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Joining a Political Party: Paths to Membership
and Activism in Contemporary Brazil



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Abstract: In August 2015, there were over 15 million party members in Brazil, aggregating nearly 11% of the electorate, which places the Brazilian democracy among the most significant in this aspect. It is surprising that millions of individuals integrate organizations that are pointed out by part of the literature as weak, deprived of internal life and without strong linkages with civil society. Regardless of the diagnosis, factors such as the fluidity of the party system, the relative ideological undifferentiation among most parties, and the distrust of much of the population in relation to political institutions do not avoid many Brazilians from joining a political party. The first survey in the country which interviewed directly (and exclusively) members of political parties was carried out in 2013 in the state of São Paulo, covering the members of the ten major Brazilian parties. Using these unpublished data, this paper explores two main points: 1) the reasons and paths that lead individuals to join a political party; 2) the activities performed within the party and the perceptions of members about this participation. The text presents some preliminary findings and data of this research, which is funded by the State of São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP, Research Project n. 2012/19330-8).

Key words: political parties; party membership; Brazil; activism; participation.

I. Introduction¹

The Brazilian political system ranks as one of the most critical in Latin America in terms of distrust in political parties. In the surveys on the trust of Brazilians in their institutions, the parties are in the last place in the ranking since 2009. In 2013, 34% of Brazilian voters believed that democracy could work without political parties. Among young people, the perception is even more negative, which was evident in the massive popular demonstrations in June 2013 that frightened the political class. During the demonstrations, 83% of the protesters said they did not feel represented by politicians, and 89% of the protesters did not feel represented by the parties.²

However, when compared to other countries, party membership rates in Brazil are substantial. The levels are superior to the majority of European democracies, where the average is less than 5%, and they are well above the European countries that have been most recently democratized, such as Portugal, Spain, and the post-communist nations. Furthermore, high rates of membership are less common in countries of continental dimensions (Mair and van Biezen, 2001; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke, 2012).

If the legitimacy of political parties is so small in Brazil (as in other countries), why thousands of Brazilians join the parties every year? How these members evaluate their

¹ This paper was presented at the workshop ‘Contemporary Meanings of Party Membership’, at the ‘Joint Sessions of Workshops’ of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), University of Salamanca, Spain, April 10-15, 2014. I am grateful for comments offered on that occasion by all the participants, but in particular by Susan Scarrow, Paul Whiteley, Anika Gauja, Gideon Rahat, Knut Heidar, Emilie van Haute, Tomas Dosek and Bruno Speck. This paper is the partial result of a broad research project coordinated by Rachel Meneguello from the University of Campinas (UNICAMP): “The organization and functioning of representative politics in the State of São Paulo between 1994 and 2014”. The survey that generated the data analyzed in this study was part of this project, which has funding from the State of São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP, Research Project no. 2012/19330-8). In addition, researchers from the Federal University of São Carlos (UFSCar), São Paulo State University (UNESP) and University of São Paulo (USP) participate in the project. All errors and problems are solely my responsibility.

² The Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistics (IBOPE) carried out the ranking and surveys with protesters. For 2013 data on democracy without parties, see *Latinobarómetro* (2013).

participation in party machines and party activities? The goal of this study is to conduct a preliminary exploratory analysis of data collected from the members of political parties in Brazil. This study is the first in the country that interviewed directly (and exclusively) members of political parties. The survey was conducted between October and December 2013, and included 445 members of political parties in 22 cities (including the capital) in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. The cities were stratified according to the size of the municipality, and the proportion of the total number of members of each party in the state was respected. The respondents were approached at the doors of local party branches, the doors of public organs (city halls and city councils) and in high traffic areas (squares, bus stops etc.).³

Members of the ten major Brazilian parties were interviewed, covering the three ideological fields. Parties from the left included the PT, PSB and PDT; parties from the center were represented by the PMDB, the PSDB and the PPS; PTB, PP, PR and the DEM are the parties from the right included in the study.⁴ Together, the ten parties represent approximately 80% of the members of political parties in Brazil and 80% of the members in São Paulo. The state of São Paulo, which is the richest in the nation, has 32 million voters, which is approximately 20% of the country's total; approximately 3 million of the voters in the state are party members. The ten main parties elected 72% of the federal deputies in the last election for the Chamber of Deputies (2014).

Using these data, in this initial analysis we explore two models about party membership and the level of involvement of individuals in political parties. A systematic test of these models to explain party membership in Brazil is not a goal of this paper (such a test will be conducted in a future work). At this time, the aim is to present some of the collected data in light of these theoretical frames.

³ Respondents stated that they were members of a political party, but there was no verification of their names with the official records submitted by parties to the Electoral Justice.

⁴ PT: Partido dos Trabalhadores, Workers' Party. PSB: Partido Socialista Brasileiro, Brazilian Socialist Party. PDT: Partido Democrático Trabalhista, Democratic Labour Party. PMDB: Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro, Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement. PSDB: Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira, Brazilian Social Democracy Party. PPS: Partido Popular Socialista, Popular Socialist Party. PTB: Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro, Brazilian Labour Party. PP: Partido Progressista, Progressive Party. PR: Partido da República, Party of Republic. DEM (Democratas, Democrats - known until 2007 as the Partido da Frente Liberal, Liberal Front Party, PFL).

The civic voluntarism model identifies three major factors that influence an individual's decision to join a political party: 1) the ownership of resources, such as income, education and time; 2) positive beliefs and attitudes regarding the efficacy of their participation in the party, and in the political process more broadly; and 3) participation in certain social groups and other volunteer activities (Verba, Schlozman and Brady, 1995; Dalton, 2008; Whiteley, 2011). On the other hand, the general incentives model considers that party membership and individuals' level of activism are dependent upon strategic calculations (collective or selective incentives), altruism, or pressure from social norms (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992).

In the first section of the text, we conduct a brief discussion on the general characteristics of the Brazilian party system since the country's democratization. Next, we present some data that make clear that the respondents are "high intensity" party activists. In the main section of the paper we present and discuss some of the results regarding the motivations and processes that led the respondents to join a political party. These results are evaluated from the perspective of the two theoretical models noted above. In the final considerations, we provide a general assessment of the results and highlight some of the next steps for research.

II. The Brazilian party system

According to some scholars, the current Brazilian party system (inaugurated in 1980) would have to overcome many institutional barriers to its consolidation, including presidentialism, a multiparty system, and a proportional representation system with open-list. Furthermore, funding rules allow individual fundraising for election campaigns, there is no uniform barrier clause to stop the party system fragmentation, the rules to prevent party switching of public office holders are very permissive, and the federal system provides broad autonomy to states. As the expected result, the multiplication of veto players would lead the country to a decision-making paralysis, ungovernability and institutional crisis. Political parties would always be fragile or catch-all, controlled by the



MPs and with no participation of grass roots members; deputies and senators would be free to act individually in Congress in a typical system of pork barrel politics.⁵

However, the most recent literature suggests that the Brazilian political system is governable and that the party system has developed a significant degree of stability. The decision-making process in both houses of the Congress is concentrated, with broad powers given to the leaders of the parliamentary parties. These leaders are key players for the deputies, as they influence the composition of legislative committees and, in the case of coalition parties, the appointments to government positions; they also negotiate pork barrel resources. The president has strong and broad institutional powers, and party system fragmentation has created different options for the formation of governing coalitions. As a result of these factors, the parliamentary parties in Congress are cohesive and disciplined, and the risks of chaos have not been consummated. The parties have been central agents in the Brazilian “coalition presidentialism”, forming and supporting the governments.

After a period of transition from a two-party to a multiparty system in the 1980s, there was a period of rearrangement of the political class between 1990 and 1994. Following this rearrangement, the party system in Brazil acquired an unprecedented degree of stability, especially considering the country’s historical patterns. One of the newest major parties is the PSDB, which was founded in 1988. A bipolar dynamic has been the trend in Brazilian politics since 1994, with two blocs alternating command of the country: the PT leads the bloc on the center-left, and the bloc on the center-right is led by the PSDB. The PMDB is in the center, and PTB, PR and PP are on the right; these parties are willing to participate in any of the governments. The two Cardoso elections (1994 and 1998), the four PT victories (2002 and 2006 with Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, 2010 and 2014 with Dilma Rousseff) and the dynamics in Congress in the periods between the elections were governed by this bipolar structure, with limited space for other options. The elections for President, Congress, state governments, and state legislatures have

⁵ Basic references regarding the negative view include Mainwaring and Scully (1994), Mainwaring (1999), and Ames (2002).



occurred simultaneously since 1994, so the bipolar dynamics of presidential disputes have begun to affect the elections in the states, setting a clearer pattern of competition.⁶

However, stability and governability may be occurring at the expense of other constitutive attributes of a strong democracy, such as representativeness and accountability. Some of the factors that make the system unintelligible to the common voter include the large number of parties in the Congress (28 parties elected federal deputies in 2014), the easy party access to public resources (e.g., space on television and state money), and ease with which politicians can switch parties without penalty or loss of office. Moreover, recent Supreme Court decisions have facilitated the process for the foundation of new parties. Encouraged by this and by the prospect of joining the coalition government, three new major parties have been created since 2011. The fluidity of the system is hampering the development of stronger linkages between parties and the electorate, especially when indicators of legitimacy are considered. Although political parties are generally not trusted by the population, they dominate the main decision-making and governance functions in Brazil, including recruitment, organization and support for governments, etc. The classic representative functions (articulation and expression of demands) are not performed well; nevertheless, a decline in the performance of procedural and institutional roles was not noted. Thus, state linkages replaced social ties as the main source of survival for the organizations. There would be no problems in this “evolutionary adaptation” if it did not compromise perhaps the only specific role of political parties: the capacity to combine representative and procedural functions. If the parties do not represent the population, are there reasons to continue governing? As Peter Mair emphasizes (2005; 2009), inefficiency in the performance of representative functions can delegitimize the procedural roles; the parties could find themselves delegitimized (even more), and the lack of viable alternative actors could ultimately compromise democracy itself.

Other indicators related to Brazilian parties are less conclusive. There is a relative stability in rates of party identification since the 1990s, with a total rate of about 45% of the electorate, and with long-term oscillations among parties (Ribeiro, 2013). After the

⁶ On the Brazilian party system, see Limongi (2006), Limongi and Cortez (2010), Nicolau (2010), Melo and Câmara (2012), Melo and Pereira (2013), Ribeiro (2013).



demonstrations in June 2013, the party identification dropped to approximately 40%; in 2015, the total rate was around 30%.⁷

In the last fifteen years, the parties have attempted to expand their membership. In Brazil, the party membership is a legal matter that is officially registered and controlled by the state; and the party affiliation is an obligatory condition for anyone who wants to compete for an elective office. The parties are required to provide the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) with complete lists of their members twice annually. This process has been significantly improved in recent years, as all records have been computerized and the organs of electoral justice at the local, state, and national levels have been connected. However, the data in Table 1 tend to be overestimated, especially for the smaller parties that are unable to maintain accurate records. Furthermore, joining a party is much easier than leaving one. Despite that, the bias tends to be random and generally affects all parties from the beginning of the time series of available official records.⁸

Aggregate party membership exceeded 15 million members in 2015, nearly 11% of the electorate (Table 1). However, the growing discontent with the political class has produced a strong reduction in the flow of new members: there were 2.5 million new affiliations in 2009, 222,000 in 2012 and 136,000 in 2013.⁹

⁷ Datafolha Institute.

⁸ Note that these figures are higher than those observed in the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) Citizenship Study of 2004 (Whiteley, 2011).

⁹ Official data of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE).



Table 1 – Party membership in Brazil, 2002-2015 (in millions of members)

	2002	2006	2010	2012	2015
PMDB	2.2	2.0	2.3	2.4	2.3
PT	0.8	1.1	1.4	1.6	1.6
PSDB	1.1	1.1	1.3	1.4	1.4
PFL/DEM	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1
PP	1.4	1.3	1.4	1.4	1.4
PDT	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.2
PTB	0.8	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.2
PL/PR	0.5	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.8
PSB	0.4	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.6
PPS	0.3	0.4	0.4	0.5	0.5
Other parties (aggregated)	1.7	1.7	2.5	2.9	3.3
Total membership	11.1	11.6	13.9	15.1	15.3
Membership/total electorate	9.7%	9.2%	10.2%	10.8%	10.7%

Source: Official data of the Superior Electoral Court (TSE).

III. Activism and intensity of participation

Before analyzing the motivations and mechanisms that lead individuals to join political parties, it should be noted that the respondents showed a clear profile of party activists, with “high intensity” participation (Whiteley and Seyd, 2002). When asked about participation in party activities in 2013, 81% of the respondents stated that they were involved in some activity (especially meetings in the local branch), and the vast majority claimed that they devote some time to their party every month (Table 2); 26% said they pay monthly or annual contributions to their party, and 23% donated to campaigns in the general elections in 2010 or the local elections in 2012. At a more intense level of participation, 46% of the respondents stated that they worked or had worked in a paid position associated with their party, especially in the politically appointed positions in the executive or legislative branches (Table 3).¹⁰

¹⁰ The sample is therefore not necessarily representative of all party members; it would be unwise to use these data to distinguish between active and inactive members.

Table 2 – Time dedicated to the party per month (%)

Less than 5 hours	24
Approximately 5 hours	15
From 10 to 20 hours	15
From 20 to 30 hours	9
From 30 to 40 hours	9
More than 40 hours	17
Does not dedicate time to party	9
Does not know	1
Total	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Question: “As a member, how much time do you dedicate to the party per month (on average)?”

Table 3 – Professional activities tied to the party (%)

Official in the legislative branch	16
Party official	12
Appointed position in the executive branch	9
Elected to public office	7
Political advisor (without specifying)	1
Activity in electoral campaign	1
Others	1
Did not perform any activity tied to party	54
Total	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Question: “Did you perform professional work tied to the party?”

About the question regarding intensity of participation, the activists from the PSDB and especially the PT stand out from the others: these parties present a more intense internal life in the state of São Paulo. The proportion of respondents who previously held positions tied to the party was 58% in the PT and 53% in the PSDB; 92% were activists who participated in a party activity in 2013 in the PT and 90% in the PSDB. However, the PT is still the main outlier; since its founding in 1980, it is the only Brazilian party that fits the Duvergerian model of a mass party with a complex and centralized organization and an intense internal life, which is quite different from the party tradition in Brazil (Keck, 1986; Meneguello, 1989). Thus, 25% of the activists in the PT devote more than 40 hours per month to the party, and only 1% stated that they do not devote any of their time. As is traditional in mass parties, 76% of the activists pay contributions regularly, and 46% stated that they made donations in the last elections. Therefore, the



party remains an “anomaly” in the Brazilian party system despite all of the transformations that took place since the 1990s (Ribeiro, 2014).

IV. Motivations and paths to membership

According to the civic voluntarism model (Dalton, 2008), we expect that party members in the state of São Paulo are older and have a higher social status than the general electorate. The members tend to have more favorable opinions about the possibilities and efficacy of political participation, and tend to be more engaged in other social organizations such as unions. We also expect to find more men in political parties than in the general population.

Table 4 confirms our predictions regarding gender and age in a pattern that is similar to that generally observed in contemporary democracies. The proportion of women is much lower within the political parties despite incentive policies implemented in the Brazilian political system in recent years. The differences in relation to age are also quite significant. With a mean age of 45 years, the activists are older than the general electorate in the state.

Table 4 – Comparison between party members and the electorate in the state of São Paulo: age and gender (%)

		Members	Electorate*
Age	16-24	4	15
	25-34	17	23
	35-44	29	20
	45-59	39	25
	60 or over	11	17
	Total	100	100
Gender	Men	67	48
	Women	33	52
	Total	100	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Data on the electorate: TSE. * In Brazil, the minimum age to register to vote and join a political party is 16 years old.

Party activists also have a higher status compared with the general population of the state (Tables 5 and 6). Almost half of the respondents have completed higher education; in



Brazil, approximately 12% of the adult population has completed higher education, and this percentage is quite similar when considering only the state of São Paulo.¹¹ In São Paulo, 65% of households earn a total monthly income below five times the minimum wage (total of approximately US\$ 1,000.00). Among party members, this situation is reversed: 57% earn an income above this amount, and 30% reported that their family income is more than ten times the minimum wage.

Table 5 – Level of education for party members (%)

Did not finish high school	6
Completed high school	35
Incomplete higher education	14
Complete higher education	45
Total	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445).

Table 6 – Comparison between party members and the population of the state of São Paulo: household income (%)

	Members	Population
0 to 1 times the minimum wage*	0.2	11
1 to 2	5	16
2 to 5	28	38
5 to 10	27	21
10 to 20	20	9
More than 20	10	5
No response	10	-
Total	100	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Data for the state population are derived from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE). * In December 2013, the minimum wage in Brazil was 678.00 Reals per month, the equivalent of approximately US\$ 170.00.

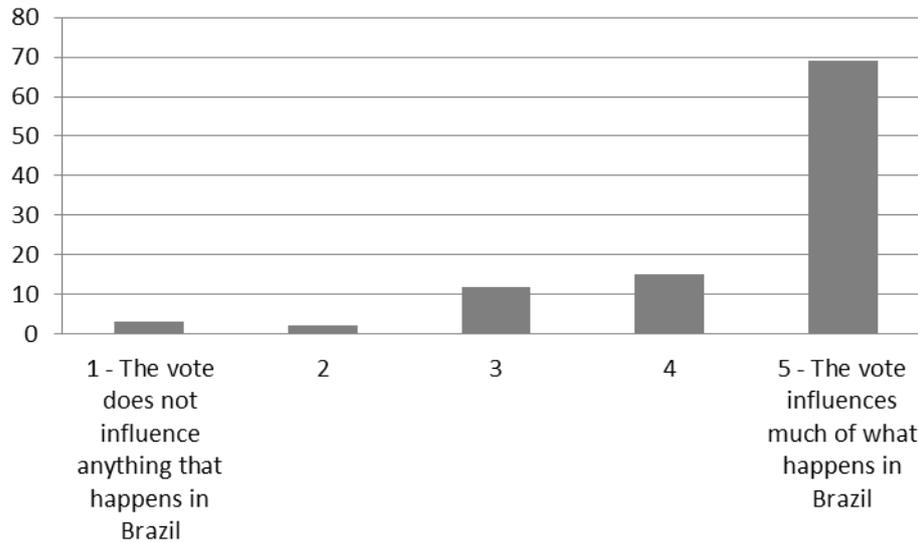
Party activists have more resources and, at the same time, they believe in the efficacy of political participation (Graph 1). For 69% of the respondents, individual votes have significant influence on the direction of Brazil (this index varies from approximately 80% for members of the PT and the PSB to 62% for members of the PP and the PSDB). Faced with the possibility of ending compulsory voting in Brazil, 92% of the party

¹¹ Data are derived from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística - IBGE) and the State Data Analysis System Foundation (Fundação Sistema Estadual de Análise de Dados - SEADE).



members stated they would continue participating in elections, which is much greater than in studies that consider the electorate as a whole.¹²

Graph 1 – Belief in the efficacy of voting (%)



Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Question: “Thinking about the population’s opinion about voting in Brazil, some people say that our vote has significant influence, and others say that our vote does not influence anything that happens in Brazil. Please grade this influence from 1 to 5, considering that 1 signifies that our vote “does not influence anything” and that 5 signifies that our vote “has significant influence” on what happens in Brazil.”

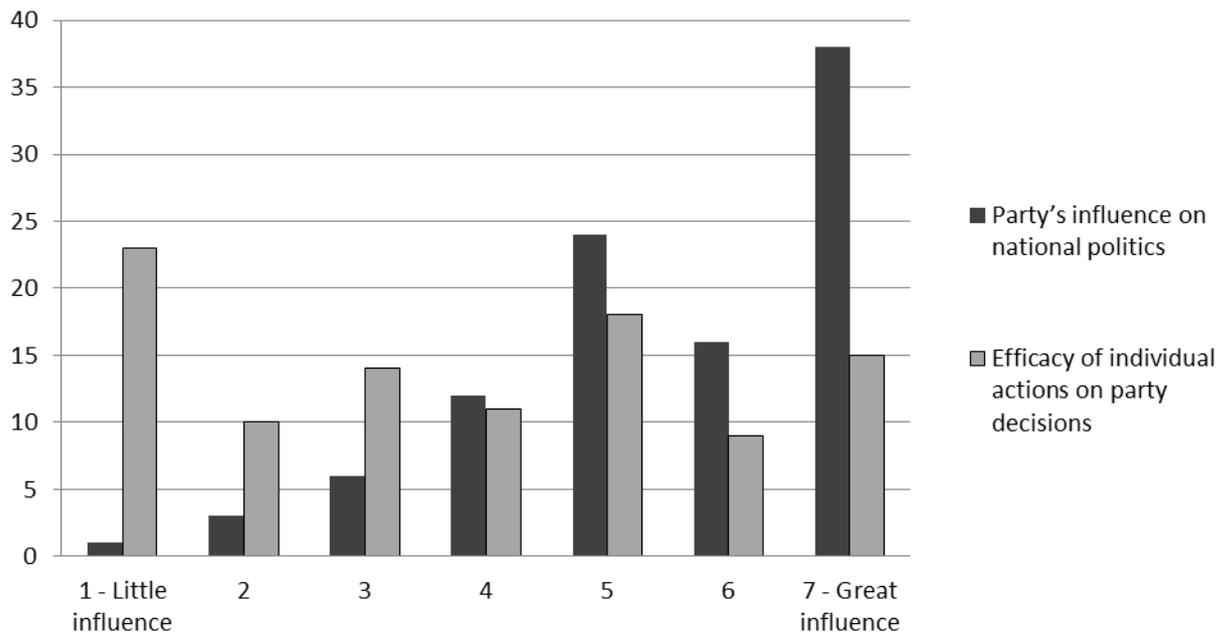
In general, the party members also believe that their party has a great ability to influence national politics (Graph 2). The activists from the PT and the PSDB, which have both been protagonist parties in national elections since 1994, have the strongest beliefs in this regard (the sum of items 6 and 7 on the scale were 86% and 71% for these parties, respectively). However, most of the party members consider that their individual participation has a little impact on the intraparty decision-making process, which can be interpreted as a symptom of their negative evaluation on the parties’ internal democracy.

¹² Question: “If voting was not mandatory in Brazil, would you still vote?” A study conducted on voters in the city of São Paulo in 2012 indicated that 56% of voters would participate even if voting was voluntary (Datafolha Institute). Another survey that was conducted in 2013 with Internet users found that 58% of Brazilians would continue voting (CONNECTA - IBOPE Intelligence).



The PT activists are an exception: 42% believe that their individual actions have a large impact on the internal life of the party (sum of items 6 and 7 of the scale).

Graph 2 – Party’s influence on national politics and the efficacy of participation in the party’s decisions (%)



Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Questions: “Thinking about the importance of your party, how much do you think that your party influences the country’s politics, considering a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means it has little influence and 7 means great influence?” “Thinking about the decisions of your party, how much do you think you influence the decisions of your party, considering a scale of 1 to 7, where 1 means little influence and 7 means great influence?”

Trust in institutions is a factor that clearly distinguishes activists from the rest of the population (Table 7). Party members have a higher level of trust in all institutions, public and private. For the Brazilian population in general (we did not obtain data disaggregated by state), the Congress and political parties have occupied the lowest two positions in rankings of trust for several years. Although party members do not trust these institutions as much as they trust the judiciary or the armed forces, they rank them in better positions than the general population, with significantly higher rates of trust.

Table 7 – Comparison between party members in São Paulo and the country’s population: trust in institutions

	Surveys (%) *		Social Trust Index (scale of 0 to 100) ¹	
	Members	Brazil Population	Members	Brazil Population
Fire department	96	-	93	77
Armed forces	75	63	68	64
Church	72	47	70	66
Elections	69	-	63	41
Laws of the country	64	-	56	-
Judiciary	62	34	57	46
Police	59	31	56	48
Government	59	33	55	41
President of Brazil	57	-	54	42
Entrepreneurs ²	56	36	53	51
Political parties	54	5	50	25
Television	51	29	47	-
National Congress	49	17	47	29
Unions	44	-	45	37

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). * The data for the Brazilian population are derived from a survey conducted by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV) in the first half of 2013 (N = 3,300). In both surveys, the scale of trust had four very similar possible responses; the responses “significant trust” and “some trust” were summed for the table. ¹ The Social Trust Index is calculated by the IBOPE Research Institute from a survey in which the respondents choose between four responses: significant, some, almost none, and no trust in the institution. Each option receives a score (100, 66, 33, and zero, respectively) and all of the scores are added together and divided by the number of respondents, which results in a final score that varies from 0 to 100. The IBOPE conducted the survey in July 2013 (N = 2,002). We replicated the same methodology to calculate the trust index for party members in São Paulo. ² In the survey from FGV: “large companies.”

Members’ trust in political parties is associated to a “romantic” view on the role of these actors, in which the expressive and representative functions dominate over the procedural or institutional functions. “Promoting ideas and ideologies” is seen as the main function of a political party, followed by social representation. Among the institutional functions, political recruitment appears as the main party activity (Table 8). This perception about the role of parties is consistent with the reasons stated for party membership. When asked directly about the reasons for joining a political party, 38% answered that “political convictions” were their main motivation, and only 15% cited the possibility of a political career or a job search, which is one of the main hypotheses regarding the motivation for party membership in Brazil (Speck, 2013). It is also important to note the weight represented by family tradition (15%) and the view of the

party as a space for social interaction, which was noted by 28% of the respondents (Table 9).

Table 8 – The functions of political parties (%)

Promoting ideas and ideologies	24
Representing social groups	21
Selecting political leadership	16
Forming governments	12
Mobilizing voters, winning elections	11
Acting in parliament	8
Facilitating the access to public resources	7
No response	0.2
Total	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties. Each member marked two options, and we added the total responses obtained for each category (N = 890). Question: “Currently, many people say that political parties have been transformed. In your opinion, among the options listed below, what are the two main functions of a political party today?”

Table 9 - Main motivation for joining a political party (%)

The party represents my political convictions	38
I like the interaction and activities of party life	28
Family tradition of political involvement	15
I intend to pursue a political career	8
Being a member increases the chances of employment	7
Other reasons	3
No response	0.3
Total	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Question: “What prompted you to join a political party?”

The civic voluntarism model assumes that members are more involved with other volunteer activities and social groups (which may or may not be political in character). Because the current involvement of members in other organizations was not part of the survey questionnaire, we evaluated this hypothesis by analyzing the channels that led individuals to join political parties. In this sense, only a minority (approximately 15%) came to their party through unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or social and community movements. Most were recruited through personal channels; nearly 50% of the members were recruited by party representatives, candidates, civil servants, elected

politicians (or advisors), or during election rallies (Table 10). Adding this to the group that joined a party after an invitation from friends or family (28%), we can state that other collective actors have very little weight in recruiting members. Together with data on the motives for membership (Table 9), we observe a considerable influence from activists' circle of personal relationships in the membership process. The PT, which was mainly founded by unionists during the re-democratization of the country, is a partial exception. Approximately 25% of the PT's members claimed to have been brought to the party by the union; at the same time, 33% joined after invitations from family and friends.

Table 10 – Paths to party membership (%)

A party representative contacted me	28
A friend or family member suggested membership	28
I joined because of participation in a union	9
An elected politician (or his/her advisor) contacted me	9
A candidate (or his/her advisor) contacted me	6
I joined because I wanted to run for elective office	3
I sought the party after watching party propaganda	3
I joined due to participation in a community council	3
A civil servant contacted me	2
I joined due to sympathizing with the party/with the ideals of the party	2
I was approached at a campaign rally	1
I joined because of my participation in an NGO	1
I joined because of participation in a social network	1
Other	3
Did not respond	0.4
Total	100

Source: survey of members of the ten major political parties (N = 445). Question: "I'll read some situations and ask you to tell me which one is closest to your path to party membership."

The high level of education and positive attitudes regarding the efficacy of political action, trust in institutions, and adherence to "civic norms" are evidence of a pattern of engagement that is similar to the civic voluntarism model. The same indicators, however, may also support the cognitive engagement model (Dalton, 2008; Whiteley, 2011). Are the party members "critical citizens" (Norris, 2000)? One method to evaluate this question would be to test the coherence between an individual's self-placement on the ideological scale and their attitudes and beliefs regarding substantive policy issues, which will not be done here. Regarding the consumption of political information, we can only

state that the circle of personal relationships (which is important in recruiting) has a small influence as a source of information for party members. Only 14% of the party members considered friends and family the most reliable source of political information, behind television (28%), newspapers and magazines (26%), and the Internet (20%).¹³

Finally, it is important to analyze the data from the perspective of the general incentives model (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992). Observing the direct responses about the motivations for party membership (Table 9), the search for a typical collective incentive (“political convictions”) appears to be the main factor. However, 28% of the party members resemble the profile of “social-minded members” because they cite selective incentives that are linked to the participation process itself (Bruter and Harrison, 2009). These selective-process incentives are benefits that are effectively enjoyed by the high-intensity activists. On the other hand, selective-outcome incentives (political career and position) were cited by approximately 15% of the respondents, and this measure tends to be underestimated because of social norms exerting pressure against such statements. The number of activists who have held some position associated with the party (46%, Table 3) is an indicator that selective-outcome incentives may be more relevant than declared. Social norms also play a role here because 15% of the respondents cited family tradition as the main reason for membership, and 28% referred to the suggestions of friends and family (Tables 9 and 10). Thus, the data set suggests that selective incentives and personal relationships are the main motivations for most activists in the state of São Paulo.

V. Final considerations

In this preliminary analysis of the data, we profiled the activists of the major parties in the state of São Paulo. Confirming the general pattern indicated by the literature on the subject, we found that these active members are older, more educated, and have higher incomes than the averages in the general population. The presence of males is also much greater among political activists. These party members have positive attitudes and beliefs regarding the efficacy of political action and trust in institutions, and they are more

¹³ Question: “Thinking about the source of information that you use to be informed about politics, which do you trust the most?” Frequency of media consumption was not part of the questionnaire.

sensitive to civic norms. They see the party as an actor that should promote the representation and expression of interests and ideologies. The combination of family traditions and selective incentives is the main driver for membership, and this process is unlikely to be mediated by other collective actors.

The PT members are much more active than those in other parties and have a stronger belief in the efficacy of political action in general and in their individual actions within the party. These data confirm previous findings about the party and the *petistas*. With a foundation intimately tied to social movements and unions, the PT is the only party that succeeded in maintaining social linkages and building a mass organization that is composed of a significant number of active members who strongly identify with the party. The members of the PSDB constitute an intermediate case, showing that the party has managed to generate important identity ties with its base, albeit less than the PT (Samuels, 2008; Ribeiro, 2014). It is noteworthy that, among the major Brazilian parties, PT and PSDB provide their members more power and opportunities for internal participation in the selection of party officials, choosing candidates, etc. (which is recognized by the *petistas* but not by members of the PSDB). These data reinforce the hypothesis that the empowerment of members can be converted into greater levels of activism and involvement within the party (Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; Ribeiro, 2013).

Moreover, this initial analysis supports the conclusion that “there is life” within the Brazilian political parties. There are members who dedicate themselves in different intensity levels to party activities on a regular basis, and who do not see membership as a purely formal requirement to run for elective office. Faced with the tradition of the fragility of political parties in Brazil, this is good news.

Much remains to be done with the data summarized in this paper, including using statistical tests to reach more robust conclusions about the variables that influence party membership and the intensity of internal participation. We must further explore the differences between the parties and perform a more systematic analysis on the “fit” of different explanatory models. Possible differences between young and old activists, which can provide significant information about the capacity for renewal and the current recruitment strategies of the parties; and the positions of the parties and their members in the ideological scale and regarding policy issues are among the topics that may yield the most interesting results. Therefore, this study is only in the beginning.



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