

Integrating Theoretical and Empirical Models of Party Switching

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1 Introduction

Party switching is a relatively common yet little studied phenomenon. Observers have remarked on the presence of switching in various circumstances and settings, but with a very few exceptions (Aldrich and Bianco 1992; Desposato 2006; Heller and Mershon 2005; Forthcoming; Laver and Benoit 2003) scholars have not seen party switching as theoretically interesting. They have instead treated party switching as an idiosyncratic phenomenon, entirely dependent on context, and essentially *sui generis* in each occurrence. The contributions to this volume represent an attempt to address what we see as a gap between extant empirical accounts of switching and the substantial leverage that a theoretically-driven approach to switching can provide. Taken together, the chapters examine the contexts, causes, and consequences of party switching. While most of the chapters focus on one or a few country cases, and each chapter examines only a piece of a larger set of strategic interactions in which switching occurs, each does so in explicitly theoretical terms.

We indicated in the Introduction that party switching takes place in the context of strategic interaction between individual members of parliament (MPs) and the leaders of the MPs' parties and of other parties. The decisions that these actors make reflect their interaction and also a larger context that includes the legislative party system, on one hand, and voters, on the other. In this chapter we lay out a theoretical framework for analyzing party switching that permits isolation of the separate elements and consequences of the strategic interactions entailed in party switching, with a clear focus on individual decisions, while at the same time placing those decisions explicitly in their larger context. We do not construct a fully specified, overarching switching game. Rather, we present the framework of a four-stage game—only two stages of which involve strategic interaction—as a foundation for examining switching in

specific cases and environments. Building on this foundation, the chapters that follow can contribute, individually and in the aggregate, to a general understanding of the causes and consequences of party switching.

Our sketch of a switching game, along with the pieces of it fleshed out by the other chapters in this volume, suggests a potential for carrying the study of party switching even farther than we and our colleagues do here. One intriguing possibility, for example, is that legislative party switching should come in cascades, as every switch both provides new information about (cf. Heller and Mershon 2005) and alters the legislative environment. Such changes could in turn induce at least some legislators who previously had not considered switching to reevaluate their positions. To the extent that such reevaluation leads to more switches, it is easy to imagine circumstances where just a few initial switches could trigger many more. The result should be cascades of switching. While an in-depth examination of the possibility of cascades lies beyond the scope of this book, in the Conclusion we briefly discuss how they might occur and what sorts of impacts they might have.

In order to construct a game-theoretic framework for legislative party switching, we first must identify the bases for our inquiry. In the next section we concentrate on the key assumptions undergirding both this volume and the project out of which it grew. The most important of these is that legislator behavior, for those who switch and those who do not, is motivated by *ambition*. In the third section, we lay out the pieces and logic of our four-stage switching game. We then highlight several of the questions that the game brings to the fore, and that the contributors to this volume explore in greater detail. We end this chapter with some brief observations about the analytical purchase afforded by submitting party switching on the part of elected politicians to rigorous analysis.

2 Precursors to Theory

Party switching is fundamentally an individual phenomenon, as the Introduction indicated. Even when legislators move *en masse* from one party to another, or to form a new party, each legislator's move generally is the product of an individual choice.¹ The study of party switching thus imposes a basic theoretical perspective, grounded in a focus on individual behaviors, strategies, and choices. This perspective entails two underpinning assumptions. First, individual politicians seek to achieve their personal goals and desires, and their behavior is motivated by *ambition* directed at achieving them. Second, *party switching is a tool* that individual legislators can use as they seek to achieve their own ambitions. The ability to move from one party to another is not unconstrained, of course—a member of parliament (MP) cannot move into a party that will not accept her, for example—but it does give MPs the possibility of improving their lot by changing their party affiliation.

2.1 Individuals and their choices

We begin with individual choices, as we must if we are to model legislators' decisions to change their party affiliations. Our focus expands rapidly beyond the individual making the choice, however, as both the decision to switch and the alternatives available to a would-be switcher depend heavily on context. An individual's choice, after all, depends on the set of feasible alternatives to doing nothing—and, in some cases (e.g., for an MP at risk of expulsion from her party), doing nothing is itself not a feasible alternative.

In the Introduction, we observed that party switching seems odd in light of parties' importance to legislators.² The first question to ask, therefore, is why would a sitting legislator want to change her party affiliation? In order to answer this adequately, we need to know not only how she is faring in her current party, but also what alternatives are open to her and how she could expect to fare in each of those. We need, in other words, to ask where a would-be switcher

would go. The answer depends on other parties. Thus, we need to know if other parties will accept switchers and, if so, why—that is, what would they have to gain from accepting defectors from other parties?

A party's willingness to accept new members depends on a number of factors, not least of which is its position in the legislative party system. On one hand, the legislative party system matters because it defines the bargaining context for policy making, agenda control, and, in parliamentary and semi-presidential systems, government formation. On the other hand, the party system matters because it defines the range of options available to voters at election time and, hence, it provides the parameters, in combination with the electoral system, that define any given legislator's probability of reelection. Further, the institutionalization of parties and the party system might play an important role in determining how any given MP views the attractiveness of membership in any given party as well as the costs of switching from one party to another. A key, unanswered question in this regard, however, is whether relatively low levels of party and party system institutionalization lead to higher levels of party switching, or whether, inversely, frequent party switching retards or even reverses such institutionalization (for discussion of this issue, see Kreuzer and Pettai this volume).

Switching is motivated by and occurs in the context of these factors. They in turn are dynamic, and every switch can in principle change them. If larger parties are generically more attractive than smaller ones, for example, then every time one MP switches all other MPs implicitly have to reevaluate their own prospects. Every move by an MP changes the legislative weight of at least one party (though compensating moves might change weights back). More subtly, every move by an MP is likely to change the observed ideal point of at least one party (see Heller and Mershon in Chapter 7 here), hence altering its attractiveness both to other

potential switchers and to its remaining members.

We stress, in other words, the interdependence of decisions to switch and of switches themselves (cf. Aldrich and Bianco 1992). A related and more general point is that whether and when an MP switches is in large part a consequence of the information available to her. Information about voter preferences (e.g., from subnational election results) might motivate an MP to reevaluate her expectations about party vote shares in the next parliamentary elections (and thus post-election seat shares), for example. If MPs have information about their counterparts' or colleagues' plans to switch parties—through rumor, inference, or straightforward announcement—shared expectations of moves could lead to simultaneous or near-simultaneous jumps by several legislators, either as a group or in some kind of interparty shuffle. Party repositioning, whether calculated or incidental to switches or some other occurrence, can move parties' observed policy preferences relative to the ideal points of potential switchers. Or observed moves by well-known or otherwise powerful politicians might change an MP's priors about how attractive parties are for voters as well as for MPs interested in legislative influence. Note that a group of ideologically compatible MPs might see forming a new party as an attractive option, particularly if they believe that voters are looking for a change, or that a new party could induce still other MPs to switch into it.

This line of reasoning suggests that switching cascades are indeed likely, as noted above. Clearly, the possibility of switching means that what has commonly been considered static is not. Switching introduces a dynamic to legislative politics and to party politics more broadly, a dynamic that is progressive and might not permit an equilibrium. Every time an MP changes party affiliation, there is a reallocation—often subtle, but not necessarily so—of bargaining power across parties and even across individual MPs. This reallocation changes the bargaining

context, wherein rank-and-file MPs and party leaders alike reevaluate their situations and their options (cf., Filippov et al. 2004). Moreover, as Mershon and Shvetsova point out in Chapter 8 (see also Mershon and Shvetsova 2008), the incentives facing sitting MPs are themselves dynamic over the life of a legislature, so at some level MPs have to reevaluate their situations even in the absence of visible changes in the party system.

2.2 Ambition

We hold as a strong maintained hypothesis the notion that politicians of all stripes are motivated by the desire to gain or retain office. The logic underpinning this claim, so ubiquitous in political science that it might be held as a law of politics, is based on the assumption that politicians seek office in order to achieve things that they could not achieve—or could not achieve to equal effect—out of office. The goal could be anything, including but probably not limited to a yen for public service, a drive for power, a vision of “good” public policy, or a profitable career. The key is that these are goals best achieved in office and, in some cases, unattainable out of office.³

A politician’s desire to gain and hold office is, in short, a simple consequence of what she seeks to achieve. It is at once both product and tool of, in a word, ambition. Even the MP who seeks only to hold a simple, unremarkable legislative seat, we suspect, does so not because she wants the seat per se, but rather it is the most attractive career option open to her. As we see it, where there are goals, there is ambition—that is, the drive to attain, or at least to seek to attain, those goals. From this perspective, choices to change party affiliation are decisions about how best to realize ambitions (or, less propitiously, how best to avoid seeing goals thwarted and ambitions dashed).

One of our basic premises, then, is that politicians, legislators included, are ambitious.

Their ambitions are personal, and while they might overlap with and be served by the ambitions of their party leaders and other copartisans it would be a mistake to equate an MP's goals with those of her party. We assume as well that individuals have basic preferences over outcomes in both policy and politics.⁴ Individuals can act strategically in order to achieve the best possible *feasible* outcome,⁵ but they also pay a cost for acting against their raw (that is, untinged by strategic or practical considerations) preferences. That is, acting strategically is on one hand psychologically or intellectually more difficult—hence, more costly—than acting naively. On the other hand, to the extent that an MP is beholden to an audience of voters that does not appreciate the complexities of strategic decision making, strategic choices might appear to represent an abandonment of basic principles or interests, for which the unsophisticated audience might impose punishment. (As Nokken suggests in this volume, legislative procedures such as those in the US Congress might allow politicians to behave strategically while appearing to be both consistent and sincere.)

2.3 Party unity

In the quest to realize their ambitions, MPs (and their parties and party leaders) face tradeoffs. Primary among these is the tension between party unity and each individual's desire to vote against the party line, whether because her goals conflict with those of the party on some issue, or because the desire to vote according to her raw preferences is particularly strong. For MPs whose goals are close to each other and to those of their party leaders, instances of conflict should be relatively few; for MPs farther from the center of the party, they should be more common. Because policy making is multidimensional, however, and a party's policy positions to some extent represent an aggregation of its members' policy preferences (see Heller and Mershon this volume, Chapter 7) it is unlikely that any one legislator would agree with the party

on all issues. Consequently, maintaining party unity might be difficult.

Party unity is important because party labels are important. Party labels give voters information-laden cues about candidates (Snyder and Ting 2002), but the amount of information they can transmit depends in part on party unity. When a candidate bears the label of a given party, the label tells voters how the candidate is likely to vote across a wide range of issues; the more unified are members of the party in legislative voting, the clearer is the information conveyed. A voter who cares about party programs might want to vote for the candidate or party whose program she likes best, for example.⁶ To the extent that party programs are unclear, so that the party label imparts little information, voters will have a hard time choosing among them. In essence, the less meaningful party labels are, the more voters who care only about programs must vote either by coin flip or not at all.

Parties can uphold unity in three ways: negative agenda control, cohesion, and discipline. *Negative agenda control*—the party leadership's ability to keep unwanted bills off the legislative calendar—is effective, albeit hard to observe. In the US House, for example, Rohde (1991; see also, Campbell et al. 2001; Cox and McCubbins 2001; 2005) suggests that the majority party seeks to ensure that the House never considers issues that would split the party. Party *cohesion* jibes with the idea of a party as a group of like-minded individuals joined for a common purpose (e.g., Bowler et al. 1999; Krehbiel 1993; Rasch 1999). Even like-minded individuals disagree from time to time, however, and some purposes are more common than others. When cohesion fails, unity can be maintained through party *discipline*, which imposes costs on MPs who fail to toe the party line. Party leaders control an array of disciplinary tools, including but not limited to ballot access (or the right to use the party label; Cox and McCubbins 1994), committee positions (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; D'Onofrio 1979), advancement within the party and, by

extension, increased influence over party policy positions and access to perks of legislative office (Bowler et al. 1999).

Inasmuch as party labels are important (which in turn depends on how voters view candidates; see Cox 1987; 1997), the ideal situation for an individual MP is to be in a highly unified party that does not constrain her own voting behavior. Accepting the premise that all members of a party are likely to take exception to the party's chosen position on some issues at least some of the time, this means that every MP would like to be able to vote against the party position, without consequences, even as all her copartisans toe the party line. This is of course the basis for a fundamental collective dilemma and is generally untenable.

On any given vote, each MP's incentives to deviate from the party line depend on institutions as well as her personal preferences. Institutions influence how much voters care about individual MPs (as opposed to parties) and their voting habits—and, as a result, how keenly individual MPs feel the need to stick to certain positions that might bring them into conflict with their party. And institutions are central to leaders' ability to punish members of their rank and file who buck the party. Rules that make party switching relatively difficult, as for example in Spain (Mershon and Heller 2003; Sánchez de Dios 1999) can make party switching less common than it might otherwise be, though as Miskin (2003) points out, such rules do not necessarily fulfill their intended normative objectives. Rules that allow party leaders to determine who gets on the ballot and who does not—and where on the party list a candidate lies—give party leaders overweening power to determine MPs' political careers (Gallagher and Marsh 1988). The wider the array of tools available to party leaders for disciplining their rank and file, in general, the fewer incentives individual MPs have to buck their party line (because it is likely to be more costly in the end).

At the end of the day, discipline is the credible threat of punishment. It works when party leaders can block or at least hamper the pursuit of one or more of the aims routinely attributed to legislators: policy, office (e.g., a cabinet post) and legislative perks, and reelection (Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1990). The tools of discipline derive from the party's control over necessary steps along the paths of MPs' ambition. Leaders' ability and willingness to impose discipline on their party rank and file are fundamental for party unity. The more MPs find themselves forced either to vote against their preference (whether strategic or naïve), however, the more they are likely to resent the constraints of discipline. The greater their resentment, the greater their incentive to search for and take advantage of alternatives that offer a better net benefit.

2.4 The link between ambition and discipline

From this vantage point, it becomes clear that ambition and discipline are closely linked, and that in combination they play strongly into an MP's consideration of the possibility of changing party affiliation. Other scholars have honed in on the importance for switching of ambition: McElroy's (2003) analysis is explicitly ambition theoretic, for instance, and Desposato's (2006) assessment of the impact of electoral, institutional, ideological, and patronage concerns on legislators' propensity to change parties hinges on legislator ambition. Desposato finds, consistent with Aldrich and Bianco (1992), that switchers aim to enhance their prospects both for reelection and legislative influence. Other studies suggest ambition as the driving force behind switching. Turan (1985, 32), for instance, finds that switchers in Turkey seem to serve longer in the legislature and to "accomplish other goals," while Sánchez de Dios (1999; see also, Àgh 1999; Tomás Mallén 2002) views switching as a means of jockeying for position and political influence. Studies that show that legislators who change parties also change the way they vote (e.g., Ansolabehere et al. 2001; McCarty et al. 2001; Nokken 2000) implicitly

consider ambition, since party-induced changes in voting behavior likely are linked to party discipline, and discipline works because legislators are ambitious.

Ambition is a quality possessed by individuals. Discipline is a threat wielded by party leaders who possess the wherewithal to thwart individual MPs' ambitions. Individual politicians' ambitions turn on holding on to office, influencing policy making, and advancing their political careers (on the primacy of these goals, see Müller and Strøm 1999; Strøm 1990). Party leaders, for their part, seek to maximize the integrity of the party label, party influence on coalition formation, and party influence in policy formation; and they use discipline to attain those ends. Leaders' goals, which are to some extent incompatible—involvement in coalition bargaining implies accepting close identification with other parties, for instance, which erodes the integrity and uniqueness of the party label—converge with leaders' personal desires, which match those of any other MP but are easier to realize in the leadership than in the party rank and file (see Cox and McCubbins 1993, Ch. 9).

Taking discipline and ambition together, analysis is in principle straightforward. Leaders simply need to impose enough discipline to generate strong party unity; their only constraint is the costs of monitoring their party's members and expending whatever resources are required to exact punishment. In equilibrium, if leaders calculate correctly, we should see MPs defecting from the party line only very rarely, and only when they gain more from defecting than they lose under the lash of discipline. The possibility that an MP might move to another party adds a new dimension of complexity: absent the possibility of switching, MPs and their leaders engage in simple cost-benefit analyses; if switching is possible, their analyses become strategic. A leader has to ask herself if a given level of discipline will induce some members to leave the party, and if so what consequences that will have for achieving her and her party's goals; an MP might

consider or appear to consider switching in the face of harsh discipline at least in part in an effort to convince his leaders to make discipline less onerous. Ultimately, the greater the role of discipline in determining MP behavior, the net benefits an MP realizes (that is, taking into account the costs she pays) from membership in a party, the less attractive is that party to her. The lower the attractiveness of the party, the greater the probability not only of voting against the party line but also of abandoning the party altogether (cf. Heller and Mershon forthcoming). Party switching thus arises at least in part out of the interaction of leaders and rank-and-file MPs. We now turn to characterize that interaction as a game.

3 The Legislative Switching Game

As strategic interaction between potential switchers and their party leaders, party switching occurs in a legislative context defined by the legislative party system, on one hand, and, on the other hand, an electoral context. Voters look at politicians and parties and legislative outcomes as they choose how to vote (strategically or naively), and the results at the polls then feed back into the legislative party system. The legislative party system in turn sets the stage for strategic interaction between potential switchers and party leaders. And so on: one round of stages forms the foundation for the next. The key is that party switching is one of the tools available to legislators who want to maximize their political fortunes, their political influence, and their ability to achieve their policy goals. Legislators choose to switch in reaction to decisions made by party leaders and in anticipation of voters' behavior the next time they go to the polls.

In this light, we portray legislative switching as part of a four-stage game, as shown in Figure 2.1. In the first stage, Nature exogenously and unstrategically 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. The level of discipline, along with party ideology and legislative bargaining weight, is a key element of a party’s attractiveness to potential switchers.

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 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.

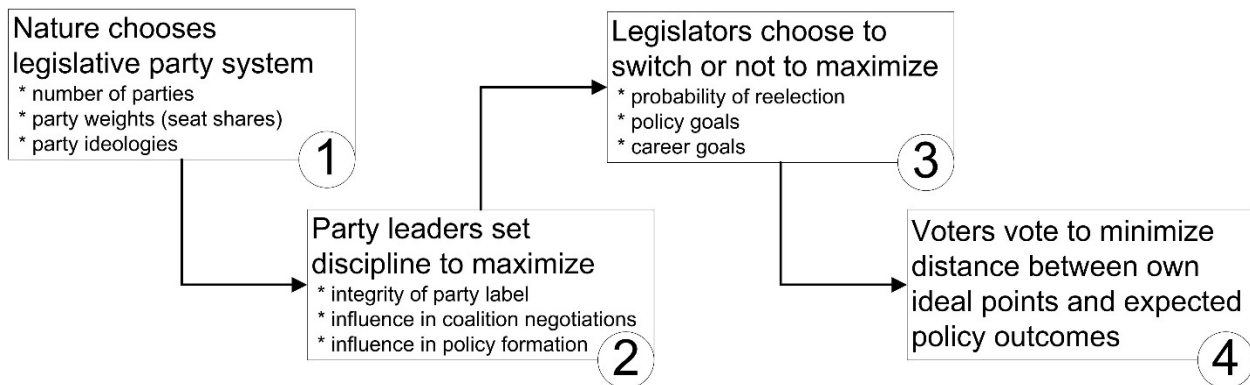


Figure 2.1, “The four stages of the switching game” about here

Voters enter the game at the final stage. Concerned only about policy outcomes, they vote on the basis of their perceptions of parties’ policy preferences and legislative bargaining weights.⁷ They are sophisticated in the sense that they implicitly consider how their votes affect each party’s input in policy making (i.e., the politics of legislative coalitions, which we do not model here). As players in the final stage of the switching game, however, voters register their sincere preferences, given expectations about each party’s influence and the value of their own votes.

We present this sequence as a framework, rather than as fully specified game. In the manner of game-theoretic analysis in search of subgame-perfect equilibria, however, we begin at the end and work backward. We assume that the players in the game have perfect information, and that each player's ideal point is common knowledge (and does not change). The usual spatial-modeling assumptions apply.

3.1 Stage four: voters decide

At the end of the day, it is voters who decide how parties and their candidates fare at the polls. We assume that voters care most strongly about policy outcomes. (As a practical matter, we suspect that even voters who evince a strong preference for types or qualities of process—e.g., “fairness” or “democracy”—would do so only as long as decision-making processes yield outcomes that do not consistently damage their interests.) How a voter decides—e.g., whether she simply votes naively for the party whose ideal point is closest to her own, or backs the party she believes most likely to move policy outcomes closer to her own ideal point—is beyond the scope of this project. In any case, if party switching affects party positions as well as their seat shares, voter decisions should take switching into account.⁸

3.2 Stage three: legislators decide

Whether legislators decide to switch parties depends fundamentally on what they want to achieve. Scholars generally agree that parties want some combination of votes, office, and policy (Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999; and see in particular Strøm 1994). Parties are not *qua* parties reasoning entities, and while for some analytical purposes it might make sense to assume that they are (as in the field of coalition studies, cf. Laver and Schofield 1990), this is not the case here. Parties ultimately are vehicles for their members, and it is vital to keep in mind that those members, not the parties themselves, want to win votes, occupy office, and make policy

(Aldrich 1995; McDonald 2004, 14).

In order to analyse legislators' party-affiliation choices, we begin with the assumption that legislators (and politicians in general) are ambitious, as already emphasized. Ambition dictates that they seek the means to their desired ends that yields the highest expected benefit; and they have chosen political careers because they can best realize their goals in the political arena. The reelection imperative so often attributed to politicians follows directly from this assumption. We can only conjecture about the goals that political ambition serves, but two possibilities stand out: power (for its own sake or the sake of the perks of office) and policy. Both lead politicians to seek increasing policy influence and, we believe, motivate sitting legislators' choices of party affiliation.

A sitting legislator's decision whether to change her party-affiliation status unfolds in a process similar to economic models of job searches. Where job search models focus on monetary remuneration, however, we highlight the expected utility of choice of party affiliation, where rewards come in the currency of power and policy. Analysis is complicated by several factors, of which we flag two:

1. the legislator in question's state prior to taking action (that is, a legislator can be in some party or, possibly, in no party⁹); and
2. the possible range of alternatives available to a legislator, which might be limited by rule-bound constraints on switching or formation of legislative party groups. Those alternatives include
 - a) staying put;
 - b) switching to a different, established party;
 - c) switching to or participating in the formation of a new party;

- d) switching to independent status (if not independent already); and
- e) exiting the legislature, whether to pursue new options outside politics or to continue a political career in a different capacity, e.g., to take subnational or supranational office.

As noted above, the legislator's objective function consists of three components, each playing on different aspects of ambition. The first and most basic is votes or, more accurately, continuance in the legislature. This depends on two things: nomination (including list position for party-list ballots), controlled by local or national party leaders or party activists, and party electoral strength, which we take as (expected) vote share. The second is offices controlled by the legislature, for which it is best to belong to a party in the legislative majority or with a good chance of getting into the legislative majority. The third is policy. Policy considerations are complicated by several factors, including:

1. The need to be part of a majority coalition in order to make policy, which makes party membership attractive and party unity desirable (Laver and Shepsle 1999; see also, Cox 1987). We assume, in line with these observations, that membership in a large party is more desirable than membership in a small party, all else constant.
2. The likelihood that a legislator's personal policy preferences will diverge somewhat from those supported by her party, which suggests:
 - a) Legislators sometimes would like to vote against their parties.
 - b) Notwithstanding the desire to break ranks with her party, each legislator should value party unity as a collective good for members of the party; that is, membership in a party with relatively high observed unity should be more valuable than membership in a party with less observed unity, all else equal.

3. A legislator who is a member of a party is better able than a legislator not in the party to move that party's observed ideal point toward her own. Even so:
 - a) A party's ability to influence policy outcomes and a legislator's likely ability to influence the party's observed preferences are independent (or perhaps inversely related).
 - b) There might well be tradeoffs between a legislator's ability to influence policy outcomes (as a member of an influential party) or enjoy enhanced career opportunities and her desire to be in a party whose members' policy preferences converge with her own (McDonald 2004, 14).

A legislator's calculation of the value of staying where she is, whether as a party member or a lone independent, depends on how she evaluates her own situation and the available alternatives to it. The criteria for evaluating options depend on both long- and short-term concerns. In the long term, legislators care about positioning themselves for reelection and so worry about both their party's chances and their chances within the party. In the short term—that is, during the legislature and between elections—legislators care about policy and office. These two considerations are inseparable much of the time: holding legislative office yields policy influence, and a legislator with policy influence (e.g., as a leading member of a party whose size or position makes it pivotal or nearly so) is an attractive candidate for office.

Party unity is a collective good for party members, not least because it gives parties leverage for bargaining over policy (Laver and Shepsle 1999). It also contributes to voters' ability to distinguish among parties, and it underpins voter confidence in the solidity of party platforms. As a collective good, however, it is likely to be undersupplied absent some mechanism—such as disciplinary threats wielded by party leaders—to motivate members to vote

with their party but against their personal preferences.¹⁰ The final element of the switching calculus, therefore, is party discipline, which acts on an MP's policy influence when party leaders can block or roll back an MP's advancement within the party, withhold the benefits of the party label (i.e., expel the MP from the party, see, e.g., Cox and McCubbins 1994), or affect the MP's possibilities for reelection through control over ballot access and list placement (cf. Gallagher and Marsh 1988). It is of course difficult to distinguish between behavior motivated by individual preferences and that motivated by partisan pressures (cf. Heller and Mershon Forthcoming). Party switching offers leverage on the question; Timothy Nokken and Scott Desposato, in their contributions to this volume, focus on party switchers to examine the extent (and form) of party influence on individual legislators' behavior.

The range of disciplinary instruments available to party leaders will vary by both leader and party. The range of disciplinable offenses against the party also vary by party, by party leader, and—as we will discuss in relation to party strategies in the face of potential switching—by legislator. In all cases, however, discipline keeps in line MPs who might otherwise break ranks with their party; discipline works in this way by threatening to impede their ability to realize their ambitions.

Legislators face two kinds of discipline. On one hand, there is discipline designed to induce desired behavior on the part of legislators. On the other hand, there is discipline designed to ensure that the kinds of people who advance within the party are acceptable to party leaders. The former consists of punishments (or threats thereof); the latter consists of obstacles to advancement. The two types of discipline are in principle separate, though they can easily fold together, and we suspect that legislators prefer that they be closely linked.¹¹ Behavioral discipline acts both on MPs who vote against the party and so incur high costs from discipline

unleashed, and on MPs who would prefer to vote against the party but do not because of fear of discipline. Every time an MP votes contrary to her personal preferences she pays a cost in benefits foregone equivalent to the difference in her utilities over the alternative she prefers versus the alternative her party prefers.

The elements of the legislator's choice are varied and, in many cases, dynamic. If larger parties are generically more attractive than smaller ones, for example, then every time one MP switches all other MPs implicitly have to reevaluate their own prospects. An MP will consider changing her state—e.g., switching into a new party, exiting the legislature, or becoming an unaffiliated legislator (legislative or constitutional rules permitting)—only when she expects to benefit more from moving than from staying put. If legislators can easily compare their expected utility from different states with their current one—and we believe that in the confines of a legislature they can—then searching for alternatives, like applying for a new job in some professions, should be essentially costless (Hey and McKenna 1979). Changing states, however, is not costless: first, most legislators who move risk losing some or all of their investments in resources specific to the state from which they move, resources such as seniority, intraparty relationships, and constituent support; second, switchers muddy their reputations with colleagues, possible future colleagues (in or out of the legislature) and voters (Desposato 2006; Hey and McKenna 1979). The general point is that whether and when an MP switches depend on her expectations and hence on the information available to her.

3.3 Stage two: parties decide

All strategic play in the legislative switching game begins at the second stage, after Nature's initial move. At the second stage, each party sets the parameters and average overall levels of discipline, that apply to its members. As noted, parties are collectivities of individual

politicians. It is party members, not parties themselves, who are ambitious and who benefit when their party can influence policy and attract votes (Aldrich 1995, 4). Parties can do neither, however, if they cannot overcome the collective action problems endemic to enterprises that require distinct individuals with disparate interests to work together for their common good. For that, they have party leaders (Luebbert 1986).

“Party” decisions are in actuality party leaders’ decisions. Leaders are constrained by checks in the decision-making process (Heller et al. 1998; Strøm 2000), the need to balance keeping their rank and file reasonably happy (and so retain control of the leadership), the need to attract voters, and the need to bargain over policy with counterparts in other parties (see Cox and McCubbins 1993). They seek to maximize their own ambitions with regard to reelection, office, and policy influence; to that end, they need jointly to maximize the party’s ability to influence policy, which in turn is closely related to its ability to win votes at the next election and its observed coherence (in legislative voting and in the behavior, pronouncements, and reputations of its members). To the extent that the party succeeds in these terms, its members—and in particular its leaders—benefit.

Where decision-making power lies in a party can be hard to identify. Rules might specify who holds specific agenda powers, but if such powers are “nested” in relationships defined by other sets of rules (Tsebelis 1990), including norms or tradition (Greif 2006), then the exercise of formal agenda powers is in itself strategic (cf. Heller 2001; 2007). Heller and Mershon address this issue with respect to the question of how party positions are set in Chapter 7 of this volume, leveraging switching-induced changes in party composition to see how the preferences of the parties’ legislative rank and file affect party policy positions.

There is an added benefit to party leadership, in that leaders can use their influence in the

party to move its observed ideal point closer to their own. To that end, they can seek to attract new members who move the party in the desired direction and they can apply harsh discipline (even to the point of expulsion from the party) for members who impede the party's movement in the direction their leader wants to take it (Heller and Mershon Forthcoming). Discipline, broadly construed as a combination of opportunities for advancement and threats of punishment, serves both these purposes. At the second stage, therefore, the party leadership has to set both behavioral and career discipline in order to a) induce desired behavior, present a unified face to voters, and maintain as strong a position as possible in bargaining over policy with other legislative parties; b) retain party members and possibly attract switchers; and c) move the party's observed ideal point as close as possible to the leadership ideal point.

Whatever its level and however strictly it is enforced, discipline plays directly on legislators' ambitions. The threat of punishment for failing to behave according to criteria set by party leaders motivates legislators to act in the party's (or party leader's) interests, even when they would rather not, in order to achieve longer-term career goals. For parties that are concerned with retaining members and attracting switchers as well as maintaining party unity, at least part of the decision on setting discipline is conditioned by the distribution of voter preferences and the locations and weights of other parties. Extremist parties, for example, can impose strong discipline on their members because, first, other parties are too distant to make switching likely and, second, the lack of nearby competitors means that they do not have to blur their labels to attract wavering voters (cf. Shepsle 1972).

The focus on party switching spotlights the basic fact that parties are made up of individuals. This observation, while in itself neither controversial nor new, tends to be treated as an afterthought in studies of party behavior. By putting party switching front and center and

treating it as a phenomenon of theoretical interest, the contributors to this book have gained—and offer to other analysts—new perspective not only on individual legislators’ behavior, but also on a broad range of political action, from party discipline to party systems. The choices that parties and their members make define party systems and, more generally, both the context and the content of political decision making. The contributions of Norman Schofield (Chapter 3) and Junko Kato and Kentaro Yamamoto (Chapter 9), for example, take the interaction of party choices with voter choices (Schofield) or legislator ambition (Kato and Yamamoto) to characterize the evolution of party systems. Along similar lines, Kenneth Benoit and Gail McElroy (Chapter 6) use party switching in the European Parliament to look at the development of a supranational political space. Their work suggests—*contra* the conventional wisdom that European voters pay little attention to European Union politics and policy making when they go to the polls—that the day might not be so far off when local, national, and supranational questions all impinge strongly on European voters’ voting behavior in every election, much as local, state, and federal questions affect vote choices in the United States.

4 Conclusion

We characterize party switching as an aspect of strategic interaction among legislators. In so doing, we embed legislators’ decisions on party affiliation in a framework that ties them to the decisions both of party leaders and of voters, which are in turn contingent on the legislative party system. We also emphasize the effectiveness—indeed, the necessity—of focusing on individual actors in order to understand this larger picture. We do not examine party switching in order to understand it alone. True, party switching is interesting in itself, normatively, substantively, and theoretically, all the more so because it is not the idiosyncratic anomaly it has often been seen to be. More important, it affords new and powerful leverage on questions that have long attracted

the attention of political scientists interested in such diverse areas as voting behavior, legislative organization, and party systems. The components of the framework presented in this chapter can be unpacked and applied in diverse ways by other theoretical and empirical researchers, as demonstrated by the analyses in the chapters that follow. Informed by the framework in this chapter, the contributors to this volume shed new light on the relationships among voters, legislators, party leaders, and the legislative party system.

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Endnotes

¹ Some moves are not voluntary, as discussed in the Introduction.

² The importance of parties goes beyond their utility to their individual members, of course. As students of collective dilemmas have shown, however, members of collectivities have little incentive to take the good of the collectivity into account unless their behavior *as individuals* contributes directly to that good and unless they realize positive benefits *as individuals* from it (Olson 1965; Ostrom 1990).

³ We recognize that there might be reasons for people who do not in fact want to hold office to present themselves as candidates. The publicity afforded by a political campaign could be useful for any number of reasons, for example. Those who are motivated by these non-office benefits of running are likely to be scarce in the universe of sitting legislators, however, and so we ignore them and their motivations here.

⁴ Ultimately, we ascribe to the belief that preferences over political outcomes derive from preferences over policy outcomes. We do not wish to belabor the point, however, and allowing for preferences over both does not affect our argument.

⁵ A strategic individual is one who makes decisions with an eye to outcomes, rather than just the choices immediately available, and in full awareness that other individuals are doing the same.

⁶ In many electoral systems, party control of nomination processes and of candidate rankings on the ballot induces voters to view parties, not individual candidates, as the entities they elect.

⁷ The information available to voters, however, varies across national settings, and in particular across established and new democracies (cf. Cox and McCubbins 1997; Mershon and Shvetsova 2008; this volume; Moser 2001) with consequences for legislators' and party leaders' behavior that we explore.

⁸ We could complicate things greatly by including voter considerations of coalition games. We do not—although we do think that in some circumstances voters might actually think in those terms (or at least parties do, as evidence from Germany on voting for FDP suggests; Riker 1982; Anderson 1995).

⁹ In some legislatures, members not formally affiliated with a party group belong to a formally established “mixed group;” in others, they have the status of independents, which could be disadvantageous. In Norway, for example, independents receive only half the non-salary budget resources that they would get as members of a party (personal communication from Hans Brattestå, Secretary General of the Norwegian Storting, 26 May 2004).

¹⁰ Personal preferences might derive from constituencies, particularly in single member district (SMD) or proportional representation (PR) systems with strong local nominating authorities. For our purposes, the difference between such electorally driven preferences and a legislator’s “own” preferences is simply that in most cases electorally driven preferences probably are harder for a party to suppress.

¹¹ The two types of discipline are linked in one way, inasmuch as punishments for breaking party discipline are meted out in terms of blocked ambition. Good behavior is not necessarily a guarantee of good career prospects, however.