Is It Better to Join the Majority? The Electoral Effects of Party Switching by Incumbent Southern State Legislators, 1972 to 2000[1]

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What are the electoral effects of a change in partisan affiliation for legislators? To answer this question, 6357 state legislative elections from 1972 to 2000 in five southern states are examined. By comparing this subset of party-switching southern legislators to their non-switching colleagues, I am able to examine (1) whether partisan affiliation and changes in party labels affect electoral outcomes over the short- and long-term; and (2) whether switching parties into the majority party in the legislature affects electoral outcomes. The findings are that incumbent legislators who switch parties do worse in general elections following their switch, especially in elections immediately following their switch. However, once these legislators have switched parties, if their party takes control of the legislature, they do no worse than their non-switching colleagues. Interestingly, other results demonstrate that southern legislators who have switched from Democrat to Republican in the 1990s have done worse following their switches, suggesting that partisan realignment among voters has not been realized completely at the state legislative level.

What are the short-term and long-term electoral consequences for incumbent legislators who switch political parties? Are positive electoral consequences following a party switch contingent upon legislators joining the majority party of the legislative chamber? These questions are analyzed by examining legislators who have defected from their political parties in state legislatures in the U.S. South. The U.S. South, in the last twenty years or so, has gone from solidly Democratic to generally competitive at the two-party level (Berard 2001; Black and Black 2002; Carey, Ransom, and Woodard 2002; Hood, Kidd, and Morris 1999, 2004; Knuckey 2001; Lamis 1999; Leal, Hess, and Ali 2003; Lublin 2004; Lublin and Voss 2000; McGlennon 2003; McKee 2003; Nadeau et al. 2004; Shafer and Johnston 2001; Stanley 1988; Vogel and Ardoin 2003). Specifically, scholars point to elites switching party affiliation as a sign of realignment in the region (Clark et al. 1991; Glaser 2001; Prysby 1998). Perhaps the last vestiges of Democratic power in the South are at the state legislative level, as only some state houses have transitioned to Republican legislative majorities more common in congressional and presidential elections in the region (Jewett 2001). And more broadly, what effect does party have on elections in the region? Does party label matter to electoral outcomes of those who have switched parties?

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The primary findings of this research are as follows. First, in southern state legislative elections involving party switchers from 1972 to 2000, legislators fare worse in general elections following their party switches when compared to elections before their switches and when compared to incumbent non-switchers. This finding is robust across a number of different measures and supports previous work examining congressional party switchers (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003): they are likely to have lower vote shares, more likely to face general election opposition, and more likely to lose. Even those legislators who joined the Republican Party in the 1990s did worse in elections following party switches, suggesting that voter realignment may not yet be realized in these state legislative districts. Second, this negative effect of party switching on general election outcomes is strongest in elections immediately following a legislator's party defection. Third, negative electoral outcomes after a party switch are generally avoided when the legislator has defected to the *majority party*.

This paper is organized as follows. First, the theory that frames this empirical study is presented. Second, I consider past empirical work on party switching in legislatures. Third, I present two hypotheses related to the effect of party-switching on electoral outcomes for legislators who have switched parties. Fourth, I present the data and methods used to test these hypotheses on general election outcomes of party switchers in southern state legislatures. Fifth, I present the empirical model, focusing particularly on the measures of party switching used in the analysis. Sixth, I explain the results, detailing the relative importance of the two hypothesized factors. Finally, I explore the implications of the results and explain how these results shed light on the theories presented earlier and also on our broader understanding of parties in elections and southern politics.

Theory: Party Switching and Electoral Consequences

The study of party switching in legislatures has become a burgeoning field. While not a common occurrence, party switching provides a natural experiment and useful variation over time to test various theories related to party affiliation. The effect of party in determining roll-call voting outcomes in legislatures has been tested by examining voting records before and after legislators have switched parties (Glaser 2001; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2001; Nokken 2000; Oppenheimer 2000; Nokken and Poole 2001). Most find that party does have an effect on the roll-call voting of party switchers. Others have empirically examined the likelihood that legislators will switch parties (Castle and Fett 2000; Desposato 2003; Heller and Mershon 2004; King and Benjamin 1986; Yoshinaka 2005), finding that electoral factors, ideological positions of legislators, and institutional perquisites predict whether legislators will switch parties.

Other works, of most importance to this article, consider the interplay of party switching and elections. Aldrich (1995) and Aldrich and Bianco (1992) model the decision for a candidate or legislator to affiliate with a particular party as being driven by the electoral costs and benefits associated with a given party affiliation. They conclude that legislators choose to affiliate with the party that maximizes their ability to achieve election. Thus, this article does not directly test the Aldrich and Bianco (1992) model, as their model considers whether a candidate or legislator will affiliate with a party or not. I do not empirically examine the decision to switch parties, but instead look at the electoral consequences following the decision to switch. However, the empirical results from this analysis shed some light on the Aldrich and Bianco model of party choice for legislators. The Aldrich and Bianco model suggests that legislators should do better at the ballot box following a party switch. According to their theory, a legislator is unlikely to switch if the probable result is a more difficult election battle following the switch.

Grose and Yoshinaka (2003) offer an alternative account to Aldrich and Bianco, examining all congressional incumbents who switched parties from 1947 to 2000, finding that incumbent members of Congress who switch parties face substantial electoral costs. They claim that the effect of a change in party affiliation is likely to negatively affect election results for a variety of reasons, but perhaps most importantly because the trust relationship between legislators and constituents (and especially a legislator's strongest partisan supporters) has been violated. In this paper, a similar analysis is conducted, but with two key advances: (1) by looking at a larger sample of legislators at the state level; and (2) by introducing an additional independent variable to capture possible electoral benefits from switching parties in order to join the majority party in a legislature. In the Grose and Yoshinaka (2003) analysis of congressional party switchers, only 129 elections involving 25 legislative party switchers were examined. In this paper, 6357 elections are examined involving incumbents from ten legislative chambers (with 82 party switching legislators) Thus, a broader test of the electoral consequences of party switching by legislators is examined with a larger subset of legislators detailed below. I examine the general election electoral effects resulting from a party switch, but also consider whether this effect will be different if a legislator switches into the majority party in the legislature (either immediately or eventually over time).

Theory: Legislators, Competing Goals, and Electoral Costs and Benefits

Contemporary political scientists have presumed that reelection is the key motivator of legislators (Mayhew 1974). However, Fenno (1973) has claimed that legislators are motivated by reelection, institutional

advancement, and good public policy. Of course, of Fenno's three goals, the latter two can be achieved only if the first goal of reelection is continually achieved. Thus, most have assumed that reelection is the predominant incentive of legislators. But what happens in the electoral realm when the goals of institutional advancement or good public policy conflict with the goal of reelection?

With legislators, there may be a trade-off between institutional advancement and electoral payoffs. If a legislator makes a decision that can possibly lead to institutional advancement within the legislature (e.g., switching parties to join the majority), the short-term electoral consequences may be negative. However, over the long run, a legislator's decision to pursue institutional goals may pay off electorally. This is what I expect with incumbent legislators who decide to switch parties, and thus examining the electoral consequences of party switching provides a nice empirical test of the electoral effects of legislators' competing goals.

A party-switching legislator and the legislator's voters have information asymmetries in terms of the likelihood of partisan change in the legislature as a whole and other effects of the decision to switch parties. Thus, if a party switch places a legislator into the majority party or will eventually place the legislator in the majority party given partisan trends, then institutional benefits may result (McElroy 2003; Yoshinaka 2002, 2005). Voters, though, may be unhappy in the short run with a legislator who switches parties (Canon 1992), as the trust that had been established between the legislator and voters has been greatly diminished (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003). These voters also have little information regarding the effect of a party switch on institutional benefits in the legislature and how these institutional benefits could eventually result in positive outcomes for the constituency (e.g., greater access to pork projects, funding for the district, other policy outcomes). However, the party-switching legislator may have more knowledge than voters about institutional benefits that can be gained by switching parties as well as long-term partisan trends in the legislature that will make it more or less likely that the legislator's new party will control the legislature. Thus, an incumbent party switcher risks taking an electoral hit by switching parties into the minority party, but may be able to avoid negative electoral consequences if the switch either immediately or eventually results in membership in the majority party.

To motivate this theory, consider the case of Mississippi state senator Joseph Stogner. In 1995, he switched from the Democratic to Republican Party. As Stogner himself indicated, a switch from the Democratic to the Republican Party in the Mississippi state legislature was rife with electoral dangers: "I'm sure I lost a lot of votes doing that. A lot of people will tell you they won't vote for a Republican, but they'll agree with you on 90

percent of the issues."[2] Even as voters in his district regularly vote Republican at the federal level, many voters still remain tied to the Democratic Party at lower levels. Thus, even as the state of Mississippi was realigning, Stogner faced a calculation pitting his short-term electoral consequences against longer-term institutional-electoral goals if the legislature continued to trend Republican.

Before the 1995 legislative election, the Democrats in the Mississippi senate enjoyed a 22-person majority in their legislative body. Thus, Stogner's decision to switch to the Republican side right before the 1995 election would mean he would have less institutional clout, given his move to the minority party. In the short run, as he indicated, this decision to switch parties may result in a loss of support at the ballot box, both for electoral reasons and institutional reasons. However the 22-seat Democratic senate majority belies other obvious trends that were favoring Republicans in the state that could lead to positive electoral payoffs for Stogner and other Democratic defectors. By the 1990s, Mississippi voters overwhelmingly supported Republican candidates at the presidential and U.S. Senate levels. Often, voters supported Republican gubernatorial candidates as well. Thus, if the senate continued to follow these trends toward a GOP majority, Stogner's decision to leave the Democratic Party may pay off for him, even though he faced electoral costs in the short-run while serving as a Republican in the minority party.[3] These electoral consequences are likely to be demonstrated with other representatives as well.

Hypotheses

There are two primary hypotheses tested regarding the role of parties in electoral outcomes. First, following Grose and Yoshinaka (2003), I hypothesize that legislators who switch parties will face reductions in vote share and will be less likely to win reelection after a party switch. Specifically, this negative impact will be most likely in the short term: in elections held soon after the party defection, legislators will fare worse in general elections, all else equal. Even when a legislator switches to a party that is more congruent with the preferences of constituents, the loss of trust that is likely to develop between constituents is substantial. Additionally, a party switch is likely to make constituents from the old party feel betrayed and constituents from the new party skeptical of the legislator's partisan bona fides.

Second, electoral costs from switching parties are likely to be much lower for legislators who switch to join the party that controls the legislative chamber in which the legislator serves. That is, when a legislator switches in order to join the majority party, voters are less likely to punish legislators for this decision than a legislator who switches to join a minority party. This

reward for incumbents who switch to join the majority party is likely to occur as being in the majority party will allow the legislator to have access to perquisites that can lead to a higher vote share on election day. If this hypothesis is demonstrated, then the implication is that legislators who switch parties to gain institutional benefits will either gain electoral benefits or, at a minimum, not face negative electoral consequences.

Data and Methods

The data examined are individual southern state legislative elections from 1972 to 2000 for incumbents who have switched parties and incumbents who have not switched parties. Both legislative chambers in five states are examined: Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina. This dataset is unique and is one of the largest accounting of party switching by legislators in the South. The task of identifying incumbent state legislators who switched parties was arduous. First, elections involving every incumbent candidate who ran for state legislative office during this period are examined and those who switched parties were identified from this larger list of legislators (using data from Carey, Niemi, and Powell 2000). Of the 6357 incumbent legislative elections examined, 301 elections involved legislators who switched parties. In total, 82 incumbent state legislators switched parties during this time period in the five southern states examined. Table 1 lists the number of switchers in each state.

In this analysis, a party switcher is defined as follows: (1) only those who actually served in office are considered; thus candidates who run for office under different party labels but who did not hold office when switching are not in the sample; (2) only those legislators who switched while

Table 1. Incumbent State Legislative Party Switchers in Five Southern States, 1972-2000

State	Number of switchers and elections involving switchers	
Alabama	18 switchers	(n=66 elections)
Arkansas	3 switchers	(n=9 elections)
Mississippi	25 switchers	(n=74 elections)
North Carolina	10 switchers	(n=37 elections)
South Carolina	26 switchers	(n=115 elections)
Total	82 switchers	(n=301 elections)

These include only state legislators who switched from one major party to the other major party while they were incumbents (Republican to Democrat or Democrat to Republican).

running for the same office are examined: if a house member switches parties and then runs for the state senate, s/he is not included in the sample; and (3) only legislators who switch from one major party to the other are examined. Elections involving both incumbents who switch parties and incumbents who do not switch parties are examined.

Why look at southern legislators? The South is examined, as over this time period realignment occurred as the region shifted from Democratically dominant to strongly two-party and many southern legislators have recently jumped to the Republican Party (Glaser 2001). Southern state legislators thus provide a useful laboratory to test the competing theories of the electoral effects of party switching (both into the majority and the minority parties). As has been well-documented, the South has become increasingly Republican (Black and Black 2002), though state legislatures have been the last vestiges of Democratic strength in some states (Jewett 2001). Two of the five states examined have had Republican majorities in at least one chamber. Thus, the test of the second hypothesis can be examined by comparing those legislators who switch to the Republican party when the legislature is still controlled by Democrats to those legislators who switch to the Republican party in a Republican-controlled legislature or in anticipation of a Republican-controlled legislature (and vice versa).

It is important to note, though, that not all legislators switched parties to join the Republicans during this period. In fact, many of the legislators in the sample actually joined the Democratic Party. As would be expected, most of this legislative party switching in the direction of the Democratic Party occurred during the 1970s, when the legislatures were dominated by Democrats. Thus, these Democratic defectors' elections also allow for a test of the hypotheses. Most defections to the Republican Party occurred in the 1990s. Interestingly, though, party defections to both parties occurred throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

The unit of analysis, as suggested above, is each *election* in which an incumbent legislator (both party switchers and non-switchers) runs for office. Thus, the sample of elections is very large (n = 6357 general elections). Fifteen total statistical models are estimated. Nine models examine the effect of party switching on the general election vote shares of incumbent switchers, three additional models examine the likelihood an incumbent faces general election opposition, and three other models examine the likelihood that an incumbent legislator wins the general election.[4] There are three different measures of party switching utilized, and these measures are included in separate equations as the variables are highly correlated with one another. In addition to these three variables, three other variables measuring the interactive effect of party switching and majority control of the legislature are also considered, one in each of the statistical models. These variables and models are explained in greater detail below.

Since all three sets of statistical models utilize data of individual legislators over time, I estimate the models controlling for fixed effects (I also control for heteroscedasticity using robust standard errors). Thus, effects specific to each individual state and year are considered in addition to the explanatory variables by including dummy variables for states and years.[5] The first set of models are estimated with OLS, while the second and third sets of models are estimated with logit.

Specifying the Empirical Models

Dependent variable. As mentioned above, I measure the broader conceptual dependent variable—electoral effects—three different ways: by examining the general election vote share of incumbent legislators, whether an incumbent draws general election opposition, and the likelihood that an incumbent legislator wins. The dependent variable for the vote share models is specifically measured as the proportion of the two-party vote received in the general election between the switcher and the next highest candidate of the opposite major party.[6] The highest possible value is "1" and the lowest possible value (theoretically) is "0."

The dependent variable for the three models examining the likelihood of opposition for incumbents in general elections is measured as follows: a dummy variable of "1" indicating that the incumbent legislator was unopposed and a "0" indicating opposition from a major party general election challenger. The dependent variable for the three models examining the likelihood of an incumbent winning reelection is also measured as an indicator variable. A "1" indicates the incumbent legislator won reelection, while a "0" indicates the opposite.

Party switching variables. There are three independent variables to capture the effect of party switching on elections and all are from Grose and Yoshinaka (2003). The first measure, called *switch1*, is dichotomous and simply designates all elections before a legislator switched parties as "0" and all elections after a legislator switched parties as "1." All elections involving nonswitchers also receive a "0." The point of this variable is to test the impact of the legislator's new party label equally over time.

The second measure, called *switch2*, is also dichotomous, but codes the post-switch elections differently than switch1. The switch2 variable designates all pre-switch elections with a "0," and designates only the election held immediately after the switch as a "1." All elections held after the first post-switch election for switchers and all elections for nonswitchers are also coded "0." This variable measures the one-time effect of switching parties. By coding just the first post-switch election as "1," we can understand the immediate impact of changing party labels on electoral outcomes. Presumably, the effect of this variable will be larger than the switch1 variable, as

the hypothesized effect of party switching on electoral outcomes should not be as great over all post-switch elections.

The final measure of party switching, *switch3*, is more nuanced as it captures the expected dissipating long-term effect of switching. For switching legislators, all pre-switch elections are coded "0," while all post-switch elections are coded as follows: the first post-switch election is coded "1," as the election held closest to the legislator's switch is expected to have the greatest impact. The remaining post-switch elections are calculated as follows: "1" divided by the number of years since the first post-switch election. For example, if a person switches parties in 1996, the election for 1996 (the first post-switch election) is coded "1." An election with the same legislator held in 1998 is coded "1/2" or "0.5" as two years have passed since the initial post-switch election. Thus, an election with the same legislator held in 2000 is coded "1/4" or "0.25." This is because the hypothesized impact of switching parties is expected to get smaller the longer a legislator remains in office following the initial party defection. Again, for all elections with legislators who do not switch parties, this variable is coded "0."

Variables measuring party control of the legislature and party switching. The other three variables of interest measure the interaction of party switching and majority party control of the legislature. As hypothesized earlier, the negative effect of switching parties is likely to be muted (or may in fact be positive) if the switch places the legislator into the majority party of the legislature. The first majority party control/party switching variable is the interaction of switch1 and a variable indicating whether the legislator's party has a legislative majority at the time the election is held (switch1 x "1" if switcher is in the majority party; switch1 x "-1" if switcher is in the minority party; and "0" for all pre-switch elections). All elections involving nonswitchers are coded "0" for this variable.

The second majority party control/party switching variable is the interaction of switch2 and the same variable indicating whether the legislator's party is the party with a legislative majority during the time of the election (switch2 x "1" if switcher is placed in majority party; switch2 x "-1" if in minority party; and "0" for all pre-switch elections for party switchers and all elections for nonswitchers). The third majority party control/party switching variable is coded similarly. The interaction of the switch3 variable (capturing the dissipating effect of switching over time on elections) and a variable indicating whether the legislator's party is the majority party (switch3 x "1" if in majority party; switch3 x "-1" if in minority party; and "0" for switchers' pre-switch elections and all elections involving nonswitchers). The interactive effect measured by these three variables tests the broader theory of majority party electoral effects when examining southern state legislative switchers. These three variables are estimated in separate equations due to multicollinearity.

Other independent variables. Scholars of state legislative elections have identified numerous variables that affect the general election vote of legislators. These variables are specified and explained briefly in the appendix. The independent variables used differ slightly across the three sets of models.

Results: Electoral Effects of Legislative Party Switching

In Table 2, the results of three models examining the impact of party switching on vote shares are shown. Generally, as hypothesized, the effect of a new party label on the general election vote of incumbent legislators is negative. On two of three measures of party switching, the general election vote share was significantly smaller for elections held following a party switch than before a party switch or than elections involving non-switchers. Also, as hypothesized, unlike the general switching variable, the effect of switching into the majority party does not lead to vote shares any lower than vote shares in other elections in all three models. Thus, while switching into the majority party does not lead to higher vote shares, it does not have a negative electoral impact.

The results from the second and third models in Table 2 are also similar, and demonstrate that the electoral consequences of party switching are greatest in elections soon after a legislator's party switch. In model 2, the model estimated with the switch2 and switch2/majority party variables, is shown in Table 2. In just the election following a switch, legislators are likely to receive about three percent less of the general election vote than in other elections of non-switching incumbents. However, if a switcher runs in the first post-switch election with the party label of the majority legislative party, then there is not a significant drop in the percentage of the vote share relative to other incumbents' elections. Clearly, the hypothesis regarding negative electoral consequences, all else equal, is demonstrated. The hypothesis regarding majority party control and party switching is also demonstrated, indicating that switching into the majority party shields legislators from negative electoral effects. In the final column of Table 2, the results from the third model are presented. In this model, the general election vote share was regressed with switch3 (the measure of switching over time) as an independent variable and the switch3 x majority party control variable. Here, like the other models, there is a significant negative effect of running as a party switcher (also about three percent), though there is no negative effect to a switcher running in the majority party.

These findings are robust to other measures of electoral consequences. In Table 3, the effect of party switching on the likelihood that an incumbent will be unopposed in a general election is examined. For all three models in Table 3, the effect of party switching is clearly negative and significant:

Table 2. The Effect of Party Switching on the General Election Vote of Incumbent Southern State Legislators, 1972-2000[†]

Dependent variable: Two-party general election vote share (proportion 0 to 1)			
Independent Variables	β (s.e.) for Model 1 (w/switch1 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 2 (w/switch2 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 3 (w/switch3 variables)
Party switch	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.030 (0.013)*	-0.026 (0.012)*
Switch into majority	-0.006 (0.009)	-0.002 (0.013)	-0.001 (0.012)
Legis. professionalism	-0.0001 (0.0005)	-0.0002 (0.0005)	-0.0002 (0.0005)
MMD vs. SMD	0.011 (0.003)**	0.011 (0.003)**	0.011 (0.003)**
Opposing incumbent	0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.004)
Party competitiveness	-0.0000 (0.0001)	-0.0000 (0.0001)	-0.0000 (0.0001)
Unopposed	0.393 (0.002)**	0.392 (0.002)**	0.393 (0.002)**
Upper chamber	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)
Constant	0.613 (0.009)**	0.613 (0.009)**	0.613 (0.009)**
N (# elections)	6357	6357	6357
R^2	0.90	0.90	0.90

[†]Model 1 is estimated with the switch1 variable (indicating the average effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch1 variable. Model 2 is estimated with the switch2 variable (indicating the one-time effect of the party switch) and the majority party x switch2 variable. Model 3 is estimated with the switch3 variable (indicating the discounting effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch3 variable. Each linear model was estimated using fixed effects controlling for effects that may be related only to each individual state and year (indicator variables for states and years are not shown; variables for Alabama and for 1972 were not included; see text for details). All models are estimated with robust standard errors.
**$p \leq 0.01$; *$p \leq 0.05$

legislators are much more likely to face general election opposition once they have switched parties. Especially in elections right after a party switch, a state legislator is much more likely to face opposition than legislators who have not switched parties (or legislators who have yet to switch parties). Also in all three models, majority party switchers are no more likely to face opposition than other non-switching incumbent legislators.

In Table 4, the results are strikingly similar, except the models examine the impact of party switching on the likelihood that an incumbent legislator will win or lose reelection. In all three measures of party switching, the electoral consequences are again negative as elections involving post-switch elections with incumbent legislators are more likely to result in a loss for the incumbent than other elections. And again, the effect of joining the majority party is not significant, suggesting that negative electoral consequences do not follow joining the majority.

These general results over the entire time period from 1972 to 2000 clearly support both hypotheses—the first hypothesis in particular. However,

Table 3. The Effect of Party Switching on the Likelihood of Being Unopposed, Incumbent Southern State Legislators, 1972-2000[†]

Dependent variable: 1 if unopposed by major party candidate in general election; 0 otherwise			
Independent Variables	β (s.e.) for Model 1 (w/switch1 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 2 (w/switch2 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 3 (w/switch3 variables)
Party switch	-0.509 (0.202)*	-0.851 (0.255)**	-0.765 (0.252)**
Switch into majority	0.129 (0.202)	0.284 (0.255)	0.364 (0.251)
Legis. professionalism	0.006 (0.018)	0.006 (0.018)	0.006 (0.018)
MMD vs. SMD	0.347 (0.090)**	0.354 (0.090)**	0.353 (0.090)**
Opposing incumbent	-0.353 (0.121)**	-0.351 (0.121)**	-0.351 (0.121)**
Party competitiveness	-0.024 (0.005)**	-0.024 (0.004)**	-0.024 (0.005)**
Upper chamber	-0.186 (0.067)**	-0.181 (0.067)**	-0.183 (0.067)**
Constant	1.892 (0.265)*	1.902 (0.340)**	1.896 (0.339)**
N (# elections)	6357	6357	6357
Pseudo-R^2	0.13	0.13	0.13

[†]Model 1 is estimated with the switch1 variable (indicating the average effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch1 variable. Model 2 is estimated with the switch2 variable (indicating the one-time effect of the party switch) and the majority party x switch2 variable. Model 3 is estimated with the switch3 variable (indicating the discounting effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch3 variable. Each model was estimated with logit controlling for fixed effects that may be related only to each individual state and year (indicator variables for states and years are not shown; variables for Alabama and for 1972 were not included; see text for details). All models are estimated with robust standard errors.
**$p \leq 0.01$; *$p \leq 0.05$

Table 4. The Effect of Party Switching on the Likelihood of Winning, Incumbent Southern State Legislators, 1972-2000[†]

Dependent variable: 1 if incumbent won reelection; 0 if incumbent lost			
Independent Variables	β (s.e.) for Model 1 (w/switch1 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 2 (w/switch2 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 3 (w/switch3 variables)
Party switch	-0.693 (0.384)*	-1.062 (0.414)**	-1.096 (0.412)**
Switch into majority	-0.293 (0.377)	-0.271 (0.412)	-0.361 (0.407)
Legis. professionalism	0.039 (0.043)	0.038 (0.043)	0.039 (0.043)
MMD vs. SMD	0.274 (0.199)	0.290 (0.199)	0.288 (0.199)
Opposing incumbent	0.161 (0.247)	0.165 (0.247)	0.163 (0.247)
Party competitiveness	0.007 (0.010)	0.007 (0.010)	0.007 (0.010)
Unopposed	6.404 (0.995)**	6.400 (0.995)**	6.402 (0.995)**
Upper chamber	-0.066 (0.141)	-0.065 (0.140)	-0.068 (0.140)
Constant	0.885 (0.736)	0.858 (0.735)	0.853 (0.735)
N (# elections)	6357	6357	6357
Pseudo-R^2	0.30	0.30	0.30

[†]See notes on Table 3. **$p \leq 0.01$; *$p \leq 0.05$

to gauge the extent of southern voter realignment on switchers' electoral outcomes in the most recent decade under study, we should examine only elections involving switchers (and non-switchers) in the 1990s to see if there is a differential effect between the party that the legislator joined. Critics of the hypotheses would allege that if realignment has affected these districts, those who switch to join the Republican Party in the 1990s are likely to receive positive electoral benefits, while those who switch to join the Democratic Party in the 1990s will not. On the other hand, if the theory presented at the beginning of the article is correct, then both Republicans and Democrats will do worse once they have switched parties (though we should still expect to see a neutral or positive effect associated with joining the majority party).

In Table 5, three statistical models are estimated on incumbents' vote shares, but only on elections involving incumbent legislators who did not switch parties and legislators who switched from the Democratic to the Republican Party in the 1990s. Here, interestingly, those who became

Table 5. The Effect of Party Switching on the General Election Vote for Incumbent Southern State Legislators (Switched from Democrat to Republican, 1990-2000)[†]

Dependent variable: Two-party general election vote share (proportion 0 to 1)			
Independent Variables	β (s.e.) for Model 1 (w/switch1 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 2 (w/switch2 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 3 (w/switch3 variables)
Party switch	-0.015 (0.013)	-0.049 (0.024)**	-0.039 (0.022)*
Switch into majority	-0.017 (0.013)	-0.033 (0.024)	-0.025 (0.022)
Legis. professionalism	-0.004 (0.002)*	-0.003 (0.002)*	-0.004 (0.002)*
MMD vs. SMD	0.030 (0.005)***	0.031 (0.005)***	0.030 (0.005)***
Party competitiveness	-0.0001 (0.0002)	-0.0001 (0.0003)	-0.0001 (0.0003)
Unopposed	0.396 (0.003)***	0.396 (0.003)***	0.396 (0.003)***
Upper chamber	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.003)
Constant	0.592 (0.024)***	0.596 (0.024)***	0.594 (0.024)***
N (# elections)	2510	2510	2510
R^2	0.91	0.91	0.91

[†]Model 1 is estimated with the switch1 variable (indicating the average effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch1 variable. Model 2 is estimated with the switch2 variable (indicating the one-time effect of the party switch) and the majority party x switch2 variable. Model 3 is estimated with the switch3 variable (indicating the discounting effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch3 variable. Each linear model was estimated using fixed effects controlling for effects that may be related only to each individual state and year (indicator variables for states and years are not shown; variables for Alabama and for 1990 were not included; see text for details). All models are estimated with robust standard errors. A variable for opposing incumbent is not included as there was little variation on this variable for this specific time period.
***p ≤ 0.01; ** p ≤ 0.05; *p ≤ 0.10

Republicans did not benefit from their switch compared to their election results as Democrats and compared to non-switchers' election results. This suggests that realignment may not have fully been realized in these districts. Notably, though, voters only punished new converts to the Republican party in the elections soon after a legislator's party switch. Based on the results in Model 2 in Table 5, Republican switchers did about five percent worse in elections immediately following their switch. Similar results are demonstrated with the party switch variable in Model 3. However, there is no significant effect (positive or negative) in all post-switch elections (the switch1 variable in model 1) for joining the Republican party in the 1990s. Thus, the first hypothesis is demonstrated on this subset of Democrat-to-Republican switchers, but only in elections held soon after the switch. The variable capturing switching into the majority party had no statistical effect in any of the models involving those who joined the Republican Party in the 1990s. Thus, perhaps surprisingly, switching to the Republican Party in the 1990s, even when the GOP controls the chamber, does not lead to higher vote shares.

In Table 6, the same three statistical models are estimated on elections involving those legislators who left the Republican Party to join the Democratic Party during the 1990s and elections with non-switching incumbent legislators. This group clearly was bucking the Republican trend in the region, though interestingly, the results provide support for both party switching hypotheses. In two of the three models, as expected, there was a large and significant negative effect on a legislator's general election vote by leaving the Republican Party to join the Democrats. In model 2 in Table 6, for instance, general election results after a switch were about five percent worse than elections held before a switch or than elections involving non-switching incumbents. When compared with the results in Table 5, clearly both Democratic and Republican switchers were punished by voters after a party switch.

Finally, the 1990s Republican-to-Democrat switchers who joined the Democratic majority did substantially *better* in elections with their new party label, lending stronger support to the second hypothesis regarding majority party membership. In all three models in Table 5, switching into the majority party resulted in legislators doing about five percent better after they switched to the Democratic Party, all else equal. Very surprisingly, given realignment, legislators still benefited electorally if they joined the Democratic Party during this period, but only if the Democrats maintained control of the legislative chamber. Perhaps new Democrats were able to survive and even thrive given the perquisites received from adding to the balance of power in the state house. It is important to note, though, that the Table 6 results are based on a small number of switchers as there were few Republican-to-Democrat switchers in the 1990s.

Table 6. The Effect of Party Switching on the General Election Vote for Incumbent Southern State Legislators (Switched from Republican to Democrat, 1990-2000)[†]

Dependent variable: Two-party general election vote share (proportion 0 to 1)			
Independent Variables	β (s.e.) for Model 1 (w/switch1 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 2 (w/switch2 variables)	β (s.e.) for Model 3 (w/switch3 variables)
Party switch	-0.021 (0.019)	-0.045 (0.026)*	-0.041 (0.024)*
Switch into majority	0.035 (0.019)*	0.053 (0.026)**	0.054 (0.024)**
Legis. professionalism	-0.0008 (0.0002)	-0.0010 (0.0002)	-0.0009 (0.002)
MMD vs. SMD	0.030 (0.005)***	0.030 (0.005)***	0.030 (0.005)***
Party competitiveness	-0.0002 (0.0003)	0.0001 (0.0002)	-0.0001 (0.0003)
Unopposed	0.397 (0.003)***	0.397 (0.003)***	0.397 (0.003)***
Upper chamber	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)
Constant	0.596 (0.025)***	0.596 (0.025)***	0.596 (0.025)***
N (# elections)	2398	2398	2398
R^2	0.91	0.91	0.91

[†]Model 1 is estimated with the switch1 variable (indicating the average effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch1 variable. Model 2 is estimated with the switch2 variable (indicating the one-time effect of the party switch) and the majority party x switch2 variable. Model 3 is estimated with the switch3 variable (indicating the discounting effect of the party switch over time) and the majority party x switch3 variable. Each linear model was estimated using fixed effects controlling for effects that may be related only to each individual state and year (indicator variables for states and years are not shown; variables for Alabama and for 1990 were not included; see text for details). All models are estimated with robust standard errors. A variable for opposing incumbent is not included as there was little variation on this variable for this specific time period.
***$p \leq 0.01$; ** $p \leq 0.05$; *$p \leq 0.10$

Implications

The findings are that legislators who switch parties do worse in general elections following their party switches, especially in elections immediately following their party switches. This supports previous findings on congressional party switchers (Grose and Yoshinaka 2003). These findings are robust across a number of different dependent variables: vote share, unopposed election, and likelihood of victory. However, once these legislators have switched parties, if their new party controls the chamber, then these legislators do not face negative electoral consequences. Also, in one case (Republican-to-Democrat switchers in the 1990s) an increase in their general election vote follows their party defection relative to non-switching incumbent legislators.

The findings related to switching into the majority party can be interpreted in two ways. First, voters may be cognizant of the control of the

legislature and are willing to support someone who has switched parties in order to be in the majority of the legislature. Second, voters may not be aware of the majority control of their state house or senate, but may be aware of specific actions their legislator has taken. Many of these actions may be due to their position in a party that is in the legislative majority. Though not tested directly in this paper, perhaps party switchers who join the majority party receive institutional benefits such as committee positions, party leadership positions, and the like. These institutional benefits that are accessed with a party switch may then head off the negative electoral effects seen with other party switchers. Thus, voters will treat a party switcher who is in the legislative majority like other incumbent non-switching legislators, yet will punish non-majority party switchers.

A legislator who switches parties into the minority is likely to face significant short-term electoral costs, but a legislator who joins the majority party may avoid these costs. These findings lend greater support to theoretical work examining the trade-off of institutional (e.g., majority control) and electoral outcomes. They also provide evidence that southern realignment at the state house level has yet to be fully realized: those who switched to join the Republican Party did worse in elections immediately following their switch. Thus, either the realignment has yet to completely reach the state house level or any prospects for voter realignment suggest that elite switching will play a minor role in terms of electoral outcomes. Interestingly, southern voters appear willing to punish even those legislators who switch to the Republican Party in the 1990s (and are willing to reward the few switchers who have jumped to the Democrats).

Finally, these findings introduce an important variable regarding party labels and elections. Legislators' electoral outcomes are clearly influenced by a change in party labels, and these outcomes are affected differently depending upon whether a legislative party switcher is in the minority or majority party of the legislature. The implication is that legislators may attempt to anticipate whether a party is likely to be in the majority and thus choose a new party label to help them achieve institutional benefits while avoiding negative electoral consequences.

APPENDIX
Independent Variables

Legislative professionalism. The level of legislative professionalization has been demonstrated to have an effect on state legislative electoral outcomes (Berry, Berkman, and Schneiderman 2000; Carey, Niemi, and Powell 2000; Holbrook and Tidmarch 1991; Van Dunk and Weber 1997; Weber, Tucker, and Brace 1991). For this variable, the individual legislative salary is used as a measure of professionalism (the higher the salary, the more professional the legislature) and the data are coded in 1000s of dollars. These data are from *The Book of the States*, and the salaries were calculated from the tables titled "Legislative Compensation: Regular and Special Sessions."

Multi-member districts. The general election vote share is likely to be less in multi-member legislative districts (Cox and Morgenstern 1995; Niemi, Jackman, and Winksy 1991; Weber, Tucker, and Brace 1991). Thus, an indicator variable distinguishing between single-member districts (coded "1") and multi-member districts (coded "0") is included.

Opposing incumbent. In a few cases, typically due to redistricting, incumbents are forced to run against one another. In this case, a legislative switcher is much more likely to have a reduced vote share in the general election and an indicator variable for these elections is included ("1" for an incumbent who is running against another incumbent).

Party competitiveness. Given the realignment that was occurring in the South during this period, it is important to control for the underlying partisanship of the electorate. Unfortunately, no state legislative district-level measure of partisanship is available for all of the elections under consideration. In lieu of a district measure, a measure of party competitiveness provided in Rusk (2001) for each state over time is utilized. This measure is a composite of competitiveness at the presidential, gubernatorial, U.S. Senate, and U.S. House level and ranges from 0 to 100. For a few observations, the measure of party competitiveness was not available for the year of the observations, so the measure from the most recent previous year that was available was used.

Unopposed election. If a legislator is not opposed in the general election, then by definition the vote share will be higher in these cases. Unopposed races are coded "1." Obviously, this variable is only used in the vote share and win/loss models (and not the models with unopposed as the dependent variable).

Upper chamber contest. Elections to the upper chamber of a legislature are likely to be more competitive and thus to have a lower overall incumbent vote share. Thus, elections for upper chambers are coded "1" and for lower houses coded "0."

NOTES

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[2]Holland, Gina. 2000. "Republicans Looking for Members in the Democratic Ranks." *Associated Press State and Local Wire*. 23 May.

[3]However, the Mississippi senate has remained in Democratic hands.

[4]I do not examine the effect of party switching on primary elections as systematic data across this time period in these legislatures were unavailable.

[5]State dummy variables are included for Arkansas, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Alabama is excluded). Time dummy variables are included for all even-numbered years except for 1972. Mississippi is the only state that held all elections in odd years in this sample; thus I do not include dummy variables for these years (as doing so leads to perfect collinearity between the Mississippi dummy and dummy variables for these years).

[6]In cases where multimember districts are used, the two-party vote is estimated using the pairing decision rule specified in Niemi, Jackman, and Winsky (1991). They pair the highest vote-getting winner with the lowest vote-getter from the opposite party, the second highest vote-getter with the second lowest vote-getter, and so on.

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