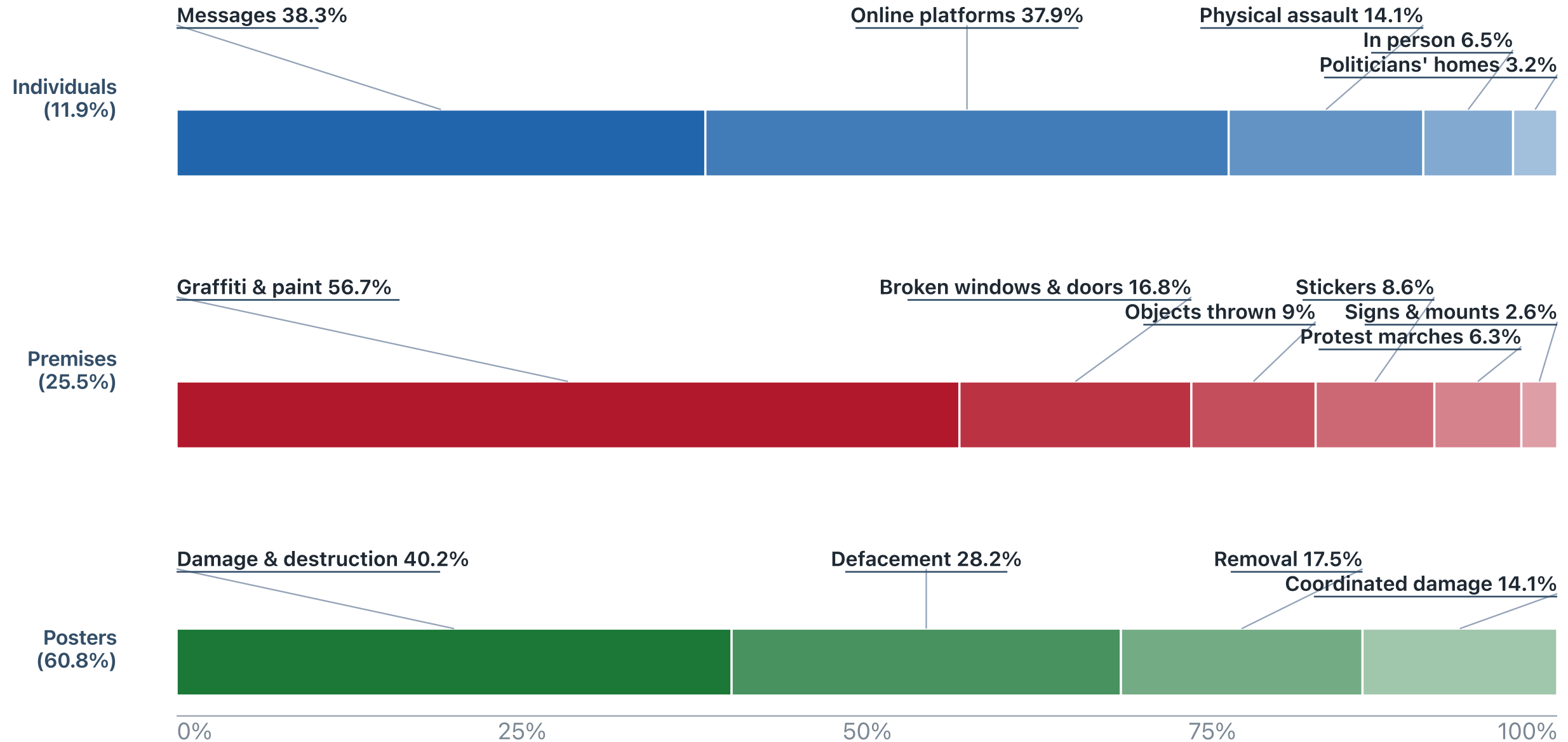
Mostly low-level: posters, graffiti, messages

Appendix: [Examples from the records](#)



N = 4,366 police narratives with attack descriptions (December 2021–June 2023) Hover a segment to see its label. Click for the full description and representative examples.

Within each target type



N = 4,366 police narratives with attack descriptions (December 2021–June 2023) Shares within each target type. Hover a segment to see its label. Click for the full description and representative examples.



Political attacks
7,748 of 10,367 shown
10,730 incidents in dataset · background = BTW 2021 constituencies (reference only)
2025-cohort points use BTW25 assignment in popups; position is by location
Filters (bottom left) · time slider (bottom right). Switch display to attack density for a location-based heatmap.
Click a constituency to center it; click clusters to expand.



Filters

Display

- Individual incidents
- Attack heatmap (by location)

Background

- Population density (~1 km grid, 2020)
- Hide points outside analysis constituencies
- Hide election poster targets
- Show only with description

Attack target

- All target levels
- Federal target
- Non-federal target
- All record types
- Person / representative
- Party premises
- Grey = analysis-excluded constituencies (BTW 2021, reference)

Medium & severity

- All media
- Online
- Severe offline
- Other offline

Target party

- All parties
- AfD
- CDU/CSU
- SPD
- FDP

Appendix: [Static maps](#)

Time

From: 01/01/2021 Until: 18/05/2025

From (slider): [Slider bar]

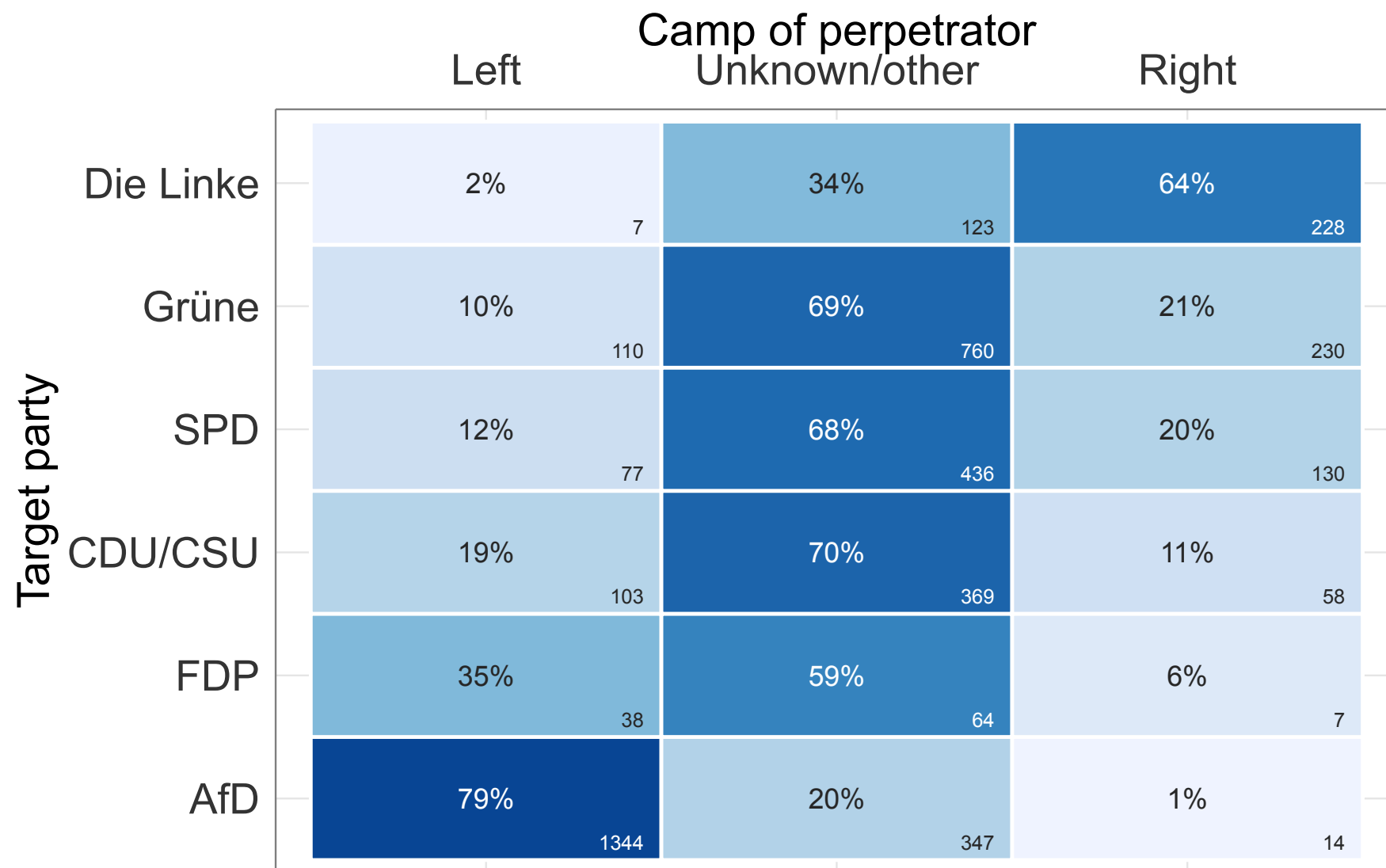
Until (slider): [Slider bar]

Jan 2021 – May 2025

- Fade older months during play

Patterns in the records

Who attacks whom



Appendix: [Electoral calendar](#) · [How they attack](#) · [Federal by party](#) · [State by party](#)

Linking candidate surveys to police records

Police-recorded attack type		GLES candidate report					
		Physical attack (N=77)	Personal/family threat (N=324)	Property damage (N=198)	Online abuse (shitstorm) (N=849)	Threat at public event (N=593)	Perceived security
Physical assault (N=37)		0.09	0.14	0.10	0.04	0.01	-0.10
Personal threats (N=80)		0.08	0.13	0.07	0.08	0.10	-0.09
Property damage (N=403)		0.08	0.18	0.13	0.18	0.15	-0.13
Online abuse (N=782)		0.01	0.09	0.09	0.19	0.11	-0.16
Public-event disruption (N=13)		-0.03	0.05	0.04	0.02	0.05	-0.01

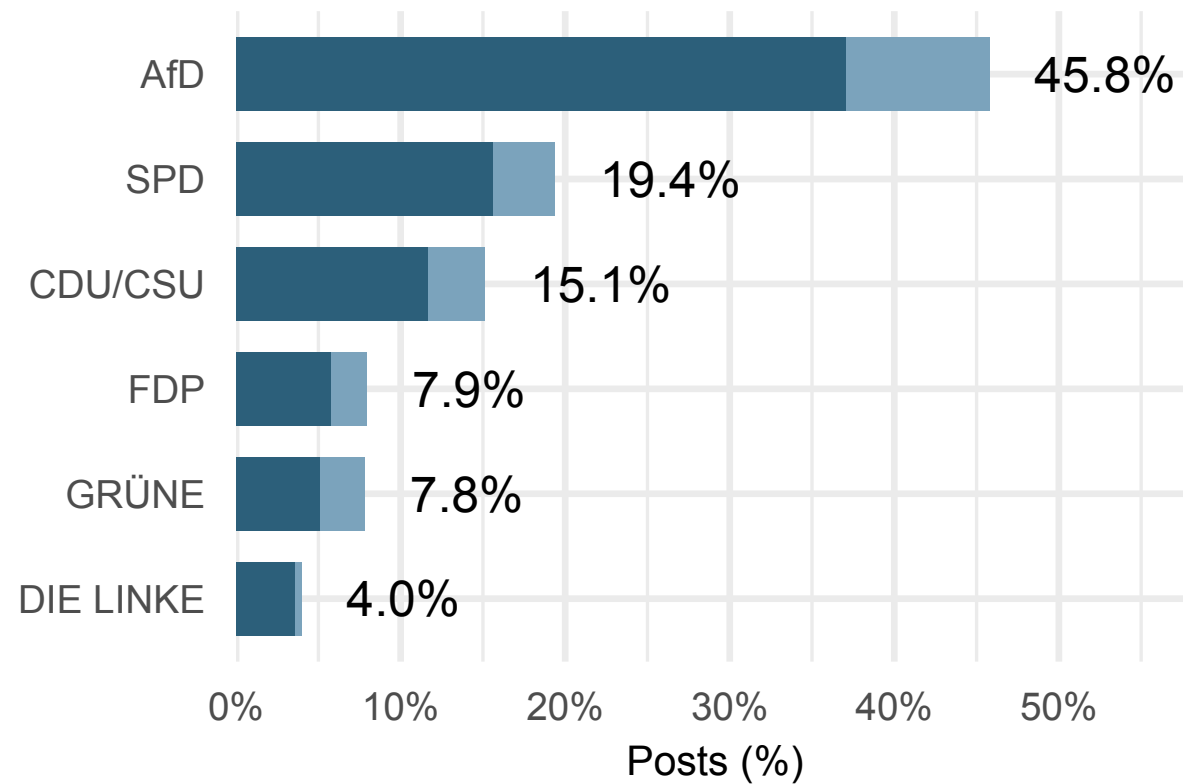
GLES 2021 + 2025 × attacks (N = 1,047)

Appendix: [Perceived security](#) · [Full GLES specifications](#)

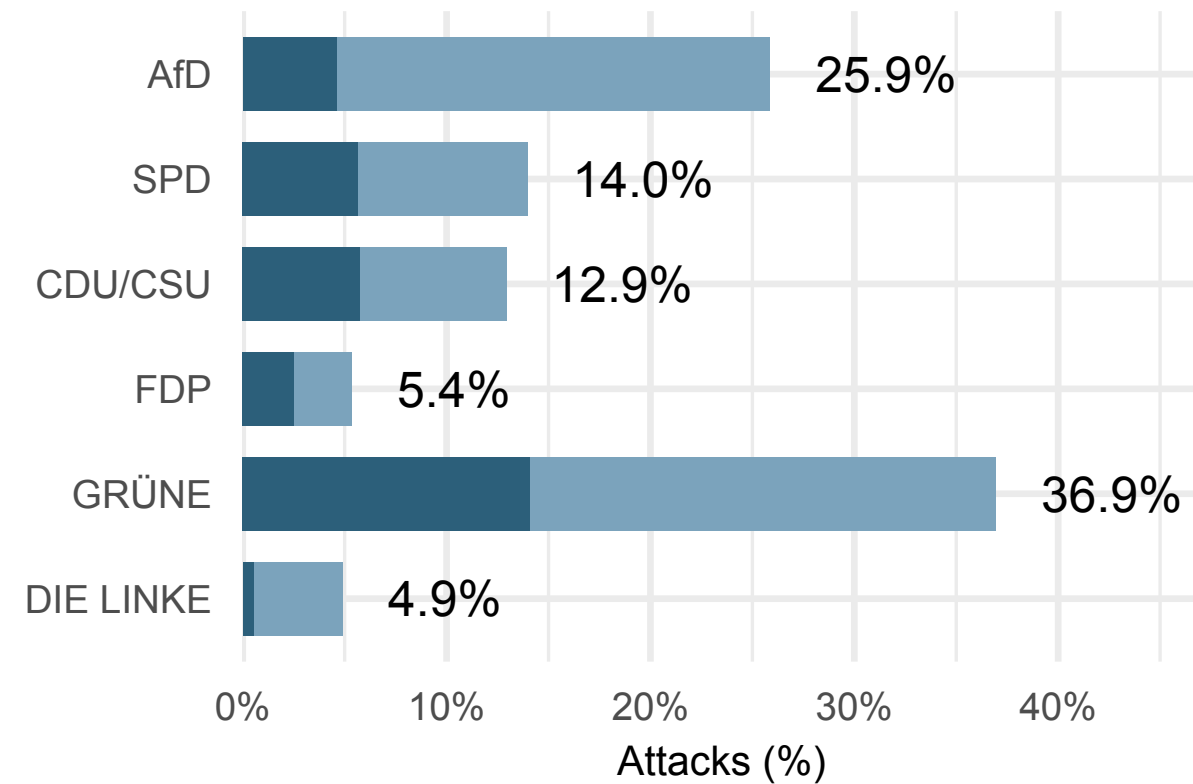
Attacks as a communication resource

Who talks about attacks?

Attack-related posts

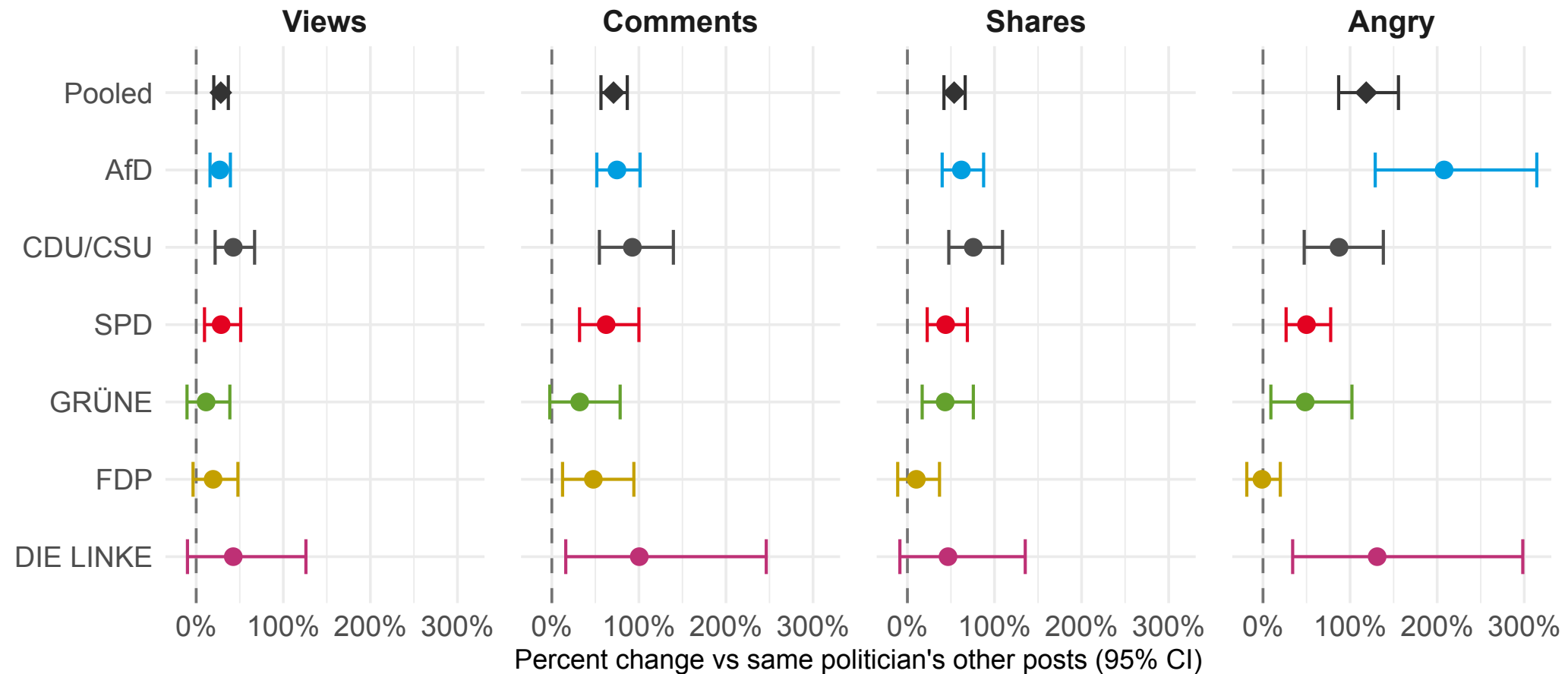


Recorded attacks



Level ■ State ■ Federal

Does talking about attacks pay off?



Within-politician estimates: percent change in engagement on attack-related posts vs. the same politician's other posts (author + week FE; pooled reference in diamonds)

Takeaways

1. **10,730 attacks** linked to politicians, surveys, and posts
2. **Low-level, thinly spread** – campaign-driven, ideological
3. **Weak link** between survey and police data
4. **Uneven politicization** – payoff in attention

Thank you

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References

- Alizade, Jeyhun, Fabio Ellger, Marius Grünewald, and Thomas Tichelbaecker. 2024. “Does Political Violence Undermine Descriptive Representation? The Case of Women in Politics.” *European Journal of Political Research*.
- GLES. 2023. *GLES Kandidierendenstudie 2021*. (ZA7704; Version 2.0.0) [Data set]. GESIS, Köln. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14100>. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.14100>.
- GLES. 2025. *GLES Kandidierendenstudie 2025*. (ZA10102; Version 1.0.0) [Data set]. GESIS, Köln. <https://doi.org/10.4232/5.za10102.1.0.0>. <https://doi.org/10.4232/5.za10102.1.0.0>.
- Håkansson, Sandra, and Nazita Lajevardi. 2024. “Representation at Risk: Evaluating Levels and Consequences of Violence Against Immigrant-Background Politicians.” *American Political Science Review*, 1–16.
- Ponce, Aldo F. 2019. “Violence and Electoral Competition: Criminal Organizations and Municipal Candidates in Mexico.” *Trends in Organized Crime* 22 (2): 231–54.

Appendix

Examples from the records

29.03.2022

Gera

Property damage · Party premises · The Left · Offline

Unknown perpetrators threw a stone at the shop window of the Die Linke constituency office and damaged the outer pane.

27.02.2023

Leipzig

Threat · Party premises · FDP · Mail

The FDP district office received a postcard by mail. Text: *“If your war comes here, we’ll kill you. Period.”*

12.06.2024

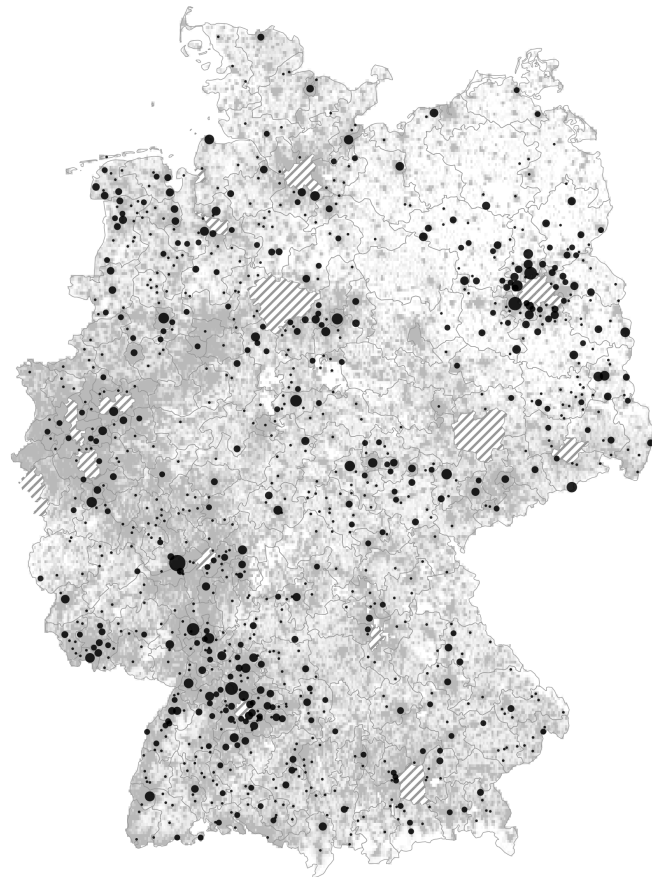
Lüchow

Insult · Party premises · SPD · In person

The accused entered an SPD MP’s office and insulted a staff member with the words “idiot”, “pig” and a homophobic slur; the insults were also directed at the openly gay MP.

Source: parliamentary inquiries (*Kleine Anfragen*).

Where attacks happen (static maps)



Population density

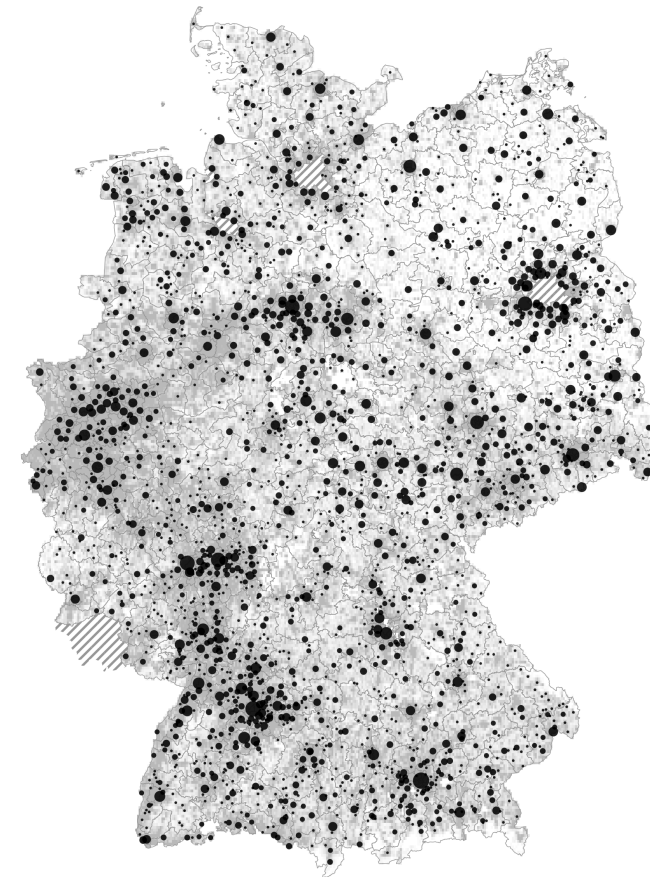
8 16 32 63

Excluded areas

Attacks at location

• 20 • 40 • 60

Federal targets (n = 1,968)



Population density

8 16 32 63

Excluded areas

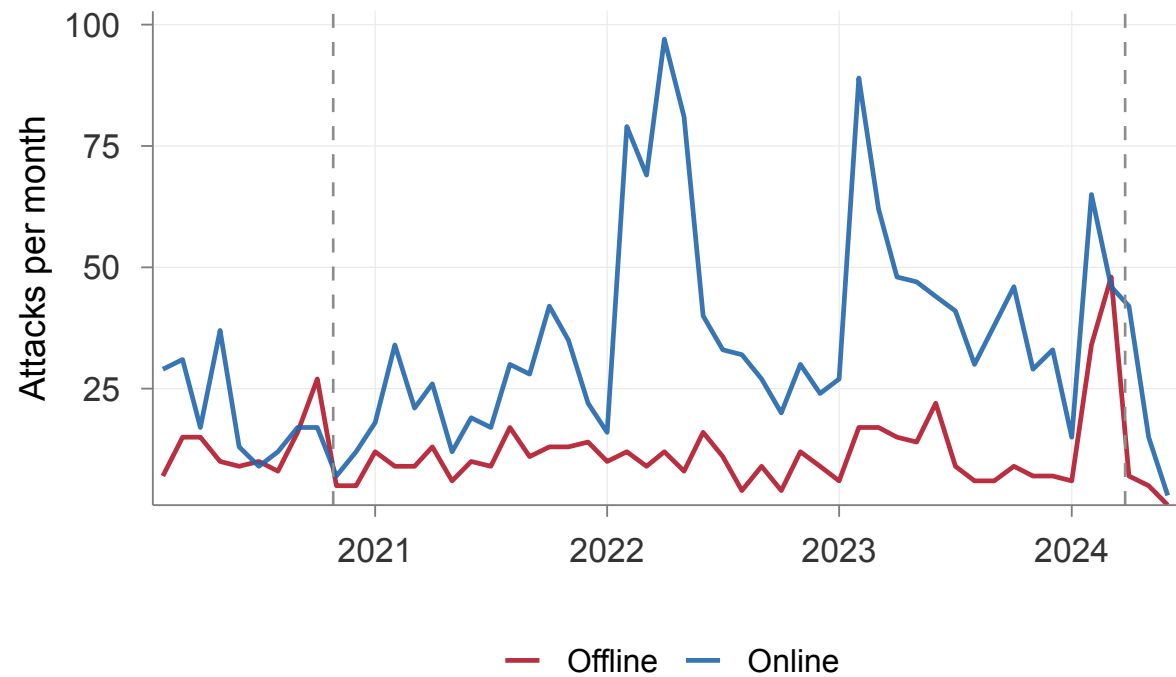
Attacks at location

• 50 • 100 • 150 • 200

All targets (n = 7,874)

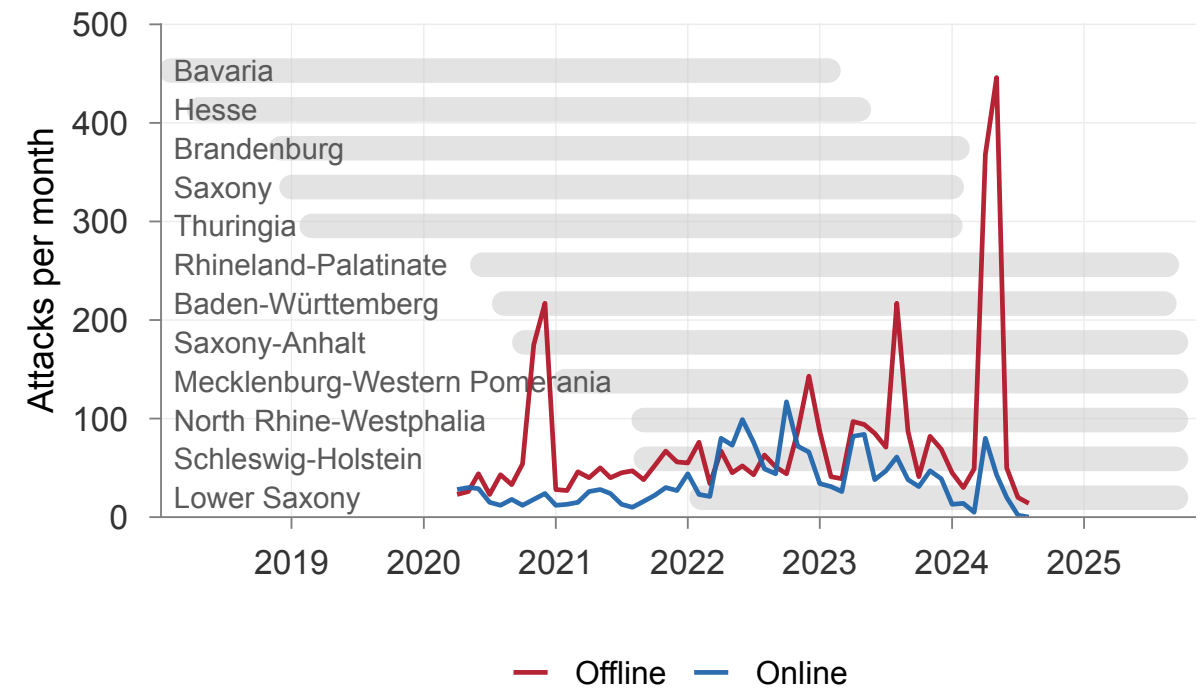
Attacks track the electoral calendar

Federal



targets; dashed lines = federal elections

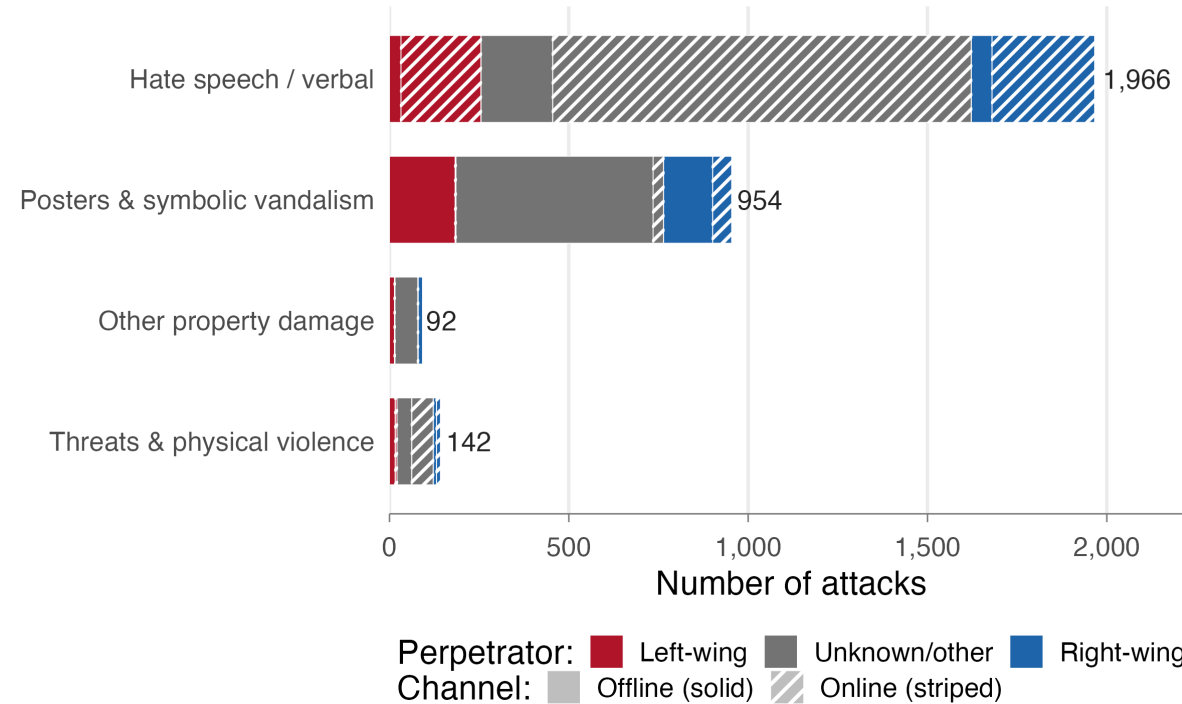
State



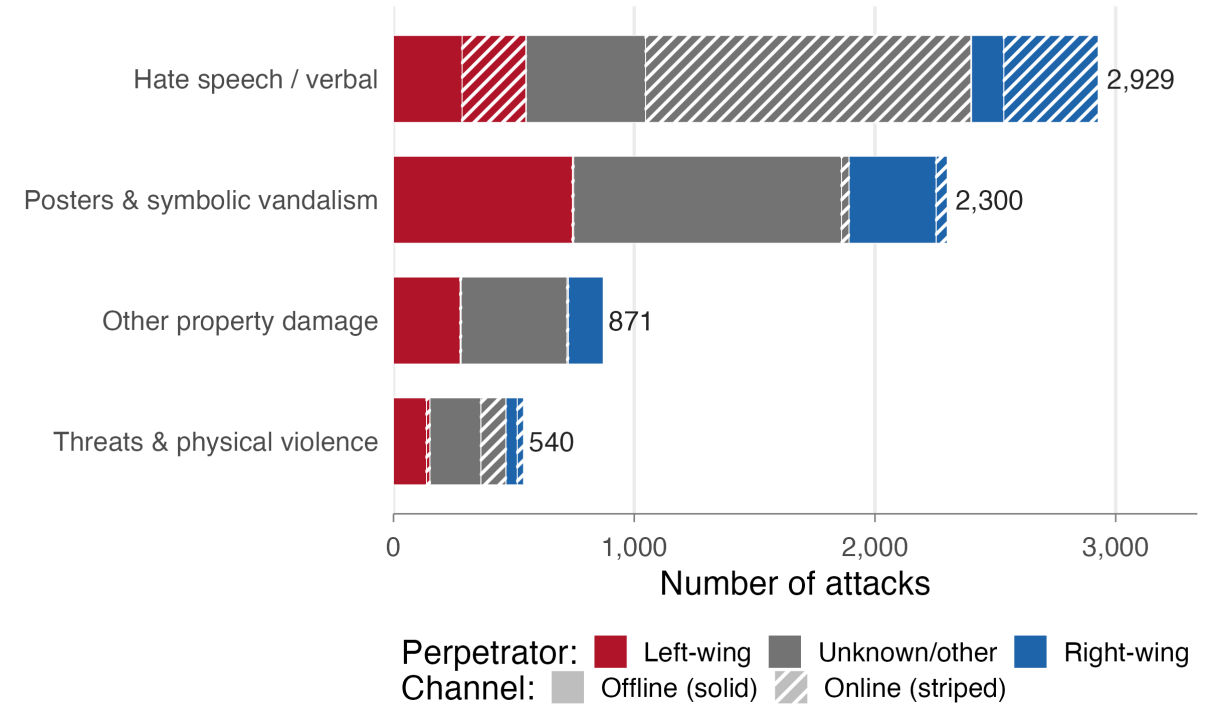
sample; grey bars = covered legislative periods

How they attack

Federal

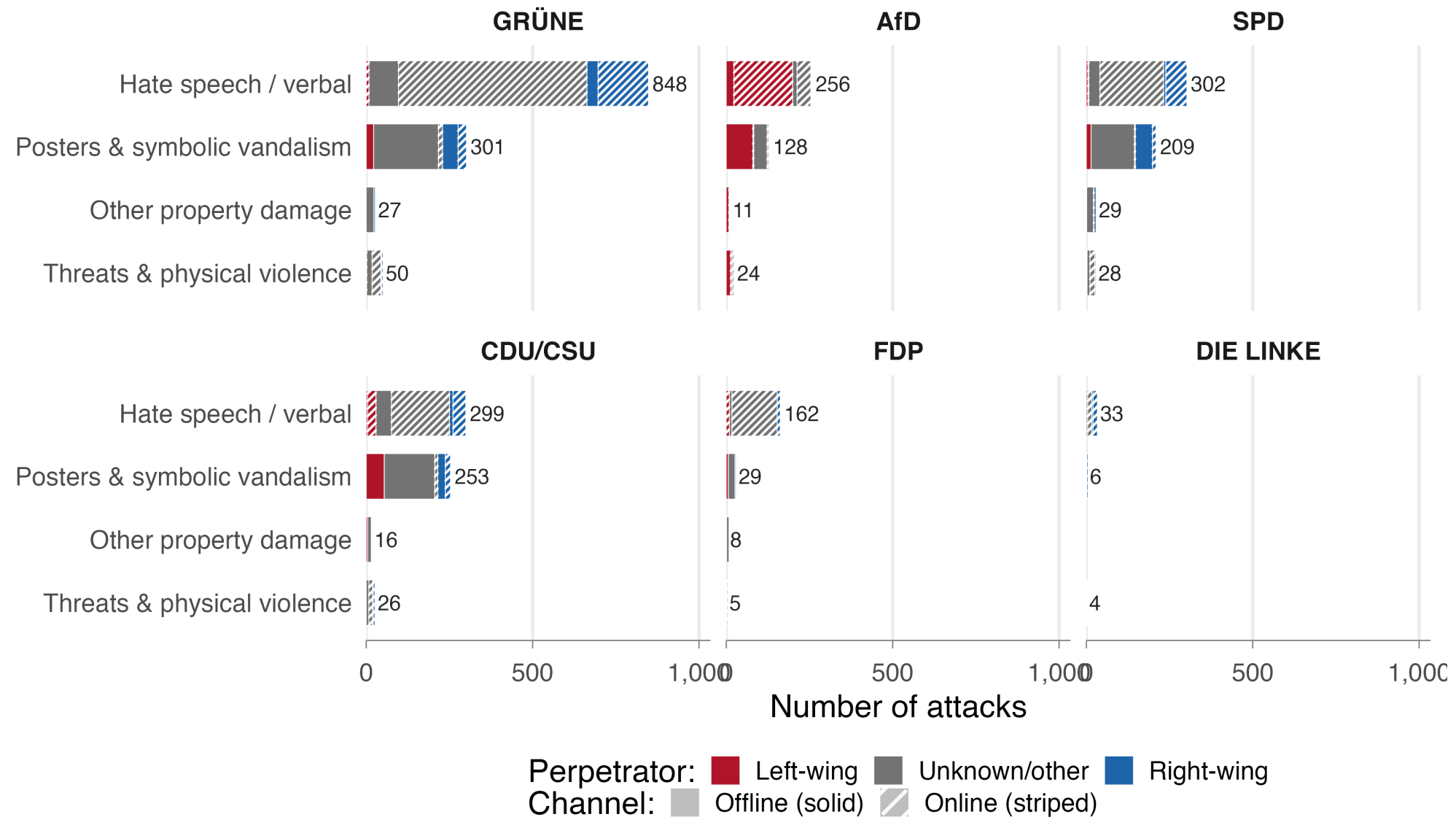


State

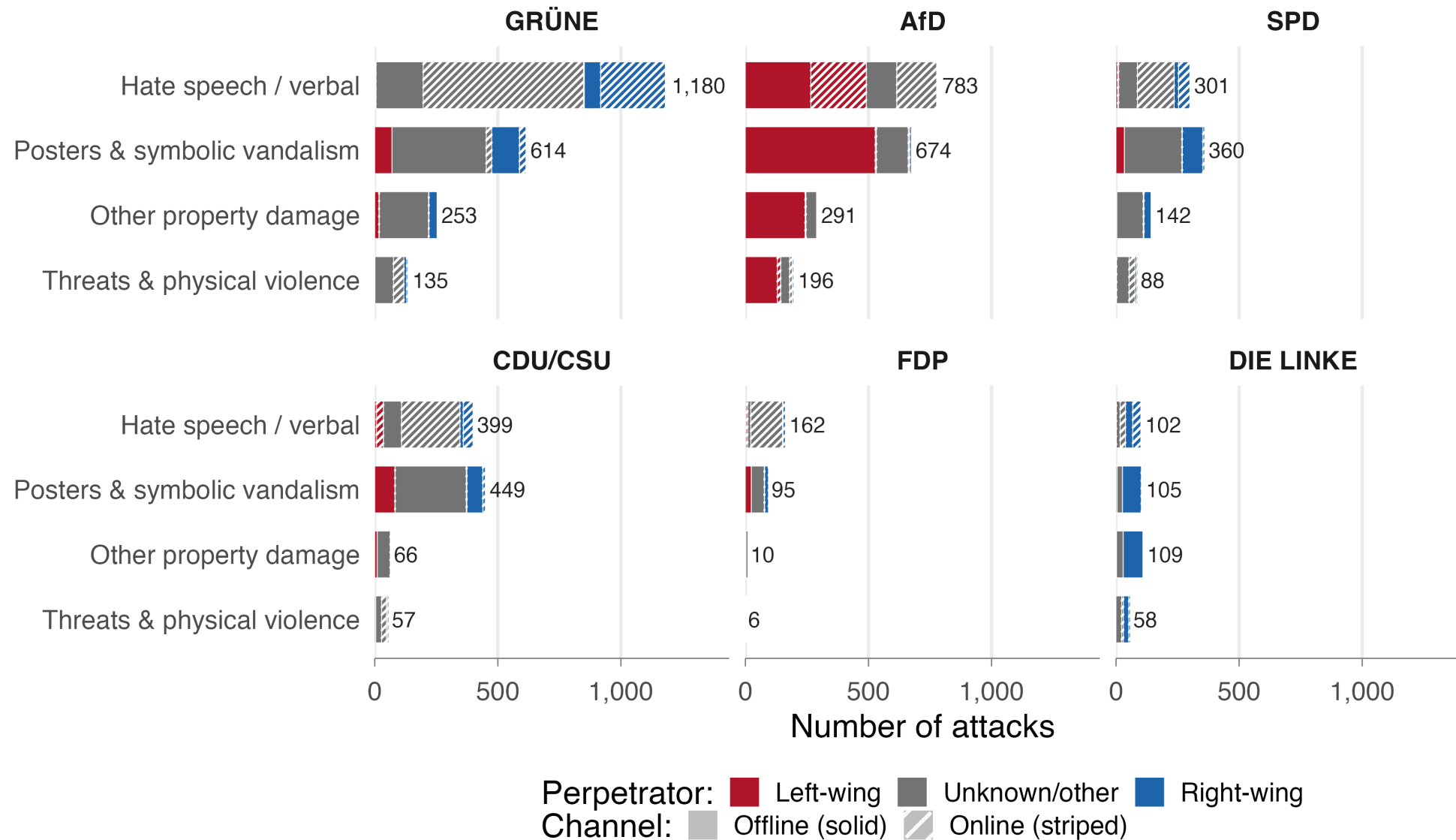


Verbal/online hate speech dominates; threats & physical violence are rare – **left- and right-wing perpetrators use similar repertoires**

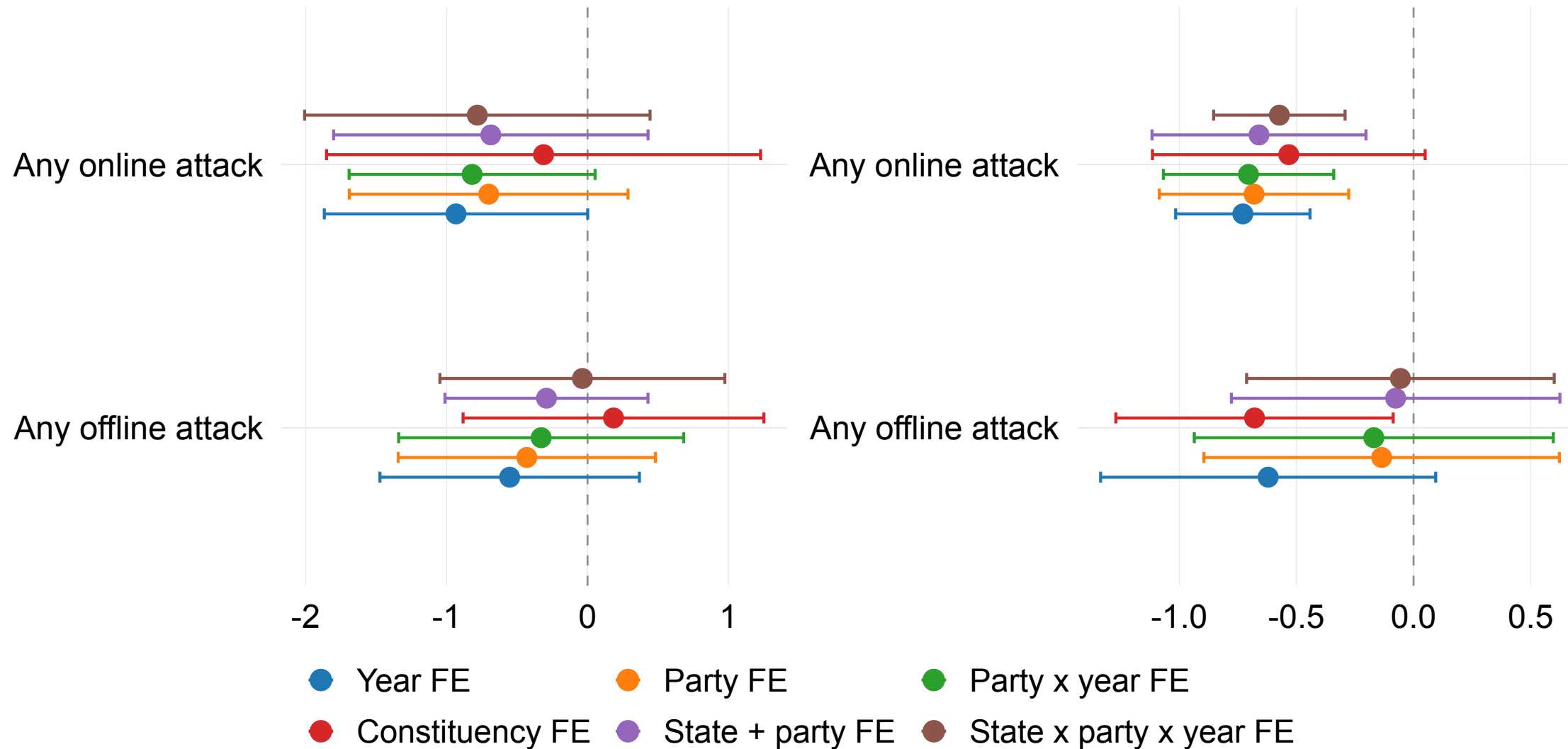
Repertoires by party (federal)



Repertoires by party (state)



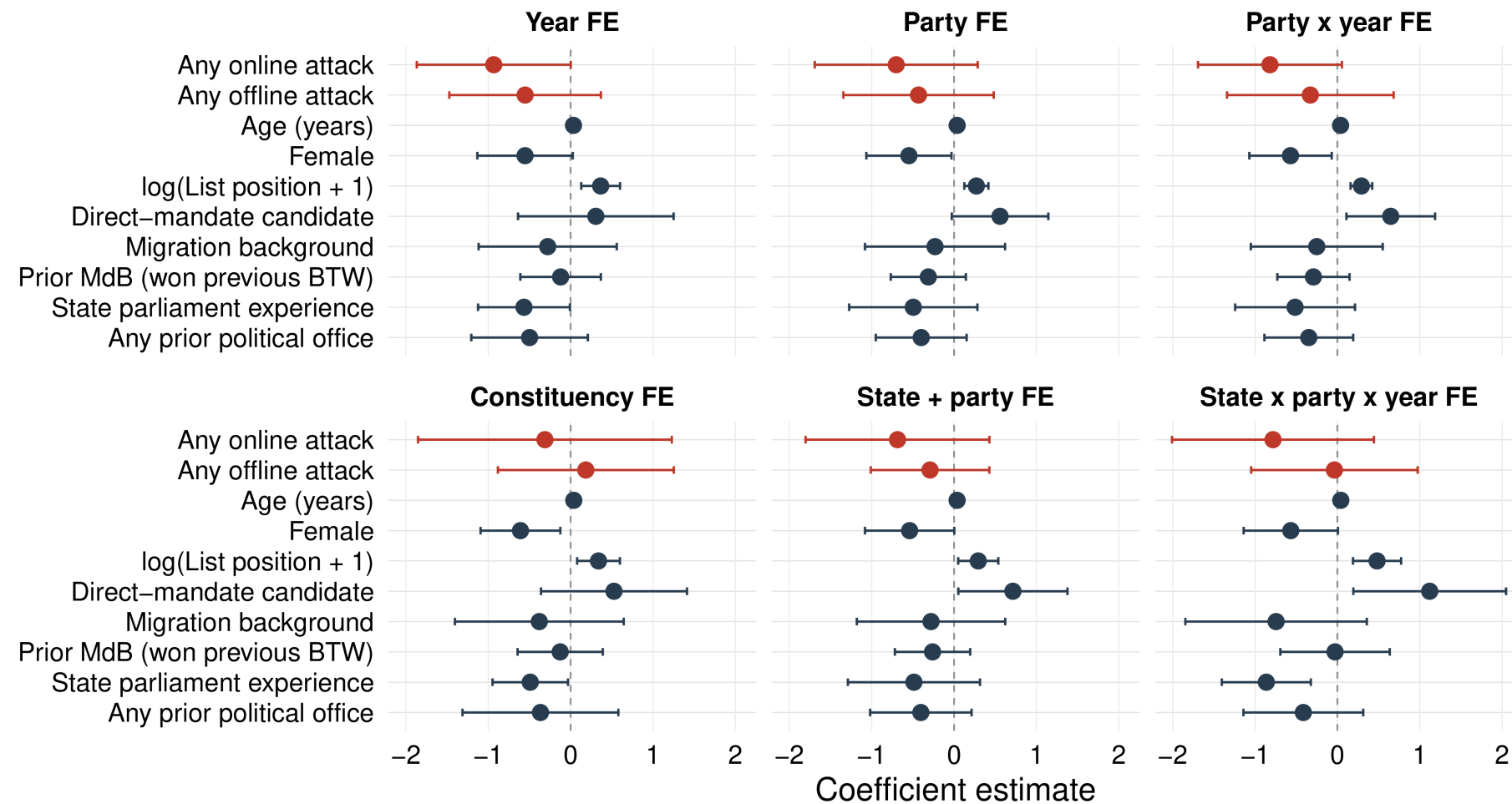
Perceived security and recorded attacks



(a) Federal targets, 6 months pre-election

(b) All targets through GLES field end

GLES: full specifications (federal, 6 months pre-election)

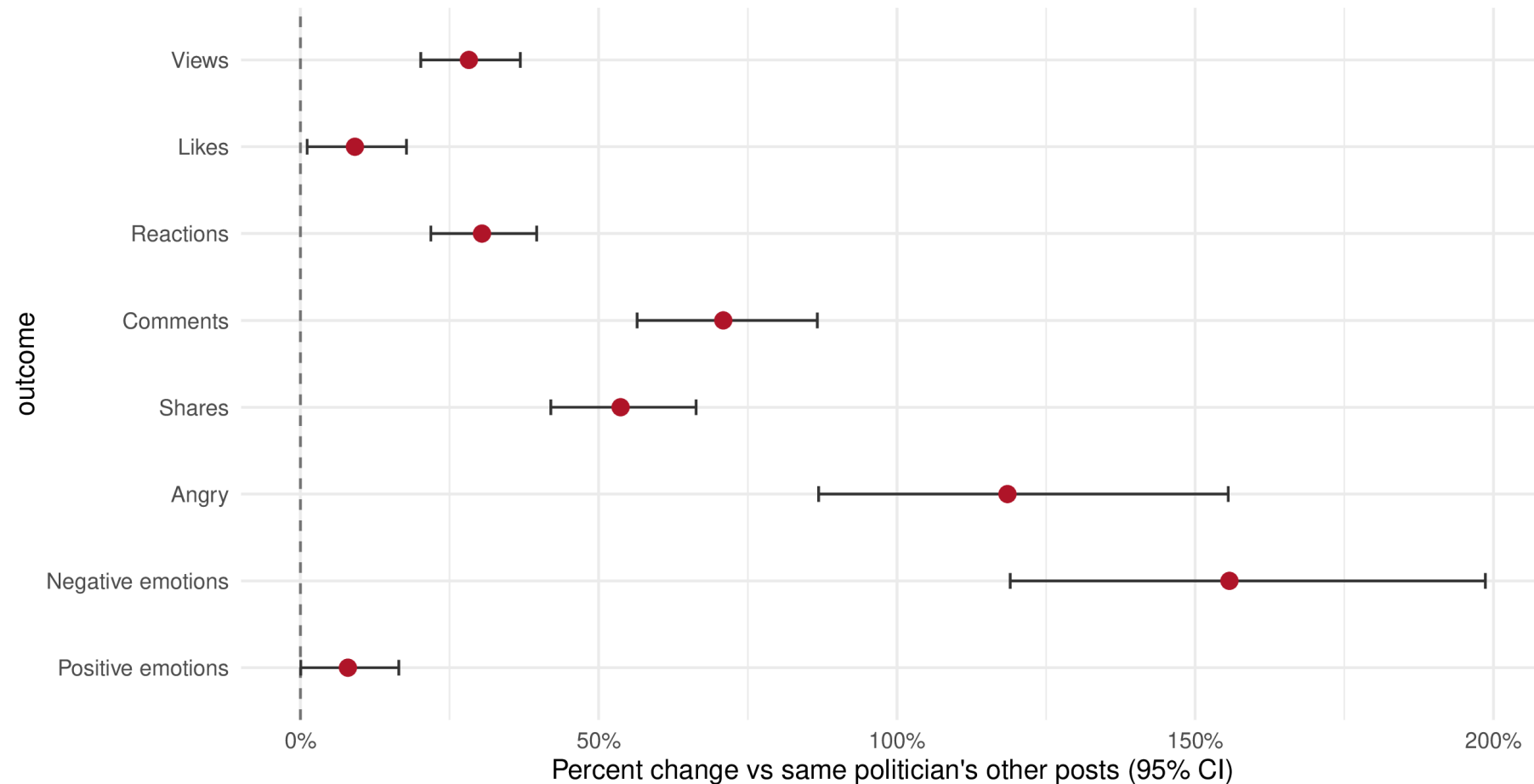


● Candidate covariates ● Recorded attacks

Engagement payoff: pooled within-politician estimates

Engagement on attack-related posts (within-politician comparison)

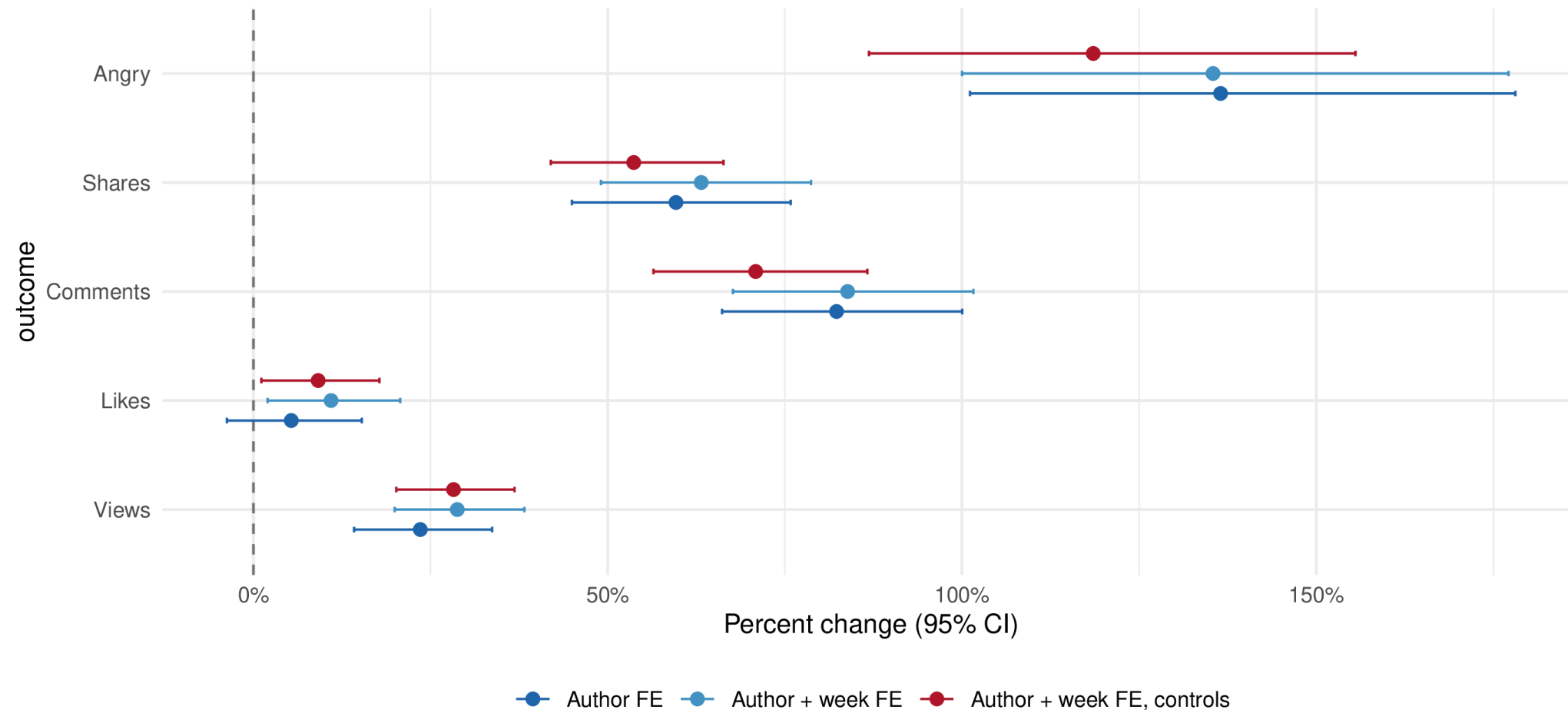
Main spec: $\log_{1p}(\text{outcome}) \sim \text{attack} + \text{content type} + \log \text{ text length} \mid \text{author} + \text{calendar week}$; SEs clustered by



Negative-emotion reactions = angry + sad; positive = love + care + haha.

Engagement payoff: robustness across specifications

Robustness: author FE vs adding week FE and post controls
Same pooled sample; attack coefficient on log1p engagement outcomes.



Engagement payoff: heterogeneity

Does who posts shape how attack posts are received?

Interaction models: attack + moderator:attack, with author + week FE (reference: CDU/CSU, male, low list position, Bund, list/no direct mandate). Post controls: content type and text

