

Emancipated Party Members: Examining Ideological Incongruence within Political Parties¹

Ann-Kristin Kölln and Jonathan Polk

Abstract

Party members across European democracies exercise increasing influence on parties' policy platforms or personnel choices. This article investigates ideological (in)congruence on the left-right spectrum between members and their parties by drawing on a party membership survey of more than 10,000 individuals across seven political parties in Sweden. The results show that around two-thirds of members are not perfectly congruent with their party. In a two-step analysis, the article argues that emancipated members, with higher political interest and with a more independent self-conception, are more comfortable being ideologically incongruent with their party. We also provide evidence that ideological incongruence matters for members' exit, voice and loyalty behavior. It is associated with a more negative evaluation of the party leader (voice) and with a higher probability to either vote for another party (loyalty) or even to leave the current one (exit). The findings indicate that ideological incongruence within parties is not a trivial matter but is rather substantial in size with potentially important consequences for party competition.

Keywords: ideological incongruence, party members, Swedish party membership survey

¹ Author names are listed alphabetically, both authors contributed equally to this project.

Political parties and their members are often seen as the political linkage between those in power and ordinary citizens (for example Müller and Katz, 1997; Kitschelt, 2000; Dalton et al, 2011). Party success in the electoral market hinges on the relationships between these groups. However, what happens within parties is no less important since it is the precursor to the party's hopefully cohesive public profile. Within parties, controversy over personnel or policy is almost unavoidable, and the literature acknowledges that 'factionalism is a fact of life within most political parties' (Harmel et al, 1995: 7). The study of ideological disagreement within parties has become more important due to recent intra-organizational trends. With increasing demands of democratization within political parties, members have gained influence as suppliers of and veto players on policies, candidates and leaders (Scarrow et al, 2000; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; Krouwel, 2012). Party members in today's (primarily) internally democratic parties have a direct influence on policy output, which emphasizes their crucial role for the ideological profile of a party. However, despite the increasing power granted to members, scholarly research on ideological congruence between party members and party positions is still scarce.

Two recent examples illustrate the relevance of ideological incongruence within parties for contemporary politics. The first is the controversy over the December Agreement within the Swedish Christian Democrats (KD). The leadership struck a deal with the other parliamentary parties in the wake of a governmental budgetary crisis provoked by the Sweden Democrats (SD) in December 2014. It allowed the newly elected red-green minority government to govern with its own budget. At the next national conference of the KD in October 2015 the delegates voted to leave the December Agreement against the leadership's proposal. The second example is the competition for the leadership position of the British Labour Party. As the prospects of Jeremy Corbyn – the most left-wing of the contenders for the leadership post – continued to rise over the summer of 2015 New Labour centrists like Tony Blair and John McTernan attributed it, at least in part, to ideological extremity and rigidity within the party's rank-and-file membership.² The concern from this perspective is that a party with an ideological and strong membership base could produce a leader that would be less viable in a general election.

Scholars of party politics are recently acquiring the information necessary to study this and related issues in contemporary societies. For example, a survey of 1,180 Labour Party members conducted in May of 2015 found these members to be quite

² Blair, Tony. (2015, July 22) In Conversation with...Tony Blair: Opening Remarks. *Progress*. Retrieved from: <http://www.progressonline.org.uk/2015/07/22/in-conversation-with-tony-blair-opening-remarks/>

left-wing in their self-reported left-right placement³, whereas earlier research had found that British sub-leaders are not extreme (Norris, 1995). Our article looks at the question of ideological incongruence between party members and party positions within Sweden, providing information on this important political relationship in a multi-party, proportional electoral system, which could produce substantially different findings than those reported in Britain. The analysis is based on a high-quality survey of more than 10,000 party members conducted with the support of seven Swedish political parties in May and June of 2015. Building on previous research on the socio-economic correlates of ideological incongruence within parties (see Van Haute and Carty, 2012), the article offers a theory-driven analysis of potential attitudinal causes and behavioral consequences.

The results show that emancipated party members with higher levels of political interest and with a more independent self-conception are more incongruent with their party's ideological position. Moreover, we find that ideological incongruence matters for members' exit, voice and loyalty behavior (Hirschman, 1970). Ideological incongruence is associated with a more negative evaluation of the party leader and

³ Bale, Tim and Paul Webb. (2015, July 23) Just who are these Labour Party members who will be choosing the new leader? *The Independent*. Retrieved from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/just-who-are-these-labour-party-members-who-will-be-choosing-the-new-leader-10409109.html>

with a higher probability to either vote for another party or to even leave the current one.

Intraparty politics and ideological incongruence

The perspective holding that parties are composed of diverse views and preferences (for instance, Katz and Mair, 1992; Panebianco, 1988; van de Wardt, 2014; Green and Haber, 2015) has been driving empirical research in several settings, focusing on various units of observation and using different methods. Although existing studies use different terms, such as ‘intraparty heterogeneity’ (Greene and Haber 2015), ‘cohesion’ (Bowler et al, 1999), ‘unity’ (Panebianco, 1988), ‘ideological misfit’ (Van Haute and Carty, 2012) or ‘internal division’ (van de Wardt, 2014), they all refer to the same phenomenon of internal party (dis)agreement regarding a specific policy issue or ideology more broadly. To this end, previous research has often focused on disagreement between parties and voters (Adams et al, 2006; Rohlfing, 2015) or parties and their supporters (Ezrow et al, 2011; van der Wardt, 2014). Within parties, studies have investigated disagreement through parliamentary roll calls (Bowler et al, 1999; Sieberer, 2006), national congress speeches (Greene and Haber, 2015a, 2015b) or social media content (Ceron, 2015). Only some studies so far used party members as their units of observation (see Narud and Skare, 1999; Widfeldt, 1999; Scarrow and

Gezgor, 2010; Van Haute and Carty, 2012). The results of these studies indicate that internal party disagreement is frequent and that a party's official policy or ideological position is often the product of such internal competition.

Even though the frequent movement from mass parties to catchall or cartel forms of organizational structure has empowered party leadership relative to rank-and-file activists (Katz and Mair, 1995; Kirchheimer, 1965), increasing demands for democratization within parties often entail more decision-making power transferred to ordinary members. Partially in response to enduring membership decline, political parties nowadays grant their members more influence over policy and personnel decisions (Krouwel, 2012; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010; Scarrow et al, 2000). Although this power is sometimes more cosmetic than substantial (Katz and Mair, 2009, 759), questions of ideological congruence within parties have still become more important. The contemporary view of parties puts an emphasis on members as 'individuals rather than as an organised body' with 'heterogeneous preferences' (Bolleyer, 2009: 561, 563). This internal heterogeneity or incongruence in preferences is not without consequences as research shows that 'intraparty divisions frequently constrain party leaders' (Greene and Haber, 2015a: 3).

Due to data limitations, so far less is known about the factors that potentially spur ideological incongruence among party members and what its implications might be

for party leaders, party competition or the party as a membership organization (see Van Haute and Carty, 2012 for an exception). Which party members are more likely to be incongruent with their party? And what are the ramifications of having ideologically incongruent members for parties?

A number of potential motivations for incongruence seem plausible. For example, May's law of curvilinear disparity (May, 1973) famously stated that members' levels of activism or rank within the party correlates with their ideological extremity, where ordinary members and the party elite hold more moderate positions and the mid-level elite holds the more extreme views. Tests of the theory are generally mixed across parties and national contexts (see, for example Kitschelt, 1989; Narud and Skare, 1999; Widfeldt 1999; Norris 1995; Dahl 2010; Van Haute and Carty, 2012).

In a study of 'ideological misfits' among party members in Belgium and Canada Van Haute and Carty (2012) found some support for May's Law. The authors also tested a number of other individual-level correlates of ideological incongruence, such as gender, religious belief, religious practice, age, education, employment, union membership, member-party linkage and members' reported reasons for initially joining. They find that 'none of the variables significantly identifies misfits' across all nine parties and that 'none is significant in more than four cases' (Van Haute and Carty, 2012: 892). The authors interpret this finding as confirmation for the diverse

character of the members that do not see themselves as ideologically congruent with the party.

In further search for potential causes of individual-level incongruence, we propose members' attitudes as important correlates. In general, we suggest that members explicitly state ideological incongruence with their party when they are less in need of cue-taking and more comfortable with a critical position towards their own party (see Baras et al, 2012 for a related discussion for Spanish party delegates). In line with cognitive mobilization theory (see Dalton, 1984), we expect that more politically sophisticated and interested individuals are less in need of cognitive shortcuts from the party and thus more inclined to take on a different ideological position. Conversely, the less efficacious see a limited personal impact on the party and are in higher need of cues from the party. They will thus be more likely to place themselves close to the party's ideological position. Likewise, we expect to find less incongruence among members that perceive their role within the party to be marginal. If a party member believes that she has a weaker voice and/or role within her party, this member should be more inclined to follow signals sent from the party and more likely to see herself as ideologically close to the party.

H1 Higher political interest, higher efficacy and a perception of a strong member role are likely to increase ideological incongruence among party members.

Ideological incongruence within parties is not necessarily a disadvantage for a party's success in the electoral market or as a membership organization. After all, disagreement and a discourse over policy or ideology with and among party members can also be beneficial, as it provides the party with new input from the units of the party closest to the electorate: the members (Budge et al, 2012; Rohrschneider and Whitefield, 2012). In fact, one of the often-cited benefits of party membership for political parties is that members are the eyes and ears of the party in the electorate (Katz and Mair, 1992; Scarrow 1994; Rohlfing, 2015); they bring in new policy ideas that are close to what the electorate needs or want. If, on the other hand, ideological incongruence is part of a larger disagreement within the party over the course of action, members' newly gained verbal and behavioral power might be a constraint for party leaders and party competition.

Hirschman (1970) famously hypothesized that perceived organizational decline could lead to exit, voice or loyalty behavior. While several studies already support this hypothesis from a variety of electoral perspectives (see, e.g. Weber, 2011; Karreth et al, 2013), there is much less empirical work on party members (Van Haute 2011, 2015). However, it is plausible that ideological disagreement within parties would have similar behavioral consequences. These might be found in particular in the

members' satisfaction with the party and the party leadership (voice), their propensity to vote for another party (loyalty), or even to terminate membership (exit). From the individual- and party-level perspective, we can also rank-order these consequences in terms of their severity. Voice is a first means for members to signal disagreement. It is also manageable for party elites and perhaps even beneficial to discuss for the attractiveness of the party's profile to non-members. Exit and loyalty, in turn, represent much stronger signals and are more problematic for the party. They can be expressed through either short-term vote choice (loyalty) or long-term party membership (exit). A change in party membership is arguably the strongest sign of disagreement but even casting a defecting vote can potentially yield powerful consequences in a multi-party proportional system.

H2 Ideological incongruence among party members increases dissatisfaction with the party and its leadership, and it increases the probability of voting for another party or of terminating membership.

Note that the proposed consequences could also be causes. For example, satisfaction with the party's ideology could also easily be a cause of ideological incongruence rather than a consequence. Our goal is first and foremost to offer a theory-driven

analysis of correlates in search for potential causes and consequences of ideological incongruence with high-quality data.

Surveying party members and data

Party members are not the focus of general public opinion and election data, and because of this existing studies that take party members as the unit of observation are limited to a small group of people and few survey items about party members (see, e.g., Widfeldt, 1995, 1999; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010).⁴ As a response to these constraints, scholarship has recently turned to harmonizing existing and future party membership surveys across countries (see Gauja and Van Haute, 2014; Van Haute and Gauja, 2015).⁵ The 2015 Swedish Party Membership survey contributes to this endeavor and addresses some of the existing methodological concerns.

In the early part of 2015, the party secretaries of six of the eight Swedish Riksdag parties (plus the Feminist Initiative as the only other Swedish party represented in the European Parliament)⁶ agreed to take part in a web-survey, administered and

⁴ Van Biezen et al. (2012) validated the proportion of party members interviewed for the European Social Survey, yet only on a country-level. The authors used official party membership figures and found a strong correlation with the survey data on a country-level.

⁵ See Ponce and Scarrow (2014) for additional discussion of general surveys versus member surveys.

⁶ Unfortunately, the Sweden Democrats did not respond to repeated requests to participate in the membership survey and the Centre Party declined to participate.

conducted by the Laboratory of Opinion Research⁷. In May, these party secretaries received individualized links to an otherwise identical web-survey alongside a cover letter, which they then distributed to their members via email.⁸ All parties, except for the Social Democrats, sent out the survey to the entire membership list, which means that the full population of members with email addresses was invited to participate in the survey. The Social Democrats sent the survey to a large randomly drawn sample from their membership list. The Swedish membership survey is therefore based on an official sample of registered members. When it was closed on July 3, a total of 10,392 Swedish party members had completed the survey. This corresponds to response rates ranging between 9.52 and 17.59 percent across parties. The data were weighted for gender.⁹ Table 1 provides an overview of the parties' own reported total membership sizes and the number of completed interviews.¹⁰

Table 1. Overview of survey populations and completed interviews per party.

	Fp	Mp	S	V	KD	M	Fi
total membership	15,283	20,660	100,000	19,151	21,054	52,260 ¹¹	

⁷ For more information, see <http://lore.gu.se/svenska>.

⁸ The interview mode might create a selection bias in favour of younger respondents.

⁹ The parties were only able to provide population statistics for gender.

¹⁰ Fi did not provide us with any information on the size of their membership or the number of email addresses they reached with the survey. For more information on methodology, the entire questionnaire and summary statistics visit <http://pol.gu.se/partiforskningsprogrammet/Forskning+om+partier/partimedlemsundersokning/party-membership-survey>.

¹¹ Includes the youth organization.

with email addresses	11,807	18,772	---	16,009	9,797	20,007	
sample size	---	---	7,000	---	---	---	
completed questionnaires	1,173	2,198	1,231	2,239	933	2,451	167
response rate	9.93	11.70	17.59	13.99	9.52	12.25	

Note: 'Fp' Folkpartiet (Liberal Party); 'Mp' Miljöpartiet (Green Party); 'S' Socialdemokraterna (Social Democrats); 'V' Vänsterpartiet (Left Party); 'KD' Kristdemokraterna (Christian Democrats); 'M' Moderaterna (Moderate Party); 'Fi' Feministiskt Initiativ (Feminist Initiative).

The data generated from our survey of members of parties in Sweden expand the number of observations, target the entire membership of the parties, and include a more extensive range of questions specific to party membership. However, since we cannot say to what extent non-respondents are missing at random, the sampling design, process and result suggest limited generalizability of our results to the wider membership population. The survey is structured to maximize comparability with similar surveys to be conducted in other economically advanced democracies, such as the multi-country membership surveys as part of the MAPP project at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (e.g. Gauja and Van Haute, 2014; Van Haute and Gauja, 2015).

Measures

Ideological incongruence is measured as the absolute distance between a party member's self-placement on a 0-10 general left-right scale (Q34) and that member's

placement of the party on the same 0-10 general left-right scale (Q35).¹² Smaller values on this variable therefore represent more member-party congruence, and higher values equal more member-party incongruence. This measure depends entirely on party members' perceptions of parties' positions, which do not necessarily reflect the 'true' position of the party. However, the use of mass-based survey placements of parties in congruence scholarship is not without precedent (cf. Powell, 2009)¹³, and for now we are more interested in what makes individual members *believe* they are close or far from a party – and the consequences of this – rather than if they actually are as close or far from the position of the party as they think they are. Our operationalization therefore captures the difference respondents see between their own ideological position and the party's.

Respondents' interest in politics is directly measured on a four-point scale whose coding has been reversed to run from 'not at all interested' to 'very much interested' (Q48). We measure political efficacy with a survey item asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement (five-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree')¹⁴ to the statement: 'I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues discussed in <PARTY>' (Q95_2). Members' perceptions about their own role in the party are measured with the following survey item (five-

¹² Respondents were asked to place their party as a whole without specific reference to leadership.

¹³ Mean left-right placements by experts and mass survey respondents also correlate rather highly with one another (Dalton and McAllister, 2015; Bakker et al, 2015).

¹⁴ The midpoint of this and subsequent five-point scales is "Neither agree, nor disagree."

point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’): ‘My role as a member is to support decisions made by the party leadership’ (Q93_5). Based on our hypothesis, we expect that political interest and efficacy have a positive relationship with incongruence, whereas perceptions of the membership role should show a negative association.

In addition to those potential causes of ideological incongruence, we also perform preliminary tests for four consequences. Firstly, we anticipate that ideological incongruence will be associated with lower levels of satisfaction, in particular for satisfaction with ‘the ideological orientation/project of the party’ (Q91_1) and ‘with the leadership’ (Q91_2). Both are measured on a five-point scale, where 1 refers to ‘not at all satisfied’ and 5 to ‘very satisfied’. Secondly, respondents were asked about their voting behavior in the last general election in September 2014 (Q79). Individuals that chose the response option ‘Yes, and I voted for another party’ are coded as 1, everyone else as 0. Finally, we measure termination of membership through the survey item ‘How frequently have you considered joining another party’ (with response options ‘never’, ‘rarely’, ‘sometimes’, and ‘often’; Q97_1).¹⁵ The descriptive

¹⁵ It should be noted that abstention does not seem to be a viable option to the vast majority of members because from all of the sampled members only 25 individuals reported having abstained.

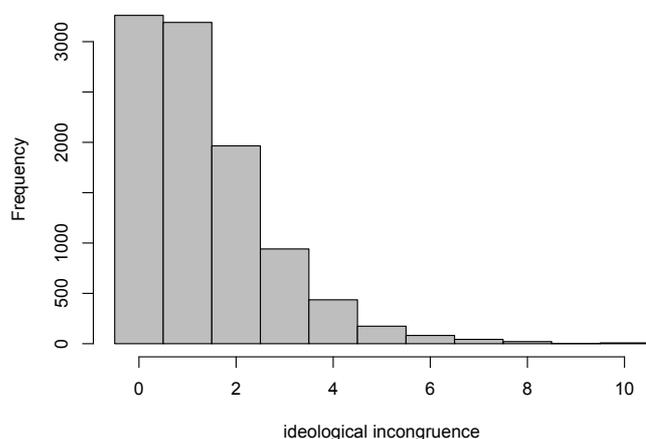
statistics of all individual-level variables are summarized in Table 1 in the supplementary material.¹⁶

Results

A substantial number of party members are not perfectly congruent with their party. Across parties, on average, only around 33 percent of members reported the exact same ideological position for themselves as for their party. This means that two-thirds of Swedish party members reported some level of ideological incongruence. Although many members reported low levels of incongruence, a one-point difference on an eleven-point scale still represents a conscious choice to differentiate oneself from the party, and some party members also reported larger differences between themselves and their party. Figure 1 shows the distribution of ideological incongruence across all parties.

Figure 1. Distribution of ideological incongruence among Swedish party members.

¹⁶ The supplementary material can be accessed here:
https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/11845255/Appendix_incongruence.pdf



Although most party members are either congruent or only 1 point off, roughly 36 percent of respondents report a distance of at least 2 points on the eleven-point scale. This provides further indication that ideological incongruence is not a trivial matter among Swedish members. Defining the cut-off point for incongruence as beginning with either a 1- or 2-point difference remains an arbitrary one.¹⁷ However, since the questions were asked back-to-back on the same screen we contend that even a one-point difference indicates that respondents made a conscious choice to differentiate themselves from their party and proceed with our analysis using this continuous definition of incongruence.

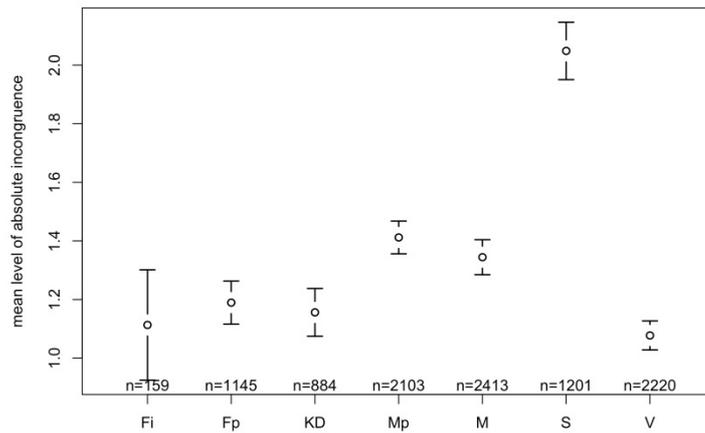
Considering the party-level, the share of at least somewhat incongruent members is highest for the Social Democrats with 80 percent and lowest for the Christian

¹⁷ Van Haute and Carty (2012) employ a three-point difference.

Democrats with around 61 percent. Moreover, the data also show that ideological incongruence comes in degrees across political parties. For this we focus on absolute incongruence that is sensitive to the magnitude but not to the direction. Although we believe that information on direction could be valuably integrated with the directional voting literature (Rabinowitz and Macdonald, 1989), this analysis lies beyond the scope of the present article. Figure 2 summarizes the means in absolute incongruence across parties.

The Social Democrats not only have the largest share of ideological incongruence among members, its members also report the largest differences on average compared to members of other parties. The average absolute distance for Social Democrat members is two on an eleven-point scale. Members of the Left Party have the smallest absolute distance. These figures illustrate that some ideological incongruence within Swedish parties is the norm rather than the exception. The differences between parties are striking and could be due to party size, party family or party organizational types. Yet, systematic explorations into these potential party-level causes are beyond the scope of this analysis with only seven parties. Instead, our theoretical framework suggests that individual-level factors may play a role, and we leave party-level explanations for future comparative research.

Figure 2. Absolute ideological distance of party members to their own party, by party with confidence intervals.



Potential causes of incongruence

Although we resist making claims of causality at this stage, we nevertheless present multiple regressions for two reasons: first, to examine the added value of attitudinal factors compared to the previously found socio-demographic correlates of incongruence (see Van Haute and Carty, 2012); second, to investigate the relative merit of each of the attitudinal factors, controlling for the others, as they might be correlated.

The first model of Table 3 only includes socio-demographic variables and midlevel activism identified by Van Haute and Carty (2012) as correlating with ideological

incongruence.¹⁸ The categories ‘elementary school not finished’ and ‘unemployed’ are taken as the base for the education and employment variables, respectively. In line with the authors’ findings, a curvilinear relationship is assumed for age and the duration of membership.¹⁹ Our results applying OLS regressions largely mirror previous findings.²⁰ Generally, men, older people and those who have been party members for a long time show greater incongruence. Finally, those with a university degree and the mid-level elite show lower incongruence or more congruence.

Models 2-4 include additional variables related to the hypotheses developed within this article. Note, that the coefficients on gender, university degree and length of membership remain statistically significant and in the same direction across all models. The coefficient on midlevel elite position strengthens slightly across models but generally indicates – and contrary to some findings from other national contexts – that parties’ midlevel elite are less incongruent. Model 2 in Table 3 suggests that more politically interested members are more likely to be more incongruent with their parties. The statistical significance and direction of the relationship holds across models. A one-unit increase in political interest increases the level of ideological

¹⁸ We operationalize midlevel activism through a survey question asking respondents whether they are currently or have in the past held public office (Q67). Subsequently (Q67_TEXT) respondents that have or currently hold office are able to report their level of office, and this allows for a direct translation of the expectation laid out in May’s Law, if the elite-level is excluded. We do this by coding individuals that are currently in office or have been in office (yet only on the city, local or municipal level) as 1 and everyone else as 0.

¹⁹ The authors use a slightly different operationalization that combines length of membership with exclusive attachment to that particular party.

²⁰ The results remain largely similar when using an ordered logit model instead of an OLS.

incongruence by an estimated average of around 0.1 among the sampled party members, which corresponds to a tenth of a unit. This finding is also in line with H1.

Model 3 reports that efficacy does not seem to play a role for ideological incongruence. However, members' perceived role within the party shows the predicted association with incongruence: the more marginal members see their role, the more congruent they are. A one-category increase in members' self-conception towards being a 'party foot-soldier' is associated with a decrease in incongruence of an estimated 0.26 units, which corresponds to around a quarter of a unit. This is also the strongest effect among the attitudes tested here even when considering standardized coefficients. It documents that members' perceived role within the party is associated with how closely they align ideologically with their party. These results partially support H1. Both, high levels of political interest and a self-ascribed independent role tend to increase ideological incongruence among the sampled Swedish party members. Efficacy, however, does not seem to affect incongruence.

Table 3. Regression results for absolute congruence. Entries are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
(Intercept)	1.52** (0.12)	1.11** (0.16)	1.13** (.17)	1.83** (.17)
age	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)	.01 (.00)	.01** (.00)
sqd. age	-.0001** (.00)	-.0001** (.00)	-.0001** (.00)	-.0001** (.00)

female	-.21** (.03)	-.20** (.03)	-.20** (.03)	-.13** (.03)
high-school not finished	-.20 (.15)	-.20 (.15)	-.16 (.15)	-.25* (.15)
high-school finished	-.10 (.10)	-.11 (.10)	-.08 (.10)	-.17* (.10)
vocational training	.04 (.10)	.04 (.10)	.08 (.10)	0.08 (.10)
university not finished	-.10 (.10)	-.12 (.10)	-.08 (.10)	-.25** (.10)
university finished	-.17* (.09)	-.19** (.09)	-.15* (.09)	-.32** (.09)
Ph.D.	-.17 (.11)	-.18 (.11)	-.14 (.12)	-.39** (.11)
part-time employment	.03 (.06)	.04 (.06)	.05 (.06)	.02 (.06)
full-time employment	.01 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.02 (.04)	.04 (.04)
self-employed	.07 (.05)	.06 (.05)	.07 (.05)	.06 (.05)
religiosity	-.02 (.02)	-.02 (.02)	-.02 (.02)	.0001 (.02)
duration of membership	0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)	0.01** (0.00)
sqd. duration of membership	-.0001** (.00)	-.0001** (.00)	-.0001** (.00)	-.0001** (.00)
midlevel elite	-.07 (.03)*	-.08** (.03)	-.08* (.03)	-.09** (.03)
political interest		.11** (.03)	.12** (.03)	.10** (.03)
efficacy			-.02 (.02)	.01 (.02)
member role				-.26** (.01)
R-squared	0.017	0.018	0.018	0.06
N	9509	9469	9362	9198

Note: *p*-values ‘***’ < 0.05, ‘*’ < 0.1.

Taken on the whole, the above analysis suggests that political attitudes are associated with ideological congruence. Compared to Model 1 that only includes socio-demographic variables, the combination with attitudinal variables in Model 5 explains more of the variance in ideological incongruence. However, R-squared values remain low across models, which also highlight the need for further research in this area. It is above all members' perceived role within the party and political interest that showed up as stronger and significant factors related to higher incongruence. Both represent suggestive evidence for how emancipated party members with higher levels of political interest and with a more independent self-conception might be less in need of cue taking from the party. Those emancipated members are not necessarily better or more correct in placing the party; they are, however, comfortable explicitly disagreeing with their party's position.

The idea of emancipation being one of the factors behind incongruence is further supported by additional analyses. Firstly, in an additional model (see Table 2 in supplementary material) support for the statement that regular members should play a greater role in developing the party's national election platform (Q115_2) was positively associated with incongruence and quite strongly so (0.177). Secondly, there seem to be no systematic differences between more and less congruent members in the kinds of reported material or career benefits they obtain from their membership

(Q65; see Table 3 in supplementary material).²¹ This means that incongruence is less likely to be affected by different material or occupational benefits members think they have and more likely to be driven by members' self-conception as emancipated citizens that want to actively influence the party platform.

Table 4. Correlations with absolute congruence.

	Pearson's coefficient
satisfaction ideology	-.40**
satisfaction leadership	-.30**
vote for other party	.15**
join other party	.27**

Note: p -values '**' < .05.

Potential consequences of incongruence

Turning to the consequences and the test of H2, Table 4 reports simple correlation coefficients, because the cross-sectional data complicates causal inferences, particularly if one conceptualizes the exit, voice, and loyalty relationship as a process developing over time. The correlations for this collection of variables are quite strong

²¹ Information on how to access supplementary material can be found in footnote 15.

and all in the direction anticipated. Higher perceived ideological incongruence between member and party is associated with decreased satisfaction with the ideological project of the party as well as with the party leadership. Moving on to ‘loyalty’ and ‘exit’ behavior, ideological incongruence is positively associated with a party member having voted for a different party in the most recent election as well as with party members contemplating joining a different party. For example, a total of 7.8 percent (n = 803) respondents said they voted for a different party than their own in the last election. Of those, around 82 percent (n = 657) are ideologically somewhat incongruent with their party. Although it is not surprising to see higher ideological incongruence associated with choosing exit rather than voice options within these political organizations, it should be noted that in party members we are discussing individuals with a formal connection to a given political party that nevertheless vote for and sometimes consider joining a different organization.

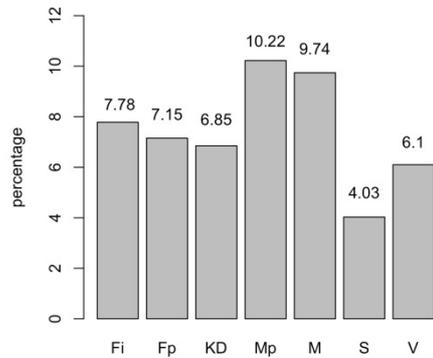
Figure 3 displays the percentage of defecting votes by party. As one would expect, the vast majority of party members cast loyal votes in the previous election. At the same time, it is quite striking how many members reported having defected in the last general election, especially since the literature usually assumes that members are the most loyal voters (see Scarrow, 2015). For example, just over 10 percent of Green Party voters defected in the September 2014 election. After polling over 10 percent in the run-up to the September general election, the party’s 6.9 percent vote share was

somewhat unexpected. Given the speculation about former Green Party voters switching to the Feminist Initiative, subsequently supported by exit poll data²², the 10 percent defection rate among Green members is provocative.

Additionally, it is worth pointing out that the Social Democrats appear to have the most loyal members on Election Day. At the same time, the results showed the highest share of more incongruent members for this party, which suggests that even those members who are ideologically at odds feel sufficiently loyal to cast a vote for their party. Mild empirical support for this idea can be found in a weak negative correlation between the level of party attachment and levels of incongruence for the Social Democrats only: Members being closer to the Social Democrats tend to have lower ideological incongruence (Pearson's $r = -0.123$; p -value $< .001$).

Figure 3. Shares of reported defecting votes in the Sept. 2014 elections, by party.

²² See: <http://pejl.svt.se/val2014/valu-riksdag/valjarstrommar/>



On the other side of the ideological continuum, over 9 percent of Moderate members voted for another party in 2014. Having previously led the bourgeois Alliance coalition government, the Moderates lost 23 seats in the *Riksdag* and experienced a nearly 7 percent drop in total vote share between 2010 and 2014. What is more, this took place as the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats gained over 7 percent between the two elections. No doubt the Moderates lost voters to both the Social and Sweden Democrats, but probing the almost 10 percent of their party members that defected in 2014 will provide important information on the nature of these losses. It is also worth pointing out that defection rates at the local election, held on the same day, were substantially lower and only ranged between 3.54 and 6.94 percent per party. This speaks against second-order effects and in favor of strategic voting at the national level.

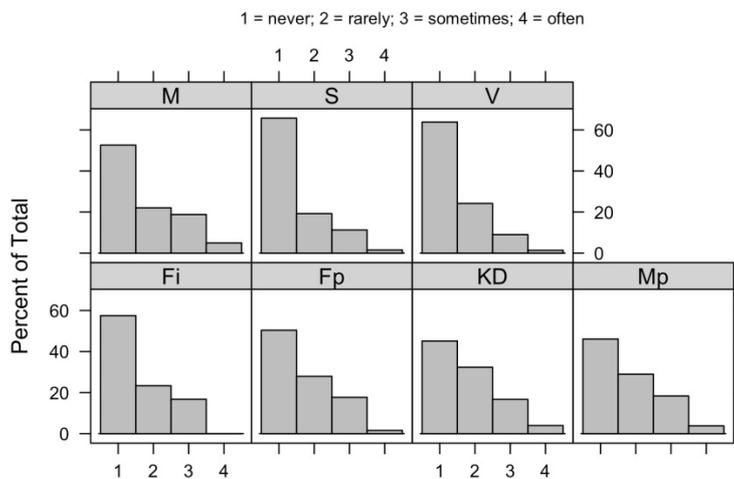
Figure 4 makes it clear that a substantial portion of party members in Sweden at least consider joining a different party. In the entire sample more than 18 percent at least ‘sometimes’ consider joining another party; among the less congruent members the share is even higher with more than 22 percent. For two parties, the Christian Democrats and Greens, the number of their members that consider joining another party – at least rarely – is actually larger than the group of members that never consider leaving these parties.

As discussed above, the Feminist Initiative represents a new left-liberal competitor for Green Party members and voters, particularly for the young.²³ Additionally, following the 2014 election the Green Party is part of a minority governing coalition with the Social Democrats and no longer defines itself as a party of opposition. It is likely that this transition would create tension and dissatisfaction within some Green Party members. The relatively large number of Christian Democrats that consider joining another party also makes sense. The party was dangerously close to falling below the four percent threshold necessary for parliamentary representation in the September 2014 election and went through a leadership change in the spring of 2015. It is reasonable to expect both events would destabilize members’ commitment to the party. In contrast, the Social Democrat members appear to be the most loyal. Just over

²³ For more information, see: <http://pejl.svt.se/val2014/valu-riksdag/valjarstrommar/>

66 percent of the party's members never consider joining another party, the largest percentage among all seven parties included in the survey.

Figure 4. Thoughts of joining another party, by party.



In order to get a better understanding of the potential exit behavior of members as a consequence of ideological incongruence, we modeled members' thoughts of joining another party with an ordered logistic regression. We only included respondents' age and gender as basic control variables, and in a second model also include a variable pertaining to attitudes towards immigration, an issue area of heightened salience to Swedish politics today (see, e.g., Dahlström and Sundell, 2012; Loxbo, 2014). It will show to what extent thoughts of joining another party are associated with general

ideological incongruence after controlling for a salient and potentially divisive issue area. Table 5 summarizes the results.

Model 1 shows that younger and female members are less likely to consider joining another party but also that higher incongruence increases the probability of considering another party. According to the predicted probabilities (Figure 5), increases in absolute incongruence are clearly associated with a higher frequency of considering joining another party, if all other values are held constant. Substantively, the results of calculating first differences show that moving from one standard deviation below the mean (= 0) in absolute incongruence to one standard deviation above the mean (= 2.75) *decreases* the probability of respondents answering with ‘never’ by 0.24 and it *increases* the probabilities of the other three categories (‘rarely’, ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’) by 0.10, 0.11 and 0.02, respectively. This is also in line with the expectations that more ideologically incongruent members are more likely to exit the party. Model 2 in Table 5 estimates the effects of immigration attitudes on considerations for leaving the party.²⁴ According to the results, the effects of general incongruence remain largely the same but a more conservative stance on immigration also has a substantial effect on members’ thoughts on joining another party. These results mean that ideological incongruence is a potentially important

²⁴ Respondents were asked about their level of agreement (very bad idea = 1; very good idea = 5) with the following statement: ‘Immigrants should be required to accommodate to the customs of Sweden.’

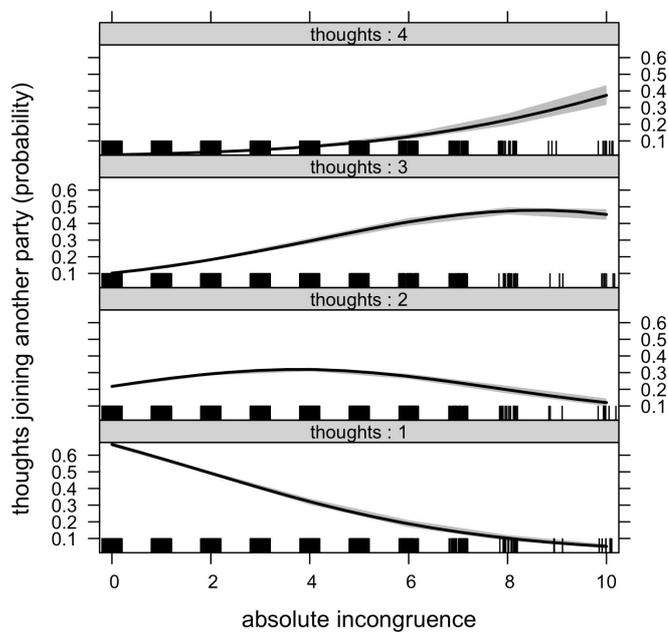
factor for members' exit behavior but by no means the only one, and specifically that Swedish party members' attitudes about migration and immigrant integration should be further explored in future work.

Table 5. Ordered logistic regression model for thoughts on joining another party. Entries are log odds.

	Model 1	Model 2
age	-.011** (.001)	-.017** (.001)
female	-.192** (.041)	-.130** (.041)
incongruence	.358** (.014)	.347** (.015)
immigration attitudes		.242** (.017)
<i>cutpoints</i>		
never/rarely	.078** (.064)	.593** (.074)
rarely/sometimes	1.404** (.066)	1.939** (.077)
sometimes/often	3.488** (.085)	4.042** (.095)
Residual variance	20603	20171
AIC	20615	20185

Note: *p*-values '**' < .05.

Figure 5. Predicted probabilities and confidence intervals for thoughts on joining another party for different values of absolute ideological incongruence (Model 1).



Note: ‘thoughts: 1’ = ‘never’; ‘thoughts: 2’ = ‘rarely’; ‘thoughts: 3’ = ‘sometimes’; ‘thoughts: 4’ = ‘often’.

Summary and conclusion

This article set out to study ideological incongruence between party members and their parties more closely. Drawing on a large survey of more than 10,000 party

members in Sweden we found that some amount of ideological incongruence is not an exception but rather the norm. Across parties, on average, two-thirds of party members described themselves as ideologically different than their party. Although at times these differences can be rather small, it remains striking that well over half of party members perceive there to be at least some meaningful difference between their ideological preferences and the position of their chosen party. With expanding democratic structures and procedures within parties, these members have the potential to push their parties in new directions. Beyond possible consequences for voicing ideological differences, this large share of Swedish party members is also the group most likely to exit and to defect from the party – either temporarily through vote choice or more permanently through membership exit.

We investigated important attitudinal and behavioral correlates of ideological incongruence on the individual-level, derived from existing theories, with the goal of understanding some of its causes and consequences. Some individual-level factors provide first hints as to the roots and effects of ideological incongruence. The results indicated above all how emancipated party members with higher levels of political interest and with a more independent self-conception might be less in need of cues from the party. Those emancipated members appear to be more comfortable being more incongruent with their party's ideological position.

Our findings also suggest that ideological incongruence might matter for members' exit, voice and loyalty behavior. Specifically, we found that higher ideological incongruence is associated with a more negative evaluation of the party leader (voice) and with a higher probability to either vote for another party (loyalty) or to even leave the current one (exit). Incongruent members can be benign for the party when they simply voice their concerns but they may also be more dangerous for a party's electoral strategy when those members defect or terminate their membership. A total of 18.75 percent of sampled members consider at least 'sometimes' joining another party. And across Swedish parties between 4 and 10 percent of members defected in the last general election in 2014. This non-trivial share of members can potentially be pivotal for electoral victories, especially in Swedish elections of 'bloc politics'. It is also interesting from the perspective of party member benefit. Members are often cited as loyal voters and a multiplier of votes (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Scarrow 2015). The above findings qualify this assumption.

These are first steps towards theorizing and testing potential causes and consequences of ideological incongruence among party members in a time when direct membership involvement is growing across Western democracies. Future research could disaggregate ideological incongruence not only in its magnitude but also its direction. For, it could be that members that are more ideologically extreme than their party differ in important ways from those that are ideologically more moderate.

Additionally, we hope to more directly connect our findings with those of other membership surveys, because one potential cause of incongruence could also lay in party-specific factors such party size, party organizational types or ideology. Therefore, comparative work involving more parties is a logical next step.

Acknowledgements

Earlier versions of the manuscript were presented at workshops and seminars at Aarhus University and the University of Gothenburg in 2015 as well as at EPOP in 2015. We thank all participants for their valuable comments and suggestions. In particular, we are grateful to Raimondas Ibenskas, Seth Jolly, and Ryan Bakker for their advice and critical remarks. The Laboratory for Opinion Research (LORE) was essential to collecting the data for this project, and Marcus Samanni and Elias Markstedt provided excellent research assistance. We also acknowledge generous funding from the Centre for European Research at the University of Gothenburg (CERGU), Forte co-funded by the European Commission (2013-2692), Riksbankens Jubileumsfonden (P13-1090:1), the Swedish Research Council (2015-00196), and the Swedish Network for European Studies in Political Science.

References

Adams J, Clark M, Ezrow L, et al. (2006) Are niche parties fundamentally different from mainstream parties? The causes and the electoral consequences of Western

- European parties' policy shifts, 1976–1998. *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 513-529.
- Bakker R, De Vries C, Edwards E, et al. (2015) Measuring party positions in Europe The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999–2010. *Party Politics* 21(1): 143-152.
- Baras M, Rodriguez T, Barbera O, and Barrio A (2012) Intra-Party Democracy and Middle-Level Elites in Spain. *ICPS Working Papers* 304.
- Bolleyer N (2009) Inside the cartel party: party organisation in government and opposition. *Political Studies* 57(3): 559-579.
- Bowler S, Farrell D and Katz R (1999) *Party discipline and parliamentary government*. The Ohio State University Press.
- Ceron A (2015) Intra-party politics in 140 characters. To what extent social media analysis provides information on intra-party dynamics? Three applications to the Italian case. *Paper presented at the Gothenburg Workshop on Intra- Party Politics, 17- 18 September 2015*.
- Dahl S (2010) Efter Folkrörelsepartiet. Ph.D. thesis. Stockholm University.
- Dahlström, C, and Sundell, A (2012) A losing gamble. How mainstream parties facilitate anti-immigrant party success. *Electoral Studies* 31(2): 353-363.
- Dalton R (1984) Cognitive mobilization and partisan dealignment in advanced industrial democracies. *The Journal of Politics* 46(1): 264-284.
- Dalton R, Farrell D and McAllister I (2011) *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage: How Parties Organize Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton R and McAllister I (2015) Random Walk or Planned Excursion? Continuity and Change in the Left–Right Positions of Political Parties. *Comparative Political Studies* 48(6): 759-787.
- Dalton R and Wattenberg M (eds) (2000) *Parties Without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. *Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ezrow L, de Vries C, Steenbergen M, et al. (2011) Mean voter representation and partisan constituency representation: Do parties respond to the mean voter position or to their supporters? *Party Politics* 17(3): 275-301.

- Gauja A and Van Haute E (2014) Members and Activists of Political Parties in Comparative Perspective. *IPSA World Congress of Political Science*. Montréal.
- Greene Z and Haber M (2015a) Leadership competition and disagreement at party national congresses. *British Journal of Political Science* ahead-of-print: 1-22.
- Greene Z and Haber M (2015b) Maintaining Partisan Ties: Preference Divergence and Partisan Collaboration in Western Europe. *Paper presented at the Gothenburg Workshop on Intra- Party Politics, 17- 18 September 2015*.
- Harmel R, Heo U, Tan A, et al. (1995) Performance, leadership, factions and party change: An empirical analysis. *West European Politics* 18(1): 1-33.
- Hirschman A (1970) *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Harvard University Press.
- Katz R and Mair P (1992). Party organizations: a data handbook on party organizations in western democracies, 1960-90. London: SAGE.
- Katz R and Mair P (1995) Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy. The Emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party Politics* 1(1): 5–28.
- Katz R and Mair P (2009) The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement. *Perspectives on Politics* 7(4): 753-766.
- Kirchheimer O (1965) Der Wandel Des Westeuropäischen Parteiensystems. *Politische Vierteljahreszeitschrift* 6: 20–41.
- Kitschelt H (1989) The internal politics of parties: the law of curvilinear disparity revisited. *Political studies* 37(3): 400-421.
- Kitschelt H (2000) Linkages between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities. *Comparative Political Studies* 33(6-7): 845–879.
- Krouwel A (2012) *Party Transformations in European Democracies*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Loxbo, K (2014) Voters' Perceptions of Policy Convergence and the Short-term Opportunities of Anti-immigrant Parties: Examples from Sweden. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 37(3): 239-262.
- May J (1973) Opinion Structures of Political Parties: The Special Law of Curvilinear Disparity. *Political Studies* 21(2): 135–151.

- Müller W and Katz R (1997) Party as Linkage. *European Journal of Political Research* 31(1-2): 169–178.
- Narud H and Skare A (1999) Are party activists the party extremists? The structure of opinion in political parties. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 22(1): 45-65.
- Norris P (1995) May's Law of Curvilinear Disparity Revisited Leaders, Officers, Members and Voters in British Political Parties. *Party Politics* 1(1): 29-47.
- Pedersen K, Bille L, Buch R, et al. (2004) Sleeping or active partners? Danish party members at the turn of the millennium. *Party Politics* 10(4): 367-383.
- Pedersen K and Saglie J (2005) New technology in ageing parties internet use in Danish and Norwegian parties. *Party Politics* 11(3): 359-377.
- Ponce A and Scarrow S (2014) Which members? Using cross-national surveys to study party membership. *Party Politics* Published Online First.
- Powell G (2009) The ideological congruence controversy: The impact of alternative measures, data, and time periods on the effects of election rules. *Comparative Political Studies* 42(12): 1475-1497.
- Rabinowitz G and Macdonald S (1989) A Directional Theory of Issue Voting. *American Political Science Review* 83(1): 93-121.
- Rohlfing I (2015) Asset or liability? An analysis of the effect of changes in party membership on partisan ideological change. *Party Politics* 21(1): 17-27.
- Rohrschneider R and Whitefield S (2012) *The strain of representation: How parties represent diverse voters in Western and Eastern Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scarrow S (1994) The 'paradox of enrollment': Assessing the costs and benefits of party memberships. *European Journal of Political Research* 25(1): 41-60.
- Scarrow S (2015) *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Scarrow S and Gezgor B (2010) Declining memberships, changing members? European political party members in a new era. *Party Politics* 16(6): 823-843.

Scarrow S, Webb P and Farrell D (2000) From Social Integration to Electoral Contestation: The Changing Distribution of Power within Political Parties. In: Dalton R and Wattenberg M (eds) *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 129–153.

Sieberer U (2006) Party unity in parliamentary democracies: A comparative analysis. *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 12(2): 150-178.

Van Biezen I, Mair P and Poguntke T (2012) Going, going,... gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe. *European Journal of Political Research* 51(1): 24-56.

Van de Wardt M (2014) Putting the damper on Do parties de-emphasize issues in response to internal divisions among their supporters? *Party Politics* 20(3): 330-340.

Van Haute E (2011) Who voices? Socialisation process and ideological profile of discontented party members. In: Van Haute E (ed) *Party membership in Europe: Exploration into the anthills of party politics*. Brussels, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 169-186.

Van Haute E (2015) Joining isn't Everything: Exit, Voice, and Loyalty in Party Organizations. In: Johnston R and Sharman C (eds) *Parties and Party Systems: Structure and context*. Vancouver, UBC Press, 184-201.

Van Haute E and Carty R (2012) Ideological misfits: A distinctive class of party members. *Party Politics* 18(6): 885-895.

Van Haute E and Gauja A (eds) (2015) *Party Members and Activists*. London: Routledge.

Widfeldt A (1995) Party Membership and Party Representativeness. In: Klingemann H and Fuchs D (eds). *Citizens and the State*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 134–182.

Widfeldt A (1999) Losing touch? The political representativeness of Swedish parties, 1985–1994. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 22(4): 307-3.