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Why do people join political parties, and what do they do for them?

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Key questions

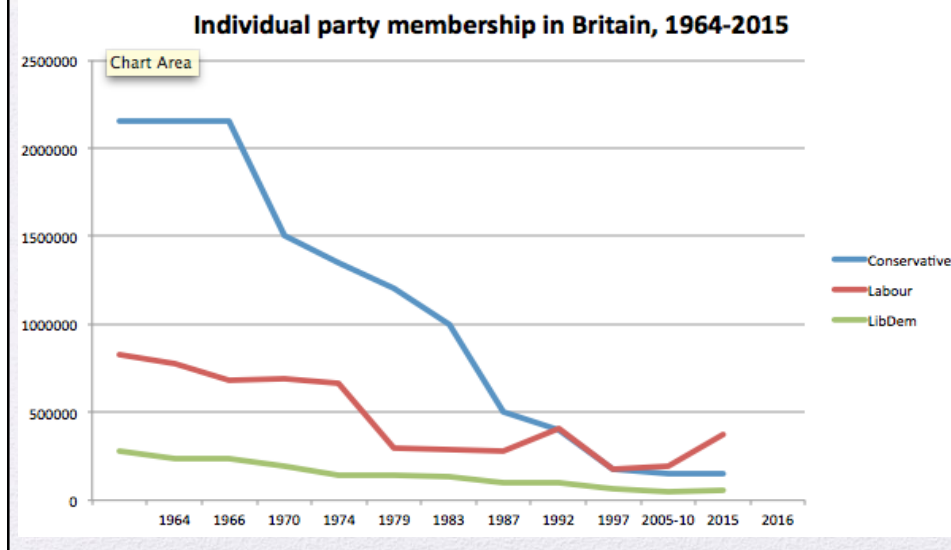
- Why do people join political parties – and why *don't* they?
- How do party members and non-member supporters compare in terms of the election campaign work they do for parties?

The Data: Party Members Project (PMP)

<http://esrcpartymembersproject.org>

- Funded by ESRC, 2015-2018
- Involves surveys in 2015 of:
 - Members of 6 parties
 - Non-member partisans (strong party supporters)
 - Labour's affiliated trade unionists
- Survey of Labour's new joiners in 2016
- Survey of party leavers in 2017
- Interviews with party officers and elites on what they want/expect of members

The context: Long-run decline of party membership



Q1: Why do some people join parties, while others don't?

- Difficult to answer directly, because typically we rely on data from survey of members
- These enable us to ask about factors we think might influence decision to join
- But what about those people who might be expected to join parties, but do not do so?
- We have asked similar questions of people such as these, and are now able to compare members and non-member supporters.

So why do people join parties? Seyd & Whiteley's 'general incentives' model

- Expressive motivations (political identity/principles)
- Collective policy reasons (positive & negative)
- Altruistic motivations (eg, for good of democracy or nation)
- Social norms
- Selective reasons (ie, personal utility)
 - Outcomes (eg, career advancement)
 - Processes (pleasure derived from involvement)

Motivations for joining parties in 2015

Importance of these motivations for joining parties

Party	Collective	Expressive	Selective Outcome	Selective Process	Altruism	Social Norm
Conservative	7.3386	8.0366	4.5209	5.9931	6.9660	2.6315
Labour	7.6377	7.7863	4.1630	5.9358	7.4011	3.0550
LibDem	6.6973	7.4575	4.5184	5.7455	7.2472	2.6306
UKIP	7.6592	8.4015	3.9780	5.7839	7.3173	2.1999
Green	7.6621	7.0444	3.5132	5.3731	7.4125	1.9929
SNP	7.6331	8.6571	3.3713	6.1009	7.6543	2.5576
Total	7.4603	7.9190	4.0353	5.8528	7.3231	2.5559
Number	5695	5679	5295	5271	5600	5361

Note: All variables are measured on scales running from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important). Source: British Party Membership Survey 2015.

But how do party members compare with non-member partisan identifiers?

Table 1: Partisan identifiers' and party members' reasons for joining parties (mean scores 0-10 scales)

	Conserv		Green		Labour		LibDem		SNP		UKIP		ALL		
	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P-M
Collective policy															
Support key policies	8.17	8.78	8.43	9.55	8.47	8.74	8.44	8.77	8.28	9.83	8.00	9.89	8.30	9.22	-0.92
Oppose key policies	7.84	7.90	7.90	7.77	8.05	8.53	7.70	6.63	7.74	7.62	7.65	7.43	7.82	7.74	0.08
Expressive															
Party principles	8.10	8.97	8.61	9.34	8.39	9.18	8.49	9.26	8.22	9.39	7.63	9.25	8.24	9.22	-0.98
Belief in leadership	7.80	8.21	7.66	6.67	7.76	6.83	7.73	6.87	7.86	9.65	7.59	9.23	7.73	7.91	-0.18
Support freedom	5.95	7.64	6.35	8.05	6.93	7.88	6.24	8.55	6.85	9.12	5.96	8.97	6.38	8.30	-1.92
Pursue equality	6.16	6.62	6.66	9.73	7.57	9.78	6.69	8.77	7.22	9.84	6.02	7.27	6.72	8.65	-1.93
Selective outcome															
For career reasons	6.78	2.74	6.47	1.56	6.36	2.13	6.40	2.00	6.09	1.85	6.79	1.91	6.49	2.08	4.41
To become politician	7.32	3.16	6.69	1.91	6.55	2.52	6.96	2.85	6.29	1.94	7.04	2.51	6.82	2.51	4.31
Selective process															
To mix with like-minded	7.67	5.89	7.49	4.83	7.65	5.83	7.59	5.49	7.49	5.94	7.40	5.37	7.55	5.61	1.94
Social norm															
Influence of friends, etc.	5.75	3.38	5.85	2.42	5.69	3.61	5.86	3.03	5.50	2.85	5.61	2.30	5.71	3.00	2.71
Altruistic															
Promote nat'l interest	6.75	8.82	6.60	8.26	7.35	8.45	6.87	8.03	7.22	9.91	6.52	9.92	6.80	8.90	-2.10
Support democracy	7.06	8.21	7.04	8.41	7.59	8.39	7.21	8.50	7.43	9.21	6.67	8.84	7.17	8.57	-1.40

Comparing the political efficacy of members and partisans

Table 2: Comparing political efficacy of partisan identifiers and party members (% agreeing or agreeing strongly)

	Conserv		Green		Labour		LibDem		SNP		UKIP		ALL		
	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P-M
Members can change community	61.7	90.7	71.2	90.3	68.6	89.8	72.0	93.1	66.8	95.4	48.0	88.6	64.6	95.4	-30.8
Leaders don't pay attention to members	49.3	23.4	56.6	6.7	52.1	34.4	49.2	17.9	43.8	3.7	66.9	14.5	53.1	18.0	35.1
Could do good job as MP/Councillor	34.9	61.2	34.2	51.5	32.7	62.6	37.3	68.3	34.0	47.1	32.3	54.2	34.3	57.6	23.3

Members' and partisans' views on the costs of membership

Table 3: Comparing partisan identifiers' and party members' evaluations of costs of party membership (% agreeing or agreeing strongly)

	Conserv		Green		Labour		LibDem		SNP		UKIP		ALL		
	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P	M	P-M
Activism takes time from family	73.9	63.5	65.9	56.5	66.9	63.4	73.6	72.3	64.7	54.0	69.1	67.2	69.1	62.5	6.6
Party work can be boring	33.4	36.0	37.2	28.3	28.2	41.3	35.4	42.1	24.5	16.2	39.6	29.5	33.1	32.8	-0.3

Have the partisans ever been members before – and would they be again?

Table 4: Partisan identifiers' thoughts on past and future membership

	Con	Green	Lab	LibDem	SNP	UKIP	ALL
Past member?	13.4	12.2	17.9	16.5	13.6	11.2	14.2
Ever considered joining?	11.6	36.7	22.2	22.6	32.5	15.6	23.7
Likely/very likely to join?	3.3	15.5	9.0	7.9	16.1	6.8	9.6
Worth joining to vote for leader?	16.4	27.9	24.4	25.6	12.5	2.24	21.5

Q2: What about campaign activism: does it make a difference whether or not partisan identifiers are members?

- H1. At the individual level, party members do more during election campaigns than non-member supporters
- H2. At the individual level, the more 'intensive' the form of activity, the greater the gap in activism between party members and non-member supporters
- H3. At the aggregate level, the overall input of non-member supporters may exceed that of party members

Testing H1 & H2

H1. Party members do more than supporters

H2. The more 'intensive' the form of activity, the greater the gap in activism between party members, supporters and trade unionists

Which of the following things did you do for the party during the 2015 election campaign?

Activity		Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Green	SNP	Total
Low intensity Activities (at least one)	M	57.4	75.3	67.4	65.0	80.6	87.6	72.0
	P	13.5	26.5	21.9	23.1	43.1	41.9	28.0
Medium intensity Activities (at least one)	M	52.5	52.2	52.8	51.1	38.5	56.2	51.0
	P	6.3	7.0	9.4	4.3	10.3	14.3	8.5
High intensity Activities	M	38.0	37.0	36.0	30.0	23.7	28.2	32.6
	P	2.0	2.4	2.8	2.3	4.1	2.4	2.7
Activism Index – M		2.15	2.56	2.38	2.28	2.43	3.02	2.47
Activism Index – P		0.25	0.48	0.42	0.37	0.79	0.80	0.51
Number – M		1193	1180	730	785	845	963	5696
– P		1142	1136	1004	1070	1029	996	6337

Note: All activities figures are percentages. Campaign activism index is based on an additive scale that runs from 0 (no activity during the election campaign) to 7 (maximal activity during the campaign, excluding "other"). M= members; P=partisans.

H3: At the aggregate level, the input of party supporters and affiliated trade unionists exceeds that of party members

Mean number of campaign activities, weighted by size of groups

	Con.	Labour	LibDem	UKIP	Green	SNP	Total
Members	322500	481280	121380	95760	148230	332200	1486940
Partisans	765498	1864063	187582	235533	130502	527243	4514981

Note: Each figure is the mean number of campaign activities reported by each group, multiplied by the estimated number of people the group. The figures may therefore be interpreted as the minimum overall number of campaign activities conducted by each group.

Conclusions

- General incentives model is still useful (especially collective/expressive)
- Partisans seem to think that membership might be important for careerist reasons – to a greater extent than members themselves do
- Partisans are also more likely to imagine that people join because of their social contacts than is actually the case
- Partisans lack political efficacy of members
- Partisans see members' activism as slightly more time-consuming than members themselves do.
- Nearly a quarter of partisans have considered joining up – and a fifth reckon it would be worth it to get a vote in leadership elections.
- Members are more likely to participate in campaign than partisans
- The more intensive an activity is in terms of time/effort, the greater the input of members compared to partisans
- Overall, the impact of campaign work undertaken by partisans is at least as great as that of members

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