

PARTY MEMBERS AND HIGH-INTENSITY PARTICIPATION: EVIDENCE FROM BRAZIL*

*Militantes partidistas y participación de alta intensidad:
evidencia desde el caso brasileño*

PEDRO FLORIANO RIBEIRO

Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil

OSWALDO E. DO AMARAL

State University of Campinas, Brazil

ABSTRACT

The literature on political parties has indicated a decline in the levels of party membership in established democracies. The few studies on Latin America show impressive membership figures, but they say nothing about profile and motivations of these individuals. Relying on original data from the first survey undertaken exclusively with party members in Brazil, this article describes the activists' profiles and explains the determinants of high-intensity participation. The findings show that activists are older, have a higher socioeconomic status, and present positive attitudes about participation. The multivariate analysis indicates that high-intensity participation is anchored in collective incentives, cognitive resources, and the perception of political efficacy. Brazil's political parties have an internal life and grassroots activities, which contradicts the traditional view of them.

Keywords: political parties, party membership, party activists, Brazil, participation

RESUMEN

La literatura sobre partidos políticos indica la disminución de la membresía en las democracias tradicionales. Las pocas investigaciones en América Latina muestran números extraordinarios de membresía, pero nada dicen sobre perfil y motivaciones de estos individuos. Empleando datos originales del primer survey realizado con miembros partidistas en Brasil, el artículo describe el perfil de los militantes y explica la participación de alta intensidad. Los hallazgos muestran que los militantes son más viejos, tienen un nivel socioeconómico más elevado, y presentan opiniones positivas sobre la participación. El análisis multivariado indica que la participación de alta intensidad está anclada en incentivos colectivos, recursos cognitivos, y en la percepción de eficacia política. Los partidos políticos en Brasil tienen vida interna y actividades de base, lo que contradice la visión tradicional sobre ellos.

Palabras clave: partidos políticos, membresía, militantes, Brasil, participación

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I. INTRODUCTION

Challenging the early pessimistic evaluations after democratization, Brazil is one of the few countries in Latin America where the party system has undergone a process of stabilization in the last three decades (Mainwaring 2018). Since the 1990s, extensive literature has pointed to the centrality of political parties in the legislative process and in the functioning of “coalition presidentialism” in the country (Figueiredo and Limongi 1999; Melo and Pereira 2013). Subsequent research has emphasized the stabilization of the system and the effects of the electoral polarization between the PT and the PSDB¹ (prevalent from 1994 to 2014) on party-voters linkages and the subnational levels of competition (Melo and Câmara 2012; Braga et al. 2016; Mainwaring 2018). This consolidation process has been shaken in recent years by Operation Car Wash—the anti-corruption investigation that has affected dozens of important politicians from all the major parties—and by the election of a populist far-right president in 2018.

The literature focused mainly on two components of party system institutionalization: the stability of interparty competition and the depth of party roots in society. Party organizations (another dimension of institutionalization) remain as an understudied subject that is still a “black box” for all of Latin America (Levitsky 2001).² The view on party organizations in Brazil remains, to a large extent, the same as it was in the 1980s. In this view, with the partial exception of the PT, the parties are organizationally weak, decentralized and heterogeneous across the territorial levels (without vertical or horizontal integration), and deprived of internal life and grassroots members and activism. In short, parties are legal fictions (*partidos de cartório*) manipulated by political elites during elections, with the sole purpose of accessing into public offices (Mainwaring 1999; Ames 2001; Samuels and Zucco 2015; 2016: 345-346).³ Although it has been nearly four decades since democratization in most countries, there have been few empirically based studies on party organizations, and this view still prevails in most analyses about political parties in Latin America (Levitsky et al. 2016b: 1-3).

This article challenges the traditional view of Brazilian parties by presenting evidence on the existence of party activities and grassroots participation within party organizations. It also shows that models developed in the most established democracies can travel to a developing country for the understanding of party processes and behavior. Using original data from a survey conducted exclusively with party members in the state of São Paulo with probabilistic sampling and stratification, this article (i) describes the sociodemographic

¹ A list of party acronyms is presented at the end of the text.

² For a sample of studies on party organizations in Latin America, see Alcántara Sáez and Freidenberg (2001), Alcántara Sáez (2004), Wills-Otero (2009), Ponce (2013), Dosek (2014), Levitsky et al. (2016a), Lupu (2016), Ribeiro and Fabre (2019), Ribeiro and Locatelli (2019).

³ See Guarnieri (2011) and Ribeiro and Locatelli (2019) for some exceptions to this traditional view.

profile of members (comparing it to the profile of the general electorate and the profiles of activists in other countries) and (ii) analyzes the factors behind high-intensity participation within the parties. The findings show that major political parties (not only the PT) have an internal life and a strong core of activists who are quite similar (in quantity and profile) from those found in the most traditional democracies. When compared to the population, party activists in Brazil are older, have a higher socioeconomic status, and present more positive attitudes about political participation and institutions. The factors that explain high-intensity involvement also echo previous findings about party activism in other countries. The high-intensity participation in party activities is anchored in cognitive resources, collective incentives, and a sense of political efficacy. The typical highly engaged party member in Brazil is male with a higher education, who firmly believes in the efficacy of political action (both in individual and collective terms), and has joined the party because of his political convictions and ideology.

This article is organized as follows. The next section reviews the literature on partisanship, party membership and activism. In addition, it presents the hypotheses (derived from the literature) and highlights the main theoretical frameworks that explain party affiliation and high-intensity participation. Section 3 presents the methodological options and introduces the database, and discusses its limitations and advantages. Section 4 presents the descriptive findings about the profile and motivations of Brazilian activists compared to the general electorate and party activists in other democracies. Using a multivariate logistic model, in Section 5 we explain the level of engagement among Brazilian party activists. The findings and contributions of the article are discussed in the final section. They reinforce a recent reappraisal in the literature by providing evidence that political parties in Brazil are not legal fictions. Specifically, in terms of intraparty life and the existence of a core of committed members, there are parties *on the ground* (Katz and Mair 1995), and there is no reason to consider that party organizations are exceptionally weak in Brazil. The findings open up several avenues for future research.

II. PARTY MEMBERSHIP AND ACTIVISM

There is a consensus in the literature about the changes in modes of political participation. Party and union membership and voter turnout are being replaced by mechanisms such as digital activism, street occupations and protests, political consumerism (boycotts), direct connection with policy-makers through petitions and lobbies, and more fluid, horizontal and temporary types of collective action that are organized around specific issues. Within this debate, the literature on political parties has indicated the almost generalized decline in the levels of membership and (to a lesser extent) activism in advanced democracies, relying primarily on the same explanatory factors used in the broader discussion on political participation—social modernization, technological changes, etc. (van

Biezen et al. 2012; Scarrow 2015; van Haute and Gauja 2015). This phenomenon is clearer in more advanced democracies due to their high levels of income, education, quality of life and technological development (Norris 2002; Dalton 2008). However, concomitant with processes of social modernization and economic development, third-wave democracies have also been experiencing such transformations (Pérez-Liñán 2001; Fornos et al. 2004; Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005; Klesner 2007; Kostadinova and Power 2007; Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2014).

The level of participation and the activities performed by party members vary significantly when comparing different parties and countries. The reduction in aggregate levels of membership largely reflects the loss of inactive or relatively uncommitted party members, rather than the departure of activists, who form a much more stable group (Ponce and Scarrow 2016). Surveys with party members have shown that most members have low levels of internal participation; however, every party has a strong core of highly active members who scarcely make up 10% of the total (Scarrow 2015: 156-174; Gauja and van Haute 2015). This kind of survey (which we use here) allows the discussion to overcome the simplistic distinction between members and nonmembers in order to address the different types, channels and levels of involvement with (and within) party organizations. The level of activism, not the formal act of affiliation, becomes the focus in conceptions such as Scarrow's *multi-speed membership* model: "(...) we need to see supporters in the way that parties increasingly seem to view them: as individuals who move between different levels of party activism and interest" (Scarrow 2015: 3). This study of the Brazilian case is largely based on such a perspective.

In general, the levels of and trends in party activism are explained through the same theoretical frameworks that explain the initial enrollment, with a focus on (i) individual resources, (ii) sociopsychological dispositions and attitudes, and (iii) rational choice models (Scarrow 2015; van Haute and Gauja 2015). The first set of major approaches includes theories based on individual material and cognitive resources, such as income, education, time and information. Having these resources supports the development of certain civic skills and psychological dispositions, such as involvement in public affairs and a sense of political efficacy, which favor membership in voluntary associations, party membership, and high-intensity engagement. This approach has its most complete expression in the civic voluntarism model of Verba et al. (1995). Second, there are theories that identify the values and attitudes of individuals on sensitive issues as the main predictors of participation. Interpersonal trust, interest in and consumption of political information, and a sense of political efficacy (individual and collective) are some of the attributes that form a psychological disposition that is more favorable for engagement. The education level, mediated by such attributes, is also central in this framework (Norris 2002; Dalton 2008).

Finally, there are models that rely on a rational choice perspective, explaining membership and participation in terms of the expectations of individuals

regarding the costs and benefits derived from engagement (Panebianco 1988). As a step forward in this perspective—and in an effort to reconcile the elements of rational choice and sociopsychological approaches—Seyd and Whiteley's (1992) general incentives model understands political participation and the degree of activism in terms of three elements: (i) individual rationality, which combines collective (e.g., identity and policy goals) and selective incentives; the latter is divided between selective-process incentives, which are linked to the inherent value of participation, regardless of the outcome (psychological and social rewards to the individual: leisure, sociability, personal ties, etc.), and selective-outcome incentives, such as access to paid positions and the furtherance of a political career; (ii) group incentives and social norms such as family traditions, religious community, etc.; and (iii) altruistic motivations, which are anchored mainly in moral values (Seyd and Whiteley 1992: 64).

Collective incentives linked to ideology and policy goals are the main factors associated with initial membership and high-intensity participation within political parties. Selective-process incentives and social motivations (e.g., networking and family tradition) generally appear in second place in cross-national surveys, while private and material motivations (career, position, status) are recognized by a minority of party members in almost all countries (Scarrow 2015: 156-174; see also Gauja and van Haute 2015).

Both general public opinion surveys and interviews conducted only with party members trace the same profile for party activists in established democracies: male, older than the average population, and with a higher status in terms of income and education. Women make up about a third of the membership, and young people are a declining minority. Party members have positive attitudes about political efficacy and trust in institutions and have higher levels of religious attendance and involvement with other associations. Party members can hardly be seen as representative of the population, and this 'status participation gap' has widened in virtually all established democracies (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010; Gauja and van Haute 2015).

Little is known about the subject in Latin America. A few studies directly address the parties' members (*militantes*), but official data on party membership are not always accurate and reliable. The most recent data do not indicate a clear trend towards the decline of party membership in Latin American parties. There are countries that present (and maintain) impressive numbers of formal party membership, such as Argentina (28% of the electorate), Brazil (11%), Chile (6%) and Mexico (12%) (Dosek 2014).

In the absence of specific data on party members, partisanship in the region has been analyzed through party identification, usually in country-specific studies (McCann and Lawson 2003; Moreno 2003; Morgan 2007; Baker et al. 2010; Vidal et al. 2010; Samuels and Zucco 2016). When official party membership data is regularly inflated—not only in Latin America (Mair and van Biezen 2001)—public opinion surveys have pointed to rates of party identification that

are by no means irrelevant. The most recent cross-national surveys, such as the LAPOP,⁴ indicate that one-third of Latin American citizens have affective ties with a party (see authors in Carlin et al. 2015; Nadeau et al. 2017). Party identification is one of the major explanatory factors for turnout in the region and is the main factor behind voting decisions in presidential races, with more significant and stable effects (in longitudinal and cross-national terms) than those of demographic variables or self-placement on the left-right scale (Carreras and Castañeda-Angarita 2014; Nadeau et al. 2017). The profile of party sympathizers is similar to that found in established democracies. Age, income, education, civic engagement and access to information are positively associated with partisanship across Latin American countries. At the contextual level, strong social heterogeneity with the formation of clear cleavages, political polarization, programmatic differentiation and party system institutionalization, with low levels of fragmentation, are factors that encourage the formation of ties between citizens and parties in the region (Lupu 2015, 2016).

In Brazil, political parties rank last in the rankings of institutional trust (69% of Brazilians did not trust parties in 2017).⁵ The rates of party identification, which had been stable at approximately 40%-45% of the electorate since the 1990s, dropped to approximately 25% after the 2013 street demonstrations and reached their lowest level at the time of Dilma Rousseff's impeachment (2016). The rate has slightly recovered since then, reaching 35% in December 2018.⁶ The lack of legitimacy has not prevented an increase of party membership in the country in recent years. In December 2018, more than 11% of voters (approximately 17 million citizens) were officially registered as members of the 35 parties in Brazil.⁷ This ratio is higher than that found in established democracies (which averages 5%) and in Eastern Europe (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010; van Biezen et al. 2012; Ribeiro and Locatelli 2019).

Relying on the previous discussion, we have two main expectations regarding party activists in Brazil. First, we expect that activists will not be representative of the general electorate. We should find more men than women among the activists, and they should be from the upper socioeconomic strata, have positive attitudes about institutions and political action, and be older than the general population. Regarding the level of party activism, we expect that education (a central variable in several explanatory models) as well as sociopsychological and motivational factors—such as a sense of political efficacy and collective/ideological incentives—will be the main drivers of high-intensity participation among the survey respondents.

⁴ Latin American Public Opinion Project.

⁵ See Table 4 in the Appendix, as well as: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2017/06/1895770-forcas-armadas-lideram-confianca-da-populacao-congresso-tem-descredito.shtml>

⁶ Source: <http://datafolha.folha.uol.com.br/>

⁷ Source: Electoral Superior Court (TSE) (<http://www.tse.jus.br>).

III. DATA AND METHODS

Researchers face several common problems when assessing party membership and activism through public opinion surveys. The “social desirability bias” (which leads to the underestimation or overestimation of data), misunderstandings about the meaning of the question, the selection bias of the respondents (the more engaged individuals tend to contribute more in surveys), and the small number of party members in various surveys are some of the most common limitations. In addition, most surveys do not include direct questions about party activism (Mair and van Biezen 2001; Scarrow 2015: 83-85; van Haute and Gauja 2015: 9-14). Using the classic image of Duverger’s (1954) concentric circles, the “general surveys” allow us to analyze the factors that differentiate a voter from a party supporter. Nevertheless, the surveys are hardly useful for distinguishing between a supporter and a party member, and they say nothing about the factors that lead a party member to become a high-intensity activist (Whiteley and Seyd 2002). To understand these intraparty processes, recent literature (Scarrow 2015; van Haute and Gauja 2015) has turned extensively to the use of surveys conducted specifically with party members and activists.

The first survey with party members in Brazil was conducted in the state of São Paulo, covering the ten most important and traditional parties in the country: three left-wing parties, the PT, PSB and PDT; three centrist parties, the MDB (formerly the PMDB), PPS and PSDB; and four right-wing parties, the PR (formerly the PL), PTB, PP and DEM (formerly the PFL).⁸ These parties elected 86% of the federal deputies in 2010 and 72% in 2014 and have approximately 75% of the party members in the country and in the state (2018).⁹ In December 2013, 445 self-declared party members were interviewed in 19 municipalities, stratified according to the size of the city and scattered throughout the state (including the capital, São Paulo). The proportions of the party members interviewed across the ten parties were representative of the proportion of membership of those parties in São Paulo, according to 2013 TSE data.¹⁰

In Brazil, party membership is rigidly controlled and regulated by the Electoral Justice (TSE) and is a mandatory requirement when running for an elected office. However, personal information that would allow contacting party members (address, telephone or e-mail) is not available, which makes it difficult to carry out surveys with a representative sampling of all party members. Moreover, most parties do not have an accurate record of all their members. Thus, the first challenge of the survey was to find party members in the selected cities until

⁸ According the left–right scale built by Power and Zucco (2012).

⁹ The state of São Paulo has today three million party members among the 33 million voters (source: <http://www.tse.jus.br>). Twenty-two percent of the country’s population is concentrated in São Paulo, which is a quite diverse state and destination for immigrants from all of Brazil’s regions. Additionally, it is the birth-place of the three major Brazilian parties: the PT, PSDB and MDB. Thus, the findings of a survey conducted in São Paulo may have implications beyond state boundaries (see Kinzo 2005: 69)

¹⁰ For example, the PSDB had approximately 11% of the members enrolled in the ten parties studied here; therefore, 11% of the respondents were PSDB members.

the number established by the sampling was reached. This procedure proved costly, as it was necessary to keep a large number of interviewers on the streets for a long period of time. Therefore, a different strategy was adopted: focusing on specific places, such as near public buildings and party branches, in addition to central squares, main streets and avenues.

This strategy may have magnified the selection bias that exists in any survey with party members (Scarrow 2015; van Haute and Gauja 2015). Among those interviewed, 89% spent some time per month on party activities and 81% engaged in some activity in 2013, a nonelection year in Brazil (see full data in the Appendix). Of the activists, 26% paid monthly or annual party fees, and 23% donated to campaigns in the 2010 general elections or the 2012 local elections. A large contingent had a professional involvement with the party: 45% stated that they were performing or had already performed some remunerative work linked to the party, especially political appointed positions in executive or legislative branches.¹¹ At first glance, these figures suggest that the respondents form a 'strong core' of party members. However, if we add the respondents who did not dedicate any time to the party (10%) to those who dedicated less than 10 hours a month (40%), we can see that half of the interviewees were inactive or had a low level of participation. This proportion is similar to that found in traditional democracies (the only data available for comparison), which validates the database used here. The most recent data from these surveys indicate that between one-third and one-half of the members devote little or no time to party activities (Gauja and van Haute 2015: 197; Scarrow 2015: 164).

Therefore, the members analyzed here should be viewed as 'traditional members' (Scarrow 2015: 33), with a significant part also being highly engaged activists—and the central objective of the article is precisely to indicate the variables that explain the higher level of participation. In addition, gains in reliability compensate for the limitations regarding universe and sampling. The sample is randomly selected and representative of the party activists in the state of São Paulo. The fact that we have a relatively homogeneous sample (nine out of ten interviewees with some dedication to the party) makes the results presented in Section 5 (multivariate model) more relevant and consistent. Despite the limitations, the survey was able to provide answers on party activists and their different levels of activism.

IV. COMPARATIVE PROFILE OF PARTY ACTIVISTS

The additional data about the activities performed by the interviewees confirm the profile of traditional members and activists. Over 50% of the respondents

¹¹ Employees of legislative staffing: 15.5% (without differentiating between appointed position and civil servant); party employees or party officials: 11.5%; appointed position in the executive branch: 9.0%; elected to public office: 7.2%; others: 2.2%. In both cases (Brazil and cross-national surveys), civil servants represent a disproportionate share among the interviewees.

attended local party meetings in 2013, 44% met with public office holders, and 33% dedicated time to recruiting new members (Table 1). These activities are important and typically performed by traditional party members, and are rarely carried out by other groups connected to the parties, such as virtual sympathizers or supporters (Scarrow 2015). This is one of the reasons why parties still invest resources in attracting traditional members (Scarrow 2015).

Table 1. Activities performed by the activists (%)

Meeting at the local party branch	53.7
Meeting with an office holder	44.3
Attendance at a party conference	43.1
Membership recruitment	33.3
Election of party officials	31.9
Canvassing	24.9
Election rally	22.9

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445). Multiple choice, multiple-answer question.

Compared to the other parties, the PT and PSDB have a more intense internal life and more engaged members. Following the categorization proposed by Whiteley and Seyd (2002), 34% of the respondents can be classified as high-intensity activists because they spend at least 20 hours per month on party activities. This group represents 48% in the PT and almost 40% in the PSDB. Among PT members, 76% claimed that they paid party fees regularly and 46% had donated money in the previous elections. Members of the PT and PSDB are also the most rewarded for their dedication: 59% of PT members and 53% of PSDB members were performing or had previously performed party-related remunerative work (45% in the total sample). These numbers may reflect the specificity of the state of São Paulo. The PT and PSDB were born in the state and were running the state's two largest administrations in 2013 (the São Paulo city government since 2013 and the state government since 1995, respectively), which granted broad access to appointed positions in the government and legislatures. PT and PSDB activists combine voluntary involvement in party activities with paid positions, obtained largely through their affiliation with the party. The data suggest a reward mechanism for activism that is based on public resources, which replicates findings about other countries (Whiteley and Seyd 2002; Gauja and van Haute 2015; Scarrow 2015).

Data on education and income support the expectations about the higher social status of activists (see the tables in Appendix A for detailed sociodemographic

information). Forty-five percent of the interviewees had completed tertiary education, and only 4% listed elementary school as their highest level of education attained; in the São Paulo electorate, approximately 12% of adults have completed higher education, and one third have only an elementary education.¹² In São Paulo, 65% of the population has a monthly household income of less than five times the minimum wage (3,390 BRL in 2013, approximately USD 1,500). Among party activists, 58% had a household income above this value, and 30% claimed that their income exceeded ten times the minimum wage. This difference may reflect the peculiar professional character of this contingent: almost 60% of the activists were civil servants, which corroborates previous studies on middle-level elites of the PT and PSDB (Ribeiro 2010, 2014; Amaral 2013; Meneguello et al. 2014).

The data also support other expectations: party activists are disproportionately male and older than the general population (Table 2 below; see complete data in the Appendix). The percentage of women did not reach 40% in any party, not even in the PT, which has adopted gender quotas for the party organs since 1993 (Ribeiro 2010). With the exception of the PTB, all parties had the highest number of members in the age groups of 35-44 and 45-59 years old. With an average age of 45, the activists are much older than the electorate—which echoes the findings of cross-national surveys, in which the average age of members is over 50 (Gauja and van Haute 2015: 195).

Table 2. Gender and age of party activists (%)

	Electorate São Paulo	Party activists
Gender		
Men	47.6	67.2
Women	52.4	32.8
Total	100	100
Age (years)		
16-24	14.7	3.8
25-34	23.0	16.6
35-44	20.2	31.0
45-59	24.9	37.5
60 or more	17.3	11.0
Total	100	100

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445). Data of electorate: TSE and Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE).

¹² See <http://www.seade.gov.br/>

Party activists have more material and cognitive resources for participation; at the same time, they believe in the efficacy of such participation and express a high level of trust in institutions (see Table 4 in the Appendix). For 68% of the respondents, the individual vote greatly influences the destiny of Brazil. Party members also feel that their party has a great capacity to influence national politics. In a survey question that asked respondents to rate the level of influence of their parties on national politics on a scale from 1 (low) to 7 (high), the average was 5.47 (S.D. = 1.50). PT and PSDB activists have the strongest beliefs in this matter, with averages of 6.54 (S.D. = 0.73) and 6.02 (S.D. = 1.19) respectively.¹³ However, most activists believe that their individual participation has a limited influence on intraparty decision-making, which can be interpreted as a symptom of a negative assessment of internal democracy. In a similar question, focused on the influence of the individual on party decisions, the overall average was 3.76 (S.D. = 2.1). PT members are a partial exception with an average of 4.75 (S.D. = 1.93).¹⁴ This dissatisfaction with intraparty democracy is also found among party members in established democracies (Gauja and van Haute 2015: 197).

When asked about the functions that parties should perform, the majority of the interviewees emphasized the classic representative functions, not the procedural-institutional ones. The two most cited responses were 'Promoting ideas and ideologies' (47%) and 'representing social groups' (42%). In turn, 'facilitating access to public resources' and 'acting in parliament' were mentioned by 15% and 16% of respondents, respectively. This perception is consistent with the reasons for membership: 'political convictions' appeared as the main reason for membership for 37% of the activists (Table 3). A substantial number of respondents (28.5%) cited selective-process incentives linked to participation itself: the party as a space of social living and interaction. Social norms also play a considerable role: 15% cited 'family traditions' as the main reason for their enrollment (as we will see below, almost 28% of the members were recruited by friends or family). As in other contexts (Scarrow 2015: 156-174; Gauja and van Haute 2015: 193), collective incentives (the struggle for a cause) prevail among Brazilian activists. Selective-process incentives rank second, while a minority point to material rewards as a motivation for membership.

¹³ The analysis of variance shows that PT members are statistically different ($p < 0.05$) from all the other activists except PSDB members.

¹⁴ The analysis of variance shows that PT members are statistically different ($p < 0.05$) from the activists of the PSB, PR, PDT and MDB.

Table 3. Main reason for joining a political party (%)

Political convictions	37.1
Social living and interaction	28.5
Family tradition	15.1
To pursue a political career	8.5
Chances of employment	7.2
Other reasons	3.4
No response	0.2
Total	100

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445). Multiple choice, single-answer question.

Finally, most activists were recruited by the party (which includes candidates and individual politicians) or through invitations from relatives and friends; self-recruitment and intermediate political actors are less relevant (Table 4). The PT is an exception again: 24% claimed that the union was a ‘bridge’ to the party. These data suggest that Brazilian parties invest material and organizational resources in the recruitment of members either directly or through candidates and appointees. In addition, they indicate that close social networks—friends and family—also play an important role in attracting new members. These findings are in contrast to what happens in the more traditional democracies, where self-recruitment (the individual seeks the party) is the prevailing pattern (Scarow 2015: 159-160).

Table 4. Paths to party membership (%)

A party representative contacted me (including rallies)	29.2
A friend or family member suggested membership	27.6
An elective office holder (or her advisor) contacted me	9.2
I joined because of participation in a union	8.8
Self-recruitment *	6.5
A candidate (or her advisor) contacted me	6.1
I joined due to participation in a community council or NGO	4.3
A civil servant contacted me	2.2
Other/no response	6.0
Total	100

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445). Multiple choice, single-answer question.

* This category includes the activists who claimed that they joined because ‘I wanted to run for elective office’ (3.6%) and those who claimed that they sought the party out after watching party propaganda (2.9%)

V. EXPLAINING HIGH-INTENSITY PARTICIPATION

In this section, we explore the variables that influence the level of activism within Brazilian parties. To that end, we test an analytical model derived from the general incentives model (Seyd and Whiteley 1992), which has proved to be quite useful in explaining the levels of participation among party members in different contexts and countries (van Haute and Gauja 2015: 8).

The dependent variable is the number of hours that members dedicate, per month, to party activities. From the categories in the questionnaire (which make it impossible to take this variable as a continuous variable), we regrouped the respondents into three groups: (a) those who dedicated up to ten hours a month to party activities (51% of the interviewees); (b) those who dedicated between 10 and 30 hours per month (24%); and (c) those who dedicated more than 30 hours per month (26%).¹⁵ The choice to use the number of hours that respondents dedicated to the party instead of focusing on some particular party activity is based on three main reasons. First, recent cross-national comparative studies use this measure to assess the level of activism (van Haute and Gauja 2015). Second, some of the most common activities (meetings, recruitment, etc.) are very similar to each other, which makes it difficult to classify them separately. Finally, each party member performs, on average, 3.38 different activities, adding another complication (this was a multiple-answer question; see Table 1 above). To check the capacity of the dependent variable to actually indicate different levels of participation and different profiles of activists, we ran a test of association between the three categories (in hours/month) and the number of activities performed by the members in the same period. The result shows a positive and statistically significant association ($r = 0.475$; $p < 0.001$).

The multivariate model includes some variables related to the reasons (types of incentives) for individual membership. It is worth noting that in both analytical and theoretical terms, the reasons for membership may be different from the factors that influence the intensity of activism. However, the questionnaire did not have a specific question about the motivations of high-intensity participation. Moreover, it is reasonable to assume that there is a link between individual motivations in the two moments—entry and activism (Seyd and Whiteley 1992).

¹⁵ This categorization also seeks to prevent any group from having too small of a number of respondents. This problem would have occurred if we had used the threshold of 20 hours per month employed by Whiteley and Seyd (2002).

Adapting the general incentives theory (Seyd and Whiteley 1992), the following variables were included in an ordinal logistic regression model (with party fixed effects).¹⁶

- *Sense of political efficacy: individual voting.* Scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 means that the vote 'does not influence anything' and 5 means that the vote 'greatly influences' what happens in Brazil.

- *Sense of political efficacy: party.* Scale from 1 to 7, in which 1 means that the party of the activist has little influence on the national politics and 7 means a great influence.

- *Sense of political efficacy: individual participation within the party.* Same scale as the previous variable, asking the member how much he/she considers that he/she can individually influence the party decisions.

- *Types of incentives.* 'Why did you join the party?' The responses (multiple choice, single-answer question) were aggregated into four groups: (i) selective-process incentives: the respondents who claimed that they were members because of the social life provided by party activities; (ii) selective-outcome incentives: the activists who joined 'to pursue a political career', 'to increase the chances of employment', 'because the boss asked', 'to get some benefits' or because 'they worked in the party'; (iii) collective incentives: members who joined because the party represents their 'political convictions' or because they 'want to change the country' (reference category); (iv) other reasons.

- *Education.* Dummy variable that separates the members between (i) those who attended higher education (even without completion of a degree) and (ii) those who achieved only elementary or high school education (reference category).¹⁷

- *Gender.* Reference category: women.

- *Control variables:* age (continuous) and ideological self-placement (scale where zero means 'left' and 10 means 'right').

Results

The results presented in Table 5 support the hypothesis that cognitive resources (education), sense of political efficacy and collective incentives are important

¹⁶ The option for three ordered categories allowed the use of ordinal logistic regressions, which are more appropriate to the type of data than multinomial logistic regressions are, since we are trying to find out what explains the more intensive participation among ordered groups of activists. The fixed effects were designed to check if specific party members were driving the results. MDB members formed the reference category. None of the other categories presented statistically significant differences. The distribution of the respondents among the categories (51% in the first) demanded the use of a negative log-log link function.

¹⁷ This division was the most appropriate due to the small number of respondents in the lower educational levels.

factors behind the level of party activism (the model is statistically significant). The three types of political efficacy are significant: the greater the sense of efficacy for both individual and party actions, the higher the chance of devoting more hours to party activities. Controlling for the other variables, a one-unit increase in the scale of political efficacy implies an increase of approximately 18%-20% in the intensity of participation. The types of incentives that led to the initial membership also influence the level of activism, as predicted by the comparative literature. Individuals who were driven by selective incentives (process and outcome) are about 35% less likely to become high-intensity activists when compared to members who were motivated by collective incentives. Education and gender also have a significant impact on activism levels. Having attended a higher educational institution increases the probability of more intense participation by approximately 70% when compared to those who achieved only elementary or high school education. A male party member, keeping all the other variables constant, is 54% more likely to become a committed activist than a female party member. The age of the interviewees and the left-right self-placement do not influence the participation level (see Appendix C for descriptive data).

Table 5. Determinants of party activism

Variables	B	ExpB
<i>Sense of political efficacy</i>		
Voting	.178**	1.195
Party (in national politics)	.167***	1.182
Individual participation within the party	.172***	1.188
<i>Types of incentives</i>		
Other reasons	-.094	.910
Selective-process	-.469**	.626
Selective-outcome	-.415*	.660
Education	.536***	1.709
Age	.000	1.000
Gender	.434***	1.543
Left-right self-placement	-.023	.977
Party fixed effects (dummy) - Yes		

N = 433. Dependent variable: hours dedicated to the party per month (0-10; 10-30; >30). Ordinal logistic regression with negative log-log link function. -2LL = 782.165; R2 Nagelkerke = 0.266. The highest VIF score was 1.255. Test of parallel lines: -2LL = 769.329 (p = .847). *** p < 0.01 ** p < 0.05 * p < 0.1.

The results corroborate our initial hypothesis and are in accordance with the literature. The collective incentives (ideology) proved to be more effective than the selective incentives in driving high-intensity participation, which is consistent with the previous findings of cross-national studies such as Scarrow (2015: 156-174) and Gauja and van Haute (2015). Both the descriptive data and the multivariate analysis indicate that the high-intensity participation in political parties in Brazil is driven by education, gender, the sense of political efficacy (at individual and party levels), and collective incentives.

The findings suggest that the analysis of party members and activism in Latin America or in other less established democracies does not need to employ country-specific or region-specific conceptual models. If voting behavior in newer democracies can be explained largely from the same theoretical models developed for the contexts of traditional democracies, “there is no clear reason to assume that other behavioral processes operate differently in developing democracies” (Lupu 2015: 227). The centrality of education as a variable with a strong impact on activism levels in Brazil echoes more specific theoretical models than the one used here (general incentives model). In this sense, further research can explore more ‘closed’ conceptual frameworks, such as civic voluntarism and cognitive engagement models (Verba et al. 1995; Norris 2002; Dalton 2008).

VI. FINAL DISCUSSION

The results of the first survey with party members carried out in Brazil corroborate our main expectations. The data suggest a profile that is similar to that found in other countries (Dalton 2008; Scarrow and Gezgor 2010; Gauja and van Haute 2015; Scarrow 2015). Brazilian party members are disproportionately male, older, and more educated and have a higher income than the general population. They have positive beliefs and attitudes about political participation and institutions and express dissatisfaction with intraparty democracy. Collective incentives (ideology and political convictions) are the main motivations for party affiliation, and such incentives also have a positive effect on a more intense level of participation.

In addition, close social networks have a greater weight among Brazilian activists, both on their reasons for joining (15% stated that family tradition was the main reason) and in their recruitment process (28% were invited by family or friends). While self-recruitment is the predominant trend in more traditional democracies (Scarrow 2015: 159-160), the Brazilian activist has a more reactive profile, responding mainly to social pressures from his close network and to party mobilization.

The interviewees have a profile of ‘traditional members’ who have a close relationship with their parties, and a significant contingent (between one-third and one-half) could be classified as typical activists (Scarrow 2015: 33). The party members have a ‘romanticized’ view about the roles performed by

parties, highlighting the traditional representative functions (promotion of ideologies and representation of interests) rather than procedural functions (e.g., recruitment, governing and the legislative process). They have close relations with the state: almost 60% are civil servants, and approximately one-third answered that they were performing or had already performed some public position linked to the party. PT and PSDB members are the most involved in party activities and the most rewarded with selective benefits (career and positions). This may, however, have been a peculiarity of the state of São Paulo, where these parties controlled the two main administrations at the time of the survey (capital city and state government). Only a national survey can extrapolate this finding to the other regions in Brazil.

The results do not support clientelistic-based explanations about the drivers of political participation in Brazil. If clientelism prevailed among Brazilian party activists, we would have found a strong influence of selective material incentives both on the initial joining and as a driver of high-intensity participation. Nonetheless, the data do not show that. This finding shall be taken, however, with a pinch of salt, in view of the social desirability bias that surrounds this type of question (Gauja and van Haute 2015: 193-194) and the high proportion of activists who had a professional relationship with the party (paid positions). In this sense, it is the party patronage rather than clientelism that should be further investigated in future research on party membership and activism in Latin America. While patronage relates to the linkages between members and party leaders, largely involving the distribution of jobs, clientelism refers to the relationship between politicians and voters (Scarrow 2015: 171). Previous findings in Latin America (Kemahlioglu 2011; Scherlis 2012; Holland and Palmer-Rubin 2015), and Brazil in particular (Praça et al., 2011; Speck 2014), leave open the question of the importance of patronage and material rewards among Brazilian party activists. This is an issue that deserves further analysis, perhaps through other methodological strategies, such as in-depth interviews and ethnographic research.

The profile of the Brazilian party activist, with a clearly higher socioeconomic status, reproduces the general tendency of the growing disparity between members and nonmembers (Gauja and van Haute 2015: 195) and supports Putnam's (1976) law of 'increasing disproportion'. As a byproduct of a wider differentiation between those who participate in political affairs and those who do not, this gap can have negative consequences for democracy in the long run in terms of representativeness, equality in the representation of interests and the capacity of parties to function as linkages between citizens and the state (Dalton 2008).

The original contribution of this article is to provide evidence that political parties in Brazil are not legal fictions. Even in a nonelection year, four out of five members engaged in some party activity (e.g., internal meetings, campaigning and recruiting), and half of the activists claimed that they devoted at least 10 hours per month to the party. In all parties, the proportion of members who

participated in some party activity was at least 70%. Brazilian political parties have an internal life, and not only during the elections cycle, and they have a strong core of party activists that are not very different (in quantity and profile) from those found in the comparative literature. This is an important finding: there are *parties on the ground* (Katz and Mair 1995) in the Brazilian political system.

One can reasonably argue that the parties studied here belong to the “old” Brazilian party system that may have been superseded by the 2018 elections, which elected the far-right Jair Bolsonaro as president. It is too early to declare the end of the party system built in the late 1980s. First, it is necessary to check whether Bolsonaro’s once-tiny PSL will survive and become a major player in the next few years or whether it is a flash party, as was Fernando Collor de Mello’s PRN (which elected the fifth largest group in the Chamber of Deputies in 1990 and was extinguished a few years later). On the other hand, it is necessary to qualify the strength and amplitude of the anti-establishment wave of the 2018 elections. The PSL elected the second largest group in the Chamber, behind the PT. Among the subsequent six major parties in the legislature, five are traditional forces that were included in this article.¹⁸ Among the seven largest parties in the Senate, five are traditional parties.¹⁹ In addition, the DEM elected the presidents of both legislative houses in February 2019.

The results of this article reinforce a broader review on the party system and the importance and strength of political parties in Brazil (Figueiredo and Limongi 1999; Guarnieri 2011; Melo and Câmara 2012; Braga et al. 2016; Mainwaring 2018; Ribeiro and Fabre 2019; Ribeiro and Locatelli 2019). The emphasis on political convictions and on sociability provided by the party environment suggests the formation of identity ties between parties and activists, with social activities that attract and retain individuals. In addition, the data on recruitment suggest the existence of party structures and agents that are able to attract new members and to provide incentives for high-intensity participation. These findings do not fit with the traditional academic assessment and the popular view about the Brazilian parties that have prevailed so far.

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¹⁸ <https://www2.camara.leg.br/deputados/liderancas-e-bancadas/bancadas/bancada-atual>

¹⁹ <https://www25.senado.leg.br/web/senadores/em-exercicio/-/e/por-partido>

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ACRONYMS

- PT – Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party)
- PSB – Partido Socialista Brasileiro (Brazilian Socialist Party)
- PDT – Partido Democrático Trabalhista (Democratic Labor Party)
- PSDB – Partido da Social-Democracia Brasileira (Party of Brazilian Social Democracy)
- MDB – Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Brazilian Democratic Movement)
- PPS – Partido Popular Socialista (Popular Socialist Party)
- PR – Partido da República (Party of the Republic)
- DEM – Democratas (Democrats)
- PTB – Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (Brazilian Labor Party)
- PP – Partido Progressista (Progressive Party)
- PSL – Partido Social Liberal (Liberal Social Party)
- PRN – Partido da Reconstrução Nacional (National Reconstruction Party)

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Pedro Floriano Ribeiro is associate professor of Political Science at the Federal University of São Carlos (Brazil) and Associate Editor of the Brazilian Political Science Review. He was a Fulbright Chair in Democracy and Human Development at the Kellogg Institute, Notre Dame University (2018), and Celso Furtado Visiting Professor at the University of Cambridge, St John's College (2015). His main research interests are party organization and electoral behavior. He won the 2009 CAPES Prize of Theses (Brazil's Ministry of Education) and the 2014 Olavo Brasil de Lima Jr. Award (Brazilian Political Science Association). He is currently serving as co-director of GIPSAL/ALACIP. Email: pfribeiro@ufscar.br

Oswaldo E. do Amaral is a professor at the Department of Political Science at the State University of Campinas (Unicamp) in Brazil. He is also the director of the Public Opinion Studies Center (Cesop) at the same institution. His main research interests are political parties, party systems and electoral behavior. He has published several books, chapters, and articles in journals like *Journal of Latin American Studies*, *Opinião Pública* and *Revista de Sociologia e Política*. He has also been a visiting-professor at the University of Salamanca and a visiting-researcher at the University of Oxford and at Notre Dame University. Email: oswamaral@gmail.com

APPENDIX A – SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC DATA, PER PARTY

Table 1. Profile of party activists: education, occupation and household income (%)

	Total activ- ists	Left			Centrist			Right			
		PT	PSB	PDT	PSDB	MDB	PPS	PR	DEM	PTB	PP
Education											
Elementary (completed or not)	4.3	6.4	3.4	2.9	3.9	4.0	6.0	3.0	-	3.9	7.3
High school (completed or not)	36.4	23.8	31.0	38.2	31.4	46.7	39.4	42.4	40.0	37.3	34.1
Higher education (completed or not)	59.3	69.8	65.5	58.8	64.7	49.3	54.6	54.6	60.0	58.8	58.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Household monthly income (in national minimum wages) *											
< 2 min. wages	5.1	7.9	3.4	2.9	2.0	8.0	6.1	-	2.9	3.9	9.8
2 to 5	27.4	34.9	20.7	32.4	33.3	32.0	27.3	21.2	22.9	19.6	19.5
5 to 10	27.2	20.6	44.8	26.5	19.6	21.3	24.2	33.3	28.6	31.4	36.6
10 to 20	20.4	17.5	20.7	17.6	13.7	20.0	30.3	30.3	20.0	23.5	17.1
> 20 min. wages	9.9	6.3	6.9	14.7	15.7	9.3	9.1	6.1	8.6	13.7	7.3
No answer	9.8	12.7	3.4	5.9	15.7	9.3	3.0	9.1	17.1	7.8	9.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Occupation											
Industry	2.2	1.8	7.7	-	2	1.4	-	3.6	3	4.1	-
Commerce	11.8	5.3	11.5	6.3	5.9	18.3	13.3	25	6.1	12.2	16.2
Services	22.2	19.3	11.5	31.3	25.5	18.3	26.7	25	30.3	20.4	18.9
Civil servant	59.0	63.1	69.2	59.4	64.6	57.8	56.7	46.5	51.5	55.1	62.2
Other	3.1	8.8	-	3.1	2	2.8	-	-	3	4.1	2.7
No answer	1.7	1.8	-	-	-	1.4	3.3	-	6.1	4.1	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445).

* At the time of the survey, the minimum wage was R\$ 678.00; in December 2019, the value was R\$ 998.00 (about 240.00 US dollars).

Table 2. Religion of party activists (%)

	São Paulo population	Total activists	Left			Centrist			Right			
			PT	PSB	PDT	PSDB	MDB	PPS	PR	DEM	PTB	PP
Religion												
Evangelical	23.9	18.7	15.9	31.0	14.7	23.5	14.7	21.2	24.2	31.4	15.7	4.9
Spiritualism	3.3	11.7	11.1	10.3	8.8	17.6	14.7	6.1	6.1	11.4	7.8	17.1
Catholic	60.1	58.0	50.7	51.8	64.7	47.1	62.7	48.5	60.6	48.6	68.6	73.2
Other	4.6	3.8	1.6	-	5.9	2.0	4.0	12.1	9.1	2.9	2.0	2.4
Not religious	8.0	6.7	17.5	6.9	5.9	7.8	2.6	12.1	-	5.7	3.9	2.4
No answer	-	1.1	3.2	-	-	2.0	1.3	-	-	-	2.0	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445). Data on São Paulo population: IBGE.

Table 3. Profile of party activists: sex, age and color (%)

	São Paulo population	Total activists	Left			Centrist			Right			
			PT	PSB	PDT	PSDB	MDB	PPS	PR	DEM	PTB	PP
Sex												
Men	47.6	67.2	68.3	65.5	61.8	68.6	66.7	69.7	60.6	71.4	64.7	73.2
Women	52.4	32.8	31.7	34.5	38.2	31.4	33.3	30.3	39.4	28.6	35.3	26.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Age (years)												
16-24	14.7	3.9	7.9	-	-	5.9	4.0	-	3.0	-	5.9	4.9
25-34	23.0	16.6	14.3	10.3	29.4	21.6	13.3	12.1	15.2	11.4	21.6	17.1
35-44	20.2	31.0	33.4	41.5	26.5	31.4	26.7	45.5	36.4	51.4	15.6	17.1
45-59	24.9	37.5	34.9	37.9	38.2	29.3	44.0	33.3	42.4	20.0	45.1	43.9
60 or more	17.3	11.0	9.5	10.3	5.9	11.8	12.0	9.1	3.0	17.1	11.8	17.0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Color (self-declared)												
White	63.9	71.7	61.9	75.9	67.6	74.6	69.4	72.7	78.8	62.9	82.4	75.6
Black	5.5	7.0	9.5	3.4	8.9	3.9	8.0	6.1	6.1	8.6	5.9	7.3
Brown (pardo)	29.1	18.5	23.8	20.7	20.6	17.6	16.0	21.2	15.2	25.6	11.7	14.6
Yellow	1.4	2.2	3.2	-	2.9	3.9	5.3	-	-	2.9	-	-
Indigenous	0.1	0.4	1.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.5
No answer	-	0.2	-	-	-	-	1.3	-	-	-	-	-
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445). Data on São Paulo population: IBGE and TSE.

Table 4. Members that took part in at least one party activity during the year (%)

	Total activ- ists	Left			Centrist				Right		
		PT	PSB	PDT	PSDB	MDB	PPS	PR	DEM	PTB	PP
Took part in at least one activity in 2013	80.9	92.1	82.8	82.4	90.2	80.0	79.8	69.7	77.1	72.5	75.6
N	445	63	29	34	51	75	33	33	35	51	41

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445).

Table 5. Time dedicated to the party per month (%)

Number of hours	Total activists	Left			Centrist				Right		
		PT	PSB	PDT	PSDB	MDB	PPS	PR	DEM	PTB	PP
Less than 5 hours	24.5	17.5	17.2	32.4	29.4	25.3	18.2	39.4	31.4	13.7	26.8
Around 5 hours	15.5	9.5	20.7	38.2	5.9	18.7	12.1	6.1	17.1	15.7	17.1
From 10 to 20 hours	14.8	22.2	10.3	5.9	15.7	8.0	15.2	9.1	11.4	23.5	22.0
From 20 to 30 hours	8.8	12.7	3.4	2.9	11.8	12.0	3.0	9.1	11.4	5.9	7.3
From 30 to 40 hours	8.8	9.5	13.8	-	11.8	9.3	12.1	9.1	-	9.8	9.8
More than 40 hours	16.6	25.4	17.2	14.7	15.7	16.0	21.2	9.1	20.0	15.7	7.3
Does not dedicate	9.9	1.6	13.8	5.9	9.8	9.3	18.2	18.2	8.6	13.7	7.3
No answer	1.1	1.6	3.4	-	-	1.3	-	-	-	2.0	2.4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	445	63	29	34	51	75	33	33	35	51	41

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445).

APPENDIX B – TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Table 6. Trust in institutions: Brazil's population and São Paulo party activists (%)

	Brazil population	Party activists
Armed forces	63	75.3
Church	47	72.6
Elections	-	69.5
Country laws	-	63.8
Judiciary	34	62.9
Police	31	59.1
Government	33	58.5
President	-	55.3
Entrepreneurs	36	56.2
Political parties	5	53.7
Television	29	51.0
National Congress	17	47.9
Unions	-	43.8

Source: survey with party activists, São Paulo, 2013 (N = 445). Data on the population: Fundação Getúlio Vargas (2013) (N = 3300). In both surveys, we add the respondents that answer "significant trust" and "some trust" in the institution.

APPENDIX C

Table 7. Descriptive data, multivariate model

		N	%
As a party member, how much time do you dedicate to the party per month (on average)?	Zero up to 10 hours/month	219	50.6
	10 – 30 hours/month	103	23.8
	More than 30 hours/month	111	25.6
Why did you join the party?	Selective-process incentives	126	29.1
	Selective-outcome incentives	72	16.6
	Collective incentives	161	37.2
	Other reasons	74	17.1
Education	Higher education (completed or not)	258	59.6
	Elementary/High school	175	40.4
Sex	Men	293	67.7
	Women	140	32.3
Party	PT	60	13.9
	PSDB	49	11.3
	PSB	28	6.5
	PR	32	7.4
	DEM	34	7.9
	PTB	50	11.5
	PPS	32	7.4
	PP	40	9.2
	PDT	34	7.9
	MDB	74	17.1
Total valid			100.0
Missing		12	
Total		445	

