

Legislator Preferences, Party Desires: Party Switching and the Foundations of Policy Making in Legislatures

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Abstract

Legislators' political identities are tightly linked to their party affiliations, even where political parties are seen as relatively weak vis-à-vis individual politicians. In this light, party switches, particularly when executed by sitting legislators, pose questions of compelling interest. We focus here on one: How does party switching by sitting legislators affect the preferences of legislative parties? We start from the basic assumption that ambition drives individual legislators' choices and changes of party affiliation. We sketch a general model of party switching, whose logic leads to several testable hypotheses. Assessing our expectations against 1988-2000 data from the Italian lower house, we find that a member of parliament (MP) who moves into a new party probably cannot expect to be able to pull that party's ideal point toward her own. MPs who do move probably do so under pressure, as their exits appear to allow parties to readjust their positions much more than they otherwise might. This suggests that much switching reflects not so much MPs' efforts to improve their lots as their efforts to flee inauspicious situations. At the same time, and most broadly, we find that every party member to some extent plays a part in determining her party's position, whether to keep it where it is or move it one way or another. In this sense, a party's legislative behavior responds democratically to the preferences of the legislators enrolled in it.

1 Introduction

Democratic politics and political parties go hand in hand. Politicians win elections and hold office as members of parties (Epstein 1967). For their part, political parties organize legislatures and the passage of policy (Cox and McCubbins 1993). Legislators' political identities are tightly linked to their party affiliations, even where parties are seen as relatively weak vis-à-vis individual politicians. In this light, party switches, particularly when executed by sitting legislators, are curious and perhaps even bizarre. On one hand, there is the motivational question: why would a legislator decide to change his or her party affiliation during a legislative term? On the other hand, there is the practical question: what difference does party switching make? We take up the latter issue in this paper by asking how party switching by sitting legislators affects the preferences of legislative parties.

To grasp the interplay of individual and party preferences, we need to address what individual legislators (MPs) get out of party membership. To this end, we first briefly examine the literatures on parties qua legislative actors, individual legislative behavior, and party switching. We next sketch of a general model of party switching, which we use as a guide to tackling the question of the relationship between individual and party preferences. The logic of the model leads us to several testable hypotheses, which we examine in the fourth section. The final section discusses the broader implications of the research.

2 Legislators and Parties

What do legislative parties do? In the US, the majority party in each chamber organizes that chamber, filling all legislative offices and managing the flow of legislation (Cox and McCubbins 1993). Parties manage the business of the legislature in parliamentary systems too, albeit generally through their control over the executive (Cox 1987). This control, along with the tight discipline commonly ascribed to parliamentary parties (Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999b),

means that majority parties (or coalitions) in parliamentary systems not only manage the legislative process, but also determine legislative outcomes (see, e.g., Baron 1998; Heller 2001; Huber 1996; Laver and Schofield 1990).

From this perspective, parties are routinely assumed to behave as unitary actors (Laver and Schofield 1990). Even students of US politics, where parties are notoriously unable—or perhaps unwilling—to impose unity on their members, often have treated parties as units conditional on their members having relatively homogeneous preferences (e.g., Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Cooper, Brady, and Hurley 1977; Rohde 1991). Analysts of European parliamentary systems, when investigating the formation and duration of governments, customarily treat parties as unitary actors with legislative weights that remain fixed throughout each legislative term. Party preferences are likewise regarded as fixed during legislative terms; reflecting this standard assumption, the oft-used Manifesto dataset on party positions is composed of measurements taken at election time (Budge et al. 2001).

The treatment of parties as unitary actors is a pleasant fiction, convenient for analysis but also recognized as misleading under some circumstances (Laver 1999; Laver and Schofield 1990; Laver and Shepsle 1990; 1999; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). The assumption that parties are fixed in weight and preferences also is a useful fiction, although not as clearly recognized as such (but see Laver and Benoit 2003; Strøm 1994). On one hand, parties can change in reaction to exogenous events, as when many Communist parties altered their names and their platforms in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union ~~in the early 1990s~~. On the other hand, legislators can reevaluate their party affiliations in response to new information—e.g., from opinion surveys or subnational elections—and thus can sometimes decide to change parties (Heller and Mershon 2005). A party that attracts switchers without losing members to

rival parties, obviously, increases its seat share, which in turn might make it more attractive to other potential switchers (Laver and Benoit 2003).

Party switching often is seen as a pathology of political ambition (see, e.g., Mejía Acosta 1999; Sánchez de Dios 1999; Tomás Mallén 2002; Turan 1985) or a symptom of political systems in flux (see, e.g., Àgh 1999; Reed and Thies 2000). Whatever the reasons for switching—and analysts agree that ambition underlies them all (cf., e.g., Aldrich and Bianco 1992; Desposato 2002; Heller and Mershon 2005; Laver and Benoit 2003; McElroy 2003)—it will affect party size and the distribution of party-member preferences under all but the most restrictive conditions. We explore party switchers’ motivations elsewhere (Heller and Mershon 2001; 2004a; 2005; Mershon and Heller 2003), and focus on consequences here.

As a party gains new members through switching, the preferences of its rank and file likely grow more heterogeneous. Preference heterogeneity might not increase if the “raw” preferences¹ of members of different parties overlap, as illustrated in Figure 1, where minority-party members *j*, *l*, *n*, or *p* could move into the majority without affecting the total range of majority-membership preferences. If membership preferences do not overlap, by contrast, switching necessarily increases the preference heterogeneity of the receiving party (as long as no members balance entries by exiting to join a different party²) and might (but will not necessarily) cause a corresponding decrease in the preference heterogeneity of the sending party.

Figure 1



¹ “Raw” preferences are preferences untinged by strategic or practical considerations.

² If minority-party member *r* were to switch into the majority, but majority member *a* were to switch out—assuming legislators are uniformly distributed—rank-and-file preferences in the majority party would shift to the right, but the range of preferences would be unchanged.

The proximate effects of party switching are clear. Along with changes in party size and heterogeneity, switching also should affect the aggregate distribution of party-member preferences. For example, if any of minority-party members j , l , n , or p in the case illustrated in Figure 1 were to switch into the majority party, party size would increase and the range of members' preferences would remain unchanged, but members' preferences would be slightly skewed to the right related to their pre-switch distribution. If such a switch into the party were balanced by an exit on the left, party size also would remain unchanged, but the change in preference distribution might be even more pronounced.

The import of party switching for any change in the distribution of preferences depends on whether and how such changes are expressed in party preferences or unity. On one hand, increased preference heterogeneity within the party could lead to less party unity, as argued for the US case in diagnoses of “conditional party government” (Aldrich and Rohde 2000; Rohde 1991; Krehbiel 1993; 1998; 1999b; 1999a; 2000). Yet greater preference heterogeneity could be advantageous for parties, particularly if it allows them to appeal to a wider audience (Shepsle 1972; but see, Alesina and Cukierman 1990). It also could force parties to use more resources to attract voters (because they have to substitute something else for the diluted appeal of ideology; see Cox 1987), make vote outcomes less certain (cf., Best and Heller 2005), and disappoint legislators—and voters—who care about policy outcomes (Heller and Mershon 2005). On the other hand, switches that move a party's center of gravity (in terms of membership preferences) might presage changes in the party's observed ideal point. It seems reasonable, after all, to posit some connection between the preferences of parties and the preferences of their MPs. Moreover, if a legislator who joins a party can pull it toward her own ideal point, that should affect potential switchers' calculations. Of course, if intraparty delegation regimes imbue party leaders with

potent tools for imposing discipline, the observable impact of switching will be whatever party leaders want it to be (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991).

We have just affirmed a link between a party's preferences and its MPs' preferences. We also think it uncontroversial from either a normative or a positive viewpoint that there should be some relationship between a party's preferences, as manifested in the behavior of its members in legislative votes, and the preferences of its members. Indeed, one of the most common claims about parties is that they aggregate preferences. And yet how they do so—and to what effect are unclear. In pursuit of clarity, we turn now to explore and test some of the implications of changes in party membership with regard to party preferences.

3 Leveraging Party Preferences

It makes sense to hold party sizes and preferences constant, as long as party memberships do not change. Party memberships do change, however. For example, new members can enter the legislature via by-elections or as replacements for legislators who move into executive offices (where executive and legislative offices are legally incompatible). Further, and perhaps more notably, sitting legislators sometimes switch parties.

It is easy to say that parties provide representation, in essence by aggregating citizen (or, more accurately, voter) preferences into policy programs. *How* they do this is not simple. At one extreme, legislators can represent their districts by voting for any and all legislation that benefits at least some substantial portion of their constituents. If all legislators behaved this way, parties would be irrelevant and policy outcomes would most benefit the constituents of the median legislator (or legislators, if the median changes with every issue). At the other extreme, legislators toe their party line on all votes. To the extent that constituencies are heterogeneous, such strong party voting suggests that most if not all such loyalist legislators will have to vote against the interests of their districts on some bills. This suggests that whom parties represent and

how representative they are depends on how they aggregate preferences.

Political parties that face no competition need neither aggregate preferences nor provide representation. Where parties compete for votes, office, and policy influence, however, a party that does not represent its constituents risks losing to a challenger that promises to do better. Similarly, a legislator who fails to represent the interests of those who put her in office risks being replaced at election time. An individual legislator, therefore, would prefer to be in a party that allows her at least to stake out positions that her constituents appreciate. Inasmuch as voters care about and cast their votes on the basis of policy outcomes, legislators also should value party unity both to signal a clear position to voters (Cox 1987) and to maximize bargaining weight in the legislature (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Laver and Shepsle 1999).

To underscore the point: If clarity of party labels is important, then legislators should want their party to send clear signals about its positions. This suggests a desire to present a unified front to voters, which in turn requires high levels of party unity in legislative voting.³ This observed unity means that it is possible to talk about party ideal points (Laver and Schofield 1990), but it does not imply that the preferences of party members do not matter. Rather, party ideal points should be some function of member ideal points, and a party's ideal point should change as its membership changes.

Legislators are elected on the basis of how electoral rules aggregate voters' preferences (see, e.g., Cox 1997; Riker 1982; Saari and Sieberg 2001). Party ideal points—which might be more or less clear depending on how tight is party unity—are determined on the basis of how internal party rules aggregate partisan legislators' preferences. It thus makes sense that party ideal points

³ We assume that voters pay attention to parties in legislatures. Given that parties compete for votes, it seems reasonable to suppose that a party that failed to maintain unity would see that lack advertised to voters by its rivals.

should be sensitive to changes in party membership. How sensitive depends on how the aggregation works.

There are essentially three possibilities for preference aggregation in a legislative party, depending on how party rules structure decision making. First, if the kinds of issues that define party positions are unidimensional, majority rule would privilege the median member of the party (Black 1958).⁴ (Decision rules also could bias party positions away from the median, but in a way that privileges some other clearly identifiable member—e.g., a supermajority rule that demands the support of the 2/3rd member.) Second, decision making could be geared to achieve consensus, resulting in choices that are tolerable to all party members, but possibly ideal for none. The outcomes of this kind of bargained decision making likely would approximate something like a mean of party-member preferences—something, in spatial terms, inside the party's Pareto hull (Tsebelis 1999; 2000; 2002).

The third possibility is for party leaders basically to set party positions on their own. Rules that privilege leadership preferences do not necessarily permit leaders to dictate their own preferences to their followers, because leaders are constrained by the need to retain rank-and-file support. Such rules do allow a leader to pull the party's position relatively close to her own, but how close and how consistently depends on the distribution of rank-and-file preferences, and how party rules allow those preferences to be expressed. Assuming that incentives exist for at least some members to vote against the party line at least some of the time (as discussed above) maintaining unity requires discipline (for a discussion of the sources of party unity, see Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999a). Party unity is a collective good, and it is party leaders' job to maintain

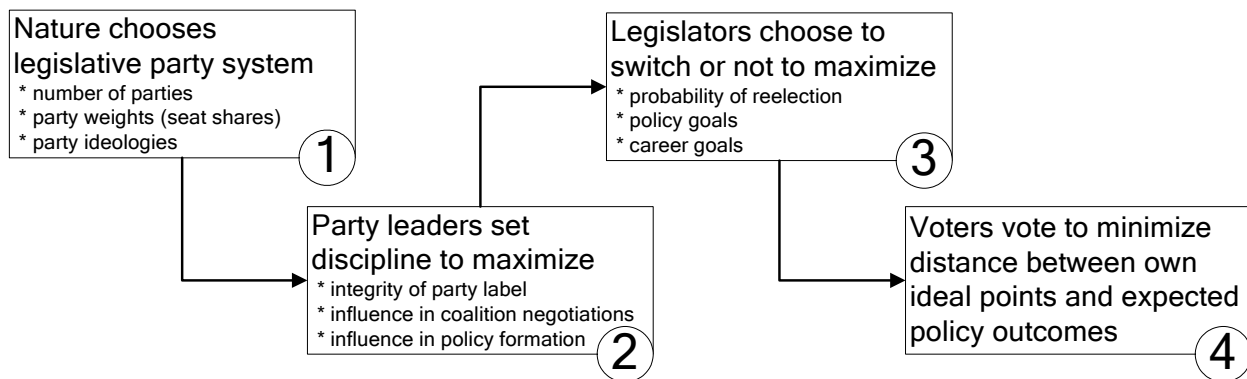
⁴ Note that if issues are multidimensional, the conditions for a median (core) are highly constrained (Plott 1967) and, when no multidimensional core exists, the kinds of processes that privilege a median voter in one dimension can lead to undesirable outcomes (Saari and Sieberg 2001; see also, Schofield, Grofman, and Feld 1988).

it (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991). Members will accept and tolerate leadership threats and punishments for this purpose as long as they value party unity, and as long as punishments are not too onerous. When punishments get to be too harsh, followers might be able to replace (or otherwise castigate) their leaders (Calvert 1987; Cox and McCubbins 1993; Shepsle and Boncheck 1997, ch. 14) or switch into a different party (Heller and Mershon 2002; Laver and Benoit 2003; and cf., Hirschman 1970).

Party switching is one of the tools available to legislators who want to maximize their own political fortunes and influence and maximize their ability to achieve their own policy goals. The choice to switch has two sides. On one hand, as just suggested, it is a reaction to circumstances internal to the party. For example, the party program might be disagreeable (that is, a legislator might switch because he or she essentially miscalculated policy distances); perceived chances for reelection might be unacceptably low, perhaps because of a decline of the party in the polls (Heller and Mershon 2005) or a poor ballot-list position (Aldrich and Bianco 1992); or opportunities for career advancement within the party might be inadequate (cf., Schlesinger 1966). On the other hand, there must be something that makes the switcher's "target" party appealing. A legislator who often finds herself at odds with her party's policies might want to move to a more compatible party, for example. In a more strategic vein, a legislator might switch in hopes of being able to influence her target party's position—and that party's leadership might try to encourage or discourage her, depending on whether her entry would help or hinder leadership goals for the party. Possible enticements for potential switchers include promises of rapid advancement in the party (and a consequent stronger ability to influence party decisions), promises of relative freedom from the pressures of party discipline, a guaranteed attractive ballot list position (see, e.g., Svåsand, Strøm, and Rasch 1997, 96), and so forth.

The act of switching parties is part of a four-stage game, as shown in Figure 2 (see Heller and Mershon 2004b). In the first stage, Nature exogenously and non-strategically sets the key parameters of the game (cf. Laver and Benoit 2003) by choosing a legislative party system. Strategic behavior begins at the second stage, when parties (more accurately, party leaders) choose a level of discipline to impose on their members. We concentrate in this paper on how the results of decisions taken at the third stage affect the legislative party system originally set up by Nature, in order to draw inferences about what happens in the second stage.

Figure 2: The four stages of switching



The parties' choices at the second stage in effect are designed to condition switching decisions in the third stage. The legislator's decision is at heart a simple one, but it is complicated by multiple and sometimes conflicting electoral, office (or career), and policy goals. These objectives are each facets of political ambition, which drives politicians of all stripes, whether party leaders or faces in the legislative crowd, to use whatever tools are available to them to further their own interests. It is thus ambition that drives both parties' decisions on discipline and legislators' decisions on party affiliation.

In practical terms, the problems of choosing decision rules, setting the agenda, and implementing and enforcing choices make it likely that party leadership will have a hand in determining party stances on important issues. Nonetheless, whether party rules favor leadership

preferences or some sort of average position—a party member privileged by where her preferences fall relative to her copartisans, or a bargaining solution that places the party ideal point at what is essentially the mean of the ideal points of its members—party ideal points should be sensitive to changes in members’ ideal points. This last simple—and, we think, uncontroversial—observation opens the door to several hypotheses.

- H1 *Median (or biased median) member hypothesis*: The party ideal point should mirror the ideal point of some legislator identifiable by her position in the distribution of party-member ideal points. If the identity of the legislator at the key position changes, the party ideal point should change to reflect the ideal point of the new legislator in the privileged position in the distribution. This hypothesis implies that party ideal points should be sensitive to changes in party membership, such as switches into or out of the party, that affect the identity of the median party member.⁵
- H2 *Mean (or biased mean) ideal point hypothesis*: The party ideal point should be close to some (possibly biased) *average* of the ideal points of its members. Possible sources of bias include the party leadership’s relationship with or dependence upon external actors, as for example the role of trade union organizations in determining the Labour party’s platform in the United Kingdom (at least until Tony Blair took control of the Labour party and the Government). This hypothesis implies that party ideal points often should be sensitive to changes in party membership, even if the median party member remains unchanged, and could be relatively insensitive to changes in the identity of the median member.
- H3 *Leadership control hypothesis*: The party ideal point should be close to the leadership

⁵ Changes in the identities of non-median party members would have no effect.

ideal point, with a variance that depends on the location of rank-and-file ideal points. Rank-and-file preferences matter because leaders are not dictators—if they wish to retain their leadership positions, they have to balance their own ambitions with those of their followers and the good of the organization (see the discussion of the "leadership dilemma" in Shepsle and Boncheck 1997; cf., Müller and Strøm 1999). The variance around leadership ideal points could well differ across parties, depending on how leaders are chosen (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991), whether they face challenges from ambitious followers (and what kinds), the party's government status, the size of the party (Best and Heller 2005), and so on. That said, however, the party position should be relatively insensitive to changes in party membership, varying only to the extent that the leadership has to cater to the interests of members who are relatively distant from the established party position or who are in some sense pivotal and thus can sway leaders who need their support (cf., Best and Heller 2005). Because party leadership is interested in maintaining (or moving) the party ideal point as close as possible to its own, leaders might want to be strategic about how they treat potential switchers (in- and outswitchers). The possibility that party switchers could affect both party size and party ideal points (either prejudicially or beneficially from the perspective of leadership) suggests two subsidiary hypotheses:

H3a Leadership should try to attract switchers who would help move the party's position closer to its own. Where leadership and party positions are the same, this means that parties either should not accept inswitchers (cf., Laver and Benoit 2003), or should accept only balanced inswitches—for example, we would expect inswitches into a party from the left to be allowed only if

balanced by corresponding inswitches on the right. Where leadership and party positions differ, we would expect to see inswitches weighted to one side of the party, and the party ideal point moving to that side. (Similar logic applies to outswitches, albeit with the party ideal point moving away from the side where the outswitchers had been.)

H3b To the extent that inswitches help improve a party's legislative bargaining position (because they increase the party's seat share and hence legislative weight), *ceteris paribus*, leadership should want to attract inswitchers even if they have no effect on the party ideal point. By the same token, leadership should seek to discourage balanced outswitching. Leadership should be indifferent toward switching that does not change a party's legislative bargaining weight (e.g., because it does not make the party any more or less pivotal; Laver and Benoit 2003), as long as the switching does not make leadership worse off vis-à-vis the party ideal point.

H4 *Fixed parties hypothesis*: Our first three hypotheses arise from the assumption that individual politicians use political parties as vehicles to gain and retain political power. As the identities of the politicians in a party change, so too does the party. This kind of legislative party ("party in parliament;" see Katz and Mair 1994) is but one possible conception of what parties are, however, and scholars have identified several other types that should in principle be much less responsive to the preferences of their elected members. Cadre parties, for example, are organized and maintained by elites, in essence to ensure their political influence without requiring that they hold office themselves (Duverger 1972). Legislators in this type of party are agents to powerful principals and

should be much more circumscribed in their ability to influence party decisions than their self-serving counterparts in legislative parties. In general, parties “on the ground” (Katz and Mair 1994) serve as relatively fixed bases, into which politicians sort themselves. Elected politicians in such parties have little influence *as legislators* on their parties’ policies.⁶ Hence, if parties are organized primarily as something other than legislative cartels (Cox and McCubbins 1993), we should not see party positions responding to changes in legislative-party membership. This is in essence our null hypothesis.

To evaluate these hypotheses, we need to compare changes in party ideal points over time to see whether and how those changes are related to changes in the ideal points of party members. This means, in turn, that we need estimations of member and party ideal points that are directly comparable without one being derived from the other. We obtain such estimates by calculating party positions on non-secret roll call votes in the Italian Chamber of Deputies from 1988 to spring 2000—a party votes “yea” if more members vote for a legislative proposal than against, otherwise it votes “nay”—and then treating each party as another legislator for the purpose of calculating comparable Optimal Classification scores (Poole 2000) for parties and sitting legislators.⁷

4 Evidence: Switches and Preferences

Our base dataset of voting in the Italian parliament begins in 1988, near the start of the Tenth Legislature (2 July 1987-2 February 1992), and ends in spring 2000, roughly one year

⁶ A legislator who stands out from the crowd, perhaps by being particularly good at attracting votes, might wield more clout—but not because of her position in the legislature.

⁷ Thanks to Mat McCubbins for suggesting this method of obtaining party scores. Thanks also Keith Poole for providing the program for calculating OC scores and Adriana Bejan for walking us through it. Italy 1988-2000 is an especially apt setting for the empirical study because it offers pronounced variation in the rate of party switching over time. Whereas switching before 1994 was rare, almost one fourth of the MPs in the 1996-2001 Legislature switched parties at least once. For a detailed discussion, see Heller and Mershon 2005.

before the mandated end of the Thirteenth Legislature on 9 March 2001. The over 2.9 million legislator-vote observations in the base dataset include all final votes on legislation, all votes to convert decree laws, all votes where the relevant government minister and the relevant committee disagree on the advisability of passage,⁸ and all votes where the outcome goes against the responsible minister's recommendation (e.g., the vote was in favor but the government was opposed).⁹ Each deputy has six possible casts: aye, nay, "voted,"¹⁰ abstain, absent, and "on mission" (absent with cause). We excluded all secret votes, which reduced the data set to just over 1.68 million observations, and coded any cast other than "yea" or nay" as missing.¹¹ We used the remaining votes to calculate Optimal Classification (OC) scores (Poole 2000) for each legislature in our dataset (Legislatures X through XIII).

The unit of analysis for calculating OC scores was deputy-party for sitting legislators and party-switchperiod for parties. This means that any deputy who changed parties during the course of the legislature in essence became a new person in the dataset, with a new ideal point. We treated parties as new entities every time the membership of any party changed due to party switching. The rationale for allowing party ideal points to change with every round of switching is that a change in any party can (and, at least in some cases, should) effect changes in the entire legislative party system. To constrain all but the party whose membership changes from reacting to the change seems theoretically unwise. Theoretical purity does not come cheap, however: the OC-scaling program rejects all legislators who vote fewer than ten times, resulting in the loss of

⁸ This disagreement is observable only on nonfinal votes.

⁹ Data selection criteria were determined in the Camera dei deputati's *servizio parlamentare*. We were unable to obtain data on non-final votes where government and the relevant committee recommendations agreed and the outcome jibed with the government's stated preferences.

¹⁰ Prior to 13 October 1988, most votes were secret. Since 1988, secret voting is allowed only on votes concerning individual deputies and a limited range of other issues (Regolamento, art. 49).

¹¹ There clearly are circumstances when an abstention—or even an absence—counts as a "nay." We hope in future to recalculate OC scores to take such circumstances into account.

344, 217, 219, and 372 legislator-party (or party-switchperiod) combinations for the Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, and Thirteenth legislatures, respectively.¹² After losing observations, we were left with a total of over 1.2 million legislator-party observations that were not missing ideal points for either the legislator or her party.¹³

Each of the three principal hypotheses calls for a specific kind of test. The first hypothesis suggests that party ideal points should track the ideal point of whoever occupies some specific spatial position in the distribution of party members—e.g., the median member, the 2/3th member, the 3/5th member. To test this, we need to identify whether parties' OC scores closely track the scores of members in specific positions (such as the median or 2/3th position) relative to their copartisans, irrespective of those members' identities or institutional positions within their parties. This test is conceptually simple, but computationally difficult—so much so that we leave it aside for now.

The third hypothesis, that party leaders manage—if they cannot determine—party ideal points, also is conceptually simple. All we need to do to test this is to identify party leaders, compare their ideal points with those of their parties, and ask whether changes (if any) in party ideal points make party leaders better or worse off. We face an information shortfall, however: while it is in principle straightforward to identify parliamentary group leaders (*capigruppo*), available data sometimes identify more than one leader per group, and we lack full data for the tumultuous XI Legislature, discussed below. There is, moreover, the question of how frequently

¹² The program also drops votes where the majority is greater than 99.5 percent. For each of the four legislatures in our dataset, this leads to a loss of about half the votes (298/608 in the X, 162/433 in the XI, 273/562 in the XII, and 517/1077 in the XIII). This might be less a commentary on the consensual nature of Italian politics than an artifact of electronic voting, where nominal data exists for most votes, including votes that in many if not most countries would be settled by acclamation or even nonlegislatively in the bureaucracy.

¹³ The breakdown by legislature is: X, 296,580; XI, 225,959; XII, 270,678; XIII, 454,753.

party leaders vote. In the US Congress, for example, the Speaker of the House (and leader of the majority) normally votes only to break ties; in Norway, party leaders also tend to vote relatively infrequently. We have not yet established whether party leaders in Italy are too busy being leaders to take the time to vote on most issues, or if they vote as regularly as their rank and file. We therefore leave direct testing of our third hypothesis for future work. This leaves the second hypothesis, that party ideal points should be responsive to changes in party membership. Note that this hypothesis is entirely consistent with the first and third hypotheses.

In order to test the second hypothesis, we want to see whether and how a party's ideal point changes when it gains or loses members. To this end, we set as our dependent variable the change in a party's ideal point from one period to the next, where periods are defined by party switching. A new period begins every time at least one deputy votes under the party-group label different from the last time she voted. We define the left-hand side variable as the difference between party i 's first-dimension OC score in the current period and its first-dimension OC score in the last period: that is, $\Delta ptyOC_i = ptyOC_{it} - ptyOC_{it-1}$.¹⁴ This variable is negative if the party's new OC score is lower (more "left") than in the last switchperiod, and positive otherwise. On the right-hand side, our key explanatory variables are two: the mean position of MPs switching *into* party i and the mean position of MPs who have switched *out* of party i . Because our unit of analysis is the party, rather than individual legislators, we collapse our dataset to yield a single observation for each party in each switchperiod.

Since we focus on changes in party ideal points, MP ideal points alone tell us very little. We need instead to know the where MP ideal points are relative to party ideal points.¹⁵ We

¹⁴ We use only first-dimension OC scores here. For parties, the mode for second-dimension OC scores is zero; for deputies, it is not.

¹⁵ We cannot interpret a coefficient indicating an MP's effect on her party's OC score if we do

therefore operationalize our measure for MP positions as the average of the difference between the MP's and the party's ideal points in the previous period: $diffMpty_{it-1} = membOC_{t-1} - ptyOC_{it-1}$, where the MP is a member of party i at time t , but need not have been at time $t - 1$. Finally, we separate in- and outswitchers from all MPs by interacting $diffMpty_{it-1}$ with weighted dummies for MPs switching in and out of the party, giving $p_in_{it} * diffMpty_{it-1}$ and $p_out_{it-1} * diffMpty_{it-1}$, where $p_in_{it} = \frac{n\ inswitchers_{it}}{party\ seats_{it}}$ and $p_out_{it-1} = \frac{n\ outswitchers_{it-1}}{party\ seats_{it}}$. This weighting scheme addresses

two related concerns. First, it seems likely that the marginal effect of switching will be smaller in larger parties, all else constant; second, we expect a greater impact from a large number of switchers with a given mean OC score than from, say, two switchers with the same mean score.

A first-cut interpretation of Hypothesis 2 suggests that inswitching MPs should pull their new party's ideal point toward their own. Outswitching MPs, by contrast, free the party of any influence they might have had, allowing its ideal point to move away from the outswitchers' ideal points. This amounts to an expectation of a positive and significant coefficient for $p_in_{it} * diffMpty_{it-1}$ and a negative and significant coefficient for $p_out_{it-1} * diffMpty_{it-1}$. Our third hypothesis, that party leaders might use switchers either to increase their influence in the party or to increase the party's influence (or both), suggests a more nuanced view, however.

A party leader can set his or her party's ideal point, but only up to a point. As agents for party membership, leaders are constrained by their principals, who also are their followers. A leader should therefore be willing to accept only those inswitchers who help to move the party closer to where the leader wants (as suggested in Hypothesis 3a) or, particularly if the party already is where the leader wants it, only those who do not influence the party ideal point at all (as suggested in Hypothesis 3b). This suggests an alternative expectation for inswitchers, i.e., the

not know whether the MP's OC score is greater or less than the party's score.

effect of inswitching on party ideal points should be null or very small. The effect of outswitching, by contrast, should be stronger.

Switching out of a party, however, is not simply the mirror image of switching in. Every MP who leaves the party is in essence one less constraint on the leader. Indeed, party leaders might want to encourage some outswitching in order to reduce the number or severity of constraints they face. From this perspective, not only would we not expect to see balanced outswitching,¹⁶ but we would expect party ideal points to respond much more strongly to outswitching than to inswitching. We test these expectations.

Adding controls for party size and party members' ideal points, then, we estimate

$$\Delta ptyOC_i = \alpha + \beta_1 diffMpty_{it-1} + \beta_2 p_in_{it} * diffMpty_{it-1} + \beta_3 p_out_{it-1} * diffMpty_{it-1} + \beta_4 ptyOC_{it-1} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

where $diffMpty_{it-1}$ both controls for party heterogeneity and provides a baseline for the expected relationship between the ideal points of a party and its members. As a baseline measure, the effect of this variable should be null, as the ideal points of deputies already in the party should already be assimilated into the party ideal point. With regard to heterogeneity, however, we expect party members who are farthest from the party's position to be the least influential.¹⁷ We include as well the lagged party ideal point, $ptyOC_{it-1}$, to account for the possibility that extreme parties respond differently to party switching from parties closer to the center of the policy space. We have no *a priori* expectations about the sign or significance of this control variable.

Most empirical studies wrestle with measurement problems or prove to be imperfectly compliant with the standard assumptions of statistical analyses. Ours is no exception. We tested

¹⁶ We should not expect to see balanced outswitching *in equilibrium*. Under extraordinary circumstances or when a party is dissolving, of course, all bets are off.

¹⁷ They might even be relatively distant from the party *because* they lack influence. This question is beyond the scope of this paper, however.

for and could not reject the presence of heteroskedastic errors, so we ran the final test (the results shown below) using heteroskedasticity-corrected standard errors. Moreover, the structure of our data, combined with the requirements of the OC-scaling program, left us with a number of missing switchperiods, which often made it impossible to calculate the change in a party's ideal point from one switchperiod to the next. Rather than throw away data, we chose to measure $\Delta ptyOC_i$ as the difference between the party dimension 1 ideal point at time t and in the most recent past switchperiod in which an ideal point is available. We take this step with a fair amount of confidence, for two reasons: First, the missing switchperiods cover relatively short periods of time—that is, after all, why they are missing—so the problem could be more that we failed to aggregate our data enough, rather than one of measurement. Second, if we show a switching effect on party ideal points across missing switchperiods, the chances are that the effect is real. That is, one possibility is that the party ideal point has changed little in the unobserved periods, so that the change we are able to capture is that occurring between observed periods. Alternatively, if the ideal has moved farther away from its position at time t , the switcher effect is in fact larger than its measured value. (Given the brevity of the missing periods, we suspect such undermeasurement to be unlikely.) If, by contrast, the party ideal point has moved closer to its position at time t during the unobserved periods, we would be overmeasuring the switching effect—a problem we see as no more likely than undermeasurement.

We test our second hypothesis with simple OLS regressions (correcting for heteroskedastic errors), as laid out in the above model. We ran the estimation for our entire dataset, as shown in the second column of Table 1. The third through sixth columns show the results for the same model separately for each legislature, and the seventh column shows the results for the full dataset excluding the Thirteenth Legislature.

Overall, the results we present in Table 1 are heartening. The pooled regression of all four legislatures deviates from expectations only in that the sign of β_2 , the coefficient of $p_in_t * diffMpty_{it-1}$, is negative. We predicted a positive sign; more importantly, however, β_2 is statistically indistinguishable from zero even at extremely generous levels of significance, in line with expectations. The individual regressions for the 10th through the 12th legislatures are perfectly in line with expectations, with the exception of the coefficient for $p_in_t * diffMpty_{it-1}$ in the 11th Legislature, which is both statistically significant and large. The coefficient's sign is in the expected direction, however, and as we detail below it is not surprising that the 11th Legislature should look somewhat different from the others. The results for the 13th Legislature are more problematic: not only is the coefficient for $p_in_t * diffMpty_{it-1}$ the wrong sign, but also it is statistically significant and very large. The results for the other variables in the regression for 13th Legislature are more in keeping with our expectations, as is a regression (column 7 of the table) pooling data from all legislatures save the 13th.

The (mildly) anomalous result for the 11th Legislature (1992-94) reflects the politics of a turbulent period in Italian legislative history. On one hand, some 201 MPs who switched into a parliamentary group other than the *gruppo misto* (and for whom we have OC scores) had moved out of the formerly dominant DC and into one or the other of the newly formed CCD (22) or DC-PPI (179). It seems to us quite reasonable to expect inswitching to have a more pronounced effect under such circumstances. (The effect of outswitching also should be large, as Table 1 shows it to be.) Moreover, the DC's travails at the time were symptomatic of the disintegration of the long-standing Italian party system, set in motion in turn by the vast corruption scandal that broke open in 1992 (e.g., D'Alimonte and Bartolini 2002; Ricolfi 1993). (For snapshots of the disintegration, see Appendix Tables A1 and A2.)

The coefficient for $p_in_i * diffMpty_{it-1}$ in the 11th Legislature makes sense. In the 13th Legislature, it does not. The remaining coefficients all are consistent with expectations in the regression for the 13th as for the other legislatures and the pooled data. The results for the 13th Legislature raise a flag, but in light of the results from the other five estimations, and the fact that the control variables do not attain significance in the 13th Legislature, but do in the other estimations, we suspect that the problem probably lies in the data rather than the model.

Thus far, we have focused only on the variables that pertain directly to our second and, to some extent, third hypotheses. There is insight to be gained from the control variables as well, however. Both $diffMpty_{it-1}$ and $ptyOC_{t-1}$ touch on extremism: the first hones in on legislator extremism relative to her party's position; the second addresses the behavior of parties that are relatively close to the center of the policy space versus that of parties that are relatively far away.

The negative and statistically significant coefficient for $diffMpty_{it-1}$ suggests that MPs who are extreme relative to their parties do not influence party positions. This makes intuitive sense: on one hand, members whose ideal points are far from their parties' might be far precisely because they lack influence. On the other hand, members who are closer to the "center" vis-à-vis their party likely would be loath to let their more distant brethren pull the party ideal away from its center. The farther away, the less influence, hence the negative sign on the coefficient. That the coefficient is small makes it plausible, as too large a coefficient would suggest a situation in which members not close to the party ideal could improve their lot by abandoning the party (Heller and Mershon 2004a). Note that this is fully consistent with party-leadership control of party positions (Hypothesis 3), but less so with hypotheses 1 and 2.

The positive and statistically significant coefficient for $ptyOC_{t-1}$ bears two interpretations. On one hand, it could indicate that extreme parties are unlikely to move toward the center. From

Table 1: Change in party ideal points as a function of member ideal points

| Dependent variable: (ptyOCi | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| | Coefficients by legislature (standard errors in parentheses, p-values in bold) | | | | | |
| | 10th - 13th | 10th | 11th | 12th | 13th | 10th - 12th |
| diffMptyit-1 | -0.204 (0.051) 0.000 | -0.351 (0.066) 0.000 | -0.441 (0.102) 0.000 | -0.360 (0.103) 0.001 | -0.211 (0.138) 0.127 | -0.295 (0.051) 0.000 |
| $P_{in_{it}} * diffMpty_{it-1}$ | -35.305 (71.126) 0.731 | 36.088 (34.442) 0.296 | 37.977 (18.265) 0.040 | 74.970 (138.154) 0.589 | -1005.076 (155.132) 0.000 | 36.232 (58.183) 0.534 |
| $p_{out_{it-1}} * diffMpty_{it-1}$ | -141.886 (6.543) 0.000 | -96.649 (11.550) 0.000 | -1168.028 (348.905) 0.001 | -262.314 (143.958) 0.071 | -126.063 (22.854) 0.000 | -112.476 (7.447) 0.000 |
| $ptyOC_{it-1}$ | 0.345 (0.055) 0.000 | 0.733 (0.087) 0.000 | 0.449 (0.127) 0.001 | 0.389 (0.099) 0.000 | 0.127 (0.139) 0.360 | 0.551 (0.061) 0.000 |
| constant | 0.000 (0.010) 0.978 | -0.044 (0.015) 0.004 | 0.095 (0.022) 0.000 | -0.009 (0.015) 0.557 | 0.002 (0.018) 0.916 | -0.001 (0.011) 0.952 |
| Observations | 566 | 149 | 98 | 105 | 214 | 352 |
| R ² | 0.298 | 0.618 | 0.444 | 0.455 | 0.168 | 0.483 |
| Root MSE | 0.232 | 0.183 | 0.21 | 0.170 | 0.262 | 0.195 |

this perspective, the farther is a party from the center of the policy space, the more likely a change in its ideal point will move it still farther away. On the other hand, and perhaps more reasonably, it could indicate that parties farther from the center of the policy space are unlikely to move toward the center—perhaps because they are ideologically anchored (**cites?)—while more centrist parties do. The coefficient for this control variable is small in any case, but it is interesting to note that parties close to the center of the policy space seem to behave differently from their more extreme counterparts.

What do our findings tell us? Leaving aside the results from the 13th Legislature, our results are consistently strong. Not only are the signs and relative magnitudes of the principal coefficients of interest “correct” in terms of our second hypothesis, but we find strong circumstantial support for the third hypothesis. These effects tell us, then, that a member of

parliament who moves into a new party probably cannot expect to be able to pull that party's ideal point toward her own. Legislators who do move, however, probably do so under pressure, as their exits appear to allow parties to readjust their positions much more than they otherwise might. This suggests that much switching comes not so much as a result of MPs seeking to improve their lots as from MPs fleeing inauspicious situations (cf. Aldrich and Bianco 1992).

5 Conclusions

We understand party switching as an aspect of strategic interaction among legislators. It is a particularly important one, for the choice of party affiliation affects a legislator's ability to affect policy, the people with whom she interacts day by day, her roles and appointments within the legislature, and likely her career. Switching, then, is just one part of a larger dynamic, so that what often appears to be unchanging—legislative party systems, party ideologies, party membership—in fact or potentially is in constant flux.

As we conceive of it, this “larger dynamic” is essentially a four-stage game like that sketched out in Figure 2. On the face of it, the one hypothesis that we test in this paper skips the first and second stages of that game, suggesting that parties are little more than black boxes. Considered more carefully, however, the assertion that a party's legislative behavior responds to the desires of its members suggests that even the most reelection-focused deputy (cf. Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1990) to some extent contributes to party policy making. This should be heartening for those who see in their elected representatives no shred of policy interest—because interested or not, every party member plays a part in determining her party's position, whether to keep it where it is or move it one way or another. In this sense, legislative parties aggregate policy democratically, and present democratically constituted policy packages to voters.

Appendix

Table A1. Changes in the Size of Party Groups, X and XI Legislatures, Italy.

| Party Group | X Legislature (1987-92) | | XI Legislature (1992-94) | |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| | N MPs Start | N MPs End | N MPs Start | N MPs End |
| DP / DP-COM | 8 | 11 | -- | -- |
| RC | -- | -- | 35 | 33 |
| PCI / PDS | 156 | 148 | 106 | 105 |
| SI | 20 | 19 | -- | -- |
| Network | -- | -- | 12 | 12 |
| Greens | 13 | 16 | 16 | 16 |
| FE-Radicals | 13 | 8 | 7 | 6 |
| PSI | 94 | 100 | 92 | 90 |
| PSDI | 17 | 12 | 16 | 15 |
| PRI | 20 | 20 | 27 | 26 |
| PPI | -- | -- | 0 | 179 |
| DC | 233 | 233 | 205 | 0 |
| CCD | -- | -- | 0 | 24 |
| Lega | [1 ^a] | [1 ^a] | 55 | 50 |
| PLI | 11 | 11 | 17 | 17 |
| MSI | 35 | 34 | 34 | 34 |
| Misto ^a | 7 | 16 | 6 | 21 |

Table A2. Changes in the Size of Party Groups, XII and XIII Legislatures, Italy.

| Party Group | XII Legislature (1994-1996) | | XIII Legislature (1996-2001) | |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|------------|
| | N MPs Start | N MPs End | N MPs Start | N MPs 2000 |
| RC | 39 | 24 | 34 | 20 |
| Prog-PDS | 164 | 166 | 171 | 162 |
| Dem | 0 | 21 | -- | -- |
| PPI | 33 | 26 | -- | -- |
| PD | -- | -- | 66 | 57 |
| DemU | -- | -- | 0 | 21 |
| RI | -- | -- | 26 | 0 |
| FLD | 0 | 29 | -- | -- |
| UDEur | -- | -- | 0 | 21 |
| CCD | 27 | 40 | 30 | 0 |
| FI | 112 | 110 | 122 | 110 |
| Lega | 114 | 75 | 59 | 46 |
| AN-MSI | 109 | 107 | 92 | 89 |
| Misto ^a | 31 | 29 | 27 | 98 |

Note: Cross-checks performed against D'Alimonte and Bartolini 2002; Pasquino 1996; Verzichelli 1996. For each legislature depicted, all groups but the Misto are listed top to bottom in the left-right order commonly accepted by Italianists. Dashes indicate the complete absence of a group during the legislature. Zeros show that a group at some point existed during the legislature; it either was created or collapsed during the term.

^aFor the X and XI Legislatures only, voting data track organized components within Mixed Group; thus, e.g., the Lombard League's single MP in the X Legislature is tracked within the

Misto. For the entire period here, Chamber rules (Article 14) stated that any group under 20 MPs must dissolve and enter the Misto, save special circumstances; the Chamber leadership began to apply the rules strictly only in the XII Legislature.

Key to group acronyms (alphabetical):

AN National Alliance (reformed Neo-Fascists)
CCD Christian Democratic Center
DC Christian Democrats
Dem Democrats
DemU Democrats-Olive Tree
DP Proletarian Democracy
DP-COM Proletarian Democracy-Communists
FE European Federalists (Radicals)
FI Forza Italy (Go, Italy)
FLD Liberal-Democratic Federation
Lega Northern League (name changes observed)
Misto Mixed Group
MSI Neo-Fascists
PCI Communists
PD Popular Democrats
PDS/DS Democratic Left (reformed Communists)
PLI Liberals
PPI Popular Party
PRI Republicans
Prog-PDS Progressive Alliance-Democratic Left
PSDI Social Democrats
PSI Socialists
RC Communist Refounding
RI Italian Renewal
SI Independent Left (elected on PCI party list)
UDEur Democratic Union for Europe

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