Examining extra-parliamentary engagement: the impact of online and offline activities on in-party commitment amongst political party members in Finland

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Abstract

Purpose – The study utilises unique survey data gathered from 12,427 party members. The dependent variable measures party members' in-party commitment and is based on willingness to donate money, to contribute effort, the feeling of belonging in the party network and social trust in the party network.

Design/methodology/approach – In this article, we study how different extra-parliamentary online and offline activities are associated with in-party commitment amongst political party members from the six largest Finnish parties. We especially delve into the differences between members of the Finnish parties.

Findings – We found that extra-parliamentary political activity, including connective action through social media networks and collective action through civic organisations, is highly associated with members' in-party commitment. Additionally, members of the newer identity parties more effectively utilised social media networks, whilst the traditional interest parties were still more linked to traditional forms of extra-parliamentary political action.

Originality/value – By employing the sociological network theory perspective, the study contributes to ongoing discussions surrounding the impact of social media on political participation amongst party members, both within and beyond the confines of political parties.

Keywords Party members, Party network, Connective action, Collective action, Social media, Finland

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

During the latter half of the 20th century, political systems and parties were *professionalised* and *cartelised*: due to the increase in both state funding and the number of professionals within parties, parties were no longer seen as dependent on the total number of members or their activity (Gauja *et al.*, 2020; Katz, 1990). As a result of professionalisation and cartelisation, the value of individual party members began to inflate, and parties were no longer as dependent on the sheer size or grassroots activism of their membership base. However, in contemporary politics this landscape has been reshaped dramatically with the

rise of social media, as individual actors now have the capacity to reach and engage vast audiences, enabling them to actively shape the public sphere and influence public opinion (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2023; McLean and Fuller, 2016; Slavina, 2021; Theocharis *et al.*, 2023; Ziegler, 2023). Consequently, the quantity and the activity of loyal social groups have become again valuable assets for political parties (Bale *et al.*, 2019; Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2023; Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016; van Haute and Ribeiro, 2022; Ziegler, 2023). This deflation of value begs scholars to redirect their analytical focus again to party members in this evolving political landscape.

Although political parties are perceived as well-engineered social machines pursuing set political goals, parties are also messy bundles of social relations. The social complexity of parties emerges especially through the parties' members. First, the party members can be considered as inter-organisational actors who interlace political parties with other political organisations and movements by acting politically in several different contexts outside the formal field of parliamentary politics (Berry, 1969; Heaney and Rojas, 2007). Moreover, during recent decades, party membership itself has become somewhat hazier: some parties have now lowered the requirements for being a member, but simultaneously, members are in some cases offered more prominence than in prior decades (Achury *et al.*, 2020; van Haute and Ribeiro, 2022; Webb *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, the differences between members and supporters have become muddled as even non-members are now engaging actively on behalf of political parties, especially on social media (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016; Webb *et al.*, 2017). Overall, what follows from this social complexity is that instead of being clear-cut organisations, parties should be understood as liquid social networks with lucid boundaries.

The lack of clarity in organisational boundaries manifests in different ways in a wide range of settings. Thus, it is topical to investigate the cross-border dynamics of party members' political action within and outside the party boundaries. In this article, with aid of extensive survey data ($n = 12,427$), we aim to capture the elusive boundaries of political parties by assessing the cycle of in-party commitment and out-party engagement. Our data includes observations from the members of the six biggest Finnish parties: the Centre Party (CPF), Finns Party (FP), National Coalition Party (NCP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), Green League (GL) and Left Alliance (LA).

Our analytical aims are threefold. First, we contribute to the methodological discussion and form a measurement for party members' in-party commitment based on theoretical discussions on social networks. Our multicomponent dependent variable covers members' willingness to contribute their personal resources (e.g. time, effort, money) on behalf of the party, as well as the affective aspects (e.g. trust and feeling of belonging) behind members' commitment within their parties.

Second, by assessing *the cycle of in-party commitment and out-party engagement*, we examine how different types of extra-parliamentary engagement are connected with members' commitment within the party. Due to political engagement's diversification in the era of social media, party members now have a variety of means for participation (Bale *et al.*, 2019; Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016; Webb *et al.*, 2020; Ziegler, 2023). Therefore, we investigate (RQ1) how party members utilise traditional means of collective extra-parliamentary engagement – such as engaging through labour unions or civil organisations – and connective forms of online engagement on social media. More importantly, we assess (RQ2) how these modes of actions – collective and connective forms of extra-parliamentary political activity – correlate with in-party commitment.

Third, in addition to examining the cycle of in-party commitment and out-party engagement in general, we investigate (RQ3) to what extent members of various Finnish parties utilise both traditional means of extra-parliamentary collective action and new means of online connective action. Recent research proposes that Finnish parties vary highly in how

they are connected to extra-parliamentary organisations, as well as how their members and supporters utilise social media platforms (Koiranen *et al.*, 2020; Raunio and Laine, 2017). In particular, we are interested in the differences between members of the traditional interest parties (NCP, CPF and SDP) and the newer identity parties (FP, GL and LA).

The article is structured as follows. Next, we define how parties could be comprehended foremost as networks and how party members' commitment is transformed into an important resource and clarify how party members participate outside the parliamentary politics and how participatory networks have transformed in recent years. After this, we produce our theoretical model and research hypotheses for dynamics between in-party commitment and out-party engagement and for party differences based on previous research. Before our empirical analysis, we present the details of methods and data. In the discussion section, we present our findings' broader implications and consider potential limitations of this article.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Inside the party network: party members' commitment as a political resource

In the past, party members were considered important resources for parties in three different ways, namely by increasing party funds, labour and (extra-parliamentary) political impact (Berry, 1969). This resource analogy pointed especially to the "amount" of resources: the more members there are, the more money can potentially be collected and the more campaign workers can be recruited. However, the analogy also indicates the "value" of party resources, as committed and actively participating party members are more likely to act on behalf of their parties. Especially during the era of social media, this understanding of the "value" shifts the attention from quantity to quality as a small group of highly committed party members, together with abundant donators, could have potential to generate a wider impact than a large but passive mass of rank-and-file members.

To comprehend the "value" of resources more precisely, especially in the current era of social media, it is crucial to acknowledge the detailed structures in which these resources appear. Earlier theoretical discussions indicate that people's social surroundings have an important role as a source of political influence, information and ideas (Zuckerman, 2005). In this study, we offer a network-based perspective for understanding members' political activity by acknowledging the prominence of social networks within political parties as sources of shared norms, information, ideas and values, as well as emphasising the importance of trust, loyalty and commitment within party networks. In essence, our argument revolves around the idea that party members' networks play a pivotal role in offering value to political parties, ultimately serving as crucial avenues through which parties can attain power within parliamentary democracies.

Theoretical discussions related to social networks provide a detailed picture of the formation of in-party commitment as well as the basic structure for the dynamics of out-party engagement. The basic premise for the formation of social networks includes the internal trust of the network actors, which also enables the network to function effectively towards common goals (e.g. Coleman, 1988). Generally, a network is a set of collaborating actors based on loyalty, solidarity and trust (Uzzi, 1996), which materialises into participatory activity as people perceive themselves more embedded in their surroundings (Lee and Brudney, 2009). The importance of these social factors is also highlighted in recruiting processes, as research indicates that a political party is joined by a number of social factors (Zuckerman, 2005; Poletti *et al.*, 2019; Sierens *et al.*, 2023). Similarly, recent research shows that active engagement in local social networks holds a pivotal influence in motivating individuals to dedicate a substantial amount of their time to campaign activities on behalf of political parties (Webb *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, it is beneficial for party leaders to have a large number of

members committed within the party as a social network. First, based on the idea of weak ties (Granovetter, 1983), the wider the network is, the more influence it has. Second and more important, the closer the network is, the better the norms associated with the party network function and the better information flows within the network (Granovetter, 2005).

Similarly, it is important to acknowledge how party networks are structured and especially how members are positioned in the party's interfaces. Accordingly, a party can gain a competitive advantage if its members are across the interfaces of the prominent external networks, such as corporatist organisations or social movements. Then, the key nodes in networks can obtain and benefit from information better and faster compared to others (see Burt, 2004). Heaney and Rojas (2007) have shown how committed members across party boundaries can act on behalf of the party within social movements, simultaneously maintaining loyalty to political party. Additionally, social networks can be useful for the members because they enable advantages derived from other actors' potential and information (Campbell *et al.*, 1986; Lin, 1999, 2008). Thus, wide networks that cross party boundaries provide influence for both the parties and their members.

Additionally, it is prominent to understand the dynamics of social ties within the party organisation. The starting point for network-based understanding is that a political party is principally a socially formed organisation that brings together like-minded people who seek shared goals and are from shared social environments built on over-generational processes, friendships, or business relations (Zuckerman, 2005). These shared social surroundings are constituted by strong ties amongst party members, fostering trust and repeated interactions. Members also possess a range of weak ties that connect them to others' strong ties, enabling them to achieve goals and disseminate information (Granovetter, 1983). Then, wide social networks built on these weak ties enhance people's engagement in political activities, consequently expanding the networks themselves (e.g.Kahne and Bowyer, 2018; Lee and Brudney, 2009; Lim, 2008; Webb *et al.*, 2020; Quintelier *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, members located socially in ways that increase their exposure to other people are potentially able to facilitate high levels of social, political and economic resources for political parties as well (see La Due Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998).

Overall, parties can leverage members' social ties to promote effective party organisation if they have committed members who actively participate on behalf of their party in various social contexts. Those parties which offer more opportunities for representation for their internal sub-groups and set lower barriers to the enrolment of new members, present higher levels of membership (van Haute and Ribeiro, 2022). Thus, both strong and cohesive in-party networks and widely spread out-party ties are transformed into valuable resources for the parties. Obviously, functional networks provide prominent benefits and resources for party organisations, as members' commitment leads to positive outcomes, such as trust and cooperation between members and a willingness to contribute on behalf of the party organisation. Thus, instead of just assessing the number of party members, it is important to recognise the party network's more distinct factors and features. These affective feelings of belongingness, trust and willingness to act on behalf of the wider group turn into value for the party network, which is often neglected in discussions related to political parties' abilities and especially is pronounced in the era of digital communication.

2.2 Party members' participation from the inside out: collective and connective out-party engagement
As mentioned, party members' political participation materialises not only through parties, but also through different voluntary organisations, trade unions, movements, demonstrations and boycotts (e.g. Berry, 1969; Demker *et al.*, 2019; Heaney and Rojas, 2007; Wauters, 2018). These other "vessels of political influence" are providing a variety of

means for participation, which may occasionally substitute political parties (Katz, 1990). Yet, again the relation of the two is not a zero-sum game: Various organisations and movements work in tandem with political parties as their motives, members and networks are embedded within each other.

When party members act in different organisations, they become connective ties between networks. Then, members' political actions could be seen as channelling through different informal branches aiming to support parties' political goals in the formal sphere of politics. Then again, this is a two-way road: different extra-parliamentary organisations' and movements' interests are transmitted via parties to the field of parliamentary politics as well (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016; Heaney and Rojas, 2007). Overall, this intermingling of different political fields can be understood as based on overlapping social networks formed by party members.

In addition to traditional organisations and political movements, various means of digitalised communication, such as social media platforms, now offer party members new means to engage. Digital media have been seen to be in a prominent position in recent changes of participatory culture (Bennett *et al.*, 2018; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2023; Kosiara-Pedersen and Heidar, 2019; McLean and Fuller, 2016; Theocharis *et al.*, 2023; Ziegler, 2023). The recent transformation of participatory activities in general has been characterised by the idea that citizens' engagement and political participation have become more individual and that people are engaging apart from collective action frames or organisations – such as political parties (Bennett *et al.*, 2018; Schradie, 2019; Slavina, 2021).

New forms of participation differ from the traditional forms in the sense of how participation is organised and how participatory networks are structured (e.g.Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Slavina, 2021). Traditional collective action mainly refers to political involvement occurring through strong organisational coordination, whilst internet-based participation has usually little or no organisational control (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). In the online era, individuals are more likely embedded in loosely knit networks rather than being members of traditional organisations. These online-constituted political networks are also more horizontal when compared to conventional political organisations (Klinger and Svenson, 2015). Consequently, networks that facilitate the connective forms of political action seem to be drastically different when compared to hierarchical collective political organisations.

In addition to differences in networks' social and organisational structures, the new means of participation differ in the sense of how participants frame the action and in which roles participants are performing action (Bennett *et al.*, 2018; Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). First, the new means of political action are based on more individual motivations, where different personalised premises are connected to larger political goals rather than explicit interest-based struggles (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Theocharis *et al.*, 2023). Second, in the digital political sphere, individualised motivations had partly substituted the collectively shared action frames that formerly guided the purposes of political movements (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012). In turn, connective action is motivated by more personal action frames, participation can be employed through more individual motivations and political identification is more likely to be founded on certain lifestyles, values and views (ibid.).

The wider changes in participatory practices have affected political parties considerably as parties themselves have begun to utilise connective action and as parties are now utilised for achieving political goals with the aid of connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Heaney and Rojas, 2007; Koc-Michalska *et al.*, 2023; Schradie, 2019). In this process, social media functions as vital sphere for party members' participation, offering tools that promote collaboration without rigid hierarchies, access to information resources and a sense of connection amongst diverse groups (Bennett *et al.*, 2018; Gerl *et al.*, 2017; Gil de Zúñiga *et al.*, 2012; Koiranen, 2022). Research highlights that political discussions on social media can
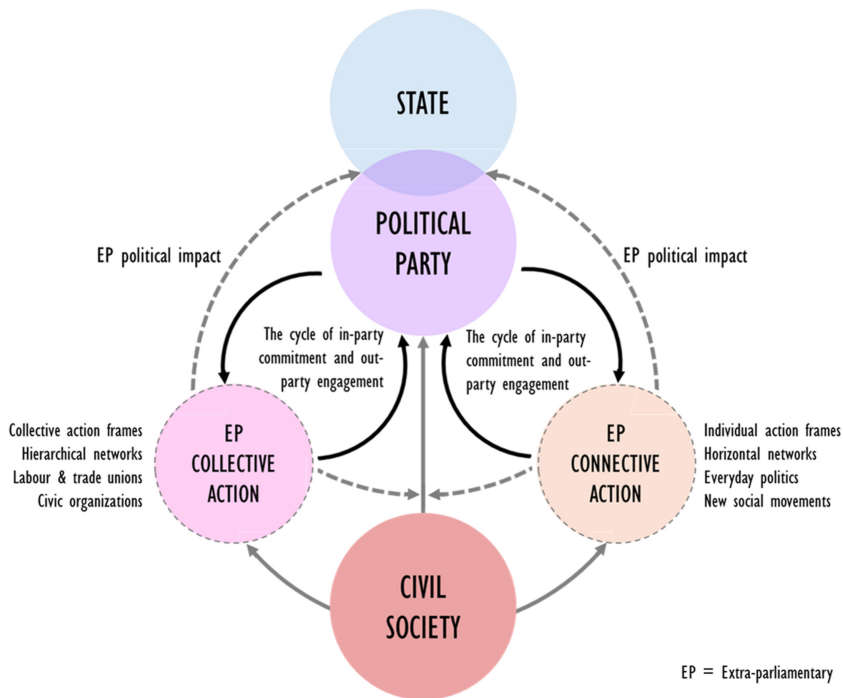
enhance interactions amongst party members and break down political hierarchies, as both members and non-members engage in party-related conversations (Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016). This shift has engendered so-called online ambassadors, who actively promote their parties and political views across various platforms by participating in political discussions (Kosiara-Pedersen and Heidar, 2019, p. 140, pp. 145–148). As a result, online media interactions not only boost members' inclination to engage with political parties but also expand the parties' influence beyond their organisational boundaries.

Notably, there are differences in the extent to which parties have been able to utilise these new means of communication, campaigning and engagement. According to earlier research in Finland, as in other Nordic countries, new identity parties' supporters are more likely to perform politically on social media than traditional interest parties' supporters are (Kosiara-Pedersen and Heidar, 2019, p. 140, pp. 145–148; Koiranen *et al.*, 2020). Naturally, this is also reflected in the political field and power relations between the parties.

3. Research design

3.1 Hypotheses

Figure 1 presents our analytical frame followed in the empirical study. Previous research underscores the enduring significance of the extra-parliamentary arena as a complementary force to party politics. It also highlights that party members remain active participants in various organisations, engaging in a range of political actions (Heaney and Rojas, 2007; Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016).Whilst party members are significant links bridging these participatory fields, party activities also leak and spread outside the party organisations'

Figure 1.
Theoretical framework
of the cycle of in-party
commitment and out-
party engagement

Source(s): Figure created by authors

boundaries, aiming to support parties' prerequisites for success in the electorate and in government. Accordingly, by focussing on Finnish party members, we want to discover how different extra-parliamentary activities interlock with members' commitment to their own parties. We call this dynamic *the cycle of in-party commitment and out-party engagement,* and we propose that (H1) *party members' extra-parliamentary participation is connected with high commitment within the party networks.*

According to previous research, there is a clear tension between traditional collective action and new means of political participation (e.g.Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; Theocharis *et al.*, 2023). In the analyses, we separated the modes of extra-parliamentary participation into two different categories: *collective extra-parliamentary participation* and *connective extra-parliamentary participation.* We propose that (H2) *connective and collective forms of out-party engagement are separate dimensions of extra-parliamentary engagement.*

We also analyse the interplay between party politics and extra-parliamentary participation, comparing various political parties. We emphasise differences in extra-parliamentary involvement, reflecting party members' commitment levels. Recognising contextual and historical factors within parties, we highlight distinctions in organisational structures and member participation approaches (Koivula, 2019, pp. 43–45). Our theoretical party categorisation is based on the combination of temporal, ideological, organisational and inter-organisational characteristics. First, parties could be categorised in the sense of relation to temporality: the old parties dominated the field of politics before, but now there are other, newer parties as well. Ideologically the traditional interest-based parties (CPF, NCP and SDP) focus on core political questions aligned with specific groups. Conversely, new identity-based parties (FP, GL, LA) prioritise more post-material concerns (e.g. Koivula *et al.*, 2019; see more Inglehart, 1990). Similarly, there are differences in how "the old" and "the new" are organised, how they facilitate democratic processes within and how the party network is structured (Keipi *et al.*, 2017; Koivula, 2019). Additionally, "the old" clearly functions as tandem with corporatist organisations, whilst "the new" parties' and corporatist organisations' connections remain relatively weak (Raunio and Laine, 2017). Acknowledging these distinctions is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of political parties in diverse contexts.

Recent empirical evidence in Finland supports the idea that different parties' members and supporters engage differently in collective and connective actions. Members of new identity parties are more active on social media, whereas members of traditional interest parties actively engage in trade unions and other interest groups (Kosiara-Pedersen and Heidar, 2019, p. 145; Koiranen *et al.*, 2020; Koiranen, 2022, pp. 34–37; Raunio and Laine, 2017). Following this, we argue that organisational, ideological and cultural features may encourage or discourage members to engage in different extra-parliamentary fields of politics. Therefore, we propose that (H3) *collective and connective modes of out-party engagement connect in-party commitment differently within traditional interest parties and new identity parties.*

3.2 Participants

The member-based surveys were collected from members of the six largest Finnish political parties between April 2016 and September 2016. The surveys reached over 50,000 Finnish party members from a national total of 200,000. The final number of respondents was 12,427. Older party members were slightly underrepresented, and we corrected the sample proportion to meet the population criteria with the post-stratified weights. The weights also considered the disproportions between the final samples and parties' real membership rates. Thus, we also weighted the samples to meet proportional population shares in the parties. Table 1 shows more detailed information related to data collection and the samples.

	Time	Response	Sample type	Population	Sample size	Final sample	Mean weight
Green League (GL)	Apr 2016	Internet	1	6,951	6,034	1,653	0.23
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Jun 2016	Internet and mail	2	40,754	5,000	1,540	1.61
Centre Party of Finland (CPF)	Jun 2016	Internet and mail	2	1,01,618	22,097	3,967	1.56
Left Alliance (LA)	Aug 2016	Internet and mail	2	10,173	6,764	2,384	0.26
Finns Party (FP)	Sep 2016	Internet and mail	2	9,520	6,022	1,932	0.30
National Coalition Party (NCP)	Sep 2016	Internet	3	35,000	5,000	951	2.24
Total				2,04,016	50,917	12,427	

Note(s): Sample types
1 = Total sample from email register
2 = Simple random sample from postal and email register
3 = Total sample from email register
Source(s): Table created by authors

3.3 Measures
Whilst there are measurements for incentives explaining why party members act for different purposes (e.g. Katz, 1990; Lee and Brudney, 2009), we provide a network-based insight related to party members' costs – or sacrificed resources – derived from the altruistic purposes and especially the affection members feel towards the party network. Our dependent variable, the measure of members' in-party commitment, is based on four different items. The aim is to consider commitment with the party network with separate components measuring: *(1) willingness to donate money, (2) willingness to contribute effort, (3) feelings of belonging in the party network* and *(4) social trust in the party network*. Due to the timing of the data collection, instead of asking, for example, how often participants had concretely done something for their parties, we enquired about how willing they felt they were to contribute. In this manner, our measure is not that prone to seasonal variance of party members' activity due, for example, to elections and party conferences.

By emphasising the social logic of political action, as part of our dependent variable, we measured these aspects by asking if members *felt willing to support party activities financially by donating money* and *if they were willing to contribute their time and effort* for the party's benefit. In addition to members' willingness to contribute on behalf of the party, we took into account other affective aspects behind members' commitment to their parties. First, we asked party members about their *feeling of belonging in the party network*, which refers to shared emotional connection with other members (McMillan and Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Second, we enquired about the level of party members' *social trust in the party network* by asking if members could trust fellow party members with managing their personal matters and sensitive information. Trust is generally acknowledged as one of the key social factors that holds networks together and evolves social cohesion within networks (Granovetter, 1985; Robinson, 1996).

Table 2 shows the descriptive information and inter-item correlations of the applied items. Responses to each question were given on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 = "strongly disagree," 2 = "disagree," 3 = "neither agree nor disagree," 4 = "agree," and 5 = "strongly agree." The internal consistency of items was relatively high (Cronbach's alpha 0.80), and the mean of the composite variable was 2.85 (SD = 0.94).

Our independent variables were *party affiliation*, *extra-parliamentary collective action* and *extra-parliamentary connective action*. Extra-parliamentary connective action was measured by analysing members' participation in political discussions on social media. The initial response options were 1 = "Never," 2 = "Sometimes," 3 = "Weekly," 4 = "Several times a week," 5 = "Daily," and 6 = "Several hours a day." For the analysis, we combined the last two categories to have a variable with five categories (1 = "Never" – 5 = "Daily"). The third variable measured extra-parliamentary collective action by assessing to what extent members cooperated with trade unions, the corporate sector, or NGOs. Members' activity was determined with the subjective question "How involved are you in cooperating with the following?" The responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "Not at all," 3 = "Some," and 5 = "A lot"). Because we were mostly interested in the effects of collaboration *per se*, we only considered the overall estimate of the variable and did not examine the associations of each component with in-party commitment. Accordingly, coding the variable considered whether the member was active in any of those examined organisations.

We also controlled for members' education, age, gender and duration of membership. We enquired membership duration by asking how long participants had been members of their party. Participants could choose whether they had been members "Under 5 years," "5–10 years," or "over 10 years" We classified the education variable by separating "Primary," "Secondary," "Bachelor's," and "Master's or higher." Participants were asked for their birth year, from which we calculated their age. In terms of gender, respondents were provided with three choices: "Female," "Male," and "Other." Given the low number of respondents identifying as non-binary, our analysis concentrated on comparing distinctions between the first two categories. The descriptive statistics of the independent variables are shown in Table 3.

3.4 Analysis techniques

In the first phase of our empirical analyses, we focussed on evaluating the direct impact of various action forms on the likelihood of members engaging within party networks. Simultaneously, we investigated the intricate connections between party affiliation and the diverse action forms. Moving into the second phase, we examined the direct influence of party affiliation on commitment within the party network, standardising control variables for precision. Additionally, our analysis delved into understanding the extent to which collective and connective actions were associated with commitment within the party network. Notably,

| | | Descriptives | | Factor scores | | Correlation matrix | | | |
		M	SD	L	U	V1	V2	V3	V4
(V1)	I am willing to donate to party activities financially	2.56	1.21	0.61	0.58	1.00			
(V2)	I am willing to volunteer for the benefit of my party	3.31	1.19	0.75	0.42	0.62	1.00		
(V3)	Cooperation with fellow party members makes me feel like I belong to a larger community	2.96	1.19	0.78	0.37	0.44	0.61	1.00	
(V4)	I can trust fellow party members with managing of my personal matters and sensitive information	2.56	1.14	0.65	0.53	0.36	0.44	0.57	1.00

Table 2.
Single items of dependent variable: means, standard deviations, loading and uniqueness with respect to the composite factor and inter-correlations between the items

Note(s): M = Mean, SD= Standard deviation, L = Factor loading and U= Uniqueness
Source(s): Table created by authors

	N	Mean/PR	Std.dev	Min	Max
Dependent variables					
Commitment within the party network	12,298	2.85	0.94	1	5
Party affiliation	12,427				
● *Centre Party of Finland (CPF)*	*3,967*	*0.32*			
● *Finns Party (FP)*	*1,932*	*0.16*			
National Coalition party (NCP)	*951*	*0.08*			
● *Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP)*	*1,540*	*0.12*			
● *Green League (GL)*	*1,653*	*0.13*			
● *Left Alliance (LA)*	*2,384*	*0.19*			
Collective action	11,949	2.80	1.25	1	5
Connective action	12,162	2.35	1.39	1	5
Control variables					
Party Experience	12,167				
● *Under 5 years*	*4,009*	*0.33*			
● *5–10 years*	*2,424*	*0.20*			
● *Over 10 years*	*5,734*	*0.47*			
Age	12,088	55.38	14.86	16	113
Gender	12,273				
Male	*7,125*	*0.58*			
Female	*5,148*	*0.42*			
Education	12,341				
Primary	*1,300*	*0.11*			
● *Secondary*	*5,818*	*0.47*			
● *Bachelor*	*1,437*	*0.12*			
● *Master*	*3,786*	*0.31*			

Source(s): Table created by authors

we conducted mediation analyses to elucidate the reciprocal contributions of collective and connective actions and estimated the mediating effects of action forms on party differences. In the final phase, we analysed if the effect of action forms varied according to the party affiliation by modelling connective and collective action within different parties.

The empirical analyses were performed with STATA 16. The results are based on the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models and were illustrated using the user-written coefplot package (Jann, 2014). Moreover, we used the khb package to decompose the direct and indirect effects of party affiliation (Kohler *et al.*, 2011).

4. Results

The results of the descriptive analysis are presented in Figures 2 and 3. The predictive margins post-estimated from OLS regression as presented in Figure 2 indicate that collective and connective action are highly associated to in-party commitment. The models underlying the predictions indicated that both variables (connective action: B = 0.17, $p < 0.001$; collective action: B = 0.19, $p < 0.001$) were significantly associated with the dependent variable.

The results reported in Figure 3 give us descriptive information of the variables used in our analysis with respect to party affiliation. We found that the FP members were the least committed within the party network (predictive margin (PM) = 2.7; standard error (SE) = 0.02) and the LA members were the most committed within the party network (PM = 3.1; SE = 0.02). According to the results in Figure 3, the levels of connective and collective action varied across the party spectrum. As expected, the dividing line was found between the traditional interest parties and the new identity parties, especially in the case of
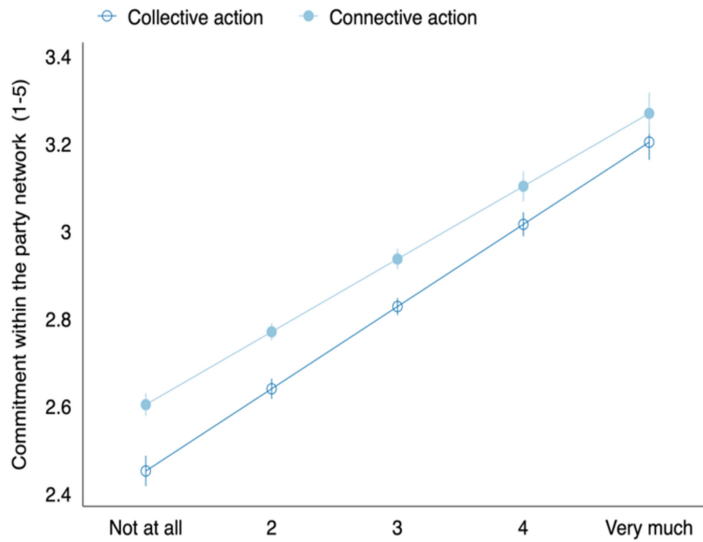
Source(s): Figure created by authors
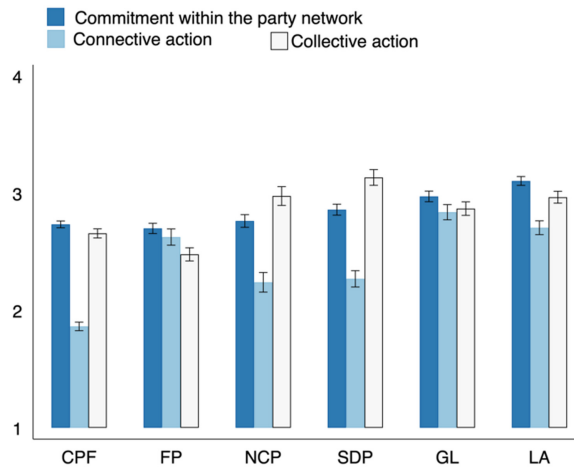
Source(s): Figure created by authors

connective action. The CPF members (PM = 1.9; SE = 0.02) were the least active in terms of connective action, whereas the GL members (PM = 2.8; SE = 0.03) were the most active. In terms of collective action, we found that the SDP members (PM = 3.1; SE = 0.03) were the most active and the FP members (PM = 2.5; SE = 0.03) were the least active.

Table 4 shows the results of the regression models. The results indicate that party affiliation had a substantial effect on commitment within the party network, even after controlling for members' differences in demographics and membership duration. The first model revealed that the members of FP (B = 0.08; $p < 0.05$), SDP (B = 0.10; $p < 0.001$), GL (B = 0.22; $p < 0.001$) and LA (B = 0.39; $p < 0.001$) had a higher propensity to commit within

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
CPF (ref.)				
FP	0.08**	0.10**	−0.01	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
NCP	0.02***	−0.02***	−0.03***	−0.05***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
SDP	0.10***	0.03***	0.05***	0.00
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
GL	0.22***	0.21***	0.13***	0.13**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
LA	0.39***	0.35***	0.29***	0.28***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Party experience (over 10 years)	0.39***	0.33***	0.41***	0.36***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Age	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***	−0.01***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	−0.10**	−0.06*	−0.08*	−0.06*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Collective action		0.16***		0.13***
		(0.01)		(0.01)
Connective action			0.15***	0.12***
			(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	3.37***	2.76***	2.87***	2.47***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Observations	11,658	11,326	11,486	11,194
R-squared	0.05	0.10	0.09	0.12

Note(s): Robust and clustered standard errors in parentheses
***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$
Source(s): Table created by authors

Table 4.
Predicting in-party
commitment according
to the party affiliation,
demographic variables
and action forms

the party network when the members of CPF were considered the reference group. The first model also indicated that membership duration (over 10 years) contributed significantly (B = 0.39; $p < 0.001$), whereas age (B = −0.01; $p < 0.001$) negatively predicted in-party commitment. Moreover, we found that women were less likely (B = −0.10; $p < 0.001$) to commit within the party network. Finally, we did not find a significant direct effect or remarkable contribution to party differences according to education; consequently, we excluded it from the models and further analysis.

The second and third models revealed that connective activity (B = 0.16; $p < 0.001$) and collective activity (B = 0.15; $p < 0.001$) were significantly associated with in-party commitment, even after controlling for party differences and the effects of demographics and membership duration at the individual level. In this respect, we can conclude that connective and collective action are remarkable predictors of commitment within the party networks across the Finnish party spectrum. The results also suggest that connective and collective action contribute to the party differences, which we will analyse in more detail in the final analysis phase.

The final model indicated that connective and collective action mainly had a detached effect on the dependent variable. We decomposed the association and tested the indirect effects of both variables using the Sobel test with party-level clustered standard errors. According to the tests, the indirect effect of connective action through collective action was statistically significant (B = 0.03; $p < 0.01$) and vice versa, the indirect effect of collective action through connective action was also significant (B = 0.03; $p < 0.001$). However, the

indirect explanations power were less than 20%, and consequently, when modelled together, both variables had significant direct associations with the dependent variable.

Next, we evaluated how collective and connective action contributed to the party differences. We conducted a decomposition analysis and estimated mediating and confounding effects by comparing the regression coefficients revealed in the fourth model, using the Sobel test with party-level clustered standard errors. The results presented in Table 5 indicate that party differences associated significantly with collective and connective action. When holding the CPF members as the reference category, we found that the effects of FP (B = 0.07; $p < 0.001$) and SDP (B = 0.03; $p < 0.001$) were associated with the effect of connective action. Additionally, controlling for connective action significantly suppressed the effects of GL (B = 0.07; $p < 0.001$) and LA (B = 0.07; $p < 0.001$). The results also revealed that the differences between CPF and NCP increased after controlling for connective action (B = 0.03; $p < 0.001$).

The second decomposition analysis indicated that collective action was also associated with party differences when predicting in-party commitment. Here, the results revealed similar patterns amongst the traditional interest parties in terms of the effects of connective action. The results showed that the effect of SDP (B = 0.05; $p < 0.001$) was indirect through collective action, similar to the effect of connective action. By the same token, we found that the differences between CPF and NCP increased when the level of collective action was standardised (B = 0.03; $p < 0.001$), corresponding to the results of connective action. The results also indicated that the FP members' commitment (B = -0.04; $p < 0.001$) was suppressed according to the relatively low level of collective action. According to the analysis, collective action did not explain the effects of GL and LA.

Finally, we conducted an analysis in which we estimated to what extent party affiliation moderated the effects of collective and connective extra-parliamentary action (see Figure 4). The results confirmed that both variables, collective and connective action, contributed significantly to in-party commitment across the party spectrum.

5. Discussion
In this study, we examined the ways in which party members' extra-parliamentary participation is reflected in their commitment within the party network. First, we formed a sociological, network theory based measurement for members' commitment within the party network and then investigated how in-party commitment is related to out-party engagement. In addition to assessing the cycle of in-party commitment and out-party engagement in general, we itemised the modes of extra-parliamentary engagement into collective and connective modes of action and examined how different parties are able to gain advantage

|	FP	NCP	SDP	GL	LA
Direct effect	0.02	−0.05***	0.01	0.13***	0.28***
	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)
Indirect effect					
via collective action	−0.04**	0.03***	0.05***	−0.01	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
via connective action	0.07***	0.03***	0.03***	0.07***	0.07***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)

Note(s): Unstandardized coefficients with robust and clustered standard errors in parentheses
***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$
Reference group: CPF
Models control for effect of age, gender and party experience
Source(s): Table created by authors

Table 5.
The decomposition of the total effect of party affiliation on the in-party commitment according to collective and connective actions
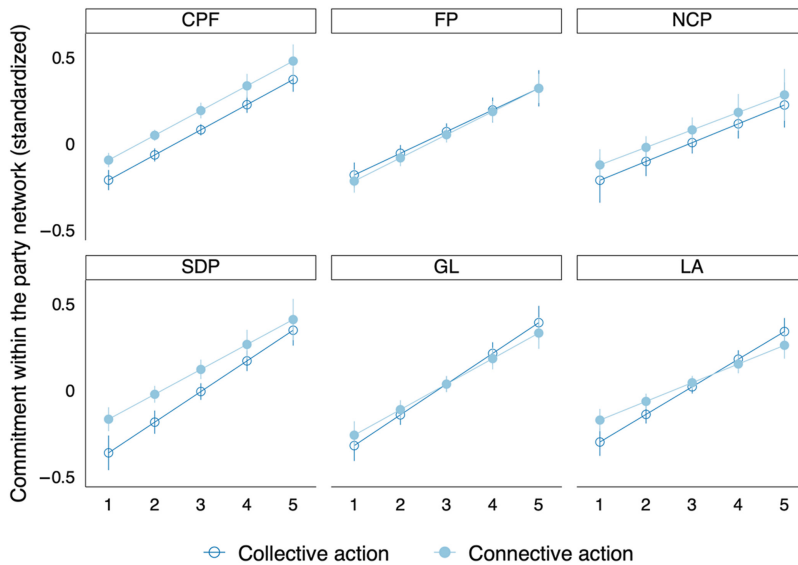
Note(s): Party-level standardized estimates with confidence intervals
Source(s): Figure created by authors

from these modes of political action. Foremost, this approach provides knowledge on how digitalisation of politics and changes in participatory culture *around* the Finnish political parties are reflected *within* the parties as well as the party system in general.

Confirming our first hypothesis (H1), the results of this study demonstrated that high levels of in-party commitment were positively connected with members' out-party engagement in all observed parties. Importantly, the nature of this engagement, whether through traditional collective organisations or online connective actions, did not significantly affect this connection. These results underline the growing importance of social media platforms as venues for political communication, influence and participation (Koiranen *et al.*, 2020; Vaccari and Valeriani, 2016). Furthermore, it is worth noting that, whilst various extra-parliamentary organisations have maintained close ties with political parties over the years (Raunio and Laine, 2017), the networks on social media appear to serve a similar function in facilitating these connections.

Our second hypothesis (H2) was also confirmed. The results show that collective and connective modes of out-party engagement did not correlate much with each other, and the activities are mainly separate dimensions. These results indicate that digital platforms offer alternative modes for engagement, which partly supersede the traditional participation forms. The results challenge the notion that the Internet merely serves as an additional participatory space for individuals who are already engaged in both traditional collective actions and online connective activities (Gerl *et al.*, 2017; Norris, 2003; Pedersen, 2006). This is primarily because party members who actively participated in both these modes of action were relatively uncommon in our findings. However, it still could be that some party members who perform political activities online would continue to do those offline if there were no means to participate online (see Larsson, 2013).

Whilst the cycle between in-party commitment and out-party engagement seems to be a universal function in Finnish parties, the intensity of these cycles varied greatly between the parties. As our third hypothesis (H3) suggested, there were differences between the

traditional interest parties and the new identity parties. First, members of the traditional interest parties – namely SDP, NCP and CPF – were more likely to be involved in traditional collective action, which significantly explained their members' high commitment within the party. Second, members of the new identity parties – namely FP, GL and LA – were more likely participate on social media, which also reflects the differences regarding in-party commitment. This shows that although the cycle of in-party commitment and out-party engagement functions similarly within the parties, there are differences in how the parties rely on collective and connective forms of extra-parliamentary action.

A partial explanation for the newer identity parties' prominent position in the field of extra-parliamentary connective action can be extracted if we widen our scope to the field of extra-parliamentary politics in general. We propose that the identity parties, whilst also having a favourable sociodemographic structure as well as more clearer standings related to post-materialist political struggles (Koiranen *et al.*, 2020; Koiranen, 2022, pp. 64–72), might have filled the void of the lack of strong connections to different organisations (see Raunio and Laine, 2017) by forming connections to digital networks and movements out of necessity. From this perspective, new parties' highlighted presence in the digital sphere of politics could have formed due to underrepresented standing in other politically important fields: Due to traditional organisations' strong connections to traditional interest parties, it is a troublesome task for new identity parties to invade strong positions in the field of traditional extra-parliamentary politics. In this sense, the new identity parties may have had to leverage their political impact with alternative social networks.

Whilst connective political action outside parliamentary politics has become more popular, one of its primary aims is still to indirectly affect political decisions made in the field of formal politics (see Heaney and Rojas, 2007). However, the changes in participatory practices and the disruptions in the political field form a sort of double-edged sword for parties and especially for their leaders. As new challengers have gained more success in the electorate, party leaders and elites needed to decide whether they lower the standards for membership, increase members' possibilities (Achury *et al.*, 2020; Bennett *et al.*, 2018; Webb *et al.*, 2017), embed themselves with more liquid social movements (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley, 2016) and simultaneously destabilise their own position within the party network. An alternative choice is to continue with the old "playbook" in a renewed political game and hope for the best.

In the Finnish context, parties have had different approaches for adapting their organisations and modes of action in the aforementioned situation, where connective political action is gaining more attention. The identity parties in Finland have increased members' opportunities to participate in the decision-making process and have focussed on activating party members, for example, by instating the party chairperson through voting (Koivula, 2019, pp. 40–43). These parties also have been able to increase the number of members significantly as well as their attraction amongst the electorate over the last decade. At the same time, the traditional interest parties are struggling due to diminishing party membership and decreasing vote shares (Demker *et al.*, 2019; Koivula, 2019).

The findings of our research can be effectively incorporated into the practical aspects of strategic party operations, particularly those directed toward enhancing political participation and fortifying relationships with party members. We believe that enhancing the internal democratic processes of political parties – and other prominent political intermediary organisations – can play a pivotal role in bolstering the effectiveness of democratic systems. Furthermore, our research offers valuable insights into the influence of social media on political engagement within such organisations.

Our study has its limitations. First, as the data is collected in 2016, it is assumable that the dynamics within the Finnish parties have already changed as social media has become an even more prominent sphere for parties. Nevertheless, our analyses reveal prominent knowledge related to dynamics that led the current situation. Additionally, the data used in the study were

based on a cross-sectional design and did not enable testing the longitudinal effects. Due to these constraints, it is impossible to know which comes first, the in-party commitment or out-party engagement. It is possible that the correlation of these two accumulates: In-party commitment and out-party engagement probably form a sort of self-feeding loop where activity in one increases activity in the other. Longitudinal surveys in future studies should be used to confirm the effects' direction. Similarly, our survey data do not provide possibilities for more nuanced operationalisation of social networks. Moreover, we were unable to determine the online networks where members act or their motives for action. It could be that members were performing in closed online communities with fellow members, agitating non-members, disputing with rivals, or performing all of these modes of action. Previous research has also found that the social media platform and its operating logic play a role in driving political participation (Theocharis *et al.*, 2023), which our study also does not address. Future studies should pay more attention to fine-grained network structures as well as various motives and action frames behind the variety of modes of participatory political action.

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