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The Individual-Level Determinants of German Party Membership

Hanna Hoffmann & Frederik Springer

Abstract

Why do citizens join German parties? Do specific attributes and abilities play a determinant role in participation in political parties? The German Party Membership Study of 2009 enables us to answer these questions. On the basis of the telephone survey, we will address these issues by way of a systematic comparison of current party members with fellow citizens who never joined a party. For the purpose of analysing the individual-level determinants of joining a party, we use fundamental explanatory approaches to political participation: The socioeconomic standard model, the social-psychological approach, and the general incentives model. The results of our analyses clearly show that social-psychological attributes best explain the decision to join a party. Nevertheless, the findings for the determinants in both the socioeconomic standard model and the general incentives model complete the picture of citizens who are party members.

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Introduction

Many recent publications have noted a decline in party membership (Biehl 2005; Kölln and Polk 2017; Niedermayer 2017; Scarrow 2006; van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012; Wiesendahl 2006). Especially as concerns the two major parties in Germany, namely the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD), this decline has primarily been caused by decreasing numbers of new memberships (Wiesendahl 2006). Against this backdrop, we need to ask why citizens become party members and how those that do differ from persons without a party affiliation. The present paper will consider the circumstances, skills and motives – in sum, the determinants – of those persons who decided to join a party.

Initial analyses in the context of the German Party Membership Study in 2009 show how party members are rooted in society (Klein 2011). It is thus revealed who party members are and if these citizens are representative of the socio-structural groups in the overall population. Based on these findings, we investigate which determinants exert the strongest influence on the decision to join a party. As a first step in this investigation, we compare the characteristics of current party members with those of individuals that are not and have never been party members. One component of the study of German party membership, the telephone survey, involves people belonging to both groups and hence allows for such a comparison. For the purpose of our multinomial logistic analyses, we further subdivide non-members into those who can imagine that they might possibly join a party and those who cannot. Employing Klein's term (Klein 2006), the latter are referred to as potential party members. We depart from Klein's approach, however, by not introducing an additional category for potential participants who consider collaborating in a party's activities without actually joining it. We focus on actual membership, and attitudes towards it, and consider the political activity of members and non-members to be a separate issue that does not fall within the scope of this article.

In order to examine the triggering factors for the empirical decision to join a party, we first draw on two basic approaches to explaining political participation: the socioeconomic standard model and the socio-psychological approach. The socioeconomic standard model (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Verba and Nie 1972), which is also called socio-structural or resources approach, suggests that especially those people are politically active who are endowed with resources relevant for political participation. These resources comprise having a high level of education, belonging to the middle or upper class, having a good occupational position, as well as being of middle age. The socio-psychological approach (Campbell et al. 1960), on the other hand, suggests that individual political attitudes explain political participation (Klein

2006). These include interest in politics, party identification, and the theoretical construct ‘political efficacy’, which covers one’s own perceived political abilities and the perceived effectiveness of political action. Finally, we draw on the general incentives approach (Seyd and Whiteley 1992), in order to explain the decision for or against party membership. The general incentives model focuses on the individual motives that favour joining a party.

We discuss these models one after another. For each approach respectively we begin by presenting our theoretical considerations and operationalisations of key concepts. Before we estimate multivariate models, basic information on the composition of party members compared to non-members is provided. This stepwise procedure makes sense as compositional data regarding party members is usually limited to a few sociodemographic statistics. After presenting the different approaches we finally estimate a fully specified composite model. Given the fact that variables of the three models are not fully independent it is important to begin with separate models before documenting the composite model. Especially, when it comes to sociodemographic variables one can argue plausibly that it is to be expected that effects on the decision to join a party might primarily be moderated by political attitudes and motives. For understanding the social roots of partisanship, these indirect effects are therefore equally relevant.

Database

The German Party Membership Study 2009 consists of two components. 17.000 party members of the six parliamentarily represented parties were surveyed by mail. This dataset lends itself to party-specific analysis and in-depth research concerning the involvement of party members in their organisations. However, for the purpose of this paper i.e. contrasting party members to the general population, the representative telephone survey is especially useful. It is based on samples of 800 non-members and 800 members of the German parties in the Bundestag, that were drawn from the population of German citizens, who are at least 18 years of age and live in a private household.

One has to be concerned about the representativeness of the sample as it is a necessary condition for the validity of our analyses. By using Infratest’s Telefon-Master-Sample it was ensured that the sample was not distorted and cluster effects were avoided. The Random Digit Dialing procedure allowed to reach individuals who are not enlisted in the public telephone register. For identifying party members, telephone screening interviews were conducted. The field phase started on the 14th of April 2009 and ended on the 30th of May of the same year.

Two implications of our decision to use the telephone survey need to be specified. Despite the disproportionately stratified representative sample we do not need to weight the data, since the stratification regards our dependent variable party membership. Furthermore, analyses differentiated by party affiliation are not possible due to potentially low sample sizes if split.

Socio-Structural Determinants of Party Membership

The extent to which someone is endowed with resources is not just crucial for political participation in general, but can be especially decisive for collaboration with or membership in a party. In principle, it is assumed that a citizen has to reach a certain level of resources – for instance, in terms of education, income or social status – in order to be politically active (van Deth 2009). It has often been shown that people with a higher socioeconomic status are more prone to take part in political activities (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 164).

In recent literature on party membership, it is assumed that a new type of party member has arisen in the context of societal change, individualisation and the consequent dissolution of social milieus.¹ On this view, the social composition of party members has changed, as have their motives for joining. Nowadays, any given party one examines would be comprised of people with substantial resources who have a higher education, are middle-aged, and belong to the new middle class of civil servants and white-collar employees. In addition, party members of the new type are still mainly male (Biehl 2005; Heidar 2006; Niedermayer 2009; Scarrow 2006). As a result of this new social composition, there has also been a change in claims and self-perception, as increased education leads to higher expectations and demands vis-à-vis the party.

Could different levels of resources thus explain why citizens join parties? This might not be enough to serve as sole predictor, but among the various attributes, we want to investigate which resources have the most significance for the decision to join. By using multinomial logistic regression analysis, we examine if the existence of a certain characteristic influences the probability of being a party member. In our models, we do not compare party members to the overall population, but rather to the respondents who are not and have never been members of a political party. Below, we consider the significance for membership of education, social status, employment, and occupation. In accordance with the resource-based approach, we expect party members to possess these attributes to a higher degree than non-members. Since it is known

¹ Because of these processes of societal change, it can be assumed that a general transformation of political participation has taken place (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

that there are, in principal, more male party members, while younger persons are underrepresented, we also control for gender and age. Even though age cannot directly be classified as a resource, it has to be acknowledged that life experience increases with age. Life experience leads, in turn, to higher odds for someone to have ample resources. As concerns employment status, for the sake of simplicity, we merely distinguish between unemployed, employed and retired respondents.

We always begin our empirical application of the different explanatory approaches with descriptive bivariate analyses, in order to indicate the distribution of the individual-level determinants in the groups of members and non-members respectively. Accordingly, Table 1 shows the column percentages for party members and non-party-affiliated respondents, which are differentiated according to specific resources that might be relevant for participation. The distributions that become apparent in this connection correspond to our expectations. In our sample, less than half of the non-members are male, while almost two-thirds of the members are male. As regards employment status, it is striking that in the group of party members, pensioners (46 per cent) are almost as well represented as people who are employed (49 per cent). However, non-members consist of two-thirds employed respondents and just over one-fifth retired persons (22 per cent). Furthermore, occupational groups differ considerably with respect to party membership: Although our sample is composed equally of party members and non-members, only 35 percent of blue collar workers are party members. This is followed by white collar workers (private sector) at 49 per cent. The self-employed and academic professionals (66 per cent), on the one hand, and white collar workers in the public sector and civil servants (63 per cent), on the other, both have high levels of membership. In addition, our results point to a positive relationship between joining a party and further predictors: namely, age, education, and subjective social status. Age, however, has a non-linear impact. It is especially notable that party members (22 per cent) are to a considerably lesser extent composed of respondents between the ages of 35 and 49 than non-members (38 per cent). At the same time, 38 per cent of party members are older than 64. This is far more than the 19 per cent of the non-party-affiliated persons who are over 64. As regards level of education, there also seems to be a connection: 60 per cent of party members have achieved a higher secondary education, in contrast to 47 per cent of the non-party-affiliated individuals who have reached this level. Finally, it should be mentioned that people who consider themselves part of the upper-middle or upper class are more prone to join a party.

[Table 1]

Thus far, we have only differentiated by actual party membership. However, for the purpose of the multivariate analyses, the dependent variable is divided into three categories: party members, potential party members, and people who are uninterested in membership. The potential party members have not joined a party yet, but could imagine doing so.² In order to study the determinants of membership compared to non-membership (in the two different modes), we use a multinomial logistic regression analysis. Regarding individual-level determinants, the attributes with the lowest percentages of party members (see Table 1), which are also the characteristics indicating the least resources, are chosen as reference categories. Beside the odds ratios, we also display the x-standardised odds, in order to be able to compare the size of the determinants' effect.

Overall, the multivariate comparison between members and non-members is in line with the descriptive results of Table 1. It is notable that all resources that could potentially be relevant for participation actually have a statistically significant impact on membership (see Table 2). Gender, age and retirement are the major determinants of membership. The influence of age, in particular, has to be discussed in greater detail. The odds of being a party member are 110 per cent higher for people in the 50–64 age group as compared to individuals under 35. There is no statistically significant effect for individuals who are over 65, however. In this connection, one needs to keep in mind that the majority of persons over 65 are retired, and that retirement, in turn, increases the likelihood of party membership. As concerns occupational category, white collar workers (public sector) and civil servants have the highest probability of being party members: The odds ratio is 2.466. This effect could be based on the closer proximity of people working in public service to political processes and the possibility to organise their time more flexibly. Likewise, albeit to a lesser extent, both white collar workers in the private sector and the self-employed and academic professionals are more prone to become party members than blue collar workers. While the specific occupation has a strong influence on party membership, in the context of becoming a member, it does not matter whether somebody is employed or not. The bivariate positive correlation between subjective social status and membership is reflected in the multivariate results: People who regard themselves as part of the upper-middle class or upper class have 56 per cent higher odds of being a party member than those who regard themselves as belonging to the working class or lower middle class. In terms of membership, it makes no difference, however, if an individual belongs to the middle class or below.

[Table 2]

² To generate this information, the respondents were asked: 'Could you possibly imagine joining a political party?'

Overall, the analysis appears to support the thesis according to which a new type of party member has emerged: This new type is mainly male; young people are underrepresented; a higher educational attainment facilitates membership; and civil servants and white collar workers are more prone to become members than blue collar workers. Regarding age, gender and education these observations are in line with international research covering about the same timeframe as the German Party Membership Study using the International Social Survey Programme und the World Value Survey (Ponce and Scarrow 2016) as well as several national party member studies (Gauja and van Haute 2015). Although effects of occupational status are rarely tested, our results are also compatible with the few existing analyses (for the British Liberal Party: Whiteley, Seyd, and Billingham 2006; for Fine Gael in Ireland: Gallagher and Marsh 2004, 411). Inasmuch as the thesis of a new party member implies a certain trend, however, in order to form a definitive judgement, one has to use longitudinal data.

The findings discussed clearly show that the distribution of resources relevant for participation explains a great deal of the variation between party members and people who are uninterested in membership. This is also true for the differences between members and potential members. Accordingly, the most important effects described above – namely, of gender, age and retirement – are also statistically significant with respect to the comparison between members and potential members. On the contrary, there is only one factor that has a statistically significant impact in distinguishing between potential members and people who are uninterested in membership: Individuals who obtained a higher secondary education are 1.955 times more likely to join a party than individuals who at most completed a secondary education. It is possible that well-educated people are more aware of the social desirability of not ruling out this conventional mode of political participation.

Socio-Psychological Determinants of Party Membership

As we have seen, within any given individual's socio-demographic profile, there are resources that influence the likelihood of becoming a party member. Nevertheless, this finding does not provide a direct explanation for the fact of joining a party. Therefore, Nie, Bingham, and Prewitt (1969) already include individual value orientations and political views for the purpose of further developing the well-known socioeconomic standard model. The consideration of personal political attitudes and predispositions in the socio-psychological approach should enable us not only to determine the conditions for joining, but also the cause of doing so (Klein 2006). It is to be expected that existing political attitudes and orientations will lead to political involvement

(Milbrath and Goel 1977), while involvement, in turn, could result in a person having the aim of becoming a party member. Personal interest in politics, the existence of an affective party attachment, and the central theoretical concept of political efficacy are, among other aspects, relevant factors in the socio-psychological approach (Campbell et al. 1960). It can be expected that party members will differ from the remaining population in terms of their interest in politics. Normally, we can imagine the following process taking place: A citizen develops an interest in politics and – subsequently – his or her own political attitudes. This might bring about the wish to support the party that best matches these attitudes by means of active participation or membership in that party. Inglehart (1977) already postulated that political interest increases the probability of participating in political activities. In addition, the hope of exerting influence is also likely to be crucial for active members.

Based on the 2009 telephone survey, we are able to examine interest in politics in general, as well as on different levels. As Table 3 shows, the majority of party members are fairly highly (39 per cent) or very highly interested (46 per cent) in politics in general. 13 per cent state that they have an average interest, and only 2 per cent have low interest or no interest at all. In contrast, the norm for non-members is average interest (44 per cent). Nevertheless, one-third has a fairly high general interest in politics and approximately one in ten persons has a very high interest.

[Table 3]

How is this general interest distributed over the levels of local, state and national politics? As concerns non-members, we can note that the distribution only varies slightly between these levels, whereas national politics obtains, on average, a higher score. One in five non-party-affiliated respondents has a low, almost 40 per cent have an average, and another 40 per cent have a high interest in local politics. Respondents expressed an average interest in state politics slightly more often. On account of its high percentage distribution, interest in national politics is most comparable to the general interest in politics: More than every other non-party-member has at least a fairly high interest in national politics.

The picture is quite different for party members. The results show that a large percentage of party members (43 per cent) are very highly and a further 30 per cent are fairly highly interested in local politics. Only a very small percentage state that they have no interest or merely a low interest. There is clearly less interest in state politics. Just one quarter are very interested, but at least 45 per cent are fairly highly interested. The percentage of party members having a low or no interest in state politics, on the other hand, is small. On the highest political level, namely

the national level, interest rises again. 43 per cent are strongly interested, while only 18 per cent have an average interest, and almost no one has low interest. A strong interest in national politics is also expressed by people without party affiliation. Party members are distinguished from non-members, however, by their particularly strong interest in local politics (see also Klein 2006, 47f.). The degree to which individuals are directly affected could play an important role when it comes to interest in municipal politics. If we recall the process connecting political interest to joining a party, as described above, we can make the following observation: Because access to local politics is more direct and requires less effort, interest in them can develop faster, which may, in turn, lead to active participation or membership in a party. In addition, participation on a local level provides a more direct benefit to the individual, because one's own goals can be achieved more easily. Finally, local politics probably evoke a stronger sense of a duty to make a contribution oneself. Comparative research based on the World Value Survey has already documented the positive effect of political interest on the decision to join a party (Whiteley 2011), though it has not been further specified which level of decision-making party members are particularly interested in.

Beside interest in politics, political efficacy is also considered as a contributing factor in the decision to join a party. This notion refers to the individual assessment of political influence and is also called 'political self-confidence' (Janowitz and Marvick 1956, 387; van Deth 2009). The issue at stake is a person's belief in the ability to influence the political system by his or her own behaviour (Lüdemann 2001, 47). One has to distinguish between internal and external efficacy. The dimension of internal efficacy comprises an individual's conviction that he or she can influence political decisions. External efficacy refers to the individual's belief that the political system is open to influences from the outside and responds to them (Vetter 1997).

Internal efficacy is measured by two survey items: 'I believe I am able to take an active role in a group that deals with political questions' and 'Politics is so complicated that somebody like me can't understand what's going on at all'. For the purpose of our analyses, we calculated a composite index from these two items. The second item was subjected to a pole change, so that high values indicate rejection of the statement. External efficacy is measured by the following survey items: 'The members of the Bundestag try to achieve close contact with the population' and 'Parties just want people's votes, but are not interested in their views'. Before calculating a composite index, we again reversed the polarity for the second item. The values of the resulting efficacy-indices range from 1 to 5.

As one would expect, party members give a higher rating to both efficacy-indices than non-party-affiliated respondents. Comparing the two groups, the average rating differs more for internal than for external efficacy. Party members are thus characterised by a rather high degree of political self-confidence. Moreover, they feel they can achieve something by their political efforts and can be heard by the upper ranks of a party. This is not the case for the non-members. Leaving aside the fact that they attribute to themselves less political ability, they also believe to a lesser extent that individual political effort – irrespective of who makes it – can affect political decisions. Analogically, Whiteley, Seyd, and Billingham (2006) show that members of the Liberal Democrats in the UK exhibit a higher internal and external efficacy compared to its supporters. Using data from the International Social Survey Programme 2004 Whiteley also demonstrates that a combined index of internal and external efficacy positively affects the probability of joining a political party (Whiteley 2011).

When Campbell, Gurin, and Miller (1954) examined the determinants of voting behaviour, they introduced party identification as a stable, affective attachment to a certain party. Since then, the connection between this psychological tie and both conventional and unconventional forms of political participation have been repeatedly studied (Bäck, Teorell, and Westholm; Finkel and Opp 1991; Gershtenson 2002). These studies suggest that there should also be a correlation between party identification and party membership. In our telephone survey, we asked people if they identify themselves with a certain party and if so, how strongly (very weak – very strong). We differentiate between respondents having no or, at most, a modest party attachment and those with at least a fairly strong identification. The descriptive analysis shows that four out of five party members strongly identify with a party, whereas this is only the case for one-third of the non-members (see Table 3). The correlation between long-term attachment to a party and membership is not surprising, but the extent of the difference between party members and the remaining respondents is notable, nonetheless.

As we have seen, party members and non-members differ with respect to their interest in politics and their party identification, as well as their assessment of internal and external efficacy. On the basis of these findings, we want to investigate which of these attributes is the major determinant on the decision to join a party. As we did for the socio-structural approach, we estimate a multinomial regression with a trichotomous dependent variable. Yet again, we distinguish between members, potential members and people who are not interested in membership (Table 4).

[Table 4]

We observe a very similar constellation when comparing party members and potential members: The same effects are less pronounced, but still highly significant. Internal efficacy is an exception, insofar as it does not affect this comparison, but influences rather the odds of being a party member as opposed to a person who is uninterested in membership. Comparing potential members to individuals who are uninterested in membership, only internal efficacy has a highly significant effect. With every additional point on the scale of internal efficacy, the odds of considering becoming a party member change by a factor of 2.078. This means that a lack of confidence in one's own political abilities impedes someone from even thinking about joining a party. Klein reported similar results using data from the German Party Membership Study 1998 (Klein 2006, 47). On the whole, the conclusion to which we came regarding the socio-structural approach also applies to our socio-psychological variables: People who are uninterested in membership and potential members differ only to a rather small extent in terms of our chosen predictors.

Motivational Determinants of Party Membership

The description of the process by which interest in politics leads to party membership implies that the decision to join a party is brought about by one or more motives. Accordingly, the wish to support a party or to change things politically can be understood as an incentive for joining a party. Seyd and Whiteley's (1992) general incentives approach enables us precisely to investigate this connection, because what is at issue in it are certain incentives or motivational predictors that can lead to membership. It is assumed that citizens become party members because they hope – in keeping with the different incentives – for one or more benefits. Besides these benefits, the resulting costs are also figured into the individual calculation. Thus, this approach considers both incentives and disincentives. More precisely, the motives are certain advantages and disadvantages that are connected to party membership. The model divides these into different components (see Table 5).

[Table 5]

Firstly, there are the selective, outcome incentives. This refers to desired personal advantages like a parliamentary mandate or a party post. Such incentives are measured here by access to a party function, establishing new useful business contacts, and becoming a member of the parliament. Since achieving these outcomes is feasible only for a selected group, we also consider selective, process incentives. In this case, the individual benefit results from active participation in a party, because the activity is perceived as interesting and exciting. Hence, this component

comprises the evaluation of participating in social events, of having fun doing party work, and of having the opportunity to develop personal political expertise.

Collective political incentives are not linked to obtaining individual benefits, but rather to an interest in helping to achieve political goals. The utility here has its source in the feeling that one is helping to strengthen the influence of the party and to achieve political goals. Supporting specific ideological principals of a specific party, in contrast, forms part of the ideological incentives, as does standing up for one's own political convictions. Normative incentives provide an explanation for joining a party when the membership corresponds to the expectations of one's social environment: namely, of one's family and friends. These expectations might be based on the view that being a party member and contributing to the functioning of democracy figure among the duties of a citizen: They may be based, namely, on altruistic incentives. Lastly, showing sympathy for the party or its leading officials, as well as gaining personal satisfaction from party membership, reflect expressive incentives.

Besides these positive incentives, membership can also have negative consequences. Analogously to the use of the term 'benefits' for positive consequences, negative consequences are called 'costs'. Costs are incurred by virtue of the membership fee, but also in the form of time expenditure and the possible work burden on active members. The hostility, envy, and resentment of other party members and disadvantages in the context of one's occupation represent other possible costs.

The possible consequences of a decision like that to join a political party are not predetermined, but rather have different probabilities of occurrence – thus making it a decision under risk. Hence, respondents were not just asked how they evaluate these different potential implications of membership, but also how likely they consider them. Using these survey items, we are able to calculate the subjective expected utilities (SEU) (Savage 1954) of joining a party. In this respect, our approach differs from that of Seyd and Whiteley (Seyd and Whiteley 1992; Whiteley et al. 1993), who used utilities only. We deem the multiplicative connection to probabilities as a useful extension, because a high utility whose realisation seems unlikely might not affect the decision at all.

In Table 6, the different SEUs for the individual incentives of membership are listed. As we would expect theoretically, all positive incentives are rated higher by party members than non-members, while for costs, the opposite is true. Taking a closer look at the evaluation of the individual dimensions, we find the biggest differences between members and non-members concern costs, as well as ideological and altruistic incentives. Interestingly, these two incentives

are also the dimensions that are evaluated the highest by both groups. This means that support for the specific ideological principals of parties and fulfilling one's civic duty are considered the most important and likely consequences of membership even by non-members. Party members, however, are noticeably more prone to this view. We observe a modest difference with respect to selective, outcome and process, collective political, and expressive incentives: Party members rate these dimensions 28–40 per cent higher than non-members. As concerns normative incentives, the ratings are low in both groups and differ only slightly. This means that an enhanced personal reputation as a result of joining a party is not expected by non-members and not experienced by members.

[Table 6]

As above, we use a multinomial logistic regression analysis, in order to find out which predictors exert the highest influence on joining a political party and to be able to compare these results with the general population. As above, the comparison between party members and persons who cannot imagine joining a party reflects the descriptive analysis to a certain extent: Costs, altruistic incentives, and ideological incentives have a highly statistically significant effect. As against what would be expected theoretically, the odds of joining decrease with an increasing expected utility of normative incentives. As suggested in the description of the bivariate results, this might be due to disillusioning experiences that members have made regarding recognition by others. Contrary to expectations, the effects of selective, process and collective political incentives are also negative, but not statistically significant.

Overall, the results presented in Table 7 diverge from the previous findings in that there are only a few differences between members and both of the other two groups. More precisely, only costs result in a difference. Possible costs seem to constitute a reason that not only impedes people from actually joining a party, but even impedes them from considering becoming a party member. Viewing membership as a means of strengthening political ideals (ideological incentive) and fulfilling a civic duty (altruistic incentive) is essential when it comes to considering membership, but it does not serve to distinguish between actual and potential members. In other words, potential members may not join because these incentives are not strong enough. The results for selective, process incentives are interesting, because they are rated highest by potential, not by actual party members. It seems plausible to assume that actual party members know from experience that the benefit to be gained from social events and the increase in one's own political expertise is limited, while potential members overestimate it.

[Table 7]

To sum up, the decision to join a party is especially based on the wish to support ideological principles and to fulfil a civic duty. It is striking that selective incentives, which represent a significant motive for action in classical rational choice approaches, hardly contribute to the motivation for becoming a party member. The decision against a membership is, on the other hand, essentially dependent on the perception of costs. Thus, someone who associates party work with a high time expenditure and a potential work burden is unlikely to be a party member.

Comparison of the Approaches

Having examined the different explanatory approaches separately, we now address the question of which model best explains joining a political party. To this end, we compare the explanatory power of the individual models and an aggregate model, which shows that the variables used to operationalise the socio-psychological approach (Pseudo R^2 : .255) have more than twice the explanatory power of those used for the socio-structural approach (Pseudo R^2 : .106). The motivational determinants (Pseudo R^2 : .082) are least suitable for differentiating between members, potential members and persons who cannot even imagine joining a party. In short, political attitudes like the belief in political efficacy or interest in politics exert the strongest influence on the decision to join. But to get a more detailed picture, we have to construct an aggregate model that includes all effects simultaneously. With a pseudo R^2 of .305 (see Table 8), the aggregate model explains the differences between our groups pretty well. Since the aggregate model performs better than the socio-psychological model, it is apparent that one or both of the other approaches also contribute to explaining party membership. In the following paragraphs, we discuss this model in detail.

[Table 8]

As regards the socio-structural approach, the two effects that are the strongest in the individual model remain statistically significant in the aggregate model, albeit on a lower level: Both being male and being retired increase the odds of joining a party, as opposed to being uninterested in membership. In contrast to the individual model, however, the fact of being retired produces the stronger effect. Furthermore, it is notable that none of the socio-structural variables contribute to the difference between potential party members and people who are uninterested in membership. Finally, the status of being retired, in contrast to unemployed, and being in the 50-to-64 age group still have a positive effect on actually joining, as opposed to remaining just a potential member. People in the latter age group might feel more confident about their decisions

for the future: e.g. decisions like joining a party. Furthermore, the potential social desirability of membership might be less important for these groups.

As compared to the other two approaches, the direct influence of the variables belonging to the socio-structural approach is small in the aggregate model. This can be attributed to interdependencies. For example, education and interest in politics correlate, but only interest in politics has a direct influence on party membership, whereas the effect of a high educational level is indirect.

As the coefficients of determination have already shown, the socio-psychological model has the greatest explanatory power with regard to party membership. General and local political interest, internal and external efficacy, and party identification are still essential predictors of whether someone will be an actual party member or is not interested in joining, whereas the level of interest in federal and national politics can again be neglected. Even if we put the standardised odds into an order reflecting the size of the effect, there is no divergence from the individual model. Only the statistical significance of interest in local politics has decreased. With respect to explaining the differences between members and potential members, as well as potential members and people who are uninterested in membership, the effects in the aggregate model are similar to the ones in the individual model.

As opposed to the individual general incentives model shown in Table 7, normative and ideological incentives do not have any effect in distinguishing between party members and people who are uninterested in membership. Altruistic incentives and costs, by contrast, still have statistically significant effects, and the individual assessment of costs still serves to differentiate between party members and the other two groups. All other effects vanish when we move from the individual to the aggregate model. It is possible that the explanatory power of the motivational predictors may be rather small, because the expectation of specific benefits is not necessarily decisive for joining a party, but only develops during membership and may be crucial for the level of activity of party members. By this time, the decision to join has already been made, due to interest in politics, belief in political efficacy or party identification.

To conclude, attitudinal variables are clearly the best predictors for explaining the decision to join a party or at least the fact of considering to do so. The other two approaches also contribute to the understanding of membership, but to a lesser extent. Measured by the size of their effect, gender, altruistic incentives, and costs are not as decisive as any of the socio-psychological determinants. Only whether someone is retired or not compares to the attitudinal determinants.

Indeed, it has an even higher standardised odds ratio than interest in local politics and external efficacy.

Conclusion

Why do citizens become party members? Generally speaking, they do so, because of their attitudes towards politics and parties. This conclusion follows from the previous analyses, which make clear that, as compared to the socio-structural and the general incentives approaches, socio-psychological determinants have the greatest influence on the decision to become a party member. The political attitudes to which we refer here comprise, above all, potential party identification and one's confidence in one's own political abilities (internal efficacy). Other essential predictors are interest in politics in general and in local politics, as well as a view of the political system as being open to outside influences (external efficacy).

These results raise the question of why citizens are interested in politics or have political abilities and preferences. Our results show that education is an important factor. Someone who is well-educated tends to be more interested in politics and to attribute greater skills to him- or herself than a person with less education. Furthermore, an interest in politics can be connected to occupation. Blue collar workers, for example, have less interest in politics than individuals in other occupational categories, especially white collar workers in the public sector and civil servants, who are occupationally close to politics. Thus, resources relevant for participation play an important, albeit indirect role in membership, even though they explain just a small part of the variance of the dependent variable in our aggregate model. The change in the effects when we move from individual models to the aggregate model have suggested a special connection between socio-demographic and attitudinal variables.

What about the motivational determinants of the decision to join a party? The general incentives model proved to have no more than a complementary role. Both different kinds of costs, covering a wide range from membership fee to professional disadvantages, and the subjective expected utility of contributing to the functioning of democracy are especially important in predicting actual membership as opposed to disinterest in membership. This is not the first study to apply the general incentives approach to the issue of joining a political party (see for example Klein 2006), but Seyd and Whiteley (1992) originally attempted to explain the different levels of participation of party members. This might be a more appropriate focus, since some beneficial consequences of membership are only to be achieved by way of a certain level of party activity. While it objectively seems sufficient to be a party member, the subjective perception might differ.

In describing our results, we stressed the three approaches' power for explaining party membership as opposed to remaining merely potentially a member or being uninterested in membership. What the diverse variables are not able to explain is the difference between people who can imagine being a party member and those who cannot. This does not mean that these two groups differ randomly, rather than systematically. Since the difference is one regarding intended behaviour and not actual behaviour, psychological effects may play a role. In addition, such an intention might be considered as a contribution to the functioning of democracy, as we saw in the case of the ideological incentive. Accordingly, social desirability might be a factor here as well.

Against the backdrop of decreasing party membership, the findings can be seen in a rather positive light. Even though we have to conclude that some demographic groups are under- and others over-represented, it is apparent that party members join for reasons that should enable them to represent the interests of all citizens in the different fields of politics. Someone who is endowed with resources relevant for participation, has a marked interest in politics, and believes in his or her own political skills, as well as in the responsiveness of political actors, can be assumed to be willing to pay attention to the interests of other citizens.

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TABLE 1
SOCIO-STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP (BIVARIATE)

	Members (column percentages)	Non-mem- bers	Difference in pp	N
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	34.6	53.1	-18.5	611
Male	65.4	47.0	18.5	796
<i>Age</i>				
Up to 34 years	9.1	19.2	-10.0	196
35 to 49 years	21.8	37.9	-16.1	415
50 to 64 years	30.8	24.2	6.6	389
65 years and above	38.3	18.7	19.6	407
<i>Education</i>				
Up to secondary education ^a	40.3	52.8	-12.4	651
Higher secondary education ^b	59.7	47.3	12.4	756
<i>Employment status</i>				
Unemployed	5.6	12.0	-6.5	122
Employed	48.5	66.1	-17.6	801
Retired	45.9	21.8	24.0	484
<i>Occupational category</i>				
Blue collar worker	7.1	14.3	-7.2	148
White collar worker (private sector)	57.6	64.8	-7.2	859
White collar worker (public sector)/civil servant	20.2	11.4	8.7	225
Self-employed/academic professional	15.1	9.5	5.6	175
<i>Subjective social status</i>				
Up to lower middle class	17.0	24.7	-7.6	291
Middle class	55.3	57.4	-2.1	792
At least upper middle class	27.7	18.0	9.7	324
Total	50.8	49.2	1.7	1,407

^a *Hauptschule* and *Realschule/Mittlere Reife*; ^b *(Fach-)Abitur, (Fach-)Hochschulabschluss*

TABLE 2
SOCIO-STRUCTURAL DETERMINANTS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP
(MULTIVARIATE)

	Members vs. uninterested in membership		Potential members vs. uninterested in membership		Members vs. potential members	
	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR
<i>Gender (ref. female)</i>	2.433***	1.554	1.444 ⁺	1.200	1.685*	1.295
<i>Age (ref. up to 34)</i>						
35 to 49	1.161	1.071	.937	.971	1.239	1.103
50 to 64	2.103***	1.395	.734	.871	2.865**	1.602
Over 65	1.732 ⁺	1.283	.489	.723	3.538*	1.774
<i>Education (ref. up to secondary education^a)</i>	1.820***	1.348	1.955**	1.397	.931	.965
<i>Employment status (ref. unemployed)</i>						
Employed	1.010	1.005	.654	.810	1.544	1.240
Retired	2.278**	1.479	.416	.659	5.479**	2.244
<i>Occupational category (ref. blue collar worker, private sector)</i>						
White collar worker (private sector)	1.751**	1.314	1.529	1.230	1.145	1.068
White collar worker (public sector)/civil servant	2.466**	1.392	1.500	1.160	1,644	1.200
Self-employed/academic professionals	2.279**	1.313	.879	.958	2.593 ⁺	1.370
<i>Subjective social status (ref. up to lower middle class)</i>						
Middle class	1.092	1.045	1.070	1.034	1.021	1.010
At least upper middle class	1.557*	1.205	1.332	1.128	1.169	1.068
McFadden Pseudo-R ²			.1055			
N			1,407			

Notes: ^a *Hauptschule* and *Realschule/Mittlere Reife*; ⁺ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

TABLE 3
SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP
(BIVARIATE)

	Members (column percentages)	Non-mem- bers	Difference in pp	N
<i>Political interest</i>				
<i>General</i>				
Very low	.3	2.5	-2.3	19
Fairly low	1.6	8.8	-7.1	71
Average	12.5	44.1	-31.6	389
Fairly high	39.1	33.7	5.4	514
Very high	46.5	10.9	35.6	414
Mean	4.3	3.4		
<i>Local</i>				
Very low	1.1	3.6	-2.5	32
Fairly low	6.1	17.1	-11.0	160
Average	20.4	38.9	-18.5	412
Fairly high	29.7	30.3	-.6	422
Very high	42.6	10.1	32.5	381
Mean	4.1	3.3		
<i>State</i>				
Very low	.4	3.4	-3.0	26
Fairly low	6.0	12.6	-6.6	129
Average	25.2	45.2	-20.0	489
Fairly high	45.0	33.7	11.2	557
Very high	23.4	5.1	18.4	206
Mean	3.9	3.2		
<i>National</i>				
Very low	.8	2.5	-1.7	23
Fairly low	2.5	9.1	-6.6	79
Average	17.7	35.2	-17.5	367
Fairly high	43.5	39.5	3.9	585
Very high	35.6	13.7	21.9	353
Mean	4.1	3.5		
<i>Party identification</i>				
Up to "Modest"	20.8	66.9	-46.0	603
At least "Fairly strong"	79.2	33.1	46.0	804
Internal efficacy (mean)	3.9	3.1	.9	1,407
External efficacy (mean)	3.1	2.5	.6	1,407
Total	50.8	49.2	1.7	1,407

TABLE 4
SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL DETERMINANTS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP
(MULTIVARIATE)

	Members vs. uninterested in mem- bership		Potential members vs. uninterested in mem- bership		Members vs. potential members	
	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR
<i>Political Interest</i>						
General	1.964***	1.883	1.008 ⁺	1.008	1.947***	1.868
Local	1.398***	1.426	.897	.891	1.559***	1.601
State	1.098	1.090	1.132	1.120	.970	.973
National	.870	.879	1.015	1.014	.858	.868
Internal efficacy	1.849***	1.879	2.078***	2.118	.890	.887
External efficacy	1.585***	1.531	1.116	1.107	1.420**	1.383
Party identification	4.023***	1.992	1.490	1.218	2.700***	1.635
McFadden Pseudo-R ²			0.2548			
N			1,407			

⁺ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

TABLE 5
COMPONENTS OF THE GENERAL INCENTIVES MODEL

<i>How do you evaluate (the) ...?</i>
Selective outcome incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...assumption of party function</i> <i>...establishment of new useful business contacts</i> <i>...obtaining of a parliamentary mandate</i>
Selective process incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...participation in social events of the party</i> <i>...having fun doing party work</i> <i>...improving your political expertise</i>
Collective political incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...strengthening of the party's influence</i> <i>...achieving of political goals</i>
Normative incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...obtaining social prestige</i> <i>...recognition by family, friends and acquaintances</i>
Altruistic incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...to make a contribution to the functioning of democracy</i> <i>...fulfilment of a civic duty</i>
Ideological incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...standing up for one's own political convictions</i> <i>...strengthening of certain political ideals</i>
Expressive incentives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...to express sympathy for the party</i> <i>...expressing admiration for outstanding leaders</i> <i>...personal satisfaction from membership</i>
Costs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>...payment of membership fee</i> <i>...participation in meetings</i> <i>...professional disadvantages</i> <i>...spending a part of one's free time on party work</i> <i>...hostility, envy and resentment of other party members</i>

TABLE 6
MOTIVATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP (BIVARIATE)

	Members (means)	Non-members (means)
Selective outcome incentives	9.4	6.6
Selective process incentives	17.3	13.4
Collective political incentives	17.9	14.0
Normative incentives	8.7	7.2
Ideological incentives	26.6	19.8
Altruistic incentives	24.4	16.6
Expressive incentives	14.6	10.4
Costs	-9.5	-4.1
N	734	673

TABLE 7
MOTIVATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP (MULTIVARIATE)

	Members vs. uninterested in membership		Potential members vs. uninterested in membership		Members vs. potential members	
	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR
Selective outcome incentives	1.015 ⁺	1.162	1.017	1.182	.998	.983
Selective process incentives	.989	.871	1.036**	1.536	.954***	.567
Collective political incen- tives	.988 ⁺	.857	1.003	1.043	.985	.822
Normative incentives	.973***	.742	.976*	.773	.996	.960
Ideological incentives	1.020**	1.307	1.004	1.055	1.016	1.238
Altruistic incentives	1.029***	1.512	1.015	1.236	1.014	1.223
Expressive incentives	1.007	1.076	.980	.797	1.027*	1.350
Costs	.943***	.588	1.007	1.070	.936***	.550
McFadden Pseudo-R ²			.0820			
N			1,407			

⁺ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

TABLE 8
SOCIO-STRUCTURAL, SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND MOTIVATIONAL DETERMINANTS OF PARTY MEMBERSHIP

	Members vs. far from membership		Potential members vs. far from membership		Members vs. potential members	
	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR	OR	x-stand. OR
<i>Gender (ref. female)</i>	1.580**	1.255	1.157	1.075	1.365	1.167
<i>Age (ref. up to 34)</i>						
35 to 49	1.156	1.068	.925	.965	1.250	1.107
50 to 64	1.511	1.203	.655	.827	2.308*	1.454
Over 65	1.091	1.040	.387	.650	2.818	1.600
<i>Education (ref. up to secondary education^a)</i>	1.199	1.095	1.405	1.185	.854	.924
<i>Employment status (ref. unemployed)</i>						
Employed	.965	.982	.572 ⁺	.758	1.687	1.296
Retired	2.438*	1.527	.479	.705	5.089**	2.167
<i>Occupational category (ref. blue collar worker, private sector)</i>						
White collar worker (private sector)	.938	.969	1.195	1.091	.785	.889
White collar worker (public sector)/civil servant	.997	.999	.966	.987	1.032	1.012
Self-employed/acad. professionals	1.092	1.029	.601	.846	1.815	1.218
<i>Subjective social status (ref. up to lower middle class)</i>						
Middle class	1.087	1.042	1.156	1.075	.940	.970
At least upper middle class	1.119	1.049	1.133	1.054	.988	.995
<i>Political Interest</i>						
General	1.665***	1.613	1.084	1.079	1.536*	1.496
Local	1.298**	1.318	.921	.917	1.409**	1.438
State	1.123	1.111	1.089	1.081	1.030	1.028
National	.827	.839	1.001	1.001	.826	.838
Internal efficacy	1.945***	1.979	1.888***	1.919	1.030	1.031
External efficacy	1.531***	1.483	1.029	1.027	1.488**	1.445
Party identification	4.246***	2.046	1.433	1.195	2.964***	1.712
Selective outcome incentives	.996	.956	.999	.989	.997	.966
Selective process incentives	.992	.905	1.019	1.255	.973 ⁺	.721
Collective political incentives	.985 ⁺	.821	1.006	1.089	.979 ⁺	.754
Normative incentives	.989	.891	.997	.970	.992	.919
Ideological incentives	1.001	1.009	.990	.867	1.011	1.164
Altruistic incentives	1.020*	1.336	1.018	1.287	1.002	1.038
Expressive incentives	1.007	1.084	.990	.895	1.017	1.210
Costs	.971*	.767	1.004	1.033	.968*	.743
McFadden Pseudo-R ²				.3051		
N				1,407		

Notes: ^a *Hauptschule* and *Realschule/Mittlere Reife*; ⁺ p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001