Party Members in the UK: some initial findings

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The Data: Party Members Project (PMP)
http://esrcpartymembersproject.org

- Funded by ESRC, 2015-2018

- Involves surveys in 2015 of:
  - Members of 6 parties
  - Non-member partisans (strong party supporters)
  - Labour's affiliated trade unionists

- Survey of Labour's new joiners in 2016
- Survey of party leavers in 2017

- Interviews with party officials and elites on what they want/expect of members and how they deal with them.

Some very basic questions

- Why do people join parties?

- Why are some members active and others not?

- Why do people quit parties?

- Do parties still want members – and if so, why?

- What are social and political profiles of members, and what election activities do they undertake?

- Will membership survive and in what form – and does it need to?

The 'highlights' so far…

- Labour Members: *old* vs *new*

- Views on Candidate Selection

- What do members – and supporters – do at elections?
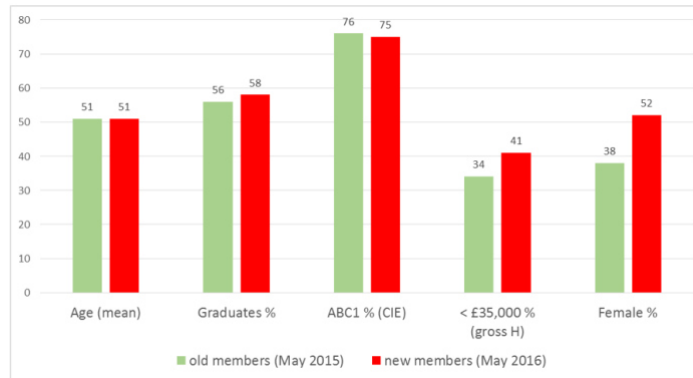
- Joining and not joining

Social and political characteristics of British political party members, 2015.

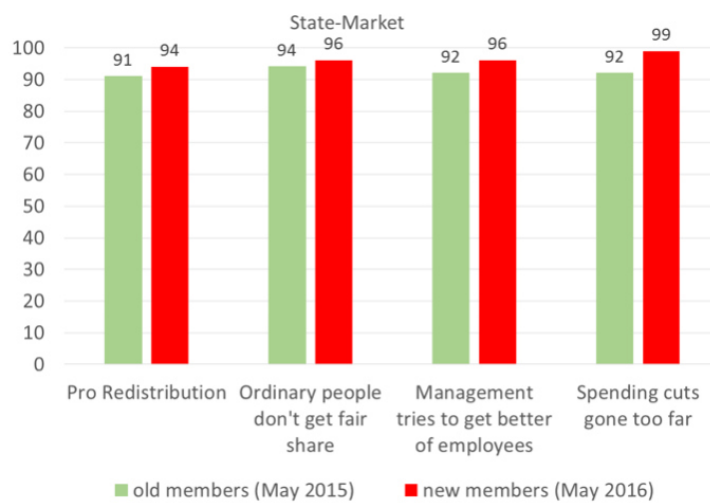| Attribute	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Green	SNP	Total
Mean age	54	51	51	58	42	49	51
% male	71.2	61.6	68.5	75.9	57.5	56.4	65.0
% graduates	37.9	56.3	55.8	23.1	56.4	41.7	45.4
% ABC1 (HH)	83.1	75.9	84.5	64.0	75.5	68.1	75.5
% ABC1 (personal)	74.6	69.7	76.0	59.9	65.2	61.9	68.2
Mean left-right*	7.76	2.39	4.1	7.34	1.9	2.96	4.44
N	1193	1180	730	785	845	963	5696

1/1 Labour Members
Old vs *New*

Demographically pretty similar

Ditto left-right

New members are socially more liberal

Socially Liberal-Authoritarian

old members (May 2015) ■ new members (May 2016)
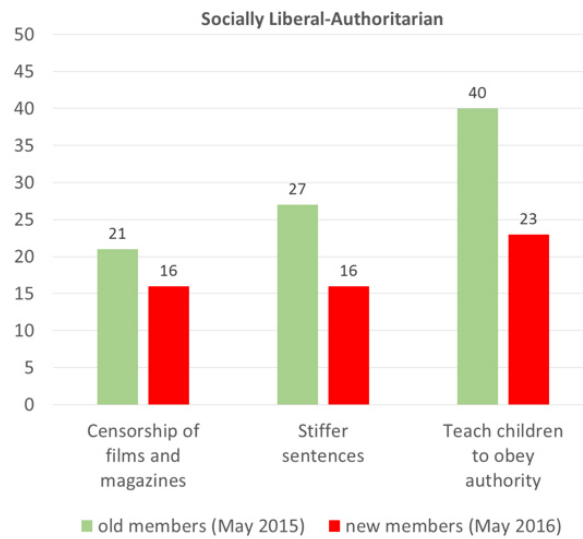
Clicktivists and activists

old members (May 2015) ■ new members (May 2016) ■ new memb & Momentum memb (May 2016)
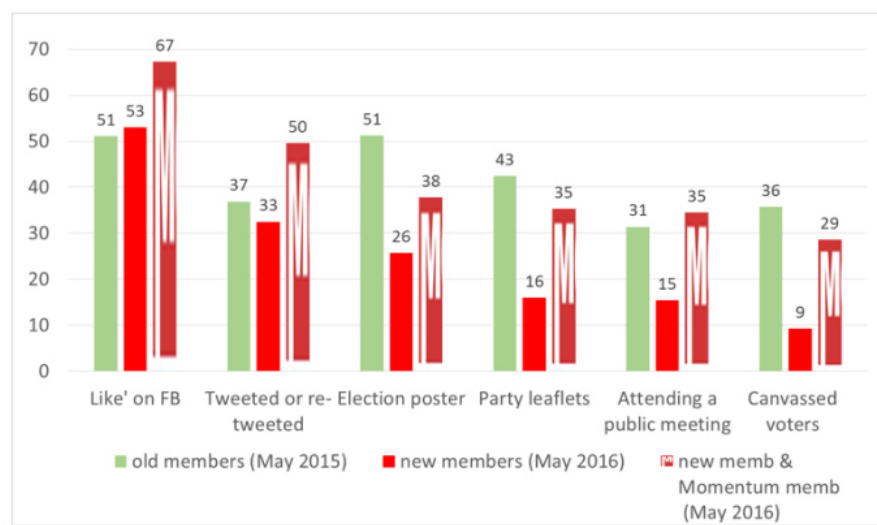
Leadership-led
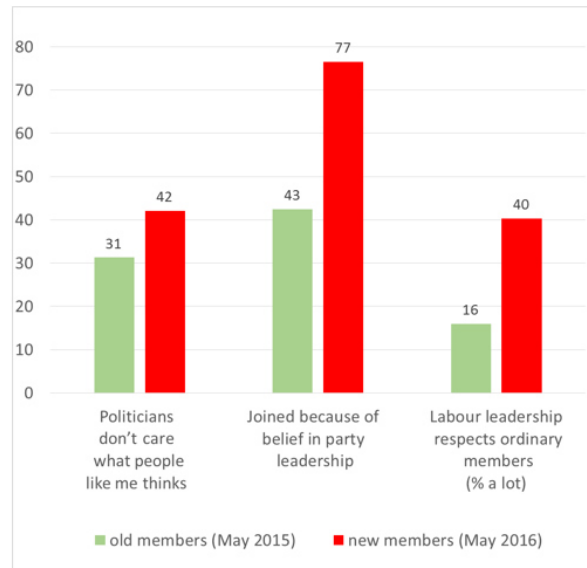
Not necessarily Labour through-and-through
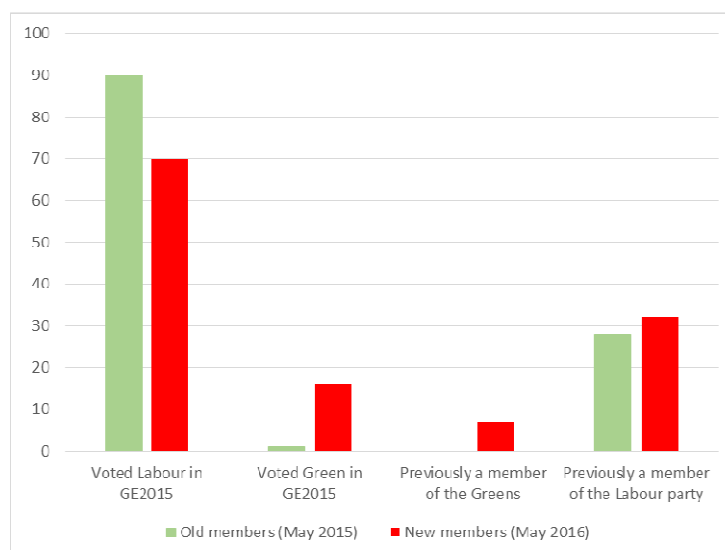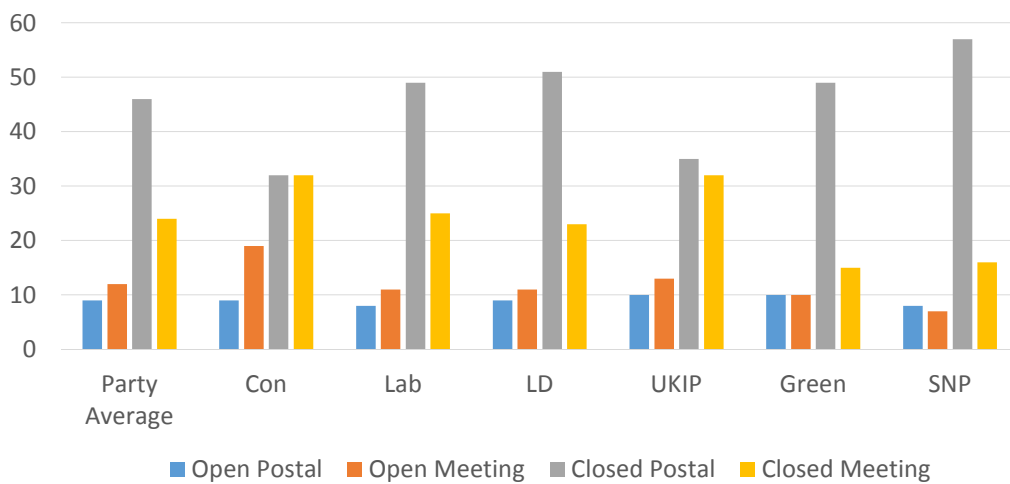
2/2 Candidate Selection

What's the best way to select candidates?

- Rational! Members clearly prefer the option that maximizes their influence but minimizes their effort, ie postal voting restricted to members.
- Those who are *relatively* keen on meetings are the more active, those with a greater sense of efficacy, those who've been members for longer, and those who are more right-wing (which may account for why UKIP and Tory members seem keener on selection meetings than the rest).

"To what extent do you believe that more or fewer MPs in Parliament should come from the following backgrounds?"

More Local MPs

More women MPs

More ethnic minority MPs

More Muslim MPs
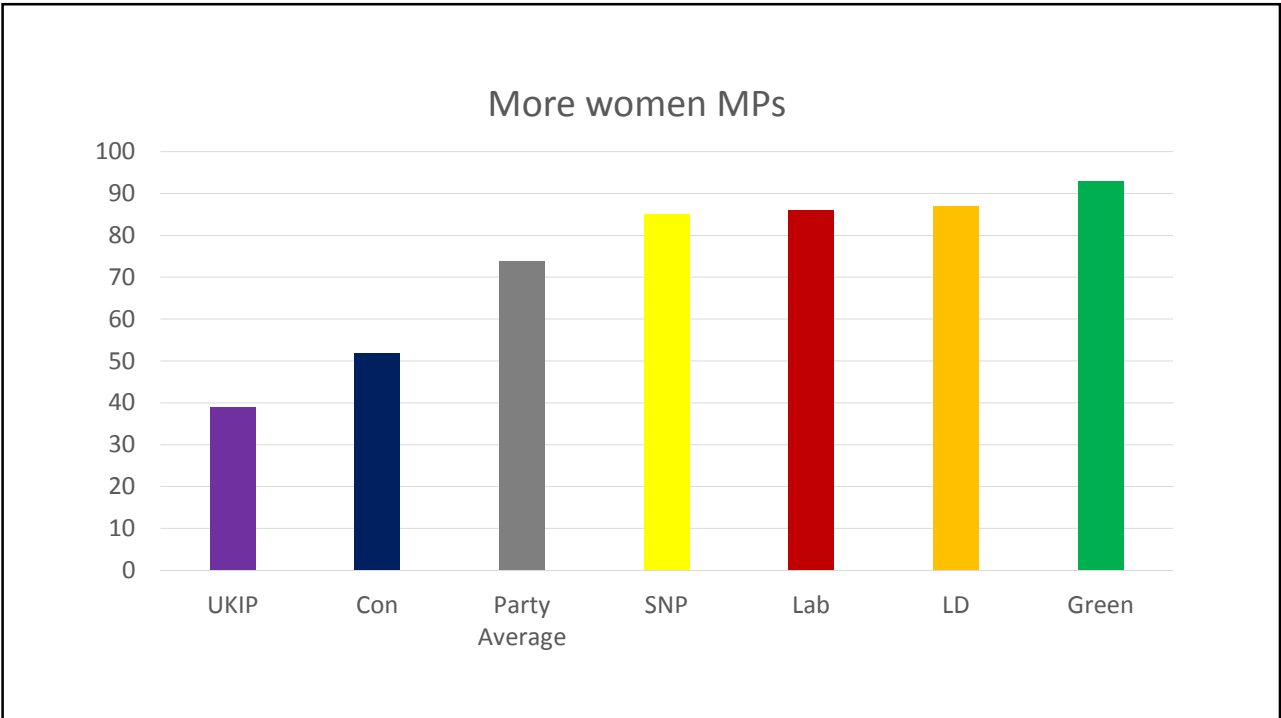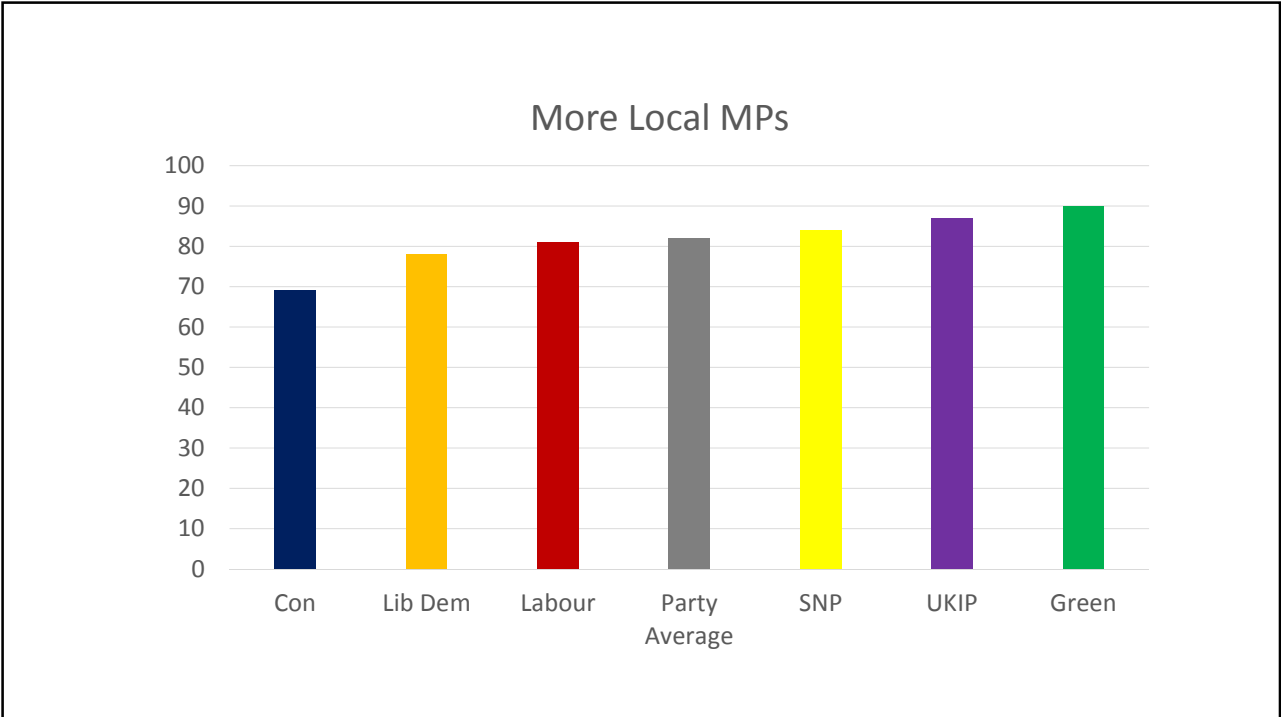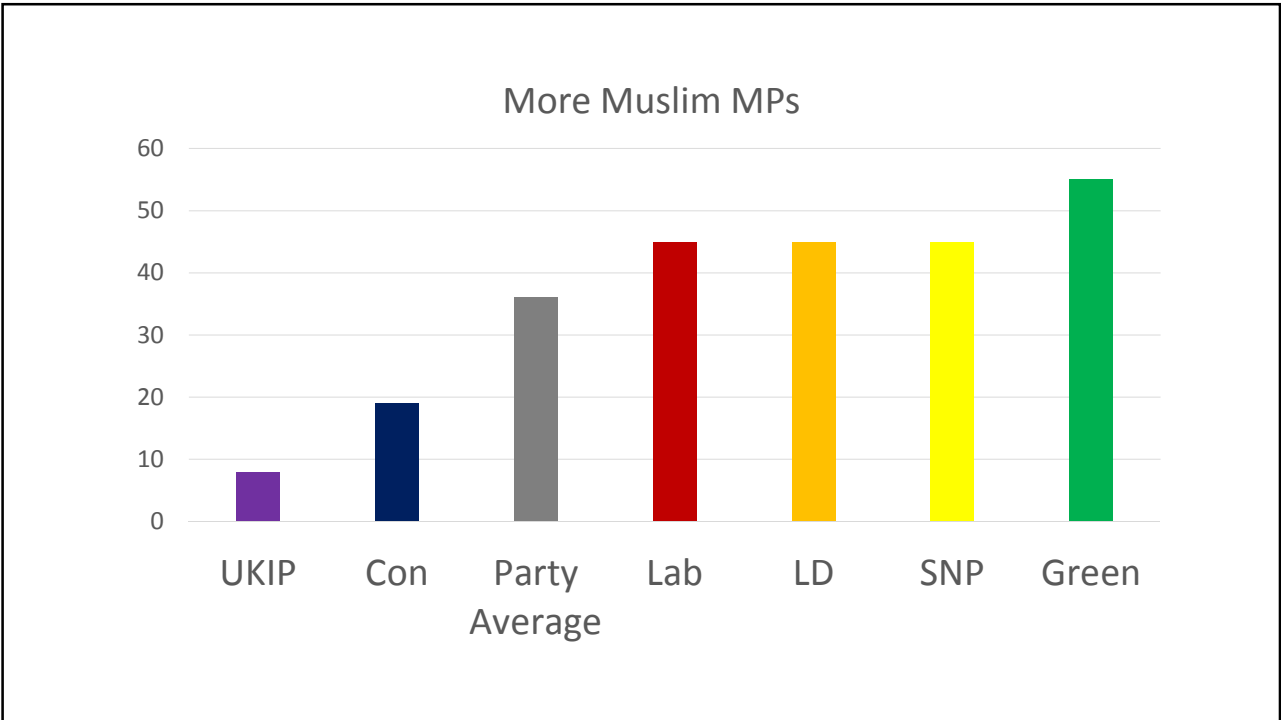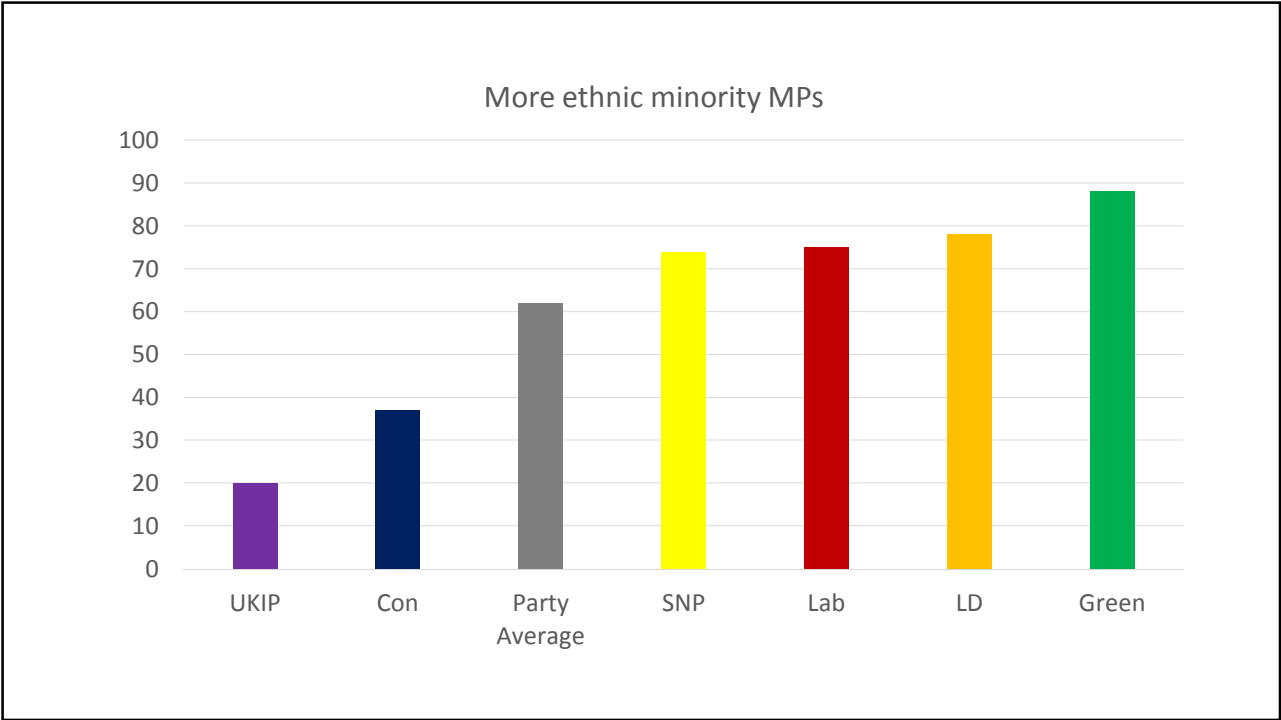
3/3 Electoral Activity

What did you do in the 2015 election?

Activity	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Green	SNP	Total
'Liked' something by party/candidate on FB	39.6	51.1	47.4	44.2	67.6	72.7	53.4
Tweeted/re-tweeted party/candidate messages	26.0	36.9	31.1	22.9	45.7	48.6	35.2
Displayed election poster in window	29.6	51.2	37.8	42.9	45.1	67.7	45.7
Delivered leaflets	43.5	42.5	45.9	38.3	28.8	35.4	39.4
Attended public meeting or hustings	31.3	31.4	28.2	40.5	27.3	49.0	34.6
Canvassed face to face or by phone	36.5	35.7	32.6	26.1	19.1	28.2	30.4
Helped run party committee	12.5	8.4	13.0	5.7	2.4	5.3	8.1
Drove voters to polling stations	6.4	7.2	4.9	5.7	2.6	7.5	5.9
Stood as candidate (local or national)	9.1	7.0	15.1	13.0	10.2	0.2	8.6
Other	16.3	14.2	20.8	14.1	12.8	16.6	15.7
None	23.0	12.9	18.4	20.8	15.3	7.8	16.3

What did you do in the 2015 election? Members v Partisans

Activity	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Green	SNP	Total
'Liked' something by party/candidate on FB	39.6	51.1	47.4	44.2	67.6	72.7	53.4
	10.2	18.8	14.8	17.2	35.4	31.2	21.0
Tweeted/re-tweeted party/candidate messages	26.0	36.9	31.1	22.9	45.7	48.6	35.2
	3.4	7.8	7.8	4.4	18.5	10.4	8.6
Displayed election poster in window	29.6	51.2	37.8	42.9	45.1	67.7	45.7
	2.5	10.7	6.0	8.1	6.0	21.1	9.5
Delivered leaflets	43.5	42.5	45.9	38.3	28.8	35.4	39.4
	2.4	3.0	3.8	1.6	2.4	2.6	2.6
Attended public meeting or hustings	31.3	31.4	28.2	40.5	27.3	49.0	34.6
	4.2	4.8	6.8	3.4	8.7	12.6	6.6
Canvassed face to face or by phone	36.5	35.7	32.6	26.1	19.1	28.2	30.4
	1.6	2.4	2.2	2.2	4.0	2.4	2.4
Stood as candidate (local or national)	9.1	7.0	15.1	13.0	10.2	0.2	8.6
	0.6	0.1	0.6	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.3
N (members)	1193	1180	730	785	845	963	5696
N (partisan identifiers)	1142	1136	1004	1069	1026	1067	6377

	Con	Lab	LD	UKIP	Green	SNP	Total
1. Estimates of national totals of party members and very strong partisans, 2015							
Members	150000	188000	51000	42000	61000	110000	602000
Supporters	3061993	3883464	446623	636577	165192	659054	8852903
2. Activism Index							
Members	2.15	2.56	2.38	2.28	2.43	3.02	2.47
Supporters	0.25	0.48	0.42	0.37	0.79	0.80	0.51
3. Mean number of campaign activities, weighted by size of groups							
Members	322500	481280	121380	95760	148230	332200	1486940
Supporters	765498	1864063	187582	235533	130502	527243	4514981

More detailed analysis reveals (1)

- For both party members and supporters, the closer the constituency race is expected to be, the more likely that they will be active.

- Political attitudes are generally influential: social liberalism, post-materialism and clear-cut feelings about the EU all incline people to be more active in election campaigns; perceived left-right congruence with the national party also inclines party members to participate more, although not supporters.

- Demographic influences on campaign activity are not obvious, bar the surprising finding that that women are the most active at elections both in the case of members and supporters.

More detailed analysis reveals (2)

- *General Incentives* & *Civic Voluntarism* explanations of traditional forms of party membership activism still perform well.

- But local party factors and constituency context add real value.

- If an individual is recruited by his or her local party, becomes embedded within it as a social network, forms a positive impression of the way it conducts its business and feels comfortable with its general ideological outlook, he or she will be significantly more likely to campaign for it at election time – all the more so if this all happens to occur in a marginal constituency and s/he is a member of one of big two parties.

- By contrast, national party factors seem to have little bearing on offline activism. But (like gender and when joined) they do make a difference to online activism, whereas local factors do not.

4/4 Joining and not joining

Why don't strong supporters join? Efficacy & Costs

	Non-member partisans	Members	P-M
Members can change things in their community and the country	65	95	-30
Leaders don't pay attention to members	53	18	-35
Could do a good job as a councillor or MP	34	58	-22
Party activity takes time away from family	69	63	-6
Party work is boring	33	33	0

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