**The limits of organizational innovation and multi-speed membership. Podemos and its new forms of party membership**

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After decades of falling membership figures (van Biezen et al. 2012) many European parties are experiencing processes of organizational innovation. These changes notoriously include new political rights for party members, greater incentives for affiliates, and the establishment of a variety of forms of affiliation that have blurred the very divide between members and non-members (Katz and Mair 2009; Fisher et al. 2014). In Scarrow’s (2015) words, we are witnessing the emergence of multi-speed membership parties: organizations that offer individuals opportunities to join through a panoply of affiliation modes and grant them flexibility to engage in an increased range of political activities of diverse intensity.

The diffusion of the multi-speed membership organizational model is taking place in two parallel ways. On the one hand, many mainstream and well-established parties have increasingly replaced their traditional approach to party membership with a multi-speed approach that incorporates new modes of affiliation. On the other hand, new parties born during this new phase of organizational innovations at the beginning of the 21st century are adopting even more ambitious approaches with regard to their members’ standing and roles. While examples of mainstream parties moving towards a multi-speed membership model are well known (e.g. Webb 2000; Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2013; Faucher 2015; Gauja 2015), the analysis of new parties’ innovations and their impact is still in progress. In some younger parties, new affiliation strategies facilitated by the availability of new information and communication technologies have produced party organizations that, to some degree, resemble the cyber party model (Margetts 2006). Pirate parties are a clear example (Hartleb 2013: 364-365), but other parties such as the Five Star Movement in Italy (Tronconi 2015), and Podemos (‘We Can’) in Spain have also revolutionised the notion of party membership and what it entails in terms of rights, obligations and activities.

The implications of these changes for parties and members’ activism are still unclear. A number of scholars (e.g. Gauja 2015; Scarrow 2015) have argued that the line between the wider electorate, supporters, members and militants that has customarily guided the analysis of party membership since Duverger (1954) is increasingly blurred. In this context, it is important that we understand the way in which innovation in membership strategies might affect what affiliates do, their characterising features, and the differences between party members and voters. Members’ activities and levels of activism affect the very own nature of parties and their linkage function. As Scarrow and Gezgor (2010) argue, a membership similar to the party’s constituency can help it to reconnect with voters and better represent them. This may mitigate the public’s distrust and the perception of remoteness suffered by many Western parties. Besides that, given the increasing empowerment of party affiliates and their participation in relevant decision-making processes such as candidate and leader selection, manifesto drafting or internal polls (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010), analysing their social and political profiles gains a renewed relevance.

This article contributes to the developing research field of the effects of organizational innovations by analysing an extreme case: Podemos - a young party which deliberately rejects the traditional notion of membership in favour of a very inclusive organizational arrangement where all members are granted full rights and no formal differences exist between types of affiliates. We put to test some of the expectations about the impact of organizational innovations on two of the most relevant areas: the members-voters gap and the blurring of classical membership categories. In particular, we aim to answer the following research questions: to what extent are Podemos’ affiliates different from its voters? And, to what extent has the use of the repertoire of options for activism offered by Podemos blurred its members’ differentiation in groups of varying activism? Our findings show that the members-voters gap remains relevant in spite of Podemos’ extremely open and inclusive notion of membership. We also find that Podemos’ innovative form of affiliation has not led to more diffused differences in members’ roles. On the contrary, patterns of internal and external activism generate groups that resemble the classical categories used to understand members’ involvement in more traditional parties. Therefore, we demonstrate the limits of organizational innovations implemented by parties in the field of membership policies and how these innovations have not substantially altered key features that have traditionally characterized party membership.

In the next pages we first discuss the literature about multi-speed membership parties and the voters-supporters gap, the Podemos’ notion of membership, and our expectations. We then describe the data used in the analysis. After that, we present our findings and conclude with a discussion on their implications for the understanding of contemporary party membership and for future research in this area.

**Members’ representativeness and multi-speed membership**

The membership decline experienced by parties in most advanced democracies during the past decades (Mair and van Biezen 2001; van Biezen et al. 2012) has had significant consequences. Membership loss and citizens’ distrust towards parties have fostered a number of changes in parties’ membership policies. Old and new parties alike are implementing innovative responses that stress grassroot involvement, frequently taking advantage of ICTs (Scarrow et al. 2000; Gibson and Ward 2009; van Biezen et al. 2012; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014). Since the end of the 20th century, Western parties have empowered traditional members giving them increased political rights mainly in the areas of candidate and leader selection (Scarrow et al. 2000; Cross and Katz 2013; Fisher et al. 2014). In addition to these changes, parties have also created new categories of adherents, or strengthened and diversified them when they already existed (van Haute and Gauja 2015), giving these new groupings relevant political rights within party decision-making.

These processes have resulted in the emergence of multi-speed membership parties, adopting different forms of affiliation with sometimes overlapping political rights, and offering a wider range of opportunities for participation (Scarrow 2015). In Scarrow’s (2015: 30-31) insightful analysis, multi-speed membership organizations may offer up to six modes of party affiliation: traditional individual membership, light membership, cyber members, financial sustainers, social media followers and friends, and news audience. Importantly enough, Scarrow (2015) presents a picture where, contrary to Duverger’s (1954) model, the boundaries between these categories are increasingly blurred. Not only can party supporters move between affiliation modes in short periods of time, but also high intensity activity is no longer confined to traditional members and militants. On the contrary, while some traditional members may be only loosely linked to the party (van Haute 2011; van Haute and Gauja 2015), light members and non-member supporters may present much higher involvement in partisan activities. Empirical evidence on this is still scarce, but Fisher et al. (2014) and Webb et al. (2017) found members of British political parties to be more likely to engage in campaign activities than supporters (being the gap greater in the more intensive tasks); and Gauja and Jackson (2016) found similar results for the Australian Green Party.

Membership decline may have not only affected parties’ internal functioning but also some of their key roles. Political participation through party membership has been one of the defining features of modern parliamentary democracies. Members play a fundamental role in the social rooting of parties, and in the performance of parties’ linkage and representative functions (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014; Scarrow 2015). Smaller memberships may deprive parties of key organizational and campaign resources (Karp et al. 2008), but also weaken them when combined with lack of members’ representativeness. As van Biezen et al. (2012: 38) argue, party members have been frequently found to be socially unrepresentative of both their voters and the wider electorate.[[1]](#footnote-1) As becoming a party member can be relatively costly, members are a group of disproportionately resourceful individuals who are more likely than non-members to belong to civil society organizations, and to be male, highly educated, better off, older and working in the public sector of the economy. Consequently, members could be understood not as part of civil society but as part of an ‘extended political class’ (van Biezen et al. 2012: 39). This lack of representativeness could damage parties’ legitimacy and increase public’s distrust further. The analysis of the features of contemporary party affiliates and whether they constitute a socially and politically isolated group from the wider electorate is also important given the increasing power of ordinary members in very consequential internal decision-making processes. However, innovative membership policies may help to close the gap between the social and political profiles of voters and supporters. By offering new incentives to participate, parties implementing new membership policies can have an impact on the type of members they attract (Whiteley and Seyd 2002; Scarrow and Gezgor 2010: 827).[[2]](#footnote-2) More inclusive, open, flexible and procedurally cost-free membership policies might therefore help to broaden party membership and be expected to close the members-voters gap.

A few pieces of research have directly or indirectly approached the question of how innovative membership arrangements affect the profiles of members and supporters. Scarrow and Gezgor’s (2010) analysis of the members-voters gap comparing the 1990s and the 2000s (when various innovations in membership policies had already been implemented in some parties) illustrates this issue. Although the gap still existed, they found a decrease in some key sociodemographic differences. Party members were still older (except in Spain), more likely to be male, unionized and religiously observant, and enjoyed higher incomes than non-members. However, the gap with non-members had decreased substantially since the end of the 20th century, and there were not significant differences in education. Similarly, Gauja and Jackson’s (2016) research on Australian Green party members and supporters does not find differences in age or education, although the former are still more likely men. Webb et al. (2017), however, find that members are distinct from supporters in several key sociodemographic variables (members are more frequently male, more educated and have a higher employment status) and that supporters are more representative of the wider electorate. Additionally, given the exhaustion of some of the benefits provided by the parties in the past, the remaining contemporary members could be found to be mostly ideologically motivated and more radical (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010: 828).[[3]](#footnote-3) This would confirm May’s (1973) classical proposition of curvilinear disparity between members and voters (and party elites), which has not yet found clear empirical support in the literature (Norris 1995; Gallagher and Marsh 2004). The results showed by Webb et al. (2017) and Scarrow and Gezgor (2010: 836) go in this direction..

To summarise, evidence regarding the effects of organizational innovations is scarce; the magnitude of the members-supporters-voters gap in full multi-speed membership parties remains unclear; and research into the differences between types of affiliates in multi-speed membership parties is still very scant.[[4]](#footnote-4) We therefore contribute to the badly needed accumulation of evidence in this field by analysing those issues for a party, Podemos, which has drastically redefined the notion of member.

**Podemos, its notion of membership and our expectations**

Podemos is a recently founded organization (January 2014) that became the third-largest party in the Spanish parliament after the 2015 and 2016 general elections (20.7% and 21.2% share of the vote, respectively). It is a populist radical-left party emphasizing left-wing socioeconomic policies, radical democracy, citizens’ political engagement and deliberative democratic procedures.[[5]](#footnote-5) Podemos’s ideological views determine its approach to party organization and membership strategies. Podemos firmly believes that conventional parties are in a critical crisis that requires an organizational transformation. Consequently, it has experimented with new forms of participation to promote mass involvement in politics. As a highly inclusive organisation with minimal membership requirements (signing up on the party’s website and agreeing with their political platform and organizational rules), its adherents do not have any formal obligation but enjoy many rights without any constraint. There is no membership fee, though adherents who wish to make donations can choose among a range of options. There is no probation period or endorsement required to join the party. Spanish citizenship is not a requisite, and belonging to another party is not forbidden (information about this is not even asked). Podemos does not offer different forms of affiliation; there is only a single category of affiliation enabling anybody who wishes to do so to participate in all the main internal decision-making processes (leadership and candidate selection, manifesto elaboration, internal ballots on electoral coalitions and government participation, etc.). Only for the purpose of measuring turnout in the internal online decision-making processes, the party differentiates its members between passive and active adherents (those that have participated in online decision-making processes in the last 12 months). In this way, Podemos is even more inclusive and cost-free than other new parties implementing fluid notions of memberships such as the Pirates parties (Bolleyer et al. 2015).

Podemos’ organizational innovation has succeeded in attracting a large contingent of adherents. With 455,932 affiliates (members/voters ratio = 0.14), [[6]](#footnote-6) it has managed to be the second largest Spanish party in number of members after the conservative Popular Party. Podemos is one of not so many cases of exponential and rapid growth in an era of general membership crisis (van Biezen and Poguntke 2014) and it is also a remarkable case because of its explicit attempt to recreate the mass party model adapted to the 21st century context (Caruso 2016) and to combine online and traditional offline activism.

In sum, Podemos is a critical case to explore the effects of organizational innovation (Seawright and Gerring 2008). The party has implemented a radical innovation in membership policy. It has reduced to a minimum the procedural costs of party membership going beyond to what some other innovative parties (e.g. the Pirates) have done, and widened the scope for members’ participation in decision-making processes through the use of ICTs. If the expectations about the capacity of more inclusive membership models to impact the type of members parties attract are right, Podemos members and voters should be very similar to each other. Additionally, Podemos has a loose notion of membership whereby no formal difference exists between members (all have the same rights), and where members are offered many different engagement opportunities with hardly any obligation. If the new membership models have the impact on members’ engagement that is often attributed to them (Scarrow 2015), Podemos actual membership should not only be similar to its voters, but also be in stark contrast with the concentric membership model described by Duverger (1954).

Thus, our first research question asks about the difference between members and voters in parties with innovative membership policies. While parties with less inclusive notions of membership should increase the unrepresentativeness of members, loose affiliation rules and the blurring of the voter-supporter divide should generate better representativeness. It would, however, be unrealistic to expect innovative organisational initiatives to make the well-known participation bias disappear completely. Political participation through party membership, even in its loosest form, is likely to demand a considerable amount of resources (Verba et al. 1995; Parry et al. 1992; Whiteley 2011). Therefore, our first hypothesis, in line with previous research (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010; Gauja and Jackson 2016; Webb et al. 2017), states that there should still be a voter-supporter gap in this new innovative membership party, with members being both more resourceful and more ideologically committed than voters:

H1 Podemos’ members are still more resourceful than the party’s voters in a) sociodemographic terms and b) levels of political activism.

H2 Podemos’ members will be more radical than their voters.

Podemos do not have a formal list of membership options but will very likely engender diverse groups depending on their use of the repertoire of activities offered by the party. While we know that most party members usually remain inactive (van Haute 2011; van Biezen and Poguntke 2014; van Haute and Gauja 2015), we do not have evidence about how affiliates choose to engage with a new party like Podemos, which adopts such a fluid membership notion. As mentioned earlier, in her depiction of multi-speed membership parties Scarrow (2015) presents a fuzzy picture where the levels of activism do not correlate well with different options of affiliation and traditional party members may often be less active than other affiliates/supporters. However, this view, which has found some support in the literature on British parties (Webb et al. 2017), raises an important question: why would anybody become a traditional member only to very rarely engage in partisan activities? Indeed, a model like the one depicted by Scarrow may work in established parties where the multi-speed membership model has been adopted on top of existing traditional organizational arrangements and a formal distinction still exists between different types of members. In such parties, existing categories have been created to offer prospective members a mix of old and new forms of affiliation that are not necessarily related to their desired levels of activity. For example, ‘traditional membership’ may be the only choice available for those who are committed to the party and wish to enjoy some of the collective and selective goods associated with full membership (Gauja 2015: 239), but do not have the resources to become a party activist. This, however, may be different in a party adopting a fluid membership model where supporters wishing to have a looser relationship with the party do not need to choose any specific membership category. Therefore, we expect members in parties like Podemos to self-select based on those variables that are known to be positively associated with higher levels of activism, such as resources and ideological motivation (Seyd and Whiteley 2002; Whiteley and Seyd 2002). A concentric pattern of membership modes may then emerge, where those with more resources and stronger ideological commitment are more likely to be active in both internal and external activities. This brings us to our last two hypotheses:

H3 Podemos membership follows a concentric model of participation based on different degrees of external activism and internal involvement

H4. More active members will present a) more socio-economic resources; b) a higher degree of activism; and c) stronger ideological attachments with the party

**Data and methods**

To test our hypotheses, we rely on data from a membership survey of Podemos conducted in the city of Madrid in January 2017. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first membership survey ever to be conducted in Podemos. At the time fieldwork took place, Podemos had 455,932 registered adherents nation-wide, 282,163 of whom were considered active (by Podemos’ definition, ‘active adherents’ are those who have participated in online decision-making processes in the past 12 months). Madrid city is the largest of Podemos’ local organizations. It represents 10.1% (46,155) of the party’s adherents, and 12% (33,850) of its active adherents - to put these figures in context, only 6.8% of the Spanish population resides in Madrid city. This is not surprising given that, besides being one of its electoral strongholds (Podemos controls the local government of Madrid since 2015), many of the party founders are also based there. The survey was conducted online using Podemos’ own survey application. An email was sent by Podemos to all registered adherents.[[7]](#footnote-7) Fieldwork lasted for 15 days and there was one reminder after the first week.[[8]](#footnote-8) 4,996 adherents answered the questionnaire, a response rate of 10.8% of adherents and 14.0% of the ‘active’ ones. These figures are similar to turnout in relevant internal ballots (García de Blas 2017; Sánchez 2017). The data were weighted using known information provided by the party about the distribution of adherents’ age and joining date.

The survey contained questions about members’ roles and participation in internal and external party activities. Respondents were asked whether they regularly vote in internal ballots; attend branch meetings; participate in (and/or coordinate) any of the branches’ working groups; represent their branch in any of the regional bodies; and/or had been elected to membership of any of the party’s governing bodies. Respondents were also asked about the way(s) in which they had economically contributed to the party (if any)[[9]](#footnote-9); and the campaign activities they had participated in (if any).[[10]](#footnote-10) Besides organizational questions, the survey also contained questions regarding the respondents’ associational involvement[[11]](#footnote-11), political participation,[[12]](#footnote-12) left-right self-placement and perception of Podemos and the main other parties’ left-right position (0-10), as well as socio-demographic variables such as age (in years), gender, employment status and education. To measure ideological coherence with Podemos, we also calculated the Euclidean distance between respondents’ ideology and each of the parties’ perceived position on the left-right continuum.

Information about Podemos’ voters was extracted from two post-election surveys conducted by the Centre for Sociological Studies between 27th May 2015 and 23rd June 2015 (after the regional elections in Madrid) and between 7th January 2016 and 19th March 2016 (right after the 2015 Spanish general election). We merged both samples because the number of Podemos voters interviewed in Madrid city for the general election study was too small (n=52), while, of course, combining both files resulted in a larger sample (n=142). All results hold when the sample from the regional election is excluded.

We use logistic regression models to investigate the differences between voters and members. In order to classify members’ activism, we rely on a two-step cluster analysis of members’ participation in party activities. Two-step cluster analysis is a particular type of unsupervised machine learning method that is designed to identify mutually exclusive groups of similar cases in the data based on the variables provided. The appropriate number of clusters is then decided following the Schwarz Bayesian criterion. Once the optimal number of clusters is identified, we proceed to investigate the differences between them using multinomial logistic regression models.

**Findings**

To test Hypotheses 1 and 2, Table 1 compares the socio-demographic and ideological characteristics of Podemos members and voters (including both respondents’ self-declared position on the left-right continuum, and the Euclidean distance between their position and each of the parties’ perceived position) as well as their political engagement. As can be observed, at first sight Podemos members and voters are significantly distinct on a number of variables, but the differences tend to confirm the hypothesis that members are more resourceful (consistent with the first part of H1) and ideologically more radical (consistent with H2). To start with, voters are older than members, though differences are small and not statistically significant (confirming previous findings by Gauja and Jackson 2016 and Webb et al. 2017). They are also significantly less likely than members to be male (67% of Podemos members are male, compared with 50% of voters), and more likely to be unemployed. The proportion of homemakers, although low in both cases, is also higher among voters than it is among members. With regard to education, members are significantly more highly educated (62% of them have a university degree, compared with 48% of voters). They are also slightly more left-wing than voters (although, admittedly, the difference is less than a quarter of point on a 0-10 scale), and see themselves as being ideologically closer to Podemos (and the other radical-left party, IU, which in 2016 run in coalition with Podemos). Conversely, ideological distance with PSOE (the mainstream centre-left party) is smaller for voters than it is for members. Lastly, while members are, on average, involved in a larger number of associations, voters had used more forms of political participation than members in the past. The fact that voters have been engaged in slightly more forms of political participation is the only piece of information contradicting the second part of H1. Differences are, however, really small (0.2 points on a 5-point scale).

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

By and large, the multivariate analyses in Table 2 confirm these findings, with members being more highly educated than voters, and more likely to be male, employed (Model 1) and more left-wing (Model 2). Members are also ideologically closer to Podemos and more distant from PSOE than voters (Model 3). Moreover, once controls are added, they are also ideologically more distant from IU than voters. The results of the descriptive statistics concerning political participation and associational involvement are also confirmed (Model 4). Associational involvement is higher among members but, oddly enough, although differences are small the opposite is the case with political participation –in line with Gauja and Jackson’s (2016: 369) findings on Australian Green Party members and supporters.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Once we have established the differences between members and supporters, we turn to analyse different types of members. According to H3, patterns of members’ involvement in internal and external activities on behalf of the party should produce a concentric model of membership. This model would involve the existence of a core of members who are both very strongly linked to the party and very active, and other groups of members who are both less active and less strongly linked to the party. To test this hypothesis, we conducted a two-step cluster analysis using all the variables on members’ participation in (internal and external) partisan activities mentioned in the Data and Methods section. All variables are nominal except for two continuous summative indices measuring the breadth of activities members have participated in on behalf of the party (0-4 scale), and the breadth of economic contributions made to the party (0-7 scale). Cluster analysis was used to explore the existence of mutually exclusive groups of similar members in the sample. If H3 was wrong, the analysis would not show a small number of clearly differentiated groups ranging from very active to very inactive members but a more fuzzy and heterogeneous picture where members can be both very active in one domain and inactive in others.

A 3-cluster solution was automatically selected based on BIC scores – adding additional clusters would have only marginally improved the BIC scores (see Figure 1A in the Appendix). The silhouette measure of cohesion and separation for the 3-cluster solution is 0.6, which is above the 0.5 threshold of good cluster quality.[[13]](#footnote-13)

The size and nature of the three clusters identified by the procedure is shown in Figure 1. By far the largest group identified (76.2% of the sample), which we have labelled ‘traditional members’, is made up of those who tend to participate in online internal ballots, but do not attend branch meetings, participate in working groups, represent their branches in regional meetings or have been elected to Podemos’ governing bodies. Importantly, ‘traditional members’ only participate in some activities on behalf of the party (mean = .4 on a 5-point scale), and do not engage with the options available to contribute economically to the party’s finances (mean = 0.42 on a 7-point scale). The second largest group in our sample (13.2%), which we have labelled ‘militants’, comprises members who are overall very active within the party. Militants declare to participate in internal ballots regularly (at least 96% of them do), attend branch meetings (78%), participate in working groups at the branch level (62%), and many of them even coordinate some working group (22%). Some of them (16%) represent their branch in regional bodies or regional working group meetings and some have been elected to Podemos’ governing bodies (5%). These members contribute actively to the party’s finances using several of the options available to them (mean = 1.36), and tend to participate in a range of external activities on behalf of the party (mean = 2.56). Lastly, the smallest group in our sample (10.5%), which we have labelled ‘audience’ or ‘friends’, are members all of whom do not regularly participate in internal ballots or attend meetings of any kind. Their contribution to the party’s finances is low (mean = 0.13) and so is their engagement with external activities on behalf of the party (mean = 0.19). Of course, we do not believe the group sizes can be generalised beyond our sample. Since our response rate is similar to turnout in some of the most relevant internal ballots, we did not expect many ‘friends/audience’ members -who are only loosely linked to the party- to have filled in the survey. This group is, therefore, likely to be largely underrepresented in our sample.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Coming back to H3, it is important to note that the clustering procedure failed to identify a consistent pattern of party members who are active in a range of external activities but are only loosely linked to the party. It may be argued that any segmenting procedure which is designed to identify mutually exclusive categories will inevitably force respondents to fit within one of the clusters. However, although outliers do indeed exist, there was little evidence in our data of substantive numbers of ‘inactive’ traditional members or activists who are only loosely linked to the party. The percentage of respondents who regularly attend branch meetings but do not participate in external partisan activities is only 1.3%. In a similar vein, those who do attend branch meetings are significantly (p<0.01) more engaged with a wider range of external activities (mean = 2.7 on the 5-point index of activity breadth) than those who do not (mean = 0.44). This provides strong evidence that the flexible organizational structure of Podemos has generated a concentric model of party organization with very active members at the core and less active members in the margins. In this vein, our results point towards a slightly more nuanced image of party membership engagement (with three types) than the one portrayed by Lisi and Cancela (2017) who found only two (active and passive members).

Finally, Hypothesis 4 states that more active members will have more socio-economic resources and stronger ideological attachments with the party than less active members, and will also present higher levels of political engagement. To test this hypothesis, we first present descriptive statistics for the three groups of members identified through the two-step cluster analysis (Table 3). As can be seen, although there are some socio-demographic differences between ‘audience’, ‘traditional members’ and ‘militants’, most of those differences are small. Age is higher for more active members than for less active members. However, the proportion of males and females is similar for ‘militants’ and ‘audience’ (62%), but there are seemingly more males among ‘traditional members’ (69%). Differences are also small with regard to employment status, although the presence of retired and unemployed members seems to be somewhat higher among ‘militants’. Finally, higher levels of education can be appreciated among ‘traditional members’ in particular, followed by ‘militants’. Regarding associational involvement, there is a clear (though not strong) positive relationship between type of member and the number of associations they belong to. On average, ‘militants’ belong to at least one civic or political association (mean = 0.9), but this figure is smaller for ‘traditional members’ (0.8) and ‘audience’ (0.7). Differences in political participation are really modest, with ‘militants’ being slightly more active. When it comes to ideological differences, militants are also somewhat more left-wing (2.68) than ‘traditional members’ (2.72) and ‘audience’ (2.84), and they also see Podemos as being ideologically closer to them, while they perceive IU and particularly PSOE as ideologically more distant.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

By and large, Table 3 shows very small differences between members, with little evidence of socio-demographic differences and somewhat more robust evidence when it comes to ideological differences and differences in associational involvement. The multivariate analyses confirm those findings (Table 4). As can be seen, ‘traditional members’ are more likely than ‘audience’ adherents to be male, and are also more likely than them to be highly educated (Model 1). The effect of education is only significant at p<0.05, but its significance increases when we control for ideological distance with Podemos and other parties (Models 3 and 4). There is also very weak evidence that militants are largely distinct from ‘audience’ adherents in their socio-economic characteristics, with the exception of unemployment as they are more likely than any other category of adherents to be unemployed. The first part of H4 does, therefore, not find strong support in the data, as the degree of involvement with the party does not seem to be explained by socio-economic resources. In contrast, what is correlated with type of member is ideology and associational involvement. The more left-wing members are, the more active they are likely to be (Model 3). Similarly, the smaller the perceived ideological distance between members and their party (and the larger the distance between them and other competitors), the more active they are (Model 4). Finally, while the degree of associational involvement does not seem to be largely different for ‘audience’ and ‘traditional members’, ‘militants’ are more likely to be engaged with a higher number of civic/political associations (Model 5). These findings support the last part of H4, which states that more active members have stronger ideological attachments with the party, but also point to higher degrees of associational engagement among them.

[TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

**Conclusions**

In the context of the rise of multi-speed membership parties, Podemos represents an extreme case of redefinition of the membership notion which makes no formal distinction between different types of adherent and allows anybody who wishes to do so to participate in all the key internal decision-making processes and party activities with minimal procedural requirements. This innovative membership approach has nevertheless not led to the disappearance of the well-known gap between voters’ and members’ profiles. Podemos members are still significantly more resourceful in terms of education, employment status, and activity in voluntary associations, and are more likely than voters to be men. Moreover, members are also more ideologically extreme than voters, and feel closer to the party and more distant from its left-wing competitors. A more fluid, open and inclusive membership strategy, providing greater incentives for affiliation, has therefore not helped eradicate the members-voters gap. Our findings confirm that, even for such an innovative party, participation is greatly influenced by individuals’ resources and ideological commitment (e.g. Verba et al 1978; Whiteley 2011).

Besides looking at the differences between Podemos members and supporters, we also analysed how adherents choose to engage with the party. By and large, our findings suggest that the classic distinction between the wider electorate, supporters, members and militants outlined by Duverger (1954) has only partially lost its analytical relevance. An analysis of members’ activity finds their behaviour has engendered a concentric model of engagement that enabled us to identify three groups, from less to more involvement, that we have labelled ‘audience/friends’, ‘traditional members’ and ‘militants’. These categories (particularly the existence of a group of ‘audience/friends’) partially reflect some of Scarrow’s (2015) categories of multi-speed membership. Podemos does not offer different modes of affiliation but the unprompted behavior of its members has de facto engendered some sort of multi-speed membership organization.

For some parties, multi-speed membership strategies seem to have led to the blurring of Duverger’s distinctions. In those parties, traditional party membership co-exists with new categories of affiliates that enjoy rights and perform tasks previously reserved to core party members. This gives raise to situations in which new affiliates (such as ‘friends’ or ‘sympathisers’) may participate more actively in partisan activities than traditional members – thereby obscuring the organizational and analytical distinction between those categories (Scarrow 2015). However, the case of Podemos shows that is not the end of the story. When a new party purposely removes any distinction between types of adherents and, through a very inclusive and cost-free procedure, allows everyone who agrees to become a member to participate in all party activities, individuals eventually align themselves into concentric groups where those at the centre are more active than the rest in both internal and external partisan activities.

In this way, our findings put into question the capacity of new models of party membership to live up to their expectations. The radically new notion of membership implemented by Podemos has not been able to remedy the voters-members gap and, with it, one of the likely sources of party malaise. Similarly, Podemos’ membership model has not removed the well-known gender gap in party membership (Coffe and Bolzendahl 2010). or completely fulfilled expectations regarding internal participation. Podemos’ members group together into concentric groups that differ in their degrees of engagement, which could potentially create the sort of internal oligarchy the party aimed to avoid. While our findings come from a case study, there is no reason to think they cannot be found in other new parties too. If Podemos’ innovative approach to membership has fell short of the expectations attributed to organizational innovations, other more modest attempts should more clearly reproduce old patterns.

Interestingly enough, the differences in Podemos members’ levels of activism do not seem to be mostly due to disparities in resources.[[14]](#footnote-14) Traditional members are a very particular subset of adherents who are ideologically motivated and have experience participating in a range of other movements or associations. Many of them are best defined as militants who are driven by ideological/motivational reasons and organizational experience rather than socio-economic factors. In this way, Podemos’ model seems to spontaneously generate an ideologically driven participatory ‘elite’ despite the party’s attempts to expand participation and to fight inequalities in this regard.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In sum, our results question the implications of some new membership categorisations, cast doubt about the capacity of new membership models to have consequential effects and seem to strengthen classic typologies (Duverger 1954; Scarrow 2015). However, the introduction of new, loose and flexible forms of affiliation is still a recent phenomenon. While this article analyses the case of a fully new party, further research should investigate the way in which party adherents choose from the repertoire of (formal or behavioural) affiliation opportunities available to them in a broader range of parties. In addition, we believe future studies should rely on panel data to address the dynamic nature of party membership -with members moving between different forms of affiliation (Scarrow 2015)-, and the factors determining such changes. Only then will we be able to fully understand the complexities of contemporary forms of party affiliation.

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**FIGURES AND TABLES**

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of members and voters with bivariate significance tests.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Members | Voters | Sig |
| Age | 43 | 44 |  |
| Gender (% Male) | 67 | 50 | \*\*\* |
| Working (%) | 64 | 54 |  |
| Retired (%) | 17 | 14 |  |
| Unemployed (%) | 14 | 23 | \*\*\* |
| Student (%) | 4 | 6 |  |
| Homemaker (%) | 1 | 4 | \*\*\* |
| Primary education or less (%) | 6 | 11 | \*\*\* |
| Secondary education (%) | 32 | 41 | \*\*\* |
| Higher education (%) | 62 | 48 | \*\*\* |
| Left-right ideology | 2.7 | 3.0 | \*\*\* |
| Distance Podemos | 0.7 | 1.0 | \*\*\* |
| Distance IU | 0.9 | 1.1 | \*\*\* |
| Distance PSOE | 3.7 | 2.8 | \*\*\* |
| Associational involvement (0-6) | 0.8 | 0.3 | \*\*\* |
| Political participation (0-4) | 2.2 | 2.4 | \*\*\* |
| n | 4,942 | 141 |  |
| + p <0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p <0.001 |  |  |

Table 2. Logistic regression models explaining differences between voters and members.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|  | Voters v members | Voters v members | Voters v members | Voters v members |
| age | -0.037+ | -0.037+ | -0.037+ | -0.029 |
|  | (0.021) | (0.021) | (0.021) | (0.021) |
| Secondary education | -0.527\*\*\* | -0.493\*\*\* | -0.450\*\* | -0.392\* |
|  | (0.098) | (0.108) | (0.140) | (0.159) |
| Higher education | -0.982\*\*\* | -0.947\*\*\* | -1.057\*\*\* | -0.919\*\*\* |
|  | (0.103) | (0.110) | (0.143) | (0.176) |
| male | -0.708\*\*\* | -0.718\*\*\* | -0.824\*\*\* | -0.805\*\*\* |
|  | (0.040) | (0.045) | (0.070) | (0.070) |
| retired | 0.697 | 0.702 | 0.748 | 0.669 |
|  | (0.460) | (0.462) | (0.472) | (0.452) |
| unemployed | 0.634\*\*\* | 0.667\*\*\* | 0.752\*\*\* | 0.603\*\*\* |
|  | (0.073) | (0.066) | (0.088) | (0.075) |
| student | -0.309 | -0.308 | -0.518 | -0.588 |
|  | (0.531) | (0.534) | (0.545) | (0.537) |
| homemaker | 1.833\*\*\* | 1.870\*\*\* | 2.136\*\*\* | 2.285\*\*\* |
|  | (0.191) | (0.189) | (0.220) | (0.229) |
| ideology |  | 0.215\*\*\* |  |  |
|  |  | (0.029) |  |  |
| distance Podemos |  |  | 0.388\*\*\* | 0.391\*\*\* |
|  |  |  | (0.037) | (0.039) |
| distance IU |  |  | -0.071\* | -0.076\*\* |
|  |  |  | (0.027) | (0.027) |
| distance PSOE |  |  | -0.400\*\*\* | -0.444\*\*\* |
|  |  |  | (0.026) | (0.022) |
| political participation index |  |  |  | 0.358\*\*\* |
|  |  |  |  | (0.024) |
| association index |  |  |  | -0.699\*\*\* |
|  |  |  |  | (0.058) |
| intercept | -0.915 | -1.553 | 0.195 | -0.585 |
|  | (1.423) | (1.419) | (1.456) | (1.474) |
| N | 4,641 | 4,641 | 4,641 | 4,641 |
| Standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: education – less than secondary education; employment relation – currently employed. |
| + p<.1; \* p<.05; \*\* p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001 |

Figure 1. Description of clusters.

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Table 3. Descriptive statistics of different clusters of adherents with bivariate significance tests.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Audience/friends | Traditional members |  Militants |
| Age | 41 | 43 | 45 | \*\*\* |
| Gender (% Male) | 62 | 69 | 62 | \*\*\* |
| Working (%) | 67 | 65 | 57 |  |
| Retired (%) | 13 | 17 | 23 |  |
| Unemployed (%) | 15 | 13 | 17 | \* |
| Student (%) | 4 | 4 | 3 |  |
| Homemaker (%) | 1 | 1 | 1 |  |
| Primary education or less (%) | 8 | 5 | 8 | + |
| Secondary education (%) | 33 | 32 | 29 |  |
| Higher education (%) | 59 | 62 | 63 |  |
| Left-right ideology | 2.84 | 2.72 | 2.68 | \*\* |
| Distance Podemos | 0.73 | 0.66 | 0.6 | + |
| Distance IU | 0.89 | 0.88 | 0.94 |  |
| Distance PSOE | 3.36 | 3.69 | 3.84 | \*\*\* |
| Associational involvement (0-6) | 0.7 | 0.8 | 0.9 | \*\*\* |
| Political participation (0-4) | 2.2 | 2.2 | 2.3 | \* |
| n | 526 | 3,801 | 661 |  |
| + p <0.1, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p <0.01 |  |  |  |

Table 4. Multinomial logistic regression with different clusters of adherents.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Model 1 |  | Model 2 |  | Model 3 |  | Model 4 |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Traditional member v audience | Militantv audience | Traditional member v audience | Militantv audience | Traditional member v audience | Militantv audience | Traditional member v audience | Militantv audience |
| Age | 0.0113 | 0.0317 | 0.0112 | 0.0315 | 0.0107 | 0.0313 | 0.0101 | 0.0307 |
|  | (0.020) | (0.026) | (0.020) | (0.025) | (0.020) | (0.025) | (0.020) | (0.026) |
| Secondary education | 0.431\* | 0.154 | 0.405\* | 0.128 | 0.442\*\* | 0.190 | 0.434\*\* | 0.153 |
|  | (0.160) | (0.294) | (0.156) | (0.289) | (0.151) | (0.289) | (0.152) | (0.287) |
| Higher education | 0.530\* | 0.385 | 0.507\* | 0.362 | 0.617\*\* | 0.527+ | 0.595\*\* | 0.407 |
|  | (0.211) | (0.294) | (0.207) | (0.290) | (0.200) | (0.290) | (0.209) | (0.289) |
| Male | 0.286\*\* | 0.0280 | 0.292\*\* | 0.0339 | 0.336\*\* | 0.0868 | 0.332\*\* | 0.0728 |
|  | (0.092) | (0.135) | (0.094) | (0.135) | (0.100) | (0.143) | (0.098) | (0.143) |
| Retired | 0.0720 | 0.0981 | 0.0689 | 0.0957 | 0.0719 | 0.100 | 0.0913 | 0.246 |
|  | (0.507) | (0.646) | (0.506) | (0.644) | (0.504) | (0.643) | (0.494) | (0.636) |
| Unemployed | -0.0220 | 0.342+ | -0.0423 | 0.318+ | -0.0713 | 0.275 | -0.0521 | 0.405\* |
|  | (0.111) | (0.174) | (0.114) | (0.183) | (0.117) | (0.181) | (0.117) | (0.183) |
| Student | 0.229 | 0.756 | 0.220 | 0.743 | 0.283 | 0.817 | 0.290 | 0.940 |
|  | (0.619) | (0.835) | (0.609) | (0.822) | (0.601) | (0.811) | (0.592) | (0.830) |
| Homemaker | 0.474 | 0.626 | 0.463 | 0.613 | 0.367 | 0.454 | 0.360 | 0.527 |
|  | (0.492) | (1.061) | (0.500) | (1.057) | (0.506) | (1.100) | (0.515) | (1.074) |
| Ideology |  |  | -0.159\*\* | -0.183\*\*\* |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | (0.044) | (0.044) |  |  |  |  |
| distance Podemos |  |  |  |  | -0.174\* | -0.295\*\* | -0.175\* | -0.315\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  | (0.069) | (0.082) | (0.068) | (0.086) |
| Distance IU |  |  |  |  | 0.0762 | 0.234\*\* | 0.0801 | 0.257\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  | (0.049) | (0.072) | (0.048) | (0.074) |
| Distance PSOE |  |  |  |  | 0.160\*\*\* | 0.212\*\*\* | 0.161\*\*\* | 0.210\*\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  | (0.032) | (0.034) | (0.034) | (0.037) |
| political participation index |  |  |  |  |  |  | -0.00450 | 0.0838+ |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | (0.039) | (0.048) |
| association index |  |  |  |  |  |  | 0.0537 | 0.265\*\*\* |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  | (0.054) | (0.060) |
| Intercept | 0.799 | -1.764 | 1.271 | -1.222 | 0.230 | -2.649\* | 0.228 | -2.990\* |
|  | (0.974) | (1.198) | (0.948) | (1.160) | (0.908) | (1.103) | (0.955) | (1.163) |
| N | 4,516 | 4,516 | 4,516 | 4,516 | 4,516 | 4,516 | 4,516 | 4,516 |
| Standard errors in parentheses. Reference categories: education – less than secondary education; employment relation – currently employed. |
| + p<.1, \*p<.05, \*\*p <.01, \*\*\* p<.001 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**APPENDIX**

Figure 1A. Two-step cluster analysis. BIC scores for different numbers of clusters.



1. Widfeldt (1995) reached similar conclusions using population surveys. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For example, Gomez and Tonge (2016) find that new members of the Democratic Unionist Party are slightly more moderate, facilitating the party’s strategic moderation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. However, this could be explained by stronger careerism as implied by van Biezen et al. (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bernardi et al. (2017) analyze the differences between ‘old-style’ and ‘new-style’ members in the Italian Democratic Party; and Sandri and Seddone (2017) analyze differences between diverse types of members and supporters in this same party. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. On Podemos see Ramiro and Gomez (2017), Gómez-Reino and Llamazares (forthcoming) and, Rodríguez-Teruel et al. (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In 2015, members/voters ratios for the other main parties were as follows: PP = 0.12, PSOE = 0.03 and Citizens = 0.01. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. All members have an email address. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 80% of the answers were received in the first week of fieldwork. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This includes contributing through loans for electoral campaigns, crowdfunding, one-off donations, regular fees, regular fee paid to the party’s foundation, buying official merchandising, or helping the local branch economically to fund individual activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This includes volunteering to organise any party activity or campaign; assisting with information tables; hanging posters in electoral campaigns; and acting as party representative at a polling station. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. This includes membership of trade unions, professional associations, environmentalist associations, sports associations, parents’ associations, and neighbourhood associations. For the analysis, a summative index of associational involvement was constructed ranging from 0 (no membership) to 6 (member of all six types of associations). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. This includes taking part in demonstrations, strikes, occupations or blockades, and political consumerism. For the analysis, a summative index of political participation was constructed ranging from 0 (has not taken place in any of those activities) to 4 (has taken place in all the four types of activities). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. To check that the cluster solution was not influenced by the order of cases, we randomly rearranged the data matrix several times and results were always the same. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Further research will be needed to confirm that this finding indicates a different pattern to the one found by Webb et al. (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Podemos is currently coming to terms with this reality and has timidly started to formally distinguish ‘militants’ from affiliates, although both groups have the same rights and obligations (Podemos 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)