

## Declining party membership in Europe

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In an article which has just been published in the *European Journal of Political Research*, Ingrid van Biezen, Peter Mair and Thomas Poguntke present an overview of the current levels of party membership in 27 European democracies (see Table below). They also discuss changes in membership levels over time, comparing party membership today with figures from both 1980 and the late 1990s.

The article reveals evidence of a major long-term decline in party membership levels in all of the long-established democracies, both when membership is measured as a percentage of the overall electorate and when it is measured in absolute terms. In extreme cases, as in Austria and Norway, the decline in the ratio of members to the electorate is greater than 10 per cent. In others it is around 5 per cent.

All of the older democracies also record a major long-term decline in the absolute numbers of members, a drop of 1 million or more in Britain, France and Italy, around half a million in Germany, and close to that in Austria. Britain, Norway and France have lost well over half their party members since the 1980, while Sweden, Ireland, Switzerland and Finland have lost close to half.

These are genuinely striking figures, and suggest that party membership as such has now reached such a low ebb that it may no longer constitute a relevant indicator of party organizational capacity.

While relying primarily on the direct and individual membership figures as reported by the parties themselves, the article also explores the fit of these data with survey data, and concludes that the two perform well in terms of convergent validity. The differences between large and small democracies are examined, as well as those between old and new democracies, and it is found that levels of party membership are related to both the size and age of the polity in question. The article also includes a detailed appendix reporting membership levels party by party.

### National Levels of Party Membership

Country	Year	Total Party Membership	Total Party Membership as Percentage of Electorate (M/E)
Austria	2008	1,054,600	17.27
Cyprus (Greek)	2009	81,433	16.25
Finland	2006	347,000	8.08
Greece	2008	560,000	6.59
Slovenia	2008	108,001	6.28
Bulgaria	2008	399,121	5.60
Italy	2007	2,622,044	5.57
Belgium	2008	426,053	5.52
Norway	2008	172,359	5.04
Estonia	2008	43,732	4.87
Switzerland	2008	233,800	4.76
Spain	2008	1,530,803	4.36
Denmark	2008	166,300	4.13
Sweden	2008	266,991	3.87
Portugal	2008	341,721	3.82
Romania	2007	675,474	3.66
Lithuania	2008	73,133	2.71
Netherlands	2009	304,469	2.48
Germany	2007	1,423,284	2.30
Ireland	2008	63,000	2.03
Slovakia	2007	86,296	2.02
Czech Republic	2008	165,425	1.99
France	2009	813,559	1.85
Hungary	2008	123,932	1.54
United Kingdom	2008	534,664	1.21
Poland	2009	304,465	0.99
Latvia	2004	10,985	0.74
<i>Mean (N=27)</i>			<b>4.65</b>