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BALANCING COSTS OF LEGISLATIVE PARTY SWITCHING IN THE DANISH PARLIAMENT 1953-2015

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Abstract
When elected politicians switch party, it disturbs the electoral connection to voters. Party switching is thus described as a betrayal of democratic representation (Heller and Mershon, 2009: 5). In this article, we argue that party switching results from intra-party conflicts in which individual legislators weigh costs of switching against costs of staying. These costs depend on the legislator’s position in the party as well as the party’s position in the legislature. To explain party switching, we propose two new explanations: personal votes and intra-party balance of power. The study is based on all Danish national legislators elected from 1953 to 2015 (N=3,850) and utilizes a mixed methods design including news coverage of each switch to inform the interpretation of the statistical results. We conclude by suggesting that party switching can increase accountability rather than betray representation.

Keywords: Party Unity, Intra-Party Politics, Party Defection, Parliamentary Parties, Rare Event Data, Denmark
Introduction

Political parties are the foundation of a functioning democracy in many countries. They organize decision-making and broker interests and structure politicians’ careers (Sartori, 1976; Ware, 1996; Mershon, 2014: 418). Nevertheless, legislators sometimes leave their party during a legislative term without giving up their seat. They either switch to another party, form a new party, or become independent. Understanding party switching is important for several reasons. First, party switching potentially changes the balance of power within a legislative assembly without involving a democratic election (Desposato, 2006: 64; O’Brien and Shomer, 2013). Second, party switching breaks the electoral contract between the voters and the party. If legislators leave their party, it may compromise the voters’ ability to hold their representatives accountable (Heller and Mershon, 2009). It may also reflect situations in which the party leadership makes decisions that contradict the party manifesto, and legislators therefore decide to leave their party to stay loyal to their voters (Klein, 2016: 2).

Despite these important implications, party switching has only received limited attention (McElroy, 2009: 207; Heller and Mershon, 2009: 4). The reason may be that party switching is rare in party-dominated systems. Therefore, studies of party switching primarily focus on providing evidence of party switching rather than developing coherent theories explaining the phenomenon (O’Brien and Shomer, 2013: 113; Mershon, 2014: 424). Most empirical studies have investigated party switching in settings in which it frequently occurs (e.g., Japan, see Reed and Scheiner, 2003; Italy, see Heller and Mershon, 2005; 2008; Brazil, see Desposato, 2006; Romania, see Gherghina, 2016). Focusing on the most likely cases may, however, lead us to overstate the magnitude of party switching. O’Brien and Shomer (2013) and Klein (2016) provide important country-comparative studies, but they use parties as units of analysis and therefore miss the opportunity to include individual-level explanations.
We propose a theoretical framework to explain party switching based on two assumptions. First, we assume that legislators seek individual goals regarding re-election, policy and office. Second, we assume that party switching results from intra-party conflicts. We argue that in situations of intra-party conflict, legislators need to weigh the cost of staying in the party against the cost of leaving the party. Party switching is thus a result of strategic considerations (Desposato, 2006; Gherghina, 2016). The costs associated with a switch depend on the position of the party in the legislature and the position of the legislator in the party. Specifically, we expect legislators without a powerful position, with a strong personal electoral platform and with limited possibilities of influencing party policy to be more likely to switch party. Further, we expect that legislators who represent parties with a strong position in the legislature because of their number of seats, policy position and government status will be less likely to switch.

We test our expectations using data on all members of the national Danish parliament from 1953 to 2015 (N=3,850). By including the full population of Danish MPs, we avoid that sampling on the dependent variable or on specific legislatures creates potential biases in the results. Two characteristics make Denmark a helpful case for testing our theoretical expectations. First, the plentitude of parties represented in the national parliament (eight parties on average) provides variation on key independent variables such as intra-party decision-making structures, policy position and size within the same institutional context and political culture. Second, while O’Brien and Shomer (2013) show that Danish parties quite frequently experience switching, the actual number of switches is limited (72 switches in 62 years). Using the Danish case, we have sufficient variation on the dependent variable to model the likelihood of a switch, but also the possibility to investigate party switching in a case in which switching is not as prevalent as most cases used in prior studies. Hereby, we are able to test to what extent existing explanations can travel to a context in which party switching is rare. We build a database integrating original data collected on
individual MPs with data on party characteristics utilizing existing datasets from the Manifesto Project (Volkens et al., 2016) and the Integrated Party Organization Database (IPOD) (Giger and Schumacher, 2015). Furthermore, we collect news articles describing the switches and use this qualitative material to inform the interpretation of the regression analyses. We utilize a mixed methods design to move closer to a causal interpretation of empirical correlations as prior studies of party switching have suggested (Gherghina, 2016: 498).

The paper proceeds with a clarification of key concepts and assumptions from which we develop our theoretical arguments and derive hypotheses regarding determinants of party switching. A research design section follows an explanation of the data collection, operationalization and integration between the qualitative and quantitative material. The third section presents the analytical results, combining insights from multivariate statistical models and qualitative content coding of news articles. Finally, we conclude by summarizing the results and discuss how party switching may increase accountability rather than betray representation in party-centered systems.

**Party Switching and Intra-Party Disagreement**

Legislative party switching is defined as ‘any recorded change in party affiliation on the part of a politician holding elective office’ (Heller and Mershon, 2009: 8). Thus, a ‘switch’ covers legislators who switch to another party, form a new party, or leave their party group to become independent. Earlier research shows that legislators have individual goals related to their parliamentary service. They seek re-election, office positions and policy influence. Even though it is difficult to separate these goals and attaining one goal may be a requirement for the others (Strøm, 2012: 90-91), it follows from this framework that party switching is best understood as a rational decision reached by legislators who have taken the potential costs and benefits associated with the switch into
consideration. In most situations, the costs of party switching are high. Switchers need to consider their chances of being re-selected by a new party (Gherghina, 2016), the potential decreasing likelihood of being re-elected (Grose and Yoshinaka, 2003) and the possible difficulties in gaining office having to work their way up in a new party. However, party switching most likely does not take place in times of intra-party harmony. Rather, party switching is a result of disappointed ambitions or discrepancy between the preferences of the legislator and the party (Castle and Fett, 2000). Therefore, our main argument is that in cases of intra-party conflict, rational legislators have to weigh the cost of leaving against the cost of staying.

From both an office- and a policy-seeking perspective, the cost of party switching increases if the legislator holds a powerful party position. From an office-seeking perspective, the cost is higher if the legislator needs to give up a leadership position when switching. From a policy-seeking perspective, legislators in powerful positions might be less likely to end up in situations of conflict in the first place because they can influence party decisions. If disagreements do occur, the legislator is more likely to be able to influence these decisions in the future, which reduces the cost of staying. Several studies also show that legislators with leadership positions to a lesser extent switch party (Castle and Fett, 2000; McElroy, 2009; Desposato, 2006). We therefore expect the following:

**H1 Legislators who hold a powerful party position are less likely to switch party.**

The cost of switching also depends on how likely it is that a switcher is able to re-win his seat (Gherghina 2016). Legislators are elected based on their party brand as well as their personal reputation (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Shugart et al., 2005). A significant research agenda investigates the impact of marginality for representative behavior, constituency responsiveness and
campaigning (Fiorina, 1973; Ansolabehere et al., 2001; Burden, 2004; Griffin, 2006; André et al., 2015), but no prior studies have directly investigated the importance of legislators’ electoral strength for party switching. The personal vote is an indicator of popularity and visibility, so legislators who have a strong personal electoral mandate can count on some of these voters’ support even if they run for another party. This means that strong vote-getters depend less on the party for re-election. This independence decreases the potential re-election costs associated with a switch and legislators with a strong personal vote who find themselves in conflict with party decisions will therefore be more likely to leave the party rather than staying and accepting disagreement.

\[ H2 \text{ Legislators with many personal votes are more likely to switch.} \]

The extent to which party disagreements harm the policy and/or office ambitions of legislators depends on how such disagreements are handled within the party. The way in which political parties reach decisions, especially where decision-making power is located, differs across parties. Decision-making power may be located in the extra-parliamentary party or rest in the hands of the party leader (Heidar and Koole, 2000). The formal position of party leaders varies across parties. Here, we consider the most central figure identified as the party leader. Inspired by Hirschman (1970), we argue that in situations of disagreement, the cost of staying in the party is higher if the prospects for influencing decisions now or in the future are slim. Or in Hirschman’s terminology: Exit becomes more likely if the expected effect of voice is low (Hirschman, 1970: 39-41, 79-82). The legislators’ ability to influence party decisions is smaller if decision-making power either rest in the hands of the party leader or among activists in an extra-parliamentary branch. If decision-making power is unspecified, the parliamentary party group will often dominate since they monitor and react to everyday changes in the political negotiations (Heidar and Koole, 2000). Even though
individual legislators cannot control the parliamentary party group on their own, they at least have the opportunity to voice and argue in favor of their position. If, on the other hand, power rests in the extra-parliamentary branch or by the party leader, individual legislators have fewer opportunities to influence party decisions. This will make it more likely that serious disagreements between legislators and party decisions occur, and it will increase the cost of staying in the party since the legislator will have fewer opportunities to change the conflictual decisions. Therefore, we expect the following:

**H3 Legislators in parties in which decision-making power rests in the hands of activists or party leaders are more likely to switch.**

The costs of switching also relate to the number of policy and/or office benefits the party is able to provide. Given the bargaining position in the legislature, some parties provide more office and policy to their legislators. The party’s size and policy position determine its bargaining position (Roozendaal, 1990). Larger parties are more likely to move into government and enter coalitions (Laver and Shofield, 1990; Martin and Stevenson, 2001) that provide policy influence and/or office supply. Existing studies of party switching have shown that legislators are indeed less likely to leave larger parties (Castle and Fett, 2000; Mejía Acosta, 2004; Heller and Mershon, 2005; Thames, 2007; McElroy, 2009). Therefore, we expect the following:

**H4 Legislators representing parties with stronger size-based bargaining positions are less likely to switch.**

Regarding the policy position, some argue that legislators from centrist catch-all parties should be more likely to switch since these parties have more vague and undefined ideologies (Mejía Acosta, 2004: 188). In contrast, on the basis of the assumption that legislators seek policy influence, we
argue that center parties are in a better position to provide policy and office as they are more likely participants of political coalitions. We therefore expect the following:

*H5 Legislators representing parties in the center of the relevant policy space are less likely to switch.*

Furthermore, the power of a party rests on its institutional position. If the party is in government, it is in a stronger position to provide office for its legislators and to influence policy. Thus, the cost of leaving a governing party is higher than leaving a party in opposition. Most studies of party switching have confirmed this relationship (Mejía Acosta, 2004; Desposato, 2006: 75; Thames, 2007; Young, 2012; Klein, 2016; see, however, Heller and Mershon, 2008), and we therefore expect the following:

*H6 Legislators are less likely to switch out of governing parties.*

We include six additional factors in our model because they may influence the decision to switch and some of our independent variables. First, the gender, age and seniority of a legislator may directly influence the decision to switch as well as the legislator’s position and number of personal votes. Second, party age is used as a proxy for institutionalization (Harmel and Janda, 1994), potentially influencing parties’ government participation, size and legislators’ decision to switch because these parties have a more firmly established platform and culture. Third, legislators are more likely to jump a sinking ship, taking future elections into consideration (Gherghina, 2016), and we therefore include a measure of how the party performed at the latest election compared to the previous. Finally, since we study party switching over time, we include dummies for legislatures in which changes in political communication and societal developments have occurred.
Data and Methods

We test our expectations using the case of Denmark. The threshold for winning legislative seats is low (2 %), which makes it easier for legislators to leave and form new parties. The multiparty structure (the mean number of parties in the legislature is eight) offers more parties for legislators to switch to. At the same time, Danish parties are stable and disciplined. Some of them go back to the birth of parliamentary democracy in the country (1901), and they vote as blocs in over 90 % of the votes (Skjæveland, 2011). Furthermore, office spoils and corruption are very limited in Denmark, which may reduce the office-seeking efforts related to party switching of individual legislators. The Danish case thus adds a very different Scandinavian consensual political system to the list of party-switching case studies.

To study legislative party switching, we have created a database including all Danish MPs elected since the latest constitutional change in 1953. Hereby, we avoid sampling biases regarding legislatures or legislators that usually hunt the study of party switching (Castle and Fett, 2000; Desposato, 2006). After each election, 175 Danish MPs (and 4 Nordic MPs which we exclude) enter parliament, summing up to 3,850 MPs representing 18 different political parties in 22 legislatures in the period 1953-2015. Information about each MP is gathered from election statistics at Statistics Denmark and the Parliamentary Handbook. For each MP, we record if the party affiliation is the same when entering parliamentary term as when leaving it. If the party affiliation changes, it is a switch (coded 1), otherwise not (coded 0). The 197 MPs leaving their seat to a substitute are excluded from the analysis. In total, 72 MPs switched party, and on average, roughly three MPs switch parties in each legislature with some variation across legislatures. Supplementary Table S1 provides frequencies of switching across legislatures and parties.

For the independent variables, we use the Parliamentary Handbook to measure the position of the MP. Positions as party leader, vice leader, head of the parliamentary party group,
party spokesperson, or minister are coded since they all offer special privileges and power to influence party decisions. Next, the database is merged with data from Statistics Denmark on personal votes of each legislator. The Danish electoral system is proportional and organizes the country into multi-member districts. Almost all parties use open lists, allowing voters to vote for the party or for individual candidates. The number of personal votes span between 197 and 70,024 (M: 5,584, SE: 5,668).

Governmental status is ‘1’ if the party has ministers representing it in cabinet and ‘0’ if not. We estimate the size-based bargaining power using numbers of seats to calculate the Shapley-Shubik index value (Shapley and Shubik, 1954) for each party. This index shows how many winning coalitions a party participates in out of the total number of possible winning coalitions. The more coalitions a party is able to turn into winning, the more size-based bargaining power it holds.

Regarding policy position of the party, we use the left-right position from the Manifesto Project (Budge et al., 2001; Volkens et al., 2016). The left-right policy dimension is the most relevant for coalition formation in Danish politics (Skjæveland, 2005), and the manifesto data uniquely provides measures of party positions of all parties - except The Schleswig Party with one MP represented from 1953 to 2964 and one independent - and across all years.

Finally, to measure the intra-party decision-making power, we use the Integrated Party Organization Dataset (IPOD) made available by Giger and Schumacher (2015). They have integrated all existing datasets on intra-party characteristics and created a measure of intra-party balance of power (BOPLA) that combines data collected by Janda (1980), Laver and Hunt (1992) and Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2012). This measure captures the balance of power between activists and party leadership, which is central to our argument. From 1953 to 1989, we use the BOPLA measure based on Janda’s data collection. The measure adds 1) an estimate of who is
responsible for policy formulation in the party and 2) an estimate of leadership concentration. Higher values indicate that the policy is formulated nationally and by a single party leader. From 1990 to 2000, we use the BOPLA measure based on Laver and Hunt’s data collection. The measure subtracts the influence of the party leader and the influence of party activists on party policy. Higher values indicate that more power is concentrated in the hands of the party leader. Finally, for the period 2001-2015, the BOPLA measure is based on data collected by Rohrschneider and Whitefield subtracting the extent to which the party leadership is powerful in determining party policy and the extent to which party members are powerful in determining party policy. Two concerns are related to the use of this measure. First, the data from the early years is collected with considerable distance between data points. However, Janda included information from 1950 to 1978 for the parties he coded, which makes us more confident that we have an accurate description of the parties in the period. Second, the measures used to construct BOPLA are not exactly the same; especially the measure based on Janda’s data diverges from the two other measures. We would therefore be reluctant to use this measure for describing developments in intra-party power of balance across time. However, we run models including dummies for each legislature to investigate differences across parties and legislators within legislatures where the measure comes from the same data source.

Regarding the control variables, seniority is measured as years in parliament. Party age is measured in years from party formation to the last year of the relevant legislature, and electoral performance is estimated as the loss/gain in number of legislative seats in the most recent election compared to the last.

All continuous independent variables are standardized into z-scores setting the mean at zero and the standard deviation at one.
The quantitative data analyses provide evidence for or against the expected empirical correlation between the theoretically connected variables. However, based on these correlations, we cannot decide whether party switching is indeed induced by disagreements within parties and which reasoning leads to the decision of a switch. To have a better understanding of the causal relations linking individual and party characteristics to the likelihood of party switching, we utilize a mixed methods design collecting media coverage of the 72 switches in the days following the switch. We use newspaper archives of two national newspapers (Jyllands-Posten and Information) for party switchers before 1990 and the newspaper database Infomedia enabling us to search across all major newspapers for party switchers after 1990. We also use Facebook posts for the most recent party switches.

News coverage includes explanations provided by the switchers and comments from other party members and political journalists. We prefer this approach over interviews since interviews would provide us with retrospective explanations and result in missing data as some party switchers have passed away.

Newspaper articles were stored electronically and linked to the relevant MPs. We combined an inductive and deductive coding approach (Miles et al., 2014) when analyzing this material to systematically investigate to what extent our expected reasons were present as well as other explanations not accounted for by our theoretical framework. We use these analyses to add nuances and contextual information to the major patterns identified in the statistical models. The final coding frame can be seen in Supplementary Table S2.

**Explaining party switching in Denmark**

Our coding of the news coverage reveal that 66 (92 %) of the switches were directly (and openly) related to an intra-party conflict. Our fundamental assumption that party switching relates to
conflict therefore seems plausible. We thus move on to test our hypotheses. The distribution on the dependent variable with only 72 ‘ones’ bias the estimates because binary dependent variable models are not invariant to the mean of the dependent variable (King and Zeng, 2001: 138; Williams, 2015). Further, since no party switching occurs in two legislatures, we face a quasi-complete separation, which means that the log-likelihood function will not approach zero. Using logistic regression would therefore make us lose 350 relevant observations and underestimate the probability of a switch. Instead we use a penalized logistic regression, which can handle the rareness of party switching and quasi-complete separation in our data (Firth, 1993). The results are reported in Table 1. Model 1 includes all individual-level explanations and dummies for legislatures as well as parties to take all variation across parties into account. Model 2 includes the proposed party-level explanations and only dummies for legislatures.

First, Table 1 shows that MPs who hold a party position are less likely to switch party. This is in accordance with H1. In total, 831 MPs held a position, and only six of them switched party (1 %). Of the 2,775 MPs not holding a position, 66 switched (2.4 %). We argued that holding a position increases the cost of switching and, at the same time, decreases the likelihood of severe disagreement since MPs in powerful positions are able to influence party decisions. From the qualitative material, we cannot directly tell which of these mechanisms are at play since we cannot code Justifications of not leaving the party. However, in five instances, party switchers highlight their position as the most important reason to switch. For instance, two MPs left their party after it was revealed that they had secretly negotiated with another party to become ministers. Also in line with the logic of our argument, but not captured in the quantitative data, deprivation from positions cause party switching in three cases. For example, MP Arne Melchior decided to leave the Center Democrats in 2001 because he was deprived of his position as party spokesperson on foreign policy.
MPs in party positions are thus less likely to switch, and the media analysis revealed that fights over positions were the main cause behind seven % of the switches.

Higher numbers of personal votes are expected to increase the likelihood of a switch since politicians with many personal votes can anticipate fewer electoral costs (H2). The results in Table 1 support our expectation. Moving one standard deviation on personal votes increases the likelihood of a switch by 34 %. However, this is not reflected in the qualitative material. No MP argues that he might as well switch party since he can obtain enough votes by himself. Party switchers with many personal votes use very different explanations, indicating that having many personal votes are not the reason behind a switch; it is rather a condition that increases the likelihood of a switch in various situations of conflict. When we exclude position from the model, the coefficient of personal votes is still positive but clearly insignificant. This indicates that popular legislators who are not able to turn their popularity into strong positions in the party are more likely to switch. This fits our cost argument since these politicians are already deprived of positions in the party and can anticipate electoral success in other parties. Hence, the cost of switching is lower. In line with this logic, the interaction term between position and personal votes shows a negative effect, but it is statistically insignificant ($r=-0.42$, $p=0.22$ in two-sided test).

Further, we expected that MPs representing parties with either dominant party activists or leaders are more likely to switch (H3). To test this expectation, we include the square of the BOPLA measure, expecting a convex relationship that increases the likelihood of a switch at the extremes of the measure. The positive and statistically significant effect of this squared term supports the hypothesis. For legislators representing parties dominated by the activists (lowest value), the probability of a switch is 12 %. For legislators representing parties dominated by the party leadership (highest value), the predicted probability is 10 %. However, for legislators representing parties with more balanced relations, the probability of a switch is almost zero.
Supporting the importance of this factor, the most common reason stated by party switchers in the news coverage is dissatisfaction with the party leader (23 instances) and unwillingness to accept decisions reached by decisive extra-parliamentary bodies (15 instances). For instance in 1967, five MPs from the Socialist People’s Party left the party and formed a new party (Left Socialists) as a protest against a decision by the executive committee and party congress to extend the cooperation with the Social Democrats. This is in line with our argumentation that strong activist influence will induce MPs to leave in situations of severe disagreement. At the other end of the spectrum, quite a few MPs leave the Danish People’s Party and the Progress Party, both of which are known for having very powerful party leaders. When MP Ole Donner left the Danish People’s Party in 2000, he stated that such a centralized party has no position in Danish politics.

Finally, we argued that MPs representing powerful parties are less likely to switch and that parties’ legislative power depends on their position on the left-right policy dimension, size-based bargaining position and government status. We expected fewer switches among MPs representing parties with strong size-based bargaining power (H4). The negative and statistically significant effect of the Shapley-Shubik index in Table 1 supports this expectation. The more potentially winning coalitions a party belongs to, the less likely MPs of that party are to switch. The probability for a switch decreases from seven % for the parties with the weakest size-based bargaining power to around zero for the strongest parties.

We also expected that MPs representing parties further away from the center are more likely to switch party (H5). To test this hypothesis, we include the square of the left-right position, expecting a positive coefficient, which indicates a convex relationship. The result in Table 1 supports this expectation. For legislators representing parties furthest to the left (right), there is a likelihood of about 17 (5) % for them to switch. For legislators representing parties in the center,
the predicted probability of a switch is close to zero. There is thus a trend for legislators representing more extreme parties to be more likely to switch.

Finally, we expected that MPs representing parties in government are less likely to switch party (H6). This expectation is not confirmed. Even if we exclude other party-level explanations, the impact of participation in government coalitions on party switching is still positive and statistically significant, which contradicts our expectations. In line with Hirschman’s ideas about voice and exit, a possible post hoc interpretation is that MPs representing parties in government, but not holding a crucial position such as minister themselves, are even less influential than MPs in opposition parties, and they therefore need to accept compromises reached by their party leadership in negotiations with other parties.

We argued that MPs would be less likely to switch out of powerful parties providing them policy influence and/or office. However, our qualitative material indicates that two mechanisms are important when interpreting the MP’s underlying motives. In line with our argumentation, 12 party switches are associated with conflicts in which the MP prefers a more accommodating strategy to realize policies and office. Especially former MPs of the Socialist People’s Party, who left after or close to the party’s withdrawal from government in 2013/14, argue that they want the party to seek influence by reaching compromises. Another mechanism, however, points in the exact opposite direction, and four MPs provide this justification for leaving the party. According to them, their party is too flexible and willing to give up on crucial principles and therefore betrays its manifesto. Thus, the analysis of the media content indicates that MPs also switch to stay policy pure (Pedersen, 2012). This provides nuances to how legislators reason about policy compromises and illuminates the contradicting mechanisms. Still, most of the instances support the results found in the statistical model, indicating that most party switchers were driven by motives of policy influence rather than policy purity.
Regarding the included control factors, only party age has a significant effect showing that switching is more likely in younger parties. The legislature dummies also have a significant effect, showing that party switching is becoming slightly more likely over time.

As stated, the mixed methods approach allows us to combine an inductive and deductive approach. Most findings in the qualitative material are in line with our theoretical framework, but we also identified some additional causes of switching. In four cases, the MP leaves his party because of personal scandals such as illegal sexual relations or fraud (Supplementary Table S2). In another four cases, we code the party switchers as ‘outlaws’. These are highly unorthodox MPs breaking the norms of party and parliamentary behavior. Such explanations are not without importance when dealing with rare event data, but they are idiosyncratic in nature and therefore extremely hard to model in any systematic way.

Conclusion

Party switching is a critical event in party-dominated systems. It can alter the bargaining and coalition situation in legislatures between elections, and it challenges the electoral link between voters and representatives, potentially causing distrust and feelings of betrayal. We argue that party switching is a rational decision reached by strategic legislators who weigh the cost of staying versus leaving in situations of party conflict. Our analyses show that legislators holding central party positions are less likely to switch party, while legislators with many personal votes are more likely to do so. Legislators representing smaller and policy-extreme parties are also more likely to switch. However, our qualitative material shows that they do not always switch to gain more policy influence but also to stay policy pure. Legislators are more likely to exit parties in which decisions are in the hands of the party leader or activists. However, in contrast to our expectations, legislators representing governing parties are not less but more likely to switch. Both findings are in line with
Hirshman’s framework that exit is more likely when the possibilities of ‘voice’, that is, influencing the party’s policy is slim.

The study contributes to the literature on party switching by providing a new case study of a political system in which parties are strong and switching rare. Compared to findings in other settings, our study shows that existing explanations of party switching can travel to a Scandinavian, consensus-seeking and strongly partisan system. Similar to findings in Brazil (Desposato, 2006), the US (Castle and Fett, 2000) and The European Union (McElroy 2009), legislator positions are important to explain party switching in the Danish parliament. Party size is important in Denmark just as it is in Ecuador (Mejía Acosta, 2004), Italy (Heller and Mershon, 2005) and Ukraine (Thames, 2007). However, the impact of government status is still contested. Just as in the Italian case (Heller and Mershon, 2008), Danish MPs representing governing parties are more likely to switch. This contradicts the findings in Brazil (Desposato, 2006), Ecuador (Mejía Acosta, 2004), Ukraine (Thames, 2007) and Malawi (Young, 2012). A possible explanation is that it is more important to represent the governing party in presidential systems than in parliamentary multi-party system. In parliamentary multi-party systems in which no party controls the majority, policy influence may also be gained outside government, and governing parties need to strike, sometimes hard, agreements to legislate and stay in power.

This study also contributes to the understanding of party switching as, based on our cost argument, we propose two new explanations highlighting the importance of intra-party politics. The organization of decision-making power as well as the electoral independency of legislators are important for understanding party switching. The analyses provide empirical support for this understanding, and it is consequential for the way party switching may be evaluated in party democracies. Even though party switching potentially leads to distrust, it is also one of the few sanctions that individual legislators control in party-dominated systems. If parties abandon electoral
manifestos, MPs can serve as accountability agents on behalf of the party’s voters. Experiments suggest that voters prefer independent legislators rather than clear-cut party agents (Campbell et al., 2016). Probably, many instances of party switching driven by office-seeking motives will undermine rather than strengthen party democracies, but limited instances driven by policy disagreements, as witnessed in Denmark, may actually serve as a release for intra-party conflicts, increasing party accountability and thereby strengthening parties as trustworthy units of representation. In this case, party switching should not be interpreted as a betrayal of the voters but rather as a way of holding parties accountable.
References


http://dx.doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PE8TWP, Harvard Dataverse, version 1.


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<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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<td>MP position</td>
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<td>-1.960 (0.480)**</td>
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<td>MP personal vote</td>
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<td>0.345 (0.108)**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Squared party balance of power</td>
<td>0.938 (0.207)**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP gender (Man)</td>
<td>0.419 (0.316)</td>
<td>0.528 (0.309)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP age</td>
<td>0.071 (0.136)</td>
<td>-0.070 (0.135)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MP seniority</td>
<td>-0.161 (0.187)</td>
<td>-0.009 (0.178)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party age</td>
<td>-0.451 (0.224)*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Party electoral performance</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.049 (0.169)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislature¹</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parties²</td>
<td>***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tjur’s D³</td>
<td>0.164</td>
<td>0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>3,653</td>
<td>3,460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹To simplify the table, only the statistical significance of the effect of legislatures is reported (Chi²=43.09 in Model 1, Chi²=42.51 in Model 2).
²Parties are included as dummies in Model 1 (Chi²=100.88).
³Tjur’s D simply reports the difference between the mean predicted probability of a party switch among all non-switchers and the mean predicted probability of a party switch among switchers. The larger the difference, the better the model. Tjur’s D is preferred to other model-fit estimates since it is not based on the likelihood function, which does not work in situations of quasi separation.
***p<0.001; **p<0.01; *p<0.1