Transnational Diffusion of Identity Politics

Soeren C. Schwuchow

Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus - Senftenberg

We deal with . . .

. . . (delayed) "spillovers" of identity politics between countries.

- Perceptable right-wing shift in (European) politics.
  - Increasing vote share for right-wing populist.
  - Increasing diffusion of right-wing attitudes (e.g., illiberalism).
  - Increasing importance of "race" (USA) or "ethnicity" (Europe) for platforms.
  - Differences between states regarding strenght and timing.
- At the same time: strong emphasis on "new" identities.
- Greater attention for formerly-ignored identity groups → (delayed) reinforcement of minority rights in different countries.

Identity & Policy Diffusion

- Generally: Policy diffuses through learning, competition, coercion or emulation.
- Parties adopt foreign strategies due to different incentives.
- Usually: Parties adopt (discover) successful strategies and impose the latter to their voters (supply side).
- Observing foreign voters reduces information asymmetries.
- Here, successful diffusion requires similar preferences of voters but imperfect information for parties.
- What about the demand side?: Even the most promising strategies are ineffective if they are opposed by the "political opportunity structure" (e.g., if the voters are heterogeneous in different countries or if strategies are not credible).
- IoW: Foreign politics may affect the voters' "preferences" to diffuse.

Policy Diffusion: Our Approach

- Diffusion: Adoption of similar strategies due to uniform changes in the electorate (demand side approach!).
- Voters change their "tastes" due to changes in foreign policies.
- Foreign politics function as benchmark for evaluating one's own behavior.
- The larger the degree of identity politics abroad, the larger is the socially-accepted degree of domestic identity politics.
- Voters *do not change* their preferences regarding identity politics but they *update their expectations* of the social acceptance of their preferences.
- Diffusion as a kind of yardstick competition.
- Common two-dimensional voting model: Voters have preferences regarding fiscal and identity politics.
- Approach consists of linked models' of (i) voting, (ii) group formation, and (iii) recategorization.
- Perfect information for parties (i.e., the latter know the electorate's composition).
- Preferred degree of identity politics depends on voters' identity.

Model: Outline/Assumptions

- Model is an extension of Besley and Persson (2019, The Rise of Identity Politics).
- Two classes (Rich–Poor) and two (opposed) identities ($\overline{N}$ and $\underline{N}$).
- Same-size classes, with same share μ of identy $\overline{N}$; θ is the salience of identity $\overline{N}$; z is the extent of economic polarization.
- Two domestic class-based parties compete for votes from the electorate by proposing a platform $\{\hat{t}_i, \hat{a}_i\}$.
- Domestic politics: tax rate ($t_i \in [0,1]$) and government's "attitude" to identity $\underline{N}$ ($a_i \geq 0$).
- Foreign politics: $a_F \geq 0$ government's "attitude" to identity $\underline{N}$.
- a_F acts as a benchmarkt for domestic citizens to identify their optimal domestic identity politics:

$$\overline{a} = \overline{a}(a_F) \quad \text{and} \quad \underline{a} = \underline{a}(a_F) \quad \text{with} \quad \frac{\partial(\overline{a} - \underline{a})}{\partial a_F} > 0.$$

- Domestic cititens with identity $\overline{N}$ can form a group with coherence ξ for costs F, which has positive externalities.
- Utilities: $U(t_i - \overline{t})$, $W(\overline{a} - a_i)$ for $\underline{N}$, and $\theta W(a_i - \underline{a})$ for $\overline{N}$.
- Probabilistic-Voting: Idiosyncratic shock $[H(\cdot)]$ and aggregate shock with pdf $g(\cdot)$ and log-concave symmetric cdf $G(\cdot)$.
- Timing
  1. Domestic polity arrives to period s with a given composition of the electorate and a given degree of identity politics.
  2. Foreign government may update a_F.
  3. Domestic cititens with identity $\overline{N}$ decide to form/abandon a group.
  4. Domestic government updates its policies $\{\hat{t}_i, \hat{a}_i\}$ as an electorate votes for party platforms.
  5. Domestic citizens can decide to recategorize (i.e., change their identity), determining the domestic society's composition.

Result 1: Optimal Party Strategies

The game is log supermodular → an unique symmetric Nash Equilibrium exits.

Both parties have the same optimal identity politics

$$\hat{a} = \begin{cases} \underline{a} & m \geq \overline{m} \\ h(m, a_F) & m \in (\underline{m}, \overline{m}) \\ \overline{a} & m \leq \underline{m} \end{cases} \quad (1)$$

with $m = (1 + \xi\mu)\theta z$ and $\xi = 0$ if no group is formed. $\overline{m}$ and $\underline{m}$ depend on $W(\cdot)$, $G(\cdot)$ and $(\overline{a} - \underline{a})$.

Result 2: Group Formation

- Utility from membership depends on the political consequences (i.e., whether the group affect politics).
- Domestic policy is affected for $m > \underline{m}$.
- Formation is beneficial for

$$\mu > \begin{cases} \mu_E & m > \underline{m} \\ \mu_N & m \leq \underline{m} \end{cases} \quad \text{with} \quad \mu_N > \mu_E \quad (2)$$

- Influential groups are formed for smaller shares of $\overline{N}$ but also groups without political influence may be formed.

Result 3: Recategorization

- Acquisition of a (new) identity $\overline{N}$ depends on its fitness $\Delta(m, a_F)$ and on "learning" its benefits.
- Approaches to learning: Individual (costly (κ) and noisy optimization) or Social (free emulation of another society member).
- Noise: Idiosyncratic shock with distribution function $K(\cdot)$ in favor of $\underline{N}$.
- Steady state for share of identity $\overline{N}$: $\mu_s = K(\Delta)$.
- Share of social learners in society is

$$\sigma = \begin{cases} < 1 & \text{if} \quad \kappa \leq (\mu_s - \mu)\Delta \\ 1 & \text{if} \quad \kappa > (\mu_s - \mu)\Delta \end{cases} \quad (3)$$

- No individual learning for $|\mu_s - \mu| > 0$ for $\kappa > 0$, i.e., society's composition is preserved before μ_s is reached.
- The stable equilibrium for the share of $\overline{N}$ in society is

$$\mu_L = \mu_s - \kappa/\Delta, \quad (4)$$

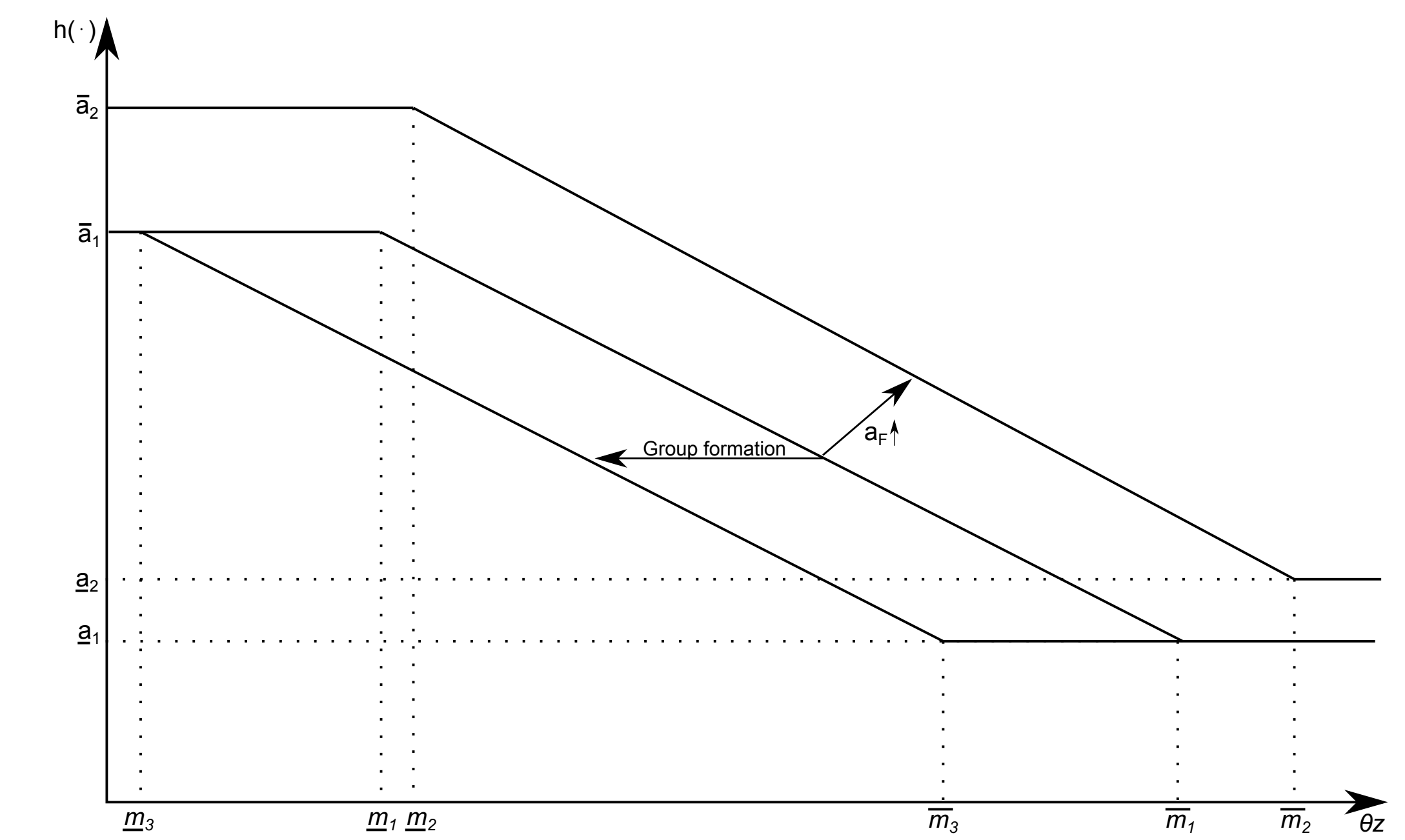whereas, for $\kappa > 0$,

$$\mu_L < \mu_s \quad \text{if} \quad \Delta > 0$$
$$\mu_L > \mu_s \quad \text{if} \quad \Delta < 0$$

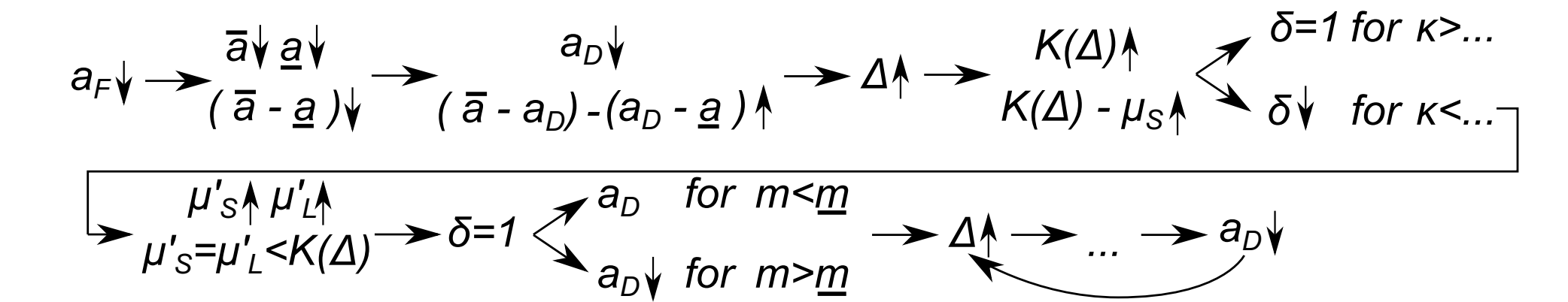hold true and, hence, the steady state μ_s is neither reached nor approached for $\kappa > 0$.

- Actual *stable* share of $\overline{N}$ in society can be larger than μ_s as well as smaller than μ_s, depending on the identity's fitness.

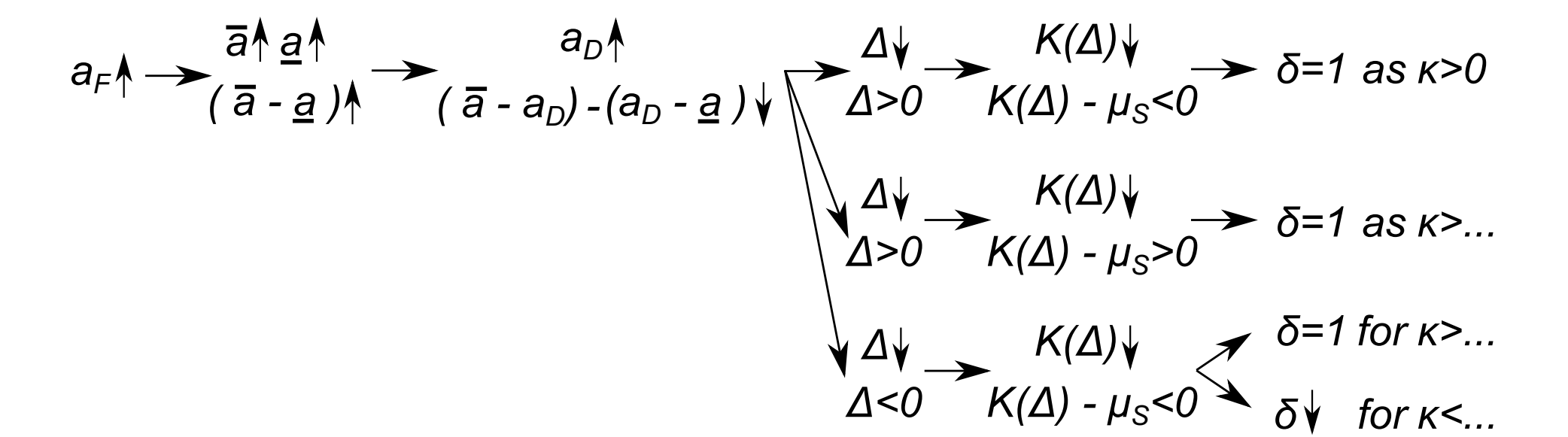## Model: Comparative Statics I

Model: Comparative Statics II

Foreign Nationalistic Shock: $\Delta=0$ $\delta=1$ $K(\Delta)=\mu_L=\mu_S$

Foreign Shock vanishes: $\Delta>0$ $\delta=1$ $K(\Delta)>\mu_L=\mu_S$

Conclusions/Takeaways

- New mechanism for *transnational* diffusion of identity politics.
- Domestic voters rely on foreign identity politics in order to determine their own identity-related behavior.
- Diffusion as the result of independent adaptation to uniform changes in voters' "tastes" (demand side).
- For small costs of group formation, groups can form solely due to utility from camaraderie and without influence on politics.
- Non-influential groups still increase the utility from membership and thus increases the incentives for recategorization.
- Shocks in one country can result in circles of mutually reinforcing identity politics in all countries.
- Culture can restrain the incentives for recategorization but also increases the irreversibility of shocks.

Contact

Soeren C. Schwuchow
soeren.schwuchow@b-tu.de
www.scschwuchow.com