Why Dominant Governing Parties Are Cross-Nationally Influential

Previous research suggests that political parties learn from and emulate the successful election strategies of governing parties in other countries. But what explains variation in the degree of influence that governing parties have on their foreign counterparts? We argue that "clarity of responsibility" within government, or the concentration of executive responsibility in the hands of a dominant governing party, allows parties to learn from the most obviously electorally successful incumbents. It therefore enhances the cross-national diffusion of party programs. To test this expectation, we analyze parties' policy positions in 26 established democracies since 1977. Our results indicate that parties disproportionately learn from and emulate dominant, high-clarity foreign incumbents. This finding contributes to a better understanding of the political consequences of "government clarity" and sheds new light on the heuristics that engender party policy diffusion by demonstrating that the most visible foreign incumbents, whose platforms have yielded concentrated power in office, influence party politics "at home."

Keywords: clarity of responsibility, government clarity, elections, party policy positions, policy diffusion, political parties

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When politicians and party strategists make programmatic choices to position their party for electoral success, they work in the context of considerable uncertainty (Budge 1994, 445; see also Somer-Topcu 2009; 2015), which may cause them to rely on heuristics or "cognitive shortcuts" (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; see also Rosenau 1990). Heuristics are short-hand guides to rational action under uncertainty (for example, Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Gale and Kariv 2003; Kahneman and Frederick 2002). Previous research suggests that political parties respond to the uncertainties of programmatic choice by employing the heuristic of learning from and emulating other parties' positions, including from recently successful governing parties *abroad* (Böhmelt, Ezrow, Lehrer, and Ward 2016), and from political parties in their own *domestic* sphere (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Laver 2005; Williams 2015; Williams and Whitten 2015).[1]

The following article examines *which* foreign incumbent platforms provide the most relevant and influential precedent for political parties. To this end, we combine research on the diffusion of parties' policies (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Meguid 2005, 2008; Laver 2005; Williams 2015; Williams and Whitten 2015; Böhmelt et al. 2016) with the literature on "clarity of responsibility" (Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999; Anderson 2000; Nadeau, Niemi, and Yoshinaka 2002; Hobolt, Tilley, and Banducci 2013). Work on the clarity of responsibility studies voters' ability to determine where authority over policy lies; "high clarity"

[1] Also consider how citizens use coalition behavior as a heuristic to update their perceptions of parties' policy positions. For example, Klüver and Spoon (2016) argue that coalitions complicate citizens' updating, while Fortunato and Adams (2015) claim that voters use the prime ministerial position as a proxy for the coalition position on policy (see also Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Adams, Ezrow, and Wlezien 2016). These conclusions are consistent with our findings.

refers to the concentration of power in the executive. We contend that the clarity characteristic also matters for party strategists who seek to identify those foreign incumbents with programs that provide the most relevant, electorally successful precedents. Following Hobolt et al. (2013, 171), we focus on *governmental clarity*: that is, the extent to which the executive's attributes concentrate power in the hands of a dominant party within government (see also Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999; Anderson 2000; Nadeau et al. 2002). This attribute of governments, which varies over time, enables us to analyze how the changing dominance of foreign incumbents in successive governments affects whether and how governing parties' programmatic positions diffuse internationally.

We define high government clarity as the *dominance of one party in the executive* and directly measure this by the vote share of the incumbent party. High-clarity incumbents are greatly visible and electorally successful parties. They typically owe their dominant position in government to their program's electoral appeal. These platforms prove influential abroad because they are *relevant, reliable*, and *available* precedents for parties abroad that search for electorally successful strategies. Thus, we should expect that party strategists "at home" focus disproportionately on high-clarity foreign incumbents. To illustrate this argument, consider the UK Conservative Party, which ruled in high-clarity, single-party majority governments in 1979-1990 under Margaret Thatcher. The party's visibility and re-election successes fueled a keen interest in its program by foreign party leaders and strategists who sought to position their own parties for electoral success. Saatchi and Saatchi, the campaign consultants who first successfully worked with the British Conservatives under Thatcher, for example, were subsequently employed by the Danish Conservatives (1990), the Dutch Social Democrats (1989), and the Irish Fianna Fail party (1989-1992) (see Farrell 1998, 172; see also Bowler and Farrell 1992). Foreign parties paid equally

careful attention to the Conservatives' policy appeals. In 1983, the Conservatives' manifesto pledge to implement privatization, including privatization of the telecommunications sector, was one of the most prominent and ambitious aspects of the party's program. Thatcher's triumph at the polls in the 1983 elections enhanced the visibility and appeal of the Conservatives' programmatic stance for foreign parties in Ireland, France, Norway, and a range of other OECD countries that subsequently chose to commit to privatization. The electoral motives of parties in these countries, we argue, contributed to making the UK the origin of an OECD-wide process of policy diffusion in telecommunications privatization (Schmitt 2011, 105).

This case illustrates a wider empirical pattern in the case-oriented literature, which suggests that manifestos of high-clarity incumbents – through their electoral success and the policies that they implement – enjoy enhanced visibility and have a disproportionate influence on the programmatic choices of election-seeking parties abroad. The implication is that other prominent examples of party policy diffusion – like diffusion from the centrist "Third Way" campaign of Bill Clinton's "New Democrats" in the first term of his presidency to Tony Blair's "New Labour" campaign in 1997, or the recent wave of populism – could gain their momentum from dominant governing parties using these policies to their electoral advantage.

Empirically, we analyze quantitative data on 26 established democracies in Europe since 1977. The results show that high-clarity incumbents are the most cross-nationally influential political parties. This finding remains robust to changes in the research design and model specifications, which we discuss in detail in the Supplementary Materials. In our conclusion, we discuss how our argument and findings inform the debates in international and comparative politics on party competition, policy diffusion in transnational politics, and the political consequences of clarity of government.

Heuristics, Government Clarity, and Party Policy Diffusion

In their search for electorally successful strategies, parties operate under electoral uncertainty and are likely to rely on heuristics to identify the most attractive programs. The platforms of dominant, high-clarity incumbents abroad offer an attractive shortcut for party strategists in judging the appeal of a party's program. They do so for three reasons.

1. When considering whether to emulate foreign incumbents, party strategists will look to the largest, electorally most successful governing parties. This makes dominant, high-clarity incumbents a *relevant* precedent.
2. High government clarity enables party strategists to identify and emulate those foreign parties that owe their incumbency most directly to the electoral success of their policy programs rather than coalition negotiations. This enhances the *reliability* of incumbency as a heuristic for judging the electoral attractiveness of these parties' platforms.
3. Dominant, high-clarity incumbents attract disproportionate media attention, which makes their platforms more *available* as precedents, facilitates emulation, and projects their international policy influence.

Office-seeking parties face uncertainty in the electoral process (Budge 1994, 445; see also Somer-Topcu 2009; 2015) and difficulties with calculating optimal electoral strategies (Laver and Sergenti 2012). Prior scholarship provides evidence that parties use various heuristics to manage this uncertainty and to make inferences about relevant information (see Weyland 2005). It therefore seems likely that cognitive short cuts also apply to their choice of their electoral strategy (also Simon 1955; Tversky and Kahneman 1982a; 1982b; Kahneman and Frederick 2002; Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier 2011). For example, parties may follow a "gradient climbing"

heuristic by moving in a given policy direction if this improves their electoral outcomes as measured by vote share (Kollman, Miller, and Page 1992; 1998; Bendor, Mookherjee, and Ray 2005; Jackson 2003). Similarly, electoral defeat leads parties to conclude that the electorate has moved away from their position under circumstances of uncertainty (Somer-Topcu 2009: 240).

Heuristics are also likely to matter for the process that drives diffusion between party programs. The literature emphasizes learning from and emulation of policies from abroad (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Most and Starr 1990; Elkins and Simmons 2005; Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2006; Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007; Gilardi 2010, 2012). One causal pathway for policy diffusion arises when parties look to foreign incumbent parties for guidance about policies that might help them to win elections at home (Böhmelt et al. 2016). Since strategists want their parties to win office, they are likely to focus their attention on foreign parties that assumed power.

Two types of cognitive heuristics guide parties in choosing which incumbents to emulate and learn from – the availability heuristic and the representativeness heuristic. According to Tversky and Kahneman (1982b, 164), "a person is said to employ the availability heuristic whenever he estimates frequency or probability by the ease with which instances or associations can be brought to mind." Using the availability heuristic, a party's subjective probability of a certain policy helping it to win office will increase with the ease with which it can be recalled that foreign incumbents successfully adopted this policy as part of their winning platforms. Under the representativeness heuristic, "probabilities are evaluated by the degree to which A resembles B" (Tversky and Kahneman 1974, 1124). Employing this heuristic, a party judges its chances of success are higher if its policies resemble those of foreign incumbents.

To analyze how these heuristics could influence *which* foreign incumbents political parties learn from and emulate, we combine the literature on party policy diffusion with that on clarity of responsibility (Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999; Anderson 2000; Nadeau et al. 2002; Hobolt et al. 2013). High clarity of responsibility enables voters to determine where authority over policy lies and to hold politicians accountable. Responsibility for policy outcomes is clear when features of the government itself and the wider institutional context concentrate power, rather than dispersing it. We focus on a specific aspect of clarity of responsibility, government clarity, which refers to the concentration of responsibility within a government. This characteristic affects not only whether voters can identify responsibility for policy, but also how party strategists attribute responsibility for *incumbency*, in their search for electorally successful programs.

Government clarity enables party strategists to identify those foreign parties that are most electorally successful and owe their dominant position in government most directly to their program's electoral appeal. The literature identifies several government features that contribute to government clarity including the dominance of the major governing party in coalition, single party government, majority government, the government's ideological cohesion, and in semi-presidential democracies, unified control of the government and presidency by the same party (Powell and Whitten 1993; Anderson 2000; Hobolt et al. 2013). We focus on the measure that best captures a party's dominance within government – its vote share.[2] We expect that the con-

[2] As noted, legislative seat share and government portfolio share are alternative measures of the same concept. In the Supplementary Materials, we show that our results are robust to these alternative operationalizations of our explanatory variable

centration of responsibility within a government facilitates international party policy diffusion through learning and emulation by focal parties for three related reasons.

First, high-clarity governments are those with large incumbents that govern alone or in coalition with significantly smaller, junior coalition partners (Anderson 2000, 154; see also Whitten and Palmer 1999; Nadeau et al. 2002; Hobolt et al. 2013). The larger vote share of incumbent parties not only enables them to gain office in the first place, but also to dominate policymaking within a governing coalition. For party strategists, a foreign incumbent's dominance in government, as captured by its vote share, acts as a cognitive short cut in judging the electoral appeal of the incumbent's platform. The largest incumbents are those who are electorally most successful – and for a party that aims to improve its electoral success by adopting the winning strategies of incumbents abroad, the most successful of these incumbents provides the *most relevant precedent*.

Second, high government clarity enables party strategists to identify and emulate those parties that owe their incumbency most directly to the electoral success of their policy platforms rather than coalition negotiations. Consider the contrast between a high-clarity, single party majority government and a coalition in which power is dispersed among multiple small partners: The majority party owes its dominant position in government directly and solely to its electoral victory. By contrast, coalition formation results from a bargaining process in which electoral performance and party size is only one parameter. In addition, coalition participation is influenced by considerations such as *coalition size*, that is, minimal winning status and the number of parties in the coalition (Riker 1962; Leiserson 1968); *policy*, including the ideological compatibility of the partners, the inclusion of the median party, or the presence of parties with anti-establishment views (Axelrod 1970; De Swann 1973; Laver and Schofield 1990; Budge and

Keman 1990); the *history* of parties in working together (Tavits 2008) and *institutional constraints* (Strøm 1990; Strøm, Budge, and Laver 1994). While these additional considerations play a role in the formation of all coalitions, they particularly blur the relevance of a party's platform to winning office when the electoral results produce no obvious dominant incumbent. Put differently, low clarity situations, which disperse power among multiple small parties, complicate party strategists' task of identifying how far the electoral appeal of a party's program rather than other considerations in coalition bargaining contributed to its success in winning incumbency. This makes incumbency in a high-clarity government in which power is concentrated in a single or dominant party a *more reliable short-cut* in judging the electoral appeal of a party's platform than participation in low clarity coalitions. As a result, the platforms of the biggest and most dominant incumbent parties inspire more cross-national learning by parties in other systems that wish to maximize their chances of winning office.

Third, media attention to incumbents varies with the concentration of government responsibility. Not only do dominant incumbents typically receive considerably more attention than junior coalition partners (Schneider, Schönbach, and Semetko 1999; Schoenbach, de Ridder, and Lauf 2001; Semetko and Schoenbach 1999), [3] high-clarity incumbents also receive greater attention than parties in governments that disperse power. Dominant governing parties

[3] Consider the difference in media attention that the German Green party and the (Liberal) Free Democratic Party receive as minor coalition partners when they are in office, compared to the more dominant parties (CDU/CSU and the SPD). The UK Liberal-Democrats are another example. Media attention to their program in the 2016 election and their ability to keep the campaign focused on their concerns lagged significantly behind their dominant coalition partner, the Conservative Party.

have privileged access to "political and media resources" (Pan and Kosicki 2001, 60; see also Carlin, Love, and Martínez-Gallardo 2015), which they can leverage to control the political narrative, including the framing of election campaigns. Keeping the campaign and media attention focused on the dominant incumbent's concerns and program enhances its *availability as a heuristic* for parties abroad. In contrast, low clarity environments, which give rise to competing framing attempts by multiple governing parties of similar weight, are likely to disperse media attention making the platform of any one incumbent a less dominant and available precedent for foreign party strategists.

In sum, for a party looking abroad, the platforms of dominant foreign incumbents in high-clarity government environments are more *relevant, reliable,* and *available* precedents than the platforms of low clarity incumbents who won fewer votes and must share power to a greater degree. As result we expect that a party's dominant role within its government enhances its probability of becoming an international target of learning and emulation. Our hypothesis summarizes this expectation:

Government Clarity Hypothesis: Political parties are more likely to learn from and emulate the policy platforms of foreign incumbents that bear dominant responsibility within their governments (measured by the vote share of the incumbent party).

Research Design

Data and Dependent Variable

Our unit of analysis is the party-year, our dataset containing information on 215 political parties in 26 European democracies between 1977 and 2010 (see also Böhmelt et al. 2016). We

use the Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) left-right measure of party positions (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, Budge, and McDonald 2006; Volkens, Lehmann, Matthieß, Merz, Regel, and Werner 2015). The left-right dimension provides a common vocabulary for political elites and voters relating to the salient issues of the government's role in the economy and the distribution of income (Huber and Inglehart 1995; Warwick 2002).[4] It is the most important dimension for issue competition (Huber and Powell 1994; Powell 2000; see also McDonald and Budge 2005). The CMP left-right measure is broadly consistent with those derived using other methods (Hearl 2001; McDonald and Mendes 2001; Laver, Benoit, and Garry 2003; see also Marks Hooghe, Steenbergen, and Bakker 2007). We rescale the CMP scores from 1 (extreme left) to 10 (extreme right) to make it consistent with the median voter scale we use. Because the spatial analysis we employ requires equally spaced observations (Franzese and Hays 2007; 2008), we interpolate scores between the election years for which the CMP data is available. In the text, we report analyses based on interpolating under the assumption that party positions do not change until the next election year.[5]

[4] Ideological structuring underlying the left-right scale in Eastern Europe may differ from that in Western Europe (Evans and Whitefield 1993) as well as across countries and time (Evans and Whitefield 1998; Harbers, De Vries, and Steenbergen 2012; Linzer 2008; Markowski 1997). However, there are strong arguments for using left-right dimension to understand party competition in post-communist democracies (Marks, Hooghe, Nelson, and Edwards 2006, 169; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2011; McAllister and White 2007).

[5] For example, if a social democratic party moderates its left-right position from 3 to 4 between elections that occur in 1997 and 2001, the yearly estimates for this party would be the following:

Methodology

We estimate spatio-temporal lag models (Franzese and Hays 2007; 2008), where a party's position at time *t* is a function of foreign parties' positions at an earlier time *e-1* and a weighting matrix specifies which subset of foreign parties exert influence. For instance, if it is believed that only foreign incumbents count, the matrix has zero entries in the row for party *i* except in columns corresponding to parties *j* that are foreign incumbents, where the entry is positive. Thus, the equation we estimate is,

$$y_t = \phi y_{t-1} + \beta X_{t-1} + \rho W y_{e-1} + \varepsilon, \quad (1)$$

where: y_t is *Party Position* and y_{t-1} is its lagged value. X_{t-1} is a set of controls lagged by one year discussed in detail below, year and country fixed effects, and the constant. ε is the error term. Wy_{e-1} is the product of a connectivity matrix (W) and the temporally lagged dependent variable (y_{e-1}). Notice that it is the position of other parties, *j, in the year before the last election* in their country before time *t* that is used when calculating Wy_{e-1} (hence the subscript *e-1*). Specifically, since developing party manifestos is a "time-consuming process [...] which typically takes place over a two-three year period during which party-affiliated research departments and committees draft sections of this manuscript, which are then circulated for revisions and approval upward to party elites and downward to activists" (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009: 832), we use parties' policy positions of the year before the last election in their country when constructing spatial lags. To illustrate this lag structure, assume that the political parties competing in the 2002 Dutch national election looked to the party position of the incumbent UK Labour Party. The previous inter-election period in the UK was 1997-2001. Thus, given our assumptions, Dutch parties re-

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1997: 3.00; 1998: 3.00; 1999: 3.00; 2000: 3.00; 2001: 4.00. The appendix includes a more detailed rationale for our data structure.

lied on the 1997 Labour Party position (a 5-year lag). The average lag for all spatial lags used for the analyses is 5.34 years (standard deviation 1.68).[6]

We estimate the model using time-series cross-sectional spatial OLS (S-OLS) regression, which is justifiable since explanatory variables are temporally lagged (Williams 2015; Williams and Whitten 2015; Böhmelt et al. 2016). Recall Franzese and Hays (2008, 758), though:

> "estimating spatial-lag models by OLS yields biased estimates, even if not too badly biased if interdependence remains mild; though even then standard-error accuracy is elusive (and PCSE is no help). A simple alternative that may ease or even erase the simultaneity problems with S-OLS is to time-lag the spatial lag […]. Insofar as a time-lagged spatial lag is predetermined – that is, insofar as the interdependence is not instantaneous, where instantaneous means within an observation period, given the model – no bias arises. In other words, if spatial interdependence processes have no effect within an observational period, and if spatial and temporal dynamics are sufficiently well modeled to prevent spatial interdependence from manifesting instantaneously due to measurement or specification error, OLS with a time-lagged spatial lag regressor is an effective estimation strategy."

Considering the Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009, 832) argument that it takes time to develop party manifestos, an instantaneous diffusion effect is unlikely. Accordingly, we estimate the spa-

[6] Alternatively, if we assume linearly interpolated party-position values, Dutch parties would have used Labour's position in the year 2000, and the lag would be two years. For linearly interpolated party-position values, the average lag is 2.67 years (standard deviation=1.24). Empirical analyses based on linear interpolation do not affect our substantive conclusions.

tio-temporal lag model with a spatial lag that is temporally lagged by using party policy values from the year before the last election (the subscript *e-1*). Further, note that estimating spatial maximum-likelihood models instead (Franzese and Hays 2007, 163; see also 2008) does not affect the reported results.

Our empirical analysis also accounts for the possibility that international policy diffusion between party programs results from common exposure to similar economic (and other exogenous) factors (Franzese and Hays 2007, 142). For example, a rich literature examines how international economic factors exert cross-national pressures that constrain government policy autonomy (Garrett 1998), the policy alternatives available to the left (Boix 1998), and the size and role of the welfare state (Rodrik 1998). Following Franzese and Hays (2008), to address this concern, we include the lagged dependent variable, party-fixed effects, and time-fixed effects. Including these items, plus a set of control variables, credibly ensures that contagion "cannot be dismissed as a mere product of a clustering in similar [party or state] characteristics," that is by common exposure (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008, 230; see also Franzese and Hays 2007; 2008; Plümper and Neumayer 2010, 427). In more detail, the lagged position of the party allows for path dependencies in policy such as those caused by inertia in policy making, year-fixed effects control for common economic shocks such as macro-economic cycles, and party fixed effects control for constant, but idiosyncratic factors affecting a party's position.

Main Explanatory Variable: Spatial Lag for Government Clarity

To capture "dominance" in the government, we rely on *vote share* that we incorporate in a spatial lag. This spatial lag then constitutes the main independent variable. As noted above, since it takes time to process information on other parties and to incorporate this into manifestos,

each spatial lag is based on the position of a party in the year before the last election in its system before year *t* (see also Böhmelt et al. 2016). Legislative seat share and government portfolio share are alternative measures of the same concept. These measures are highly correlated. A governing party's dominance in controlling vote share is typically reflected in that party's dominant control over the government's legislative seats, which in turn correlates with dominance in controlling government portfolios (Gamson 1961; Warwick and Druckman 2006). In the Supplementary Materials, we show that our results are robust if legislative seat share and government portfolio share are used as alternative measures of our explanatory variable.

Incumbent parties with large vote shares are more visible for party strategists abroad who consider learning from and emulating successful foreign parties. In effect, their larger vote share makes these incumbent parties more dominant in the government, which facilitates government clarity (Hobolt et al. 2013, 170f). To test the government clarity hypothesis, we use the spatial lag $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$ defined as follows: in the row corresponding to party *i*, entries are 0 unless in column *j* the corresponding party was recently in government in another country (either forming the government on its own or as a member of a coalition) in which case the entry is party *j*'s vote share. Data for incumbency is from Döring and Manow (2012), and data on vote share is from the CMP (Budge et al. 2001; Klingemann et al. 2006; Volkens et al. 2015).

On theoretical grounds that apply in our context, we do not row-standardize $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$ (Böhmelt et al. 2016; see also Williams 2015 and Williams, Seki, and Whitten 2016). Here, row standardization would imply that parties allocate a fixed amount of effort to considering other parties' positions independent of the number of such parties that might be relevant. This is not a rational approach: consideration should be given if the marginal extra information

gathered has greater value than the marginal cost of obtaining it, which does not imply the allocation of a fixed amount of effort.

Control Variables

Parties respond to the positions of other domestic parties (Adams 2001; Adams and Merrill 2009; Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009) – particularly to members of their party family (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009, 839; see also Adams 2001; Adams and Merrill 2009; Meguid 2005; 2008; Williams 2015). To allow for this, we define two additional spatial lags. In $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic}}$, in the row of W for party *i* the cell corresponding to the column for party *j* contains 1 if *i* and *j* are different parties competing in the same political system, otherwise containing 0. $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic Ideology}}$ is defined in a similar manner except that in W cells contain 1 only if *i* and *j* are different parties competing in the same system that belong to the same ideological bloc, and 0 otherwise. Party family data derives from the CMP, but we follow the recoding suggested by Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009, 834): Communist, Green, and Social-Democratic parties are recoded as "left"; conservative, Christian-democratic, and nationalist parties as "right"; and liberal parties as "centrist".[7]

We further control for the position of the median voter using Eurobarometer data on respondents' left-right self-placement on a scale of 1 (left) to 10 (right) (Schmitt and Scholtz 2005). These data cover EU member states from 1976, with additional data becoming available with the accession of new member states, and are also available for a few non-member states.[8]

[7] The parties belonging to remaining CMP families (namely, regional, agrarian, and other small specialized party families) are omitted.

[8] We return to this in the Supplementary Materials.

We use Tukey's method (1977) to calculate the median from the individual level data, and we then lag the median by one year to allow for delayed responses by parties.

Ward, Ezrow, and Dorussen (2011) argue that integration into the world economy pushes party positions to the right unless the median voter is already far enough to the right, in which case competition will already have pushed parties to positions at which globalization does not have an impact. First, we control for the economic component of Dreher's (2006) Globalization Index, deriving from trade flows, portfolio and direct investment, tariff and invisible barriers to trade, and capital controls. Second, to allow for Ward, Ezrow, and Dorussen's (2011) findings, we include the multiplicative interaction *Lagged Median Voter * Lagged Economic Globalization*. In the related literature, national macro-economic conditions are often controlled for (Williams 2015; Williams and Whitten 2015; Williams, Seki, and Whitten 2016). However, unemployment rates, GDP growth, and inflation were insignificant when added to our model, and reported results are robust to their inclusion (see Supplementary Materials).

Empirical Results

Table 1 summarizes three models. Model 1 focuses only on $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$ and the control variables, but omits the domestic-level spatial lags. Model 2 adds $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic}}$, while Model 3 add $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic Ideology}}$ to model 2. Because we do not row-standardize, the coefficients of the spatial lags cannot be interpreted directly; following Plümper and Neumayer's suggestion (2010: 430f; see also Ward and Gleditsch 2008: 39), we multiply the coefficient of the spatial lag by the average number of neighbors to assess short-term impacts. Because we include the temporally lagged dependent variable, long-term effects of spatial lags (and other explanatory variables) are

larger than short term effects in the current year. For instance, the impact of a spatial lag w is at period T > t is,

$$\sum_{t=1}^{T}\left(\rho\sum_{j}w_{ij}y_{je-1}\right)\beta_0^{T-t} \tag{2}$$

β_0 being the coefficient on the lagged dependent variable (Plümper, Troeger, and Manow 2005, 336; Plümper and Neumayer 2010, 425). We estimate both asymptotic long-term effects and short-tern effects, and report them in Figure 1.

Moreover, when including a spatial lag into a model, coefficients provide information about the pre-dynamic effects, that is, "the pre- [spatial] interdependence feedback impetus to outcomes from other regressors" (Hays, Kachi, and Franzese 2010, 409). To fully understand the effect of the variables when including a spatial lag, one must estimate spatio-temporal multipliers, which allow the "expression of estimated responses of the dependent variable across all units" (Hays, Kachi, and Franzese 2010, 409). Our initial discussion of the effects focuses on the pre-spatial effects, but we have calculated spatial long-term equilibrium effects and present them in Table 2.

As expected by our theory, $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$ is positively signed and statistically significant at conventional levels in Models 1-3. Substantively, a party's left-right policy position would be 0.004 points higher in the short run, if all foreign (neighboring) incumbents shift one unit to the right, compared to the year before (Ward and Gleditsch 2008, 38). In the long run, as demonstrated with Figure 1, the effect increases to 0.015 when the spatial lag $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$ is raised by one unit. While these substantive results are based on Model 1, adding or dropping specific variables does not change the findings qualitatively. This also holds true when adding the domestic-level spatial lags (Table 1 Models 2-3).

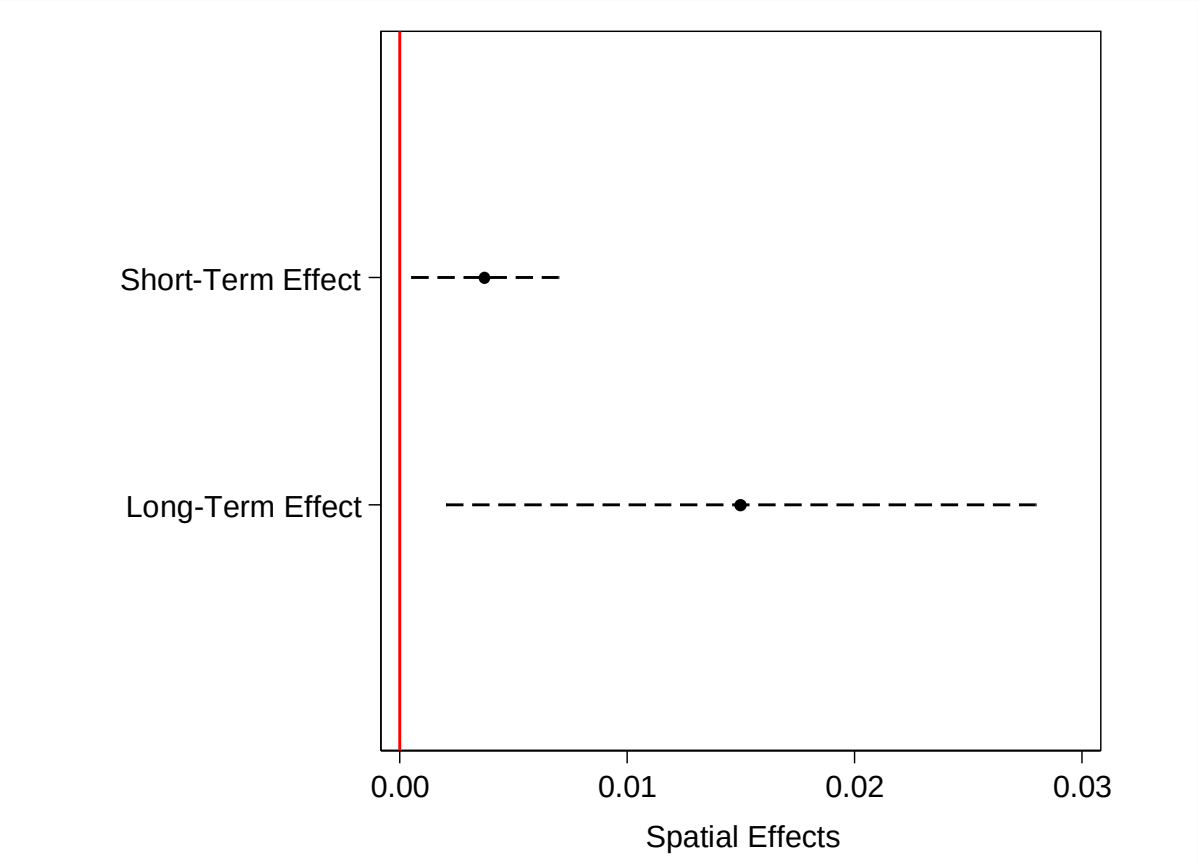
Table 1. Government Clarity in Party Policy Diffusion – Incumbents' Vote Share

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	-1.5745	-1.4626	-1.3808
	(0.8895)*	(0.8854)*	(0.8916)
Lagged Party Position	0.7511	0.7388	0.7385
	(0.0129)***	(0.0131)***	(0.0131)***
Lagged Median Voter	0.4555	0.3990	0.3877
	(0.1580)***	(0.1577)**	(0.1583)**
Lagged Economic Globalization	0.0290	0.0262	0.0254
	(0.0113)***	(0.0112)**	(0.0113)**
Lag Median Voter *	-0.0061	-0.0053	-0.0051
Lagged Economic Globalization	(0.0021)***	(0.0021)**	(0.0021)**
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic}}$		0.0060	0.0053
		(0.0012)***	(0.0015)***
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic Ideology}}$			0.0019
			(0.0024)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$	0.0002	0.0001	0.0001
	(0.0001)**	(0.0001)*	(0.0000)*
Observations	2,718	2,718	2,718
Year and Country Fes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R^2	0.877	0.878	0.878
RMSE	0.325	0.323	0.323

Notes. Table entries are coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; year and country fixed effects included in all models, but omitted from presentation; the scale for party position (dependent variable) recalibrated from the left-right estimates reported by the CMP to fit on the 1-10 median voter scale; all explanatory variables are one-year lags, the spatial lags capture parties' policy positions of the year before the last election.

* p<0.10; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01

Figure 1. Temporal Short-Term and Asymptotic Long-Term Effects of $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$



Notes. The horizontal bars are 95 percent confidence intervals. Spatial effect of 0 marked with red vertical line. Estimates are based on Model 1.

These effects appear quite modest because the spatial lag $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$ weighs the linkage by vote share and so the estimates are based on the neighboring governing parties ("neighbors") having received 1 percent of the vote. If all neighbors have 2 percent of the vote, the influence of these neighbors doubles. With respect to government clarity, if all neighbors are in countries with low government clarity and receive, for example, 17.5 percent of the vote, these neighbors will influence the focal party by half as much the situation in which neighbors compete under high clarity (in this example, these parties receive 35 percent of the vote on average). In the short run, these effects are: 0.004 * 17.5 = 0.07; and 0.004 * 35 = 0.14; and, in the long run, the effects increase to 0.015 * 17.5 = 0.2625; and 0.015 * 35 = 0.525, respectively.

Coming to the long-term equilibrium impacts, or the higher-order effect from the influence the policy position of *i* in *e-1* exerts on its neighbor *j* in *t*, which in turn feeds back into the network and then influences others, including *i*, at time *e+1* (see also Ward and Cao 2012, 1092-1094), we assumed that the spatial weights and all other variables remain at 2010 values. Next, we hypothetically increase the parties' policy positions by 1 unit on a 1-10 scale. We then calculate the long-term effects on all parties, as the shock reverberates through the system of spatial and temporal lags using the following equation (Ward and Gleditsch 2008, 45),

$$(I - \rho \mathbf{W} - \phi I)^{-1} \Delta X\beta \quad (3)$$

where I is the identity matrix, **W** the sub-matrix of the i^{th} weighting matrix for period *t*, and $\Delta X\beta$ is the shock at time *t*. Since each unit will have a different set of linkages to its neighbors, the impact of a hypothetical change in x_i will depend on *which unit* is being changed.

Based on Model 3, Table 2 ($\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}$) summarizes the findings from two such experiments for the impact of a one point increase in a party's policy position on the 1-10 scale in 2010 for a selected set of focal parties: the CDU/CSU (Germany) and Labour (UK). Table 2 reports the median (50 percent) equilibrium impact, based on 1,000 random draws from the multivariate normal distribution of the spatial and temporal lags. The simulations suggest that a one-unit increase shock in the UK's Labour party's policy position would positively affect all other parties in the system. For instance, the German SPD would react to this by increasing its policy position by 0.16 units to the right. Likewise, the Dutch Christian Union would move to the right by 0.17 units.

Table 2. Spatial Long-Term Equilibrium Effects: $W_{y^{\text{Incumbent Vote Share}}}$

Country	Party	Germany CDU/CSU	UK Labour
Netherlands	GL Green Left	0.15	0.17
Netherlands	SP Socialist Party	0.15	0.17
Netherlands	PvdA Labour Party	0.15	0.17
Netherlands	D'66 Democrats'66	0.15	0.17
Netherlands	VVD People's Party for Freedom and Democracy	0.14	0.17
Netherlands	CDA Christian Democratic Appeal	0.15	0.17
Netherlands	CU Christian Union	0.15	0.17
Netherlands	PVV Party of Freedom	0.15	0.17
France	Les Verts The Greens	0.14	0.16
France	PCF French Communist Party	0.14	0.16
France	PS Socialist Party	0.14	0.16
France	MoDem Democartic Mouvement	0.14	0.16
France	UMP Union for a Popular Movement	0.14	0.16
France	FN National Front	0.14	0.16
Italy	PdL People of Freedom	0.14	0.16
Italy	PD Democratic Party	0.14	0.16
Italy	UdC Union of the Center	0.14	0.16
Italy	LN Northern League	0.14	0.16
Italy	IdV List Di Pietro - Italy of Values	0.14	0.16
Spain	IU United Left	0.13	0.15
Spain	PSOE Spanish Socialist Workers' Party	0.13	0.15
Spain	PP Popular Party	0.13	0.15
Spain	CiU Convergence and Union	0.13	0.15
Germany	90/Greens Alliance'90/Greens	0.14	0.15
Germany	LINKE The Left	0.14	0.15
Germany	SPD Social Democratic Party of Germany	0.14	0.15
Germany	FDP Free Democratic Party	0.14	0.15
Germany	CDU/CSU Christian Democratic/Social Union	3.90	0.15
UK	Labour Party	0.13	3.92
UK	Liberal Democrats	0.13	0.14
UK	Conservative Party	0.13	0.14

Notes. Table entries pertain to spatial long-term equilibrium effects when raising the party policy position of one of the parties highlighted in the last three columns by 1. Entries are based on two decimal places and rounded to this. Table only captures a selection of parties and countries in 2010, not the whole sample.

Linking these findings to our theory, we find strong and robust support for the *Government Clarity Hypothesis*. Office-seeking parties operating under electoral uncertainty rely on heuristics, and foreign office-holders serve as an available precedent for the focal party wishing to gain office. However, not all foreign incumbents are created equal. They differ in terms of how clearly they control government (Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999; An-

derson 2000; Nadeau et al. 2002; Hobolt et al. 2013), and we have shown that this influences their visibility abroad. For party strategists who consider emulating and learning from foreign incumbents, the evidence of a party platform's electoral success is most direct when the incumbent bears *clear responsibility* for winning office. Relying on the vote share of governmental parties, we find that high government clarity projects the international policy influence of incumbents.

Finally, the results concerning the control variables corroborate the findings reported in Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009), Williams (2015), and Ward et al. (2011). In line with the expectations expressed by Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) and Williams (2015), the coefficients of the domestic-level spatial lags, $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic}}$ and $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic Ideology}}$, have positive, nearly identical coefficient estimates, although the estimate of $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Domestic Ideology}}$ is slightly higher (around 0.006). This replicates the findings in Adams and Somer-Topcu (2009) and Williams (2015) as we show that parties respond to the left-right policy positions of their competitors at the domestic level. Indeed, these estimates are (unsurprisingly) close to the estimates in Williams (2015, 152). Second, there is evidence for a significant interaction effect between economic globalization and the median voter as the estimate on the interaction coefficient indicates that the further to the right the median voter, the more globalization pushes parties' positions to the left (Ward et al. 2011).

Conclusion

Political parties respond disproportionately to the left-right positions of dominant governing parties abroad. Existing scholarship on the clarity of responsibility has traditionally focused on accountability "at home" (Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999; Anderson 2000; Nadeau, Niemi, and Yoshinaka 2002; Hobolt, Tilley, and Banducci 2013). We show that

government clarity has previously uncharted cross-national, and much wider, implications than generally understood. Our work also sheds new light on how leaders and strategists choose the policies that position their parties in electoral races (see Alvarez, Nagler, and Bowler 2000; Budge 1994; Budge Crewe, and Farlie 2010; Dow 2001; 2011; Erikson and Romero 1990; Glasgow and Alvarez 2005; Kedar 2005; Laver 2005; Somer-Topcu 2009; Spoon 2011; Tavits 2007). The heuristics applied by these decision makers identify the policy pledges of high-clarity incumbents, who have secured a dominant position in government, as the most relevant and reliable guide to electorally successful policies.

We believe that this finding has practical implications. In the policy world, the electoral strategy of emulating dominant and successful foreign incumbents rests on the assumption that parties and voters operate in information environments with some broadly defined common content. The rise of new media and the fragmentation of communication channels presents challenges not only to the party-political strategy of learning from successful incumbents abroad, but also to the informational mechanisms that underpin representation and accountability more generally. Parties may carefully craft programs to position themselves for electoral success, but the effectiveness of that strategy will increasingly depend on their ability to communicate this position to voters by harnessing the full range of new and old media and reaching across segmented communication channels. When parties master this challenge and rise to dominance in government, our research shows that their mandate will, in turn, encourage programmatic learning by parties in other countries. The reward of a clear mandate, therefore, is not confined to domestic politics alone, but can also be expected to contribute to the creation of a more congenial international policy environment. Put differently, our work highlights that electoral mandates entail global consequences. This has important consequences for how we understand effective political repre-

sentation, responsiveness, and accountability in an age of increasing international interdependence. A narrowly defined "domestic-only" view of party policy choice and competition will fail to capture this reality.

In addition, there are crucial consequences for the study of transnational policy diffusion (Elkins and Simmons 2005; Dobbin, Simmons, and Garrett 2007; Gilardi 2010, 2012). While this literature primarily focuses on government-to-government public policy diffusion, we highlight the importance of an additional *party-to-party channel* of transnational policy diffusion. [9]

Moreover, the literature on "partisan waves" (Hellwig 2001; Kayser and Peress 2012; Farrell and Newman 2017) shows that center-left or center-right party success diffuses cross-nationally. Our study implies that another cross-national consequence of partisan waves is that they affect *all* the parties, not just those from the same party family or bloc. For example, if a social-democratic party is electorally successful, then parties abroad in general – and not only more left-wing parties – will shift to the left. Similarly, cross-national learning from successful governing parties who absorbed into their own programs at least some of the policies of populist

[9] The evidence we present shows that the programs of the most obviously electorally successful, dominant incumbents are emulated extensively across borders. Together with the well-established finding that party *positions* influence public policy *outputs* (Kang and Powell 2010; see also McDonald and Budge 2005; Budge et al. 2012), this indicates that one channel for the diffusion of international public policy is programmatic learning by political parties from the platforms of highly visible incumbents abroad.

challengers can be expected to magnify the impact of the populist wave on party competition internationally.[10]

Our work also holds insights for the politics of transparency. Transparency, that is, information about policy, is crucial to meaningful elections and accountable government, but the sources of transparency remain poorly understood. Focusing on the relationship between democracy and transparency, for instance, Hollyer, Rosendorff, and Vreeland (2011) argue that transparency is a consequence of democratic as opposed to non-democratic forms of government. Our results suggest that transparency cannot be attributed to the form of government alone. Among democracies, the information available to observers about the policy positions of governing parties varies and is enhanced by government clarity. This, in turn, shapes programmatic emulation.

Finally, our study leads to new opportunities to research how parties choose policies at a time of increasing cross-national interdependence. First, a core assumption of our theoretical work is that parties imitate the policy pledges of high-clarity, dominant incumbent parties abroad to compete more effectively at the domestic level. Future works could study whether this strategy is effective in electoral terms. Second, although analyzing party policy diffusion on the left-right dimension is an important first step, future research might examine the cross-national diffusion of party positions in more specific dimensions such as European integration (De Vries and Hobolt 2012) or focus on issue salience competition strategies (Egan 2011; van Heck forthcoming). Third, future work might explore in more depth how cross-national learning enters into the process by which political parties choose their policy positions. This requires contextual analyses

[10] A related but separate question is whether newly emerging populist parties copy the example of populist parties abroad that have been successful *at increasing their vote share but (typically) not at getting into office*. We leave this question for future research.

of the manifesto writing process in the context of parties' organizational structures, the goals of their elites, strategists and rank-and-file party supporters (Meguid 2008; Spoon 2011; Tavits 2013), to determine which actors within the party are responsible for copying parties in other countries. Along these lines, researchers might evaluate whether intra-party constraints condition learning and emulation (Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis 2013; Lehrer, Ezrow, Ward, and Böhmelt 2017) and affect the speed with which parties respond to foreign party policy shifts. Hierarchical political parties, in this context, may perhaps take less time to respond to outside stimuli that affect their own policies (see Ceron 2012; 2014; Greene and Haber 2016; Greene and O'Brien 2016; Lehrer 2012; Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis 2013; Schumacher and Giger 2017; Spoon and Williams 2017; Wagner and Meyer 2014). Factional disputes could take longer to resolve when parties are organized democratically internally, and this might also affect diffusion processes. An analysis of these factors, although outside the scope of this study, is necessary to reach a better understanding of how party policy diffusion occurs.

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