

**Legislator Preferences, Party Desires:  
The Impact of Party Switching on Legislative Party Positions**

William B. Heller  
Department of Political Science  
Binghamton University  
P.O. Box 6000  
Binghamton, NY 13902-6000  
tel: 607/777-2562  
fax: 607/777-2675  
e-mail: wbheller@post.harvard.edu

Carol Mershon  
Department of Politics  
University of Virginia  
P.O. Box 400787  
Charlottesville, VA 22904-4787 USA  
tel: 434/924-7875  
fax: 434/924-3359  
e-mail: cam6m@virginia.edu

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## **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 manage the passage of policy (Aldrich 1995; Cox and McCubbins 1993; 2006). 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. As the first chapter in this book emphasized, there is on one hand the motivational question: why would a legislator decide to change his or her party affiliation during a legislative term? As we also highlighted at the outset, there is on the other hand the practical question of policy consequences: what difference does party switching make? We take up the latter issue here 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 members of parliament (MPs) get out of party affiliation. To this end, we first briefly examine the literatures on parties qua legislative actors, individual legislative behavior, and party switching. We next sketch 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**

Legislative 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). Party switching is so rare in the US that the widespread assumption that legislative parties are stable in size tends to escape notice. 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; in line with 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 Heller and Mershon 2005a; forthcoming; Laver and Benoit 2003; Mershon and Heller 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. 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 2005a). 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, as stressed in Chapter 2, analysts agree that ambition underlies them all (cf., e.g., Aldrich and Bianco 1992; Desposato 2006; Heller and Mershon 2005a; 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 2005a; forthcoming; Mershon and Heller 2003).

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” preferences<sup>1</sup> of members of different parties overlap, as illustrated in Figure 7.1, 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 party<sup>2</sup>) and might (but will not necessarily) cause a corresponding decrease in the preference heterogeneity of the sending party.



**Figure 7.1: “Parties with Overlapping Membership”**

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 7.1 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 2005a). 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; 2006; 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; 2006; 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.<sup>3</sup> This observed unity means that it is possible to talk about party ideal points (Laver and Schofield 1990, among many others), 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; Ordeshook and Shvetsova 1994; 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 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, 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). Second, if the kinds of issues that

define party positions are unidimensional, majority rule would privilege the median member of the party (Black 1958).<sup>4</sup> (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 2/3<sup>rd</sup> member.)

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 use of the instruments of discipline (for a discussion of the sources of party unity, see Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999). Party unity is a collective good, and it is party leaders' job to maintain 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 Bonchek 1997, ch. 14) or switch into a different party (Heller and Mershon 2005b; Forthcoming; 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 side, 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 had miscalculated policy distances at the outset); perceived chances for reelection might be unacceptably low, perhaps because of a decline of the party in the polls (Heller and Mershon 2005a; cf. Zielinski, Slomczynski, and Shabad 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 side, there must be something that makes the switcher's "target" party appealing (cf. chapters by Benoit and McElroy and Desposato, this volume). 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 dissuade 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, and a guaranteed attractive ballot list position (see, e.g., Svåsand, Strøm, and Rasch 1997, 96).

We examine some of the consequences of switching for individuals in other work (see, e.g., Heller and Mershon 2002; 2005a). Our focus in this paper on party positions precludes closer analysis of individual legislators' behavior, though we do draw some tentative inferences about party leaders' strategies vis-à-vis individual members.

In practical terms, the party leadership's role in influencing decision rules, setting the agenda, and implementing and enforcing choices make it likely that the leadership will have a hand in determining party stances on important issues. Nonetheless, whether party rules favor leadership preferences or some other position—e.g., a party member privileged by where her preferences fall relative to her copartisans, or a bargaining solution that places the party position

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 observation opens the door to several hypotheses.

*H1 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 legislative 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 shaping the Labour party's program in the United Kingdom (until Tony Blair won election as party leader in 1995 [Seyd 1998]) or an institutionalized requirement that representative organs of the mass membership be consulted on major decisions, such as the Irish Labour party rule, dating from 1977, that a special conference must approve party decisions to enter governing coalitions (Marsh and Mitchell 1999). 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 under some conditions could be insensitive to changes in the identity of the median member.

*H2 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 party decision-making processes include voting by members of the party's legislative caucus, then the decision rule (e.g., majority or some kind of supermajority) should privilege specific members, just as majority-rule voting privileges the median voter. If the identity of the members thus privileged should change, the party ideal point should change as well. This hypothesis implies that party ideal points should be sensitive only to changes in party membership, including the entry and exit of switchers, that affect the identity of the privileged

member.

*H3 Leadership control hypothesis: The party ideal point should be close to the leadership ideal point, with a variance that depends on the location of rank-and-file ideal points.*

To the extent that party leaders, by virtue of their position, wield more influence than rank-and-file members in party decision making, party positions should be disproportionately responsive to leaders' preferences. 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 Bonchek 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 so on. That said, 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 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 three subsidiary hypotheses:

*H3a Leaders should try to attract switchers who would help move party positions closer to their own.*

*H3b Leaders should encourage outswitching by members who, by virtue of their own preferences and contrary to the preferences of most of their copartisans, constrain leaders from moving their parties in desired ways.*

*H3c To the extent that inswitches 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.*

**H4 *Fixed parties hypothesis:*** *Party positions are independent from the positions of individual members, including leaders, and should not change with changes in legislative membership.*

Our first three hypotheses arise from the assumptions that individual politicians use political parties as vehicles to gain and retain political power (e.g., Cox and McCubbins 1993; 2006; Müller and Strøm 1999), and that the majority legislative party (or majority coalition of legislative parties) operates in turn as a legislative cartel (Cox and McCubbins 1993; 2006; cf. Katz and Mair 1995). Thus, as the identities of the politicians in a party change, so too does the party. This kind of legislative party (see Katz and Mair 1994; 1995) is but one conception of what parties are, however. Scholars have identified several other types that should in principle be much less responsive to the preferences of their elected members. For instance, Duverger (1972) defined cadre parties as those dominant in the nineteenth-century era of limited suffrage and those organized and maintained by a small circle of elites who could ensure their political influence without holding office themselves. Alternatively, mass membership parties, whether in their heyday in the first half of the twentieth century or in their more attenuated contemporary

form, serve as relatively fixed bases into which politicians sort themselves (Duverger 1972; Katz and Mair 1994; 1995; Scarrow 2000). Elected politicians in such parties should have little influence *as legislators* on their parties' policies. Finally, catch-all parties, driven by the leadership's concern to appeal to a broad and diverse electorate (Kirchheimer 1966), should not allow for a tacking of ideological sails to accommodate a shifting parliamentary membership. In sum, if parties are organized primarily as something other than legislative cartels (Cox and McCubbins 1993; 2006), we should not see party positions responding to changes in legislative-party membership. This is in essence our null hypothesis.

#### **4 Evidence: Switches and Preferences**

Hypotheses in hand, we now spell out our research design and measures, and proceed to assess our expectations. Italy 1988-2000 is an especially apt setting for our empirical study because it offers pronounced variation in the nature and rates of party switching over time. From 1988 to 1994, switching in the Italian Chamber stemmed primarily from party splits. It was only after 1994 that solo switching became relatively common. Indeed, nearly one fourth of the MPs in the 1994-96 and the 1996-2001 Legislatures switched parties at least once. In addition, extant research on switching in Italy concentrates on the causes of the phenomenon, be they systemic (Verzichelli 1996) or individual (Heller and Mershon 2005a), not the effects. Though many scholars have sought to diagnose the continuing evolution of the Italian party system (e.g., Bartolini and D'Alimonte 1995; D'Alimonte and Bartolini 1997; 2002), none, to our knowledge, has probed the impact of party switching on party policy.

##### **4.1 Data and Measures**

To evaluate our 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 legislative 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 two-dimensional Optimal Classification (OC) scores (Poole 2000; 2005) for Italian deputies and their parties on non-secret roll call votes in the Italian Chamber of Deputies. 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 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 (a disagreement observable only on nonfinal votes), 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).<sup>5</sup> Each deputy has six possible casts: yea, nay, “voted,”<sup>6</sup> abstain, absent, and “on mission” (absent with cause). We excluded all “voted” casts, as they reveal no information about preferences, and coded “on mission” and “absent” as missing data. We kept certain abstentions, as detailed below.

With these data, we calculated OC scores separately in each legislature for all deputies who voted at least ten times in a single party in votes where the losers comprised at least one-half percent of those voting.<sup>7</sup> We counted abstentions as nays when two conditions obtained: first, the vote did not pass; and second, the number of abstentions exceeded the difference between yeas and nays—that is,  $\sum_1^v yea_t - \sum_1^v nay_t < \sum_1^v abstain_t$ , where  $v$  is the total number of votes at legislative vote  $t$  (see Heller and Mershon forthcoming). For calculating OC scores for parties, we counted a party as voting for a measure when a plurality of a party’s MPs who were present at a vote voted in favor of it; conversely, we counted a party as voting against a measure when a plurality of the party’s MPs present at a vote voted against it. Otherwise, we treated the party on

a given vote as missing data, since we could not determine where the party as a whole stood on the proposition. We then treated each party as another legislator for the purpose of calculating comparable OC scores for parties and sitting legislators.<sup>8</sup> Our unit of analysis for calculating OC scores was deputy-party for sitting legislators and party-switchperiod for parties.<sup>9</sup> 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 each party as a new entity every time its membership changed due to party switching. We also treated parties as new entities if they changed their names.<sup>10</sup> We calculated OC scores in two dimensions, using the Communist Party and its hardline successor (RC) for the left anchor and the Lega Nord for the “up” anchor.

Each observation in the full dataset is a deputy-party combination for every recorded vote. Our hypotheses focus not on individual deputies, however, but rather on whether and how *party* positions change when their membership does. We therefore collapsed the dataset by legislature, party, and switchperiod, yielding 31,962 observations over the four legislatures in the dataset; collapsing further to a single party observation per switchperiod left a total of 386 observations, which after accounting for observations dropped in the calculation of OC scores and the differencing required to produce our dependent variable (see below) reduced further to 179 usable observations (35 in the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislature, 34 in the 11<sup>th</sup>, 37 in the 12<sup>th</sup>, and 73 in the 13<sup>th</sup>). The ideal points of deputies remain as averages.

#### **4.2 Test**

Each of the three principal hypotheses calls for a specific kind of direct test. The second hypothesis suggests that party ideal points should mirror the ideal point of whoever occupies some particular spatial position in the distribution of party members—e.g., the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> 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) relative to their copartisans. This direct test is

conceptually simple but computationally difficult, so we leave it for future work.

The third hypothesis, that party leaders manage party ideal points, also is conceptually simple. A direct test of this hypothesis consists of identifying party leaders, comparing their ideal points with those of their parties, and checking whether changes (if any) in party ideal points make party leaders better or worse off. We face information shortfalls, however: Available data for the Italian Chamber sometimes identify more than one parliamentary group leader per group, and we lack full data for the tumultuous 11<sup>th</sup> Legislature, discussed below. There is, moreover, the question of how frequently party leaders vote. In the US, for example, the Speaker of the House (and leader of the majority) normally votes only to break ties. Preliminary analysis suggests that party group leaders in the Italian Chamber do not vote as often as their rank and file (cf. Camera dei Deputati 1987; Nocifero and Valdini 1992, 24-34). We therefore leave direct testing of our third hypothesis for future work as well.

This leaves the first hypothesis, that party ideal points should respond to changes in party membership. Note that this hypothesis is not entirely incompatible with either the second or the third hypotheses. Both the first and second hypotheses envision party ideal point sensitivity to shifts in party membership: in the first hypothesis, the party ideal point is simply an aggregation of the ideal points of its members, as established by party decision-making rules, which changes when membership changes in such a way as to affect the mean; in the second hypothesis, the relationship between the position of parties and their members reflects intraparty decision-making processes that both define and privilege pivotal actors (cf. Krehbiel 1998), whose identities can change when the membership of the legislative party changes. While changes that would be observable if H1 is correct might not register in the context of H2, and vice versa, many changes in party membership and position that would be consistent with both hypotheses.

Similarly, the third hypothesis envisions party positions as unchanging as long as leaders' identities *and the preferences of party members able to check leaders' decisions* are stable. Inasmuch as switches can affect the preferences of those who can check leaders, by affecting members' aggregate preferences (as defined by party decision-making processes), in line with the first hypothesis, or by affecting the identity of pivotal members, in line with the second hypothesis, they can open the door to leader-instigated changes in party position. Thus, while we focus primarily on the first hypothesis, our analysis should provide insight, albeit indirect, on the second and third hypotheses.

In order to test the first hypothesis, we need to see whether and how a party's ideal point changes when it gains or loses members. To this end, we set our dependent variable as the change in party ideal point across switchperiods:  $\Delta PartyOC_{it} = PartyOC_{it} - PartyOC_{it-1}$ , where  $PartyOC_{it}$  is party  $i$ 's first-dimension OC score at vote  $t$ . Our key independent variables are two: 1)  $inswitched_{it}$ , the difference between the mean positions of MPs who switched *into* party  $i$  in switchperiod  $t$  and of continuing members ( $inswitched_{it} = inswitchersOC_{it} - continuersOC_{it}$ ; 2) and  $outswitched_{it}$ , the difference between the mean positions of MPs who switched *out* of party  $i$  in switchperiod  $t$  and of continuing members ( $outswitched_{it} = outswitchersOC_{it-1} - continuersOC_{it-1}$ ). In both formulations, the calculated variable is weighted by the relevant subgroup's weight vis-à-vis the entire legislative party. The underlying assumption is that party members' ideal points constitute constraints on party ideal points, and adding or subtracting members from the overall legislative membership changes the boundaries of the constraint. Our first hypothesis leads us to expect a positive coefficient for  $inswitched_{it}$ , as new members move the party's position toward their own (inswitchers to the left of the party's ideal point would move the party to the left, and inswitchers to the party's right would move the party to the right). For  $outswitched_{it}$ , by contrast,

we expect a negative coefficient as the party's center of gravity moves away from the ideal points of former members. Coefficients statistically equivalent to zero would constitute support for the null hypothesis. Table 1 summarizes our expectations.

**Table 1: Expectations: Party Positions as a Function of Party-Member Positions**

Dependent variable: $ptyOC_{it}$				
	Coefficients			
	<i>H1</i>	<i>H2</i>	<i>H3</i>	<i>H4 (null)</i>
$inswitched_{it}$	positive	positive (unless balanced)	positive (but small) or zero	zero
$outswitched_{it}$	negative	negative (unless balanced)	negative	zero

Our expectations under hypotheses 2 and 3 are not as crisp as those under H1 and the null, since, again, we lack data to test the former directly. For the second hypothesis, in general—looking at a relatively large number of switches and assuming that most switches are not balanced—we expect results for the effect of switching that are substantively identical to those under H1.

The third hypothesis yields expectations for coefficients that are conditional both on how much authority party leaders have to determine party positions and on where parties are relative to where their leaders want them to be. Even if we assume that party leaders can set party ideal points, we suspect that they can do so 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 H3a) 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 in H3c). This yields an alternative expectation for inswitchers, i.e., the effect of inswitching on party ideal points should be null or very small. The effect of outswitching, in line with H3b, should be stronger.

From this perspective, switching out of a party 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. Thus, not only would we not expect to see balanced outswitching,<sup>11</sup> but we would expect party ideal points to respond much more strongly to outswitching than to inswitching. Crucially, our test of H1 also tests these expectations.

We test our first hypothesis with simple OLS regressions, one for each of the four legislatures included in our data. We do not pool data across legislatures, in part because of differences in switching across terms—switching in the Tenth and Eleventh Legislatures largely entailed party splits generating simultaneous moves, while in later terms, solo and (near-) simultaneous moves both were common—and in part because the 1993 electoral reform constitutes a fundamental change in the institutional context of switching. The results of the estimations are shown in Table 2.

Overall, the results in Table 2 support the basic contention of our first hypothesis that party positions are defined by their legislative members. Our hypothesis predicts positive and negative coefficients for *inswitched* and *outswitched*, respectively. As can be seen in Table 2, both the coefficients have the expected signs in the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> legislatures, although the coefficient for *inswitched* is significant at acceptable levels only in the 12<sup>th</sup> legislature. The coefficient for *outswitched* is both negative and significant, as expected, in the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> legislatures. For the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislature, the coefficients of interest are statistically and substantively insignificant, and both are signed in the wrong direction.

At first blush, and leaving aside for the moment the 10<sup>th</sup> legislature, the findings in Table 2 both support and undermine our first hypothesis. The results for *outswitched* are fully consistent with predictions, again except for the 10<sup>th</sup> legislature; the results for *inswitched*, by

contrast, appear fairly weak. The results for *inswitched* take on a different meaning when viewed through the lens of our third hypothesis, however: one of the implications of the third hypothesis (and *H3c* in particular) is that party leaders might welcome inswitchers but at the same time ensure that inswitchers do not add constraints to leadership influence over party positioning. By this reasoning, as suggested in Table 1, inswitchers' influence over party positions should be minimal at best. Our results thus support both the contention that party positions are products of intraparty processes for aggregating the preferences of their legislative members (as in H1) and the claim that party positions are set by party leaders exploiting their agenda-setting advantage to direct those same processes (as in H3).

**Table 2: Party Positions as a Function of Party-Member Positions**

Dependent variable: $\Delta ptyOC_{it}$				
	Coefficients by legislature (standard errors in parentheses)			
	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>
<i>inswitched<sub>it</sub></i>	-0.617 (3.851)	22.441 (24.656)	10.924* (5.647)	8.622 (7.671)
<i>outswitched<sub>it</sub></i>	0.407 (0.600)	-103.651** (6.326)	-12.029** (0.661)	-11.123** (0.494)
<i>constant</i>	-0.008 (0.025)	0.011 (0.018)	0.011 (0.027)	0.000 (0.017)
Observations	35	34	37	73
R <sup>2</sup>	0.0034	0.2992	0.3153	0.1261
Root MSE	.15596	.16788	.15744	.1489
* = p < 0.05; ** = p < 0.01 (one-tailed test)				

Honing in on estimations for individual terms, and still deferring discussion of the anomalous 10<sup>th</sup>, two distinctions emerge. First, the 11<sup>th</sup> Legislature (1992-94) stands apart in that the coefficients for both variables of interest are quite a bit larger than in the 12<sup>th</sup> or the 13<sup>th</sup> legislatures (1994-96 and 1996-2001, respectively). Second, once more, the 12<sup>th</sup> Legislature is distinctive for its significant coefficient on *inswitched*. The 11<sup>th</sup> Legislature was engulfed by the

vast corruption scandal that broke open in Italy in 1992. Fully one quarter of the MPs elected in 1992 were under official investigation for abuse of office by late 1993, and the bulk of the MPs embroiled in the scandal came from Italy's longstanding governing parties (Ricolfi 1993). Reflecting these pressures, the party that had ruled Italy continuously since 1946, also the largest party since 1946, the Christian Democrats (DC), split in early 1994. Most switching in the 11<sup>th</sup> Legislature thus owed to the dissolution of the DC: 145 MPs who switched into a parliamentary group other than the *gruppo misto* (and for whom we have OC scores) moved out of the DC and into one or the other of the newly formed Christian Democratic Center (CCD, 13) or Popular Party (DC-PPI, 132). Under the pressures of scandal, too, Parliament approved electoral reform in August 1993.

We think it quite reasonable that party switching and intraparty decision making in the 12<sup>th</sup> Legislature rendered inswitchers' impact on party positions more than minimal. The elections to the 12<sup>th</sup> Legislature were the first under the hybrid electoral laws introduced in 1993. The largest party in this term, Forza Italia (FI), was founded only two months before the 1994 elections by a (former) non-politician who after the elections became Prime Minister. Other political entrepreneurs created new parties, also responding to the new electoral rules, and established parties welcomed new recruits. Hence, an extraordinary 70.8 percent of MPs took their seats for the first time in 1994 (Verzichelli 1996, 141). The upheaval in the Italian party system was so profound that some analysts pointed to the inauguration of Italy's "Second Republic," although the 1948 Constitution was still in place (e.g., D'Alimonte and Bartolini 2002; Ricolfi 1993). It makes sense that much switching in 1994-96 reflected MPs' learning and adjustment to the new rules and what qualified as, in essence, a new party system. It makes sense as well that in this uncertain context party leadership would be especially likely to allow party

positions to accommodate inswitchers' ideals.

Amid the continuing evolution of the Italian party system, the findings for the 13<sup>th</sup> Legislature comport with the first hypothesis as shaded by the third hypothesis, whereby intraparty preference aggregation leads a party away from outswitchers' ideals, and leadership influence limits the impact of inswitchers. The 1996 elections reaffirmed the trend to bipolar competition under the hybrid laws and tilted the balance of power in favor of the center-left bloc, so that the first center-left coalition took office in post-World War II Italy and post-Communists remained in the executive throughout the 1996-2001 term. Switching abounded during this term, as multiple party fissions and startups occurred and a total of 277 MPs changed affiliation, the largest number of switchers ever registered per term in the Italian Republic. Even under these conditions, again, our reasoning holds.

It is time to take up the anomalous 10<sup>th</sup> Legislature. Switching in this term was dominated by the rupture of Italy's second largest party, the perennial opposition Italian Communist Party (PCI). In 1991 the PCI split in two, with the majority forming the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS, 154 MPs, of whom we have OC scores for 144) and the dissidents, Communist Refounding (RC, 14). After the initial split, there were very few switches involving the former PCI, with a few exits from the PDS and one set of entries for the RC. In the face of the historic exogenous shock of the collapse of communist regimes, outswitchers terminated the PCI even though the mean position of that party lay relatively close to their own ideals. Inswitchers into the PDS and RC accepted that their new parties' positions brought them away from their own ideals *as once defined* (and the technical requirements of calculating OC scores (see note 7) meant that an observation for the RC was dropped). Although almost all of the switchers in the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislature served in the PCI and its successors, a few other MPs of varying stripes also

switched in the 10<sup>th</sup>, and their repeated changes of affiliation generated fully 20 party-per-switchperiod observations—over half of the 35 observations in the estimation for this term. Of the 20 observations, 12 pertained to three parliamentary groups with low policy coherence: the Radicals and the Greens, which each tolerated internal variation on the traditional left-right dimension and lacked definition on the second, centralist-regionalist, dimension; and the motley Mixed Group, which made no effort to aggregate the preferences of its members. With the end of the Cold War prompting the bulk of switching among individual MPs, the behavior of a few MPs feeding over one-half of the party-per-switchperiod observations, and one-third of those observations represented by ideologically loose groups, it is understandable that our hypotheses fall flat for the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

Yet overall our logic accounts quite well for the impact of party switching on party positions in what amount to fundamentally distinct legislative party systems. Except for the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislature, our data strongly support a nuanced interpretation of our first hypothesis. Not only are the signs and relative magnitudes of the principal coefficients of interest “correct,” 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 the exits appear to allow parties to readjust their positions much more than they otherwise might. This suggests that much switching stems not so much from MPs seeking to improve their lots as from MPs fleeing inauspicious situations (cf. Aldrich and Bianco 1992).

## **5 Conclusions**

The upheaval and transformation of Italian politics during the span we study present a stiff challenge to our hypotheses. Our premise is to take switching seriously. We seek to discover whether a general argument can hold even as conditions vary across legislative terms and even

under extreme conditions, and can still illuminate politics in a given place. It is remarkable how well our reasoning identifies the effects of party switching in what amount to different party systems operating under different electoral laws. True, we see anomalies in the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislature and, along with confirmatory evidence, some distinctions across other terms. Yet the favorable findings overall carry weight precisely because Italy is a hard case.

We understand party switching as an aspect of strategic interaction among legislators. It is a particularly important one, for the choice of party affiliation shapes 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 trajectory. 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 Chapter 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 <sup>a</sup> ]	[1 <sup>a</sup> ]	55	50
PLI	11	11	17	17
MSI	35	34	34	34
Misto <sup>a</sup>	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 <sup>a</sup>	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.

<sup>a</sup>For 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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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> “Raw” preferences are preferences untinged by strategic or practical considerations.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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).

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> OC scores locate MPs in policy space by assuming that MP votes reveal sincere preferences and summarizing MP votes (Poole 2000; 2005; cf. Benoit and Laver 2006; Gabel and Huber 2000; Spirling and McLean 2007). A minimum number of votes is required because the reliability of estimates of revealed preferences declines with the number of observed votes. In the same vein, there is little information about preferences to be had from unanimous or near-

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unanimous votes. The 10-vote minimum resulted in the dropping of some 24,662 observations from the original file.

<sup>8</sup> Thanks to Mat McCubbins for suggesting this method of obtaining party scores. Thanks also to Keith Poole for providing the program for calculating OC scores and Adriana Prata for walking us through it. For a detailed discussion, see Heller and Mershon forthcoming.

<sup>9</sup> *Switchperiod* is a party-specific counter that increases by 1 for party  $i$  in every vote that at least one deputy votes as a new member of  $i$  or at least one deputy who was in  $i$  votes in party  $j \neq i$ .

<sup>10</sup> Party name changes sometimes might reflect changes that should not be expected to affect party positions. To the extent that this is the case, our data are biased *against* finding evidence of systematic changes in party preferences in line with our argument.

<sup>11</sup> 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.