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### **Do Party Switchers Pay an Electoral Price? The Case of Taiwan**

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#### **Abstract:**

This study looks at the consequences of party switching in an Asian third wave democracy, Taiwan. We examine some of the key theoretical questions related to party switching. Earlier studies show that politicians in the United States and Spain that switch parties pay an electoral price. We test whether Taiwanese party switchers face a similar punishment. We also address two theoretical puzzles in the party switching literature. Firstly, while the key theme of explaining why politicians switch focuses on their rational decisions to improve their career prospects, studies that examine the consequences of switching show that the decision actually undermines electoral prospects. A second puzzle addressed is that though party switching is expected to undermine party system stability, Taiwan shows that a country can have moderate levels of party switching but still features a very stable party system.

**Key words:** Party switching, Taiwan, legislative politics, Kuomintang (KMT), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP)

Despite the fact that party switching occurs in all democracies, it is a relatively understudied political phenomenon. As Heller and Mershon explain, 'This is not to say that scholars of legislative and party politics have neglected it entirely, but rather they have underestimated the breadth and depth of its significance' (2009, p.4). In a recent cross-national study O'Brien and Shomer found that out of 239 parties examined almost a third had experienced some party switching (2013, p.131). Party switching can have an enormous impact on the party system, government policy making and bring down government coalitions. The heavy media attention given to the latest series of MP defections from the UK Conservative Party to the UK

Independence Party reveals the significance of the practice (Hope, 2014). The topic of party switching was recently visualized in the Danish political drama TV series *Borgen*. In Series 3 the protagonist Brigitte Nyborg establishes a new party and attempts to entice sitting MPs, prospective new candidates and grassroots supporters to switch from the mainstream parties to her New Democrats.

The majority of the literature on party switching examines cases in the United States and Western Europe. However, party switching is quite rare in these older democracies. The study conducted by Grose and Yoshinaka examined just 25 cases of party switching in the US Congress between 1947 and 2000 (2003). In contrast, switching parties is also much more common in newer third wave democracies. O'Brien and Shomer contrast the fact that while the UK Labour Party suffered a single defection between 2001 and 2005, the Socialist People's Party of Brazil lost 85 percent of its parliamentary membership between 2002 and 2006 (2013, p.115). Taiwan experienced more legislative switches in a single term between 1998 and 2001 than the US over a five decade period (2014, Fell). There has been a growing body of literature on cases beyond the United States and West Europe, with the publication of Heller and Mershon's (2009) edited collection on party switching a landmark moment. However, research has been quite uneven, with significant bodies of work on Brazil (Desposato 2006, 2009) and Japan (Kato and Yamamoto 2009, Desposato and Scheiner 2008), but other large regional gaps in research coverage in third wave democracies.

In this study we consider the effects of party switching in an Asian third wave democracy, Taiwan. Taiwan represents an appropriate case to examine party switching for a number of reasons. Since democratic transition began in the late 1980s, it has had a relatively stable party system compared to neighbours such as Japan or South Korea. Although challenger parties have managed to win significant numbers of seats in parliament at certain periods, for the last 25 years two parties, the Kuomintang (KMT) and the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) have dominated the party system (Yu, 2005). Taiwan has experienced moderate levels of party switching, higher than those seen in the UK or US but lower than other new democracies such as Ukraine, Brazil or South Korea or even the more mature democracy of Japan. Thus Taiwan represents a puzzling case in that it has

experienced similar levels of party switching to Japan but maintained a much more stable party system. Despite the significant levels of party switching seen in Taiwan, the practice has attracted less academic attention than in South Korea (Shin 2013) or Japan (Kato and Yamamoto 2009). Thus our study represents the first attempt to examine the electoral consequences of party switching in Taiwan.

The literature on party switching attempts to address a number of dimensions to this political phenomenon. An initial prerequisite on the topic is to conduct time-series measurement of party switching in a country. This can offer a picture of the overall level of party switching in a polity and how the practice has changed over time. Heller and Mereson have attempted to plot broad patterns of party switching over time in 19 countries' parliaments (2009, p.13). However, the majority of the literature focused on party switching attempts to answer two core questions (1) why do politicians switch party affiliations? and (2) what are the consequences of party switching?

Carol Mereson argues that there are two main approaches in the literature for explaining why politicians switch, 'the strategic and the institutional' (2014, p.419). The institutional approach focuses the macro-level context and thus the way that institutions, such as electoral systems shape political behavior. In contrast, for the strategic approach the focus is on the individual politicians and what Mereson calls their 'cost-benefit analysis' as he or she chooses whether to retain or change party affiliation (2014, p.419). The guiding assumption is that politicians are motivated by political ambition, particularly to gain election or political office. Heller and Mereson suggest that there appears to be an overall consensus in the field 'on the centrality of legislator ambition in choices and changes of party affiliation' (2009, p.12). A recent cross-national study of party switching concludes that 'motivational explanations are correlated with interparty movement and that institutional arrangements exhibit only limited direct influence on switching' (O'Brien and Shomer 2013, p.111). The field of party switching research can contribute to the debate of whether politicians are primarily motivated by vote, office or policy

seeking goals (Müller and Strøm 1999). For instance McMnamin and Gwiazda (2011) argue that in the Polish case switching was largely driven by vote seeking motivations. However, when politicians are asked to justify their switching decisions, they provide a more principled understanding of party switching. A British Tory defector, Shaun Woodward, explained his decision to move to the Labour Party in these terms, 'I can no longer support the increasingly right-wing policies of the Conservative Party....It is not me who is leaving my party. My Party has left me....It is the Tory Party that has changed in the last 2 and a half years' (Miskin 2003, p.14).

This study is primarily located in the field examining the consequences of party switching. It addresses the relatively neglected question of whether switching party affiliation has an impact on the defector's subsequent electoral performance. If the rational self-interested argument is correct then it seems logical that party switching should be motivated by the desire to improve ones' electoral prospects. However, a number of commentators and academic studies suggest that politicians will pay an electoral price for switching. Academic research seems to support this electoral price conclusion. Grose and Yoshinaka's study of party switching in the United States between 1947 and 2000 found that 'On average, switchers lose about seven percentage points in all elections after they switch' (2003, p.63). Similarly Heller and Mershon note their studies on party switchers in Spain found them less likely to run for reelection and less likely to win reelection if they do stand (2009, p.17). An Australian Parliamentary report on party switching notes that, 'the number (of switchers) who lose their seats is vastly greater than the number who retain them. In the United Kingdom, for example, defections are seen as "rare and risky" because quitting the party "tends to bring short-term fame and long-term obscurity"' (Miskin, 2003, p.21).

We examine the Taiwan case to address a number of the key theoretical issues in the party switching literature. Firstly, we test whether the switching punishment effect seen in Spain and the United States also applies to the Taiwanese politicians. Secondly we engage with two theoretical puzzles in the literature. There is seemingly

a contradiction between the core assumption that party switching decisions are based on politicians' strategic desire to improve their electoral prospects and studies that reveal switching actually undermines electoral prospects. The second puzzle concerns the relationship between the party switching and the party system. Democracy theorists agree that institutionalized parties and party systems are key ingredients for democracies (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). However, many third wave democracies have struggled to develop such stable party systems since democratic transition (Randall and Svasand 2002). It is thus generally assumed that party switching is expected to undermine party system stability. Thus Taiwan represents a puzzling case as it features moderate levels of party switching but still has a very stable party system.

We attempt to go beyond merely tracking to overall success rate of switching by examining whether there are any clear patterns in the success rates of different types of party switchers. For instance are politicians from certain parties more likely to be successful after switching? Has switching been more fruitful during different legislative terms? Are incumbent switchers more successful than newcomer switchers? Should we expect to see a gender effect in switching? In other words, will male defectors have a higher success rate than females or vice versa? By answering these questions we can also offer some tentative hypothesis on why politicians switch. This approach finds support for both sides of the first theoretical puzzle. In other words, it is not switching per se that matters but the type of switching that determines whether the decision is rational. We show that though overall party switching in Taiwan incurs an electoral punishment, certain types of switching can actually be rational and enhance a politician's career prospects. As to the second puzzle, we show how patterns of party switching and the way voters respond to party switching has served to enhance party system stability.

### **Datasets and Methods**

Before examining the datasets we need to consider what constitutes party switching or what is known in New Zealand as waka (canoe) hopping (Miskin 2003, 14). It is

defined by Heller and Mershon as, 'any recorded change in party affiliation on the part of a politician holding or competing for elective office' (2009, p.8). Party switching may occur between new or existing parties, as well as movement to or from independent status. In fact in our Taiwan case, the latter was a particularly common form of switching.

The time period examined is between 1986 and the national level elections in 2012. Since the actual moment Taiwan becomes a democracy is contested, we have taken 1986 as the starting point for the analysis as though opposition parties were technically still illegal under martial law, this was the first year in which an opposition party contested a national level election.<sup>1</sup>

In this study we examine the effects of party switching in two datasets of party switchers. The first dataset looks at the career records of 1,862 politicians that stood for a relevant party in at least one national level election between 1986 and 2012.<sup>2</sup> The main relevant parties in the Taiwan case are the KMT, DPP, New Party (NP), People First Party (PFP) and Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU). In addition we also brought into the database a number of smaller parties that did nominate extensively in multiple elections. These are the Chinese Social Democratic Party (CSDP), Labor Party (LP), Green Party Taiwan (GPT), Taiwan Independence Party (TIP) and New Nation Alliance (NNA). Analysts of Taiwanese party politics often talk in terms of Pan Blue and Pan Green party camps. The colours refer to the main colours on the KMT and DPP party flags respectively. Thus the Pan Blue camp includes the KMT and its splinter parties, the NP and PFP, while the Pan Green camp includes the DPP, TIP, NNA and the TSU. The Pan Blue and Pan Green splinter parties fit well into the category that Lucardie terms as purifier parties, that 'clings to an existing ideology, which it feels is diluted or betrayed by one (or more) of the established parties'

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the lifting of martial law non KMT candidates could contest elections as independents but opposition parties were not permitted.

<sup>2</sup> Politicians that only stood as independents and never stood for a relevant party in a national level election were excluded from the study.

(2000, p.177). The core ideology for these purifiers is the national identity debate between advocates of unification with China and those calling for a declaration of Taiwanese independence. In contrast, alternative parties such as CSDP, LP, and GPT can be viewed as what Lucardie calls prophetic parties that focus their appeals on new issues ignored or neglected by the mainstream parties. In the Taiwanese party system the splinter or purifier parties have been far more successful than the alternative prophetic parties in terms of winning seats (Fell 2014a).

The standard method of measuring party switching is to focus solely on incumbent legislators. In contrast in the first dataset we consider a wide variety of defections by national level politicians. There are two main reasons for adopting this alternative approach. Firstly, this has allowed us to generate a much larger sample of party switching cases than if we had used the traditional method. Secondly, our method gives a much clearer picture of political career trajectories. In other words, our analysis of the electoral records of Taiwanese politicians revealed how they move both up and down the political ladder during their careers. For instance, we found numerous cases where after having failed in a national level election, politicians would then attempt to revive their careers standing for city or county councilors. Often attempts to move up or down the ladder featured changes in party affiliation.

#### **Table 1 and Table 2 about here**

Of this group of 1862 politicians, 604 (32.4 percent) switched parties at least once in their careers. Each time a politician stood for election during this time period (regardless of the election level) represents one measurement case and this generated a total of 4,796 cases, of which 823 cases featured a change in party affiliation. In other words, 17.1 percent of measured cases featured party switches. We also broke the cases down according to gender, with a total of 709 cases of male candidates switching out of 4011 male cases and 114 cases of female candidates switching out of a total of 785 female cases. In other words, female candidates were slightly less likely to switch than their male counterparts. We examine the success

rate for these 823 cases of party switching, as well as the remaining 3,973 non-switching cases. Each case refers to where a politician is recorded as having stood for election. For instance, the politician Wang Yi-hsiung counted as two cases of standing for election. First he was successfully elected as legislator for the DPP in Kaohsiung in 1986 and then in 1989 he stood unsuccessfully in Kaohsiung but for the Labor Party. Thus Wang's 1986 election represents a (successful) non switching case; while in 1989 his second case represents a (unsuccessful) switching case. The main source for measurement was the Central Election Commission database, though for some earlier elections we also needed to refer to newspaper post election reports.

The first dataset represents cases in which politicians move up and down the political ladder and thus includes a range of election types. This means that cases are often not directly comparable due to standing in different levels of elections or where the election district magnitude was altered or the election system changed. In contrast, the second dataset only includes directly comparable cases at the same national level and where there has been no major change in the district magnitude. The majority of these comparative cases are from the Legislative Yuan 1992 vs. 1995, National Assembly 1991 vs. 1996, Legislative Yuan 1998 vs. 2001, Legislative Yuan 2001 vs. 2004, Legislative Yuan 2008 vs. 2012. The reason for the gaps are that there was a large expansion in legislative seats and thus district magnitude in 1998, and in 2008 the new single member district two vote electoral system was introduced. To gain a greater understanding of the effect of switching we need to also look at the fortunes of those staying loyal to their parties. Thus in the second dataset we included both comparative cases of switchers and non switchers. This included 468 cases of non switches and a further 77 cases of switching.

The long electoral career of Lee Ching-hua can be used to illustrate what constitutes a comparable case. In 1992 Lee had stood for the KMT in the 9-seat Taipei City Legislative District 2 and he won reelection there three years later in 1995 in the same seat but this time he stood for the NP. Thus Lee in 1995 represents a comparable case of switching as he stood in the same district which did not feature a



change in district magnitude. However, in 1998 Lee stood in Taipei County District 3 thus this cannot count as a directly comparable case. Lee's successful reelection for the KMT in 2012 in the single member New Taipei City District 13 represents a directly comparative case of non-switching, as the district was unchanged from 2008.

### **Results for the first dataset**

The initial results are laid out in Table 1 which shows the total numbers of switches and the success rate of switchers. These figures are then further broken down by gender in Table 2. The first lesson here is that switching is a risky decision with only 30 percent of switching cases successful. In contrast, 61 percent of those staying loyal were successfully elected. In other words, the punishment effect seen in the literature seems to be supported in the Taiwan case. Although female politicians are less likely than male colleagues to change affiliation, there were no signs that there is a gender effect in switching. In fact, proportionally female candidates were slightly more successful regardless of whether they switched or stayed put. Thus 33.6 percent of female switches were successful compared to 30 percent of male switches. Where female candidates stayed loyal to their parties their success rate was 65 percent compared to 61 percent for male counterparts.

### **Table 3 about here**

The next question is whether we see any clear patterns of change over time. Table 3 shows the number of party switches, the number of successful switches and their success rate. While we would have expected to see a gradual reduction of switches and their success rate as the post democratic transition party system institutionalized, we actually see the considerable fluctuation over time. If we compare the first four terms with the second four terms, there is a higher level of switching and successful switching after 2000. The peak in the proportion of candidates switching occurs in the fifth legislative term (1998-2001), with just over

28 percent of candidates switching. The highpoint in successful switches came in the seventh term of 2004-2008, with over 47 percent of switches being successful.

To get a sense of what kind of switching was rational and irrational we need to look in more detail at actual types of party switching. We summarized the types, number of switches, number successful switches and success rates by types in Figure 1. We found over 60 different types of party switching and have only included the top 14 types in which there was a minimum of 13 switches. Despite the diversity in switching types, there is actually a high degree of bunching, with a limited number of types showing very high numbers of switching cases. By far the most common types are outswitches from the two largest parties, the KMT and DPP, to independent status, with these accounting for almost 43 percent of switches. There were 256 switches from the KMT to independent status and 97 from the DPP. The second most common broad category involves inswitches from independent status to the mainstream parties. For instance, our database found 83 such cases of politicians moving from independents to the KMT and 49 to the DPP. Thus the outswitches from large parties to independent far exceeds the inswitches from independent to large parties.

**Figure 1 about here.**

Inter-party switching has been less common than movement to and from independent status, but can be put into four broad categories. Firstly, there are switches from the larger parties to splinter parties, such as from the KMT to its breakaway party, the NP or from the DPP to the TIP in the 1990s. It should be noted though that the scale of switches to the splinter parties was much higher on the part of the KMT than the DPP. Our database included 31 switches from the KMT to the PFP compared to only 7 from the DPP to the TIP. The second type is switches from these splinter parties (often back) into the large parties, such as the 13 switches from the NP back to the KMT and 28 from the PFP to the KMT in the 2000s. A third type of inter-party switches is between the smaller challenger or splinter parties. One such small wave came when 12 NP politicians switched to the PFP between 2000 and 2002. Thus these were switches among KMT splinter parties. The final type of inter-party switching is actually quite rare. This is switches across the ideological divide between Pan Blue Parties and Pan Green Parties. Our database found only four cases of switches from the KMT to DPP and only one in the opposite direction from the DPP to the KMT. The only exception with significant numbers of movement

across the Blue-Green divide was the 14 switches from the KMT to the TSU. However, this in itself is a controversial case as the TSU recruited evenly from the DPP as well as the KMT. A missing category is switches to and from alternative prophetic parties. By alternative parties we mean those that do not base their appeal on national identity or Taiwan's relationship with China. It would appear that the alternative parties have not been willing to or able to attract mainstream party politicians and similarly the mainstream parties have not recruited from the alternative parties. The only exception to this lack of involvement in party switching was a mini wave of switching from the CSDP to the NP as the two merged in 1993. Our database found six such transfers, including that of the CSDP's founder Chu Kao-cheng.

With the data discussed so far we can begin to understand the puzzle of why Taiwan's moderate level of party switching has not led to party system instability. The data suggests that there is logic to the patterns of party switching rather than a chaotic pattern. Politicians generally have not crossed the ideological party lines in their switching patterns. Although there has been some switching from mainstream to splinter parties, this has been followed by a reverse wave back to the two mainstream parties. In other words, both these trends should contribute towards party system stability.

The next step is to see whether there is significant variation in how voters treat different types of switching at the ballot box. A first lesson is that voters appear to punish politicians that defect to stand as independents, as the success rate for such politicians is approximately 15 percent, thus half the average success rate. In contrast the success rate for those non-switchers standing for the two largest parties is over 68 percent.<sup>3</sup> Shelley Rigger has argued that Taiwan's Single Non Transferable Vote in Multiple Member District electoral system favours candidate oriented voting behavior and that DPP voters are more issue oriented in their voting than KMT supporters. (1999, p.43-46). Therefore we would expect that where KMT politicians switch to independent status they should be more successful. While it is true KMT politicians are much more likely to stand as rebels, their success rate is surprisingly lower at 15.2 percent compared to 20.6 for DPP rebels.

The large gap between numbers defecting to independent and those going from independent status to mainstream parties suggests that in most cases rebels are not

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<sup>3</sup> This is based on the 2141 cases of winning DPP and KMT candidates out of 3114 cases of non switches for these two parties.

allowed back into their original parties. However, politicians going from independent to mainstream parties do represent the second largest broad category and features the opposite effect to out-switching. In other words, politicians switching from independent to mainstream parties show very high success rates across the board in four of the five most relevant parties. Such switching into these four parties saw above the average success rates, with a 67.4 percent success rate for the KMT, and approximately 40 percent for the remaining three (DPP, TSU and PFP). The fact that independents wish to switch into the mainstream parties is not surprising given their greater prospects of winning election. If we take both switching and non switching cases the success rates for those standing for the KMT and DPP were 74 and 60 percent respectively.

There are also very significant patterns of variation in switching success rates in inter-party changes in affiliation. The most common category of inter-party switching has been between the main parties and their splinters. The different success rates are quite startling. Firstly, the success rates of politicians switching from the KMT to its splinters, the NP and PFP is very high at 41 percent and 45 percent respectively. In other words, outswitches from the KMT to its Pan Blue splinters were quite successful. However, the opposite is true of politicians defecting from the DPP to its Pan Green splinters such as the NNA and TIP where we only have one successful case out of 14 switches. Even in the DPP to TSU case only 2 out of 16 switches were successful. In short, Pan Blue voters have been much more tolerant of politicians switching out of the KMT to splinters. In contrast, Pan Green supporters are more likely to punish defectors.

Earlier we showed how independents that switched into mainstream parties had above average records of winning election. This then brings us to the next type of interparty switching from the splinter parties back to the mainstream parties. Once again there is a clear gap between the Pan Blue and Pan Green parties. For instance, 24 out of the 28 switches from the PFP to the KMT were elected, representing highest success rate at almost 85 percent. While successful switches from the NP to the KMT were also over double the average at 66 percent successful. In contrast, there were only a handful of cases of politicians switching from the Pan Green splinters back to the DPP. The only exception was the 6 cases of TSU to DPP switches, of which two were successful. However, this rate is well below that seen in the Pan Blue return switches. This shows that the DPP was much less willing than the KMT to allow back splinter party politicians and that Pan Green voters were less tolerant of politicians that had previously split away.

The next broad category of switching features changes of affiliation between challenger parties. Once again there are stark contrasts in the Blue and Green camps. There were almost no transfers between the Pan Green splinter parties at all. We only found five such cases from the NNA or TIP to the TSU, of which a single case was successful. In contrast there were 12 transfers from the NP to the PFP of which almost 60 percent were successful. The one type that is not so easy to classify was the CSDP, which had marketed itself as a leftist party and had nominated more extensively than any other alternative party even to this day. The majority of its failed candidates did not stand again for election after 1992. Out of those that did stay in politics, six of its members switched to the NP and two of them were successful, while the five that stood as independents all failed to get elected. Once again we see that Pan Blue politicians are more likely to switch parties and that where they do switch their chances of winning election are greater than their Pan Green counterparts.

The final broad category of inter-party switching features changed affiliations that cut across the Blue Green divide. Such switching was extremely rare. Most types that crossed this divide had at most one case and most were unsuccessful. The only significant cross-camp wave was that between the KMT and the TSU of which 3 out of 14 cases were successful. Of the five cases involving transfers between the KMT and DPP (4 KMT-DPP) and (1 DPP-KMT) four were successful. It appears that this supports the argument that switching into the larger parties tends to lead to more favourable outcomes.

By breaking the consequences of party switching into distinct categories we can continue to address the theoretical puzzles raised in the introduction. The first dataset has shown that certain types of switching can be quite rational. In particular, switching into mainstream parties and among Pan Blue parties appears to be largely rewarded by voters. In contrast, other types are tantamount to electoral suicide, such as standing as independents or switching out of the DPP to splinter parties. The way voters have responded to party switching also helps understand the relationship between party switching and party system stability. In other words, voters have tended to reward switches into mainstream parties which reinforce party system stability, while they have punished switching patterns such as switching to independents that could undermine stability.

**Table 4 and 5 about here**

## **Second database**

The next step is to examine the patterns seen in the smaller dataset of directly comparable cases of party switching, with its 468 non-switches and 77 switching cases. These have been first summarized in Table 3 and 4. The first lesson from this data is that maintaining party affiliation has clear electoral benefits, with an overall success rate of 75.88 percent for non-switches compared to 46.75 for switching cases. As with the first database there were less female switching cases and the success rate was higher than for male cases. Unsurprisingly incumbents have a major advantage in both switching and non-switching cases, with a success rates at 63.41 and 78.97 percent respectively. The advantage that incumbents enjoy even when they switch parties can be seen in the fact that they have a higher success rate than non-incumbents that stay loyal to their party.

We next looked at the partisan effect of non-switching and switching in this dataset. These trends have been summarized in Figure 2 and Table 6. For non-switching cases there is a very significant party effect, with very high success rates for politicians maintaining party affiliation in the largest three parties. In other words, at least prior to the introduction of the new electoral system in 2008 standing for one of the two main parties virtually guaranteed getting elected in the majority of cases.

### **Figure 2 and Table 6 about here**

We also see similar patterns in terms of the partisan effect of switching to the first dataset. A first lesson is that once again switching from mainstream parties to independent status is punished by voters. For instance, only 3 out of 11 KMT rebels won election and 2 out of 8 DPP to independent cases were successful. In fact all three of these successful KMT to independent switchers were incumbents and two were from KMT strongholds on offshore islands. One of these exceptional cases was Lin Ping-kun in Penghu. He had won as a KMT legislative candidate since 1995 but in 2001 though the KMT chose not to nominate him; it also did not nominate a KMT candidate, giving Lin a free run against the DPP's candidate. Thus though the KMT did not nominate Lin, he was effectively the KMT candidate for the next four legislative elections. A representative case showing the effect of defecting from the DPP to independent status is that of Shih Ming-teh in 2001. Shih had been a key political dissident under martial law, had spent over two decades as a political prisoner, he had been DPP party chairman and was an incumbent legislator. He has even been described as Taiwan's Nelson Mandela (2015 Copper, p.251). Despite

these impressive credentials when he switched to independent status he failed to win reelection in the ten seat Taipei North district and saw his vote share decline from 7 to 4 percent.

In fact in this database, none of those leaving the smaller relevant parties to independent status won. One such case is Su Ying-kuei who after being expelled by the TSU stood as an independent in Kaohsiung North in 2004. In 2004 he failed to win reelection and saw his vote share collapse from 11.38 to 5.49 percent. Su is an especially interesting case as he started off as a DPP politician but having failed to win in the DPP primary in 1995; he stood unsuccessfully as an independent. After losing his reelection bid in 2004 he actually joined the KMT in 2006 and though he failed to win KMT nomination for the 2006 Kaohsiung mayoral election, he did go on to serve in the cabinet of KMT run Taipei City government. Generally when politicians do cross the Blue Green divide, like Su, they tend to first stand as an independent before switching sides.<sup>4</sup>

Switching from either smaller parties or independent into mainstream parties again saw higher than average success rates. For instance, out of the 8 cases of politicians switching from independent to the KMT six were successful. One of those two unsuccessful cases was Hsu Ching-huang in Kaohsiung County. Having failed to win the DPP primary in 2008, he stood as a rebel and his 10 percent almost caused the official DPP candidate to lose. He was then recruited to the KMT and stood in the 2011 by-election for the same district. Although his 30 percent was an improvement on his part, for the KMT it had gone from almost winning the seat to losing by a margin of 40 percent. In this case we can see how a defector was both punished by his former party's (DPP) supporters and not fully embraced or trusted by his new party's (KMT) voters. The success rate for those switching from independent to DPP was lower with only two out of five cases winning after switching. One such unsuccessful case that again suggests the way DPP voters appear to distrust defectors is that of Chen Chin-ting in Changhua County. Chen had begun as a KMT National Assembly member in 1996 but then switched to independent in 1998,

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<sup>4</sup> Another well-known case is Cheng Li-wen. She originally was elected as a DPP National Assembly member in 1996 and was Deputy Director of the party's Youth Department. However, she was expelled from the party in 2002 and then stood unsuccessfully as an independent legislator in Kaohsiung in 2004. A few months later she was elected to the National Assembly again but for the KMT in 2005. She later went on to be elected as a KMT legislator in 2008 and after losing her reelection bid in 2012 served as the Executive Yuan Spokesperson for two years.

winning three consecutive terms as a Changhua legislator. After losing in 2008 he joined the DPP for the 2012 legislative election in Changhua District 1. Despite the fact that the DPP was far more popular in 2012 than four years earlier and the KMT being undermined by a strong rebel candidate, Chen failed to win the district.<sup>5</sup>

Due to changes in the district sizing and electoral system some interparty movement patterns are not picked up in the direct comparison database such as the 2005-7 migration of politicians from the PFP to KMT. However, we again see a pattern of high levels of successful switching among Pan Blue parties. For instance 10 out of 11 transfers from the KMT to the PFP were successful, 3 out of 4 switches from the NP to the KMT won election and both switches from the NP to the PFP were successful. The case of the three NP politicians who switched to the KMT in 2004 is especially illustrative of the potential positive effect of switching. The three in question were Lai Shyh-bao, Alex Fei and Joanna Lei. Despite being non incumbents and having failed to win for the NP in 2001, all three won after switching to the KMT in 2004. Both Lai and Lei increased their vote shares by over 8 percent and were the top vote winners in their respective and highly competitive districts of Taipei City South and Taipei County District 3.

Returning to the career of Lee Ching-hua reveals the way Pan Blue voters show greater tolerance of party switching within Pan Blue parties. He was first elected for the KMT in Taipei City in 1992, but within less than a year was among the founding members of the NP in August 1993. He then won reelection twice as a NP legislator first in Taipei City in 1995 and then moving to Taipei County District 3 in 1998 and served as the party chair. He then was part of the wave of NP defections to the PFP in 2000-2001, and he won reelection under the PFP banner in 2001 and 2004. Once it became clear the PFP was in decline, Lee was one of the first to defect back to the KMT in what later became a wave of switches that decimated the PFP. A mark of the impact of this switching wave was that while the PFP nominated 41 district candidates in 2004, four years later it was reduced to just nominating three. Having lost a KMT primary in 2007, Lee had to switch to the unfamiliar Taipei County District 12, but still KMT supporters ensured he comfortably won reelection in 2008 and 2012.

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<sup>5</sup> The vote breakdown was KMT 35.21, Chen (DPP) 34.99, KMT rebel (independent) 28.34. If Chen had been able to gain the support of the 1.51 percent who voted for the GPT, it would have allowed him to win.



Another dimension of the switching effect we wanted to test was whether there was a price to be paid in terms of vote share. As we mentioned earlier Grose and Yoshinaka had found in the American case switchers paid a seven percentage point price (2003, p.63). In contrast, our directly comparable cases in Taiwan suggest that switching is close to having a 50 percent success rate. When we looked at the average post switch vote share it was down almost 1 percent (0.98%). Even more perplexing is the fact that though incumbents had a better success rate, their average post election vote share was down 2.87 percent, while the non-incumbents managed a 1.18 improved average vote share. We also need to keep in mind there are many factors affecting the total vote share, such as the number of candidates in a district, especially allied and rebel candidates and even changes in party nomination levels per district. In short, whether switching candidates win election is probably a better tool of measuring success than vote share.

As we mentioned in the dataset and methods section our study focused on politicians that has stood for a relevant party at the national level and thus excluded those that only stood as independents. However, we wanted to see how non switching independents fared in directly comparable cases. Out of 63 such cases only eleven such independents were successful. Thus the success rate of these independent non switchers (17.4 percent) is actually almost the same as those switching from mainstream parties to independent status in the first database (15 percent). An important caveat here is that even among these eleven, a number were similar to that of Lin Ping-kun discussed earlier. In other words, though they were officially registered as independents, they were de facto KMT candidates. Once we exclude such cases then it is clear that the space for independent candidates is very limited in national elections.

### **Why do politicians switch despite the electoral costs? Can switching be rational?**

Although our study focuses on the consequences of party switching our findings can offer some tentative answers to the question of why politicians change affiliation. Our data suggests that the key driving force for switching is politician's strategic ambition. In other words, politicians often switch to improve their chances of gaining reelection. While on average politicians pay a price for switching, we have shown that often certain types of switching can be rational and actually benefit the career prospects of politicians. Some switching cases appear to have been welcomed and rewarded by party supporters. For example, switching from independent status to a mainstream party, particularly the KMT, has tended to be rational. However, the

highest switching success rates have been seen between Pan Blue parties, particularly the waves from the KMT-NP (mid 1990s), NP-PFP, KMT-PFP (2000-2002) and NP-KMT and PFP-KMT (2004-2010). In each of these waves politicians switched away from Pan Blue parties suffering from deteriorating popularity into more popular Pan Blue parties. In fact at times staying loyal has actually backfired. For instance, all the NP legislators that stood for reelection under their original label in 2001 were defeated, while almost all those switching to the PFP were reelected. In contrast, switching among Pan Green parties has been rarer and less successful. This suggests that political culture among politicians and party supporters on the Pan Blue side is much more tolerant of switching within the Pan Green alliance.

Changes in inner party factional balance of power may also make switching rational at times. For example, the majority of KMT politicians that formed the NP in 1993 faced a bleak future in the KMT once Lee Teng-hui won the power struggle against his party rivals. By establishing a new party the NP's founders were able to remain in parliament and play a central role on party politics for the rest of the 1990s. One similar individual case is Lin Jih-jia from Taipei County. After having failed to win Pan Blue nomination in 2001 for local executive, he stood unsuccessfully as an independent in the legislative election that year. After losing he joined the TSU, serving as the party's Secretary General and getting back into parliament on the TSU's party list in 2004. If he had stayed in the KMT it is highly likely he would have been marginalized.

Nevertheless, strategic ambition alone cannot explain why politicians did not switch across the Pan Blue Pan Green divide. For instance at times the leading parties were highly unpopular or after changes of ruling party such as 2008 Taiwan did not experience waves of opportunistic party switching. Party ideology both among politicians and supporters has served to constrain the kind of chaotic party switching seen in some newer democracies.

Our data alone cannot explain why so many politicians have adopted a strategy that appears to be political suicide, which is switching to independent status. This is especially relevant as it is the most common form of party switching and the one with the lowest success rates. Given that standing as a rebel will increasingly disqualify a politician from future nomination by their original party and the low possibility of success, why would a politician take this risk? We can hypothesize some potential reasons for such seemingly irrational decisions.

In many of our cases switching occurred in the year before the elections after politicians had failed to win their parties' nomination, often after losing primaries. Thus staying loyal to the party may no longer be an option. In such cases, even though a politician is likely to lose by standing as a party rebel (independent) or switching to a splinter party, this may be the best way to maintain their political career. Naturally the party will try hard to dissuade such potential rebels from standing, but as our data shows many cannot resist standing regardless. As Heller and Mershon note switching may not be an irrational option as 'If the switcher had stayed put, would he have faced some kind of demotion.....that would have increased the probability of electoral defeat had he not switched?' (2009, p.17) An intriguing possibility is that the switching is motivated by the desire for revenge. In other words, though the switcher cannot win the election the priority is to prevent your fellow partisan rival from being elected. Rigger for example argues that in 1989 KMT factional figures dissatisfied with the official KMT magistrate candidate 'pulled his leg back (che tade houtui)' (1999, p.146). Another possibility is that sufficient momentum had been built up in the failed bid for party nomination that the campaign can be hard to stop. Lastly, it is possible that an independent campaign that has next to no chance of success can be a stepping stone for the next campaign at a lower level and at a level where party affiliation is less important. For instance, our dataset found numerous cases of politicians standing as KMT rebels in national elections and then later winning election as township chief or local city/county councilor. Thus success would need to be tested by examining the next election result. This raises the question of whether we should take winning election as the sole criteria for evaluating success in switching. In short, a failed independent candidacy may be rational in the long term.

### **Implications for Taiwan's party system**

At the outset of the paper we suggested that Taiwan represents a puzzling case as despite significant levels of party switching it has seen a very stable party system, with the same two parties dominating since the mid 1980s. So how do our datasets help explain this theoretical puzzle?

Our study can tell us part of the story. The key variable has been the way voters have tended to punish types of party switching that could have undermined party system stability. In particular, we have seen how voters have punished politicians that stand as party rebels (to independent status). Moreover, we showed how most rebels were not allowed back to stand at the national level for parties. Another system

reinforcing trend has been that generally voters have rewarded politicians who switch into the two large parties both from independent status or smaller splinter parties. Switching between the two camps has been rare, again reinforcing the party system stability. The largest waves of inter-party switching occurred between Pan Blue parties and this saw quite high switching success rates. However, this again did not undermine the party system. After 2001 the Pan Blue splinter parties operated as allied parties to the KMT in parliament and between 2004 and 2010 the vast majority of these splinter party politicians actually switched back into the KMT.

One further related party system reinforcing factor has been party organizational change, in particular the implementation of more institutionalized nomination mechanisms (Wang 2011). While the DPP has consistently used primaries for determining nomination since the late 1980s, the KMT only began a more institutionalized use of primaries after its presidential defeat in 2000. The formalized method of nomination has made it harder for former defectors to register for nomination. Secondly in the past where nomination was decided behind closed doors it was easier for politicians to appeal for sympathy votes by arguing that the nomination had been unfair. Once genuine primaries were implemented politicians that stand as independents having either lost or not joined primaries are more likely to be punished by party supporters (Fell 2013).

## **Conclusions**

Our study represents the first comprehensive attempt to assess the electoral consequences of party switching in an Asian democracy. This allowed us to contribute to a number of the theoretical questions in the literature on party switching. In the introduction we raised the seeming contradiction in the literature that stressed the rational basis of party switching decisions and the studies that showed switchers tended to be punished by voters. We found support for both arguments on our study. As with earlier studies in Spain and the United States, we found on average Taiwanese switchers paid an electoral price. However, when switching patterns are broken down into more detailed partisan types, then some switching is actually quite rational and can enhance a politician's long-term career. By examining the electoral consequences of switching affiliation we could also offer some insights into why politicians take this seemingly risky decision. We suggest that politician's strategic ambition is the key driving force for switching decisions. In addition, party ideology has served to constrain cross alliance switching. We hope to look in more detail in the future on why politicians have changed affiliation by conducting fieldwork in Taiwan.

We also addressed the puzzle of why Taiwan has developed a more stable party system than its democratic neighbours despite high levels of party switching. Overall the switching patterns and the post-switching success rates discussed in this paper show that switching has actually contributed to Taiwan's party system stability, rather than undermining it. Voters have tended to punish switching patterns that could undermine system stability such as switching to independents. In contrast, system reinforcing switching patterns have tended to be rewarded by voters. There has been some variation in how voters on the Pan Blue and Green sides have responded to switching. Pan Blue voters have been more tolerant of switching to and from splinter parties. This also partly explains why there has been more space in the party system for Pan Blue splinter parties.

Since we wrote the first draft of this paper, party switching has once again come to the fore of Taiwanese politics in the latest round of national elections in January 2016. A number of experienced politicians left the unpopular ruling KMT and stood as either independents or splinter party candidates. One particularly eye catching case featured sitting legislator Hsu Hsin-ying who left the KMT and established the Republic Party. Within months the new party claimed to have already recruited over 100,000 members, making it the third largest party and it actively sought out politicians to join its 2016 campaign. Thus Hsu faced the same challenges as those for Brigitte Nyborg in the TV series *Borgen* on creating a brand new party. Hsu's eventual failure to make a breakthrough in these elections reveals the way that party switching patterns in Taiwan can actually reinforce party system stability. The return of widespread party in 2016 suggests that the topic promises to be a fruitful area for future research.

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**Table 1: Total Switches, Non Switches and their Success Rates**

Cases	Number	Ratio
Total Switches	823	
Total Successful Switches	248	30%
Total Unsuccessful switches	575	70%
Total Cases	4796	
Proportion of Cases Featuring Party Switches		17.16%
Total Non-Switches	3973	
Total Successful Non-Switches	2432	61%
Total Unsuccessful Non-Switches	1541	39%

Note1: This table shows the total switching cases, successful and failed cases of switching, the success rate and the proportion of cases featuring switches. In addition, non switching cases and their success rates are included.

**Table 2: Party Switching by Gender**

Cases	Male Cases	Ratio	Female Cases	Ratio
Total Switches	709		114	
Total Successful Switches	210	30%	38	33%
Total Unsuccessful Switches	499	70%	76	67%
Proportion of Cases Featuring Party Switches		17.67%		14.52%
Total Non-Switches	3302		671	
Total Successful Non-Switches	1999	61%	433	65%
Total Unsuccessful Non-Switches	1303	39%	238	35%
Total Cases	4011		785	

Note1: This table shows the total switching and non-switching broken down into male and female cases, successful and failed cases of switching, the success rate and the proportion of cases featuring switches.



**Table 3 Party Switching and Non-Switching over Eight Terms**

<b>Term</b>	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3	Term 4	Term 5	Term 6	Term 7	Term 8	Total
<b>Period</b>	1986-89	1989-92	1992-95	1995-98	1998-01	2001-04	2004-08	2008-12	
<b>Successful switches</b>	10	16	20	31	40	47	51	33	248
<b>Switches</b>	75	61	76	148	123	134	108	98	823
<b>Success Rate</b>	13.33%	26.22%	26.31%	20.95%	32.52%	35.07%	47.22%	33.67%	30.13%
<b>Switch Proportion</b>	13.39%	9.78%	15.02%	13.84%	28.15%	23.22%	18.72%	21.97%	17.16%
<b>Non switches</b>	485	563	430	576	314	443	469	348	3973
<b>Successful non switches</b>	321	346	255	921	168	284	301	181	2432
<b>Success rate</b>	66.18%	61.46%	59.30%	62.54%	53.50%	64.11%	64.18%	52.01%	61.21%
<b>Total cases</b>	560	624	506	1069	437	577	577	446	4796

Note 1: This table shows the number of switches and non-switching case, successful

switches and non-switches, proportion of cases featuring switches, and their success rate over eight legislative terms.

**Table 4: Directly Comparable Cases: Total Switches and Success Rates**

		Success Rate	Male	Female	Incumbents	Non Incumbents
Total Switches	77		64	13	41	36
Successful Switches	36	46.75%	29 Success rate: 45.3%	7 Success rate: 53.8%	26 Success rate: 63.41%	10 Success rate: 27.77%
Losses	41		35	6	15	26

Note: This table shows the 77 directly comparable switching cases, the number of successful cases and success rates. The data is then broken down by gender and incumbent status.

**Table 5: Directly Comparable Cases: Total Non Switchers and Success Rates**

		Success Rate	Male	Female	Incumbents	Non Incumbents
Total Non-Switches	468		378	90	409	59
Successful Non-Switches	355	75.85%	284 Success rate: 75.13%	71 Success rate: 78.89%	323 Success rate: 78.97%	32 Success rate: 54.23%
Non Switches Losses	113		94	19	86	27

Note: This table shows the 468 directly comparable non-switching cases, the number of successful cases and success rates. The data is then broken down by gender and incumbent status.

**Table 6: Most common switch types and successful cases among the directly comparable switches.**

Types of Switches	Switching cases	Successful switches
KMT-Indep.	11	3
DPP-Indep.	8	2
Indep.-KMT	8	6
KMT-PFP	11	10
Indep.-DPP	5	2
Indep.-PFP	4	2
NP-KMT	4	3
Indep.-TSU	3	1
NP-PFP	2	2
KMT-NP	2	1
TSU- Indep.	2	0
DPP-TIP	2	1

Note: Only types with at least two switching cases have been included.