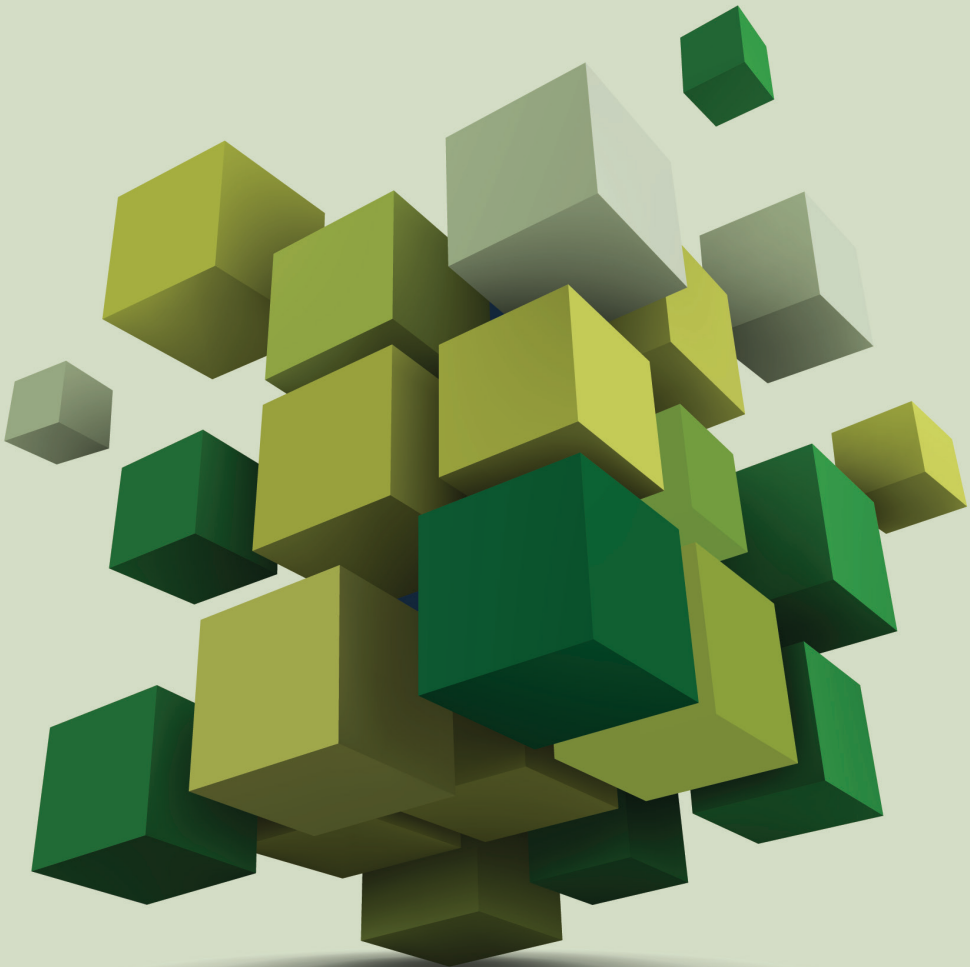# New Forms of Political Party Membership

Political Party Innovation Primer 5

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Contents

1. Introduction

For decades, political parties aimed to create large memberships to sustain and advance the objectives of their political platforms. This way parties became the main vehicle for political activism and the gatekeepers for political representation. A large, committed membership was a crucial requisite for a viable political party and a viable, healthy democracy (Duverger 1951; Sartori 1976). As the Global State of Democracy index demonstrates, free political parties capable of representing society accurately are closely related to the quality of democracy (International IDEA 2019a).

Membership was based on active participation in the activities of the party and in some cases on paying a fee to finance the party, with some exceptions such as parties in some post-communist democracies or many countries in Asia. Today, many parties still boast large traditional memberships: the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) in India, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey and the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party) in Brazil are good examples. Yet a trend of decreasing numbers is observed globally (Casal Bértoa 2017; van Biezen and Poguntke 2012; Gauja and van Haute 2015; Klaukka, Van der Staak and Valladares 2017). Decreasing membership is explained by a wide array of reasons. What citizens demand from parties and what parties offer to citizens have dramatically changed in many respects. Citizens request new forms of engagement that are more in line with societal changes (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014; Klaukka, Van der Staak and Valladares 2017). At the same time, parties need a different way of engaging with potential supporters, far removed from the traditional mass party model of organization and more in line with modern social interactions (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). In addition, fees from members are in most cases not a key financial resource for parties any more, which also changes the relationship

between members and parties for those parties that did finance their activities through fees.

However, decreasing numbers do not mean decreasing political activism or even decreasing political party engagement (Youngs 2019). Schumpeter even argued that membership not only was not necessary but even hindered parties from reaching their objectives (Schumpeter 1943). While formal membership is decreasing because of the shifts in supply and demand, new forms of political party membership are being introduced. These new forms involve new types or levels of membership that require less commitment, or do not include any payment of fees. Parties are also creating new layers of digital membership and presence for their members. The changes also entail a general redefinition of what a member of a political party is and does, including new relationships with collaterals and reduced barriers to interacting with the party outside formal membership channels.[1]

This Primer will analyse these new forms of political party membership and how different parties and contexts have given birth to different ways of engaging citizens in the party's life. The Primer understands membership as 'formal status within a party's voluntary organization' (Scarrow 2017). The Primer will firstly focus on a more conceptual debate, understanding the changes in society that are driving these new forms of political party membership. Afterwards, based on interviews and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance's (International IDEA's) experience of working with political parties globally, it will explore the different questions that political parties need to face when (re)considering how they would like to involve, engage and harness their supporters. It will then turn to some factors parties should consider before embarking on any transformation. The last section will summarize the Primer's content.

Endnotes

1. Collaterals are those institutions that are closely related to a political party. Traditionally these collaterals were trade unions or religious institutions (van Biezen and Poguntke 2012, 2014).

2. What is the issue?

The future of political representation is intimately linked to political parties and their capacity to accurately represent the different sections of society. As parties are influenced by the way they relate to members and the role of members in the organization, political party membership is an issue that will define the future of political representation.

Political parties are, according to Sartori (1976: 220–21), a 'transmission belt' in charge of connecting citizens with political power and decision-making. This transmission happens on two levels. On one level, political parties represent citizens by articulating their interests and mobilizing them. On the other level, and legitimized only by the former, they are also in charge of the procedural handling of candidate selection and of populating key democratic institutions such as parliament. The core representative function is anchored in the assumption that parties have the capacity to harness and articulate the interests of a section of the citizenry (Katz and van Biezen 2005). Often, however, parties articulate the interests of an elite, and serve as vehicles to defend their interest under democratic rules. This is the case of parties based on patronage networks (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). In all situations the party's legitimacy is achieved through its membership. Membership of political parties has been the main avenue for citizens to gather around political ideas and social structures to make their voice heard. At the same time, it has helped parties to fulfil their procedural function. Party members were a good enough sample of the group of society the party represented, and an adequate pool of activists, mobilizers and potentially candidates.

However, all numbers, with few exceptions, point to an irremediable decline in political party membership globally (Casal Bértoa 2017; van Biezen and Poguntke 2012; Klaukka, Van der Staak and Valladares 2017). These members, often the foundation upon which parties fulfilled their functions, are becoming more and

more scarce. Many have argued that without members parties cannot, or will find it very difficult to, fulfil their representative and aggregative functions in an accountable way (Liddiard 2018; Whiteley 2009; van Biezen and Poguntke 2012). Democracies with declining engagement and membership in political parties will suffer from a lack of accountability and institutionalization (Liddiard 2018; Hicken 2006; Mainwaring and Torcal 2006; Mair and Kopecký 2006). Parties that do not represent society accurately will not be capable of transforming collective interests into legislation (Mainwaring and Torcal 2006). At the same time, society will lose an institutionalized channel for influencing policymaking, which will increase dissatisfaction and at the same time open up space for less representative political figures (Liddiard 2018).

Yet parties are not remaining idle. Political party membership, while decreasing in its most traditional sense, is also changing globally and adopting new forms for the ways parties relate to and involve potential sympathizers and supporters. New forms of political party membership are difficult to quantify, and they exist alongside more traditional forms. Yet both new and old parties all over the world are trying to engage supporters innovatively and using methods that are more attuned to the evolution of society in recent years.

Changing membership has not one form but many. It has taken different shapes all over the world. It is therefore paramount to shed light upon these new forms of political party membership and highlight what the fundamental considerations, precautions and key questions are that political parties engaging in the process will need to face.

3. Perspectives on new forms of party membership

Political parties' membership has evolved closely in tandem with the evolution of social and economic relations. The mass party was ushered in by the Fordist production line and it replicated the same idea; a strong member-based organization, with clear hierarchy, closed to the outside, with a strong identity and aiming to achieve stability and great numbers of members (Gerbaudo 2019b; Revelli 2013). This type of party, defined by Duverger (1951) as the mass party, suffered a membership decline concurrently with the extensive transformation of society and the economy during the last decades of the 20th century (Gauja 2017). Of course, the mass party was never the only type of party present in some democratic contexts. Many party systems have weak institutionalized parties without the shape of the mass party (Hicken 2006; Kitschelt 2000). These parties do boast membership, not to aggregate their interest and concerns but rather to obtain political support in exchange for goods (Kitschelt 2000).

Van Biezen and Poguntke (2014) argue that this decrease was induced by a transformation on two fronts, one external and one internal. Externally, parties have been forced to adapt to a changing social and economic reality (Gauja 2017). Economic transformations, modernization and evolution shifted the social class system, creating a more fluid and less rigid one with weaker class identification. Secularization and the rise of diverse forms of professing religion also added to a changing political identification. Citizens found it increasingly difficult to identify with a political party based on their social status or religious affiliation, with of course some exceptions. Based on the difficulty in securing strong identifications based on class, religion, etc., parties started to appeal to the electorate at large rather than specific groups of society (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). However, not all groups in society have the same concerns and collective

problems, which makes it nearly impossible for parties to be representative of society at large.

Internally, access to public funding and the professionalization of politics created parties that are more top-down political structures. The tendency towards professionalization rule inside political parties pre-dates public funding, as highlighted by Michels' seminal work (1911), but was accelerated by it (Katz and Mair 1995). Public funding to political parties is available in 68.2 per cent of countries globally (International IDEA 2018); 40.9 per cent provide public funding on a regular basis, and not only for campaigns (International IDEA 2018). Parties' access to funding and media reduced the importance of activists as volunteer campaigners to achieve victory (Norris et al. 1999). In addition, access to other sources of funding has also prompted an increase in patronage practices by parties (Mair and Kopecký 2006). Parties have relied on consultants and communication firms to run their campaigns, rendering the role of members much less important. At the same time, having access to public funding reduces the importance of fees from members in the party's budget in the cases in which fees are collected (van Biezen 2004; Whiteley 2009). Katz and Mair (1995) even argue that these changes pushed parties to collude in seeking access to power and the maintenance of a status quo even if that meant not fully representing their electorate. In this situation, the capacity of society to influence politics dwindles, which in turns disincentivizes engagement and membership.

Types of parties in party systems

Most democracies do have a wide mix of political parties, with several types. In Greece, the cradle of democracy, parties aiming to be mass parties, such as the Greek Communist Party, professional parties, such as New Democracy, parties with innovative methods of engagement, such as MeRA25, and parties that sit in between the three types, such as Syriza, coexist at the same time. The same happens in Brazil, Italy, the Republic of Korea and South Africa. This implies that, rather than closed categories, parties should be understood as having characteristics of one or other type. The French party La Republique en Marche! (The Republic On the Move), for instance, combines characteristics of professional parties with new forms of engaging its supporters. Some parties, especially relatively new parties such as Podemos in Spain, have adopted more overarching innovations in their membership, whereas others such as the Liberal Party of Canada combine old and new forms of membership.

These two elements transformed parties from the traditional mass party, in which membership was fundamental, to different models that all sought to transcend class and other identities as the definitory element of one's vote and that blurred the role of membership (Duverger 1951; Faucher 2015; Katz and

Mair 1995; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014; Gauja 2017). These new parties sought to catch as many votes as possible from a diverse and non-aligned society through the use of mass media—especially TV—and marketing techniques, as opposed to the use of class identification and members' voluntary work (Faucher 2015; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014; van Biezen 2004). Mobilization campaigns through members became less important, and parties paid less attention to them to avoid their demands for accountability (Faucher 2015).

Yet, in recent years these catch-all, professionalized and TV-based parties have suffered a setback in their capacity to maintain power and the status quo. Society has become increasingly suspicious of professionalized political parties that, many argue, cannot aggregate and articulate the interests of the citizenry and that fall into patronage practices too often (Mair and Kopecký 2006). Social media and digital technologies have produced a significant change in communications, capturing the capacity of influencing public opinion that was traditionally in the hands of TV.

Moreover, the way society does politics and its political repertoire have increased and shifted dramatically (Youngs 2019; Gauja 2017). These new forms of political activism are more ad hoc, less permanent, more centred around causes rather than ideologies and rarely, if ever, mediated or led by political parties (Barnes, Newman and Sullivan 2007; Youngs 2019). At the same time, as noted by Youngs (2019), political activism is not only not decreasing, but rather surging. The difference, again, is that it is not mediated by political parties in most cases, rendering the political scenario increasingly hostile to party politics.

In this context, parties are attempting, in different ways, to reimagine membership in order to redefine, revamp and regain their role as transmission belts between the state and society. As in the past, these new models of membership would need to reflect and be attuned to the social and economic context.[1] The following chapter will highlight these new forms of membership and what they imply, and use case studies from different parties to help parties understand the main innovation avenues when it comes to political party membership.

Endnotes

1. It is important to highlight that current political parties globally do maintain structures that stay within the definition of the mass party (the African National Congress in South Africa), the catch-all party (the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico), the electoral-professional party (Liberal Democratic Party of Japan) or cartel parties (until recently, the main two parties in the Republic of Korea). Yet, as forms of membership, numbers and political systems vary greatly around the world, changes are more profound in some context than others.

4. How do new forms of party membership work?

Innovations in the way people are part of a political party in the broader sense can be clustered, as explained before, in three overlapping categories—redefining membership, digitalizing membership and (re)engaging membership. These three innovation categories overlap in many senses, as many of the innovations influence more than one level. At the same time, all these innovations imply certain structural changes in the way political parties work. Some of them affect the decision-making process, others the way the party communicates or even what type of organization the party is.

4.1. Redefining membership

Redefining membership involves changing the meaning of what a member is and shifting the way a member is identified. Enlarging the conceptualization of membership allows parties to create diverse engagement strategies, creating a spectrum of options for engagement. These options can cater to those aligning diffusely or contingently with the party, to those who are partisan activists and to everyone in between.

Many parties have addressed the issue by reducing the cost of membership and creating different tiers whereby supporters can choose how much they would like to be involved. This also allows a more fluid relationship with the party and for an easier transition between types of membership. This redefinition takes place in different ways.

Multilevel membership

Perhaps the most popular strategy that many parties have used is to create different levels of membership, in order to decrease the barriers to access and create members with different levels of commitment. Creating a multilevel membership is also popular because it does not generally imply significant structural changes within the party.

Joining a party has an idealist/ideological aspect that focuses on advancing the ideas of the party. Yet it also has a utilitarian one, whereby the individual members or potential members seek to influence policymaking, feel included in an identified group and increase their decision-making power within their chosen political structure. On a purely utility analysis of fee-based membership, citizens might find that they do not have the time or resources to fully utilize the rights given to them through their membership (Achury et al. 2018). Creating different membership levels allows those citizens to join the party with a commitment tailor-made to their capacities, compromises and available time (Gauja 2017).

Examples of multilevel political party membership

Parties all over the world have embraced multilevel membership and this is perhaps one of the most widely spread innovations in terms of membership. The Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom and the Partido Popular (People's Party) in Spain offer the possibility of becoming a member or a supporter. Two main differences separate members from supporters. Firstly, membership has a cost, while being a supporter is free, or at a significantly lower cost. Secondly, members have voting rights in the various decision-making mechanisms of the party conference, party elections, etc., whereas supporters can attend those meetings but often do not have the right to vote. It is important to note that parties with open primaries to select their leadership—such as the French Socialist Party—bestow the right to vote even beyond supporters. In Tunisia the party Afek Tunis (Tunisian Aspiration(s)) offers the possibility of becoming a sympathizer or a member, but in both cases it is possible to indicate to the party that the person would like to become an active member, involved in the party's activities. In this case, paying the fee becomes, to a certain extent, voluntary.

Other examples of multilevel membership can be found in Portugal, where the party Iniciativa Liberal (Liberal Initiative) offers the possibility of volunteering by suggesting policies or being active in party events before officially joining the party. Another Portuguese party, Livre (Free), distinguishes between members and supporters. Both can run to be on an electoral ticket for the party, but only the members can run for internal positions within the party. The Canadian Liberal Party aims to reach individuals not willing to fully join the party, offering instead a 'more flexible framework for active engagement as a Liberal partisan' (Liberal Party, Canada 2011).

There are many ways in which parties have created these different levels of membership. The most basic levels of membership are based on unidirectional information from the party to the person who has agreed to be informed. At a minimum, parties ask their supporters to join a mailing list as a first step. In many cases, parties go beyond and try to create a 'lite' membership to engage sympathizers and potential future members who would like to try or use a lower level of engagement before embracing full, paid membership.

These lite membership types are often referred to as 'sympathizers' or 'friends' of the party, implying a lower level of commitment, in terms of both time and resources, than full membership. They replicate many online subscription models usually called freemium. This is a business model—applied by newspapers for instance—that provides the customer with basic features of the product or service, or a limited number of uses, but requires a fee or subscription for full access. In political parties, these lite memberships are mostly for free, only asking the person to register and create a profile.

When parties have lite memberships, they also maintain full membership, whereby those willing to pay a fee gain access to all the perks of full membership, usually including voting rights, the right to attend key party meetings and the right to stand for office as a party representative.

Eliminating fees

Some parties, such as the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party) in India, La Republique en Marche! in France (The Republic On the Move), the Alliance pour la Republique (Alliance for the Republic) in Senegal or the Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement) in Italy, go further and have eliminated altogether any type of fee to be a member. These parties have not created different tiers of membership, but minimize the barriers to membership by eliminating fees. Membership in these parties requires only registration and providing some type of identity assurance to avoid multiple profiles by the same person. Usually, parties without fees tend to be relatively new parties that use this technique to distinguish themselves from traditional parties and attract a sizeable number of people in their early days without raising barriers in the shape of financial commitment. In most of these cases, parties choose to allow supporters—members or not—to donate financially to the party. These donations do not entail more participation and membership rights; this decouples fees from participation and membership rights.

It is important to note, however, that eliminating fees might not have the desired effect of having a membership that truly reflects the group of sympathizers or potential voters (Achury et al. 2018). As Achury et al. (2018) demonstrate, it is the mix between costs and benefits of the different types of membership that influences how much members reflect supporters or voters of the party.

Reducing time commitments

As overarching ideological frameworks are less attuned to the fluidity of modern societies, reducing time commitments to the party is a strategy to provide some of the benefits of membership, but through a weaker linkage between party and citizens. Creating different forms of support and engagement with the party allows citizens a smaller time commitment. Whereas traditional membership was almost a lifelong statement, today parties seek more occasional support that might or might not transform into further engagement. One example is the Spanish political party Podemos (We Can). The party allows people to lend microcredits to the party ahead of electoral campaigns to cover expenditure. Microcredits are returned once the party receives the allocated public funding after the elections. Anyone can lend a microcredit, regardless of their relationship with the party. Yet the commitment of the citizen to the party does not go beyond the microcredit. Other parties carry out active engagement campaigns online, for instance asking supporters to change their profile pictures on social media platforms to show their support for a party, something that can be reverted almost instantly.

4.2. Digitalizing membership

If there is a factor in which political parties are increasingly mirroring society, it is in going digital. The same happens with membership. Parties are adding a further spatial dimension to membership, creating activities that members do online. This is a natural consequence of the increasing online presence of political parties and the increasing importance of the political debate that takes place online.

Digitalizing political party membership in France

La Republique en Marche! (The Republic On the Move) in France is a good example of how political parties can create a digital sphere when it comes to political party activism. The party does not disregard physical activities by its members but understands that between elections and campaigns—moments of decisive offline activities for the party—members will be more active if such activism is also channelled online. Although the party structures itself in a relatively traditional way around local chapters, the key coordination tool of the party is the messaging app Telegram. The chapters coordinate and communicate internally through the app, and most discussions take place on members' phones rather than face to face. Telegram allows members to discuss actively without having to meet physically, and at the same time it gives the party the opportunity to reach all members using the broadcasting function of the app (which allows one to broadcast a message rather than open a conversation).

Digitalizing political party membership in France (cont.)

Moreover, the party has created a number of online platforms and activism spaces that allow members to influence its policies and unpack their political membership into concrete actions, such as the Projets Citoyens (citizen projects), the Formations (a training platform) or the Atelier des Idées (workshop of ideas). The Atelier des Idées is a platform in which members of the party can propose policy ideas, contribute to existing ideas and support proposals made by other members. These ideas are managed and incorporated into the party's policy discussion mechanisms by the staff of the party. When a member submits a proposal, he or she needs to complete and answer a series of questions about it, such as which problem it is addressing, what solution is being proposed, what risks are associated with the proposal, the budgetary implications, its impact on the environment and the gender perspective of the proposal.

According to the party, these channels of digital membership have allowed it to mobilize members beyond key electoral contests and have created an avenue for members to unpack and realize their membership, influencing the party management and its elected representatives.

Online participatory platforms

Many political parties have taken the idea of the public square online, and created participatory mechanisms online for their members. These types of platforms are becoming a fundamental trait of what are called digital parties (Gerbaudo 2019a). Through these platforms, parties aim to digitalize the internal party debate, and often allow those engaged to discuss more actively and even vote on internal decisions. The idea is to provide members and supporters—however they are identified—with more tools to influence decision-making inside the party.

A key question on these platforms is who has access to them, and the decision-making power that these platforms enjoy. Digital parties have risen to prominence in various countries. In Italy the Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement), which won the most votes in the 2018 general election, runs a decision-making platform called Rousseau. On this platform, those who have signed up to be members of the party—which is free of charge—can discuss policies, vote for key decisions of the party and choose the individuals running for office in the name of the party (Gerbaudo 2019a). In Germany, the Grüne (The Greens) have also introduced diverse participatory methods for members, but limited only to paying members owing to the legal framework in the country (Thuermer 2019).

It is important to note that these platforms are sometimes intended to go beyond recreating an online version of the public square. Some groups, such as those behind the concept of Liquid Democracy or some parties such as the

Argentinian Partido de la Red (Net Party) or, in its origins, the Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement), aimed to make these platforms the cornerstone of a major shift in the role of political parties in society (P2PFoundation 2019). These ideas aim to shift the role of political parties from representatives of citizens to instruments of more direct democratic methods. The idea is to give these platforms and the collective voice they create the decision-making power, and elected politicians will only be the procedural implementers of what the platform decided (Gerbaudo 2019a; P2PFoundation 2019). Such power for online platforms has not been fully applied yet by a political party, although the case of the Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement) is perhaps the most representative (Gerbaudo 2019a).

Online participatory platforms have the potential to redefine membership in many respects, as in today's world they are the most readily available tool to engage members and sympathizers in the internal life of the party. These platforms can act as a fundamental mechanism in providing the party with the legitimacy to represent a sector of society. Yet, for this to happen, the platforms ought to allow discussion and become real discussion venues for the party. Learning from the examples of big social media platforms, that is a daunting challenge (Zuboff 2019). When managed top-down, these platforms might become purely plesbiscitarian mechanisms that provide an artificial patina of members' decision-making power (Gerbaudo 2019a).

Digital activism for members and supporters

As the online space has become an active part of people's life, it is only natural for political parties to replicate the mobilization of its ranks online too as a way to facilitate political membership. Despite the known risks of social media to the health of democratic dialogue in society, parties find digital activism to be a new way of rendering political party membership useful and more accessible to potential members. Parties such as Centerpartiet (The Centre Party) in Sweden provide their members with a code of conduct on how to behave on social media as well as clear instructions on how to spread their content on social media. In addition, they also create visual material to be shared by members among their friends, including identifying visually on social media as supporters of the party.

At the same time, parties can strengthen the relationship with members by providing online resources and training. In the case of La Republique en Marche! (The Republic On the Move) in France, the party provides various online platforms in which members can expand their knowledge or influence the key ideas and debates of the party. Rede Sustentabilidade (Sustainability Network) in Brazil and the Grüne (The Greens) in Germany also provide an array of online spaces for their supporters and members to learn, find material for political campaigns, or enter debates and political discussions with other members (Floriano Ribeiro et al. 2018; Thuermer 2019).

The online ambassador programme of the Democratic Alliance of South Africa

The Democratic Alliance in South Africa has created a programme of online ambassadors in order to influence the political debate online and maintain a uniform message on the main social media platforms. These online ambassadors of the party are members, staff or influencers who boast a large number of followers on social media and are generally capable of getting a message across to that audience. The programme originated as an attempt to coordinate the most influential social media profiles that were supporting or affiliated to the party. Thanks to its success and the capacity of the online ambassadors to get the message of the party across, the party has expanded the programme, covering more profiles and being more active.

Democratic Alliance's online ambassadors, after being selected by the party and agreeing to be ambassadors, receive content and instructions for posting it online. The content and instructions are decided by the party management and aim at two objectives. On one hand, they send a clear, unified message from the party—such as its economic view or its 'rainbow party' character. On the other hand, the online ambassadors give the impression of an organic and more authentic message that is not fully controlled by the party, as it comes from individuals, which is more credible on social media.

4.3. (Re)engaging membership

By innovating and finding new membership formulas, parties are ultimately seeking one thing: to re-engage citizens in their political activities. They seek more, and more active, members as well as having a membership model that is adapted to social realities, political cleavages and modern technologies. The innovations that political parties are carrying out, aiming at engaging members further and deeper, focus on how political parties relate to collaterals—trade unions or religious groups among others—and how they might attempt to overcome negative attitudes towards them by creating issue-based spaces of activism.

Shifting the relationship with collaterals

Collateral organizations have always been a fundamental part of the life of political parties. In many countries such as the Republic of Korea, South Africa or Spain, trade unions have had a close relationship with political parties. Other traditional anchoring societal institutions such as religious authorities have influenced parties in Brazil, Lebanon and Pakistan. Strong social movements have also managed to create close relationships with parties, such as the civil rights movements and the Democratic Party in the United States. In the UK, the

Labour Party and trade unions have always had a close relationship—the party was a spin-off from trade unions at the beginning of the 20th century. Recently, the relationship has been shifting to include Labour-affiliated trade unions within the party's structure. Before the shift, trade unions influenced Labour as a block. Currently, all union members have an individual vote on aspects such as the election of the leadership, rather than having to agree with the union's official line.

In terms of religious affiliation and support, some groups such as evangelical churches in Brazil have become key actors in providing support to one or another candidate, but are not clearly identified with one party, nor do they promise the endorsement to a candidate beyond one electoral cycle. Marina Silva managed to get significant support from evangelical groups in the 2014 elections in Brazil by framing their main political concerns within her political platform.

Issue-based networks

Trust in political parties remains low globally (Afrobarometer 2018; Pew Research Center 2019; Latinobarómetro 2018). As a consequence, parties find it hard to attract citizens to their discussion and debate spaces. One of the alternatives that parties are finding is to create issue-based networks in which citizens can engage around a single issue, without necessarily embracing all the ideology of the party. In Chile, the political party Evolución Política (Political Evolution) offers several spaces to become politically active based on the issues that interest supporters the most. Thus it offers activism spaces on diverse topics such as the environment, rural action or migration. In addition, it offers a space for supporters or sympathizers to offer their skills pro bono to the party, as an in-kind contribution. In New Zealand, the New Zealand National Party has a set of issue-based networks based on the particular interests of its supporters or members. These networks aggregate supporters through descent—Chinese, Maori, Pacific Islander, etc.— age or special interests—the environment, for instance.

Opening up leadership selection

Many political parties are opening up the way they select their leadership in order to include people outside the party (International IDEA 2019b). This gives citizens who might have an interest in or affinity to the party a window of opportunity to influence the party without formally joining. Open primaries seek to give a stronger say to those who are close to the party, even if not formal members. At the same time, they seek to open up competition and debate internally in order to advance the way the party thinks (International IDEA 2019b). NEOS (The New Austria and Liberal Forum) in Austria and the Tėvynės Sąjunga–Lietuvos Krikščionys Demokratai (Homeland Union–Lithuanian

Christian Democrats) in Lithuania follow this model and allow people outside the party to vote in open primaries that decide the future leadership.

Opening up leadership election to non-formal members might serve two purposes from the membership perspective. On one hand, it gives a taste of membership to potential sympathizers of the party. That way the party will also have an insight into the ideas and concerns of its potential voters. On the other hand, giving the right to vote in an internal election gives non-members the opportunity to enjoy some of membership's benefits without the commitment, thus engaging with the party.

5. Issues to consider before renewing or updating party membership models

The role of parties in society and their capacity to relate to members and supporters are highly contextual. In some countries, such as India, the main political parties boast massive memberships and the key issue for parties is not how to redefine membership but rather how to utilize the huge numbers of supporters to win elections. In other cases, such as in many European countries, the debate around parties is how to retain their legitimacy as the connection node between citizens and power.

Before embarking on a transformation and redefinition of membership, political parties should take into account the legal framework under which they operate. Many countries, such as Brazil or Germany, demand that parties have formal, paying members in order to qualify as political parties. The legal framework may interfere in the way political parties innovate in the shape of their membership. In Brazil, for instance, the party Rede Sustentabilidade (Sustainability Network) attempts to allow at least 30 per cent of its candidates to come from citizens' nominations. Yet, based on Brazilian law, once these candidates are official, they need to join the party (Floriano Ribeiro et al. 2018). In Germany, the Grüne (The Greens) have seen how many of their attempts at innovative engagement with potential members and supporters are usually curtailed by the law regulating political parties in the country (Thuermer 2019). It can be argued that the extent to which parties are capable of innovating in terms of membership is linked to the legislation regulating political parties, especially when it comes to the legal obligation to have members.

Another relevant aspect to consider is the use of technology and the inherent risks it entails. Many innovations taken on by political parties to create or advance innovative forms of membership include the use of various digital technologies.

These technologies—such as online voting or participatory platforms—facilitate new roles for members, yet they also entail risks. Cybersecurity is paramount in the implementation of these initiatives. Political parties, through these platforms and technologies, can amass a significant amount of data about their members and supporters. All those data need to be protected from possible hacks. In addition, these systems need to create security measures that avoid external manipulation or interference, or even manipulation by members of the party. Ownership of and access to data and the back-end of the platform are key issues parties need to address beforehand. In addition, these technologies usually have an associated cost.

Also important is parties' understanding of the structural changes that new forms of membership imply. Most innovations in how the party understands membership also entail profound structural changes in the party. Hence, for these innovations to have impact, parties need to consider, and duly apply, the necessary structural changes that the innovations require. For instance, for a participatory platform to be meaningful, parties need to reconsider the internal mechanisms of decision-making and adapt them to the functioning of the platform.

Lastly, parties need to understand that new forms of political party membership often exist vis-à-vis more traditional forms of membership. Moreover, these new forms of membership in most cases do not replace, but rather complement, traditional forms.

6. Conclusions

Is there a new party model with new forms of political party membership? In the 1990s academics defined new types of party, centred on their lack of class identity, their professionalization or their attempts to remain in or around power for as long as possible using state resources. These types of parties, defined as the cartel party, the professional party and the catch-all party, have been heavily influenced by televised political campaigns. Have the Internet and new labour relations ushered in a new type of party? Have these changes altered the role of political party membership?

What political parties need from members and what citizens demand from political parties have changed fundamentally in the last few decades. Political parties today do not need to have a strong membership base to act as the transmission belt between people and power. That was already the case for some parties that were based on patronage. Yet all types of parties used to need members to campaign, spread their political message, support them financially—when fees were paid—or grasp the main concerns and claims of society. In all these respects, parties of all types have sidelined members. This has had a negative impact on parties' performance, legitimacy and accountability. If parties do not aggregate, through members, the concerns and ideas of a section of society, they cannot fulfil their function. At the same time, citizens are demanding another type of relationship with parties, more horizontal, with deeper participation, increased influence, less time commitment and a higher rate of exchange of ideas. The innovations we are seeing today among political parties need to reconcile parties' continuing need to harness membership with the current demands of society.

The Primer has highlighted three respects in which diverse political parties are innovating in creating new forms of membership. Firstly, parties are redefining what a member is, creating multiple levels of membership, lowering—or even

eliminating—economic barriers to engaging with the party, and making available the possibility of short-term commitments to the party. Secondly, parties are harnessing the potential of online technologies to digitalize political party membership. These innovations include the creation of participatory networks and spaces to realize political activism in the digital sphere. Lastly, parties have attempted to (re)engage members by shifting the way they relate to collaterals, by giving a stronger voice to supporters in determining who leads the party and by creating spaces for issue-based activism.

The different innovations that political parties are using globally to address declining membership and to reimagine party-based political activism are probably a reflection of a wider phenomenon. Political parties, as entities in charge of aggregating society's concerns and ideas, and representing them in democratic institutions, need to reflect society. In the same way as the mass party reflected Fordist society, modern parties need to reflect today's society. In a rapidly changing, interconnected and interdependent world, political parties are struggling to update and fully exercise their function as the transmission belt between citizens and politics.

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