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RESEARCH ARTICLE/ÉTUDE ORIGINALE

# Incentives to Join a Local Party Association: Evidence from Canada

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**Abstract**

The comparative literature has devoted considerable attention to why individuals join political parties. This is especially important in the context of the declining party membership and activism that political parties face in contemporary politics. While the question of why members join parties has been well-documented, considerably less work has considered incentives to join other party positions. In the Canadian case, for example, we know very little about the incentives to join an electoral district association (EDA). This is surprising given the consequential role—both formal and informal—that local party associations and their presidents have been known to play in intra-party politics (influencing candidate nomination, membership recruitment and so forth). This study applies Clark and Wilson's (1961) framework of material, solidary and purposive incentives to local party association membership and asks why individuals join their local party executive and whether this motivation shapes the subsequent character of the EDA.

**Résumé**

La littérature comparative a accordé une attention considérable aux raisons pour lesquelles les individus adhèrent aux partis politiques. Cette question est particulièrement importante dans le contexte de la baisse du nombre d'adhérents et de l'activisme auxquels les partis politiques sont confrontés dans la politique contemporaine. Si la question des raisons pour lesquelles les membres adhèrent à un parti a été bien documentée, les incitations à adhérer à d'autres positions du parti ont été beaucoup moins étudiées. Dans le cas du Canada, par exemple, nous savons très peu de choses sur les incitations à adhérer à une association de circonscription électorale (ACÉ). Cela est surprenant étant donné le rôle notoire—autant officiel qu'informel—que les associations locales de partis et leurs présidents exercent dans la politique interne des partis (en influençant la nomination des candidats, le recrutement des membres, etc.) Cette étude applique à l'adhésion à une association locale de parti le cadre d'incitations matérielles, solidaires et intentionnelles de Clark et Wilson (1961) et demande pourquoi les individus adhèrent à la direction de leur parti local et si cette motivation façonne le caractère ultérieur de l'ACÉ.

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**Keywords:** political party; party membership; constituency association; incentives to join; Canada

**Mots-clés:** parti politique; appartenance à un parti; association de circonscription électorale; incitations à adhérer; Canada

## Introduction

It has often been lamented that there is a national-level bias in Canadian party politics research, leading some scholars to call for more academic attention to be devoted to party politics at the constituency level (see, for example, Cross, 2016).[1] An increasingly vibrant constituency-based parties research agenda has emerged in recent years and there is now a growing literature that tackles questions related to this very issue. This includes analyses of candidate recruitment (Tolley, 2019; Pruysers and Cross, 2016; Albaugh, 2022), nomination dynamics (Everitt and Tremblay, 2023; Lapointe et al. 2024), local candidate characteristics (Johnson et al., 2021; Sevi, 2021), constituency campaigning (Robbins-Kanter, 2022; Marland and Giasson, 2022), local party financing and spending (Currie-Wood and Pruysers, 2023; Currie-Wood, 2020; Cross et al., 2020), candidate/district effects in election outcomes (Bodet et al., 2022; Stevens et al., 2019; Sevi et al., 2022), multilevel integration between federal and provincial party associations (Pruysers, 2018), and constituency representation/service (Marland and Snagovsky, 2023; Koop et al., 2018)—just to name a few. While a renewed focus on constituency-level politics is undeniable, a number of important questions remain unanswered.

One such gap concerns the motivation to join an electoral district association's (EDA) executive. The comparative, and to a lesser extent Canadian, party literature has explored why individuals join political parties as members (Young and Cross, 2002a; Whiteley and Seyd, 1996; Scarrow, 2015; van Haute and Gauja, 2015). This has been, at least in part, due to an ongoing concern regarding the decline of parties. In the context of declining membership and activism (van Biezen et al., 2012), scholars have been interested in knowing why some take the leap and join a party. Virtually no work, by contrast, has considered incentives to join other party positions, especially at the constituency level. Pruysers (2016: 315), for example, suggests that "we know very little about constituency associations or the individuals who populate them." A similar claim is made by Koop (2010: 894) who writes that "political scientists know very little about constituency association executives" in general. This is somewhat surprising given the consequential role—both formal and informal—that party EDAs and their presidents have been known to play in intra-party politics. Under Canada's single member plurality electoral system, constituency associations serve as a fundamental building block of democratic life (Carty, 1991). They are the organizational apparatus that allow national political parties to have a formal and organized presence in each of the country's electoral districts. By organizing in an inherently grassroots way, local party associations connect the broader party organization, and the state when the party is in office, to civil society (Clark, 2004); offer ordinary members a crucial venue to participate in party politics in their local communities (Sayers, 1999); provide public legitimacy to the party, especially when the local organization is healthy and vibrant (Koop, 2011); and mobilize and integrate members of the electorate

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into democratic politics (Denver and Hands, 1997). Moreover, the stratarchical nature of Canadian party politics that provides local associations with considerable agency over local affairs (Carty, 2004; Cross and Young, 2011) means that EDA presidents and their executives perform a number of essential party tasks: EDAs recruit candidates for nomination (Cheng and Tavits, 2011; Tolley, 2019; Cross and Pruysers, 2019); aid in the organization and execution of local constituency campaigns during elections (Sayers, 1999; Carty and Eagles, 2005); attend party conferences, often as automatic delegates (Cross et al., 2022); and engage in inter-election maintenance activities like recruiting new members, organizing social events and so forth (Koop, 2012; Pruysers, 2016; Carty, 1991). As individuals who play an important, albeit understudied, role within Canadian party politics, understanding the motivation to join a local EDA and serve on its executive is important as it likely has downstream consequences for the kinds of decisions and activities that the association engages in.

Why do some individuals join their local EDA executive and take on a leadership role within their local party organization? This article addresses this and considers three interrelated questions. First, what are the incentives to EDA executive membership? Second, what are the individual differences in these incentives/motivations? Third, and finally, do initial motivations to join an EDA influence the subsequent character and activities of that EDA? To answer these questions, this article makes use of data from a survey of constituency association presidents in Canada. Drawing on Clark and Wilson's (1961) framework of incentives to membership, results reveal that material and social incentives play only a minor role in the decision to join a local party executive. Instead, policy related goals and the ability to participate in the selection of a local candidate are far more relevant for most individuals who take on local leadership positions within an EDA. At the same time, however, the analysis does reveal considerable variation among individuals (younger individuals, for example, are more motivated by material incentives than older ones). Although causality cannot be determined, the data also provide some preliminary evidence to suggest that the original reason for joining an EDA may be related to the kinds of activities that the EDA engages in afterwards. For example, constituency associations whose president was initially motivated by solidary incentives tend to host significantly more social events throughout the year compared to those who were motivated by other incentives. Overall, then, the results provide new insight into the incentives to membership literature by examining an understudied cohort of party actors: constituency association presidents.

## Party Members, EDAs and Incentives

Much has been written about the apparent "decline of parties" in recent decades (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Mair, 2013; Rahat and Kenig, 2018). Declining rates of membership and activism (van Biezen et al., 2012; van Haute and Gauja, 2015; Scarrow and Gezgor, 2010), waning levels of partisanship and party identification (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Clarke and Stewart, 1998; Garzia et al., 2021; Klar and Krupnikov, 2016), and a growing distrust and dissatisfaction towards political parties in general (Dalton and Weldon, 2005; Bergbower and Allen, 2021) are increasingly common features of contemporary party and electoral politics. In this context it is

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important to understand why individuals join political parties, but also why some take on additional leadership roles within their local, grassroots, party organizations.

The study of group membership and activism has a long history. Building on the work of Olson (1965), for instance, a large body of research has explored why individuals join political parties (Ammassari, 2023; Gomez et al., 2021; Young and Cross, 2002a; Heidar and Kosiara-Pedersen, 2020; Power and Dommett, 2020; Whiteley and Seyd, 1996; Scarrow, 2015; van Haute and Gauja, 2015; McCulloch, 1990; Achury et al., 2020). As parties often provide collective benefits, they are said to face an inherent collective action problem: How can the organization convince individuals to join, pay dues and volunteer their limited time and energy, when the primary benefits of party membership are collective in nature? To address the collective action problem of free-riders, political parties offer their members selective incentives—benefits that are generally not offered to non-members. Clark and Wilson's (1961) typology of incentives to membership is perhaps the most well-known articulation of such benefits/incentives. Here the authors introduce a tripartite typology of *material* incentives, *solidary* incentives and *purposive* incentives.

Material incentives offer party members with personal, often tangible, rewards for their membership.[2] As Young and Cross (2002a: 549) note, these material rewards can "range from patronage appointments or government contracts to more general inducements like career advancement." Common examples of material incentives include learning new skills, networking and job opportunities. Solidary incentives, by contrast, are more intangible and offer members the ability to socialize with like-minded individuals and spend time with co-partisans. Clark and Wilson (1961: 134–35) note that solidary incentives include rewards such as "socializing, congeniality, the sense of group membership and identification, the status resulting from membership, fun and conviviality, the maintenance of social distinctions, and so on." Examples of solidary incentives include party-sponsored BBQs, pub nights and other social events. Finally, purposive incentives allow members to aid in the party's pursuit of collective policy goals. Purposive incentives differ from solidary incentives insofar as the rewards are derived from seeing the party's goals realized "rather than from the simple act of associating" (Clark and Wilson, 1961: 135).

While others have adapted the Clark and Wilson model, making changes around the margins, the incentives model remains among the most common frameworks for understanding why individuals join political parties. Seyd and Whiteley (1992), for example, offer a similar model, the general incentives model (GIM). This framework outlines a number of incentives that parties offer to prospective members. This includes selective incentives (that is, material reward), collective incentives (that is, collective policy outcomes) and affective incentives (that is, group solidarity and connections). Likewise, Young and Cross (2002a) add to the standard incentives of material, solidary and purposive by including a desire to influence the outcome of a candidate nomination or leadership election. As politics becomes increasingly personalized (Cross et al., 2018; Rahat and Kenig, 2018), it has been argued that the opportunity to participate in the selection of party personnel may be an important selective incentive that parties are able to offer those who join (Faucher, 2015).

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The importance of the kinds of benefits or incentives that Clark and Wilson (1961) identified have been largely confirmed in subsequent research (Young and Cross, 2002a; Poletti et al., 2019; Cross et al., 2022; Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley and Seyd, 1998). In general, the literature has found that material incentives, while important in previous decades, have become less important to prospective party members over time (especially as patronage and clientelism decline and professionalization increases) while other incentives, primarily purposive ones, have become more important. The influence of various incentives, however, have not just changed over time. They are also more or less important for different cohorts of individuals. A number of studies, for instance, have revealed that material and career-related incentives, which are less important overall, tend to be more relevant for younger individuals (Bruter and Harrison 2009; Weber, 2020; Fjellman and Sundström, 2021) as well as more active and committed activists (Seyd and Whiteley, 1992).[3]

Recent research has extended the question of why members join political parties and has begun to consider why only some supporters of a party take the leap and become members. In other words, why do some people join the party while other individuals, who support the party nonetheless, fail to formalize their affiliation as party members[4] (Poletti et al., 2019; Gomez et al., 2021)? Such questions are important as recent research reveals that members do considerably more labour-intensive work during elections than supporters (Webb et al., 2017). While the literature has concerned itself with party members, and now supporters, far less attention has been devoted to other positions within the party beyond membership. In many national contexts, political parties maintain decentralized, and local, organizations/branches at the district level (Clark, 2004). Incentives to join a local party association's executive team—to take on a leadership role within the grassroots party organization—have not been well-explored in the Canadian or comparative party literature.

In the Canadian case, these local party branches are termed "constituency associations," "riding associations" or "electoral district associations" (EDAs). Local party associations are made up of an executive team—a small group of "local activists who provide leadership for constituency associations and conduct their month-to-month business" (Koop, 2010: 896). EDAs are led by a local party president and typically include 8–10 additional executive members (vice president, policy chair and so forth; see Cross et al., 2022).[5] These local organizations provide Canadian parties with a formal presence in each of the single member districts across the country and act as an essential building block for Canadian party politics (Carty, 1991; Pruysers, 2015). As Carty and Eagles (2005: 2) write, "constituencies and the political organizations and processes that they frame, stand at the very core of Canada's political life." Constituency associations broadly, and EDA presidents specifically, play a crucial role in Canadian party politics by engaging in candidate recruitment and nomination (Tolley, 2019; Cross and Young, 2013; Pruysers and Cross, 2016), providing support to party-endorsed candidates during elections (Sayers, 1999; Carty and Eagles, 2005; Cross, 2016), sending delegates to party conferences (Cross et al., 2022) and engaging in inter-election maintenance and renewal (Pruysers, 2016). Joining the local EDA executive, therefore, is very different than becoming an ordinary, dues-paying party member. While the latter

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requires a small membership fee and has no participatory obligations or responsibilities, joining an EDA executive requires taking on a leadership role within the local party organization, attending frequent party meetings and contributing to the general stewardship of the party in the district (Cross et al., 2022; Koop, 2010).

Not only do EDAs engage in important and wide-ranging functions, but the nature of Canadian parties means that who populates an EDA executive is likely to matter as well. Cheng and Tavits (2011), for instance, demonstrate that EDAs who are led by a woman president tend to nominate more women candidates (see also Tremblay and Pelletier, 2001; Cross and Pruysers, 2019). This finding has been replicated by Tolley (2019) with regard to racialized EDA presidents and racialized candidates. High levels of personalization (Lalancette et al., 2022; Pruysers and Cross, 2018; Cross and Young, 2015) and a stratarchical arrangement that provides local party associations with considerable agency in conducting local party business (Carty, 2004; Cross, 2018) combined with a party structure that is relatively open and permeable (that is, allowing noncitizens and youth to join and become members) suggests that individual EDAs will operate differently from one another depending on their composition. Diversity, therefore, is not only expected between political parties but within parties. Given this local freedom, the initial motivation to join an EDA's executive may have important implications for the kind of activities and decisions that the EDA takes, as well as the general ethos of the local organization.

Why do individuals take on additional responsibility and join their local EDA executive? This article considers this and three interrelated questions. First, what are the incentives to join a local party association? We revisit the work of Clark and Wilson (1961) and consider whether the same kinds of incentives that explain why members join their party also contribute to our understanding of why individuals join their EDA and take on a leadership role within the party. Second, who is motivated by the various kinds of incentives? Here we consider differences in sociodemographic background (age, gender and so forth), party and geographic context (competitive district, urban vs. rural and so forth). Finally, we explore whether the motivation to join an EDA is related to the subsequent character of that local association. For instance, do EDAs who are led by an individual who was motivated to join for policy-related reasons (that is., purposive incentives) have more policy-related discussions with their members compared to EDAs whose president was not motivated by such concerns? We explore these questions in the remainder of the article.

## Data and Methods

To explore the question of incentives to local party leadership we make use of data that was derived from an online survey of constituency association presidents in Canada.[6] The survey was conducted online, using the Qualtrics platform, in the summer of 2019 (June and July). The data include 367 responses from four federal political parties: 83 Conservative, 93 Liberal, 98 New Democrat and 77 Green party associations participated. Additionally, 16 individuals declined to provide their party. The 367 respondents who participated in the survey represent about 30 per cent of all EDAs in the four federal parties for which up-to-date contact

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information was available. We paired the survey responses with data from other sources—namely Elections Canada—to ensure accurate information regarding election outcomes, competitiveness, and geographic location (urban vs. rural). As for sample characteristics, the mean age of respondents in the dataset is 55 years (SD = 15.5; ranging from 22 to 67) with approximately 23 per cent being 40 years or younger. Nearly one-in-five (18%) respondents were born outside of Canada. Consistent with the actual universe of EDA presidents, the majority of respondents are men (69%). In terms of geography, half of respondents are located in urban districts (50.4%) while the remaining 49 per cent are from less urban and more rural districts.[7]

To capture motivations/incentives, we asked EDA presidents to think about their reasons for originally taking a leadership position within the party: "We are interested in knowing your reasons for originally joining your party's executive." Participants were then asked to rate the importance of a series of potential incentives that tap into Clark and Wilson's (1961) framework. This includes "To meet interesting people and extent my social life/participate in social activities"; "To acquire new skills (administration, organization)"; "To have greater influence in party policy"; and "To support a candidate for local nomination." The first item, participation in social activities, taps into solidary incentives, the second item regarding new skills captures material incentives, and the third item about policy influence speaks to purposive incentives. The fourth item, candidate nomination, speaks to Young and Cross's (2002a) contention that personnel selection, especially in the context of increasingly personalized local nominations, acts as an important incentive as well.[8] Given that EDAs often have the ability to structure local contests, sometimes even manipulating the process (Cross et al., 2016), we include candidate nomination as one of the incentives examined here.[9]

While these incentives are expected to be the primary drivers of membership on a local party executive, a large literature demonstrates that socioeconomic variables—resources in particular—are relevant for understanding political activism more generally (Verba et al., 1978). As such, we include a number of sociodemographic controls in our analysis as well. This includes age (in years), gender, education, income, foreign born, level of activism[10] and length of party membership (in years). Additionally, we control for factors related to the district itself in terms of electoral competitiveness[11], and whether the district is geographically urban or rural. Our final control is party, as research suggests that some parties are more ideological in nature (Cross and Young, 2004), which in turn has been shown to influence both organizational and intraparty dynamics (Young and Cross, 2002b).

## Results

We begin with our first questions: why do individuals join their local EDA, and do the incentives that have been identified for membership broadly also apply to local party leadership? Figure 1 reveals that purposive incentives (a desire to influence policy) as well as the ability to engage in personnel selection (candidate nomination) are viewed as considerably more important than are solidary (that is, attending social events) and material (that is, acquiring new skills) incentives. While nearly half (46% and 45%) of EDA presidents reported that social events

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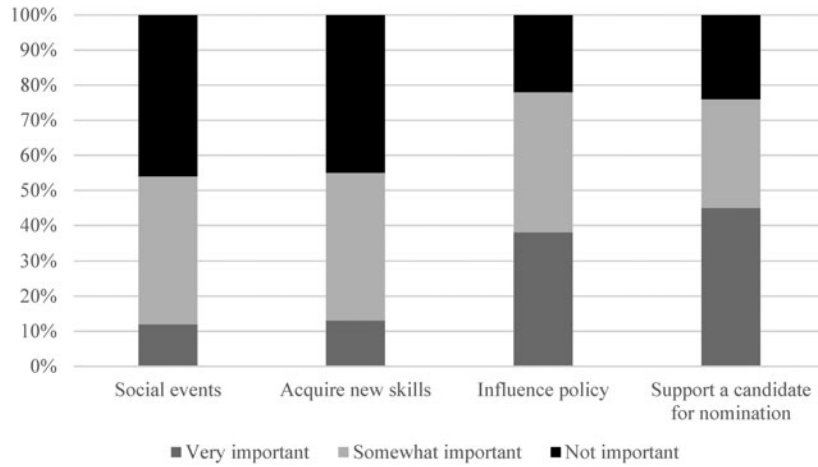


**Figure 1.** Incentives to join a local party executive.

and acquiring new skills were unimportant to their decision to join their local party executive, this figure is just 22 and 24 per cent for policy influence and candidate nomination. While not completely irrelevant—more than half of respondents rated these motivations as at least somewhat important after all—joining a local EDA is certainly not driven by a desire to enhance one's social connectedness or gain news skills and career opportunities. While not shown in Figure 1, there are considerable party differences. For example, whereas 22 per cent of Liberals report that social events were important to their decision, less than 10 per cent of New Democrats (8.7%) and Conservatives (8.2%) report the same. Such patterns may be the result of the more ideological nature of the New Democrats and the Conservatives.

If there are party differences, there are likely individual differences to uncover as well. Figure 2 in the appendix provides some preliminary evidence of significant gender differences in motivation at the bivariate level. For example, women are significantly more likely to rate policy-related incentives as "not important" to their initial reason for joining an EDA compared to men (32% to 22%; $p<.05$). Our next question, therefore, explores who is motivated by the various incentives. To explore this question, we conducted a series of logistic regression analyses where the dependent variable is reporting that the incentive was very important to their decision to join (see Table 1).[12] Model 1 includes the results for material incentives; Model 2 for solidary incentives; Model 3 for purposive incentives; and Model 4 for candidate nomination incentives. Each of the models includes the same set of explanatory variables: age, gender, education, income, foreign born, level of activism, length of party membership, urban/rural district, party and competitiveness. Starting with Model 1, we see that material incentives appear to be more important for some individuals than others. Consistent with the existing literature regarding age and incentives to membership (Weber, 2020), older individuals are less concerned with material incentives like career advancement and new skills. We find a similar pattern for those located in highly competitive districts. Foreign born

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**Table 1.** Correlates of Membership Incentives

| | Model 1 (Material Incentives) | | Model 2 (Solidary Incentives) | | Model 3 (Purposive Incentives) | | Model 4 (Candidate Nomination) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | S.E | Exp(B) | S.E | Exp(B) | S.E | Exp(B) | S.E | Exp(B) |
| Age | 0.02 | **0.952**** | 0.017 | 0.983 | 0.012 | **0.978*** | 0.012 | 0.993 |
| Gender (man) | 0.536 | 0.599 | 0.587 | 1.942 | 0.369 | 1.653 | 0.349 | 1.229 |
| Education | 0.25 | 1.247 | 0.264 | 1.393 | 0.18 | 0.788 | 0.169 | 1.088 |
| Income | 0.246 | 0.755 | 0.237 | 0.699 | 0.16 | 0.998 | 0.159 | 0.763 |
| Foreign Born | 0.64 | **3.377**** | 0.574 | **2.884**** | 0.441 | **2.437**** | 0.42 | 1.649 |
| Activism | 0.195 | 0.881 | 0.192 | 1.037 | 0.157 | **1.603**** | 0.127 | 0.884 |
| Length of membership | 0.028 | 0.975 | 0.022 | 0.982 | 0.015 | 1.01 | 0.014 | 1.011 |
| Urban district | 0.505 | 0.924 | 0.501 | 1.766 | 0.334 | 0.706 | 0.317 | 0.696 |
| Liberal | 0.746 | 2.111 | 0.715 | **7.389*** | 0.471 | **0.386**** | 0.446 | 0.67 |
| New Democrat | 0.732 | 0.723 | 0.778 | 1.011 | 0.484 | **0.292**** | 0.448 | 0.493 |
| Green | 0.901 | 0.33 | 0.9 | 0.809 | 0.582 | **0.304**** | 0.545 | 1.588 |
| Competitiveness | 0.013 | **0.966**** | 0.012 | 0.984 | 0.008 | 1.001 | 0.008 | **1.022**** |
| R | .226 | | .199 | | .151 | | .146 | |

Notes: reference category is "Conservative"; *$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

individuals, by contrast, tend to place more emphasis on the importance of such material incentives.

Turning to Model 2, solidary incentives, we find two significant relationships. First, and consistent with the bivariate results reported earlier, Liberal EDA presidents are significantly more likely to report that solidary incentives—the social benefits to membership—were important in their initial decision to join. We also see the same for foreign born individuals. In this regard, membership on a local party executive may play an important socializing and integrating function for new Canadians. Model 3 includes the results for purposive incentives. Here we find that older individuals are less motivated by policy concerns. Conservatives and highly politically active individuals, by contrast, are more likely to be motivated by a desire to shape party policy. Finally, Model 4 provides the results for candidate nomination. Here we find that the more competitive a district is for a party, the more important participating in a candidate nomination is to the original decision to join. This, of course, makes sense as candidates competing in party strongholds are more likely to be successfully elected during the general election and therefore the nomination is more consequential (Cross, 2008).

In the above analysis, the incentives to join an EDA were modelled as the outcomes (dependent variables). Now, we use the motivation variables as explanatory variables (independent variables) and consider whether initial motivations to join an EDA are related to the subsequent character and activities of that EDA. The data allow us to explore this question in two ways. First, we consider whether EDAs that devoted more time to policy discussions (operationalized as the number of policy discussion meetings that were held in the 12 months prior to the survey) are led by a president who reported that purposive incentives were important to their initial reason for joining. Next, we do the same for solidary incentives and consider whether EDAs that hosted more social events (local BBQs, pub nights and so forth) in the 12 months prior to the survey are led by a president who

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reported higher levels of importance to solidary incentives. Table 2 provides the results.

Model 1 of Table 2 provides the results for solidary incentives. Here we find that NDP associations report significantly fewer social gatherings than Conservative EDAs (the reference category). At the same time, we find that EDAs located in districts where their party is electorally competitive tend to hold more social functions throughout the year compared to less competitive EDAs. Importantly, we also find that EDAs that have more social meetings are more likely to have an EDA president who was motivated to join for social/solidary reasons. This suggests that the original reasons for joining an EDA might influence the subsequent character of that EDA. Model 2 provides the results for purposive, or policy-related, incentives. Here we find that NDP EDAs, as well as those led by men, tend to have more policy meetings than other EDAs. Local associations whose president has higher levels of formal education, by contrast, tend to have fewer. Unlike the results for solidary incentives, however, we do not find any evidence that EDAs whose president joined for policy-related reasons have more policy discussions throughout the year. The evidence for whether initial motivations to join an EDA influence the character of that EDA are therefore mixed.

## Conclusions

Given that Canadian parties are best described by stratarchy and not hierarchy (Katz and Mair, 1993; Carty, 2002; Cross, 2018), power is not concentrated at the "top" of the party organization. Instead, different actors throughout the party organization play important roles (Cross et al., 2022). Members of an EDAs executive, local party presidents in particular, recruit and influence nominations, support candidates during election campaigns, attend party conferences, and

**Table 2.** EDA Activities and Original Incentives to Join

| | Model 1 (Social Events) | | Model 2 (Policy Discussions) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | B | S.E | B | S.E |
| Age | -0.049 | 0.061 | -0.002 | 0.063 |
| Gender (man) | -0.168 | 1.802 | **3.766**** | 1.823 |
| Education | 0.103 | 0.899 | **-1.980**** | 0.918 |
| Income | 0.382 | 0.815 | -0.357 | 0.854 |
| Foreign Born | 3.378 | 2.236 | 0.015 | 2.279 |
| Activism | 0.282 | 0.699 | -0.702 | 0.732 |
| Length of membership | -0.048 | 0.073 | 0.058 | 0.074 |
| Urban district | 1.093 | 1.671 | -2.125 | 1.709 |
| Liberal | -1.914 | 2.402 | -1.470 | 2.424 |
| New Democrat | **-4.760*** | 2.465 | **4.198*** | 2.517 |
| Green | 1.306 | 2.865 | -0.083 | 2.995 |
| Competitiveness | **0.091**** | 0.040 | 0.018 | 0.040 |
| Solidary incentives | **4.805*** | 2.473 | - | - |
| Purposive incentives | - | - | 2.548 | 1.739 |
| R | 0.066 | | 0.061 | |

Notes: reference category is "Conservative"; *$p$ < .10. **$p$ < .05. ***$p$ < .01.

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contribute to the health and vibrancy of political parties during the inter-election period. Given the consequential role that they play, understanding why some members join their local party executive and take on a leadership position within the party is an important question. Applying a modified version of Clark and Wilson's (1961) framework regarding the incentives to party membership, this article draws upon data from a survey of EDA presidents to explore the incentives to join a local party association executive. The results reveal a number of important takeaways.

First, and consistent with previous literature which has explored the decision to join a party (see, for example, Young and Cross, 2002a), purposive (policy) and personnel selection (candidate nomination) incentives are the most relevant types of incentives for those seeking local EDA positions. Consistent with arguments regarding a growing atomization of political life (Putnam, 2000), solidary incentives that center on social events and community building appear to be no more important than material benefits and rewards. These results speak to the challenges that Canadian political parties currently face. As material and solidary incentives decline in importance, EDA membership is driven by policy and personnel selection. Personnel selection, however, occurs irregularly and generally only when the party's incumbent is not seeking re-election. Policy-related incentives, by contrast, have the ability to be regular activities that can motivate individuals to join even when there is no election in sight. The challenge for Canadian parties is that they do not typically provide much room for party members and EDAs to meaningfully influence policy (Cross, 2004; Cross et al., 2022). In fact, a lack of grassroots influence over party policy has long been a point of concern and frustration for ordinary party members (Cross and Young, 2006).

Second, we find that different individuals are motivated by different incentives. Younger individuals, for example, are more likely to be motivated by material incentives than older individuals. This is consistent with the comparative literature on party membership (Bruter and Harrison 2009; Weber, 2020; Fjellman and Sundström, 2021). Younger individuals have much of their careers ahead of them and likely view EDA executive membership as a stepping stone to their future career aspirations. Rewards such as new skills, an expanding network and potential job opportunities are therefore stronger motivators for younger individuals. Interparty differences are also evident. Liberals, for instance, place significantly more emphasis on solidary (social) incentives and significantly less emphasis on purposive (policy) incentives when compared to Conservatives. Part of this may be the result of Liberals being in government and therefore local Liberal EDAs having greater opportunity to engage in high-profile social events (for example, visits from a cabinet minister). Given the cross-sectional nature of the data it is unclear whether this is a true party difference or whether the "Liberal" variable is also capturing a "governing party" effect (that is, local party officials may have less room to influence policy when their party is in government). Future research should therefore attempt to disentangle the effects of party and governing status. Among the most interesting findings is that foreign born individuals are significantly more likely than Canadian born EDA presidents to report that the social aspects of party life were very important to their initial decision to join their local EDA. In this regard, local party associations have the ability to play an important and

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understudied role in integrating and socializing new Canadians into party and electoral politics. This is made more relevant by the fact that membership in Canadian parties does not typically require citizenship. As integration is often viewed as a primary party function (King, 1969; Meisel and Mendelsohn, 2001), activities such as EDA-sponsored BBQs, pub nights and other routine social gatherings may be an undervalued aspect of local party life. Parties, especially their local organizations, have the potential to be highly inclusive, participatory and integrating spaces.

Third, and finally, we provide some preliminary evidence of a relationship between the motivations to join an EDA and the kinds of activities that the EDA engages in afterwards. Specifically, EDAs whose president was motivated by social incentives report having significantly more social events during the year than those EDAs whose president was not particularly motivated by solidary incentives. In this regard, the stratarchical bargain that provides local associations with considerable agency in the conduct of local affairs (Carty, 2004) appears to provide EDA presidents with the ability to shape the nature and activities of the local organization. While we should be cautious not to interpret these results fully causally (that is, EDAs that are already active socially might attract a president who is interested in joining for social reasons and therefore continues the social activities already in place), the fact that the relationship holds when controlling for a variety of other factors is interesting and suggestive. This pattern, however, was not replicated when examining purposive incentives and the number of policy-related discussions that the EDA engaged in. As such, the results of Table 2 suggest an important avenue for future research and warrant replication.[13]

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## Notes

1 This, of course, is not to say that earlier parties' research was completely devoid of such a focus. There were many exceptions (see, for example, Carty and Eagles, 2005; Sayers, 1999; Tremblay and Pelletier, 2001; Koop, 2011; Pruysers, 2016).

2 Clark and Wilson (1961: 134) describe these materials incentives as "rewards that have a monetary value or can easily be translated into ones that have."

3 Other models, which focus more on individual level psychological attitudes (such as alienation, dissatisfaction, efficacy etc.) have also been used in the literature (that is, Ammassari, 2023). While not discounting this approach, this article focuses on the incentives identified by Clark and Wilson.

4 Changes to party membership, what Scarrow (2015) terms multispeed membership, have allowed new forms of affiliation through categories such as "supporters," "registered party friends" and "party sympathizers" (Gauja, 2015; Scarrow, 2015). New modes of affiliation offer individuals less burdensome avenues to affiliate with parties as fees, activism requirements and so forth are all modified and reduced.

5 Liberal Party by-laws, for example, state that each local party association is to be comprised of a chair (president), vice-chair, secretary, organization chair, policy chair, up to six directors at large, the current

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Liberal MP in the district (if there is one), the party's nominated candidate in the district and one representative from each recognized Commission. Additionally, the EDA is to include a number of non-voting members (treasurer, fundraising chair and so forth; Liberal Party By-law 2, 2018).

**6** As Poletti et al. (2019) note, the survey approach is not without limitations. The primary limitation is the lack of variation on the dependent variable (that is, there are no non-EDA presidents who are in the analysis).

**7** The sample appears to be reflective of the total universe of potential respondents. Cross et al. (2022), for example, note that approximately two-thirds of all EDA presidents (67.5%) are men. This is remarkably similar to our sample, which includes 69 per cent men. Similarly, other features, such as age and whether the individual was born outside of the country, are consistent with what we know of parties and their members more broadly (Cross, 2004).

**8** On the surface, candidate selection would appear to be firmly rooted in the purposive incentive category (furthering the party and its goals through the selection of personnel). However, candidate selection is often highly personalized. Nomination contestants recruit heavily from their own personal networks and mobilize new members who have no (or little) history or attachment to the party (Cross et al., 2016). In these cases, candidate nomination is not driven by an inherent desire to further the party and its goals, but rather by social networks and personalized connections to individual actors. As evidence of this, recent research suggests that when a member's preferred candidate loses an intraparty election, members tend to withdraw their activism and financial donations (Pruysers, 2024). Supporters of losing candidates are also more likely to let their membership lapse and not renew (Cross and Pruysers, 2019). For many individuals, then, their support is connected to a particular candidate and not necessarily the party itself. For this reason, we model candidate selection incentives separately from purposive ones.

**9** While party members may be incentivized to join their party so that they can cast a ballot in the nomination (Young and Cross, 2002a), the incentive is slightly different for EDA members. Not only can members of an EDA executive vote in the intraparty election, but as members of the executive they can engage in formal candidate recruitment (Tolley, 2019; Cross and Pruysers, 2019; Cheng and Tavits, 2011) as well as influence the nature of the contest itself (alter the timing, location, etc.) in order to support their preferred candidate (Cross et al., 2016; Kenig and Pruysers, 2018). Koop (2010: 893), for example, recounts an example of when a local EDA "suddenly changed the date of the nomination meeting" in order to "provide an advantage to their favoured candidate" who had prior notice of the changes. Such accounts are a common feature of every election cycle (Pruysers and Cross, 2016; Cross, 2006) and highlight the powerful role that EDAs can play. Candidate nomination, therefore, is likely an especially important motivation for EDA executive membership. Interviews with Canadian EDA executive members support this contention as many suggest that supporting a candidate was crucial to their decision to join (Koop, 2010).

**10** Activism is measured using a series of seven items that capture a range of potential political activities that the respondent could have engaged in over the course of the past year: signed a petition, boycotted or boycotted a product for ethical, environmental or political reasons, tried to persuade others on a political or social issue, participated in a protest/demonstration, contacted an elected official, donated money to a charity, or volunteered. These items were summed into a single scale ranging from 0–7.

**11** Competitiveness is measured by the percentage of the vote that a party won/lost by in their district during the previous general election. Incumbency may also be relevant. When an association's candidate is not an incumbent Member of Parliament, for example, incentives related to candidate selection may take on additional significance. This is because incumbents are often protected from nomination challengers (Cross, 2006; Pruysers and Cross, 2016), and under these circumstances the typical candidate recruitment and nomination process does not occur. Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to determine whether the local association had an incumbent when the respondent initially decided to join the executive. Competitiveness, which may capture longer-term dynamics insofar as it is not coded dichotomously, is therefore used instead. Nonetheless, all analyses were also conducted using incumbency (as of 2019) alongside competitiveness. The pattern of results does not change. In one instance (not shown) competitiveness loses its significance and incumbency gains significance (Model 4, Table 1).

**12** The answers to these questions are not mutually exclusive. That is, a respondent could rate material incentives as very important and also rate purposive incentives as very important. As a result, a technique like multinomial logistic regression is not appropriate.

**13** A pre-and-post kind of design, where EDA activities are explored *before* and *after* a new local president takes the position, would be ideal. In such a design we would be able to see, more clearly, whether the

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motivations/attitudes of the president influence the character of the EDA and its activities. Interviews with local activists would help clarify this relationship as well.

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## Appendix

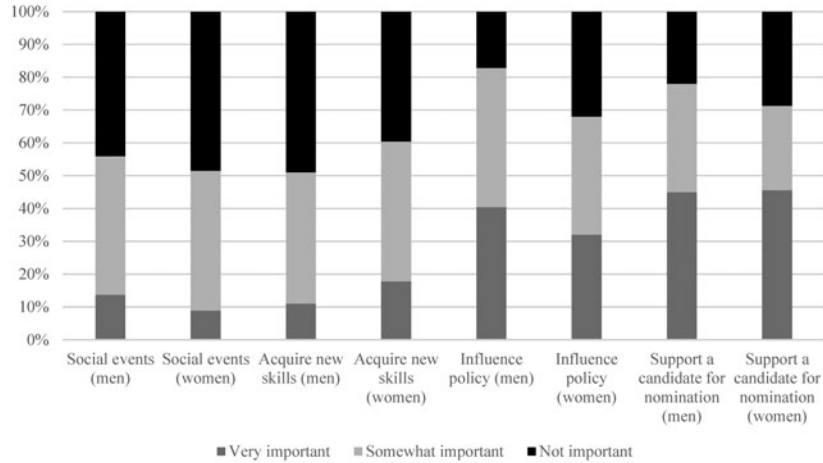


**Figure 2.** Incentives to join a local party executive and respondent gender.

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