

Party Switching in the Canadian House of Commons

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Abstract

This thesis seeks to explain the phenomenon of party switching (or floor-crossing) in the understudied case of the Canadian House of Commons. It uses Müller and Strøm's "Policy, Office or Votes?" framework at the individual level of analysis and a mixed methods approach that combines document analysis and econometrics to assess the effects of individual and institutional variables on the decision to switch parties. The results inform a wider discussion regarding individual political behavior as well as the role, influence and evolution of political parties in the Canadian state. The research demonstrates that the electorate is adept at recognizing opportunism and tends to respect MPs who switch parties on principle while punishing those that switch for more self-centered reasons.

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1. Introduction

Sometimes, all it takes is a few minutes for a political career to change forever. In that length of time, David Emerson decided to jump from a sinking ship to what looked like a stable raft. A Liberal Member of Parliament (MP), Emerson wanted to stay in government when his party was defeated in the 2006 federal election. Thus, when the Conservative cabinet met to be sworn in for the first time at Rideau Hall, more than a few heads turned in surprise to see him walk into the room. The stormy, partisan Liberal who vowed just two weeks earlier to be the Conservative Party's "worst nightmare" was now accepting a prestigious set of portfolios in the Conservative government (Taber and Chase 2006).

This story stands in stark contrast to the tale of Conservative MP Brent Rathgeber, who often spoke about the need for government transparency and championed a private members bill that would increase salary disclosure in the federal civil service. On the instructions of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Conservative-dominated committee transformed the bill beyond the recognition of its author (Wingrove 2013). To Mr. Rathgeber, this was indicative of a broader lack of commitment to transparency and accountability on the part of the government. As he wrote on his blog following the committee vote, "I joined the Reform/Conservative movements because I thought we were somehow different, a band of Ottawa outsiders riding into town to clean the place up, promoting open government and accountability. I barely recognize ourselves, and worse I fear that we have morphed into what we once mocked" (Rathgeber 2013). Mr. Rathgeber quit the Conservative caucus, and continues to sit as an independent MP.

Both stories are of legislators making decisions about their political careers that have important implications for democracy. In this way, they could not be more different. The first may well be the model for political opportunism writ-large, seeming to confirm many of our most cynical sentiments regarding professional politics. The second is a story of political suicide; of a legislator standing on principle while knowing it shatters his subsequent chance of re-election.

Is there more here than a confluence of circumstance, interesting to academics but relatively meaningless to everyone else? I argue that there is indeed more. The stories, trends and patterns of party switching in the Canadian House of Commons reveal a great deal about our democracy.

There are four compelling reasons why party switching in Canada matters. The first has to do with the substantive relationship between legislators and political parties. The second has to do with the apparent paradox of switching parties *vis-à-vis* electoral security. The third has to do with the nature of the ballot in a representative democracy. The fourth has to do with the contribution of the Canadian case to the study of comparative politics.

Political Parties and Party Switching

Modern democracy is not possible without political parties. They serve as a shortcut for voters – a way to quickly assess a candidate’s platform and decrease the information cost of political participation. Parties “bring people together behind political agendas and candidates,” creating banners of political action to rally behind (Barrow 2007, 171). In a time when political participation has reached historic lows in Canada, it

is difficult to imagine what voting would look like without this crucial tool. Political parties are even more important in terms of the service they render as instruments of accountability; they forge links between policy records and the legislators responsible for them and create a way for citizens to “throw the rascals out” with one fell swoop.

For most politicians, the portrait is somewhat less romantic. Political parties alter the incentive structures of MPs by serving as the primary method by which individuals can be elected to public office. Politics becomes a “team sport” where the interests of constituents may be rendered subordinate to the interests of the party. In Canada, political parties control almost all career advancement – from committee assignments, to cabinet appointments, to electoral labels and funding. MPs who vote against the party line do so to the detriment of their careers and electoral prospects (Kam 2009, 150). While former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien is perhaps not the strongest disciplinarian in modern Canadian political history, he is surely the most famous. In the early years of the Chrétien government, the Prime Minister was charged with crafting a strong cabinet while paying off political debts to both his supporters and opponents within the Liberal caucus. From 1991-1997, Chrétien aggressively disciplined his MPs, both by demoting a number of senior MPs from the front bench and through a “harsh and public brand of discipline that involved sacking several rebellious MPs from their committee positions and expelling another (John Nunziata) from the party altogether” (Kam 2009, 154–155). Successive Prime Ministers have not shied away from this brand of heavy-handed discipline.

Despite this, MPs may not always be as powerless as the above portrait suggests. “When confronted with a decision, [a politician] will examine the alternatives with which he is confronted...and will chose the alternative which yields for him the greatest

expected value” (Black 1972, 146). This could mean staying loyal to the party, voicing his dissatisfaction, or leaving the party fold altogether.¹

Party switching therefore represents the ultimate counter-move in the legislative game played between MPs and the party leadership – if the leadership falls back on discipline too often, MPs can simply leave the party. In a system wrought by the iron grip of party discipline, this can be an important move indeed.

For observers of Canadian democracy, party switching has another substantive significance. The strength of party discipline in this country gives citizens good reason to believe that they live in a “benign dictatorship” where governments can get away with nearly anything between elections – that is to say, the vast majority of the time (Docherty 2004, 165). The long tradition of studying electoral events in political science has bourn much fruit. With the ever-increasing centralization of power in Canada (Savoie 1999; White 2006) however, there has never been a more important time to focus on what happens between elections.

The Paradox of Switching Parties

Party switching can be seen as a reaction to the heavy-handed discipline that characterizes Canada’s parliamentary system. However, this same logic poses a certain paradox. Ambition theory describes the “politician as office-seeker”; someone who is prepared to do whatever necessary to climb the greasy pole while keeping himself from sliding down (Schlesinger 1966). Anecdotal evidence suggests that few MPs who switch

¹ Hirschman's (1970) “Exit, Voice and Loyalty” framework is a useful point of reference for MP decisions vis-à-vis the party leadership.

parties are re-elected. What possible incentive could an MP have to cross the floor, and therefore sacrifice their electoral viability?

As demonstrated in the story of David Emerson, the perks of high office await some MPs upon defection. However, this is not the case for the majority of MPs. It is also true that not all switchers are defeated immediately upon defection; still, conventional wisdom points to party switching as an act of political self-immolation. Despite this, MPs continue to switch parties, parliament after parliament. This notion presents an interesting puzzle for students of parliamentary careers.

Representative Democracy and Party Switching

Party switching also has a normative dimension. Representative democracy is based upon the idea that not all political decisions can be made by referendum. Thus, informed citizens select representatives who they trust to make decisions in their place, and who are bound in turn to serve them to the best of their abilities. Parties are the crucial intervening variable, and are used to streamline this process of choosing representatives and legislating thereafter.

In addition to the discipline imposed by party leaders in Canada, MPs suffer from a self-imposed discipline brought about by the confidence convention. “The golden rule of parliamentary politics is that the cabinet must maintain the confidence of the House. If it cannot do this, it must either give way to a new cabinet or dissolve Parliament and call an election” (Kam 2009, 52). Since every government motion in the Canadian House of Commons is a confidence motion, backbench MPs risk triggering an election with each dissenting vote cast. The outcome is an even greater agenda-setting power for party

leaders, and even less agenda-setting power for the average legislator. As such, voters have real cause to believe they are casting a ballot for a party or party leader, not a local MP. It was to this effect that the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party financing concluded that the evidence for a personal vote in Canada is tenuous at best (Ferejohn and Gaines 1991).

Starting from the position that political parties are fundamental to democracy, some observers such as Barrow (2007) have argued that party switching is a threat to the link between politicians, parties and the electorate, and a way in which political opportunism can further erode levels of public trust in the political system. In the context of the Mexican state, she points to the increasingly common practice of politicians switching parties, often multiple times, and sometimes to parties with very different ideological commitments. “These trends lessen parties’ capacity to provide coherent and unified alternatives, while calling into question parties’ and legislators’ ability to serve their representative functions” (Barrow 2007, 167).

If it is true that the electorate makes decisions on the basis of party affiliation and not on the merits of their local representatives, there is a serious case to be made in support of Barrow’s argument. The notion that voters do indeed make such decisions, however, is not self-evident. One oft-overlooked aspect of party switching is that it can be used to *determine* the extent to which voters cast their ballot for partisan reasons. By tracking the electoral success of legislators through a party switch, we can learn more about the preferences of the constituency that elected them. If MPs are merely the fortunate byproducts of an electorate that cares only about partisan affiliation, switchers should be deeply unpopular after defecting. If the electorate cares more about local

representation, MPs should be able to carry their support from one party to the next. Party switching tells a story about the personal vote – it can be used as an analytical tool to determine what is really taking place when the electorate goes to the ballot box.

The Canadian Case

While several researchers have made a recent push into the subject of party switching, the field remains in its infancy; this is even truer for work on the particularities of the Canadian example. Nevertheless, the value of this case to the comparative literature is considerable. Previous work on party switching has been limited by the availability of data and has resulted in a larger number of studies using aggregate level data on legislative bodies as wholes. This kind of analysis is useful for revealing general trends and illuminating theoretical patterns, but makes causal claims difficult to come by.

By combining individual-level biographical data from the Library of Parliament, electoral data from Elections Canada and archival data from newspaper archives, we can draw conclusions regarding whether MPs switch parties for different reasons, and whether those reasons have any bearing on how they do in subsequent elections. While this is valuable in-and-of-itself, the Canadian case is even more useful because these findings can be readily applied to other jurisdictions. Canada is a prototypical federal state, with a prototypical Westminster parliamentary tradition. These two realities create great potential for the results of this study to be extended to other such polities.

Finally, the high quality of data available for research on Canada creates room for methodological advancement. One of the greater potential contributions of this thesis is that it devotes considerable effort to analyzing the circumstances surrounding each party

switch and subsequently coding the results. The outcome is a model based on the classic “Policy, Office or Votes?” framework (Müller and Strøm 1999) that pays strict attention to categorizing changes in partisan affiliation and analyzing their effects.

Research Question

These four reasons lead me to the dual research questions of this thesis. First, *why do Members of Parliament in Canada switch parties?* Party switchers in Canada are often thought of as opportunistic, self-centered egotists who are interested only in themselves (see CBC News 2006 and CBC News 2015 as representative of many others). This thesis will dig deeper into this notion and evaluate it in an empirical fashion.

Second, *what are the electoral consequences of party switching?* If party switching is held in such low esteem, it follows that voters should punish MPs who change partisan affiliation. To this end, this thesis will also evaluate whether there is a relationship between the reasons MPs switch parties and their subsequent electoral fates.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis proceeds as follows: In Chapter 2, I review the existing literature on party switching. The research on this subject is penetrating, thoughtful and well designed – but limited. This is especially the case with research on Canadian and Westminster parliamentary systems, of which much remains to be done. This chapter also probes the theoretical foundations of this brand of work – specifically ambition theory and the behavior of political elites.

Chapter 3 explores the theoretical framework of this thesis by applying the theory discussed in Chapter 2 to the Westminster parliamentary tradition, specifically the Canadian House of Commons. This is achieved by extending the “Policy, Office or Votes” (POV) framework to an individual level of analysis – that is, to explain the behavior of political actors instead of political parties.

Chapter 4 presents the data and methodology that I use in answering my research questions, as well as my hypotheses. I use an original dataset that combines demographic data, electoral data and information from historical archives. I explain how each variable is coded and operationalized, and present descriptive statistics. I explain the methodological approach I take to answer my research question, which combines a cross-sectional and time-series dimension to construct a panel.

Chapter 5 presents the results of this research. This section will evaluate the statistical accuracy of the model presented in Chapter 3 in light of the empirical findings, which reveal that MPs that switch parties for opportunistic reasons do worse in subsequent elections than their non-opportunistic colleagues. This chapter discusses the broader significance of these results to the study of party switching and the field of comparative politics. While the model used to approach this research question proved to be a reliable barometer, it is also important to discuss the aspects of this research that did not turn out as expected.

I conclude this thesis in Chapter 6 with a closing discussion that situates this study in a broader context and explore avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

While the literature has diverged on the specific factors that influence party switching, there is widespread agreement on the place that ambition holds in this analysis. The contemporary work on party switching traces its origin to Schlesinger's ambition theory, which states that, "a politician's behavior is a response to his office goals. Or, to put it another way, the politician as office-seeker engages in political acts and makes decisions appropriate to gaining office" (Schlesinger 1966, 6). This view does not necessarily mean that politicians seek higher office as an end-in-itself since access to higher office usually leads to greater influence in policy making. Black (1972) builds on Schlesinger's analysis and argues that the decisions made by politicians when pursuing their ambitions are made according to the choices they have available to them at the time they must make their decision (145). "The average politician can hardly afford to develop elaborate plans concerning his political life. Rather, he probably tends to make decisions on the basis of the costs, benefits, and probabilities that operate at the time of his decision" (Black 1972, 145). At the heart of this view is a belief that politicians will act rationally and in a way that maximizes their individual utility.

This chapter explores the existing work on party switching from the lens of individual- and institutional-level determinants. It considers the logic of party switching, the influence of career incentives, ideological incentives, the relative balance of power in a legislature, timing, and the nature of the electoral system.

The Calculus of Party Switching

Party switching can be seen as a game in which politicians make strategic decisions in order to maximize their opportunities for advancement. In this game, the main players are individual legislators and the party leadership. Legislators seek to maximize their overall utility, which is a function of the expected payoffs of membership in both their current and prospective parties less the transaction cost incurred through switching (Desposato 2006, 63). Parties seek to maximize their power relative to other parties by maximizing seats, cabinet positions and committee placements.

For the most part, parties have good reasons to try and attract new members; a minority party strives to become the majority party; a minority government in a Westminster-style system seeks to become a majority government; and even majority parties or governments who hold these privileged statuses have strong incentives to cement them where possible. The effects of party switching can be substantive; Belinda Stronach's 2005 defection to the governing Liberal party, for instance, ensured the government's survival by preventing it from falling on a crucial budget vote (Chase and Curry 2005). Even if none of these specific instances apply, a party that attracts new members from the opposite side of the aisle sends a positive signal to the electorate and its financial base regarding its strength (Yoshinaka 2005, 393).

On the other hand, switching comes at a cost to the legislator. Grose and Yoshinaka (2003) have shown that legislators who switch parties while in Congress suffer consequences at the ballot box, and Yoshinaka has pointed to a loss of seniority (in the U.S. system) within the legislator's new party. Thus, it is in the interests of party

leaders to increase the payoffs MPs receive to offset the losses associated with switching (Yoshinaka 2005, 392).

Desposato argues that party leaders, acting as rational agents, will offer these benefits to potential switchers when the “benefits of welcoming the new member exceed the costs of resources offered” (2006, 64). It follows that as the value of a new member goes up (for example, from a potential change in the balance of power or increased electoral support resulting from that member’s celebrity status), so too does the value of resources offered to the defector. The value of Stronach’s switch was so great to the governing party that she was immediately promoted to cabinet upon defection (Clark and Laghi 2005). The extent to which a party can offer such incentives will vary according to the institutional framework. For example, a closed-list proportional-representation (PR) system gives parties exclusive jurisdiction in controlling access to the party label, while the U.S. primary system gives other party members this prerogative (Desposato 2006, 64). These are all considerations that weigh on the minds of party leaders when deciding what resources to entice potential switchers.

The final element of the calculus of party switching is party discipline. “Party unity is a collective good for party members...[because it] contributes to voters’ ability to distinguish among parties, and it underpins voter confidence in the solidity of platforms” (Heller and Mershon 2009, 42). As such, parties have an incentive to enforce discipline among their ranks by blocking or curtailing a dissenting MP’s advancement within the party, preventing access to legislative perks and prestigious assignments, or even revoking access to the party label and defeating prospects for re-election (Heller and Mershon 2009, 42). Party discipline creates a collective action problem where MPs are

forced to weigh the benefits of the party label with the costs of toeing the party line, compounded by the probability of discipline resulting from dissent. When the costs of the party label outweigh its benefits, the logic of switching becomes more compelling.

There are two levels of determinants that impact party switching: individual and institutional.

1) Individual-Level Determinants of Party Switching

1A) Career Incentives

While every legislative body is different, McElroy (2008) posits it is relatively uncontroversial to assume that all politicians prefer holding a higher office to a lower one, and prefer a lower office to no office at all. In practice, this means that a legislator will prefer being the leader of a party or serving on a high-profile, powerful committee than being a back-bencher or serving on a low-ranking one, respectively (McElroy 2008, 209).

European Union (EU)

The European Parliament (EP) is an interesting case for the study of career incentives. In contrast to a national legislature such as the House of Commons in Canada or House of Representatives in the U.S., electoral incentives to switch parties in the EP are not immediately obvious. “It is well documented that elections to the European Parliament are not run on the basis of European issues but are best understood as classic ‘second order elections’ ... the elections are essentially informal referendums on national government performance; the competition takes place between national political parties

rather than the political groups of the European Parliament” (McElroy 2008, 208). The electorate knows little of individual MEP voting patterns and European party labels have no significant meaning for most Europeans. In addition to the absence of electoral incentives, European political groups have no control over the nomination process of MEPs, a mechanism controlled by national parties. Thus, switching cannot be a way to improve ranking in the party-list, and most members who switch affiliation from one group to another do not switch their party allegiance at the national level (McElroy 2008, 205–8).

Why then do MEPs change parties? McElroy argues that career advancement is the key to understanding this behavior. She demonstrates through a statistical model that all else being equal, party-leaders, senior members, and members on key committees are less likely to defect than backbench MEPs or those on low-ranking committees. Indeed, committee assignments are crucial to this analysis, and are often used as patronage by party leaders to reward loyal MEPs. She finds that legislators are much more likely to defect to one of the two largest parties, and the odds of defection to a party represented in the Parliamentary Bureau (a powerful regulatory body responsible for the budget, as well as administrative and organizational matters) was much higher than for a party that was not represented (McElroy 2008, 219–22). In these circumstances, party switching can be used as a tool for advancing one’s political career.

United States

As in the EP, committee assignments act as a strong incentive for U.S. Members of Congress when deciding whether to defect. These assignments are controlled by the

respective party leadership on both sides of the House, and are used to reward loyalty and party tenure. “The textbook account of the committee system states that Members of Congress who are assigned to a committee for the first time (either as a first-year member or by transfer) begin their tenure at the back of the committee queue. As members leave the committee or Congress altogether, those below the departed member move up the committee ladder” (Yoshinaka 2005, 393). Party leaders can circumvent this seniority norm to reward certain Members of Congress, including party switchers. Yoshinaka (2005) shows that all else being equal, party switchers in the House are more likely than non-switchers to be rewarded with a committee assignment that violates the seniority norm. The practice of party switchers leapfrogging more senior members of their new party is an example of both the institutional incentives created by party leadership to encourage party switching, and the high transaction costs associated with switching. Despite such benefits of office, only 19 Members of Congress switched parties from 1975 – 2002 (Yoshinaka 2005, 395–6).

Brazil

“Pork,” or privileged access to state resources, can also be important in legislators’ career considerations (Desposato 2006). In Brazil, government resources can be diverted into projects that provide lucrative contracts and jobs to supporters, rewarding campaign workers and strengthening support networks for subsequent elections (Desposato 2006, 70). Legislators maximize access to government funds and resources by joining the governing coalition and being loyal to the party executive. Since “pork” is a rival good, however, Desposato theorizes that governing parties should attract

legislators only to a certain point (where there is too much competition for scarce resources), after which switching should be discouraged. According to this model, legislators in less developed regions should prioritize access to “pork” to increase their share of the vote, while those in more developed regions should prioritize access to policy (2006, 70–1). Desposato finds access to “pork” is a key variable in the calculus of party switching in Brazil (2006, 77).

1B) Ideological Incentives

The second individual-level determinant of party switching is ideological and policy-oriented. Scholars have always had a difficult time differentiating between roll-call votes cast by legislators for personal reasons and those cast for partisan reasons. “That is, are measures of cohesion high because parties enforce discipline, because legislators in parties all think alike, or for some other reason? High party cohesion scores alone do not prove the existence of party discipline on votes” (Desposato 2003, 3–4). Party switching has proved to be a unique window into this problem. If parties matter little and most votes cast are for personal reasons, legislators who switch parties should vote with their old party just as often as they did before switching. By contrast, if partisan reasons dominate the calculus of voting, legislators should vote less often with their old party.

Desposato (2003) finds a clear and obvious change in the behavior of legislators who have switched parties in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, a conclusion that lends support to the party influence hypothesis. In the 49th legislature, switchers voted with their original parties significantly less after a switch, and significantly more with their

new party (Desposato 2003, 9–10). This supports the conclusion that party membership matters in Brazil, and while it does not prove that these deputies switched for ideological reasons, the notion that party membership determines voting patterns confirms the presence of an ideological *incentive* to switch parties. That is, if deputies want to maximize the percentage of votes they cast according to their personal convictions, party membership is an important consideration.

Switching may also be a reaction to strong party discipline, and legislators who feel ideologically stifled by its constraints have much to gain from defecting (Heller and Mershon 2008). Heller and Mershon argue that legislators who care little about party discipline have little reason to change affiliations (2008, 910–11). “In the end, a legislator’s decision to switch is some function of her ideal policy, her party’s policy position, her party’s ability to influence outcomes, and her contribution to that influence” (Heller and Mershon 2008, 912). In their analysis of the Italian case, they observed that more disciplined parties saw more switching, and MPs whose ideals were furthest away from the party line were most likely to switch (Heller and Mershon 2008, 912). Note that the relationship between party discipline and party switching is expressed through an internal calculation of utility, which is in turn a function of more than simply the number of policies the deputy agrees with. In politics, legislators must often pick their battles; thus, they may toe the party line even if they disagree with their party’s position as long as the total utility gained by doing so exceeds the potential penalty for dissent (Heller and Mershon 2008, 913).

Partisan affiliation is significant even in legislatures where party discipline is low. As a consequence of the primary system of candidate selection in the United States, party

leaders cannot block candidate nominations. Thus, the leadership lacks an important tool for disciplining rank-and-file legislators. Furthermore, given that there are only two political parties in Congress, each must house a broader diversity of opinion under their legislative tents. Given this loose party discipline and relatively broad notions of partisan identity, one might expect Members of Congress to switch often and strategically in order to benefit from association with membership in whatever party enjoys more support at a particular time. However, only 38 Senators and 160 Members of Congress have switched parties in 163 years (Nokken 2009, 81). Using data from the 80th to 105th Congress, Nokken finds that Democratic legislators who switch to the Republican Party, and vice versa, start to vote like members of their new party (2000, 418).

2) Institutional-Level Determinants of Party Switching

2A) Relative Balance of Power

The balance of power in a legislature can add major significance to the defection of a member from one party to another.

Writing with respect to Japan, Kato and Yamamoto (2009) make a distinction between a Formal Majority (FM) and Decisive Majority (DM). An FM is a statistical majority which surpasses the usual winning threshold to form government, while a DM defines the winning threshold for a party coalition to control all policy decisions (2009, 234). In a majoritarian parliament such as the Canadian House of Commons, control of a floor majority equals control over government office and all government policy. In this case, the FM and DM are equivalent. By contrast, while an FM in Japan's House of Representatives is sufficient to control government office, a DM is required to ensure

control over all policy decisions. This is because of Japan's committee system in which committee seats and chairs are allocated proportionally based on parties' parliamentary seat share (Kato and Yamamoto 2009, 235). An FM in the House of Representatives does not ensure the safe passage of all bills through committee, even if they pass a floor vote. In the lower house which consists of 480 seats and 610 committee positions, 241 seats yields an FM, while 252 is required for a DM (Kato and Yamamoto 2009, 238).

This distinction is important; a deputy contemplating a switch to a party close to an FM finds himself in a different situation than switching to a party which controls an FM, but lacks a DM. "In the presence of rules that make policy control feasible only with a DM, switching takes on an added dynamic - switching to the second-largest party can both deny policy control to the largest party and give the second-largest party the institutional wherewithal to challenge the government" (Kato and Yamamoto 2009, 234). This idea was most significant in Japan from 1993-2005, a period for most of which the fate of the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was greatly influenced by party switching. The LDP failed to win an FM in four general elections in that period (1993, 1996, 2000, and 2003). As a result of inter-electoral party switching however, the party gained an FM three times (1997, 2001, and 2003) and a DM once (1999) (Kato and Yamamoto 2009, 239). It is not difficult to see how the threat of party switching could weigh heavily on the minds of political leaders in deciding their legislative strategies, the content of their policies, and the benefits of attracting new members from opposition ranks.

2B) Timing and the Parliamentary Cycle

While ambition theory posits that MPs make rational decisions in order to maximize their utility and accomplish their career goals, this view does not necessarily mean that objectives and goals are static. Indeed, the specific goals and incentives salient to the career of an MP depend a great deal on timing. “The different stages of the parliamentary cycle hold different mixes of incentives to MPs, make some incentives more prominent at some times than others, and thus highlight different motivations” (Mershon and Shvetsova 2009, 202).

Mershon and Shvetsova (2009) propose a five-stage model to describe the incentive structure faced by legislators as they move from one election to the next. *Affiliation* (Stage A) is the stage right after an election where legislators have the opportunity to either change or reaffirm their commitment to the party label they held during the election. The authors suggest that during this stage, legislators should be motivated most by the prospect of party perks, and therefore respond to the availability of goods tied to membership (2009, 203). *Benefits* (Stage B) is the stage at which these perks, such as seats on prestigious committees, committee chairpersonships, and other legislative posts, are actually given out. In parliamentary systems, executive portfolios, perhaps the most sought after perks of all, are allocated at this point. During this period, office-seeking goals and therefore office-seeking behavior are at the height of their power (2009, 203). *Policy Control* (or Stage C) describes the period where the legislative agenda focuses most heavily on policy issues. Instead of a single, continuous Stage C spanning the period between two elections, the authors suggest that there is instead a “non-continuous sequence of shorter phases of concentrated attention to the most

important policy domains” (2009, 203–4). *Elections* (Stage E) are a crucial point in the career of any legislator; as a precondition for the other stages, electoral motivations and pre-electoral positioning come to the forefront (2009, 204). Finally, the authors propose *Dormant* (Stage D) as a residual stage to describe all times that do not fall into the other four categories. The authors expect there to be very little switching during Stage D, as it would be more advantageous for MPs to do so at other times (2009, 204).

According to this incentive cycle, office-driven switching should predominate in Stages A and B, the most advantageous stages to claim high office. By contrast, policy/ideology-driven switching should predominate in Stage C, and vote-seeking switching should characterize Stage E (Mershon and Shvetsova 2009, 204). Using data from Italy (1996-2001) and Russia (1993-2005), Mershon and Shevtsova find basic support for the theory that MPs switch by stage (2009, 205–10).

This typology is a useful, albeit restricted, starting point. One of its principal limitations is that it assumes all MPs find themselves at the same stage of the parliamentary cycle as all other MPs. It is not difficult to imagine why an MP who knows his time in cabinet is limited would have a different set of incentives and goals than his heir apparent. During any stage of the cycle, an MP who knows they have a strong chance to join cabinet should find career considerations at the forefront. Furthermore, the savvy legislator always has electoral considerations at the back of his mind, such that it is difficult to predict by timing alone when a vote-driven switch may take place. Without more information, it is difficult to identify a single point in the parliamentary cycle where it is best to switch for electoral reasons.

2C) Electoral System

Electoral systems have important implications for party switching. McLaughlin (2011) examined a natural experiment in the local legislatures of South Africa after the legalization of “floor-crossing”. All local South African legislatures use a 50/50 mixed electoral system by which half of legislators are elected through a closed-list PR system, and half are elected to represent “wards” through single-member district plurality rules (SMDP). Prior to new legislation in 2002, party switching was illegal; afterwards, the government established two 15-day windows where switching would be permitted to take place. The result was a “scramble to defect” – a total of 1,025 switches took place across 300 similar legislatures in South Africa over the course of 30 days (McLaughlin 2011, 566–7). In his analysis, McLaughlin shows that PR legislators were more likely to switch than SMDP legislators, although not by a wide margin. This was consistent with Heller and Mershon’s prediction that electoral rules that encourage legislators to build personal support for re-election should discourage party switching, while those that depend on their stature in the party (and therefore are more subject to influence by party leadership looking to attract switchers) should encourage it (2005, 539). In contrast to these findings however, Heller and Mershon observed no similar relationship between party-list and SMDP legislators with party switching in the Italian Chamber of Deputies (2005, 556). In this case, the authors suggest that the observed result was an artifact of the differences between pure-type systems and their mixed-member progeny (2005, 556). These findings are supported by O’Brien and Shomer who also observed no such relationship in a cross-national analysis of party switching in 20 democratic regimes (2013, 112). To further complicate matters, Mershon (2008) found that while there is no difference between PR

and SMDP legislators in terms of party switching overall, SMDP deputies were much more likely to switch during the initial affiliation stage than PR deputies. When office benefits were being disbursed however, almost three times more PR deputies switched than SMDP deputies (Mershon 2008, 400).

While we have yet to fully understand the relationship between party switching and electoral systems, the electoral risks of party switching are generally more apparent. In an analysis of party switching in the U.S. Congress, Grose and Yoshinaka demonstrate that incumbent legislators who switch parties suffer in both general and primary elections, while both their “new” and “old” parties subsequently hold more competitive primary contests (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003, 57). Switchers experience a drop in vote margin during primary elections that dissipates over time. This impact of switching is more pronounced in general elections, where switchers’ vote shares are typically lower in all elections after their switch (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003, 69). This is related to the costs of party defection: “Party switchers may alienate past supporters, including general election voters, primary supporters, and partisan elites, and be unable to fully compensate with the support of new partisans” (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003, 57). Grose and Yoshinaka propose three principal mechanisms by which support is decreased and competition is increased: first, the switchers’ former compatriots may be more motivated by revenge, and thus more likely to enter the nomination race. Second, the switcher’s old party may view their chances of winning the district as fairly high, since they held it until the incumbent defected. Third, it is possible that some incumbents may switch preemptively if they predict a competitive primary in the long run, and make strategic decisions to avoid it (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003, 69).

Party Switching in Canada

Literature on the Canadian case is scarce. In a five-page review, Morton (2006) paints a broad picture of the Canadian landscape. He finds that “lists of ‘switchers’ include a disproportionate number of Quebec and Western MPs expressing their discontent with party labels they seldom controlled or which, in the case of the Progressives and, later, Reform, virtually legitimized an independent spirit” (2006, 6).

Docherty (2011) briefly continues the work done by Morton in a descriptive analysis of party switching. He finds that, “not surprising...party switching is most likely to occur when political parties themselves are undergoing periods of transition” (2011, 198). Docherty sought to dispel the popular notion that party switchers commit electoral suicide; “Despite conventional wisdom that floor crossing is not rewarded we find that 57% of floor crossers who run for re-election under their new party banner win their bid” (Docherty 2011, 200). While a valuable challenge to the conventional wisdom, the remaining 43% of switchers who run and lose remain markedly different from the 20% of all MPs who exit parliament involuntarily (Kerby and Blidook 2011, 628).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the literature on party switching with respect to its individual- and institutional-level determinants. Legislators and party leaders play their respective parts in this delicate balancing act. Both sides have much to gain from party switching; legislators, often seen by party leaders as mere pawns in the parliamentary game, are sometimes resigned to passive participation in the legislative process. A change in party loyalty can yield tremendous policy-making influence for a

backbencher, as well as more rapid progression through the parliamentary ranks. Party leaders too see the benefits of convincing their political rivals to defect, a move that all but guarantees a direct or indirect benefit to their party writ-large.

Understanding the incentive structures created by the “greasy pole” of political careers is useful to understanding why certain legislators behave the way they do. Access to policy-making resources, the benefits of high office, and electoral stability, however, are key variables in this calculus.

In the next chapter, I will explore the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis and discuss the model of party switching I propose to direct this research.

3. Theoretical Framework – “Policy, Office or Votes?”

The literature on political careers and party switching tells a story of the decisions made by ambitious legislators. These actors use party switching as a tool to advance their own interests, whether that may be advancing a certain policy agenda, attaining higher political office such as a seat at the cabinet table, or simply getting re-elected.

These decisions are based on ambition, an idea too often tied to the caricature of the corrupt and selfish politician who cares little for the general welfare. This portrayal misses the mark for two reasons. The first is that the modern democratic system is based on ambition. The basic premise of representative government holds that citizens elect representatives on their behalf, and these representatives serve them for fear of dismissal. As Schlesinger (1966, 2) writes, “A political system unable to kindle ambitions for office is as much in danger of breaking down as one unable to restrain ambitions...No more irresponsible government is imaginable than one of high-minded men unconcerned for their political futures.” The second is that regardless of whether ambition is a desirable feature of our political system, it is a reality of it. Ambition cannot simply be ignored or treated “as a human failing to be suppressed” (Schlesinger 1966, 2). Studying its role is important to any comprehensive analysis of political decision-making.

Schlesinger’s seminal work on Ambition Theory asserts that political ambition is at the heart of political decisions. Schlesinger acknowledges that legislators respond to their constituencies, but constituencies broadly defined; that is, not necessarily the voters in their riding. The legislator’s own strategy of advancement is based on these constituencies, and “our ambitious politician must act today in terms of the electorate of the office which he hopes to win tomorrow” (Schlesinger 1966, 6).

Müller and Strøm (1999) dig deeper into the particular nature of political ambition in their work on political parties in Western Europe. They argue that political parties, and especially party leaders, are motivated by three core desires: policy, office and votes. In doing so, they must consider the costs and benefits of each type of behavior in order to maximize their total expected payoffs.

The policy-seeking party seeks to maximize its influence on public policy according to its preferred policy ideal-type. “At the heart of the policy-seeking model lies a belief in the reality and significance of the contest over public policy decisions that characterizes democracy...Politicians trade in promises of public policy, and...the ultimate outcomes that flow from such policies matter to them” (Müller and Strøm 1999, 8). Policy may be sought after because its proponents genuinely believe in its value, or for more individualistic reasons such as gaining favor with party elites or a certain body of electors (Müller and Strøm 1999, 8).

The ideal office-seeking party places the benefits of political office above all else. These spoils can include governmental or sub-governmental appointments, including access to prestigious committee assignments and appointments to cabinet. “Office can have an intrinsic value, or it can have an instrumental, electoral, or policy value” (Müller and Strøm 1999, 6); it can be valuable in-and-of itself or as a tool for attaining greater electoral or policy success.

Vote-seeking is the final ideal-type of party behavior. Following this ideal-type, party leaders try to maximize the number of votes their party receives so as to strengthen its position *vis-à-vis* the other parties in a legislature. However, Müller and Strøm contend that votes are instrumental and are rarely ends-in-themselves. Few legislators

seek votes for “the pure thrill of winning” and as such, “Votes are not valuable in themselves; they are simply a means by which other objectives, such as policy or power, may be realized” (Müller and Strøm 1999, 11). In plurality systems, vote-seeking may be synonymous with seat-seeking, which reinforces access to both policy and potential cabinet appointments.

These forms of party behavior are ideal-types, and combinations of all three can motivate legislative decisions. Still, parties can rarely maximize all three goals at the same time; tradeoffs between different objectives are inevitable. Policy pursuit may lead to unpopular positions, which can have electoral costs that affect a party’s standing in a coalition. In other cases, playing to a specific block of voters may yield electoral dividends, but can later result in other policy sacrifices. Party leaders must choose the strategies they want to pursue based on their own valuations of the costs and benefits of each.

While Müller and Strøm’s framework had the decisions of political parties and their leaders in mind, it may be effectively extended to explain the behavior of individual legislators (Mershon and Shvetsova 2008; O’Brien and Shomer 2013; S. Martin 2014). MPs seek votes in the political arena for some combination of policy outcomes and office-related prestige. In these pursuits, partisan affiliation is not a foregone conclusion – rather, is a tool to be leveraged and applied selectively in the ultimate pursuit of other goals. “Not only do politicians choose to identify with a major party in the first place, they choose to maintain or alter that identification. Their choice, therefore, must be the consequence of the theory, rather than be assumed by it” (Aldrich and Bianco 1992, 103).

An MP may cross the floor because he no longer believes that his party is true to a certain policy position, or perhaps because his own policy ideal-point has changed. The former was the case for Brent Rathgeber, MP for Edmonton-St. Albert, whose public sector transparency bill was disassembled in committee by his party (Rathgeber 2013). In leaving the government caucus, Mr. Rathgeber wrote on his blog: “I no longer recognize much of the party that I joined and whose principles (at least on paper), I still believe in. Accordingly, since I can no longer stand with them, I must now stand alone” (Rathgeber 2013).

Other legislators may be convinced to switch parties through the promise of a cabinet position, a legislative perk that many MPs value above all else. For example, David Emerson, a highly partisan Liberal minister, accepted a position in the Conservative cabinet after his party lost the 2008 general election. In response to his critics, Mr. Emerson said the decision came down to a simple question for him: “If I’m going to be in politics for another couple of years anyway, how can I be most effective?” (Taber and Chase 2006).

Finally, an MP may abandon his party for fear of a rising electoral tide, or because he feels that a certain party has a better chance of paying electoral dividends. Angela Vautour’s decision to leave the New Democratic Party (NDP) for the Progressive Conservatives (PCs) fits this description well. Observers of Canadian politics might find this a strange transition given the ideological distance between the parties. Indeed, Ms. Vautour is the only sitting MP in Canadian history to move from the NDP to the Conservatives. Her stated rationale made clear that her transition was motivated by electoral incentives, a desire to join a party that she believed would eventually form

government (Fraser 1991, 1). “Certainly, some will describe my move as opportunistic... But what is important for me is that it will open channels to provincial decision makers and that it offers the opportunity to be part of a federal government in the future” (Fraser 1991, 1).²

Moves and Motivations – A Theoretical Model of Party Switching

Following Heller and Mershon (2009, 31), two assumptions inform the model of party switching proposed in this thesis: politicians are motivated by ambition, and in turn use party switching as a tool to maximize their access to some combination of policy-, office- and vote-related payoffs. Politicians seek to hold office because it gives them ability to achieve things they otherwise could not, and change their partisan affiliation through conscious decisions about how best to realize their individual goals. These can range anywhere from a desire to serve the public, a “drive for power, a vision of ‘good’ public policy, or a profitable career” (Heller and Mershon 2009, 33).

It is worth further expanding on Müller and Strøm’s framework as it relates to party switchers. I propose the following conceptual framework to assess the voluntary movement of legislators between parties, which can be seen in Table 1.

Policy Switches (1a, 1b, 1c)

MPs who switch parties for policy reasons do so because their own policy ideal-point no longer matches with their party’s. This may be because of a growing distance in

² As Müller and Strøm’s original framework notes (1999, 6, 8), each of these three motivations is linked to the other two. In the same way, a web of incentives motivates each switching event; however, a dominant motivation will usually be present.

Table 1: Directions and motivations of voluntary legislative party switching

Direction	Motivation		
	Policy (P)	Office (O)	Votes (V)
Opp. → Gov. (OG)	1a	2	3a
Gov. → Opp. (GO)	1b	N/A	3b
Opp. → Opp. (OO)	1c	N/A	3c

general policy direction; Hazen Argue left the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1962 after losing the party leadership contest to Tommy Douglas, claiming that the interests of farmers would crowd out those of labor. Argue switched between two opposition parties (1c) at the beginning of John Diefenbaker's term as Prime Minister, a move with no foreseeable electoral or office gain.

Policy switches may also be fueled by long-standing discontents that finally erupt, such as the formation of the Bloc Québécois (BQ) in 1990. The BQ was the ultimate consequence of a series of defections from both the governing Progressive Conservatives (1b) and Official Opposition Liberals (1c) after the failure of the Meech Lake Accord.

Finally, some MPs switch *into* the governing party because of policy reasons (1a); however, examples of this are scarce. In 2007, Liberal MP Wajid Khan served as a consultant to the Conservative Prime Minister on the Middle East and Afghanistan. After the Liberal leader told Khan to decide where his loyalties lay, Khan left the Liberal caucus to sit with the Conservatives.³

³ Even this, however, is a much more complicated story. After switching, Khan's old Liberal riding association was disbanded by Elections Canada because of financial irregularities and Khan was charged under the Elections Canada Act, though those charges were later resolved (Ottawa Citizen 2007; CanWest News Service 2008).

From a theoretical point of view, policy switches *out of* the government party (1b) or between opposition parties (1c) should be more likely than switches *into* the governing party (1a). In Canadian federal politics, private members have little influence on policy, whether or not they are in the governing party. Cabinet controls most of the policy-making agenda, and unless a switcher has reason to believe they would soon be appointed to cabinet (an office switch), there should be little difference which party they belong to from this perspective. By contrast, governing parties have more baggage to carry than opposition parties; in a Westminster parliament, governing parties (according to the direction of cabinet) are the only ones making substantive policy decisions. As a result, there is usually more to criticize in terms of policy direction and implementation. Opposition parties benefit from hindsight and reacting to policy decisions, while governments must often make the best of bad circumstance and choose among the lesser of several competing evils. As a result, it is usually easier to criticize government performance than opposition performance, and fewer MPs should want to switch into a governing party for policy reasons alone.

Of the three categories of voluntary party switching, the electorate should react most favorably to policy switches. Some voters cast their ballots with a party or party leader in mind; sending a local representative to Ottawa is a somewhat pleasant but mostly irrelevant byproduct of this decision. Others care a great deal about who their local MP is. Most probably vote for some combination of these two. When an MP switches parties, the first group of partisans who have just had their votes reversed, is likely to be most angry. The second and third groups are more likely to respond well to an MP who switches to better represent the interests of the riding. Thus, since these two

groups act as a buffer for the third group, I expect that MPs who seem to switch for the right reasons will be most likely to absorb the electoral shock of their move.

Office Switches (2)

This category of switching is the most straightforward to identify, and is characterized by sharp advancement in a legislator's political career after their switch.⁴ This type of switching is unidirectional – to enjoy the spoils of higher office (in Canada, this usually means a seat in Cabinet), one must be in the governing party.⁵ Thus, direct entry into cabinet is the strongest indication of an office switch, though this may also be for a combination of policy and/or votes.⁶

Examples of office switching abound; David Emerson and Belinda Stronach, who were previously spoken of, immediately joined cabinet upon defecting. Henri Courtemanche became Deputy Speaker of the House of Commons three months after changing affiliation, and “Cactus Jack” Horner became Minister Without Portfolio the day after switching to Pierre Trudeau's Liberals.

Office switches are unlikely to be well received by the electorate. An MP that switches to get into cabinet or receive some other office perk usually does so for self-centered reasons, and is less likely to successfully hide they are only in the political game for themselves. Despite this however, voters may also recognize the benefits of their local

⁴ A case could be made that an ambitious legislator would respond to *any* career advancement; however, few rungs exist in the Canadian parliamentary ladder, and the expected payoff of a move has to be significant enough to justify a potentially disastrous decision.

⁵ Since legislators respond to proximate incentives, it is less likely they would switch into a party that *could* become government than they would switch into a party that *already* forms government.

⁶ Conversely, office switches between opposition parties are not very likely since there is not much difference between a senior critic in one party and a junior critic in another (all opposition MPs are critics in some way).

MP sitting in cabinet, as it may result (or be perceived to result) in more favorable treatment of their riding. Thus, these switchers should have a more difficult time buffering the shock of their move than MPs who switch for policy reasons.

Vote Switches (3a, 3b, 3c)

In 2000, David Price and Diane St-Jacques switched from the PCs to the Governing Liberals (3a). Both MPs openly admitted that they were worried about re-election under the PC banner, and chose to roll the dice under new colors.

Vote-based switching was also popular in the nineteenth century and middle of the twentieth century, when MPs would switch partisan affiliation to signal their independence to the electorate. Joseph Pinard and William Major, for example, left the Liberal Party to become “Independent Liberals” in 1945 and 1953 respectively (3b) – a move that left them as Liberals for all parliamentary purposes. Nevertheless, it served as a sign of autonomy to the voters of their riding. These vote-based tilts in partisan affiliation went both ways – MPs drew closer to a party when it was popular in their riding, and distanced themselves when it was not. This type of “partisan tilt” is much less commonplace today.

Vote-based switching is less common between opposition parties, though not totally unheard of. Angela Vautour’s switch (described above) is a good example of this – Vautour switched between the NDP and the PCs, two opposition parties (3c). A case could be made that Vautour’s move was actually an example of an *office* switch between two opposition parties, since her stated rationale revealed the plain desire to be part of government. Following Schlesinger (1966) and Black (1972) however, this sort of move

is best classified as vote-based. Ambitious politicians must make decisions based on proximal incentives; Vautour must have first won re-election (which she failed to do) before securing a position in the new government or even in the new cabinet. If her move were motivated by office-related concerns, she would have switched after winning her seat again in the next election. In this case, it is more likely that Vautour reacted to electoral considerations when choosing partisan affiliation.

Explicit vote-based switching is the most likely of the three voluntary types to result in major electoral repercussions for a legislator. Vote-based switching is the most opportunistic course of action of the three; these MPs change parties not because of a policy issue, not to get into cabinet (which could at least be useful to their riding), but quite literally to save their jobs. In turn, voters are more likely to recognize and punish such overt opportunism, leaving vote-based switchers to take the brunt of the electoral backlash.

One can argue that vote-based switching is not opportunistic. After all, a legislative system based on ambition depends on MPs who keep their fingers on the pulse of their riding and make legislative decisions to best respect their constituents' wishes. If a certain party is more popular in a riding, an MP could feel that their constituents would be better represented if he were a member of that party. To this extent, they might argue, there is no difference between a policy switch and a vote switch.

There is a certain amount of truth to this claim. In both types of switching, legislators make career decisions that respond to their constituencies' perspectives. To this end, timing plays an important role in differentiating policy switching and vote switching. Since MPs react to proximal events, policy switches usually have triggers;

these may be specific policies, changes in party leadership, or some other acute instance of friction between an MP and their party. By contrast, vote switches do not usually have specific triggers; MPs respond to their own valuations of possible electoral success rather than specific instances of policy failure. Many vote-driven switchers may try to convince their constituencies that they switched for policy reasons; however, it is likely to be much more difficult to assert that their departure from a party was motivated by long-latent discontent if there was no tipping point to the decision. Attempts to do so often beg the question of why they did not make the decision sooner – in other words, “why now?”

The case of Eve Adams is revealing in this regard; “Adams, who said she had supported the Conservatives since she was 14, said she could no longer back the ‘mean-spirited leadership that divides people instead of bringing them together’” (Urback 2015). This reasoning does not make clear what pushed Adams over the edge, or why she remained a vigorous defender of controversial policies like income-splitting that she later cited as an example of Conservative folly. It is much more plausible that Adams’ move was informed by the Conservative Party’s decision less than two weeks earlier to disallow her prospects of nomination for the Conservative banner after a series of well-reported and controversial setbacks in two Conservative nomination races (Urback 2015; O’Malley 2015).

In the context of these two types of switching, the key difference then is the balance of probability and perception. The “Policy, Office or Votes” framework describes three ideal types of decisions, and MP’s motivations will almost always be mixed. With regard to electoral consequences however, it matters a great deal more how

a legislator's constituents *perceive* their MP's actions as opposed to the precise mix of incentives motivating them.

Independents and "Independent Intermediates"

Party switching is not only the business of partisans, and independent MPs have a role to play in this story. Especially in Canadian politics, MPs who leave a political party often do not join another one, or at least not right away. Instead, they may sit as independents. This designation has certain advantages, such as complete freedom from party discipline (since they belong to no party that can discipline them). However, it also has drawbacks; independents have much less access to committees, are allowed to ask fewer questions during Question Period, do not have access to the public goods that come with party membership (research staff, fundraising capacity outside of writ periods, etc.), and face many electoral disadvantages.

In the model described above, independents are treated as members of the opposition; there is little to gain by treating them as a separate category of MPs. Not only do they fall into this category according to parliamentary procedure (all MPs that do not belong to the governing party are opposition MPs), they fulfill the same role as all other opposition MPs in terms of holding the government to account. For example, when Arthur Cardin left Mackenzie King's cabinet over conscription in 1945, his move is treated as a policy switch from the government to the opposition (1b). As a result, he lost the benefits of the Liberal electoral label along with his cabinet position. Even though Cardin did not join another party, he became a member of the opposition. Independent MPs can also be important when deciding whether the government has the confidence of

the House. In 2005, the Liberal government survived a crucial budget vote because of Chuck Cadman, an independent MP. Both the governing Liberals and Official Opposition Conservatives lobbied Cadman, an indication of just how important his vote was (CBC News 2008). The same is true of MPs who switch to designations such as “Independent Liberal” or “Independent Conservative” – these MPs are still independents and are still members of the opposition (whether they want to be or not); they simply choose to signal their ideology in their partisan label.

But what to make of MPs that make a brief pit stop as independents? Should their switch be considered a brief move to the opposition? I argue that it should not. Partisan affiliation is not an *event*, but rather a *process*. MPs make a series of choices about their party label, and continue to reaffirm these choices throughout their careers. An MP may begin the process of partisan change by deciding she no longer wants to sit as a member of a political party, and simply leaves. This is most likely to happen for policy reasons; an MP no longer agrees with a party policy or is upset with a party event or decision. An MP has no reason to spend time in limbo if her move is motivated by the attainment of high office or promises of another electoral label.

From there, the legislator may remain an independent or look for a party to adopt them. The move from this “independent intermediate” to another party can be motivated by any of the three reasons that got them there in the first place; they can join another party because they believe in that party’s policy direction, because they were promised certain office perks, or because they wish to reap the benefits of that party’s electoral label. How this move should be classified overall depends on the case, and the overriding motivation that got them where they are in the end. As a general rule however, I suggest

that the motivation for leaving a party should be given more weight than the motivation for joining one. In a case where an MP spends a reasonable amount of time as an independent, it seems that the exit was so important to them that they did not care where they ended up.

In 2012, Bruce Hyer voted against the long gun registry and was disciplined by his party's whip, after which he left the NDP caucus to sit as an independent. This move seemed based primarily on policy considerations, but likely also on electoral considerations; Hyer believed in the merit of a certain policy, but also did not want to be punished by a constituency where the long gun registry was very unpopular. Hyer's subsequent move to the Green Party in 2013 was almost entirely vote-based; he reached a fairly public agreement with the Leader of that party which let him vote however he wanted, yet retain the electoral advantages that came with his new party label, such as ability to raise funds outside of a writ period (Delacourt 2013).

Even in a situation like this where motivations are mixed, I argue Hyer's "net" move should be classified as a policy move between opposition parties (1c). Hyer spent the better part of a year as an independent, which meant that he was far more concerned with leaving the NDP than joining the Greens.

In a Westminster system based on a Single Member Plurality (SMP) electoral system, I expect to find a greater number of party switchers taking advantage of an "independent" label than in a system with a greater degree of proportional representation. Such systems often produce more electorally competitive parties than SMP does, where Duverger's Law dictates the party system will converge on two main brokerage parties. Even where the rules permit MPs to sit as independents in these systems, MPs should be

less likely to avail themselves of this designation because they have a greater number of adoptive parties to choose from. As a result, they should be more likely to find a party that is closer to their policy ideal point than in an SMP system where the ideological distance between parties is often quite large.

Simplified Model

Following from this discussion, I propose a simplified model of party switching that is more specific to my research questions.

From 1945 to 2011, 125 MPs switched parties. Of these 125 legislators, 23 did not run in the next election (descriptive statistics on this are presented in the next chapter). Therefore, the population of switchers during this period contains 102 MPs. My sample size is large enough for statistical analysis, but only to a point; the N is too small to analyze both the motivation and direction of switch (the groups that the MPs would be split into are too small). A better indicator of how an MP performs in an election is not whether their party is in government or in opposition leading up to an election, but the popularity their party enjoys in percentage points. An MP will reap the benefits or suffer the consequences of their party's popularity, or lack thereof, whether or not that party is in government.

By contrast, I believe the reason for switching parties will be a very important determinant of electoral success. I expect that voters will respond better to MPs that act with the best interests of their constituents in mind, as opposed to those that betray them by switching in the interests of career advancement or electoral gain. I will speak more to this idea in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Ambition is the ultimate driver of political decisions in professional politics. These decisions are taken with policy outcomes, office benefits or electoral considerations in mind. In this regard, partisan affiliation is no different. Party switching is a tool that can be selectively leveraged to realize these ambitions; MPs can therefore switch parties for these same three reasons.

The first side of this equation, MPs' motivations and ambitions, is balanced by the second: the response of their constituents. Opportunism should breed anger, and MPs who switch parties in the pursuit of their own interests are likely to be punished accordingly. By contrast, MPs who switch parties to better represent their constituencies should perform better in subsequent elections than their more self-centered colleagues.

The expanded model discussed above has great promise for future research, especially in a comparative context. As the number of observations grows, so too does the inferential power of the dataset.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the data and methods that will be used in answering my research question. I will then operationalize the variables that are useful to this analysis. Finally, I will lay out a first glance of the party switching landscape in Canada before testing my hypothesis: that MPs who switch to best serve their constituents do better than those who switch to best serve themselves.

4. Data, Methods and Hypotheses

Apart from Grose and Yoshinaka (2003), there has been no systematic effort to track the electoral fortunes of party switchers. This is a major gap in the study of legislative careers; party switching is a natural experiment with far-reaching implications for the study of legislators, political parties and partisanship.

Tracking electoral outcomes among party switchers creates a window through which to gaze into the values of voters and the incentive structures of legislators. Put simply, do voters cast their ballots for the political party or the local candidate? This question is not only important for its own sake; it strikes at the root of the very logic that underpins our political system. Our system of representation is based on local governance and accountability; if the electorate votes primarily for a party rather than an individual legislator, is this system still meaningful or legitimate? Most parliamentarians submit completely to the will of the party leadership; if the electorate votes primarily for the local candidate, to what extent is this behavior and the institutions that support it compatible with democracy in the Canadian context?

Through party switching, we can control for the most important difference in this equation – the candidate. By tracking the same candidate under two different party labels, we can determine whether the candidate really matters, or whether the length of the party's coat tails is the most important factor. If switchers face little wrath from their constituents at the polls, we can conclude that voters choose between local representatives during elections. If legislators face considerable electoral consequences after switching parties, we can surmise that voters punish MPs for betraying their initial trust and confidence as party standard-bearers.

Data

Following Grose and Yoshinaka (2003), I set up a series of simple models of the electoral consequences of party switching in the Canadian House of Commons. The data I use are based on primary research, and my dataset contains information obtained from the Library of Parliament on the population of MPs, including party switchers, from 1945-2014. From there, I take a sample that contains all events after the Second World War in which an incumbent legislator changed party labels between elections.

I include only those switches in which the legislator ran under a different party label in two subsequent elections. Thus, this analysis omits cases where a legislator switched parties after an election and then switched back before a new election was held (such as the Democratic Representative Caucus of 2001 where a group of Canadian Alliance legislators briefly left the caucus after Stockwell Day became leader). It also ignores cases of party mergers and re-brandings – such as when the New Democratic Party (NDP) replaced the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1961, or the merger of the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties in 2003. This dataset also excludes the Social Credit dramas of the 1960s and early 1970s where the caucus split along linguistic lines, but remained one party for all other intents and purposes.

I look only at party labels held at election time. Thus, when Robert Toupin switched from PC to Independent to NDP to Independent between 1984-87, this is coded as a move from PC to Independent, since these are the two labels under which he ran for office. Likewise, if an MP moves through an “independent intermediate,” where they leave one party to sit briefly as an independent before joining another, the intermediate

step is excluded. So, when Lucien Bouchard moved from PC to Bloc Québécois after spending seven months as an independent, this is coded as a move from PC to BQ.

Finally, this analysis looks only at cases where MPs ran for re-election after switching parties. It excludes legislators who did not run and who have not yet had a chance to run after defecting (although descriptive statistics on this are provided – see Tables 3 and 4, Figure 1). As a result, it considers all switches that occurred between 1945-2014, but considers elections from 1940-2011.

Dependent Variables

This study measures electoral success in two different ways. In the first, the dependent variable is the percentage of the vote each switcher received in their riding. This serves as an indication of the overall level of support the legislator enjoyed. In the second, the dependent variable is the switcher's margin of victory compared to the next runner-up. In cases where MPs lost after switching, the margin describes the distance (in negative percentage points) between them and the winning candidate. This gives us an indication of the competitiveness of the election.

Independent Variables

This study also identifies party switches in several different ways. In the first, I use a simple binary variable called “switched” which is coded as 0 for “not switched” and 1 for “switched”. In the second, the “switched” independent variable is split into four more precise independent variables according to Müller and Strøm (1999) framework.

Using archival data, I coded each MP who crossed the floor from 1945-2014 according to their stated reason for switching parties and the reasons reported most often in the press. According to this framework, MPs either switched voluntarily for policy, office or votes, while some were thrown out of caucus (“booted”). I relied primarily on the Globe and Mail Historical Archive. I chose the Globe and Mail because it is the largest newspaper in Canada and is the only major paper to have an online database for the entire sampling period. For more recent switches, I also used additional online archives such as CBC News, National Post, Huffington Post and The Toronto Star to identify the specific nature of individual party switches.

I coded each switch according to four dummy variables: “policy”, “office”, “votes” and “booted”. If an MP switched for one of these four reasons, the corresponding variable is coded as 1, while the reference category of “non-switches” is coded as 0. Some MPs were more difficult to code than others, and seemed to switch for more than one reason simultaneously. In these “harder cases,” I coded the MP according to the most dominant motivation.

I operationalized “policy” switches as any event where an MP left caucus voluntarily on a point of principle, as a response to her party’s position on a certain policy issue, or because she identified a new party as being stronger on a certain issue than his old one. For example, Maurice Bourget left the Liberal Party in 1944 to protest the government’s conscription policy (Canadian Press 1944), while Lucien Bouchard resigned from the PC cabinet and caucus over the party’s position on the Meech Lake Accord (Freeman 1990b).

I operationalized “office” switches as any instance where an MP joined a government caucus and was appointed to cabinet within one year. Belinda Stronach’s high-profile defection from the Conservative Party to the governing Liberal Party saw her immediate promotion to Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, as well as Minister Responsible for Democratic Renewal (Howlett 2006). Likewise, Jack Horner took his seat at the cabinet table on April 21, 1977 – the day after he became a Liberal (Hawthorn 2004).

I operationalized “vote” switches as any event for which an MP made reference to electoral motivations or when there was strong indication that they left for fear of the results of an approaching election. For example, Gerard Girouard left the Social Credit Party to join the Progressive Conservatives because “the Social Credit Party [had] committed suicide by its internal disputes and hopeless division” (Westall 1964). Other MPs, like Raymond Rock, faced stiff nomination challenges and likely feared they could not get their party’s subsequent endorsement (Wills 1972). Still others switched between specific parties and titles such as “Independent Liberal” or “Liberal Labor,” a common electoral strategy of the early 1940s and 1950s.

While some MPs jumped ship, others were pushed. I therefore operationalized the “booted” variable as any instance where an MP actually lost a nomination battle, was ejected from caucus, or was forced to step down by the party leadership. For example, Jean Guy Carignan resigned from the Liberal Caucus after being sentenced to jail time for a hit-and-run accident (CBC News 2001), while David Kilgour and Alex Kindy were expelled from the Progressive Conservative caucus for voting against the establishment of the Goods and Services Tax (Freeman 1990a).

Finally, while the “Policy, Office, or Votes?” framework may explain switcher motivations in a more complete way, it is possible that voters may not recognize the nuances between these categories. Thus, the third way in which I identify switching is according to a variable “opportunist,” which combines office and vote switching. This binary variable is coded as 1 for opportunistic switches (office and vote switching), and 0 for non-opportunistic switches (policy switching). Both the “policy” variable and “booted” variable are also used in this analysis.

Since this methodology often relies on MPs’ stated reasons for leaving their caucus, certain unstated or hidden motivations may throw off the coding process. However, in *most* cases (and much to my surprise), the reasons MPs changed party affiliation are relatively straightforward. In conducting this research, the first group of switchers I coded were office-switchers, since their stories are the easiest to identify – these MPs switched parties and within a year found themselves in cabinet. It is possible that more MPs switched for office reasons only to have their new party renege on their previous offer; this is somewhat unlikely however, and would have a high chance of being leaked to the press if it did take place (which would mean it would be caught by the coding process).

The second group of switchers I coded were booted MPs, since their stories are also fairly straightforward – they were involuntarily removed from caucus, usually a loud and messy affair.

From there, all switchers that remained fit into either the policy or votes category. Meeting the timing criteria described in the previous chapter, a large percentage of policy switches were the direct result of major events in Canadian history and politics (such as

the Conscription Crisis of the Second World War and the resurgence of the Quebec independence movement in the early 1990s).

I found it most surprising that vote-driven behavior was rather apparent in the discourse used by many MPs at the time of their switch. This category is the most likely to produce a type II error, as electoral concerns were most likely part of the calculus of many switchers. However, in many such cases these considerations were trumped by other (policy- or office-related) factors.

Furthermore for the purpose of this analysis, the *actual* reasons an MP switched parties are less important than the *perceived* reasons they switched parties. When analyzing the electoral consequences of party switching, we must avail ourselves only of the information voters would have had at the time they made their decision. This is why newspaper archives are a particularly useful source of information for making distinctions between different kinds of party switching. While the actual decision to switch is likely the result of a complex web of interconnecting thoughts and ideas, MPs are forced to articulate their rationale for switching simply and succinctly to their constituents. The media, which often have more insight into the particularities of political life than ordinary citizens, too offer a useful perspective.

Control Variables

This analysis takes a number of variables into account when examining the relationship between the independent and dependent variables:

Incumbency

These variables controls for experience and rank in parliament – that is, how many years the MP spent in parliament and whether or not the MP is a cabinet minister, respectively. The “seniority” variable is continuous and is coded as the number of years the MP spends in office. The “cabinet” variable is binary and is coded as “1” for MPs who are parliamentary secretaries or cabinet ministers and “0” for MPs who are not.

These intervening variables come from the well-established literature on incumbency advantage (Irvine 1982; Krashinsky and Milne 1985; Krashinsky and Milne 1991; Happy 1992; Marland 1998). From a theoretical perspective, voters may be more likely to vote for a candidate that they are familiar with, or that has been the local representative for a long time. “An incumbent may...build an organization, gain prestige in parliament and work assiduously to deal with constituent grievances” (Irvine 1982, 760). Marland (1998, 33) writes:

With an eye towards re-election, incumbents maintain a range of constituency services although the types of services range widely, and the extent to which they are offered differs depending on the member. Specific services include addressing constituent correspondence, answering phone calls, scheduling constituent appointments, writing for community newspapers, maintaining constituency offices, attending ceremonial functions and constituency gatherings, dealing with constituents’ concerns (which often means directing them to the proper official), distributing congratulatory letters, and generally engaging in informal contacts with constituents.

Not only do these perks allow a candidate an opportunity to campaign unofficially during the time between writ periods (1998, 34), repeated exposure to a base of constituents can breed trust, comfort and familiarity.

Incumbents can also claim they are more qualified for the job they are running for and tend to face serious challengers less often than non-incumbents (1998, 34). By the

same logic, voters may also be more likely to cast a ballot for a cabinet minister since they are usually senior parliamentarians with a large amount of experience and political savvy. Cabinet ministers are also more powerful than backbench MPs, a notion that could leave voters with the perception that their Member could offer their riding more in the way of perks. A recent, high profile example involved Tony Clement, a cabinet minister who “operated a \$50-million government program that was sold to Parliament as an infrastructure fund to reduce border congestion but instead was used as a treasure chest to pretty up his riding with parks, walkways, gazebos, etc.” (L. Martin 2015).

Personal Characteristics: Gender and Age

Gender is an imperative consideration in any study of political elites because of the different ways in which male and female actors are treated on the political stage. This variable is especially important to consider given that this study relies heavily on media coverage in determining how a switcher’s constituents likely perceived their move. “[Gendered] news media coverage of women politicians can have negative effects on evaluations of female candidates and office holders and, by extension, women’s chances of winning and maintaining elected office” (Goodyear-Grant 2013, 7). This notion is most evident in the case of Belinda Stronach, who was accused of “whoring” or “prostituting” herself as she switched from the Conservative Party to the Liberal Party by several male MPs (Goodyear-Grant 2013, 59). The media was also instrumental in propagating a gendered view of her decision. “Stronach is not the first Canadian politician to change party affiliation; however, gender-specific story angles and sexual innuendos are not standard in coverage of male party switchers, such as Jean Lapierre,

Scott Brison, and Keith Martin” (Goodyear-Grant 2013, 58–9). Stronach was also criticized for her independence and ambition, both of which are “not qualities that tend to be critiques in male politicians” (Goodyear-Grant 2013, 91–2). Women switchers then, are treated differently in the court of public opinion from their male counterparts.

The potential effect of age is less obvious, but still worth considering. It is possible that all else being equal, older MPs, who are likely closer to the end of their careers than younger MPs, may be seen as less opportunistic and self-motivated because they have fewer career considerations. By contrast, younger MPs who may be trying to make a career out of elected office may have greater incentives to take risks and make self-interested career moves.

The variables for this category are “female” which is coded as “1” for female MPs and “0” for male MPs; “age” which is the age of the MP in years; and “age2” which is the age of the MP in years squared (to control for the possibility that the impact of age is not linear). Further, “switch_female” is an interaction term that isolates the effect of gender to switchers in particular.

Party Popularity

As established in the introduction to this thesis, political parties are important variables in Canadian politics. The overwhelming majority of successful MPs run under a party banner, and their party’s fortunes are important for their own electoral success. This support also varies a great deal by region – in some regions parties matter more in general than in others, and most parties are more popular in some regions than in other regions (Krashinsky and Milne 1985, 162).

To account for this effect, I control for the popularity of the MP's political party using the variable "partyprovshare," which is operationalized as the percentage of the popular vote a party received in the MP's province during the election in question. I also control for whether or not the MP ran as an independent, and thus had no party support to rely on at all. This variable, "independent," is binary, and is coded as "1" for MPs who ran as independents and "0" for those that did not. Further, "switch_indep," is an interaction term that isolates the effect of independence to switchers. Taken together, these variables can help us control for partisan swings that may positively or negatively impact the dependent variables.

A summary of these intervening variables and how they are operationalized is shown in Table 2.

Methodology

I applied a quantitative approach to analyzing the data described above. The dataset I use consists of the population of MPs from 1945-2014 in every election they ran in (N = 7,802). I use this data to construct a panel, and thus look at both cross-sectional (across individuals) and time-series (across time) dimensions. Three of these models use legislators' vote shares as the dependent variable, and three of these models use legislators' margins of victory as the dependent variable. This is done to make the analysis more robust and to see if there is a difference between electoral popularity (measured by vote share) and electoral competitiveness (measured by margin of victory).

Table 2: Description of Variables

Variable	Description	Operationalization
percent	Percentage of the vote the MP received in their riding.	Percentage of the vote the MP received in their riding.
margin	Margin of victory of the MP compared to their next closest competitor.	Distance in percentage points between the MP and their next closest competitor if they won, or the distance between them and the winner if they lost (in negative percentage points).
switched	Denotes whether an MP switched parties.	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who have switched and “0” for MPs who have not switched.
policy	Denotes whether an MP switched parties for a policy reason.	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who have switched for policy reasons and “0” for MPs who have not.
office	Denotes whether an MP switched parties for an office reason.	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who have switched for office reasons and “0” for MPs who have not.
votes	Denotes whether an MP switched parties for an electoral reason.	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who have switched for electoral reasons and “0” for MPs who have not.
booted	Denotes whether an MP was ejected from caucus or lost a nomination contest.	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who have been ejected from caucus/lost a nomination and “0” for MPs who have not.
opportunist	Denotes whether an MP switched parties for an opportunistic reason (office or votes)	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who have switched for opportunistic reasons (office or votes) and “0” for MPs who have not.
cabinet	Denotes whether an MP was a member of cabinet directly prior to election.	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who are parliamentary secretaries or cabinet ministers, and “0” for MPs who are not.
seniority	Indicates how long an MP has served prior to election.	The number of years the MP has served in parliament prior to the election in question.
independent	Denotes whether or not the MP is an independent at election time.	Binary variable coded as “1” for MPs who are independents and have no partisan label at election, and “0” for MPs who are running as an official party candidate.
switch_indep	Interaction term between “switched” and “independent”	“switched” multiplied by “independent”
partyprovshare	Popularity of the MP’s party in their province in percentage points.	Percentage of the popular vote an MP’s party received in their province in the election in question.
female	Gender of the MP.	Binary variable coded as “1” for female MPs and “0” for male MPs.
switch_female	Interaction term between “switched” and “female”	“switched” multiplied by “female”
age	Age of the MP.	The age of the MP in years.
age2	Age of the MP squared.	The age of the MP in years, squared.

Further, two models use the binary “switched” variable, two models deconstruct this variable by motivation (policy, office, votes, or booted – abbreviated here as POVB), and two use the “opportunist” variable in place of “office” and “votes”. The result is six models: by (1) vote share and switched, (2) margin of victory and switched, (3) vote share and POVB, (4) margin of victory and POVB, (5) vote share and opportunist, and (6) margin of victory and opportunist.

Both the Breusch and Pagan Lagrangian multiplier test for random effects vs. OLS, and the Hausman Test for fixed vs. random effects produced highly significant probability values ($p < 0.00$). The first test (Breusch-Pagan) indicates that the panel data are not well served by a “pooled” analysis (which combines the cross-sectional and time-series dimensions of the data and treats the panel as a simple OLS regression). The second test (Hausman) suggests that the panel is best represented with a fixed-effects, rather than a random-effects, model. Fixed-effects models compare individual results over time – for example, John Doe’s election results compared to all his other election results. In addition to this, the model is made more robust by analyzing the “Between” effects and First Differences. Between effects compare individual results to those of other individuals – for example, John Doe’s election results compared to Jane Smith’s election results at all time points. First Differences look only at the impact of a one-time period change in the independent variable on the dependent variable – in this case, the impact of switching in the election immediately after the switch (Katchova 2013).

Hypotheses

For the first set of models where switching is treated as a binary phenomenon (i.e. either an MP has switched or has not), the null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between party switching and electoral success. The alternative hypotheses are that switching parties results in lower vote shares and smaller vote margins.

H_{1-A}: MPs who switch parties will have lower vote shares in the election directly after their switch than in the election directly before it.

H_{1-B}: MPs who switch parties will have smaller vote margins in the election directly after their switch than in the election directly before it.

For the second set of models where switching is broken down according to the “Policy, Office or Votes” framework, it is possible that any of the three motivations could be responsible for most partisan changes. Each has a different implication on how we see party switching.

H_{2-A}: Policy benefits will explain the plurality of voluntary switching events.

H_{2-B}: Office benefits will explain the plurality of voluntary switching events.

H_{2-C}: Electoral benefits will explain the plurality of voluntary switching events.

While any of these hypotheses could prove correct, I anticipate that opportunistic switches (office-based and vote-based) dominate principled switching (policy-based) in quantity.

H_{3-A}: More MPs will switch for office-based and vote-based reasons combined than for policy-based reasons.

I expect to find a hierarchy of motivations as they relate to consequences at election time. In theory, voters should reward “noble” or “honorable” behavior, and punish “opportunistic” or “self-serving” behavior. My hypothesis is that policy-driven switches will be the best received by the electorate, as MPs change affiliation to best serve their constituents. I predict that office-driven switches will be more costly, since voters may see them as more self-centered and opportunistic. By this logic, vote-driven switches should be the most expensive voluntary maneuvers, as they are the most opportunistic course of behavior of the three (i.e. quite literally switching parties to save their job). Finally, I predict that being thrown out of caucus will result in the stiffest electoral consequences, both because this is a signal to voters that the MP has lost the confidence of the party, and because this sometimes happens as a result of scandal. Stated formally:

H_{4-A}: Policy-switchers will receive higher vote shares and have larger vote margins in the election following their switch, followed by office-switchers, vote-switchers, and booted MPs.

H_{4-B}: Policy-switchers will receive higher vote shares and have larger vote margins in the election following their switch than opportunistic MPs (those who switch for office- and vote-related reasons).

Descriptive Statistics

From 1945-2014, roughly 38% of switchers were defeated at the next election, 18% chose not to run again, and for 8% it is too early to tell. 36%, or close to one-third of MPs who switched parties were subsequently re-elected (Table 3).

From 1945-2014, roughly 40% of MPs switched parties for policy reasons, 10% switched for office reasons, 19% switched for vote reasons, and 31% were thrown out of

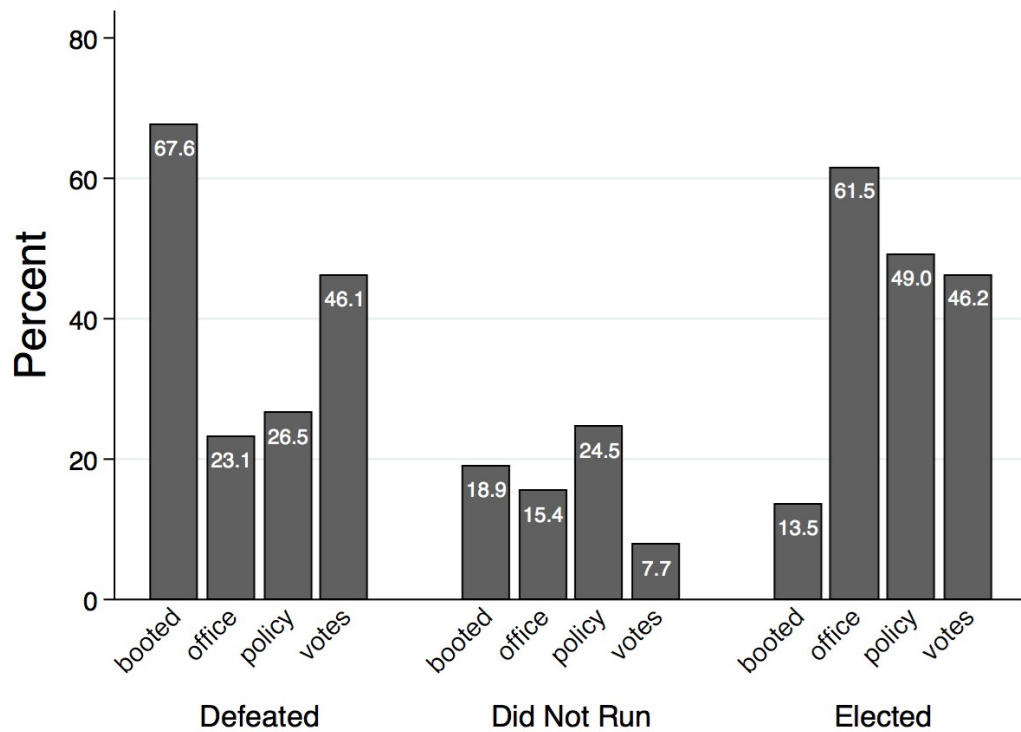
Table 3: MP Macro Electoral Consequences in the Election After Switching (1945-2014)

	Frequency	Percent
Defeated	51	37.5
Did Not Run	25	18.4
Elected	49	36.0
Too Early	11	8.1
Total	136	100.0

Table 4: Motivations for Switching Parties (1945-2014)

	Frequency	Percent
Policy	55	40.4
Office	13	9.6
Votes	26	19.1
Booted	42	30.9
Total	136	100.0

Figure 1: Electoral Outcomes After Switching by Type



caucus. Policy switching makes up the plurality of all switching events, and the majority of voluntary switching events. This provides evidence for accepting alternative hypotheses H_{2-A} and H_{3-A} .

From 1945-2011, roughly 49% of policy switchers, 62% of office switchers, and 46% of vote-switchers were re-elected. Only 14% of MPs that were booted were re-elected in the subsequent election. While it makes sense that policy-switchers were more successful than vote-switchers, who in turn fared better than booted MPs, the trend with regards to office-switchers is surprising – a greater proportion seem to survive the ensuing electoral storm than policy-switchers (Figure 1).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the data, methods and hypotheses that I will use when testing my research questions. I also presented descriptive statistics on party switching in Canada, and in so doing have answered my first research question: contrary to popular belief, most MPs do not switch parties for opportunistic reasons. The plurality of all switching events (voluntary and involuntary), and the majority of voluntary switches occur for policy-based reasons; MPs change partisan affiliations because they believe in a policy issue or because they want to better represent their constituents.

In the next chapter, I will dig deeper into my second research question by performing the quantitative analysis described in the last section and asking whether there is a relationship between party switching and electoral success. In particular, I will evaluate whether the reason a MP switches parties affects their subsequent electoral standing.

5. Results and Discussion

Using the coding methodology and quantitative techniques described in chapters three and four, I obtained the following results that inform a broader discussion about voter preferences and the nature of the personal vote.

The results of the panel analyses are shown in Tables 5-7. When switching is seen as a binary phenomenon (i.e. ignoring the reasons for switching), defecting to another party results in a 4.9% decrease in a switcher's average vote share compared to before they switched. This suggests that MPs take a permanent hit in vote share by switching parties (Table 5). This effect is mirrored in competitiveness, and the average margin of victory between switchers and non-switchers tightens by approximately 3.1% (Table 5). This provides evidence for alternative hypotheses H_{1-A} and H_{1-B} .

Party popularity in the province accounts for 87% of a MP's average popularity throughout their career, but only about 55% when compared to other MPs (Tables 5-7). This indicates there is a strong correlation between MP popularity and party popularity, but that it alone does not explain the differences between different MPs' vote shares.

The effects of incumbency are marked, and MPs gain one-third of a percent in vote share for every year they are in office in relation to other MPs (Tables 5-7). In the long run of a MP's career however, the effects of seniority seem to level out and do not have a statistically significant impact in terms of raw vote share, though senior MPs tend to face less competitive elections (i.e. they have higher margins of victory) both compared to other MPs and for every year they stay in office (Tables 5-7). This makes sense; long-time incumbents may be less likely to face serious challengers.

Table 5: Estimators for Panel Data Models by Switched

	Vote Share			Margin of Victory		
	(1) Between	(2) Within or Fixed Effects	(3) First Differenc es	(4) Between	(5) Within or Fixed Effects	(6) First Differenc es
switched	-3.98 (3.17)	-4.89*** (0.95)	-1.72 (2.04)	-3.69 (4.58)	-3.12* (1.51)	-2.57 (2.35)
seniority	0.34*** (0.05)	0.07 (0.31)	-0.10*** (0.03)	0.62*** (0.07)	1.05* (0.49)	-0.22*** (0.04)
independent	23.17*** (1.77)	20.36*** (1.11)	4.41 (2.57)	21.08*** (2.56)	34.03*** (1.78)	9.99*** (2.42)
switch_indep	-20.75*** (4.89)	1.42 (1.79)	-11.93** (4.61)	2.87 (7.07)	5.73* (2.87)	-4.45 (4.46)
partyprovshare	0.55*** (0.02)	0.87*** (0.01)	0.36*** (0.01)	0.63*** (0.02)	1.03*** (0.02)	0.38*** (0.01)
cabinet	7.34*** (0.88)	0.34 (0.33)	-1.63*** (0.45)	9.07*** (1.28)	0.76 (0.53)	-3.29*** (0.68)
female	-0.44 (0.52)		0.33 (0.50)	2.08** (0.75)		0.90 (0.70)
switch_female	-4.60 (7.12)	-11.85*** (2.38)	-5.69 (4.22)	-11.66 (10.28)	-10.22** (3.80)	-2.63 (4.14)
age	-0.02 (0.13)	0.74* (0.32)	-0.04 (0.12)	-0.15 (0.19)	0.29 (0.52)	-0.02 (0.18)
age2	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	22.20*** (3.20)	-3.84 (13.85)	-13.10*** (3.00)	-11.43* (4.62)	-17.17 (22.15)	-12.32** (4.51)
Observations	7790	7790	5401	7790	7790	5401
r2_w	0.43	0.64		0.29	0.46	
r2_b	0.40	0.34		0.29	0.17	
r2_o	0.41	0.43		0.30	0.25	
rho		0.70			0.71	

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6: Estimators for Panel Data Models by Motivation

	Vote Share			Margin of Victory		
	(1) Between	(2) Within or Fixed Effects	(3) First Differenc es	(4) Between	(5) Within or Fixed Effects	(6) First Differenc es
policy	3.47 (4.56)	-1.25 (1.28)	0.70 (2.65)	4.02 (6.60)	-2.15 (2.06)	-3.02 (3.00)
office	-0.82 (6.82)	-8.17*** (2.06)	-3.96 (4.80)	-5.19 (9.88)	-5.43 (3.32)	-3.57 (5.41)
votes	-10.43* (4.82)	-5.44*** (1.55)	-1.55 (3.89)	-10.76 (6.98)	-1.23 (2.49)	-0.13 (4.12)
booted	-18.82** (6.54)	-20.81*** (2.13)	-17.24** (5.40)	-5.72 (9.47)	-13.52*** (3.42)	-10.40* (5.16)
seniority	0.33*** (0.05)	0.02 (0.30)	-0.10*** (0.03)	0.62*** (0.07)	1.01* (0.49)	-0.22*** (0.04)
independent	22.67*** (1.77)	21.11*** (1.11)	4.35 (2.57)	20.99*** (2.57)	34.66*** (1.79)	9.97*** (2.42)
switch_indep	-13.88* (6.13)	8.96*** (2.05)	-3.75 (5.46)	1.88 (8.88)	10.76** (3.31)	-0.00 (4.90)
partyprovshare	0.55*** (0.02)	0.87*** (0.01)	0.35*** (0.01)	0.63*** (0.02)	1.03*** (0.02)	0.38*** (0.01)
cabinet	7.24*** (0.88)	0.36 (0.33)	-1.63*** (0.45)	9.05*** (1.28)	0.77 (0.53)	-3.30*** (0.68)
female	-0.45 (0.52)		0.33 (0.50)	2.07** (0.75)		0.90 (0.70)
switch_female	-1.46 (7.21)	-9.22*** (2.38)	-3.13 (4.19)	-9.30 (10.44)	-8.77* (3.83)	-1.68 (4.25)
age	-0.02 (0.13)	0.80* (0.32)	-0.03 (0.12)	-0.15 (0.19)	0.33 (0.52)	-0.01 (0.18)
age2	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	22.31*** (3.19)	-6.43 (13.75)	-13.21*** (2.98)	-11.25* (4.63)	-19.07 (22.15)	-12.51** (4.52)
Observations	7790	7790	5401	7790	7790	5401
r2_w	0.44	0.64		0.29	0.47	
r2_b	0.40	0.35		0.30	0.17	
r2_o	0.41	0.44		0.30	0.25	
rho		0.70			0.71	

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 7: Estimators for Panel Data Models by Opportunist

	Vote Share			Margin of Victory		
	(1) Between	(2) Within or Fixed Effects	(3) First Differenc es	(4) Between	(5) Within or Fixed Effects	(6) First Differenc es
policy	3.79 (4.55)	-1.33 (1.28)	0.62 (2.66)	4.21 (6.58)	-2.28 (2.06)	-3.14 (3.00)
opportunist	-7.32 (4.04)	-6.41*** (1.25)	-2.41 (3.07)	-8.95 (5.85)	-2.72 (2.02)	-1.36 (3.34)
booted	-18.32** (6.53)	-21.06*** (2.11)	-17.44** (5.40)	-5.43 (9.45)	-13.90*** (3.40)	-10.70* (5.15)
seniority	0.33*** (0.05)	0.03 (0.30)	-0.10*** (0.03)	0.61*** (0.07)	1.03* (0.49)	-0.22*** (0.04)
independent	22.70*** (1.77)	21.08*** (1.11)	4.35 (2.57)	21.01*** (2.57)	34.62*** (1.79)	9.97*** (2.42)
switch_indep	-14.79* (6.09)	9.24*** (2.04)	-3.51 (5.46)	1.36 (8.81)	11.19*** (3.28)	0.33 (4.87)
partyprovshare	0.55*** (0.02)	0.87*** (0.01)	0.35*** (0.01)	0.63*** (0.02)	1.03*** (0.02)	0.38*** (0.01)
cabinet	7.29*** (0.88)	0.35 (0.33)	-1.64*** (0.45)	9.07*** (1.28)	0.75 (0.53)	-3.31*** (0.68)
female	-0.46 (0.52)		0.33 (0.50)	2.07** (0.75)		0.90 (0.70)
switch_female	-0.78 (7.19)	-9.18*** (2.38)	-3.14 (4.19)	-8.90 (10.41)	-8.70* (3.83)	-1.68 (4.20)
age	-0.02 (0.13)	0.79* (0.32)	-0.03 (0.12)	-0.15 (0.19)	0.31 (0.51)	-0.01 (0.18)
age2	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Constant	22.36*** (3.19)	-5.93 (13.74)	-13.21*** (2.98)	-11.22* (4.62)	-18.30 (22.14)	-12.51** (4.52)
Observations	7790	7790	5401	7790	7790	5401
r2_w	0.44	0.64		0.29	0.47	
r2_b	0.40	0.35		0.30	0.17	
r2_o	0.41	0.44		0.30	0.25	
rho		0.70			0.71	

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The results for the panels in which switching is broken down according to the POVB framework are shown in Table 6. As expected, MPs who switch parties for office-related and vote-related reasons have lower vote shares than MPs who switch for policy reasons (no statistically significant change). MPs who switch for votes do better than those who switch for office when compared to their own previous records, but much worse when compared to other MPs. This suggests that either vote-based switchers may be perceived as less opportunistic (since they may switch because their old party is unpopular) or that they are better electoral tacticians than those who switch to climb a few rungs higher on the greasy pole. These MPs still do not escape the wrath of their constituents, however. Booted MPs suffer the harshest electoral consequences, losing 20.1% in vote share and 13.5% in vote margin. Competitiveness seems to be unaffected, and no statistically significant drops in vote margin took place (except for booted MPs). This provides evidence for accepting a modified version of hypothesis H_{4-A}: MPs who switch for policy reasons do the best of the four categories, though it is not immediately clear which form of switching (office- or vote-based) is perceived as more opportunistic than the other.

The effects of switching as broken down according to policy vs. opportunism are shown in Table 7. While policy switching carries no statistically significant drop in vote share or vote margin, an opportunistic switch (the aggregate of office- and vote-switching) results a 6.4% drop compared to the MP's previous electoral results.⁷ This

⁷ While the initial lack of findings when looking at margin of victory are disappointing, it is important to remember that analysis contains the *population* of MPs from 1945-2011, and not just a sample. Thus, while I have erred on the side of caution to maintain statistical robustness, it is important to acknowledge that the substantive effects of party switching *are* reflected in the margin of victory.

provides further evidence for accepting alternative hypothesis H_{4-B}: opportunistic switchers do worse in subsequent elections than non-opportunistic switchers.

Gender seems to have little impact on the electoral fortunes of most MPs, and female MPs do not fare differently than their male colleagues in terms of vote share (Tables 5-7). In fact, all three models of competitiveness indicate that female MPs seem to have higher margins of victory than male MPs by approximately 2.1%. This situation stands in stark contrast to the relationship between gender and party switching. Depending on the model, female switchers have vote shares of 9.2% to 11.9% lower than their male counterparts, providing support for the notion that party switching is a gendered phenomenon. Female switchers also face more competitive elections, having margins of victory of 8.7% to 10.2% lower than their male colleagues.

MPs seem to have higher vote shares as they get older, but paradoxically do no better than younger MPs. This suggests that some other factor may be behind this phenomenon – perhaps a degree of colinearity with level of experience (an MP has to get older to gain more experience in parliament).

The results concerning independents are markedly different than expected; in every panel model, independent MPs do much better than partisan MPs. Since this dataset contains the population of everyone who held office between 1945-2011 and not all those who ran for it, this might suggest that while independents have a more difficult time getting into office, once they get there they do very well. Thus, there may be an element of self-selection in this category – MPs that make it as independents are probably very popular on their own merits, and are unlikely run in subsequent elections if they consider the odds of winning to be low. This idea is supported by the results for

independent party switchers – in all three models, independent switchers face a marked drop in vote share compared to their partisan colleagues. These results provide support to the obvious – while parties are not the be-all and end-all of Canadian politics, they are certainly not irrelevant.

An interesting trend seems to emerge in relation to cabinet status. Cabinet ministers appear to perform between 7.2% and 7.3% better than other MPs with respect to their vote shares (Tables 5-7). However, this long-run trend starts with a short-run loss of vote share of 1.6% (Tables 5-7) in the election immediately after appointment, which suggests that cabinet ministers actually do worse before doing better. This effect is mirrored in vote margins; cabinet ministers' elections become less competitive (i.e. cabinet ministers have higher vote margins) by 9.1% (Tables 5- 7) in the long run compared to other races, but become more competitive in the election directly after appointment by about 3.3% (Tables 5-6). This may be because of the initial shock in workload that follows a cabinet appointment; in the short run, newly-appointed cabinet ministers may be so overwhelmed with their workload that they have less time to spend in their ridings or campaign leading up to a writ being dropped. In the long run, cabinet ministers seem to find their footing and reap the benefits of their ministerial designation.

The above results support the hypothesis that the way in which an MP changes party affiliation matters when it comes to electoral performance. There is a clear hierarchy of party switches at the ballot box, and MPs who switch on principle suffer the least at the polls. There may be several mechanisms at work here, all of which support the theory that party switching does not necessarily threaten the link between representatives and their constituents. The first is that many MPs may switch because they feel that

changing party affiliations is the best way to serve their constituents. They feel that their party's position on a certain policy issue, or that their party's ethical conduct, does not serve their constituencies well. Voters, in turn, recognize that the MP is trying to act in their best interests, and most do not seek retribution at the ballot box. However, the reverse may also be true here – MPs may switch because they know their constituents are disappointed with their party's position, and change party affiliation in order to be responsive to them. In both cases, policy switches do not compromise the link between government and the governed, and in fact seek to strengthen it.

The same cannot be said for more opportunistic switching – that is, changes in party affiliation for office- or vote-related reasons. It appears voters are not fooled by this sort of behavior, and recognize it as naked ambition and political maneuvering. This is not to say that office- and vote- switching never pays off – we have seen, in fact, that 62% and 46% of office and vote switchers are re-elected, respectively. However, this suggests that other factors may be at play, and that the micro-circumstances surrounding a switch may be important, especially as they vary by constituency. One such mechanism concerns the type of legislator that might be motivated to switch parties for opportunistic reasons. In making their decisions, these MPs weigh the costs and benefits of switching – the benefits are obvious to the outside world, but valuations of the costs are often not. Such legislators may feel that their chances of re-election are quite high regardless of their behavior – in effect, that they have an electoral cushion to fall back on after taking an initial hit. Vote-related switchers are also theoretically more likely to fear the consequences of the next election (hence their decision to switch for electoral reasons in the first place). It could be that these MPs are already on their way to suffering the wrath

of their constituents, and that switching is a way to mitigate this. If this is the case, there may also be some self-selection within this group.

The electoral fates of MPs who were pushed out of caucus are also telling, and these MPs by far do the worst out of the legislators in the sample. MPs in this group are much more likely to change partisan affiliations as a result of scandal or wrongdoing than MPs who change voluntarily. Several of these MPs were thrown out of caucus because of criminal charges, while others could not secure re-nomination under their party's banner. For some of the legislators that were booted (in this sample, for reasons such as sexual assault convictions, unemployment insurance fraud, corruption charges, drunk driving convictions and hit-and-runs), scandal may have been a confounding variable: voters may have been thinking less about the MP's partisan affiliation and more about criminal wrongdoing. However, most such MPs did not run again in the next election, and less than one-fourth (23%) who qualified for entry into our regression (i.e. ran again in the next election) resigned or were ejected due to scandal. In fact, most (77%) of the MPs in the "booted" category who subsequently lost in the next election were thrown out of caucus for speaking out against the party leadership, breaking ranks on a whipped vote, or losing a nomination battle. These results suggest that even though voters do not treat all party switches equally, they are also not indifferent to partisan brands and a certain amount of party-based voting is still taking place.

6. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the electoral implications of party switching in the Canadian House of Commons. I set out to test two research questions: first, *why do Members of Parliament in Canada switch parties*, and second, *what are the electoral consequences of party switching?*

The results of my empirical analysis which involved estimating a series of cross sectional time series models of electoral success conditional on party switching indicate that there is a strong relationship between the reasons MPs switch parties and their subsequent electoral fates. Based on these results I conclude not only that most MPs switch parties for non-opportunistic reasons, but also that voters can tell the difference. As a result, the electorate punishes MPs who switch parties to further their own careers while sparing those who set out to serve their constituencies.

In order to reach these conclusions I progressed through a multistage process. In Chapter 2, I began with a review of the literature that exists in a field that is still in its infant stages. Much of this work draws on Schlesinger's ambition theory, which describes the politician as an office-seeker – a rational agent who makes decisions today according to the office goals he sees for tomorrow (Schlesinger 1966, 6). This body of work relies heavily on game theory, depicting party switching as a game of legislative moves and countermoves in which partisan affiliation is an ongoing process as opposed to a single, acute event. Switching parties can come at a cost to legislators in the form of electoral security and standing in their new party (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003; Yoshinaka 2005), and the benefits of switching must outweigh the costs for this move to take place. These benefits are often provided by the party leadership, who offer more perks and resources

to potential switchers as their value, be it personal celebrity status or whether they can tip the balance of power to their new party's favor, goes up (Desposato 2006, 64). In this calculus, party discipline is crucial; while parties have strong incentives to enforce discipline among their membership, an over-reliance on the party whip can have devastating consequences.

In Chapter 3, I outlined a theoretical framework based on the work of Müller and Strøm (1999), who dig deeper into Schlesinger's notions of ambition to isolate three principal macro motivations used by parties and party leaders to inform their decision making processes. These three motivations are ideal types, and party leaders must sometimes sacrifice in one area to gain in another. Policy-seeking behavior tries to maximize access to specific policy outcomes; office-seeking behavior strives to maximize access to powerful political positions; and vote-seeking behavior pursues future votes as an instrumental tool for the first two. These forms of behavior describe the motivations of individual politicians as effectively as they describe the decisions of parties seeking to form coalitions. Policy-based switches typically happen between opposition parties or from governing parties to the opposition, though every so often an opposition MP will make a principled jump to the government. Office-based switching is unidirectional, and always happens as an opposition MP joins the government's ranks. Vote-based switching, perhaps the most opportunistic type, can happen in any direction, and differs empirically from policy switching based on timing and perception. Some MPs spend a brief time as independents on their way to the ranks of another party, and some stay as independents indefinitely. Finally, while some MPs jump ship, others are pushed and forced to leave their parties against their will.

In Chapter 4, I described the methods by which this primary research was conducted. I described how each type of switch was coded – whether as policy, office, votes, or booted. I described the two dependent variables of interest – vote share as an indicator of overall electoral success, and vote margin as an indicator of the competitiveness of an electoral contest. I described the control variables I used – seniority, or the length of time an MP spends in the House before an election; cabinet status, or the MP’s rank in parliament; independent status; age; gender; and finally party popularity, defined as the party’s vote share in the MP’s province. I described my principal hypotheses – that MPs will suffer electoral consequences after switching parties, that certain motivations may explain more switches than others, and that the reasons for a switch will determine how an MP subsequently does at election time. I described the quantitative methods I used to evaluate these hypotheses – in particular, by organizing the dataset as a panel and employing a cross sectional time series analysis. Finally, through descriptive statistics I demonstrated that principled switches (that is, those based on policy) accounted for the plurality of all switching events and more than office-based and vote-based switching combined – which countered of my initial hypothesis that opportunistic switching would predominate.

In Chapter 5, I discussed my primary results. While switching resulted in an electoral cost to the legislator at the subsequent election, this effect deserves a more nuanced look. In particular, MPs that switched for policy-based reasons did better than MPs that switched for office-based and vote-based reasons. By contrast, MPs that were thrown out of caucus suffered the grimmest electoral fates. These effects were marked by both measures of electoral success – overall success as determined by vote share, and (to

a lesser extent) electoral competitiveness as determined by vote margin. I discussed the highly gendered nature of switching – female party switchers did much worse at the polls than their male counterparts. Cabinet status, another control variable, resulted in a short-term loss followed by a long-term gain. Party popularity was also strongly correlated with MP electoral returns, though party popularity alone did not explain legislator success.

I hope that other researchers take notice of party switching as the powerful analytical tool and valuable window into voter preferences that it is. Party switching is a growing and evolving academic field, and there are ample directions for future research. As sampling techniques become more precise and polling becomes more sophisticated, voter preferences can be measured in new and more interesting ways. I hope that future studies can use this research as the groundwork for comparative studies of party switching as they relate to voter preferences. The international situation is interesting, but the politics of Canada's provinces also have much un-reaped potential.

Having covered most of the heavy lifting in previous chapters, I return to three ideas I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis: party switching and the relationship between MPs and political parties, the apparent paradox of party switching as electoral suicide, and party switching as a window to the nature of the ballot.

Docherty's claim, that the strength of party discipline in Canada may lend thoughts to some that they live in a "benign dictatorship" where governments can get away with almost anything when they are not immediately standing for re-election (2004, 165), is worth stating again here. The confidence convention can be so rigid in Canada that it turns some observers off politics altogether, proof that their voice counts for little the vast majority of the time. This logic is as self-reinforcing as it is lethal; the more

citizens shed their duty to be informed and engaged, the easier it will be for governments to do as they please.

Backbench MPs, especially those that belong to opposition parties, lament the limited role individual Members play in parliament as trustees of the public good. Some of these very MPs may later find themselves in cabinet, part of the same vicious cycle that they once bemoaned. Successive governments are trapped between the benefits of political expediency and avoiding the public-relations damage caused by MPs straying from the party line, and the benefits of staying true to the principle of responsible government that props up our system of government in the first place. True responsible government is impossible when backbench MPs shed the burden of holding the government to account.

This vicious cycle has another dimension: the less backbench MPs stand up to their party leadership, the more their party can assert that they lack the legitimacy to do so at all. The less MPs speak their minds, the more they reinforce their roles as partisan seat-holders to the public.

I hope that this thesis can serve as evidence that it is not too late. Some MPs are trapped by the logic that if they cannot get elected, they cannot affect meaningful change. They make concessions, lest they be thrown out of office in a few years' time. I hope that this thesis has helped, in however small a way, to dispel this notion. Despite the conventional wisdom of a cynical few, voters in Canada are indeed paying attention to the politics of their country. Voters recognize opportunism as easily as they recognize an MP who tries to stand up for the interests of their constituents. Citizens vote with parties in mind, to be sure, but they also vote for individuals. Voters respect legislators who

stand up for what they believe in, who defy the conventional wisdom that the only people who matter in a party are its leaders.

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