Governing Coalition Partners' Images
Shift in Parallel, but do not Converge

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Abstract

Research by Fortunato and Stevenson documents that, all else equal, voters infer that governing coalition partners share similar ideologies. All else <u>may not</u> be equal, however, if coalition partners counteract voters' coalition-based heuristic by publicly emphasizing their policy differences. We argue that coalition partners are motivated to differentiate their policy images, and we review studies documenting these differentiation efforts via party press releases, interviews, speeches, and legislative amendments. We then report analyses of survey data from 21 European party systems that document that, the coalition heuristic notwithstanding, voters displayed only weak and inconsistent tendencies to perceive Left-Right policy convergence between coalition partners. However we argue for – and empirically substantiate – an alternative pattern, namely that voters perceived coalition partners shifting their positions <u>in the same direction</u> over time, an effect that maintains <u>stable</u> perceived policy distances between parties. These findings have implications for parties' election strategies and political representation.

In an influential study, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) document that voters perceive coalition partners' Left-Right positions as more similar than is implied by the policy tones of their election manifestos, i.e., voters use government participation as a heuristic to infer policy agreement between coalition partners. Fortunato and Adams (2015) extend this finding to show that citizens project the Prime Minister's position onto its junior partners, but not vice-versa. These findings imply that junior coalition partners should project that cabinet participation will draw their policy image into the Prime Ministerial party's orbit, thereby blurring the junior partner's distinctiveness which may depress its electoral appeal (Sagarzazu and Klüver forthcoming; Spoon 2011).

While the Fortunato-Stevenson study illuminates voters' coalition-based heuristic, parties' desires to maintain distinct identities may prompt coalition partners to counter this voter heuristic by pro-actively emphasizing their policy differences. That is, the authors' finding that, all else equal, voters infer convergence between coalition partners, may prompt these partners to act to ensure that all else is not equal, namely by publicizing their policy distinctiveness. This is a delicate balancing act, however, since emphasizing cabinet policy differences may undermine the government and endanger its survival. These considerations raise the questions: Do governing parties' policy images in fact converge over time? And, are there alternative patterns in parties' policy images associated with coalition participation?

We present theoretical and empirical analyses to address the above questions. Theoretically, we delineate the reasons why coalition partners benefit from maintaining distinct policy profiles. We then review studies documenting coalition partners' efforts to publicize their distinctiveness via their speeches, press releases, interviews, manifestos, and legislative amendments, and we contrast these efforts with other actions coalition partners are constrained to take that may blur their images, notably voting for and publicly supporting government-sponsored

legislation. Because these considerations point in conflicting directions, we believe the question of whether coalition partners' policy images actually converge over time is best settled by empirics, not theory. However we argue for an alternative, coalition-related effect, namely a <u>parallel image shifts hypothesis</u> that when voters perceive policy shifts by the Prime Ministerial party, they will perceive its junior coalition partners shifting <u>in the same direction</u> over time.

Empirically, we report longitudinal analyses of survey respondents' perceptions of parties' Left-Right positions, drawn from European Election Study (EES) surveys, along with robustness checks on national parliamentary election surveys, that bear on our arguments. First, we find only weak and inconsistent tendencies for coalition partners' images to converge over time. These estimates suggest that coalition partners can often counteract voters' application of the coalition heuristic via their press releases, speeches, interviews, and proposed legislative amendments. Second, we find strong support for the parallel image shift hypothesis, that coalition partners' images shift in the same direction over time. This parallel movement helps maintain <u>stable</u> differences between coalition partners' policy images, as opposed to convergence.

Our findings have implication for party strategies and mass-elite linkages. First, they imply that party leaders invited to enter government as a junior partner <u>should not</u> project that cabinet participation will inevitably blur their party's distinctiveness vis-a-vis the Prime Ministerial party. Junior partners can publicize their distinctiveness in many venues, and our findings suggest that their communication strategies largely counteract voters' application of the coalition heuristic. However our findings also imply that party elites <u>should</u> expect voters to project shifts in the Prime Ministerial party's policy image onto its junior partners.

Second, our study illuminates an apparent disconnect between two notable recent studies of parties' policy images. On one hand, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) document that voters

infer substantial Left-Right convergence between coalition partners, while on the other hand Dalton and McAllister (2015) show that parties' Left-Right images are extremely stable over time. These findings appear in conflict, for if coalition membership by itself significantly shifts parties' policy images, then one might expect that the coalition heuristic in combination with the many other factors shaping parties' images – including speeches, press releases, legislative amendments, and so on – would surely destabilize party images, contra Dalton and McAllister. We propose that both sets of authors are correct: voters indeed infer that coalition partners converge significantly on policy, all else equal, but we then argue that all else may not be equal because governing parties have incentives to use rhetorical strategies to counteract voters' application of the coalition heuristic. Our arguments may illuminate the 'paradox' of how parties' policy images remain stable in the context of the coalition heuristic.

Governing Parties' Incentives and the Coalition Heuristic: Theoretical Arguments

Many studies on parties' election strategies and mass-elite linkages implicitly assume that voters accurately perceive parties' policy positions (e.g., Calvo and Hellwig 2011), yet while citizens' party placements correlate with the codings of parties' manifestos and also with experts' placements (Dalton and McCallister 2015; Bakker et al. 2012), studies find that *over time*, citizen perceptions of party policy shifts only weakly track these alternative measures (Adams et al. 2011; Fernandez-Vasquez 2014). This raises the question: How do voters' perceptions change? Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) argue that voters infer that governing parties' policy positions converge, because voters recognize that coalition partners feel pressure to compromise (e.g., Ganghof and Brauninger 2006), and that parties with similar positions often coalesce (Martin and Stevenson 2001). The authors show that citizens perceive coalition partners' positions as more similar than is implied by the Left-Right tone of their policy manifestos.

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It is important to understand both what Fortunato-Stevenson's findings do and do not imply. The authors show that, all else equal, voters perceive coalition partners' policy images as substantially more similar than is implied by the tones of their policy manifestos, i.e., that voters employ a coalition heuristic. However this finding does not necessarily imply that voters will perceive coalition partners' policy images converging, because all else may not be equal. Parties' images are shaped by many factors beyond the observable fact of their cabinet participation, including party elites' speeches, press releases, election manifestos, and interviews. Hence coalition partners have the tools to communicate their policy distinctiveness, should they choose to do so. This raises the question: Are coalition partners motivated to publicize their differences, in an effort to counteract citizens' application of the coalition heuristic? This issue is interesting because theoretical arguments point in conflicting directions. The argument that coalition partners will not push back against the coalition heuristic is that because coalition participation confers prestige, visibility, and policy influence, coalition partners are motivated to compromise on contentious issues in order to maintain harmony and avert a cabinet dissolution. In this regard, since every governing party has a de facto veto in most cabinets, the passage of government policy implies that all governing parties endorse the policy, a dynamic that is reinforced by the norm of collective responsibility, which explicitly prohibits open attacks on government policies after they have passed. Indeed, coalition governments employ various mechanisms to ensure cabinet policy compromises including formal coalition agreements, parliamentary committees, and junior ministers (see, e.g., Martin and Vanberg, 2011). These considerations suggest that governing partners will cooperate in ways that reinforce voters' coalition heuristic.

On the other hand, the selective benefits of cabinet membership notwithstanding, coalition partners have electoral incentives to differentiate their policy images. Fortunato (forth-

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coming) documents that voters punish coalition participants that compromise unduly over policy, because voters resent such parties' failure to fight for the principles they espoused during the election campaign. Moreover, junior partners have a related incentive to distinguish their issue profiles from the Prime Ministerial (PM) party, because the PM party – typically a large party with a past history of governance – often enjoys a positive image with respect to attributes such as competence and the ability to govern effectively, that citizens value but that are not directly tied to the parties' issue positions. Thus junior coalition partners may seek to differentiate their policy image from the PM party, fearing that otherwise voters will compare the parties based on their non-policy attributes – a comparison the junior partners will lose. In this regard, Spoon (2011, chapter 2) demonstrates that niche parties' vote shares decline when their issue positions converge with those of larger, mainstream parties (see also Sagarzazu and Klüver forthcoming).[1]

With respect to how coalition partners can differentiate their images given the norm of collective responsibility, as noted above parties communicate their policies in many forums including speeches, interviews, press releases, parliamentary debates, and election manifestos, which provide coalition partners opportunities to convey distinctive issue profiles. In this regard, Martin and Vanberg (2008) analyze how coalition parties use legislative speeches to justify their policy compromises, and to explicate their own preferred positions; van der Velden and Schumacher (2015) document that coalition partners' manifesto-based policy statements diverge over

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[1] Bawn and Somer-Topcu (2012) suggest an additional reason why coalition partners may seek to differentiate their positions, namely that voters tend to discount these parties' abilities to implement their pre-election policy promises, which implies that governing parties have electoral incentives to present more extreme (hence differentiated) images to the public.

time, on average; and, Sagarzazu and Klüver (forthcoming) analyze German political parties' press releases and find that as the time of the next national election approached the governing coalition partners increasingly diverged in their issue emphases, in an effort to differentiate their profiles (see also Meyer and Wagner 2016). Finally, while the norm of collective responsibility precludes criticizing government policies <u>after</u> they are enacted, parties may publicly question and amend their coalition partners' policy initiatives <u>before</u> their enactment. Fortunato (2010) analyzes the legislative review process in Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands and finds that coalition parties amend their partners' legislation more freely when voters perceive them growing more similar to their partners – an indication that coalition partners explicitly work to counter voters' application of the coalition heuristic.

In toto, theoretical arguments do not support clear predictions about whether coalition partners' policy images will converge over time, because while coalition partners have electoral incentives to <u>distinguish</u> their policy images, they have coalition-based incentives to pursue policy <u>compromises</u> that maintain cabinet harmony. It is unclear how governing parties balance these conflicting motivations. Moreover, even if real world coalition partners prioritize policy distinctiveness over cabinet compromise, we cannot predict whether the distinctions parties publicize via their press releases, speeches, manifestos, and legislative amendments will trump voters' application of the coalition heuristic. As Fortunato and Stevenson emphasize, the force of the coalition heuristic is that it is a simple inference voters draw from an easily observable <u>action</u>, namely parties' decisions to join (and remain in) the cabinet. By contrast, citizens may discount coalition partners' speeches, interviews, and press releases as "cheap talk". Even fully-informed citizens may reasonably disagree with each other over whether party ideologies are more faithfully reflected in their actions or their rhetoric.

What does theory imply about cabinet partners' images? The parallel shifts hypothesis

While theory offers no clear prediction about coalition partners' image convergence, we see strong reasons to advance an alternative parallel image shifts hypothesis, that citizens will perceive junior coalition partners' policies shifting in the same direction over time as the Prime Ministerial party's perceived shift, i.e., that when citizens perceive the PM party shifting to the right (left) they will perceive parallel rightward (leftward) shifts by its junior coalition partners. We believe that consideration of both voter heuristics and parties' strategic incentives imply this hypothesis. With respect to heuristics, Fortunato and Adams's (2015) empirical finding, that citizens project the PM party's position onto its junior coalition partners, implies that when citizens perceive the PM party as more right-wing (left-wing) they will infer that its junior coalition partners also hold more right-wing (left-wing) positions, which implies in turn that voters who perceive the PM party shifting its position will project this policy shift onto its junior partners. Moreover, we believe that junior coalition partners have strategic incentives to reinforce voters' application of this parallel shift heuristic. In particular, junior coalition partners plausibly seek to maintain a stable degree of divergence between their policy image and the Prime Ministerial party's image, reasoning that the perceived differences with the PM at the time of the last election "worked", in the sense that in the election's aftermath the party was invited to join the government. Junior partners might therefore see any changes in their perceived position relative to the PM party's position as risky, in that perceived image convergence towards the PM might depress the junior partner's electoral appeal at the next election, while perceived divergence from the PM might diminish the junior partner's attractiveness as a coalition partner. Hence risk-averse junior partners plausibly see the PM as a "marker party" (Budge 1994), and calibrate their own image

against the PM in an effort to maintain a stable degree of (perceived) policy distance to the PM party. This "marker party" strategy implies the parallel image shifts effect we hypothesize, since if the PM party is perceived as shifting right (left) the junior partner must "follow" via its own rightward (leftward) shift, so as to maintain a stable policy distance to the PM party.

We also note that research by [*identifying reference removed*] suggestively supports the parallel shifts hypothesis, in that the authors find that coalition partners' policy images shift in parallel with respect to European integration policy. Although this study spans a limited time period and analyzes a specialized policy issue, it provides preliminary support for the proposition that coalition partners' overarching Left-Right images may also shift in parallel.

Data and Initial Analyses

For our initial analyses, we measure parties' policy images using respondents' Left-Right party placements from the European Election Studies (Schmitt et al. 2015), which were administered in all countries that belonged to the European Union at the time of the European Parliamentary elections held in 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014.[2] We analyze all party systems that were surveyed in at least two consecutive elections (the minimum necessary to measure shifts in parties' policy images): Austria, Belgium, Britain, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden.[3] The survey respondents were asked to place themselves

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[2] An additional European Election Study survey was administered in 1979, but since no survey was conducted in 1984, we cannot use the 1979 survey.

[3] We note that we exclude Hungary from our analyses because the party PM party's perceived position was not available in two consecutive years.

and each party on a scale running from 0 (left) to 10 (right).[4] Table S1 in the supplementary information memo reports the set of parties that we analyzed, along with the years they were included in the surveys. (*Note to reviewers: This memo is presented at the end of this paper*.)

We initially analyze the European Election Study (EES) surveys, first because these data maximize the number of observations (we have over three hundred observations of party perceived policy shifts using these data), second because the EES surveys allow us to analyze parties' policy images both in years that coincide with national elections (i.e., years when the country held elections to both its national parliament and the European Parliament) and in the years between national elections. This is important, because research by Sagarzazu and Klüver (forthcoming), discussed below, finds that coalition partners maximize their efforts to differentiate their policies near the times of national parliamentary election. Analyses of the EES data allows us to account for this temporal dimension of party strategies. However below we report robustness checks of survey data from national election studies, which substantiate our conclusions.

Our empirical analyses rely on computations of parties' <u>mean perceived positions</u>, defined as the mean Left-Right position EES respondents assigned to the party, computed over all respondents who provided a valid party placement. For a focal party j, we label this variable [*Party j's perceived position* (*t*)]. Similarly, the variable [*Party j's perceived shift* (*t*)] denotes

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[4] The question about respondents' self-placements was as follows: "In political matters people talk of "the left" and "the right". What is your position? Please use a scale from 0 to 10, where '0' means "left" and '10' means "right". Which number best describes your position?" The question about respondents' party placements was: "And about where would you place the following political parties on this scale? How about the [party name]? Which number from 0 to 10, where '0' means "left" and '10' means "right" best describes this party?"

the change in the focal party *j*'s mean perceived Left-Right position between the current and previous EES surveys.[5] Finally, for any party *j* that is not the current Prime Ministerial (PM) party, the variable [*Party j's perceived distance to the PM party* (*t*)] denotes the distance between the mean perceived positons of party *j* and the PM party at the current EES survey.[6]

Initial patterns: Strong evidence of coalition partners' parallel image shifts, but weak evidence for image convergence

Analyzing parties' policy images – and image shifts – requires controlling for multiple factors beyond coalition arrangements including country and year effects, and long-run equilibria in parties' policy images. Below we report multivariate analyses that address these factors. First, however, we summarize simple patterns in the data suggesting that coalition partners' images converge only modestly over time, but that they consistently shift in parallel.

Perceived party differences: Weak evidence that coalition partners' images converge. As outlined above, while the coalition heuristic implies that – all else equal – coalition partners' policy images converge over time, these partners have electoral incentives to counteract this voter heuristic by publicizing their policy differences. The computations reported in Table 1A, which

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[5] That is, this variable is defined as

[*Party j's perceived shift* (*t*)] = [*Party j's perceived position* (*t*)] − [*Party j's perceived position* (*t* − 1)]

where [*Party j's perceived position* (*t* − 1)] is *j*'s perceived position at the previous EES survey.

[6] That is, the variable [*Party j's perceived distance to the PM party* (*t*)] equals the absolute value of the difference between the variables [*Party j's perceived position* (*t*)] and [*PM party's perceived position* (*t*)], where party *j* is not the PM party.

compare coalition partners' perceived Left-Right distances at the <u>current</u> versus the <u>previous</u> European Election Study (EES) survey, suggest that coalition partners' images converged only modestly over time, on average. Column 1 reports the mean perceived distance between the PM party and its junior partners, i.e., the mean value of the [*Party j's perceived distance to the PM party* (*t*)] variable, computed over all PM-junior partner pairs in our data set (77 in all) at the time of the <u>current</u> EES survey. This mean perceived distance is only 1.57 units along the 0-10 Left-Right scale, which fits with past findings that parties with similar ideologies often coalesce (e.g., Martin and Stevenson 2001). However it does not directly address whether coalition partners' policy images converge over time. To evaluate this issue we ask how far apart voters perceived these <u>same</u> pairs of parties at the <u>previous</u> EES survey, administered five years earlier. These computations, reported in the second row of column 1, show that the mean distance between the <u>current</u> PM party and its <u>current</u> coalition partners, as perceived at the time of the <u>previous</u> survey was 1.72 units on the 0-10 Left-Right scale, which is 0.15 units less than the mean <u>current</u> perceived distance between these pairs of parties on the 0-10 Left-Right scale. This mean perceived convergence is detectible ($p < .05$), but it is modest.

As a comparison, column 2 in Table 1A reports the mean perceived Left-Right distances between the current PM party and all parties that were <u>in opposition</u> at the time of the current EES survey (row 1 in column 2), along with the perceived distances between these same party pairs at the previous EES survey (row 2 in column 2). This comparison is relevant because if opposition parties' images shift <u>away from</u> the PM party over time, we might conclude that <u>compared to opposition parties</u>, junior partners' images converge substantially towards the PM party. However our computations do not support this interpretation: the perceived Left-Right distance between the PM party and opposition parties, averaged across all [PM-opposition party] pairs in

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our data set (252 pairs in all), is 2.65 units at the current EES survey, while the perceived distance between these same party pairs at the previous EES survey was 2.70 units. Thus the public does not perceive the PM party and opposition parties diverging over time.

Finally, note that while we identify modest image convergence between coalition partners over time, we are cautious about inferring that joint governance caused this convergence, since the reciprocal process, whereby parties' image convergence caused joint governance, is also possible. That is, given the well-known finding that parties with similar policies are more likely to form a coalition (e.g., Martin and Stevenson 2001), we might expect that among all party pairs that were not jointly governing five years ago (the time between EES surveys), those pairs of parties that subsequently converged on policy were more likely to subsequently form a coalition; and, that among party pairs that were jointly governing five years ago, those coalition partners that subsequently converged on policy were more likely remain in a joint coalition. Both types of endogeneity should bias our analyses towards finding that coalition partners' images converge over time. Yet we detect only modest image convergence between coalition partners.

Perceptions of parties' policy shifts: Evidence for the parallel shifts hypothesis. Next, we present computations suggesting that junior partners' images tend to shift in the same direction as the PM party's shift. Column 1 in Table 1B reports that the correlation between the current PM party's perceived Left-Right shift and its junior coalition partners' perceived shifts is strongly positive and significant ($r = +0.50$, $p < .001$), denoting that the more the PM's image shifted to the right (left), the more its junior partners' images tended to shift in the same direction. By con-

trast, the correlation between the perceived shifts of PM parties and <u>opposition parties</u>, reported in column 2 of Table 1B, is small ($r = +0.10$) and statistically insignificant.[7]

<center>[TABLES 1A-1B ABOUT HERE]</center>

The computations reported in Tables 1A-1B support a clear story. First, across the European party systems in our data set, coalition partners' Left-Right policy images converged only modestly over time, on average, either in an absolute sense or relative to the convergence between governing and opposition parties. Second, coalition partners' policy images displayed strong tendencies to shift <u>in parallel</u>, i.e., in the same direction over time, while opposition parties' policy images did not meaningfully shift in parallel with governing parties' images. These patterns provide *prima facie* evidence for our parallel image shifts hypothesis. Below we present analyses that control for additional confounding variables, which substantiate these conclusions.

Multivariate Analyses

We specify a regression model to evaluate how citizens' perceptions of parties' Left-Right shifts are related to the composition of governing coalitions. Since first-difference models often perform poorly and throw out long-run effects, scholars' attention has recently moved to

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[7] These analyses of parties' parallel shifts do not raise the same endogeneity concerns we discussed above, with respect to parties' image convergence, because we see no reason to expect parallel party shifts to <u>cause</u> these parties to form (or maintain) a governing coalition. This is because parallel party shifts do not cause policy convergence that could prompt parties to enter (or remain in) governing coalitions; instead, parallel shifts maintain <u>stable</u> policy distances between pairs of parties, which should exert no net effects on the viability of a coalition.

applications of error correction models (ECMs) to time-series data (e.g., Beck and Katz 2011), particularly in studies of dynamic representation (e.g., Bevan and Jennings 2014). ECMs allow us to estimate both short-term effects, whereby party positions respond to <u>changes</u> in the PM party's policy image – so that we can evaluate the parallel shifts hypothesis – and long-term effects whereby party images respond to the PM party's (lagged) image (De Boef and Keele 2008), which pertain to the issue of governing parties' image convergence.

Our dependent variable is [*Party j's perceived shift* (*t*)], defined above as the change in the focal party *j*'s Left-Right image between the years of the current EES survey and the previous survey, held five years earlier. Our independent variables are: [*PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)], which is the mean perceived position of the <u>current</u> Prime Ministerial party at the time of the <u>previous</u> EES survey; [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)], which denotes the perceived Left-Right shift of the current PM party between the years of the current and the previous EES surveys; [*party j is in government* (*t*)], a dummy variable that denotes whether the focal party was in government at the time of the current EES survey; and, the [*party j is in government* (*t*)] variable interacted with the [*PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)] and [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] variables. We specified the following model, to be estimated over all parties <u>except for the current PM party</u>:

Party j's perceived shift (*t*) $= b_1 + b_2$[*PM party j's perceived position* (*t* – 1)]

$+ b_3$[*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)]

$+ b_4$[*Party j is in government* (*t*)]

$+ b_5$[*Party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)]

$+ b_6$[*Party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] .   (1)

To evaluate the parallel shifts hypothesis, the key coefficients are those on the [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] variable and the interacted variable [*Party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)]. The coefficient b_3 on the [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] variable denotes the relationship between over-time changes in the Prime Ministerial (PM) party's image and changes in opposition parties' images, while the coefficient b_6 on the interaction [*Party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] denotes how the relationship between the PM party's perceived shift and the perceived shifts of its junior coalition partner(s) differs from that for opposition parties. A positive coefficient on this interaction would denote that, compared to opposition parties, voters perceive the positions of the PM party and its junior partners shifting in the same direction over time – a relationship that would support the parallel image shifts hypothesis.

To evaluate whether governing parties' policy images converge over time – and whether these convergence effects differ for junior coalition partners compared to opposition parties – the key coefficients are those on the [*PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)] variable, and the interacted variable [*Party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)]. A positive coefficient b_2 on the [*PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)] variable will denote that the more right-wing the PM party's (lagged) image the more opposition parties' images shift to the right at the time of the current EES survey, while the coefficient b_5 on the interaction [*Party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)] denotes how the relationship between the PM party's lagged image and its junior partners' perceived shifts differs from that for opposition parties. A positive coefficient on this interaction would denote that junior coalition partners' images disproportionately track the PM party's lagged image, which will suggest that junior partners' positions converge towards the PM party.

Our specification also includes the dummy variable [*Party j is in government* (*t*)], to control for direct effects associated with being in government.

Our decision to calibrate junior partners' and opposition parties' perceived policy shifts (the dependent variable in our model) against the PM party's perceived shift (and lagged perceived position) reflects the theoretical and empirical reasons, outlined above, to expect citizens to project PM parties' positions onto their junior partners, not vice versa.

Finally, we note that our specification is subject to the same endogeneity concerns outlined earlier, namely that to the extent we estimate that junior partners' policy images have converged towards the PM party's lagged image, then this policy convergence may have <u>caused</u> the coalition to form (and endure), as opposed to the coalition causing the junior partner to converge towards the PM. However, if we find little evidence of coalition partners' image convergence, even in statistical tests that may be biased towards a positive finding, this conclusion would certainly extend to tests that could overcome this endogeneity bias. On this basis we proceed.

Results

We estimated the parameters of equation 1 on the 328 perceived party shifts in our data set. Table 2 reports the means and standard deviations of the observed values of our dependent and independent variables, which suggest that voters perceived parties undertaking modest policy shifts during the period of our study: the mean magnitudes of parties' perceived shifts are on the order of 0.5 units on the 0-10 Left-Right scale (column 2 in Table 2). This perceived party policy stability parallels the findings of Dalton and McAllister (2015: 770).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Our data is time-series cross-sectional. Estimating a simple regression on the pooled data can lead to erroneous conclusions due to unobserved heterogeneity between parties, although this problem is mitigated with the differenced model specified in equation 1 (see, e.g., Wooldridge 2002). We estimate robust standard errors clustered by party (Rogers 1993).

We report our parameter estimates in column 1 of Table 3, where the dependent variable, [*Party j's perceived shift* (*t*)], is the change in European Election Study (EES) respondents' mean placements of the focal party *j*'s position between the years of the current EES survey and the previous survey, administered five years earlier. Before turning to effects pertaining to coalitions, note that we find no evidence that being in government <u>directly affects</u> voters' perceptions of party shifts, i.e., the estimate on the variable [*party j is in government* (*t*)] is insignificant.

We now consider the coalition-based effects that interest us. If citizens' perceptions of the PM party's policy shift are related to <u>opposition parties</u>' perceived shifts, we would expect a significant coefficient on the variable [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)]. In fact this estimate is positive and significant ($p < .05$), although its magnitude, +0.19, is substantively small. Since this positive estimate disappears for models with additional controls (introduced below), we will not discuss it here. Meanwhile citizens' perceptions of junior coalition partners' shifts are much more strongly related to the PM party's perceived shift: the coefficient on the interacted variable [*party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)], +0.42, is statistically significant ($p < .01$) and denotes that, compared to opposition parties, citizens shift their perceptions of junior partners' positions in tandem with the PM party's perceived shift. The conditional effect, +0.61 (s.e. = 0.12; p < 0.001), is the sum of the parameter estimates on the [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] variable and the [*party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] variable, and it implies that a one-unit perceived shift by the PM party is associated with an 0.61-

unit shift in citizens' perceptions of junior coalition partners in the same direction, where all parties' positions are calibrated along the 0-10 Left-Right scale. This estimate implies that the difference between a perceived PM party shift of 0.44 units to the left on the Left-Right scale (one standard deviation below the mean value for the PM parties in our data set) and a perceived PM party shift of 0.74 units to the right (one standard deviation above the mean) is associated with an increase of 0.72 units in the junior partner's perceived Left-Right shift.

Figure 1 depicts the estimated effects of perceived PM party shifts (the horizontal axis) on junior coalition partners' and opposition parties' perceived shifts (the vertical axis), along with a density plot of the distribution of perceived PM party shifts. The former are displayed as a dotted gray line and the latter as a solid black line, with dashed 95% confidence intervals, over the full range of values of the [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] variable in our data set. (These estimates are calculated while holding all other independent variables at their mean values.) The figure illustrates that perceived PM party shifts are strongly related to perceived image shifts by junior coalition partners: junior partners' images are projected to shift to the right in parallel with rightward shifts by the PM party, a projection that is statistically significant for any magnitude of the PM party's rightward image shift, while junior partners' images are projected to shift left whenever the PM party's image shifts at least 0.3 units to the left, and this projected left-shift is statistically significant when the PM party's image shifts at least 0.65 units to the left. By contrast, opposition parties' images do not strongly track the PM party's perceived shift.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Next, we consider long-term effects related to the PM party's lagged policy image. If citizens' perceptions of opposition parties' Left-Right shifts are related to the PM's lagged image, we would expect a significant coefficient on the variable [*PM party's perceived position* (*t* − 1)],

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while the coefficient on the variable [*party j is in government* (*t*) × *PM party's perceived position* (*t* – 1)] denotes how this relationship differs for junior coalition partners compared to opposition parties. Both coefficient estimates are near zero and insignificant, denoting that we detect no tendency for either opposition parties or junior partners' images to shift to the right (left) as the PM party's (lagged) position becomes more right-wing (left-wing). This non-finding substanti-ates the patterns we reported earlier in Table 1A, that junior partners' Left-Right images do not meaningfully converge towards that of the PM party. Indeed, whereas these earlier analyses re-ported statistically significant – if substantively modest – image convergence between coalition partners, here we find no evidence of such convergence.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Robustness checks

To substantiate our conclusions, we estimated the parameters of models that included ad-ditional control variables. First, to control for time period effects, we estimated a model that controlled for the year of the EES survey, and that also interacted the survey year with the [*party j is in government* (*t*)] variable.[8] Given that, for instance, the 2009 and 2014 EES surveys were administered during periods of severe economic recession in many EU countries (particularly in 2009), and that these period effects plausibly influenced parties' Left-Right positions, it seemed advisable to control for these effects. The parameter estimates for this Year Effects Model, re-

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[8] We included the dummy variables [1994], [1999], [2004], [2009], and [2014], with 1989 as the baseline, and we interacted each dummy variable with the [*party j is in government* (*t*)] variable.

ported in column 2 of Table 3, continue to support our substantive conclusions, i.e., we again estimate strong parallel shift effects but no positional convergence between coalition partners.[9]

Next, we re-estimated our model on the set of countries that were included in all six waves of the EES surveys in our data set (1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, 2014), i.e., the set of countries that were members of the European Union in 1989. (The countries included in these analyses were Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and West Germany.) We conducted this robustness check because an expert on error-correction models, Will Jennings, advised us that such models estimate lagged effects – such as the effect of the PM party's lagged positional image on the focal party's current image shift – most reliably when the number of time points is maximized. (In particular, ECM model estimates based on shorter time series may prove unreliable when shocks decay slowly.) The parameter estimates for this EU members 1989-2014 Model, reported in column 3 of Table 3, continue to support our substantive conclusions.

Finally, we re-estimated our models on an alternative data set of 43 national parliamentary election surveys from Britain, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands, the five European countries for which a lengthy time series of such surveys are available which, as discussed above, may generate more reliable estimates of causal processes in analyses based on error-correction models. (Table S2 in the supplementary materials memo reports the set of elections and parties included in these surveys.) These analyses allow us to substantiate our conclusions using survey data drawn from different electoral contexts from those covered in the EES

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[9] Table 3 does not report the parameter estimates on the yearly dummy variables, or the interactions with the [*party j is in government* (*t*)] variable. These estimates reveal that both governing and opposition parties were perceived as shifting noticeably to the right in 2009.

data, namely surveys conducted during periods that featured a national election campaign but no campaign for the European Parliament. Table 4 reports analyses of these national election surveys that parallel those reported in Table 1 above for the EES surveys, estimated on the set of 179 mean perceived party shifts. Table 4A shows that coalition partners' policy images converged modestly over time, on average: the mean perceived distance between coalition partners declined from 1.79 units at the previous election to 1.83 units at the current election (although this difference is not statistically significant), whereas the mean perceived distance between the PM party and opposition parties remained stable. Table 4B shows evidence of the parallel shift effect, in that the correlation between the PM party's Left-Right image shift and its junior coalition partners' perceived shifts is positive and significant ($r = +0.34$, $p < .05$), while the correlation between the perceived shifts of PM parties and <u>opposition parties</u> is near zero ($r = -0.08$) and insignificant. And, column 4 of Table 3 reports the ECM parameter estimates for this <u>National Election Studies Model</u>, which continue to support our substantive conclusions, i.e., we again estimate statistically-significant parallel shift effects but no tendency for coalition partners' Left-Right images to converge over time.

[TABLES 3 AND 4 ABOUT HERE]

Finally, we conducted several additional robustness checks in order to substantiate our conclusions. First, we re-estimated our models on subgroups of EES respondents divided according to their levels of political interest. Next, we re-estimated our models while controlling for national economic conditions. We then re-estimated our models while controlling for the party's lagged perceived position, i.e., which is intended to capture any regression to the mean in party placements. Next, we re-estimated our models while controlling for the Left-Right tones of

parties' national election manifestos. Next, we evaluated whether coalition partners' degrees of image convergence (and the tendencies for their images to shift in parallel) was mediated by these parties' relative sizes; by the coalition's duration; and by the dispersion of parties' Left-Right images in the party system. Next, in response to research by Falco-Gimeno and Fernandez-Vazquez (2015), we evaluated whether citizens react disproportionately to "unexpected" governing coalitions composed of parties with dissimilar ideologies. Next, we estimated multivariate analyses on coalition partners' image convergence, based on an alternative specification that does not employ the error-correction model framework. Finally, in response to research by Sagarzazu and Klüver (2017) suggesting that coalition partners make special efforts to differentiate their policy images in the run-up to national elections, we estimated a model designed to evaluate whether coalition partners' image convergence varied with the point in the national election cycle. All of these analyses, which we report in the supplementary information memo, continue to support our substantive conclusions.[10]

Conclusion and Discussion

Fortunato and Stevenson's (2013) finding that citizens infer coalition partners' policy convergence has implications for mass-elite linkages and for parties' electoral strategies. The finding illuminates how citizens use the simple coalition heuristic to infer parties' relative policy positions, which alleviates the need to rely exclusively on the more nuanced informational cues contained in party elites' speeches and press releases, election manifestos, parliamentary debates,

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[10] These supplementary analyses provide suggestive evidence that the tendency for coalition partners' parallel image shifts is especially strong when the PM party is large relative to its junior partner(s), and when the party system is polarized.

and legislative amendments. The Fortunato-Stevenson study thereby extends previous research documenting citizens' use of informational shortcuts (e.g., Lau and Redlawsk 2001).

At the same time, the fact that voters cue off coalition arrangements does not necessarily imply that they ignore all other political information. We have argued that governing parties have electoral incentives to actively work to counteract voters' inference that coalition partners converge on policy, and we have reviewed studies of cabinet members' efforts to differentiate their images via legislative speeches (Martin and Vanberg 2008), press releases (Sagarzazu and Klüver forthcoming), election manifestos (van der Velden and Schumacher 2015), and legislative amendments (Fortunato 2010). Our empirical analyses of survey data from 21 European democracies between 1989-2014 suggest that these communication strategies are largely successful, in that – the coalition heuristic notwithstanding – we find only weak and inconsistent evidence that governing parties' images converge over time. However, the effects of governing coalitions show up in our parallel image shifts finding, that citizens perceive coalition partners' images shifting in the same direction over time. We have argued that the coalition heuristic implies this parallel image shifts dynamic, and that – unlike the image convergence dynamic – governing parties have strategic incentives to reinforce voters' perceptions of parallel shifts. Our substantive conclusions extend to alternative analyses that control for year effects and for different points in the national election cycle, and they extend to analyses of an alternative data set of national election studies (as well as the additional robustness checks summarized above).

Our study comes with caveats that raise questions for future research. First, our failure to detect consistent image convergence between coalition partners does not prove that no image convergence ever occurs: absence of evidence does not constitute evidence of absence. This is especially true given that our simple bivariate analyses of election survey data did in fact detect

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slight image convergence between pairs of governing parties, although the degree of convergence was modest (see Tables 2 and 4 in the paper) and these estimates washed out in the multivariate analyses reported in Table 3 (see also the robustness checks in the supplementary information memo). In future research we hope to extend our analyses to other countries and time periods, and we also plan to evaluate whether our conclusions about parties' Left-Right policy images extend to more focused policy dimensions. We also plan to systematically analyze scenarios where coalition partners' image convergence seems especially likely, such as when parties engage in joint election campaigns or when they form election alliances (e.g., Golder 2005).

Second, while we have reviewed studies documenting cabinet members' efforts to differentiate their policy images via their press releases, speeches, and legislative amendments, our empirical analyses do not control for these factors, because we lack cross-national, over-time measures of these variables. While we see grounds to infer that parties use these communications strategies to counteract voters' application of the coalition heuristic, final disposition of this issue must await the creation of new cross-national, longitudinal data sets that calibrate party statements in speeches, press releases, and interviews along the Left-Right scale (or other policy scales). Third, we have not parsed out the mechanism through which governing parties' communications influence voters. It would be interesting to analyze how media coverage mediates the public impact of party communications, in particular whether citizens cue directly off coalition partners' actual rhetoric, as opposed to responding to media characterizations of this rhetoric, i.e., to media interpretations of how party communications represent "clashes" or "compromises" between coalition partners.

In this paper, we have extended the study of coalition-based heuristics to analyze parties' incentives to counteract voters' application of this heuristic. We have argued that parties have

strategic incentives to counter voters' inference that coalition partners' images converge over time, but that parties have incentives to reinforce voters' inference that governing parties' images shift in parallel. Our empirical analyses of parties' Left-Right images in 21 European polities substantiate this argument: Voters perceive parallel policy shifts between pairs of governing parties, but we find only weak and inconsistent evidence that they perceive policy convergence between these parties. We conclude that coalition partners' policy images are connected – but not necessarily in the way implied by previous research.

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Table 1. Analyses of Coalition Partners' Image Convergence and Parallel Shifts: European Election Study Surveys

1A. Analyses of Parties' Image Convergence

	Computations on junior coalition partners (1)	Computations on opposition parties (2)
Party j's perceived distance to the current PM party (*t*)	1.57 (1.13)	2.65 (1.47)
Party j's <u>lagged</u> perceived distance to the current PM party (*t* − 1)	1.72 (1.14)	2.70 (1.49)
N	77	252

1B. Analyses of Parties' Parallel Shifts

	Computations on junior coalition partners (1)	Computations on opposition parties (2)
Correlation between party j's perceived shift and the PM party's perceived shift	0.50 ($p < .001$)	0.10 ($p > .10$)
N	77	252

<u>Notes</u>. The computations reported in these tables are from European Election Study (EES) surveys administered in 21 European Union member states between 1989 and 2014. The set of countries and parties included in the analyses is listed in Table S1 in the supplementary information memo. The variables listed in the tables are defined in the text. In Table 1A, the variable [*Party j's perceived distance to the PM party* (*t*)] is calibrated along a 0-10 scale, where zero denotes that the focal party *j* and the PM party are perceived as holding identical (mean perceived) positions along the 0-10 Left-Right scale, and 10 denotes that these parties are perceived as holding positons at opposite ends of this scale. The numbers in parentheses in Table 1A are standard deviations.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics: Dependent and Independent Variables

	Mean value (1)	Mean absolute value (2)	Minimum & Maximum Values (3)
Party j's perceived shift (t)	0.06 (0.65)	0.51 (0.40)	-2.29, 2.45
Party j's perceived position ($t-1$)	5.21 (1.90)	5.21 (1.90)	1.04, 9.13
PM party's perceived position ($t-1$)	5.94 (1.65)	5.94 (1.65)	1.04, 8.72
PM party's perceived shift (t)	0.15 (0.59)	0.49 (0.36)	-1.07, 1.50
Party j is in government (t)	0.38 (0.49)	0.38 (0.49)	0, 1

Notes. The numbers in parentheses in columns 1-2 are the standard deviations of the reported

values. The measures of citizens' perceptions of parties' Left-Right positions (and position

shifts) are based on mean party placements drawn from European Election Study respondents

surveyed in 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014. The set of countries and parties included

in the analyses is listed in Table S1 in the supplementary information memo. The variable

definitions are given in the text.

Table 3. Analyses of Citizens' Perceived Party Left-Right Shifts

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES	Basic Model (1)	Year Effects (2)	EU Members 1989-2014 (3)	Natl. Election Surveys (4)
PM party's perceived position ($t-1$)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
PM party's perceived shift (t)	0.19* (0.07)	-0.08 (0.07)	-0.20* (0.07)	-0.02 (0.16)
Party j is in government (t)	-0.07 (0.29)	-0.10 (0.40)	-0.70 (0.69)	0.39 (0.24)
PM party's perceived position ($t-1$) × *Party j is in government* (t)	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	0.10 (0.06)	-0.04 (0.03)
PM party's perceived shift (t) × *Party j is in government* (t)	0.42** (0.12)	0.48** (0.15)	0.82* (0.34)	0.33[†] (0.18)
Intercept	0.11 (0.15)	0.09 (0.17)	0,24 (0.20)	-0.05 (0.11)
N	328	328	228	179
R^2	0.14	0.36	0.34	0.07

** $p \leq .01$; * $p \leq .05$, [†] $p \leq .10$, two-tailed tests.

Notes. Standard errors (clustered by party) are in parentheses. For the analyses in columns 1-5 the dependent variable was the change in the focal party's perceived Left-Right position at the time of the current European Parliamentary election compared to the previous election, as perceived by all European Election Study (EES) respondents who provided valid party placements. The data is from EES surveys administered near the times of the elections to the European Parliament held in 1989, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014. For these analyses the parties' positions as perceived by the survey respondents were all calibrated along a 0-10 scale where higher numbers denote more right-wing positions. The "Year Effects" specification reported in column 2 includes controls for the survey year, and also for the survey year interacted with the [*party j is in government* (t)] variable. The "National Election Year" model in column 3 is estimated on the data from EES surveys administered in years when the country held a national parliamentary election, while the "No National Election Year" model in column 4 is estimated on the data from all other EES surveys. The analyses in column 5 are over the set of countries that were included in all six EES surveys between 1989-2014, and those in column 6 are of national elections surveys from Britain, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Table 4. Analyses of Coalition Partners' Image Convergence and Parallel Shifts: National Election Study Surveys

4A. Analyses of Parties' Image Convergence

	Computations on junior coalition partners (1)	Computations on opposition parties (2)
Party j's perceived distance to the current PM party (*t*)	1.62 (1.04)	2.98 (1.58)
Party j's <u>lagged</u> perceived distance to the current PM party (*t* − 1)	1.79 (1.21)	2.98 (1.56)
N	39	141

4B. Analyses of Parties' Parallel Shifts

	Computations on junior coalition partners (1)	Computations on opposition parties (2)
Correlation between party j's perceived shift and the PM party's perceived shift	0.34 ($p < .05$)	-0.08 ($p > .10$)
N	39	141

<u>Notes</u>. The computations reported in this table are from 43 national election surveys administered in Britain (1992-2015), the Netherlands (1981-2010), Sweden (1979-2014), Norway (1973-2013), and West Germany (1976-2013). The set of elections and parties included in these analyses are reported in Table S2 in the supplementary materials memo. The variables listed in the tables are defined in the text. In Table 4A, the variable [*Party j's perceived distance to the PM party* (*t*)] is calibrated along a 0-10 scale, where zero denotes that the focal party *j* and the PM party are perceived as holding identical (mean perceived) positions along the Left-Right scale, and 10 denotes that these parties are perceived as holding positons at opposite ends of this scale.

**Figure 1. Predicted Effects of Perceived PM Party Shifts
on Junior Partners' and Opposition Parties' Perceived Shifts**
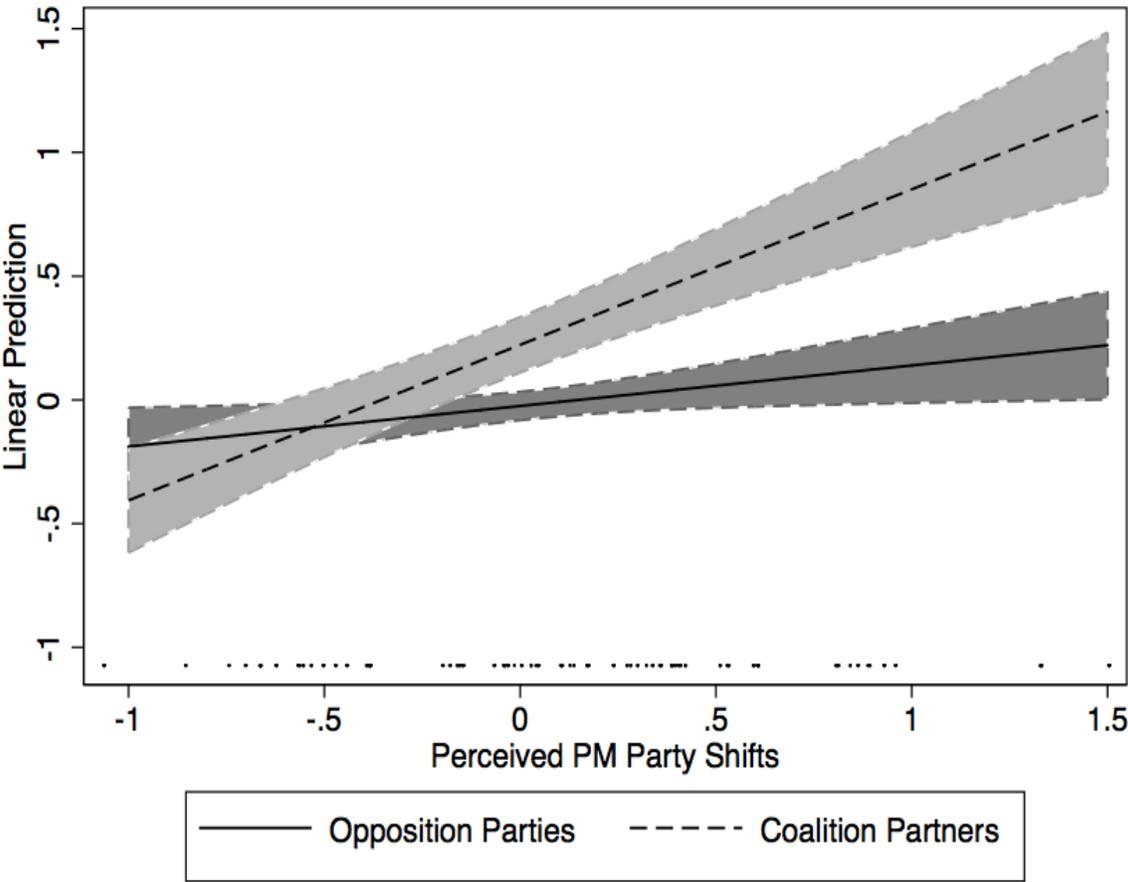
<u>Notes</u>. The figure displays the predicted effect of the [*PM party's perceived shift* (*t*)] variable on

the [*Party j's perceived shift* (*t*)] variable, computed for junior coalition partners (the dotted grey

line) and for opposition parties (the solid black line) for the coefficient estimates reported in col-

umn 1 of Table 3. The dashed lines denote 95% confidence intervals.