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POLITICAL PARTY INTEREST IN HAVING MEMBERS: EXPLAINING  
THE DIFFERENT PARTY MEMBERSHIP LEVELS IN ESTONIA AND  
LATVIA

MA thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis provides a demand-side explanation on why Estonia and Latvia - countries of similar contemporary historical trajectories and the emerging party systems - have substantially different results in party membership levels. The study is built on an assumption that parties in Estonia are more interested in having members than parties in Latvia, with the intent to determine a relationship between the interest in having members and the party membership level in a country. To ascertain interest in having members, a novel index is created. Not only the total results of countries are compared, a lower-level analysis in three dimensions across parties in the two countries is provided.

Both country parliamentary parties are studied, providing a thorough analysis and comparisons of 14 political parties. Findings depict that the level of party membership is higher in Estonia because parties are more interested in having members than parties in Latvia. Crucial differences in approaches to member recruitment are identified.

**Keywords:** party membership decline, M/E, member recruitment, Estonia, Latvia

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Party membership decline has been an on-going phenomenon for the past several decades. While the phenomenon has been well-documented by various scholars, e.g. Dalton (2005), Katz et al. (1992), Mair (1994), Mair and Van Biezen (2001), Scarrow (2000), Scarrow (2014), Van Biezen, Mair & Poguntke (2012), Whiteley (2011), there is no univocal answer to why the numbers of party members are falling. It needs to be noted since various forms and intensities of political participation are available nowadays, the concept of party membership has a complex nature (Gauja, 2015). As the meaning and experience of membership vary between different people, the concept should be perceived as a social construct. However, the legal sense of party membership has not changed – party member is an individual who appears on the party's membership list. While it can be argued that the boundaries between members and non-members have become blurry (Katz & Mair 2009: 755), parties are still required to have an official membership basis to participate in the electoral competition.

Scholars have sought explanations for the membership decline both on party and individual levels. Scarrow (1996) has suggested summarizing these explanations as either 'supply-side' or 'demand-side', where supply-side explanations refer to factors that have made citizens more averse of becoming political party members and demand-side explanations refer to the motives of why parties have perhaps been unenthusiastic in recruiting new members. While a focus has been on supply-side explanations, a research gap can be identified in demand-side explanations.

Although Scarrow (2014: 73-75) has pointed out the idea that public subsidies, media-intensive campaigning, and dissolution of once-strong parties could contribute to the membership decline phenomenon, the question she already raised two decades ago on why should contemporary parties even need to have members (Scarrow, 1994: 41) is still topical and forms the base start of the demand-side explanations. She suggests viewing the „certain changes in party organizations as the product both of changes in party perceptions of members' utility, and of changes in party perceptions of the factors likely to motivate

potential members” (Scarrow, 1994: 58). It is argued that if political parties are interested in having members, they provide particular incentives for them (Scarrow, 1994: 51-52). Therefore, the questions of if parties are interested in having members and whether they provide stimulus to be attractive for new members should be asked first when trying to explain membership decline.

Moreover, the discussion of changes in party membership has usually taken place in the context of Western Europe, leaving the newer European democracies out of the spotlight. For example, while in the Baltic state region it is not possible to make the comparisons of now a day- and “golden-times” mass-parties, the issue of membership decline can be looked at in regards to why Estonian political parties have more members than parties in Latvia. The difference is profound – while for the 51 Latvian parties the membership expressed as a percentage of the electorate is 1.7 per cent (Uzņēmumu Reģistrs, 2019; Centrālā statistikas pārvalde, 2018), for the 14 Estonian parties this percentage is 6.7 (Centre of Registers and Information Systems, 2019; Statistics Estonia, 2019). Although due to the availability of data about party members and for the reason that membership expressed as a percentage of the electorate in both countries has barely changed over 10 year period, a temporal dimension cannot be built. However, a cross-sectional comparison of countries and party types can be done.

This study tackles why the two countries of similar contemporary historical trajectories and the emerging party systems have such different results in party membership. Can different amount of interest in having members serve as an explanation? This study aims to explore political party interest in having members, to provide a demand-side explanation for the different membership levels in Estonia and Latvia.

For ascertaining the interest of having members, a novel index that compiles four distinct aspects a party can use for reaching out to new members and motivating current members is created. This composite measure includes the evaluation of input a party requires for a potential member to join the party, provided incentives through granted member rights, an existence of member



recruitment strategy, and provided incentives through organized activities for members. Responses for these aspects are retrieved from party articles of association and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with elite party members. Qualitative content analysis of the data is carried out, and for the purpose of coherent comparisons, results are outlined with a quantitative measure of allocating points from one to three in each aspect according to predetermined categories.

For ascertaining the interest scores, a small-N comparative, most similar systems design study that compares the current parliamentary parties in Latvia (elected in 2018) and Estonia (elected in 2019) is done. At the moment, these parties both in Latvia and Estonia are in the post-electoral period when they can focus on strengthening and developing their organizations, thus working on their membership basis. This repeatedly implies the topicality of performing such a study.

Albeit the calculations of each country's total interest score will provide easily comparable results, for a more in-depth outlook, additional lower-level analysis is carried out. The interest in having members across Latvian and Estonian parties will be compared in three dimensions: 1) according to worldview, 2) according to age, and 3) according to ethnic distinction. Such comparisons will allow making more meaningful conclusions about experiences of party membership across different parties in both countries.

This thesis consists of three parts: 1) theoretical overview, 2) research methodology, and 3) empirical analysis. The theoretical overview consists of two chapters. The first chapter is devoted for understanding the concept of political parties and the development of party organization models. The second chapter overviews issues regarding party membership – political participation, motivations for people to join parties, and peculiarities of member recruitment. Then the methodology section with a thorough explanation of the data and methods used for answering the research puzzle follows. The empirical part consists of three chapters. First, an analysis for Latvian parties is provided. Then

an analysis of Estonian parties follows. A separate chapter is devoted for cross-country and lower-level comparisons. Finally, conclusions are made.

## **1. POLITICAL PARTIES**

Political parties are often called the gatekeepers of democracy. While they are vital in ensuring that needs and interests of society in a representative manner are met, no other public institution has such a bad reputation as political parties. To understand what political parties are and how they have evolved, two subchapters follow. First, an overview of various definitions is given, as well as the core tasks of political parties are described. Second, the evolution of party organization is briefly described.

### **1.1. Understanding political parties**

When it comes to the now a day large nation-states, in order for democracy to work the act of representation is indisputable. However, representation itself is a perplexing and antagonistic concept. Pitkin (1967), for example, distinguishes three types of representation – substantive, when the representative acts in the interests of the represented, descriptive, when the representative is objectively similar to the represented, and symbolic, when the representative is illustrating the represented by the means of shared culture and identity. Although representation cannot fully substitute the perks of direct democracy (Urbinati, 2006: 18), political parties are authorized to work towards mirroring society as a whole.

The well-known assertion of Schattschneider (1942: 1) that „modern democracy is unthinkable save in terms of political parties” has successfully established in the predominant discourse. They are seen as inevitable in representative democracy, and even desired (Van Biezen, 2004: 704-705). Nevertheless, explaining what a political party is may not be as trivial as it seems at the first glance.

Defining what a party is and what is its purport, on the one hand should be an objective task, however, due to the transformations society continuously undergoes, conceptualization of political parties varies alongside these changes. Hence parties and their tasks are revealed not in the terms of what they are but what they are ought to be. White (2006: 6), for example, outlines some ideas – it is a body of men where the ideological roots dominate (Burke, 2002; Reagan,

1984), it is an organization that engages in striving for governmental power (Epstein, 1980; Schlesinger, 1994; Aldrich, 1995), or rather an organization that coordinates voter choice to influence government actions (Downs, 1957; Key, 1955; Chambers, 1967). White (2006: 7) reveals that neither statesmen nor scholars have ever sufficiently answered these normative questions, therefore attempts to define parties and their tasks have often produced more turmoil than clarity.

Inevitably, political parties differ in their motivation, organization, behavior, and significance (Katz, 2008: 294). Nevertheless, Huckshorn (1984) has tried to capture the essence of parties. In his words, „a political party is an autonomous group of citizens having the purpose of making nominations and contesting elections in the hope of gaining control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of the government” (Huckshorn, 1984:10). In this definition the four elements that are commonly found in various definitions are successfully combined. First, the objective of parties is identified. The goal is to gain control over governmental power through the capture of public offices and the organization of the government. Second, methods by how parties strive to achieve control are identified. That is, parties make nominations and compete in elections. Third, parties participate in the competition for power where the result is not previously determined. Huckshorn (1984) captures this idea by portraying that parties use their methods for striving for power „in the hope of” achieving the power. And fourth, the group of citizens which have associated in a political organization is autonomous and the participants have a mutual understanding, or a purpose, for their actions. Katz (1987: 8) notes that in the context of democratic party-government, the concept of political party can be described by three components – 1) parties display team-like behavior 2) to become in charge over all political power 3) and they base legitimacy for this action on their electoral results.

Simply stating, political parties are associations of like-minded people who have their own perception on how society should function. Therefore, to ensure the realization of their perception, they participate in the competition for

power. However, political party functions do not stop there (Gunther and Diamond, 2001: 7-9).

Gunther and Diamond (2001: 7-9) distinguish several core functions. First of all, parties are responsible for two distinct phases of electoral process – candidate nomination when people in inner party competition are chosen for who will represent the party in elections, and electoral mobilization when course of action is taken to actively encourage potential voters to engage in the election process. Over the long term, parties can facilitate one`s attachment or identification with a specific party. If implementation of a continuous mobilization strategy takes place, a party holds an imperative position in structuring the choices and alternatives along different issue dimensions. Parties also represent various social groups. The representation proceeds in an either symbolic manner or genuinely accelerates the particular interests of the group. The act of representation takes place in two rounds: First, when the interparty competition for voter support in election campaigning period happens; second, following the election, when the drafting and deliberation of bills happens in the legislative arena. However, the second round of representation is regularly based on party`s calculations about their overall gains or loss and not an absolute advancement of the represented group`s concerns. Interest aggregation, when separate interests of various groups are combined into broader entities. The way how parties approach the interest-aggregation process is vital both for the policy stability and government coalition longevity in parliamentary systems with multiple parties. A key task is ensuring that governments are formed and are feasible. As well as, parties are essential in enabling citizens to engage in the political process, and in securing that citizen interests have been heard, furthermore – taken into account when, proceeding with the legislative work. But, the aspect that Gunther and Diamond (2001: 7-9) highlight, is that different types of parties perform these tasks in different degrees. In addition, a particular type of party will emphasize one or a distinct set of tasks, whereas a different type of party will accentuate other tasks.

## **1.2.Evolution of the political party organization**

From now a day perspective, the origins of political parties lie in the representative assemblies of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and in the forces that tried to get a voice in them. In both of these cases, parties originated from the sense that coordinated action will likely be more effective than individual strives. The origins of parties can be divided in two - parties who originated within parliaments and parties who originated outside parliaments. Parties of internal and external origin also differ in terms to who they are representing. While parties that originated in parliamentary conditions represent the establishment of upper and upper middle classes, the external parties represent the middle, lower middle, working classes, sometimes marginalized groups or adversaries of the establishment. The strive to include those groups who were excluded from participation in political affairs due to various economic, religious, and gender restrictions led to an extensive development of the political party organization.

Over the years, however, the models how parties organize have changed. The earliest modern parties were the cadre or elite parties. Since each member of a parliament who made a party was dependent on clientele, having an active organization beyond this specific member of the parliament was irrelevant. Starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, mass parties started to form outside the parliaments. These political organizations strived for specific interests, mainly the workers` class interests. Mass parties introduced structured organization, which based its power on the members. In academia, the period when this type of parties was present is often referred as golden age of parties. In the longer term, however, representation of only particular groups did not work out. To participate in the competition where mass suffrage became present, parties needed to appeal to as much people as possible. Hence, group boundaries got torn down and catch-all parties formed. This type of parties started to require more professionalization, but membership, although vaguely based on ideology, was still needed.

At the moment, the fourth stage of party organization takes place. The model that predominantly exists today is the cartel party type. These parties have moved towards the state, in the sense that they are ever more dependent on rules

and laws laid down by government (Katz and Mair, 2009: 755). The state influence largely comes from the substantial amounts of public money to fund political parties, and, although parties are private organizations who should freely manage their own internal structures and processes, party laws strictly regulate their organizational practices. The cartel party model implies high professionalization, for example, instead of using member resources, often hired people work with electoral campaigns, administrative affairs, and other activities. Alongside the less frequent business party organization model that developed in late 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is characterized by adapted business strategy in gaining access to political power, both cadre and business parties are not interested in having large memberships. As these parties receive their financial means from other sources and they can hire professional staff to help them achieve their political goals, large membership numbers become nonessential.

It is only natural that the ways how organizations organize themselves change over time. While there have been speculations that parties may exist without members, there is no telling what models of party organization we will experience in the future. Despite that the disruption of party organization is often mentioned, scholars assert that political parties are fundamental in making democracy work (Linz, 2002: 291). Parties are a vital part of the political participation phenomenon. Although parties could persist with professionalized staff, members still play a crucial part. In some countries, including Estonia and Latvia, for an organization to call itself a political party, it has to assemble a certain number of members. The next chapter of this study is devoted to understand why people engage in political organizations and how parties can enhance the participation.

## **2. PARTY MEMBERSHIP**

To understand the peculiarities of having members, a chapter on party membership is provided. However, first the phenomenon of political participation has to be explained. Party membership is essentially looked at from two sides – what motivates a person to join a party, and how parties can motivate people to join parties. The final subchapter provides an introductory discussion on whether parties are even looking for members.

### **2.1. Political participation**

To ensure a link between the political elite and the rest of society, political participation is needed. However, the term - political participation – covers a wide spectrum of activities. Voting, donating to political parties and their campaigns, running for election, seeking political office, writing petitions, participating in boycotts and demonstrations, associating in various groups and unions, as well as participating in illegal activities, like, occupying buildings, blocking public spaces and confronting authorities.

Kitschelt and Rehm (2011: 330-336) categorize political participation that is not a one-time activity, in three major groups: 1) social movements; 2) interest groups; and 3) political parties. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to tackle why people repeatedly take part in political activities. Especially, what are their motivations to participate?

While political incentives, the political position, and the political environment play a great role (Milbrath and Goel, 1977), for participation in politics one`s subjective self assessment is critical (Almond and Verba, 1963). For example, Dahl and Stinebrickner (2002) explain, that there is a greater chance that one will participate in politics if 1) he or she positively values the expected benefits from the participation; 2) he or she believes that it is important to find alternative solutions for existing problems; 3) he or she believes that it is in their power to contribute to change the outcome; 4) he or she believes that the outcome will be unsuccessful in the case of them not participating; 5) he or she possesses necessary skills and knowledge on how to usefully participate; 6) he or she is interested in overcoming peculiar obstacles to participate.



Since various forms and intensities of political participation are available nowadays, participation in the central element of the representative democracy – political party – has a complex nature. As the meaning and experience of membership vary between different people, the concept should be perceived as a social construct. However, the legal sense of party membership has not changed – party member is an individual who appears on the party’s membership list. While it can be argued that the boundaries between members and non-members have become blurry (Katz & Mair 2009: 755), parties are still required to have an official membership basis to participate in the electoral competition.

For decades, scholars have sought to explain what motivates individuals to join political parties. Despite that the evolution of political parties provokes us to think about party membership in specific ways, it has to be acknowledged that the experience of membership is diverse – not everyone who participates, participate in the same way. As well, that accounts for reasons why people decide to join political organizations.

## **2.2. Why do people join political parties?**

Clark and Wilson (1961) in their article on various types of organizations claim that parties belong to a group of utilitarian organizations whose activities are based on material merit. These authors believe that parties, like most private companies, seek to provide their members with tangible benefits, such as higher wages or opportunities to work in new and better-paid jobs. Moreover, party members expect such goods.

While Olson (1971) argues that groups of individuals with a common interest will act in a way to benefit the whole group, this statement does not entirely apply for parties. McCulloch (1990) argues that the logic of collective action only works in groups with a small number of participants, as rational individuals in larger settings with no coercive measures being present act in their personal interests. It can be assumed that individuals in parties are motivated by material benefits, however McCulloch’s (1990) study on what motivates people to join parties in the United Kingdom, the materialistic goods were not the reason why individuals decided to join parties. Although political parties are still mass

based organizations that unite at least several hundreds of people, ideological factors, willingness to participate in various party's activities, curiosity about politics as such, identification with a certain party or support for the party leader stand before materialistic goods (McCulloch, 1990). However, the social convention may dictate not to endorse the material side of joining a party, hence the respondents perhaps have been shy to identify this dimension of motivation.

For example, in a study conducted by Conway and Feigert (1968) where party members in two different areas of the United States - Knox County in the state of Illinois, where agriculture and manufacturing were the main occupations, and the Montgomery County in the state of Maryland, which is a prominent suburban state – in both cases people's motivation to join a party depended on their level of well-being. Authors align their conclusions with nowadays contradictory Maslow's hierarchy of needs that people first of all want to satisfy their primary needs and only after that they can begin to think about values, party ideology, as well as strive for collective good. It implies that participation in a party is dominated by the need of material benefits.

The problem of collective action in relation to the motivation and incentives of party members has been elaborated by Ware (1996). The author explains that in large groups of rationally minded people, each of them calculates the worth of their actions. Assuming that a specific policy will benefit everyone, but the implementation of it requires involvement of many but not all, taking a part in the implementation activities will cost a certain amount of resources – whether it is time, skills, or money. However, if an individual does not get involved in any of the activities, it costs him or her nothing, because others will invest their resources instead of this particular individual. Ware (1996) presumes that each individual calculates the need for participating in the implementation process by forecasting, whether the policy will be implemented with the same results if he or she does not take part in the process. If the number of potential activists is large, the likelihood that one particular individual's involvement or non-involvement will change the policy development is very small. However, the potential loss for each individual who involved in implementing the policy is

greater than the benefit. Therefore, a rational-minded individual will choose not to participate and, because most of individuals think in such patterns, policies will not be put into action. Olson (1971) described this as the „free rider” problem, when individuals want to receive goods without investing their resources for achieving these goods.

The „free rider” problem is also present at the political party level. While there are individuals who want that the party goals are achieved, they do not want to directly participate in achieving these goals. Therefore, party`s task is to achieve active involvement of its members in party`s affairs. However, if membership provides only collective benefits, what can stimulate individuals to join a party?

### **2.3.How parties can recruit members?**

Some scholars (e.g. Clark and Wilson, 1961; Seyd and Whiteley, 1992; Whiteley et al., 1994; Ware, 1996) indicate that parties can offer material, solidary, and purposeful incentives to motivate people in participating. Most accounts of stimulus to party membership follow Clark and Wilson's (1961) tripartite typology of incentives. Similarly, although in a different terminology, tripartite typology of incentives is presented by Seyd and Whiteley (1992). Ware (1996: 67-71) presents this idea in the most comprehensive way.

Material incentives give the potential party members a belief or anticipation of personal reward in return for party membership. These may include payment for a particular activity or a venture in the pre-election campaign, assignment to a governmental office, an opportunity to contract as an entrepreneur with the government for the supply of goods or services, etc. The basis of material incentives is the idea of exchange of membership for a reward from the party.

Solidary incentives, unlike the material ones, can be described as intangible, and they are available on the basis of collective benefit. At times, solidary incentives are portrayed as member`s motivation to join a party to take part in the party`s activities, enjoy the company, or to receive benefits that membership provides – summer camps, seminars, sports events, or even a specific status that are not directly linked to the strive for power.

Purposeful incentives relate to individual's chance to participate in achieving the party's program or ideological goals. These people feel that their value system coincides with the party's value system, and that the goals set by the party are close to those of the individual. Such individuals actively contribute in the party's affairs as they are interested in contributing to the societal interests. Individuals which are led by purposeful stimulus join parties as they are primarily guided by values and ideology.

According to people's motivations, parties can offer these stimulus. For example, material stimulus are present in some mass parties, however, cadre parties acknowledge much more that they need skilled people for the party's affairs, hence their skills can be rewarded with material benefits. As political parties are organizations which existence is bounded to a certain minimum of members, parties acknowledge that they can attract „signatures” by providing opportunities to participate in fun events that reach beyond the traditional affairs of a political organization. By providing solidary benefits, parties can attract such members that will not necessarily contribute to the organization but will ensure its existence and a share of votes. To lessen expenditures on material and solidary stimulus, parties are interested in attracting individuals who are genuinely interested in party's affairs due to its ideological stances and values. For such individuals, parties can offer a platform for expressing their attitudes and ensure opportunities to work towards achieving the party's goal.

Another way how to divide stimulus that parties can offer to their potential members, is described by Katz (2005: 103-105). He provides two categories of stimulus – selective and collective.

With selective incentives, Katz (2005) understands benefits that are available only to party members. Initially, the most widespread selective incentive is public office, as well as various social benefits, however it needs to be highlighted that the supply of such incentives is relatively small. Although previously parties could ensure such benefits, in the now a day democratic and developed world the criteria for selecting people for public positions are stringent, hence for parties it is more complicated to place their own people in positions. As

the procedures for gaining a public post are becoming more transparent, individuals can no longer be motivated to join a party in order to become an official. Another benefit mentioned by author is access to power. That is, for civil servants to achieve the desired decisions if they have the support of the party. However, nowadays this access to power is limited by laws that regulate the political neutrality of civil servants. Nevertheless, an incentive - access to information – is highly relevant. The party`s newspapers, letters and correspondence, discussions and speeches are valuable for people who are interested in how politics are made. Moreover, not only members can be motivated by giving access to information, members have the opportunity to participate in creating information and correspondingly spread it in society.

Collective incentives by Katz (2005) are divided into two subtypes. First, support for the party in elections. And second, opportunity to express the party`s ideology and goals. Regarding the first subtype, if a party achieves successful results in the elections, the party has the chance to lead the development of the country and society according to their ideology. The second type relates more to psychological benefits, as the member of the party can strive for ideals that the party presents, as well as spread these values in society, hence fostering the development. While the understanding of what is right or what is wrong depends on each individual`s value system, like-minded individuals have the opportunity to associate in political organizations to strive for the power and develop country according to their worldview.

#### **2.4. Are parties bad at recruiting members?**

Although there are techniques on how parties can recruit members by providing various incentives, it has not stopped the on-going party membership decline phenomenon that has been present the past several decades. The trend is well documented and confirmed across European democracies, starting with evidence from the Western Europe (Katz et. Al, 1992) and updated data including Central and Eastern European countries (Mair and van Biezen 2001). Some of the recent studies stress the even more deepening membership decline (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010; Whiteley 2011; van Biezen et al. 2012, Scarrow 2014). There is no univocal answer to why the numbers of party members are falling. The picture of

who joins political parties, as well as leave them, what is their motivation to do that, and what values do they hold is muddled (Heidar 2007). Moreover, from party perspective, it is still a mystery of whether parties have trouble with recruiting new members or retaining the existing ones.

As nowadays political parties are highly professionalized, the need for enrolling members varies among parties. Some believe that member input can help them achieve the political goals, whereas some just expect their vote for their respective party in the elections. Parties often expect that members will contribute to their party, either by donations or time. And still, party membership bases are essential for drawing candidates for local, national, and sometimes even international posts.

In providing explanations for party membership trends, both individual and party level perspectives have been sought. Scarrow (1996) proposes to summarize the explanations as either 'supply- side' or 'demand- side'. Supply-side explanations seek to understand the motivation or un-motivation of people to join parties, but the demand-side explanations refer to the motivation of parties to recruit members. Webb et al. (2002: 450) notes, that the supply-side explanations seem to be more convincing because there is no good evidence that parties are not interested in recruiting members.

Albeit acknowledging that Estonia and Latvia have a similar Soviet experience, that is often put as an explanation in why people are not interested in becoming party members, membership levels between the countries differ tremendously. Moreover, Eurobarometer data (Eurobarometer 88, 2017: 42-43) indicates almost identical percentage of people who are interested and very interested in politics. Therefore, it is worth exploring if people should be blamed for being passive or actually parties in Estonia and Latvia approach members with different enthusiasm?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

To ascertain the interest of having members, a composite measure of four distinct elements: 1) required input from potential members for joining a party, 2) provided incentives through granted member rights, 3) an existence of member recruitment strategy, and 4) provided incentives through organized activities for members, is created (*cf. Figure 1*). To determine how easy or difficult it is to join a party and what incentives are provided through officially granted member rights, qualitative content analysis of each party's statutes according to pre-determined categories is carried out. To determine whether parties have developed specific recruitment strategies and what incentives they provide through organizing activities for members, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with elite members from each party are carried out. An informed consent with each interviewee is obtained, as well as they are given the opportunity to remain anonymous in the study. The interviews are carried out online in Latvian and English. Forms in both languages that are used in interviews are attached in Appendix 1. To analyze the obtained information, qualitative content analysis of interview transcripts according to pre-determined categories is carried out.

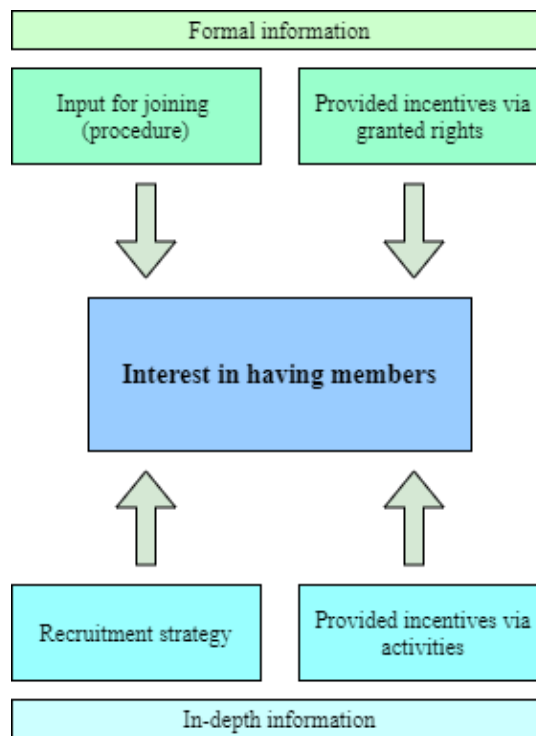


Figure 1. Composite measure of interest in recruiting new members

To make comprehensible comparisons, findings are laid out in a quantitative manner. For each of the aspects, according to the pre-determined categories, a party can receive points from one to three. To calculate the total country score, average results in every aspect are counted together. This means that the total score of interest can vary from four, if all analyzed parties in all aspects receive one point, and 12, if all analyzed parties in all aspects receive three points. More points indicate more outreach to new members. The total scores of interest in having members are compared between both countries, to conclude whether Estonia has a higher level of party membership than Latvia because parties are more interested in having members.

The first aspect of analysis is admission procedure. It is determined how much input is required from a potential member if he or she wants to join a party (*cf. Table 1*). Respectively, it is answered whether the procedure is easy, relatively difficult, or difficult. The procedure is categorized as easy if the applicant has to only hand in an application to join the party. The procedure is categorized as relatively difficult, if an application is required, plus the potential member has to know someone from the specific party who could provide a recommendation letter. For this category, some of the elements can be interchangeable. For example, if there are additional limitations regarding citizenship, but recommendation letters are not required, the procedure is still categorized as relatively difficult. The procedure is classified as difficult if the party has set additional requirements than the basic ones set in the political party law, and both application and recommendation letter(s) need to be handed in. If a party has an easy admission procedure, it receives three points in this aspect. If it is relatively difficult to join a party, the party receives two points in this regard. For parties who require a lot of input from the potential member to join the party, one point in this aspect is allocated.



Table 1. Classification of admission procedures

Category	Score to be allocated	Required input
Easy	3	Application
Relatively difficult	2	Application + recommendation(s) from party member(s) // additional requirements than in the law + application
Difficult	1	additional requirements than set in the law + application + recommendation(s) from party member(s)

Second, it is explored what incentives parties provide to resonate to member motivations by granting rights (*cf. Table 2*). As previously described in section 2.3., parties can use material, solidary, and purposeful incentives to motivate people to engage in the organization. It is analyzed, which types of incentives parties have encapsulate in their statutes by setting member rights. If a party has indicated that members have a right to receive personal goods for participation in the party, it is verified that party has formally established material incentives. If a party has indicated that members have a right to be associated with the party, for example, a membership card is provided, access to the party's information is granted, they can attend meeting or gathering that are organized only for the specific party's members, etc., it is verified that the party formally has established solidary incentives. If a party has formally established purposeful incentives, like participation in the party's working groups, participation in discussions, they have a right to express opinion, they can make initiatives and submit ideas for further improvement, as well as rights to participate in intra-party decision-making is granted, it verified that the party provides purposeful incentives. If a party has formally established one type of incentives, it receives one point in this aspect. Subsequently, if a party provides two types of incentives it receives two points, and for providing three types of incentives it receives three points in this regard.

*Table 2. Classification of types of incentives via member rights*

<b>Incentive</b>	<b>Reward</b>
Material	Rights that allow to receive personal good for participation
Solidary	Formally established elements and activities that assure one`s belonging to the party
Purposeful	Rights that allow to participate in improving the party`s internal and external life; Rights to contribute to the state by participating in the party`s work

For the next element – recruitment strategy – from online face-to-face interviews with party elite members it is explored whether parties want to widen their membership and for that reason they implement strategic recruitment activities. If a party puts an emphasis on recruiting new members and implements planned, regular activities to do that, it is considered that party has an existing recruitment strategy. In such a case, three points are allocated to the party. If a party has set the goal to widen its membership, but the recruitment activities are erratic, it is verified that the party implements some recruitment activities but it is not a well organized process. Hence, in such a case the party receives two points in the strategy aspect. If a party is not looking for widening the membership and they do not implement specific activities to attract new members, it is verified that the party does not have a clear strategy to recruit members. For such cases one point will be allocated to parties in this aspect. The classification of recruitment strategies and allocation of points is outlined in the Table 3.

Table 3. Classification of member recruitment strategies

Category	Score to be allocated	Description
Existing strategy	3	Widening membership is important, hence regular activities in a strategic manner are enacted
Some recruitment activities	2	Widening membership is important, but activities are irregular and not well organized
No clear strategy	1	Widening membership is not considered important, thus no specific recruitment activities are enacted

The last element refers to what types of incentives that resonate to member motivations parties provide to via organized activities. To approach this aspect in a sensitive manner, first, a question to explore presence of purposeful incentives is asked. Interviewees are asked to describe how members can involve in intra-party work. Then a question regarding solidary incentives follows. It asked what formal and informal activities the party provides for its members. The intent is to discover how parties give an opportunity for each individual to expand knowledge and develop skills, as well as to meet new people and network. It is expected that parties would try to dodge questions about possible material rewards hence this part is carried out especially sensitive. For each interviewee it is asked to compare if belonging to the respective party gives a leverage for a person to obtain party-related jobs, for example, assistant for a member of the parliament, assistant for the parliamentary group, post at the office of the minister, and others, in comparison to a person who is not the party's member. Similarly to the approach in categorizing types of incentives via member rights (*cf. Table 2, page 23*), if the presence of all three types of incentives is detected, three points are allocated to the respective party in this aspect. If two types of incentives are provided, two points are allocated. A party that provides activities that resonate to only one type of incentives receives one point in this aspect.

When points in all aspects are allocated to parties, the total country score is calculated. It is assumed that -

**H: The higher the total score of interest in having members is, the higher the level of party membership in a country is.**

However, to provide a more meaningful insight into the practices used by parties in Estonia and Latvia, comparisons in three dimensions are provided. First, it is explored and compared whether parties in both countries have different interest in having members according to their worldview. Second, it is explored and compared whether parties in both countries have different interest in having members according to their age classification. Third, it is explored and compared whether parties in both countries have different interest in having members according to their ethnic divide.

With the worldview dimension it is understood how parties place themselves in a bigger picture, outside the national politics. That is, where do parties belong in the “world map”. The cross-country party comparison according to their worldview is done based on their belonging to the political groups of the European Parliament that were formed in 2019. This gives a greater insight on how do parties define themselves outside the national politics and what are their core values that are comparable to other European parties.

Party belonging/ or plausible belonging in the case of being elected to the European Parliament is compiled in the Table 4. Acknowledging that in the case of Latvia, no party belongs to the Identity and Democracy group, and in the case of Estonia no party belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists group, based on the fact that the parties belonging in these groups - EKRE and National Alliance - are both classified as populist radical-right, they have friendly relations and common inter-border goals (for example, the Bauska pact and mutual invitations to torch-light parades), as well as scholars (e.g. Auers & Kasekamp, 2015) have identified their similar worldviews, this study will follow the previous practice of comparing them.

*Table 4. Party belonging to the European Parliament groups*

<b>EP group</b>	<b>Estonia</b>	<b>Latvia</b>
European People's Party (EPP)	Isamaa	New Conservative Party, Who Owns the State, ZZS, Unity
S&D	Social Democratic Party	Harmony
Renew	Estonian Reform Party, Estonian Centre Party	Development/For!
ID	EKRE	-
ECR	-	NA

Over the years, the Baltic country elections experience a constant trend, where new political forces emerge, change the vote share, and end up distorting the political landscape. Pettai, Auers and Ramonaitė (2011: 153), however, highlight that the changes in political party supply in Estonia are less frequent than in Latvia and Lithuania. Although in comparison to the Western Europe, all parties in this study can be considered young, for a meaningful comparison a party is classified young, if it has been established sometime in the 10 year time period before the 2018 elections in Latvia and 2019 elections in Estonia. Parties established until 2008 in Latvia and 2009 in Estonia, in this study are classified old. The distinction between young and old parties in both countries is outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. Party classification according to their age

Age Category	Estonia	Latvia
Young	EKRE (2012)	Harmony (2010); Unity (2011); New Conservative Party (2014); National Alliance (2010); KPV LV (2016); For Latvia`s Development (2013); Movement “For!” (2017)
Old	Estonian Reform Party (1994); Estonian Centre Party (1991); Isamaa (2006); Social Democratic Party (1990)	The Latvian Green Party (1990); Latvian Farmers` Union (1991)

The cleavage theory has played a great role in understanding voter support for parties. While in Western countries the cleavages have formed across mainly socio-economic, clerical - anti-clerical, urban – rural divides, as well as later across divides in post-materialist attitudes and gains from globalization, the post-communist countries have a different experience. In these countries the first major cleavage established between anti-communist and post-communist forces, however both in Estonia and Latvia the most important divide for many years has been the ethnic one (e.g. Pettai et. Al, 2011: 151-152). Approximately one quarter of inhabitants in both of these countries belong to the Russian speaking minority, which has led to the Estonian vs. Russian-speaking or Latvian vs. Russian speaking divide. Although over the years Estonia has managed to create the left

vs. right divide, the subsequent events after last parliamentary elections of the Centre party significantly losing support among their Russian-speaking minority (Wright, 2020), presumably due to the inclusion of the non Russian-friendly EKRE in the government, assures that ethnic politics are still a now a day reality. In Latvia, the ethnic divide is still the only real political competition (Pettai et. Al 2011: 152; Ijabs, 2017: 92-93).

To make a purposeful judgment, four parties with the most specific distinctions in voter basis are contrasted to each other (cf. Table 6). In Estonia the Russian-speaking minority is targeted by the Centre Party and in Latvia it is the Party Harmony. Parties who specifically target only Estonian/Latvian voters are EKRE in Estonia and the National Alliance in Latvia.

*Table 6. Party distinctions according to ethnic divide*

<b>Voter basis</b>	<b>Estonia</b>	<b>Latvia</b>
Targeting the Russian-minority	Estonian Centre Party	Party Harmony
Targeting specifically Estonians/ Latvians	EKRE	National Alliance

In the subsequent chapters, first, all aspects for Latvia are analyzed. Then the analysis is done for Estonian parties. A separate chapter with overall country comparison and the lower-level comparisons across the three distinct dimensions follows.

#### **4. LATVIA**

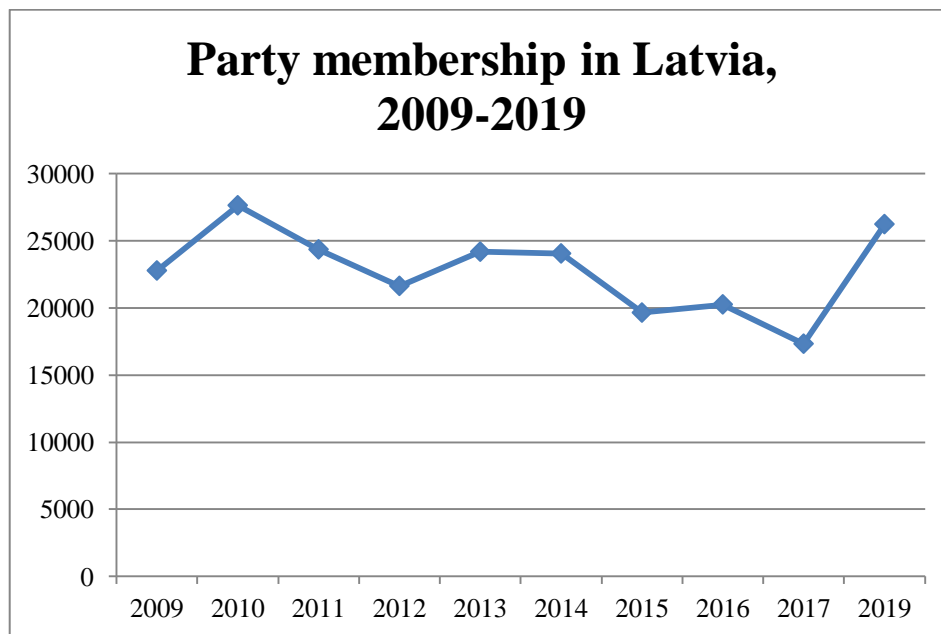
The organization of political parties in Latvia is bounded by several laws. On the basis, parties refer to the Article 102 of the Latvian constitution, that „everyone has the right to form and join associations, political parties, and other public organizations” (Latvijas Republikas Satversme, 2019). While the reference to political parties in the Latvian constitution is remarkably brief, as at the constitutional level they receive similar treatment to any other voluntary organization (Ikstens, 2017: 232), a separate party-related legislation has been reactively developed. Due to various loopholes, stricter and stricter regulations have been adopted frequently since the start of the 1990`s to up until now. For example, the party financing law that was adopted in 1995 has been amended 14 times in the 25-year period. The political party law that regulates political organizations only entered into force on January 1, 2007. Until then, the law on non-governmental organizations was referred also to political parties. The political party law not only explains the procedures of establishing a party and regulates their inner structures, but the law is clear on explaining party members` rights and duties. Parties are free to decide how they are going to ensure these rights, as well as they can make additional rules that do not contradict with the law.

According to the 2007 political party law, no less than 200 citizens of Latvia who are at least 18 years old can establish a political party. When establishing a party, to ensure the authenticity of signatures of all participants and certify decisions at the party`s inaugural meeting, the presence of a notary is required. Additionally, while also non-citizens of Latvia and EU citizens who are residing in Latvia can become members of political parties, in parties where there are more than 400 members, at least half of the members have to be Latvian citizens. A person is allowed to be a member of only one political party. Judges, police officers, prosecutors, Auditor General, Council of the State Audit Office or audits member of the department panel, ambassadors, and professional service soldiers are not allowed to be political party members.



The registry of party members is held by the Enterprise register and is accessible to anyone by a payment. Since 2007, every year until March 1 all parties have to hand in their membership figures to the Enterprise register, however, this activity is not taken too seriously. Every year there are several parties who do not hand in their membership figures, hence calculations about party membership and its changes over time in Latvia are not completely accurate. It has been hypothesized that many political organizations are reluctant to annually update their membership figures due to the minimum membership requirement and the huge trust issues towards political parties. Moreover, prior to 2007 no reliable data about membership figures is available.

Over the 10 year period, there have been some fluctuations in the total party membership expressed in raw numbers (*cf. Figure 2*). Although the missing data from some parties does not allow making precise calculations, the range of change in raw numbers has been from about 17300 members at its lowest to 27600 members at its highest. In 2019, only 1.4% of the country`s population were members of a political party.



*Figure 2. Party membership in Latvia, 2009-2019*

Source: Data from the Latvian Enterprise Register

Regarding party membership expressed as a percentage of the electorate (M/E), Latvia is located at the extreme within the European context. While on average membership levels in European countries tend to reach 4.7 per cent, Latvia ranks as the last one among the 27 analyzed countries for the reason that the level of party membership failed to reach even 1 per cent (Van Biezen, Mair, & Poguntke, 2012:28). Data from the last 10 years indicate that the membership level has slightly increased (*cf. Table 7*), however not even 2 per cent of the electorate are political party members. Moreover, this small percentage of people is scattered across 51 different parties. To achieve that the smaller parties do not participate in the national level elections, in 2017 the law on electing the parliament was modified by a new regulation. It stipulates that in order for a party or party association to participate in the Saeima elections, it has to have not less than 500 members and the organization has to be established no later than one year prior to the respective elections.

*Table 7. M/E in Latvia, 2010-2018*

<b>Year</b>	<b>Eligible voters</b>	<b>Party members</b>	<b>Membership/ Electorate ratio %</b>
2010	1532259	~27632	~1,80%
2011	1543672	~24348	~1,58%
2014	1552235	~24046	~1,55%
2018	1548673	~26231	~1,69%

Source: Data from the Central Election Commission of Latvia and the Latvian Enterprise Register.

It has been repeatedly concluded that although the major parties in Latvia do not possess a grand membership basis, they do not rush to admit new members (Ikstens, 2017: 232). From one side, citizens are criticized for their lack of interest in politics, however what do parties as the vital element of political participation do to increase the engagement? And, moreover, are parties even interested in assembling more people in their organizations?

The next subchapters give a detailed analysis about member recruitment practices in Latvian parties. First, an overview about the parties in the current parliament is given. Each party and their membership numbers are briefly described. Then the analysis of all elements of interest in having members follows. For each aspect, parties are allocated points according to the methodology and the average result for country is calculated.

#### **4.1. Overview about parties in the current parliament**

In the current parliament, the 100 deputies are elected from seven lists that were created by five parties and two party alliances. The party Harmony got 23 seats, KPV LV got 16 seats, also the New Conservative party got 16 seats, the party alliance Development/For! that is formed by two main parties - For Latvia's development and the Movement "For!" – and a smaller party „Growth” got 13 seats, the National Alliance got also got 13 seats, the Union of Greens and Farmers that is formed by two main parties - the Latvian Farmers` Union and the Latvian Green party -, and two local partner-parties For Latvia and Ventspils and the Liepāja Party, got 11 seats, and the Unity got 8 seats. Societies mood for a change in Latvia`s politics is clearly expressed, as for the party KPV LV, the New Conservative party, and for the alliance Development/For! this is the first time in the parliament.

In the next several sub-chapters short overview about each of these parties is given. The parties in elected alliances are analyzed separately, as well as the analysis is provided only for the parties who form the biggest share of members in these alliances. Data about each party`s membership figures is retrieved from the Register of Enterprises of the Republic of Latvia.

##### **4.1.1. The Social democratic party „Harmony”**

The Social democratic party „Harmony” calls for a socially responsible state policy and the creation of a socially responsible economy which, under all foreign policy, external economic conditions and in constant compliance with their values - health, family, work, interethnic harmony, as well as political and economic independence of Latvia - would ensure long-term sustainable development of society and the well-being of every inhabitant of Latvia. The

party was created in 2010 when three parties - People's Harmony Party, the New Center Party and the Social Democratic Party merged into one. In 2011 also the regional Daugavpils city party joined Harmony.

At the moment it is the biggest party in Latvia in various aspects. First of all, membership wise, as in 2019 the party reported that 3657 people belong to this party. Second, it has the biggest representation in the parliament with 23 seats from 100. However, repeatedly a *cordon sanitaire* towards Harmony has been implemented as it has never been in the government. Moreover, contrary to the Western tradition of asking the winning party to form the coalition, Harmony has never been granted this chance. Third, Harmony, together with the party Honor to Serve Riga, has been ruling the Riga city municipality over the past decade. In the last Riga municipal elections their candidate list won 32 seats from 60.

Although over the years Harmony`s membership basis and electoral support is comparatively great to other parties, majority of society is skeptical towards it as it is a Russian-centric party. Up until 2017, before Harmony joined The Party of European Socialists, it had a partnership contract with Putin`s United Russia. Although the contract is terminated, Latvian political scientists (e.g. Rajevskis, 2017) do not believe that the informal relationships have ended.

#### **4.1.2. The party KPV LV**

The party KPV LV that is also previously known as the party Who Owns the State, was initiated by the actor/politician Artuss Kaimiņš who established this organization in 2016. It is a clear cut populist party that repeatedly expresses “us vs. them” rhetoric and claims that the elite is corrupt. The party claims to be centric-right with the goal to defend taxpayer relationships with the Latvian state. The party got a massive break-out from attracting the electorate that was previously left out from the viewpoint of other parties. Their anti-corruption and anti-elite rhetoric led the party to winning 16 deputy seats in the 2018 parliamentary elections. Moreover, the party is included in the government and holds three posts - Minister for Economics, Minister for Interior Affairs, and Minister for Welfare. Party`s internal struggle, however, exacerbated when the two most significant party`s faces – Artuss Kaimiņš and Aldis Gobzems –

got into a feud, the party split in the Saeima faction, as well as the supporters split into half and expressed their devastation with the unfulfilled promises by publicly burning the party's pre-election T-shirts. It is reported, that the party possibly will undergo a re-organization and change their branding (LSM.lv Ziņu redakcija, 2020).

Membership figures for three years have been reported to the Enterprise register. In 2016, the party was established with 376 members and in 2019 the number had almost doubled up to 663. The party's founder and co-chair Artuss Kaimiņš withdrew from KPV LV short before the annual 2020 congress and encouraged other members to liquidate the party. At the congress liquidation of the party was not revised and a new chairman, Atis Zakatistovs, was elected. However, the Latvian Enterprise Register soon announced that the congress was not decisive, due to the lack of delegates and the misinterpretation of the procedure. As the party experiences great internal struggles, the future of party's membership and even the existence of the party is unclear.

#### **4.1.3. The New Conservative Party**

The New Conservative Party aims to develop the independent and democratic Latvian states based on modern conservative values. For example, the party claims that the 1922 constitution should be respected and the founding ideas should not be altered with any future amendments. They refuse dual society or dual state language by promoting that Latvia should be a Latvian-speaking nation. Their most recognizable feature is striving for democracy and the rule of law that would ensure transparency. The party adheres only to a traditional family, where marriage is a union only between a man and a woman. They are pro welfare state idea as well as declares Latvia's full-fledged belonging to the Western societies. The new conservative party was founded in 2014 with a little over the minimum of required members. While the party claims to be ideologically conservative, the anti-corruption and elite vs. us rhetoric clearly marks the populist behavior.

Currently, the New Conservative party can be considered among the biggest parties as the membership is over 1000, as well as it got 16 seats from 100 in the latest parliamentary elections. In 2014, when the party tried out their luck

for parliamentary elections the first time, as it received less than 1% of the votes and did not overcome the 5% threshold. Their 2018 success story is largely based on attracting two previous anti-corruption and prevention bureau lions – Juta Striķe and Juris Jurašs. At the moment, they are a part of the coalition where the party has acquired three posts – minister of justice, minister of education and science, and minister of transport. It can be assumed that due to their growing popularity, their membership basis has grown along. Over the five years since founding the party, membership numbers have increased approximately four times.

#### **4.1.4. For Latvia's Development**

This classical liberal party was founded in December 2013, under the initiative of one of the most famous Latvian politician Einārs Repše. The party's core values are based on liberal views of an individual, tolerant, free, diverse, fraternal and democratic society that is free from prejudice and discrimination. The party values individual's right to freedom and independence in various forms, including the reduction of the state's role in business and the development of free market. Although previously For Latvia's development formed itself as an organization, it decided to contribute directly to the state's development by registering itself as a party and participating in the 2014 parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, this party only managed to receive a bit less than 1% of the votes and did not get into the parliament. The following elections in 2018 came with a success as the party formed an alliance with the newly established liberal party „For!” and a smaller party “Growth”. The alliance gathered around 12% of votes, resulting in 13 seats in the parliament. The alliance is included in the government and holds three posts, however only one of the posts - Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development – is allocated to the party's For Latvia's Development member, the chairman Juris Pūce. As he has been known for his longtime feud with the party Harmony and it's face – Nils Ušakovs – Mr. Pūce managed to fire Mr. Ušakovs from the Riga mayor position as well as dismissed the whole Riga city council for irresponsible service towards Riga city inhabitants.

Since establishing the party, membership figures have raised almost 2.5 times. In 2014 party reported that 218 people belong to this organization, but in 2019 the number of members reached over 500. The growth of membership has been steady, adding little by little every year.

#### **4.1.5. Movement “For!”**

Movement “For!” is a pro-European liberal-centric political party that was established in 2017. The party stands for everyone`s freedom and importance in society, with high inclusion and tolerance. They call for a just state, which is free from oligarchy, supports entrepreneurship and welfare of everybody. The core of this party is the previous liberal wing of the party Unity that decided to separate and create their own political organization. At the moment, this party has established a strong partnership with the party For Latvia`s Development. Together they sealed 13 deputy seats in the 2018 parliamentary elections. Two party`s members – Artis Pabriks and Ilze Viņķele – who previously were one of the most recognizable faces of Unity, are now working in the government as Deputy Prime Minister / Minister for Defense and Minister for Health.

In two years, party`s membership has increased almost twofold – from 298 to 548 members. As the party is very active in social media, it has gained a considerable amount of online supporters, which may become members at some point. For example, Movement “For!” called for supporting their manifest by collecting signatures of those people who identify themselves with these values. Since publishing this manifest online on July 2017, more than 800 citizens of Latvia have signed it. The party is working towards greater inclusion hence subsequently their manifest is available in Latgalian<sup>1</sup>, Russian, English, Belarusian, German, French, Estonian, and Hebrew.

#### **4.1.6. National Alliance**

National Alliance describes itself as a nationally conservative party that aims to develop Latvia into a national, just and wealthy state. This party was established in 2010, when the patriotic party For Fatherland and Freedom / LNNK that contributed dearly in times of regaining independence in the late 1980s and

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<sup>1</sup> A non-official language of one of Latvia`s regions

early 1990s, and the more radical, youth-based party All for Latvia! merged into one. Although identifying with national conservatism, scholars (e.g., Auers and Kasekamp, 2013) classify National Alliance as a populist radical – right party. While the popularity of populist radical – right is a relatively new phenomenon in the Western Europe, National Alliance in Latvia is perceived as a mainstream party.

This party has experienced steady growth in electoral support. For example, in the 2010 parliamentary elections the party received 8 deputy seats, but in the following early elections in 2011, they managed to almost double its share of votes, resulting in 14 seats. In the 2014 elections party continued to attract more votes and gained 17 seats. In the latest parliamentary elections, where new populist forces came into the political scene, National Alliance lost 4 seats, resulting in 13 deputy mandates. Not only voter support over the years, but also the inclusion of National Alliance in every government since 2011 demonstrates the normality of this party. One of the most familiar National Alliance`s faces – Ināra Mūrniece - despite her more radical All for Latvia! background has been elected into the parliament speaker post two times in a row, both in 2014 and 2018.

Data that has been submitted to the Latvian Enterprise register depict that the number of members when the party first reported their membership in 2014 and the most recent numbers, have decreased almost 2.5 times. While in 2014 the party indicated presence of around 2400 members, at the moment it assembles approximately 1000 members. Albeit electorally the party has been thriving, the stark decline may signal some internal struggles. Taking into account, that the party is very closed minded to one quarter of Latvia`s society – that is, the Russian speaking minority – perhaps they are not looking for attracting members because of the number count but because of their loyalty to the ideological stance.

#### **4.1.7. Latvian Farmers` Union**

Unlike most other parties in Latvia, the ideological roots of the Latvian Farmers` Union trace back to the first half of the 20th century. The party has played a role in the implementation of the agrarian reform, creation of the foreign



policy, development of agricultural and other activities that strengthen the Latvian state until the communist regime took over. In the midst of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Farmers` Union renewed its political activities, emphasizing that this party is the continuation of the original one. At that time of the first parliamentary elections in the restored independent Latvia, Farmers` Union gathered near 400 members and won 12 seats out of 100. In 2002 the party decided to become more centric, hence they partnered up with the Latvian Green Party. Since then, they have participated together in all following parliamentary elections under the name Union of Greens and Farmers.

The Union of Greens and Farmers currently is experiencing a downfall in the political scene. In the 2018 elections they received only 11 seats in contrast to the 2014 elections where 21 seats were allocated to the alliance. Moreover, the party alliance for the first time since 2002 was excluded from the government due to the incontestable proofs of oligarchy and influencing activities in politics by one of the most famous Latvian oligarchs Aivars Lembergs.

Nevertheless, the membership figures for the Latvian Farmers` Union are still holding strong. There have been fluctuations in membership, as, for instance, in 2009 party reported to have 1810 members, but in 2015 the number had decreased for more than 500 members. Still, this is one of the biggest parties in Latvia membership wise as at the moment it gathers almost 1500 members.

#### **4.1.8. The Latvian Green Party**

The origin of establishing a party that represents the green ideology is found in the Environmental Protection Club. In January 1990, when environmental activists, as well as activists who supported the restoration of Latvia's independence gathered together, the Latvian Green Party was founded. This was the first newly formed political party in the history of the restored Latvia. The party has participated in parliamentary elections only in joint lists with other parties, but their most meaningful partnership started in 2002, when together with the Latvian Farmers` Union the Union of Greens and Farmers was established.

The Latvian Green Party calls for sustainable development that is ensured by a knowledge-based society. The party fully supports European Union's principles - justice, security, freedom, tolerance, solidarity, subsidiarity, and respect for diversity. A lifestyle that ensures traditional and ecological thinking is supported. Due to communication and payment failures, intolerance towards the LGBTQ+ community, and the actions that are taken against the „green`s” values, in 2019 the party got excluded from the European Green Party.

The party's membership figures have been steadily increasing since 2010. New members chose to join this party, as in nine-year's time span the membership has increased from 630 members to approximately 909 members. While separately this party is not considered very powerful nor membership wise, nor popularity wise, this is one of the few Latvian parties that assembles close to 1000 members.

#### **4.1.9. Unity**

The party Unity has associated based upon core values such as democracy, the rule of law, patriotism, a national and socially just state, balanced and sustainable development of Latvia, as well as the whole European unity. This party was established in 2011, when the liberal party New age, the conservative party Civic alliance and the social democratic party Society for Political Change merged, however these parties already made a successful joint candidate list for the 2010 parliamentary elections. For the most recent parliamentary elections an association “New Unity” was created, where five regional parties joined Unity to make a broader pool of potential deputies.

The party previously gained clear support, for example, in the 2010 parliamentary elections it received 33 deputy seats and established the biggest faction in the parliament, in the 2011 elections it received 20 seats, and in the 2014 elections – 23 seats, but the last Saeima elections, however, came with great loss. In the 2018 elections Unity barely surpassed the threshold by attracting a bit less than 7% of votes which resulted in 8 seats in the parliament. The sharp popularity decrease is often explained not only by their internal scandals, like their leader rivalry, and the separation of the more liberal minded members, but

also public scandals, like the case of vote buying and possible involvement in Compulsory Electricity Purchase Component`s scam that has allowed for specific companies, some of who have close ties with Unity`s people, to gain huge sums at the expense of the entire Latvia's population. Nevertheless, due to intrigues after the elections in the whole political scene and failed attempts to create the government, the president trusted Unity`s member, Krišjānis Kariņš, to lead and form the new cabinet of ministers. From election losers, to gaining three powerful posts in the government – Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Minister for Finance, Unity now holds strong in the game.

Over the years, the party Unity has sustained a decent amount of members for the Latvian trend. In 2019 the party reported 2165 people as Unity`s members. The rises and falls for membership have been steady, for example, the first reported number of members was 2356 in the year 2012, the peak was achieved in the year 2013 with 2525 members, but the most serious fall was is detected in the year 2019 as the party`s liberal wing has separated and created their own party - Movement “For!” -, leaving Unity with 2165 members.

#### **4.2. Analysis of interest in having members**










In the following sub-chapters, elements for the interest in having members are described and analyzed. First, the admission procedures are examined and it is determined how much input parties in Latvia require from the potential members to join a party. Second, the rights of members in each party are explored to determine which types of incentives parties guarantee. Third, party approaches to member recruitment are described. Fourth, it is determined which types of incentives parties provide for their members via organized activities. For every aspect, the country average result is determined to compile the score of total interest in having members.

##### **4.2.1. Procedure**

While the political party law regulates who may become party members, the procedure of how a person can apply for becoming a members can be freely determined by parties themselves. Each party can set its own requirements. Moreover, a party can make its own limitations on who can apply.

After analyzing all parliamentary party statutes, the results are not ambiguous. All three categories are covered (*cf. Table 8*). Majority of parties have established relatively difficult procedures as they request recommendation letters or have specific requirements regarding citizenship, language knowledge, and hostile actions against the Republic of Latvia.

*Table 8. Admission procedures for parties in Latvia*

	Party								
Procedure									
Easy		X		X	X				
Relatively difficult	X					X		X	X
Difficult			X				X		

Three political parties – the party KPV LV, For Latvia`s Development, and the Movement „For!“ – enact easy admission procedure that does not require a lot of input from a potential member. While For Latvia`s Development and the Movement „For!“ only ask for an application, the party KPV LV asks to hand in an application that is accompanied by *Curriculum Vitae* and a declaration where previous memberships in other parties are listed. One officially becomes a member of the party KPV LV when the membership fee is paid. Albeit KPV LV requires some additional documents, the potential members do not have to obtain recommendation letters or have do not have citizenship limitations, hence this admission procedure classifies as easy.










The social democratic party Harmony, the National Alliance, the Latvian Green Party, and the party Unity have set relatively difficult admission procedures. All of these parties, apart from the National Alliance, request an application that is accompanied by a recommendation letter. The part Harmony requests a recommendation letter that is signed by two members, the party Unity requires one recommendation letter that is signed by one member, but the Latvian

Green Party requests a letter that is signed by a party member who has been a member of the party for at least one year. While the National Alliance does not require a recommendation letters, it has set additional limitations than the ones stated in the political party law. Only Latvian citizens, who know Latvian language and have not taken part in organizations that are hostile to Latvians can become this party`s members. National Alliance`s, Latvian Green Party`s, and Unity`s statutes also stipulate one to 12 months probation period for all new members before they are granted a full-fledged membership.

The New Conservative Party and the Latvian Farmers` Union require the most input from people who want to join these parties. The Latvian Farmers` Union allows only Latvian citizens to join the party. The potential member has to fill out an application that is accompanied by signatures of two current party members with a minimum one year`s membership, as well as one has to provide a proof that he or she has not participated in repressions against the people in Latvia and does not have a criminal conviction against him or her. The New Conservative Party has the longest set of requirements for potential members. First, one may not become this party`s member if he or she possesses the Latvian non-citizen status, and if he or she does not speak Latvian. The potential member has to fill out several applications – the general one for applying to the party, an application where his or her belonging to another party at the moment is denied, as well as an application that one understands the statutes, program and core values of this party. Then a document that proves that the person has not been convicted of a deliberate criminal offense or has not been prosecuted for an intentional criminal offense has to be added. Moreover, a document that proves that one has not taken part in organizations that have been hostile to the people in Latvia and the Latvian state has to be added. Two recommendation letters signed by current party members have to be handed in to the party`s board. But, the admission procedure does not stop there. If all the documents match the requirements set in the New Conservative Party`s statutes, the potential party member is invited to the board`s meeting for a face-to-face interview. One becomes a full-fledged member when the membership fee is paid.

According to the categorized input that is requested from potential members, parties are allocated points from one to three (cf. Table 9). This allows concluding that on average, the procedures for becoming a member of a party in Latvia are bit more than relatively difficult.

*Table 9. Allocated points for Latvian parties in procedure aspect*










	Party									Average
										
Allocated points for procedure	2	3	1	3	3	2	1	2	2	~2.1

#### 4.2.2. Rights

The political party law already sets a list of rights that a party has to ensure for its members. The law defines that members have the rights to participate in intra-party decision-making according to the procedures specified in the statutes, to elect the executive board of the party and other bodies thereof, to run for candidate at the intra-party elections according to the procedures specified in the statutes, to receive information about the party`s activities, as well as to freely express his or her opinion, to dispute decisions taken by the party according to the procedures described in the statutes, to withdraw from the party, and to decide regarding party candidates for elections to local municipalities, the Saeima and the European Parliament, according to the procedures specified in the statutes (Saeima, 2017). While the party law explicitly encapsulates a broad spectrum of rights, a party can add additional rights at its discretion. As the theory suggests that it is possible to determine how much a party is interested in having members by the provided incentives through the range of activities that the party offers, it is worth to explore what parties officially grant to their members. It is determined what types of incentives parties provide through the granted rights to resonate to certain motivations.

The analysis of each party's statutes allows deducting that officially political parties in Latvia ensure rights that resonate to solidary and purposeful motivations, but the presence of any material benefits for participation is not indicated in any of the studied parties (cf. Table 10). The New Conservative Party stands out with the fact, that it only has listed three rights for their members that resonate only to purposeful motivations.

*Table 10. Types of incentives ensured via member rights in Latvian parties*

	Party								
Type of incentives									
Material									
Solidary	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Purposeful	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Regarding rights that refer to solidary motivations, parties enlist various status-benefits. Most frequently, i.e. in seven from the nine analyzed parties, the right to access information about the respective party's affairs is officially ensured. For Latvia's Development, the National Alliance, and the Latvian Green Party also stipulate the opportunity to take part in all-level decision-making institutions, including attendance of the board's meetings. The social democratic party Harmony, the party Unity, and the Latvian Green Party issue their members a membership card, however, the usefulness of these cards is unclear. Parties have not identified for what reasons the membership card is used and whether the possession of it gives any benefits. The party KPV LV highlights that the member status gives the right to receive answers from the party's board if a question has been stated. A group of 20 Movement "For!" members has the right to ask for including an issue in the agenda for an annual congress, similarly, members of the Latvian Green Party have the right to request inclusion of topical issues into party's following congress by submitting a document to the party's board that has been supported by at least five regional divisions or minimum of 50 members. The Latvian Farmers' Union guarantees the freedom of expression, however, it is










specified that this freedom applies in party`s institutions. When a final stance is made, members should accept and embrace this stance. This party also encourages members to participate on an advisory level in the work in any of the party`s institutions. The social democratic party Harmony indicates the right to participate in events within the party as well as in the non-governmental sector that enhance a member`s political professionalism.

The range of purposeful rights is almost identical to all parties. Apart from the New Conservative Party that has only indicated the opportunity to make suggestions and hand in applications to the party`s board, the rest of the parties largely reiterate the list of rights set in the political party law. Members have the right to participate in intra-party decision-making, they can elect the executive board of the party and other bodies thereof, they can run as candidates for the intra-party officials` elections, as well as decide regarding party candidates for elections to local municipalities, the Saeima and the European Parliament. Additionally to the rights stipulated by the political party law, all of the parties permit submission of proposals or draft decisions to impact the party`s activities according to its core values and goals. Five political parties – the party Harmony, KPV LV, For Latvia`s Development, the Movement “For!”, and the National Alliance – also officially have granted the right to associate within the party into interest or working groups. Members are free to join any of these groups and contribute with their ideas.

According to the types of incentives that a party can provide via member rights, parties are allocated points from one to three (*cf. Table 11*). As all of the analyzed parties, apart from the New Conservative party, provide two types of incentives – solidary and purposeful – parties receive two points. Therefore, the average result is close to two.












Table 11. Allocated points for Latvian parties in member rights aspect

	Party									Average
										
Allocated points for rights	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	~1.9

#### 4.2.3. Recruitment strategy

From the interviews carried out with all party elite members, such as secretary-generals, board members, regional coordinators, and youth organization chairpersons, it is deduced that majority of the Latvian parties do not run specific recruitment activities (*cf. Table 12*). While some of the parties organize some activities to reach out to new members, they are not centrally organized and done in a strategic manner. Only two parties – For Latvia’s Development and the Movement “For!” – have developed clear recruitment strategies with different approaches to reach as many new potential members as possible.

Table 12. Presence of member recruitment strategies in Latvian parties

Recruitment strategy	Party								
									
Existing strategy				X	X				
Some recruitment activities		X					X		X
No clear strategy	X		X			X		X	

The social democratic party Harmony, the New Conservative Party, the National Alliance, and the Latvian Green Party believe that potential members should approach a party themselves based on the respective party’s ideology,

values, and political accomplishments. Harmony's Vice-chairperson and Riga's region head coordinator Anna Vladova states that the party looks for quality over quantity from members, hence not only the party does not enact recruitment activities, but also does not accept all people who have approached the party with an interest to join it. From this party's perspective, it is the biggest party in Latvia because people have seen their input in politics, hence they approach the party themselves as they want to express their support. Similarly, the New Conservative Party's representative tells that the party has adopted a stance, that they will not recruit new members on purpose. The party actively expresses its values and positions on issues therefore, if a person holds the same worldview, he or she will reach out to the party himself or herself. Moreover, potential members are thoroughly checked, for example, screening of their social media profiles is done, as well as an interview with multiple open-ended questions regarding the party's positions is held with each person who has passed the selection process. The party's representative mentions, that partly the stance on not specifically recruiting new members is explained by the scarce financial resources before the changes in the party financing law came into force on January 1, 2020. The National Alliance does not actively recruit new members following the assumption that for parties in Latvia it is not common strive for large membership. Few of the regional divisions recruit new members as they want to increase their representation in the party's institutions where decision-making takes place or they want to make a broad choice for candidate selection, however centrally organized recruitment campaigns do not take place. Likewise to the party Harmony and the New Conservative Party, the National Alliance relies on people's own decision whether they agree to the party's values and they want to get involved in this organization. The Latvian Green Party's secretary – general Pēteris Dimants specifies that the party does not organize any activities for recruiting new members, as well as they are not focused on widening their membership. Because they are a green party, they expect that those people who support environmentalism will approach the party themselves. Mr. Dimants notes that it is the peculiarity of a green party - there will always be a demand for such a political force, hence people who want to participate in local municipal elections

or those who represent the environmental topics and want to achieve more than they can as individuals or members of non-political organizations will approach this party themselves.

The party KPV LV, the Latvian Farmers` Union, and the party Unity indicate that for them it is important to have a lot of members, however their recruitment activities are erratic. The party KPV LV has set a goal to be open to people and achieve a large representation both in the parliament, as well as in their member ranks, so a part of their approach to new member recruitment is by having an uncomplicated admission procedure, plus the regional divisions` meetings are open. The Latvian Farmers` Union`s secretary – general Artūrs Graudiņš tells that member recruitment is regularly discussed at various party levels and some activities are organized by the party`s office, board members and some more active members. While the party has addressed people to join the party through social networks, approached them during pre-election campaigns, as well as by organizing traditional events in the regions, like, sports games, regional conferences, the commemoration event of the party's founder Kārlis Ulmanis in Dobeles region "Pikšas", which is usually attended by several thousands of people, recruitment of new members happens in a more ad hoc manner. The head of Unity`s Youth organization and Riga region`s board member Santa Zarāne indicates that the party organizes some open events that can be attended by anyone, as well as the party`s office asks the more active youngsters in regions to identify people who may be interested in joining the party and address them with an offer. A common idea expressed by the representatives of these parties is the face-to-face recruitment, when members invite their friends and acquaintances to join the party.

The only two parties, who also form an alliance in the parliament – For Latvia`s Development and the Movement “For!” – have developed specific strategies for approaching as many new members as possible. The party`s For Latvia`s Development secretary – general Jeļena Jesajana distinguishes three main ways how the party recruits new members. First, members can invite their friends, acquaintances, colleagues and other people that may be interested in the party or










in politics in general to the party's board meetings. This is an on-going process, where the potential members are given to chance to get to know the party and its goals. The party's office then keeps in contact with these people and offer to join the party. Second, the party organizes a special series of events – new members' month. For one month in autumn, different events, like, seminars, discussions and informal meetings with the party's politicians are organized every week. At that time, the party's leaders talk to society why political participation is important. Moreover, Facebook ads sponsored by the party are published. The new members' month ends with the annual congress, so that the newly accepted members could conform to the party. The third way how the party approaches new members is via election campaigns. During campaigns they communicate more with people on the streets as well as they take part in festivals, and they invite people to join the party. The party's secretary – general highlights the problem of low political participation, so the party believes that by recruiting and engaging members the political participation can be enhanced. If a person is a party's member, he or she gets an access to information that they can share with others and through that people may become more interested in politics.

The party's Movement "For!" board's member, party association "For Development/For!" senior consultant of the parliament faction Vladislava Šķēle, who is in charge of planning member recruitment events, also distinguishes several approaches. First, the party makes sure that it is well presented in the social media. Second, mainly in the party's office in Riga but also in other cities, the party organizes events that are open to everyone. Some of these events are focused on politics, like discussions about current events or ideas that the party may push, but other events are more informal, for example, brain games that are especially popular nowadays. Members can invite their friends to these events, as well as all those who are interested are welcomed. This is a way how the party ensures that like-minded people meet with each other, with a goal to stimulate people to join the party. The party's regional divisions also have a duty to attract members in the regions by organizing events and having a good social media presence. Similarly to their partner party For Latvia's Development, the party planned to organize new members' month with a special campaign, but due to the

global health emergency this initiative is called off. Ms. Šķēle asserts that the party has overcome the stage when the people who founded the party recruited their friends and acquaintances, thus they have started using a broader range of means to attract new members. A special strategy is used for planning the member recruitment events. To engage people with different levels of interest in politics, several steps need to be taken. At the first level there are observers, hence good social media presence needs to be ensured. At the next level there are people who want to support party, thus a supporters group needs to be provided. Only in the next level there are people who want to attend events and engage in the party, therefore activities on the ground need to be organized. It is important that a party provides various options for people with different level of interest, as that is the way how to reach out to all possible new members.

According to the ways how parties approach new member recruitment, points from one to three are allocated to each party (*cf. Table 13*). On average, parties tend to enact some activities or do not specifically address people if they do not have a motive to join the particular political organization. Only two parties have clear-cut strategies and different approaches for reaching out to as many potential new members as possible. Five of the nine analyzed parties expressed some interest to widen their membership ranks, but three of them are not making a serious contribution to achieve it.

*Table 13. Allocated points for Latvian parties in recruitment strategy aspect*










	Party									Average
										
Allocated points for strategy	1	2	1	3	3	1	2	1	2	~1.9

#### 4.2.4. Activities

From the interviews carried out with elite members, it is determined that all parties, apart from the party Harmony and the Latvian Farmers` Union, through

their organized activities provide all three types of incentives (*cf. Table 14*). While the extent on how many activities parties organize for their members varies considerably, all parties provide a platform for developing ideas and socializing.

*Table 14. Types of incentives provided via activities in Latvian parties*

Type of incentives	Party								
									
Material		X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Solidary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Purposeful	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

As for provided activities from which a person may get a personal financial reward in return for being a member of the party, all representatives, apart from the social democratic party Harmony and the Latvian Farmers` Union, assure the presence of such opportunities. While the party For Latvia`s Development allows members of the parliament s to choose their assistants based on their own preferences, often deputies choose party members because they have worked with them during the election campaign. The rest of the parties indicate that members are given an advantage to get a party-related job because they receive the information about open positions first. Moreover, the National Alliance`s and the party`s Unity representatives mention that career opportunities are usually offered for the party`s youngsters. Santa Zarāne from the Unity explains that an assistant`s job can be combined with studies, hence they are usually offered to students from the party who could agree to a job that is not that well paid. Both For Latvia`s Development and the Movement “For!” representatives highlight that party-related jobs require a high level of loyalty, hence membership at the respective party is an indicator of trustworthiness. One of the most peculiar approaches for allocating party-related jobs is used by the New Conservative Party. The party hold an activity registry, where the most active members are listed based on their attendance to working groups or other events. When there is a possibility to get a party related job, these positions are

offered to the individuals who have actively participated in the party's internal affairs. Moreover, as only about 25 per cent of members actually engage in the party's activities, it is easy to spot experts in certain fields. Therefore, those members who, for example, have showed their expertise in public relations, now work as public relations specialists at the party's ministers' offices. The Latvian Farmers' Union's secretary-general and Harmony's Vice-Chairperson indicate that for each party-related job either in local, national, or European level, first, a person's skills, education, and ability to work well together are evaluated. Belonging to the party is valued as secondary. However, it needs to be mentioned that over the years, the party Harmony has been regularly accused by the investigative media that this party's members are suspiciously often appointed to various posts in institutions that are connected to the Riga city council. Therefore, the question about possible connection between membership and personal rewards by the interviewee was answered hesitantly.

In regards to activities organized by a party, where members can enjoy each others' company, or receive non-material benefits from the participation in the party, all of the analyzed parties provide such activities. Two main types of activities that refer to solidary motivations crystallize. First, formal-educational activities and, second, informal-social events are organized. Both types of events divide into several distinct subtypes.

As for formal-educational activities, three mostly mentioned types can be distinguished. First, all parties, apart from the National Alliance and the Latvian Farmers' Union, mention discussion events, where experts are invited to tell about the current political affairs. Mostly parties ask their own politicians to enlighten members. Second, events that are devoted to develop members' skills are organized. The utmost of the parties tell that they invite public relations specialists who teach members how to present themselves in the social media. Also lessons about public speaking are mentioned. Three parties – the Movement "For!", the National Alliance, and the Latvian Farmers' Union – mention specific work with their younger members. These parties indicate that they organize various activities that focus on developing youngsters' leadership skills. For example, the Farmers'

Union has established the "Young Leaders Academy", where members meet up once in three months for a whole day session and experts from various fields share their experience in marketing, public relations, and politics. Also the National Alliance organizes a variety of educational activities, but some of them are fee-based. The third type of educational activities, mentioned by the party Harmony, the New Conservative Party, For Latvia`s Development, and the Movement "For!" are courses that are specifically organized for their members who plan to run as candidates in elections. For example, as the New Conservative Party is starting to prepare for the extraordinary Riga city council elections and local municipal elections in 2021, a course where a Professor of Law gives a meaningful insight into the legislation that regulates municipalities is provided. This course is organized for potential candidates, but it also welcomes all members who want to take part in it. Cross-country educational activities for the candidates are provided by the party For Latvia`s Development. The party both encourages its members to take part in events organized by ALDE, as well as, together with the Estonian Reform Party and the Lithuanian Freedom Party, it organizes the academy „Balta”. It is a recent initiative, sponsored by ALDE and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, for members from the three parties that want to participate in elections, but they do not have any previous political experience. European level political trainers are invited to educate these people in campaigning and teach them skills to actively participate in shaping politics. Not only this event is organized to prepare more competent young politicians, it aims to build inter-border friendships across liberal party members.

While the spectrum of informal events that parties organize is quite similar for all parties, the most differences can be seen when categorizing who in the party is responsible for organizing them. From the interviews, three main types can be distinguished: 1) centrally organized informal events, 2) social gatherings that are organized by regional divisions, and 3) spontaneous gatherings initiated by members themselves. The bigger events, like summer camps outside Riga, sports games, and Christmas parties are usually organized centrally. The representative from National Alliance tells, that these big events are great for team-building, as well as in the informal atmosphere members are more prone to












share their ideas and find like-minded members to then work on these issues together. Some of the parties – New Conservative Party, For Latvia's Development, and the Movement „For!” – organize informal events at the party's office that are only accessible to the respective party's members. It is a chance to chat with opinion leaders and politicians in a friendly atmosphere as well as network with other members. A distinct type of activity – field trips to the parliament or local municipalities – that can be classified as both educational and informal is also centrally organized by several parties. Smaller informal events, like participation in the Great Clean-up, picnics, or celebrating national holidays depend on the interest and activity of regional coordinators. The more a regional coordinator is interested in organizing social gatherings additionally to the monthly formal meetings, the more the respective division's members are provided with opportunities to come together in an informal atmosphere. The two parties that expressed their reluctance in organizing informal events – the Latvian Green Party and the party Unity – rely on members' own spontaneity to come together. The Unity's representative tells that all ideas about organizing a festivity for all members has always stopped at the question, who is going to pay for this, but the Latvian Green Party's secretary-general tells that nowadays people are not that keen on socializing within a party. Both parties believe that they are providing a platform where like-minded people can meet each other, but they can organize informal meet-ups themselves. The Green Party has supported its youngsters by providing the office space where to organize social gatherings, but the party as such does not involve in organizing these events.

All of the parties provide a platform for expressing members' attitudes and ensure opportunities to work towards achieving the party's goal. Parties ensure it by establishing regional divisions, allowing members to associate in groups according to their interests and expertise, accepting proposals and engaging members in pre-election campaigns. The party For Latvia's Development, Movement “For!”, and Unity also highlight the opportunity for members to engage in creating election programs. A concern identified by the New Conservative Party's representative is that the interest-based working groups usually meet up in Riga, hence for members from the regions it is difficult to take

part in them. An interesting observation is the incorporation of digital tools into parties' lives. For Latvia's Development, Movement "For!", and the party Unity mention existence of private Facebook groups for members only, where discussions can be held in an efficient way. Moreover, for ensuring transparency in decision-making, the Movement "For!" has always ensured online live broadcasts from the board's meetings. Due to the limitations imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, also other parties have sought digital solutions for making their decision-making institutions more accessible. For example, although in the party Unity the board's meetings could be attended by anyone, they were organized in the Riga city centre on Monday mornings, which is not a convenient time for most of the people that do not have politics related jobs. Now that the meetings are held online, Santa Zarāne notes observations by the party's opinion leader Vilnis Ķirsis that the attendance of rank-and-file members has remarkably increased.

According to the variety of types of incentives that parties provide via organized activities, parties are allocated points from one to three (*cf. Table 15*). All party representatives have indicated that purposeful and solidary incentives are ensured through their organized activities.

*Table 15. Allocated points for Latvian parties in activities aspect*

	Party									Average
	 Saskaņa	 EKSVILV		 Latvian Civic Alliance	 parī		 LES		 VIENOTĪBA	
Allocated points for activities	2	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	~2.8

## 5. ESTONIA

While still under the Soviet rule, Estonia with the Supreme Soviet of ESSR adopted a law on citizens' associations. Although the term „party” was not used as it could possibly create an unwanted conflict due to the still existing USSR regulation (Toomla, 2017: 160), the regulation stated activities of the citizen associations which we find similar to the activities that political parties pursue now – for example, take part in directing public and social issues, as well as make economic, social and cultural decisions. Therefore, in Estonia the understanding of political party principles date back to 1989.

In 1992 a referendum on the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia was held, as well as the constitution entered into force. The constitution ensures that everyone has the right to form non-profit associations and federation. Estonian citizens, and since 2004 also all citizens of the European Union with a permanent residence in Estonia may belong to political parties. The paragraph 48 is specifically devoted to parties and other citizens' associations, however contrary to the Latvian constitution, where political parties are mentioned only once, throughout the whole Estonian constitution references to political parties are made seven times.

The two defining regulations for political parties in Estonia are the Political Parties Act that was adopted in 1994 and the Non-Profit Associations Act that was adopted in 1996. The Political Parties Act regulates actions undertaken by parties according to constitution, gives specific restrictions on how a party can be established, and states clear membership requirements. A party in Estonia can be registered if it has at least 500 members. This has been decided to be the optimal minimum number of participants as in the beginning of the 1990s it was 200, but from 1999 until 2014 at least 1000 members were needed to register a party. There is no restriction on which parties can participate in the national level elections, as well as election coalitions and single candidates can participate.

The prerequisites for one to become a political party are similar to the ones stated in the Latvian law on political parties. One may become a member if he or she is Estonia's citizen or is an EU citizen with a permanent residence in the

country and has attained 18 years of age. An individual can belong to only one political party. The Estonian law also outlines the requirement of active legal capacity of the person, as well as that persons who are serving a criminal sentence cannot be members of a party. Also there are series of positions, i.e. the Chancellor of Justice and their advisors, the Auditor General and the chief auditor of the National Audit Office, judge, prosecutor, police officer, and a member of the Defense Forces in active service, that prohibit their holder from being a political party member. Also the President has to suspend his or her membership in a political party for the duration of the term of office. While the Latvian law on political parties also states the rights and duties of party members, Estonian regulation is vaguer and leaves it to the competency of political parties themselves. The Non-profit Associations Act specifies that the conditions and procedure for member admission, leaving and exclusion, as well as rights and obligations of political party members are determined by parties themselves in their articles of association.

Data about parties and their members is accessible online at the Business register homepage, where names, surnames, dates of birth, and dates of becoming a member are publicly available to anyone. The data online is updated every day. Over the years, this has allowed for great insight into the dynamics of party membership, as well as the gender and age structure. While there is some data from the 1990s, trustworthy membership figures are available from 2003, when parties began to submit lists of their members to the commercial register.

Over the 17 year period, there have been fluctuations in the total party membership expressed in raw numbers (*cf. Figure 3*). There has been a sharp increase in the early 2000s from 54634 members in 2003 to 61965 members in 2005. However, in 2006 the membership numbers returned to approximately 56000. Since 2013 the numbers have been quite stable – in between 58000 and 60000 members. In 2020, about 4.5% of the country`s population are members of a political party.

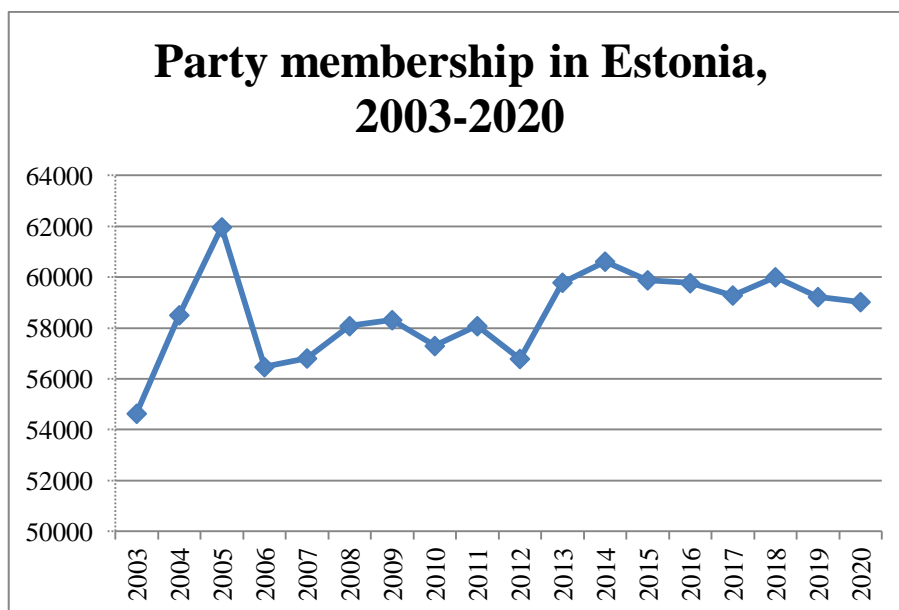


Figure 3. Party membership in Estonia, 2003-2020

Source: Data from the Estonian Business Register

When expressing party membership as a percentage of the electorate, Estonia is well above the European average 4.7 per cent (van Biezen et al. 2012: 27-28). The calculations from the combined data from the Estonian National Electoral Committee data and Estonian Business Register data show that over the years this ratio has been between 6 to 7 per cent (*cf. Table 16*). And, contrary to the party membership decline phenomenon, the membership as percentage of the electorate in Estonia has even risen.

Table 16. M/E in Estonia, 2003-2019

Year	Eligible voters	Party Members	Membership/ Electorate Ratio
2003	860278	54634	6,35%
2007	895 310	56809	6,35%
2011	913 346	58078	6,36%
2015	899793	59882	6,66%
2019	887420	59222	6,67%

Source: Data from the Estonian National Electoral Committee and the Estonian Business Register.

Estonia appears to be an exceptional case. Although the percentage of inhabitants both in Estonia and Latvia that are strongly interested in politics does not differ that much (Standard Eurobarometer, 2017: 43), party membership differs dramatically. Are parties in Estonia more interested in having members than parties in Latvia?

### 5.1. Overview about parties in the current parliament

In the current parliament, the 101 deputies are elected from five political parties. The Estonian Reform Party got 34 seats, the Estonian Centre Party got 26 seats, the Conservative People's Party of Estonia got 19 seats, Isamaa got 12 seats, and the Social Democratic Party got 10 seats. Estonia has followed the populist radical-right trend - a massive increase in support was expressed for the Conservative People's Party of Estonia. The party managed to increase its seat share by 12 seats.

In the next several sub-chapters a brief overview about each of these parties is provided. Data about each party's membership figures is retrieved from the Estonian Business Register.

### **5.1.1. The Estonian Reform Party**

The emergence of Estonian Reform Party dates back to 1994 when it split from National Coalition Party Pro Patria, and incorporated the Estonian Liberal Democratic Party. The party stands for a liberal environment, where individual's freedom of choice, the protection of ambitious people and entrepreneurs, low taxes and tolerance are valued. The Reform party has been the core force for Estonia's free market and low taxes policies. It has been present in every parliament since 1995 with a great share of votes. From 1999 until 2016, the Reform party has been in each government. Moreover, the Reform party was leading the coalitions from April 2005 up until November 2016, when Taavi Rõivas lost a confidence vote in parliament due to the internal arguments in the government over economic policies. In 2019 parliamentary elections the people expressed their support to this party that resulted in 34 seats from 101, making the Reform Party's faction the largest one. While it was expected that the party with Kaja Kallas in the lead will form the government, the tables turned in favor for the Centre party, leaving them together with the Social Democratic Party in the opposition.

Since 2003, the Reform party's membership has risen approximately three times – from 3769 members to 11594. The peak of membership was in 2013 when 12984 members were registered. Membership wise currently it is the second largest party in Estonia, right after the Centre party.

### **5.1.2. The Estonian Centre Party**

The Estonian Centre Party identifies itself as a centric, social-liberal party that aims to secure the independence and sovereignty of Estonia, contribute to the formation of a wealthy and large middle class, as well as to provide a welfare state. The party was established in 1991 on the basis of the Popular Front of Estonia. The party has been elected in every parliament since 1992 with a share of seats from 15 to 29. The party mostly has been in the opposition, but November 2016 came with their hour of fame. The Centre party's leader Jüri Ratas became the head of the new government, after the coalition led by the Reform party's leader Taavi Rõivas split. The 2019 parliamentary election results came with a

surprise. Albeit the Reform party gained the most seats and invited Centre party to form a coalition together, Ratas turned down the offer. A coalition was formed by Centre party, Isamaa, and EKRE, as Ratas chose to secure his personal power. Due to the inclusion of EKRE in the coalition, right after the elections the Centre party significantly lost their support among their Russian-speaking voters (Wright, 2020).

Since 2003, the Centre party's membership has almost doubled from 7646 members to 14757 members in 2020. At the moment, it is the biggest party membership wise. Moreover, it has four times more members than Latvia's biggest party Harmony. The peak of membership figures was reached in 2018, when 14940 members were registered.

### **5.1.3. The Conservative People's Party of Estonia**

The Conservative People's Party of Estonia (further – EKRE) resonates to the Western trend of the rise of populist radical-right parties. Established in 2012, it sealed seven seats in the 2015 parliamentary elections, and significantly increased their representation in the latest elections by 12 seats. EKRE is represented with 19 seats, as well as is included in the coalition. The far-right party has caused great concerns both in politics and society as a whole. With its ethno-nationalism, xenophobia, and anti-LGBT rhetoric, the presence of EKRE in the government has called for the international attention on how this will impact the development of Estonia.

Over the years, with some fluctuations this party has maintained 8000 to 9000 members. Although in the past few years it has experienced electoral success, data does not depict also an increased joining to the party.

### **5.1.4. Isamaa**

The party Isamaa under the name Pro Patria and Res Publica Union was established in 2006, when two conservative parties - Pro Patria Union and Res Publica – merged. The party aims to keep Estonia and its people safe, conserve the language and culture, as well as contribute to the growth and prosperity of Estonia. Over the years, the party has been popular among voters as in the 2007 parliamentary elections it received 19 seats, and in the following 2011 elections it



rose up to 23 seats. In the last two parliamentary elections it experienced significant loss – in 2015 it managed to secure 14 seats, but 2019 elections came with support of only about 11 per cent of the voters, resulting in 12 seats. It is thought that the more radical nationalists casted their vote for the newcomer EKRE. Despite the fluctuations in parliamentary seats, Isamaa has been in the government from 2007 to 2014, and from 2015 until the present time.

Since 2003, when 6447 people were registered as members, Isaamaa has steadily grown its membership basis. The peak of membership was reached in 2013 with 9778 members. Currently, about 8000 people are members of this party. Although this national conservative party allows also European Citizens who reside in Estonia to become members, Isamaa assembles less members than the more radical and closed EKRE.

#### **5.1.5. The Social Democratic Party**

The origins of the Social Democratic Party lie in the beginning of the 20th century, but this party's foundation took place right after restoring the independence of Estonia. This party represents the common social-democratic values, like equality, social justice, and solidarity. They are pro-free market economy that includes elements of fair competition to secure the welfare state idea. Over the time, party has undergone re-branding. It was established as the Estonian Social Democratic Party, in the late 1990s it renamed itself as the Moderates, but in the 2003 reorganization it accepted the current name - Social Democratic Party. The party has been both in the coalition and the opposition, as the number of mandates received at the elections in comparison to other parties has been rather small. Their peak was 2011 parliamentary elections when 19 seats were won. The longest time spent in coalition has been from 2014 to 2019. Currently, alongside the 2019 parliamentary election winners – the Reform party – the 10 Social Democratic Party's politicians are in the opposition.

Since 2003, the party has not massively grown its membership basis. Reaching its peak in 2014 with 6216 members, currently 5461 people are registered as members. From the parties who are represented in the parliament, this party has the least members.

## 5.2. Analysis of interest in having members






In the following sub-chapters, elements for the interest in having members are described and analyzed. First, the admission procedures are examined and it is determined how much input parties in Estonia require from the potential members to join a party. Second, the rights of members in each party are explored to determine which types of incentives parties guarantee. Third, approaches to member recruitment are described. Fourth, it is determined which types of incentives parties provide for their members via organized activities. For every aspect, the country average result is determined to compile the score of total interest in having members.

### 5.2.1. Procedure

The Estonian political party act not only regulates who may become party members, but also sets the minimum requirement for how to join a party. In order for one join a party, the person has to submit a written application to the respective party. The non-profit associations act determines that a party admits their members according to the procedure stated in respective organization`s articles of association (Riigikogu, 2019) hence each party can make additional requirements for potential members than just request a written application.

After analyzing all parliamentary party statutes, some differences have been identified, however majority of parties enact relatively difficult admission procedures (*cf. Table 17*). The Social Democratic Party requires the bare minimum that is enshrined in the political party act. The party Isamaa, however, requires the most input from a potential member to join the party.

*Table 17. Admission procedures in Estonian parties*

	Party				
Procedure					
Easy					X
Relatively difficult	X	X	X		
Difficult				X	

As mentioned above, the admission procedure only for the Social Democratic Party classifies as easy. For one to become a member or an official supporter, an application has to be handed in to the party's board, where the decision on admission is taken.






The Estonian Reform Party, the Estonian Centre Party, and EKRE enact relatively difficult procedures. The Reform party requests to add a recommendation letter from a party member to the written application. The Centre Party takes this a step further as it requests to submit a written application to the party, that is accompanied with two recommendation letters from members with an at least one year membership in the party. While EKRE does not request recommendation letters, it is the only party from the analyzed ones that admits only Estonian citizens. Moreover, people who have acted against the restoration of the independence of Estonia or are currently acting against the independence, have participated in activities of repressive institutions during the occupation period, have been or are members of foreign intelligence services, have a valid criminal record, have been dismissed from public posts due to illegal activities, or have a reputation that may damage the image of EKRE cannot become members. As EKRE requests to submit a written and (digitally) signed application and it has set a list of specific limitations, this party's procedure also is considered to be relatively difficult.

The party Isamaa has set the most steps a potential member has to overcome to join the party. All people who want to apply for either full-fledged membership, junior membership or become official supporters have to hand in a written or digitally signed application, where the candidate approves his or her suitability for this party. Then one has to participate in a face-to-face interview with the respective regional division's board or have to get a personal recommendation from one of that board's members. Moreover, a person who has a valid criminal record or has reputation that would damage the image of Isamaa is banned from joining the party. This admission procedure requires the most input from a potential member - not only the potential member has to know any

member, like in the cases of the Reform party and the Centre party, one must be acquaintances with an elite member or undergo a face-to-face interview.

According to the categorized input that is requested from potential members, parties are allocated points from one to three (*cf. Table 18*). This allows concluding that on average, the procedures for becoming a member of a party in Estonia are relatively difficult.

*Table 18. Allocated points for Estonian parties in procedure aspect*






	Party					Average
						
Allocated points for procedure	2	2	2	1	3	2

### 5.2.2. Rights

Contrary to Latvia where member rights are defined in the political party law, the Estonian Non-profit Associations Act only mentions that the organization has to indicate the rights of members in their articles of association (Riigikogu, 2019). To determine how Estonian parties refer to member motivations by providing official rights each party's articles of association are analyzed.

The analysis provides an unambiguous answer (*cf. Table 19*). All of the analyzed parties ensure rights that encapsulate solidary and purposeful incentives. In none of the parties rights that refer to material benefits from participation are indicated.

Table 19. Types of incentives ensured via member rights in Estonian parties

Type of incentives	Party				
					
Material					
Solidary	X	X	X	X	X
Purposeful	X	X	X	X	X

Rights that refer to solidary motivations vary among parties. The most popular one – mentioned by the Reform party, Isamaa, and the Social Democratic Party – is access to party-related information. Isamaa, Social Democratic Party and the Centre party also grant their members the opportunity to attend meetings of the party`s institutions. Moreover, the Centre party indicates that members have the right to turn to these institutions for asking to protect their rights. The Social Democratic Party and the Centre party allow their members to use the party`s insignia according to the prescribed procedure in the articles of association. Alongside this, the Centre party provides additional rights for members – a right to receive a membership card with their photograph if they request one, a right to call for party`s support when applying for elected institutions and posts that are no related to the party, as well as the more longer one is a member of the party, the more advantages he or she receives in intra-party elections. While the usefulness of the membership card remains unclear, it is relevant to acknowledge the advantages a member receives if he or she has spent more time in the party than other members. The Centre party indicates in a case of intra-party elections when governing bodies and other institutions of the party are elected, if two candidates receive equal share of votes, the candidate who has been this party`s member for a longer period of time shall be elected. EKRE, in comparison to other parties, has been the most ungenerous regarding providing solidary incentives via rights. What can be identified as a solidary incentive is the right for members to turn to party`s institutions for revising party`s activities.






As for rights that refer to purposeful motives, six main rights crystallize. All of the parties ensure that members can participate in intra-party elections – both elect and be elected. Also the right to express opinions and to take part in discussions is officially granted by all parties. Moreover, the Reform party encourages to demand a discussion if a member is in the minority position regarding a party's policy and activities. Participation in the whole internal decision-making is specifically highlighted by EKRE as not only members can participate in electing the party's board and institutions, they can make changes to the program or statutes, as well as decide on other party-related issues. Submission of proposals is indicated by all parties, apart from the Centre party. EKRE and the Social Democratic Party allow forming associations within the party to work on distinct topics. Moreover, EKRE has officially ensured that members who have associated in these groups have the right to ask for organizational and material assistance from the party to fulfill their agenda. Unlike other parties, the party Isamaa encourages to form inter-party associations with like-minded people. Although participation in elections to the Riigikogu and the European Parliament and elections of councils of local authorities is one of the main tasks for political parties, the right to run as candidates for these elections in statutes is mentioned only by Isamaa and the Social Democratic Party.

Albeit the ensured rights in these parties are nothing revolutionary, what seems interesting is that not all members are granted these rights. The party Isamaa, EKRE, as well as the Reform party have indicated that members have these rights if they have paid their yearly membership fee as well as they do not have any arrears towards the party. In EKRE, however, if a member gives a valid reason for why their membership should be waived, party can satisfy this request and secure member rights without covering the membership fee. Both in the Reform party and in Isamaa members who have not paid their membership fees cannot participate in elections for the party's posts.

According to the types of incentives that a party can provide via member rights, parties are allocated points from one to three (*cf. Table 20*). As all of the analyzed parties provide two types of incentives – solidary and purposeful – each

party has received two points in this aspect. The average score in the rights aspect for Estonia therefore is two.

*Table 20. Allocated points for Estonian parties in member rights aspect*





	Party					Average
						
Allocated points for rights	2	2	2	2	2	2

### **5.2.3. Recruitment strategy**

Four party representatives from the five analyzed parties agreed to participate in interviews regarding recruitment practices in Estonian parties. Due to the restrictions implied during the Covid-19 crisis, it was possible to organize online interviews with the Reform party's youth wing secretary-general, the party's Isamaa Youth Vice-Chairperson, the Social Democratic Party's youth wing president, and a member of the Estonian parliament from the Centre party. No representatives from EKRE agreed to grant an interview for the purposes of this study.

From the interviews it is clear that the majority of the analyzed parties carry out specific recruitment activities with different approaches towards different potential members (*cf. Table 21*). Three parties – the Reform party, the Centre party, and the Social Democratic Party – enact various planned activities for recruiting new members. The party Isamaa organizes some activities that intend to attract new members, but they are not planned in a strategic manner. Three interviewees indicated that recruiting as many new members as possible is an important goal for their respective party, however switching to the quality rather than quantity of members is frequently mentioned as an option.

Table 21. Presence of member recruitment strategies in Estonian parties

Recruitment strategy	Party			
				
Existing strategy	X	X		X
Some recruitment activities			X	
No clear strategy				

An approach used by the three parties that have developed a strategy for recruiting members is recruitment at public places. The Reform party has volunteers from the party that go out on the streets with leaflets about our party and, moreover, during these campaigns people can simply sign up as members. Similarly, the Centre party actively recruits new members at public places. They attend either events that are organized by bigger organizations, for example, youth events where different organizations can display themselves, or place their tent nearby markets, shops, and other areas where most people pass by during the day in Tallinn and also in other smaller cities. Also the Social Democratic Party organizes recruitment campaigns on the streets where volunteers advertise the party.

Another approach that is used by the Centre party, the Social Democratic Party, and the party Isamaa is targeted recruiting. The Social Democratic Party organizes several distinct recruitment campaigns for specific demographic groups, but the party Isamaa focuses specifically on young people by organizing open events within the youth wing of the party. The Centre party, however, approaches its „targets” in a very deliberate manner. The member of the parliament Oudekki Loone tells that especially before elections the party contacts people that have been identified as somewhat important in their communities or even in society general. Moreover, the party’s secretary-general has a task to check on a daily



basis, whether new socially active people have appeared, for example, if someone has started to write opinion pieces that go very well with the party's ideology. In such a case, the party contacts this person and directly offers to join the Centre party.

The two distinct recruitment approaches that involve a substantial sum of money are used by the two biggest parties – the Reform party and the Centre party. For example, when the Reform party is positively reflected in the media with new polling results that assure the popularity of the party, a sponsored Facebook post is made about it. They take an advantage of a positive reflection, and use it as a call for people to join the „winning team” in Estonia. The Centre party, however, enacts a continuous recruitment activity. The regional coordinators are paid for recruiting new members. Coordinators are given the task to recruit at least five new members each month to get a special allowance for widening the party's membership. An opportunity to get a material benefit from fulfilling this task is enough motivating for coordinators to bring in new members.





Nevertheless, encouraging current members to invite new people into the party is a recruitment approach used in the Reform party, in Isamaa, and in the Social Democratic Party. Sirle Rosenfeldt from Isamaa tells that members are asked to speak with their family members, friends, and acquaintances about political topics and invite them to the events organized by the party to spur their interest in joining this party. The Reform party uses this approach especially during the pre-election time for local municipal elections as the party focuses on getting as many candidates as possible because there are no limitations on how many people can be put on the ballot lists. The Reform party's representative Kristo Enn Vaga points out that up until now this has been the best way how to attract the most useful and loyal members. However, before the party asks its members to bring in their friends and acquaintances, an active work has to be carried out with these members so that they would see the actual purport of bringing in more people. Joosep Vimm from the Social Democratic party depicts that recruitment via personal contacts allows to bring in people who share the

same values and they are willing to contribute to societal interests according to the party's ideology.

What, however, seems striking is that the two parties with the most members in Estonia – the Reform party and the Centre party – expressed a common concern that recruitment in bulk does not give their parties any additional value. The Reform party's representative mentioned that large membership numbers contribute to the party's popularity, and that can be further used in the electoral competition. However, pretty much it is the only use for continuously recruiting passive new members. It has been indicated that only about 15 to 20 per cent of members are actually active, hence large membership numbers not always correlate with actual political engagement. The Centre party's representative provides the example, that often there have been problems with people who have signed the application for joining the party during their public recruitment campaigns without understanding for what they sign up for. Hence, some people are surprised when they find out that they are actually members of a party. Moreover, the party lacks mechanisms for integrating and engaging the newly recruited members into the party's affairs. Both party representatives mention the possibility of focusing more on targeted recruiting in future, as more work could be done with less, but motivated members.

According to the categorized ways of approaching new members, it is concluded that three of the parties have clear-cut strategies for recruiting members with different approaches towards different potential members (*cf. Table 22*). Therefore, the maximum of points is allocated to the Reform party, Centre party, and the Social Democratic Party. As the party Isamaa enacts some recruitment activities and are interested in approaching new members, two points are allocated to the party in this regard.





Table 22. Allocated points for Estonian parties in recruitment strategy aspect

	Party				Average
					
Allocated points for recruitment strategy	3	3	2	3	~2.8

#### 5.2.4. Activities

From the interviews carried out with elite members, it is determined that all parties provide the three types of incentives via their organized activities (*cf. Table 23*). The analyzed parties ensure pretty similar activities for expressing ideas, acquiring information and new knowledge, learning various skills, giving members opportunities to socialize with each other, as well as ensuring opportunities to receive material benefits.

Table 23. Types of incentives provided via activities in Estonian parties

Type of incentives	Party			
				
Material	X	X	X	X
Solidary	X	X	X	X
Purposeful	X	X	X	X

As for provided activities from which a person may get a personal financial reward in return for being a member of the party, all representatives assure that members have an advantage to get a party-related job at the national and European level. The Reform party, the Centre party, as well as the party Isamaa emphasize that they want the assistants or advisors to understand their ideology and be up to date about the party's policies and members of their parties do that. Belonging to the respective party assures the ideological compatibility, as

well as indicate loyalty to that organization. Similarly to the representative from the Latvian party Unity, Kristo Enn Vaga from the Reform party explains that a party-related job is not a normal eight-to-five job but rather a lifestyle, hence not a lot of people are willing to do it. Assistant positions are usually offered to the youngsters in the party's youth wing. The Centre party, however, asks the regional divisions whether they have someone who would be suitable for such a job or the party's central office itself spots some people during the party's activities, who present themselves very well. The open positions then are offered to these people. While the Social Democratic Party's representative explains that the party does not force their deputies or ministers to hire advisors that the party finds suitable, and the party trusts its politicians to make the right choice, Mr. Vimm speculates that in a case where there are several candidates for a position who are equally knowledgeable and suitable for the position, an advantage would be given to the person who belongs to the party.

All of the interviewees indicate the presence of events that refer to solidary motivations. Similarly to the Latvian parties, informative-educational events and informal gatherings are organized. It is observed, that all of the analyzed parties emphasize the need for well-educated members, hence members regularly receive the newest updates about the party's affairs, as well as informative and practical sessions are organized. The common activity organized by the Estonian parties is a two to three day summer camp, where both educational and informal activities are provided for members.

For educational activities, same as in the case of Latvia, three types can be distinguished. First off all, the Reform party, the Centre party and the Social Democratic Party organize informative seminars and discussions. The Social Democratic Party ensures the opportunity for members to educate themselves in different fields of their interests, hence they often invite state officials, scientists, or experts who are not the Social Democratic Party's members, but are professionals in their respective field to brief party members. The Centre party organizes discussions at most of the regions at least once a month, where politicians from the party inform members about the party's activities. They

respond to questions and take into consideration ideas. Kristo Enn Vaga from the Reform party highlights that educational events is the most important thing a party can ensure for its members, hence the party has made all of their educational events accessible via digital tools. Second, all of the parties organize practical sessions where members can develop their skills. Mostly, seminars to develop skills that are needed for pre-election campaigns, for example, social media marketing, branding, and public speaking, are organized. The Reform party also attracts international trainers via the support of ALDE and the Renew political group. Some more specific seminars are organized in the intra-party groups. For example, the Centre party's women's organization covers a wide variety of topics - starting from time management, feminism, or workers' rights, to how to be a small entrepreneur. Albeit the Centre party provides educational events, the representative Oudekki Loone indicates that the organization of these activities is a bit too sporadic and improvements need to be made. Third, the Reform party, Isamaa, and the Social Democratic Party organize special courses for members who are going to be the potential candidates in elections. The Isamaa representative illustrates that because the party implies a door-to-door approach in the pre-election campaign, candidates are taught how to present themselves as well as how to approach all types of people. For the Reform party members who have applied as candidates, both financial and training support is provided by the party.





In regards to informal events, all of the parties centrally organize a two to three day summer camp where all members can participate. Alongside attending political discussions, members can spend quality time together by participating in sports games or other leisure time activities. The Reform party and Isamaa indicate that after the annual congress a big party with musical performances is organized for members. Christmas parties and other festivities, like, national holidays, are organized both centrally and by regional divisions. Regarding non-centrally organized activities, Joosep Vimm from the Social Democratic Party shared the experience of the division led by him in Tallinn. Members go to cafes, pubs or saunas together, but they also take part in meaningful activities, like the World Clean-up Day, and at the moment they help the district to distribute help-

packages for the elderly who live alone. The Centre party's representative also asserts that the party has provided a platform where friendships emerge, hence the more active members organize meetings themselves.

For expressing members' attitudes and values, a platform is provided by all parties. While there are some differences to the ensured mechanisms for participation, on the basis level all parties provide the opportunity to engage in regional divisions. Second, deducting from the examples provided by party representatives, in the pre-election time the range of purposeful activities increases. For example, before the 2019 general elections the Reform party organized a program tour across Estonia, where a group of people went to different cities and organized seminars about different topics. In these seminars members were welcomed to share their ideas to the party's leading people so that the ideas could be embedded into the program. Similarly, in 2019 the Centre party organized a series of events - 101 meetings in Estonia - where discussions were organized all over Estonia to understand society's point of view on what improvements need to be made. Odekki Loone notes that the party's election program was largely based on ideas expressed in these meetings. Also the Social Democratic Party organizes discussions at the grassroots level where everyone is given the chance to speak up. By compiling ideas expressed by members, policies and election programs are created. For a large part of the Social Democratic Party members it is very important to actively be out in the streets and promote the party in the pre-election period as this is the way how they stand for their values. Third, the Centre party and the party Isamaa identifies that, on a daily basis, organizations and topic-based groups within parties allow members to contribute with their ideas and skills. A distinct activity, mentioned only by the Centre party, is the collection of signatures. The party's representative mentions that this has been a common activity for the party over years. For instance, a recent example comes from a rank-and-file member in Tartu, who initiated collecting signatures about stopping all payments and interests to banks in Estonia until the Corona-crisis is over. The party offers support for significant ideas and help to organize the collection of signatures.

According to the types of incentives that parties provide via organizing activities, parties are allocated points from one to three (*cf. Table 24*). The information provided by all party representatives allows concluding that each party provides all three types of incentives by organizing activities. A noteworthy observation is that all parties expressed the necessity of educating and entertaining their members. While there are some differences in how members are given opportunities for financial reward in each party, it is clear that members are given the first hand over non-members when people for party-related jobs are searched.

*Table 24. Allocated points for Estonian parties in activities aspect*

	Party				Average
					
Allocated points for activities	3	3	3	3	3

## **6. COMPARISON**

Membership levels in Latvia and Estonia over the years have portrayed two very different pictures about political participation. Whereas in Estonia about six to seven percent of eligible voters have been members of a political party, in Latvia the proportion has not even reached two per cent. To look at this controversy, it is important to acknowledge some of the legislative differences. For example, to form a party in Latvia the political party law requires 200 members, but in Estonia this number has varied between 200 to 1000 members over time. At the moment, the Estonian Political Party Act already stipulates that a party must at least have 2.5 times more members than a party in Latvia. Moreover, it can be speculated that electoral institutions in Estonia may require more grassroots involvement in local campaigning, as for general elections Estonia is divided into 12 electoral districts, but Latvia into only five. In the context of political party financing, however, one would think that Latvian parties should be more interested in having free labor and finances from members due to the low state subsidies. Before adopting the new changes in the Law on Financing of Political Organizations (Parties), the Latvian Ministry of Justice released official calculations, that only 20 per cent of party income is obtained from the state, whereas in Estonia state subsidies account for 74 per cent of parties' total income (Tieslietu ministrija, 2019).

While the analysis of legislative differences could provide an explanation of the contrasting membership levels in both countries, it is intriguing to disentangle the party perspective. Are parties in Estonia and Latvia equally interested in having members? It has been reported that in the early 2000s Estonian parties even engaged in a battle for members (Smith, 2013: 561), but are Latvian parties even approaching potential members? In the next subchapters comparisons according to the developed methodology are described. First, the calculated total scores are compared. Then, lower-level comparisons across countries in worldview, age, and ethnic divide dimensions follow.

### **6.1. Country total score**

According to the created methodology, the country total score is calculated. Compiling the results from the four analyzed aspects – procedure,



rights, recruitment strategy, and activities – for a country it is possible to receive four to 12 points. The score four would mean that parties on average are very uninterested in having members, but 12 would mean that parties on average indicate a high interest in having members. The calculated results for Latvia and Estonia show that differences between the two countries exist when ascertaining party interest in having members (*cf. Figure 4 and Figure 5*).



Figure 4. Total score for Latvia



Figure 5. Total score for Estonia

On average, parties in Latvia have a bit easier admission procedures than parties in Estonia. In both countries the analyzed parties on average have set relatively difficult procedures that require a certain amount of input from a potential member, like, a written application that is accompanied by recommendation letters from current members. Parties in Latvia that require the least input from potential members are the party KPV LV, For Latvia`s Development and the Movement “For!”, whereas in Estonia only the admission procedure for the Social Democratic Party classifies as easy.

Regarding the provided incentives that resonate to members` motivations via ensuring rights, both in Latvia and Estonia the analyzed parties have officially stated rights that resonate to solidary and purposeful types of motivations. While parties can attract members by ensuring rights that also resonate to material motivations, none of the parties in both countries officially grant them. For Latvian parties the average score in this aspect is slightly smaller than for Estonian parties because the New Conservative Party in its statutes has only embedded rights that resonate to purposeful incentives.

The biggest difference between countries, however, is seen in the recruitment strategy aspect. On average, parties in Latvia tend to implement some activities to attract new members, but they are erratic and not well planned. Moreover, four from the nine analyzed parties are not even looking for new members. A narrative – if they want to join us, they will do that – is present, thus no specific activities for attracting new members are organized. Only two parties – For Latvia's Development and the Movement "For!" – show that they are interested in recruiting as much members as possible hence they have developed clear-cut recruitment strategies. In contrast, all of the analyzed Estonian parties implement activities to recruit new members and see this as an important task. The Estonian Reform Party, the Estonian Centre Party and the Social Democratic Party also strategically implement different approaches to reach different potential new members. Especially interesting approaches are used by the Centre party. They carry out targeted recruiting on a daily basis by indicating new opinion leaders as well as they pay a monthly allowance for regional coordinators if they manage to widen the party's membership. A common concern expressed by all analyzed Estonian parties is that the amount of members does not necessarily reflect active and meaningful political participation. For example, if a party has 1000 members and only 20 per cent of them are active participants, the 800 other members do not bring in an extra value apart from their vote in the elections for the party. Some of the representatives mention that targeted recruiting or asking their active members to bring in their friends seem to be the best ways how to get loyal members, hence it may be speculated that the approach of recruiting members in bulk may become extinct in near future.

In scrutinizing how parties resonate to members' material, solidary and purposeful motivations by providing activities, it is concluded that all parties in this study apart from the social democratic party Harmony and the Latvian Farmers' Union organize activities that to some extent refer to all of these types of motivations. The two indicated Latvian parties do not make a clear connection on whether members are given a first hand in getting a party-related job either in national or European level. Regarding purposeful incentives, for most of the parties in both countries provision of regional divisions and pre-election

campaigns are the most valuable activities for meaningful participation. Working groups, inside organizations according to age or gender, or topic based groups were the second most popular arrangements for allowing members to express their ideas and prepare proposals. As for solidary incentives, all of the analyzed parties provide informative and educational events for their members. Members are given the opportunity to access direct information as well as attend discussions, lectures, and seminars. All parties assure the need for informal gatherings. While some of the Latvian parties indicated some issues for organizing such events, like, time- or financial- resources, all representatives from Estonian parties highlighted the need for activities that allow building strong ties between members.

## **6.2.Lower-level comparisons**

To provide a more meaningful insight into differences that parties in Estonia and Latvia have in regards to interest in having members, lower-level comparisons are made. Comparisons in three dimensions: 1) according to the worldview, 2) according to age, and 3) according to ethnic divide are made. Due to the fact that any of EKRE`s representatives did not manage to provide the necessary information about their recruitment strategies and organized activities, these comparisons have not reached their full potential.

### **6.2.1. According to the worldview**

For parties who are or who would be a part of the European People`s Party group, the results quite vary in all aspects. In regards to the required input from a potential member to join the party, party Isamaa, the New Conservative Party and the Latvian Farmers` Union have created difficult admission procedures. Potential members have to obtain recommendation letters from existing members with a specific standing, have to participate in face-to-face interviews, the New Conservative Party also has set a long list of requirements one must meet, and moreover European citizens who permanently reside in Latvia cannot become members of the Latvian Farmers` Union. The Latvian Green Party and the party Unity require some additional effort as they ask for recommendation letters. The only party from this bunch that does not set a long list of requirements is the party KPV LV. As for rights that are granted in statutes, all of the parties apart from the New Conservative Party ensure rights that resonate to purposeful and solidary

incentives. The New Conservative Party has established rights that only resonate to purposeful motives. None of these parties have a clear strategy for recruiting members. While most of them implement some activities, for example, ask their current members to bring in their friends and acquaintances, the News Conservative Party and the Latvian Green Party do not purposefully reach out to new members. All parties apart from the Latvian Farmers` Union ensure the provision of activities that would resonate to purposeful, solidary, and material members` motivations. The Latvian Farmers` Union`s secretary-general proclaims that members are not given an advantage for getting a party-related job. What needs to be highlighted is that from overall results, the New Conservative Party has received the lowest score from all analyzed parties. Due to its difficult admission procedure, poorly granted rights, and non-existent recruitment strategy, the party has received only six out of the 12 possible points.

The two represented parties in the Socialists & Democrats group have varying results, apart from the types of incentives via granted rights. While for joining the Social Democratic Party a potential members has to meet the requirements set in the state law and hand in an application, the social democratic party Harmony also asks to hand in a recommendation letter signed by at least two party members. In both parties` statutes rights that resonate to purposeful and solidary motives are granted. The biggest difference, however, is seen in the strategy aspect. The Social Democratic Party actively approaches new members, whereas the party Harmony does not organize any recruiting activities as well as they set a probation period for each potential member before he or she is fully accepted to the party. Activities that resonate to purposeful or solidary motives are organized in both parties, however, only the Social Democratic Party indicates that a member is given a preference when for one position two equally knowledgeable and suitable candidates compete. Compiling all results, the Social Democratic Party is one of the three parties that received the highest interest score – 11 points out of 12 possible.

For the Reform party, the Centre party, For Latvia`s Development and the Movement “For!” which are represented in the Renew political group, the results

are almost identical. The only difference is in the admission procedure, as the Estonian parties ask for recommendation letters. All four parties grant purposeful and solidary rights, all of them have active and clear recruitment strategies, as well as they provide activities that would resonate to the three types of member motivations. These parties also expressed their far-reaching interest in educating their members and creating strong informal ties between them. What, however, needs to be noted is that both Estonian parties revealed concerns that large membership numbers do not indicate conscientious participation. The party's For Latvia's Development and the party's Movement "For!" representatives, on the other hand, believe that by active recruitment and meaningful engagement in the organized activities people will become more politically active. The two Latvian parties, alongside Estonia's Social Democratic Party, have received the highest score for interest in recruiting new members – 11 points out of 12 possible.

For the two populist radical-right parties who are represented in the Identity and Democracy group and in the European Conservatives and Reformists Group only the formal aspects can be compared as none of EKRE's representatives managed to participate in the study. While the National Alliance's admission procedure is classified as relatively difficult due to the citizenship and language knowledge requirements, EKRE's procedure is classified as difficult. EKRE has listed a long set of requirements a potential members needs to meet, as well as only Estonian citizens may become members. Regarding granted rights, both parties provide rights that resonate to purposeful and solidary incentives. While from the interview with a representative from the National Alliance it is known that the party definitely is not looking for new members, but they provide all three types of incentives via their organized activities, conclusion about EKRE in these aspects cannot be made.

### **6.2.2. According to age**

The most striking difference between parties in Estonia and Latvia in the age dimension is the share of new parties represented in the Latvian parliament in contrast to Estonia. Whereas only two from the nine parties in the Latvian parliament were founded in the 1990s, in the Estonian parliament the only party

that has been established in the last 10 years is EKRE. Sikk (2012) has previously mentioned newness as the winning formula for parties in Latvia, and the difference between the two country current parliaments is remarkable. It is therefore intriguing to discover the differences or similarities that the older parties have in the interest of recruiting members as they have persisted over a longer period of time.

From the formal side, all of the parties both in Estonia and Latvia that classify as old due to their existence also 10 years before the last parliamentary elections – the Reform party, the Centre party, Isamaa, and Social Democratic Party in Estonia, as well as the Green Party and the Farmers` Union in Latvia – grant rights that resonate to purposeful and solidary motives. Regarding procedure, only the Social Democratic Party does not require a lot of input from a potential member to join the party. As for the insight provided by representatives, only Estonian parties, apart from Isamaa, have developed recruitment strategies with different approaches towards different potential members. From all of these parties only the Latvian Green Party does not organize any recruitment activities, as they expect that people who are interested in environmental topics will join the party based on their own enthusiasm. Regarding providing purposeful, solidary, and material stimulus through the organized activities, only the Latvian Farmers` Union alleges that members are not given a preference when a position for a party-related job in the national or European opens up.

### **6.2.3. According to the ethnic divide**

A completely valid comparison in the ethnic divide dimension is not possible due to the lack of insight information from EKRE. However, it is still possible to look at the differences between the parties in both countries who target Russian-speaking voters.

The Centre party in Estonia and the party Harmony in Latvia have identical results from the formal side, but the in-depth information depicts some crucial differences. From the analysis of both party statutes, it is concluded that both of them have relatively difficult admission procedures, as well as they both grant rights that resonate to purposeful and solidary motives. The most striking

difference is in the recruitment strategy aspect. While the Centre party implements various approaches to attract as much members as possible, including a day-to-day targeted recruiting and financial benefits to coordinators, party Harmony is not too worried about their amount of members. Anna Vladova from the party Harmony tells that they have shifted from quantity to quality hence they are not organizing specific recruitment activities. She explains that the party has recognized that those people who see the party's contribution in society will come to the party themselves. In regards to the Centre party, while the party implements various activities to reach as much people as possible, the party's representative Oudekki Loone mentions that there are internal discussions about whether the party should increase the intensity of targeted recruiting instead of investing resources into recruiting members in bulk that may not give an additional value to the party. As for the organized activities that can resonate to different members' motivations, both parties ensure activities where members can engage purposefully, as well as get solidary goods, like, access to information, educational events, and social gatherings. In contrast to the party Harmony, the Centre party's representative clearly indicates that all assistants for the parliamentary group are recruited within the party, as well as people for ministers' offices are first searched within the party's ranks.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to determine political party interest in having members in order to provide a well-argued demand-side explanation on why Estonia and Latvia experience drastically different membership levels. By applying the created novel index that compiles four distinct aspects a party can use for reaching out to new members and motivating current members, it was found that political parties in Estonia are more interested in having members than parties in Latvia. While the calculated total score for Latvia is 8.6, the score for Estonia is 9.8. Therefore, research hypothesis was proven to be true. As in the case of Estonia parties are more interested in having members than parties in Latvia, the party membership level in Estonia is higher.

The lower-level analysis provided a more in-depth outlook in the differences and similarities across parties in both countries. It is noteworthy to highlight the most meaningful finding, that the parties in Estonia and Latvia who belong to the liberal Renew political group have almost identical actions and attitudes that result in a high interest in having members. The Reform party and the Centre party in Estonia, and For Latvia's Development and the Movement "For!" in Latvia depict good provision of incentives via member rights and organized activities, as well as all four of them have developed specific recruitment strategies to approach as many new members as possible.

One of the most profound findings is the difference between the two countries in how parties approach new member recruitment. While on average Estonian parties enact strategic and planned activities for recruiting members, like, public campaigns, targeted recruitment, sponsored advertisements in social media, as well as monthly payments, in Latvia only two from the nine parliamentary parties organize specific recruitment activities. While Estonian parties showed a great devotion to member recruitment, the majority of analyzed Latvian parties believe that potential members should approach the party themselves based on purposeful motives.

While the cartel party thesis would imply that parties in Estonia should not be too interested in having members as up until 2020 they received significantly



larger state subsidies than parties in Latvia, the real life practices indicate an opposite picture. Although one would automatically assume that because parties in Estonia have more members than parties in Latvia, more people in Estonia are politically active, the acquired information from Estonian party representatives does not support this statement. The two biggest party – the Estonian Reform Party`s and the Estonian Centre Party`s - representatives raised a concern that via public campaigns where they recruit members in bulk, does not give their parties any additional value apart from a large membership number.

In tackling, why Estonian parties have an interest in having members, three main arguments can be distinguished from the compiled information provided by party representatives. First, the more members a party has, the more people cast their vote for this party in elections. Parties expect that the least a member will do, is voting for their party in elections. It can be speculated that as parties want to secure their seats, they are interested in having a safe voter-basis. Second, more members provide a larger pool of possible candidates. In this case, the Estonian parties highlighted benefits of active targeted recruitment, as it allows attracting loyal and useful members with a potential to run in elections. Third, large membership numbers serve as an advertisement for elections. The more members a party has, the more it is supposed to give an assurance for people that it is the best party.

Albeit this thesis may be criticized as it does not provide statistically significant findings, the study illustrates the differences that parties in Estonia and Latvia have regarding the interest in having members. This thesis serves as a well-argued demand-side explanation for why the membership levels in Estonia and Latvia are different. As it is identified that the large membership numbers in Estonia are connected to the will for a successful election results, it would be meaningful to look into more how the interest in having members varies according to the electoral cycle.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

Interview form in Latvian and English

- 1) Lūdzu, pastāstiet, kādas aktivitātes partija veic, lai piesaistītu sev jaunus biedrus?
- 2) Vai partija to sev ir uzstādījusi kā svarīgu mērķi – pēc iespējas vairāk paplašināt biedru loku?
- 3) Lūdzu pastāstiet, kādas aktivitātes biedrs var veikt partijā?
- 4) Kādas aktivitātes partija rīko saviem biedriem?
- 5) Vizualizējot situāciju, ka deputātam tiek meklēts palīgs vai arī tiek meklēti cilvēki ministra birojam, vai partijas biedram ir lielāka iespējamība iegūt šo darbu nekā cilvēkam, kurš nepieder Jūsu pārstāvētajai partijai?
- 6) Vai vēlaties kaut ko papildināt par biedru rekrutēšanu vai aktivitātēm partijā?

- 1) Please tell what activities the party implements to attract new members?
- 2) Is it important for the party to widen the party`s membership as much as possible?
- 3) Please tell what activities a member can do in the party?
- 4) What kinds of activities does the party organize for its members?
- 5) Visualizing a situation when the party looks for parliamentary group`s assistants, European Parliament member`s assistants or people for a minister`s office, are party members given any sort of preference over people who do not possess this party`s membership?
- 6) Perhaps there is something you want to add about recruiting members or activities that a member can do in the party?

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