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Loyal Activists? Party Socialization and Dissenting Voting Behavior in Parliament

The question of why members of parliament (MPs) overwhelmingly toe the party line is receiving increasing scholarly attention. Adding to discipline-based approaches, party loyalty, that is, a feeling of allegiance not related to policy agreement or disciplinary pressures, is an important part of the explanation. In this article, we employ a more nuanced view on party loyalty than previous observational studies and conceptualize it as the result of socialization processes of most politicians into the structures of their party prior to their mandate. We test our argument quantitatively using data for whipped votes in the German Bundestag (1949–2017). The results support our propositions that MPs who didn't hold party offices prior to their mandate have a higher probability of vote defection and that the behavioral differences related to pre-parliamentary socialization vanish the longer MPs serve in parliament. Our work has important implications for research on intraparty politics, legislative behavior, and representation.

Party unity—the MPs of a parliamentary party group voting almost unanimously together on a legislative motion—is a defining characteristic of parliamentary systems (Steffani 1983) and a necessary condition for responsible party government (Bowler et al. 1999). Much ink has been spilled on

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the intermediate role of parties linking voter preferences via party manifestos to legislative outcomes (Dalton et al. 2011; Klingemann et al. 1994). This approach views MPs as delegates of political parties who have been mandated by voters in the election to pursue a certain policy path. Indeed, empirical studies corroborate such an important influence of parties on legislative behavior. In the German *Bundestag*, more than 95% of the MPs' whipped votes in parliament are cast according to the party line in most of the party groups (Bergmann et al. 2016; Sieberer et al. 2020), and even higher unity scores of 99% have been reported for the Netherlands (Louwerse et al. 2018) and Sweden (Willumsen and Öhberg 2017). The high but varying propensity of MPs to toe the party line is often attributed to reward and punishment processes, that is, disciplinary pressures, exerted by the parties as the MPs' major principal. Thus, rational choice approaches dominate the literature on legislative voting behavior (Russell 2014).

However, drawing on the literature on different pathways to party unity (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011), it is plausible that interpreting high rates of uniform voting behavior mainly as MPs' rational anticipation of possible disciplinary sanctions misses an important part of the story. With party loyalty, meaning a feeling of allegiance not related to policy agreement or disciplinary pressures, this article explores a further pathway to unity which, according to our argument, originates mainly from MPs' socialization experiences into party structures. Consequently, we expect loyalty not to be equal but to differ among MPs given that not all of them got through the same party career prior to their national-level mandate. In fact, empirical work has already shown how party socialization matters at several stages of a politician's career: First, studies of candidate selection show that politicians passing through the proverbial *Ochsentour*, meaning an effortful process of intra-party proving through party offices at the local/regional level, are more likely to get nominated as candidates in promising districts (Rehmer 2021; Schüttemeyer and Sturm 2005). Second, in their political life, "party animals" more often than MPs with other career trajectories reach parliamentary or executive leadership positions (Ohmura et al. 2018). Third, in her study on welfare policies, Alexiadou (2015) shows that looking more closely at the standing of ministers in their party helps us to understand their policy decisions: "Ideologues" (politicians with strong policy preferences) and "partisans"

(politicians with strong partisan ties) affect policies more strongly than “loyalists” who are keen on office. Based on this, Wenzelburger and Zohlnhöfer (2021) argue that party socialization can be seen as an agency-based explanation of party effects on public policies.

To date, studies of legislative voting behavior have mainly conceptualized party ties as the mere length of the party socialization process (Gherghina and Chiru 2014; Rehmert 2022a). However, this bears the risk of regarding periods of passive membership as socialization experience. Therefore, adding to this literature, we focus more closely on the essence of party socialization and study its effect on MPs’ legislative behavior. We regard MPs as being party-socialized if they held local- or regional-level party offices prior to their first election into the national parliament. We hypothesize that if MPs lack party socialization, they will be more likely to cast a vote against the majority of their party group whereas those having served in party structures have a higher chance of toeing the party line. Additionally, we expect this effect to depend on an MP’s parliamentary experience in such a way that the higher defection rates of nonsocialized MPs decrease with growing parliamentary experience, whereas parliamentary socialization does not markedly affect those MPs’ behavior who were already socialized in a party. Methodologically, we create a rich dataset on MPs’ party socialization for all legislative terms of the German *Bundestag* (1949–2017) and test its influence against alternative explanations of party-compliant voting behavior. We focus on whipped votes, which should be the harder test case than free votes to examine the relevance of party socialization because disciplinary pressures as competing explanations of party unity are in place. The results confirm our theoretical expectations: We indeed find that MPs vote with a higher probability against the party line if they didn’t hold party offices prior to their mandate. Our results also confirm that MPs without this kind of party socialization are much more strongly affected by parliamentary socialization as compared to “party animals.”

The remainder of the article is structured as follows: After a brief overview of the literature on the individual-level determinants of legislative voting behavior, we develop our socialization-based arguments and deduct two falsifiable hypotheses. Following a discussion of data and methods, we present the empirical results and discuss their implications for legislative research and beyond.

Party Loyalty and Legislative Behavior

State of the Art

Why do MPs of a party group vote together in parliament? According to the literature, several “pathways to party unity” (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011) exist that are structured along a sequential decision-making process at the individual level (van Vonno 2019): First, if an MP agrees with their party on policy grounds, they will vote in accordance with the party’s position on a motion regardless of other factors. Second, if policy agreement is lacking, the MP could toe the party line out of loyalty. Third, if there is no policy agreement with or a feeling of loyalty towards their party, MPs could be pushed to vote in line by disciplinary means (Bailer 2018). These include informal sanctions such as disregarding the MP or denying support for their policy initiatives (Delius et al. 2013) as well as threats of more far-reaching punishments such as the removal from offices or, ultimately, the exclusion from the party group (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011). If the utility of voting against the party line outweighs the risk of potential sanctions or passed chances of office promotion, an MP will cast a dissenting vote.

Studies analyzing *whipped votes* usually employ a large- N design across multiple policy areas. Since data on issue-specific MP preferences are scarce, those studies mainly focus on variables influencing the effectiveness of party discipline, such as electoral considerations, parliamentary or legislative offices, previous occupational experience, gender, or outside earnings (André et al. 2015; Benedetto and Hix 2007; Bhattacharya and Papageorgiou 2019; Cowley and Childs 2003; Degner and Leuffen 2016; Gherghina and Chiru 2014; Grimmer and Powell 2013; Heuwieser 2018; Mai 2022; Ohmura 2014; Sieberer 2010; Sieberer and Ohmura 2021; Slapin et al. 2018; Tavits 2009, 2011; Willumsen and Goetz 2017; Willumsen and Öhberg 2017; Zittel and Nyhuis 2019), in order to explain the varying propensity of MPs to vote against the party line. For *unwhipped votes*, existing studies mainly investigate the impact of personal and constituency preferences on the direction of MPs’ voting decisions. Those preferences have either been measured directly using survey data (for personal preferences, see Raymond 2017a, 2017b; Raymond and Overby 2016; Raymond and Worth 2017; for constituency preferences, see Hanretty et al. 2017) or approximated using sociodemographic characteristics

of the MP (Arzheimer 2015; Baumann et al. 2013, 2015; Bauer-Blaschkowski and Mai 2019; Engler and Dümig 2017; Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Overby et al. 1998; Plumb 2015; Preidel 2016; Wenzelburger and Fehrenz 2018) and/or the sociodemographic composition of an MP's constituency as proxies (Baumann et al. 2013; Haider-Markel 1999; Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Kauder and Potrafke 2019; Mai et al. 2022; Overby et al. 2011). In addition, the MPs' party affiliation has proved to be a significant predictor of voting in favor of permissive or restrictive morality policies, respectively (Engler and Dümig 2017; Cowley and Stuart 1997, 2010; Hibbing and Marsh 1987; Overby et al. 1998; Plumb 2015; Raymond 2017a, 2017b; Raymond and Overby 2016; Raymond and Worth 2017).

Surprisingly, both strands of the literature—on whipped and unwhipped votes—only rarely investigate the influence of party loyalty, except from studies using survey instead of observational data (e.g., Close 2018; Kam 2011; van Vonno 2019; Willumsen 2017). When party loyalty is included, scholars have often conceptualized it as the result of parliamentary socialization, albeit with mixed results. Only a few studies report that parliamentary experience correlates with lower defection rates (Delius et al. 2013; Kam 2011), whereas most studies detect positive (Benedetto and Hix 2007; Bhattacharya and Papageorgiou 2019; Heuwieser 2018; Mai 2022; Sieberer and Ohmura 2021; Slapin et al. 2018; Willumsen and Goetz 2017; Willumsen and Öhberg 2017; Zittel and Nyhuis 2019) or insignificant or ambiguous effects (Clayton and Zetterberg 2021; Gherghina and Chiru 2014; Saalfeld 1995). Those findings suggest, as Kam (2011, Chap. 9) argues, that MPs could have already been socialized into the norm of loyalty outside parliament, for example, in the extra-parliamentary party structures. A pre-parliamentary socialization effect—which takes place while often young people engage in a party and hold their first party offices at the local/regional level—has not often been tested yet. To our knowledge, only two studies have focused on the effects of socialization beyond parliament on MPs' voting behavior in a more systematic way. For unwhipped votes, Rehmert (2022a) finds a significant effect of the length of party membership and age of joining a party on voting behavior in the German *Bundestag* (1953–2013). Concerning whipped votes, Gherghina and Chiru (2014) also include the length of party membership as a control in their models on dissenting voting behavior in Romania—without finding a significant effect. However, two

aspects remain largely unexplored in the existing literature: First, as Rehmert (2022a, 1084) concedes in his respective study, the mere length of party membership is “only an imperfect empirical approximation of measuring the actual degree of socialization”. Consequently, other indicators might be better suited to capture the phenomenon of interest.¹ Second, the persistence of loyalty effects, that is, whether party socialization influences MPs’ voting behavior over their whole parliamentary career or are conditioned or replaced by other loyalty- or discipline-inducing factors, is still to be investigated.

Main Argument

As we have learned from theoretical models of legislative behavior, party loyalty can induce unity separately from (and additionally to) ideological agreement and party discipline. According to Dickinson, and based on Hirschman (1970), we define party loyalty as “a strong feeling of support and allegiance not directly related to agreement, or any immediate expected gain or loss, resulting from association with the object of loyalty” (Dickinson 2018, 344). Comparable to the party identification of voters (Raymond 2017a), it is a kind of moral commitment to one’s own party, rooted in a self-definition by a group in relation to another group (Crowe 1986). Some empirical studies have pointed to such effects as possible explanations for high unity scores in free votes on morality issues, arguing that party unity in free votes can only be rooted in a “social identity shared among co-partisans” (Raymond and Overby 2016, 319).

But how do such pre-parliamentary socialization processes play out in the real life of a future MP? Building on Andeweg and Thomassen (2011), it seems that most of the socialization work is done at lower levels of the party structure. In fact, dedication to the party on the ground—from hanging posters and helping out at party events to holding local party offices—is essential for getting nominated on the party’s ticket, which, from the party’s perspective, assures recruiting loyal individuals for parliament (Cordes and Hellmann 2020). Conceptually, the rare existing studies on party loyalty have approximated socialization with the length of party membership (Gherghina and Chiru 2014; Rehmert 2022a). While it is true that a long membership in one’s own party, for example, since school days, could signal commitment to the party, membership does not mean activism—and,

theoretically, it is difficult to argue that party group identity will simply emerge by paying membership fees and being a nominal member. Based on an analysis of the two major German parties, the Christian and the Social Democrats, Nickig (1999) concludes, for instance, that the large number of formal non-active members do not exhibit an actual tie to the party. Wüst (2009) finds that MPs even ideologically diverge from their party the longer they are party members. In this article, we therefore argue that being an active member in the party's organizational structures captures party socialization best. This is not only in line with what social identity theory suggests for dynamics in organizations (Ashforth and Mael 1989), but it also resonates with empirical evidence from studies on the socialization process within parties (see also Rehmert 2022a): Dodson (1990, 1134) finds—based on data of new activists joining the US Democrats—that, “as those activists became well integrated into the communication network and decision-making processes of their party, they adopted conformist patterns of behavior”. A similar dynamic has been reported by Eldersveld (1964). More broadly, Clarke and Price (1977) report that MPs having held party offices prior to their mandate have a more comprehensive understanding of the different role expectations that MPs are confronted with. Therefore, we argue that party socialization is most likely when a person is integrated in the organizational network of a party by holding formal local- or regional-level party offices. This process of intra-party proving as the most common but not exclusive career path for MPs (Ohmura et al. 2018) often goes along with a long-standing party membership but, substantially, encompasses more aspects than mere seniority (Hellmann 2020). From our understanding, having held leadership positions in local and regional party branches prior to an MP's parliamentary career is likely to lead to an increased sense of loyalty towards one's own party as well—and eventually affects an MP's legislative behavior.²

But why should a thorough socialization process during party offices increase loyalty and lead to party unity in legislative votes? MPs are, like other humans, simultaneously members of different social groups. Given what we know from social psychology, the behavior of other group members generally serves as a benchmark and a default option for what is considered appropriate to do by oneself. The cohesion level of groups is associated with factors like physical proximity, frequent interaction, similarities and common goals among the group members, and intergroup conflict

(Russell 2014). We regard the affiliation to political parties as a particularly formative group experience since all of those factors inducing group cohesion are fulfilled. The experiences associated with an active party membership are expected to foster the internalization of certain norms that, on their part, reinforce political behavior closely oriented towards party interests. Party activists begin to value the advantages of collective action, as practiced in the collaborative structures of party committees, compared to a “going it alone” attitude in politics. They experienced, even before entering parliament, that they are “members of a common team with common rules” (Patzelt 2003, 107) and understand, or are effectively reminded of, the fact that they owe their mandate (in the German electoral system) overwhelmingly to partisan votes that are based on a party platform which, therefore, commits the MPs to the will of their electorate (Crowe 1986). Party socialization, Jörke (2012, 233) states in rather exaggerated terms, “over the years transfers young radicals into obedient party soldiers” (own translation). Additionally, after having held offices in various bodies of the party organization, politicians created networks with copartisans and, thereby, a keen intuition for sentiments and policy positions that are supported by a majority of other party members. According to Bailer and coauthors (2013), MPs having held party offices before entering parliament show a more party-oriented style of representation than MPs with other career types, meaning that they stated in an MP survey that they would rather vote according to the party line than according to their own opinion or constituency preferences in case those positions contradict each other—since “disloyalty violates the MP’s sense of duty” (Crowe 1986, 164). Taken together, socialization into party structures ought to lead to a higher propensity of MPs to vote with the majority of their party even when they lack ideological agreement (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011).

In contrast, MPs without those party socialization experiences lack all the described factors inducing party-compliant behavior. An MP survey reveals that those MPs are fully aware of the fact that they are more independent-minded and have a less partisan view on issues (Bailer et al. 2013, 113, own translations): “Since I haven’t been through party organizations for many years, I’m more independent in forming opinions, but I also have to network more intensively.” “I have a very independent view from the outside and am not so interwoven with party structures.”

This attitudinal difference between both types of MPs leads us to the first hypothesis:

H1: MPs who have not been socialized into party structures have a higher probability to vote against the party line than MPs who have such socialization experiences due to party offices prior to their mandate.

Not only as members of their party on the ground but also as members of their parliamentary party, MPs can be conceptualized as group members. Obviously, parliamentary party groups, just like local/regional party branches, offer particularly favorable conditions for a high cohesion of their members at the aggregate level: As members of a party group, MPs of the same party work together nearly every day in order to reach shared policy-related goals and compete with other parties. Consequently, membership in a parliamentary group, just as party membership, fosters feelings of loyalty at the individual level of MPs. However, MPs are not elected to parliament already as ‘loyal’ party group members. A process of socialization is a precondition for group loyalty. Socialization is regarded as a learning experience in which various institutional norms are conveyed to newcomers (Dickinson 2018). Just as politicians are initially newcomers to their own party, they are also newcomers to their parliamentary group after being elected to the national parliament for the first time. Therefore, we assume that not only the experiences politicians make during their time in party offices at the local or regional level but also their work in the national parliament can lead to socialization effects. With a longer tenure in parliament, MPs get used to the functioning of parliamentary government. Compared to freshmen MPs, more experienced MPs have become familiar with the routines of parliamentary work and accept the norms structuring this work to a higher extent, which includes the norm of party unity (Delius et al. 2013; Patzelt 1999). Additionally, the newly elected MPs’ ideological closeness to the party mean demonstrably increases with parliamentary experience (Wüst 2009)—presumably not only due to the fact that experienced MPs, once specialized in a particular policy area, become increasingly successful in shaping the policy position of their party group (Tavits 2009). Various studies support that those socialization processes take place during MPs’ first years in parliament (Mughan et al. 1997; Reiser et al. 2011; Rosenblatt 2007). However, the findings for a direct effect of parliamentary experience on MPs’ probability of vote defections are mixed (as shown in the [State of the Art](#) section).

In the face of this second socialization process, we argue that the effect of *party* socialization is contingent upon MPs' parliamentary experience. During their first year in parliament, MPs lack any parliamentary experience and the respective processes of *parliamentary* socialization are just about to start, without any effects on parliamentary behavior already having materialized. Depending on different pre-parliamentary-socialization experiences, MPs' understanding and expectations towards parliamentary work differ (Reiser et al. 2011). Accordingly, we expect that MPs in this phase exclusively rely on their former experiences—and, relatedly, that the difference between those who are party animals and those who are not should matter most. This difference is perceived by the party-socialized MPs themselves, visible in the following quote from an MP survey (Bailer et al. 2013, 109, own translation): “The difference between the career changers and me is that I naturally knew exactly what the rules of the game were in the parliamentary group, what the hierarchical structure of the parliamentary group was like. I didn't have the idea that I would come to Bonn (at that time) and tell them what politics is. I knew exactly that you would start small” In other words: The party-socialization effect in Hypothesis 1 is likely to be strongest for freshman MPs. Empirically, this implies that newly elected MPs who lack socialization into their party organization by the means of party offices at the local/regional level have significantly higher defection rates than the bunch of MPs who served in party offices prior to their mandate.

After various years in parliament, the experiences MPs made during their socialization process outside parliament might be sidelined by new, maybe different, role expectations and experiences within parliament. Their national-level legislative work now dominates their political life in terms of time and effort invested, compared to local- or regional-level party offices (Patzelt 2014). Those experiences from everyday parliamentary work are likely to equalize differences among the MPs' party socialization, and the MPs converge with regard to their attitudes towards parliamentary work. Empirically, we expect that *parliamentary* socialization first and foremost reduces the initially higher defection rates of those MPs who lacked a thorough *party* socialization. This is consistent with Wüst's (2009) argument that the potential for parliamentary socialization effects is greatest for those MPs who have not been socialized pre-parliamentary (for example, through party work). All else being equal, this leads to our second hypothesis:

H2: The positive effect of a lacking party socialization on dissenting voting behavior is strongest at the beginning of MPs' parliamentary career and loses its importance with longer parliamentary experience.

Study Design

We test our propositions using data for MPs' voting behavior in Germany. Germany, called a "party state" (Schmidt 2008, 71), and the *Bundestag* as a "party group parliament" (Ismayr 2012, own translation), is a suitable (and rather likely) case to test an argument based on party loyalty given the central role of political parties in policymaking, allocation of offices, and legislative politics in particular. Due to our focus on MPs from a single country, we are able to hold characteristics of the party or electoral system constant that proved to affect party unity in cross-national studies (Carey 2007; Coman 2015; Shomer 2017; Sieberer 2006).

We chose an observational approach to examine our argument whereby party socialization matters for MPs' legislative behavior. Several studies on the role of party loyalty use survey data instead (e.g., Kam 2011; van Vonno 2019; Willumsen 2017). While this is generally a proper way to investigate the relationship between certain norms or attitudes, that is, what MPs think about their parties, it is, on the downside, also limited to that regarding the dependent variable: if we used survey data, we would only be able to study what MPs *think* on how they would vote in given circumstances. How MPs actually vote and, thus, how relevant party loyalty is for their actual behavior (and political outcomes), would remain undetected (Saalfeld 1995). Concerning the independent variable, the numerous studies cited in the theory section already indicate that holding subnational party offices actually induces loyalty on the attitudinal level. Therefore, a test of our hypotheses with observational data is appropriate.

We exploit the full set of whipped votes in all parliamentary terms of the *Bundestag* (1949–2017). In this setting where party discipline is enforced using career-related rewards and sanctions, party loyalty is expected to function as an additional explanatory pathway to unity, according to standard models of legislative voting behavior. Our analysis is restricted to roll-call votes which constitute about 5% of all votes taken in the German parliament (Sieberer et al. 2020). Although there are reasonable doubts regarding their representativeness (Ainsley et al. 2020), they often

cover controversial (Crisp and Driscoll 2012) and, thus, politically relevant decisions. For Germany, roll calls represent the only source of individual-level voting behavior in parliament.

The dichotomous dependent variable for all models captures whether a single MP votes against the majority position of their party (then value 1) or not (then value 0). We therefore run logistic panel regressions with cluster-robust standard errors on the MP level to account for the clustered data structure (multiple votes per MP). Multicollinearity is not an issue since party socialization does not correlate strongly with any particular control (see Appendix B in the online supporting information).

Our main independent variable is measured according to our theoretical considerations and focuses on party socialization—that is a person's dedication to the party at lower levels before they made it to parliament. As data on party work on the ground (hanging posters, helping out at party events or in campaigns) is not available, we have collected data on whether MPs held offices at local or regional party branches before they were elected to parliament for the first time. We take this variable partly from Küpper (2013) but amend it for MPs first entering parliament in 2009 or 2013. If no information concerning party offices or when MPs started them could be found in their biographies, we coded party socialization as 0.³ Party socialization is measured dichotomously for various reasons: First, this kind of measurement directly fits to our argument that the probability of vote defection is dependent on whether (or not) MPs have been socialized into party structures. Second, we assume that a fundamental behavioral difference exists between MPs who lack any party-socialization experiences and those having held at least one party office at the local/regional level. Conversely, we believe that it does not make much difference to their voting behavior whether MPs held five or six different party offices, especially since the mere number of offices, in this case, would still have to be weighted by the length of time they held these offices. This leads to a third reason: Neither the duration nor the exact number of different party offices can be reliably measured in most cases, especially if the first election of MPs to parliament took place a long time ago or if the MPs held a bunch of different party offices. One must assume that the (self-reported) official biographies contain only a sample of all the offices MPs have ever held in their parties. Additionally, information on the duration of their party offices is missing in most cases. Finally, the process of socialization within the party can also be considered complete at some point if,

for instance, MPs have held office as district chairpersons of their party for years and thereby became acquainted with the sensitivities of their local members as well as the state and national party for which they participated as delegates at party congresses. An additional number of or tenure in party offices would then no longer trigger any behavioral effect.

In all the models, we control for additional variables that, according to the literature (see [State of the Art](#) section), influence an MP's decision to toe the party line. Not considering these controls in the model could lead to biased estimates for our hypothesized party-socialization effects. The first set of controls relates to the effectiveness of party discipline vis-à-vis other (e.g., electoral) principals. Holding an executive or a parliamentary office likely increases the effectiveness of party discipline (e.g., Zittel and Nyhuis 2019). Second, behavioral differences between MPs elected in the district and on the party list are reported regarding their voting behavior (Sieberer 2010) but also regarding other activities like social media activity (Schürmann and Stier 2022) and MPs' responsiveness to constituency requests (Bol et al. 2021). Most of the MPs without party socialization are elected via party list, according to Bailer et al.'s (2013) data. In order to rule out that the effect of party socialization is biased by the MPs' mode of election, we control for their mandate type. Third, the length of membership in the *Bundestag* is also held constant since it could capture parliamentary socialization which—for testing Hypothesis 1—we want to keep distinct from party socialization. In order to disentangle those two facets of socialization, Rehmert (2022a) restricts his analysis to MPs in their first legislative term. We argue that a rigorous test of a pre-parliamentary party-socialization effect has to include the full set of MPs. In this setting, the conditional role of *parliamentary* socialization on the *party* socialization effect (H2) can be explicitly modeled. Fourth, in order to rule out that all socialization effects are actually generational effects, we include the MP's age in the year of the vote as a further control. Fifth, we also take the type and origin of the motion into consideration, given that the disciplinary pressure and thus the baseline level of dissent differs between motions (Bergmann et al. 2016; Stecker 2015). Specifically, we control for votes on defense policies which, due to their polarizing nature in the context of Germany's history, usually exhibit higher-than-average defection rates. Additionally, we include a dummy variable indicating whether the motion on the floor has been initiated by the MP's own party group (or the government for

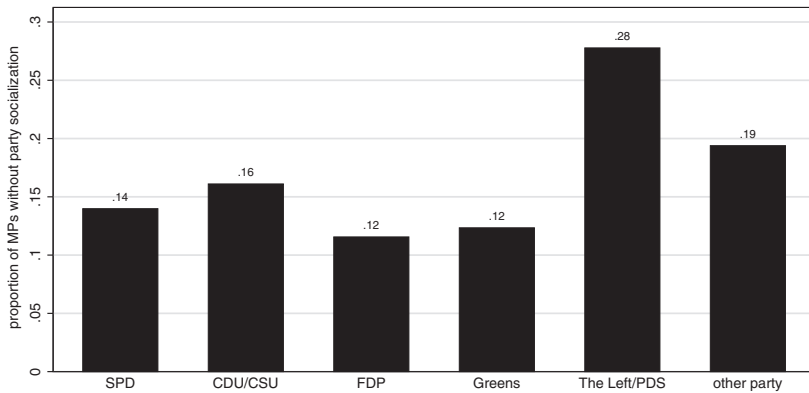
government MPs)—since Bergmann and coauthors (2016) expect lower defection rates for votes on own motions in order not to be blamed for disunity by the public. Sixth, in order to account for temporal variance in MPs' voting behavior, three vote-specific controls are added to the models. The seat share of the government parties captures the closeness of voting decisions, with a smaller margin resulting in higher disciplinary pressures on the MPs (Bergmann et al. 2016). Moreover, we control for election-cycle effects with a dummy variable measuring whether the vote took place between January and the federal election (in an election year). In those years, both a higher level of dissent in order to signal dedication to voter preferences (Lindstädt et al. 2011) or a lower level of dissent in order to demonstrate unity (Willumsen and Öhberg 2017) would be conceivable. Furthermore, we control for potential differences in the voting behavior before and after the German reunification in 1990. Finally, we include party fixed effects (i.e., one dummy per party) to account for specificities of parties that may drive voting behavior. Most variables for the 1st–17th terms are coded using data from Sieberer et al. (2020); for the 18th term, we collected the data by ourselves. Further information on the measurement and data sources of all variables can be found in Appendix A in the online supporting information.

Results

Before we investigate the hypothesized relationship between party socialization of an MP and their probability to vote against the party line, we present some descriptive statistics on our main independent variable. About 15% of the MPs included in our dataset (not weighted by the number of votes they attended) have entered parliament without a career in local/regional party offices. According to Figure 1, the parties are rather similar regarding the prevalence of party socialization—with between 12% and 16% of the MPs having not been in any party office at lower levels before entering parliament. An exception is the Left Party/PDS where around 28% lack this kind of party socialization. Additionally, the proportion of MPs that have not been party socialized varies over time (see Figure 2): It decreased from roughly 25% in the 1950s to less than 10% between the 1980s and the beginning 2000s, before it began to rise again to more than 15% in the last term under study.

In order to test our two hypotheses, separate regression models were estimated (see Table 1). The first model includes the

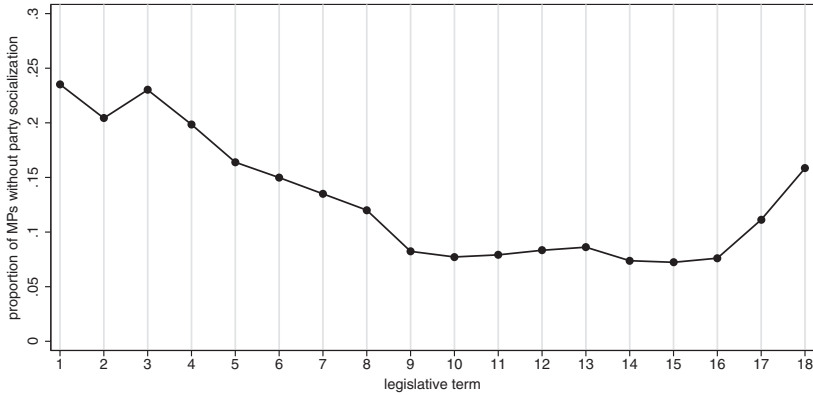
FIGURE 1
Proportion of MPs without Party Socialization, by Party



unconditioned effect of lacking party socialization (Hypothesis 1) and parliamentary experience, respectively. The second model includes an interaction term between party socialization and parliamentary experience as formulated in Hypothesis 2.

The results of both models are clear-cut with regard to the independent variable of theoretical interest: In model 1, lacking party socialization significantly increases the probability that an MP casts a dissenting vote, even after controlling for various other powerful determinants of their voting behavior. Hence, the data strongly support our initial hypothesis. In model 2, the coefficient of the interaction term between party socialization and parliamentary experience is statistically significant as well which points to a possible interaction effect. In order to explore the size and significance of the interaction, we have plotted the average marginal effect of party socialization on MPs' propensity to defect at different levels of parliamentary experience in Figure 3. It shows that, in their first year in parliament, MPs who did not hold party offices before have a significantly higher probability to vote against the party line, and the difference from MPs having experienced this kind of party socialization is strongest. During their subsequent years in the *Bundestag*, the party socialization effect gradually gets weaker. After roughly six years in parliament, that is, one-and-a-half regular terms, MPs lacking party-socialization experiences prior to their first election no longer differ significantly from party-socialized MPs. Thus, as expected by Hypothesis 2,

FIGURE 2
Proportion of MPs without Party Socialization, by Legislative Term



parliamentary socialization is particularly relevant for those MPs who enter parliament without having been socialized previously during a party career.

The results for party socialization as well as for the interaction effect are robust against different model specifications: Both keep their statistical significance if the party dummies are excluded from the models or if they are replaced by a dichotomous variable for government participation of an MP's party. As a third robustness check, we included the candidacy mode instead of the type of mandate in the models in order to capture electoral pressures on the MPs in a more fine-grained way. Again, both the unconditioned and the conditioned party-socialization effect (at representative values of parliamentary experience) keep their statistical significance (see Appendix C in the online supporting information for full results).

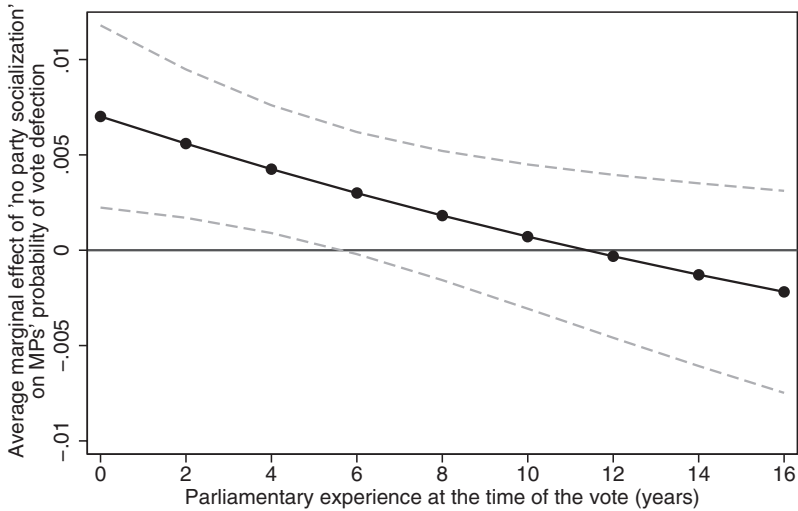
Beyond statistical significance, which has its drawbacks in a large sample like ours, our effects are also substantively meaningful (see Figure 4). For freshman MPs, the substantive effect is strongest: MPs without party-socialization experiences have, in their first year in parliament, a defection probability of 3.26%, compared to 2.56% for MPs with party socialization—which equals an increase of the defection probability of 0.7 percentage points (as shown in Figure 3), and, given the generally low level of defection, of more than 27%. After four years in parliament, MPs who did not

TABLE 1
Regression Results for the Chance of Casting a Dissenting Vote

	(1) Party Socialization: Unconditioned Effect	(2) Party Socialization Conditioned by Parliamentary Experience
Lack of party socialization	0.151* (0.065)	0.269** (0.087)
Parliamentary experience	-0.010* (0.005)	-0.008 (0.005)
Party socialization * Parliamentary experience (interaction term)		-0.024* (0.011)
Executive office	-1.343*** (0.107)	-1.350*** (0.107)
Parliamentary office	-0.255*** (0.056)	-0.256*** (0.056)
Direct mandate	-0.236*** (0.056)	-0.241*** (0.056)
Age	0.010*** (0.003)	0.009*** (0.003)
Gender (female)	-0.191** (0.060)	-0.190** (0.060)
Vote on defense policy	0.480*** (0.060)	0.480*** (0.060)
Vote on own motion	-0.118*** (0.031)	-0.118*** (0.031)
Government seat share	1.575*** (0.151)	1.580*** (0.151)
Vote in election year	0.446*** (0.026)	0.448*** (0.026)
Vote after unification	0.320*** (0.062)	0.311*** (0.062)
SPD	-1.566*** (0.167)	-1.563*** (0.166)
CDU/CSU	-1.292*** (0.173)	-1.289*** (0.173)
FDP	-0.514** (0.159)	-0.516** (0.159)
Greens	-0.790*** (0.180)	-0.786*** (0.180)
The Left/PDS	-1.416*** (0.197)	-1.415*** (0.197)
Constant	-4.581*** (0.230)	-4.590*** (0.230)
<i>N</i>	1,037,363	1,037,363

Note: Logit coefficients are displayed and standard errors in parentheses.
Levels of significance: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

FIGURE 3
Average Marginal Effect of the Lack of Party Socialization, by
Parliamentary Experience

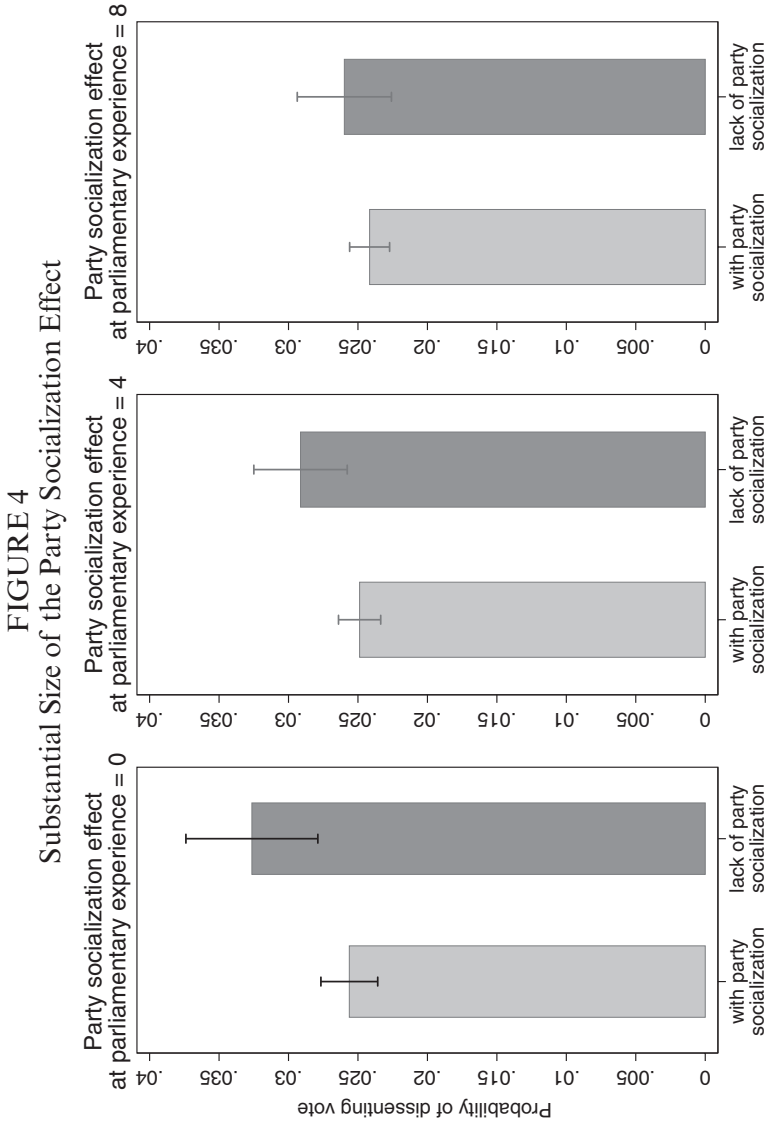


Notes:

Positive values indicate a higher probability of dissenting votes by MPs who lack party socialization. Point estimates as well as 95% confidence intervals (dashed lines) are shown.

hold party offices prior to their *Bundestag* mandate still have a 17% higher defection rate (2.49% vs. 2.91%) than MPs without this kind of party socialization. After eight years of parliamentary experience (i.e., two full terms), the difference in the defection probabilities is both substantially and statistically insignificant. Overall, the figure shows that it is not the party-socialized but mainly the formerly unsocialized MPs who, with rising parliamentary experience, become more loyal in their legislative behavior.

Although the size of the effects is substantial given all the controls, party socialization is not the only and not the most powerful pathway to unity. All controls exert a statistically significant effect on dissenting voting behavior. Independent from party socialization, higher parliamentary experience decreases MPs' probability of vote defection. As expected, indicators of formal party discipline do also have their expected explanatory power: MPs holding parliamentary and, even more pronounced, executive offices, which they presumably do not want to lose in the aftermath of dissenting votes, show a lower probability of vote defection. In substantive terms, only the effect of holding



an executive office clearly exceeds party socialization in terms of the difference in predicted probabilities—the defection probability decreases by 72% for MPs holding government offices. Parliamentary offices reduce MPs’ defection probability by 21% which is almost the same effect size as for party socialization of freshman MPs. MPs who have been directly elected in the constituency show significantly less vote defections—contrary to theoretical expectations and earlier results for single terms in Germany (see, e.g., Sieberer 2010) but similar to results for longer observation periods in Germany and other countries (see, e.g., Crisp 2007; Sieberer and Ohmura 2021). Older MPs show higher, female MPs lower defection rates, compared to their colleagues. Concerning the vote characteristics, we see higher defection rates in votes on defense policy matters, compared to other (possibly less contentious) issues. In votes on motions that were initiated by MPs’ own party group (or, in case of government MPs, the federal government), they show lower defection rates, compared to other motions (as expected). In addition, the political circumstances affect MPs’ defection rates: In times of comfortable government majorities, in election years as well as generally in votes after the German unification (with a more fragmented and polarized party system), we observe more MP votes against the party line. Finally, compared to other parties represented in the first terms of the *Bundestag* and serving as reference, MPs of all established parties, especially Social Democratic, Socialist, and Christian Democratic ones, vote in a more unified manner.

Conclusion

Based on standard models of legislative research according to which party-compliant voting behavior of MPs is the result of either ideological agreement with one’s party, party loyalty, or party discipline, we argued that a substantial party-socialization process fosters a stronger feeling of loyalty towards one’s own party and, consequently, reduces the probability that an MP votes against the party line in parliament. In order to test our argument, we compiled a rich dataset on MPs’ party career, other personal and career-related characteristics, as well as their individual-level voting behavior in the German *Bundestag* over nearly 70 years (1949–2017). The results supported our proposition that MPs who did not hold party offices at the local/regional level prior to their national mandate show a higher probability to vote against the party line. Additionally, behavioral

differences between MPs with this kind of party socialization and those without vanish the longer MPs serve in parliament.

We interpret the relationship between party socialization of MPs and party-compliant voting behavior in parliaments as a loyalty effect, assuming that MPs who were not engaged in the party structures missed acquiring values, like the importance of unity, that, in turn, foster voting in accordance with the mainstream position of their party group. Although we consider such a causal relationship likely given our correlative evidence, whether MPs have actually internalized such values due to their party-socialization process and, if so, whether those values actually influenced their voting behavior, cannot be ultimately proved in a study with observational data (Mughan et al. 1997). Survey data as a potential alternative are confronted with other drawbacks discussed in the methods section. Nevertheless, apart from being able to additionally control for MPs' policy preferences, survey data could allow future studies to investigate the effect of further conceivable aspects of party socialization on MPs' legislative behavior that are hardly measurable by observational data, for example, the amount of party work beyond holding visible party offices.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, our study has several implications for research on party politics and legislatures: First, adding to rational-choice approaches whereupon legislative behavior is considered to be a product of carrots and sticks or electoral incentives, our results show that party loyalty is another important pathway to unity, even when party discipline is not suspended. Second, the findings underscore that, for many MPs, a politically effective socialization process does not start in the national parliament but in local/subnational party committees, implying that *party* socialization has to be regarded as a loyalty-inducing factor besides *parliamentary* socialization. Additionally, the significant interaction effect between party and parliamentary socialization shows that they are not mutually exclusive but complementary pathways to unity. Third, our results can be related to the literature on candidate selection, providing an additional explanation for the repeated observation that showing commitment to one's own party, e.g., by holding local/regional-level party offices, increases the chance of being nominated as a candidate for the national parliament (Hellmann 2020 and Rehmert 2021, 2022b for the German case): Since politicians who are experienced in subnational party offices vote more frequently according to the party line, it is reasonable

for party delegates to select precisely those loyal individuals as candidates—because parliamentary democracies do not work by means of party discipline only but also depend on party-loyal MPs. Finally, our findings can be linked to political megatrends such as partisan dealignment and the personalization of politics (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002; Garzia et al. 2022). André and co-authors (2015) have already empirically confirmed that in districts where partisan dealignment is strongest, MPs' party loyalty is weakest. If the party label loses its importance for MPs' (re-)election, then MPs are increasingly encouraged to cultivate personal votes which, in turn, reduces the loyalty to their party and, ultimately and according to our results, party unity in parliament. If, more broadly, political success is less closely linked to party labels, then both trends will also weaken individuals' incentives to pursue the hard intraparty road to political top-positions by themselves. Empirically, the proportion of MPs lacking party-socialization experiences is already rising since several parliamentary terms. The weakening of this pathway to unity that we have established in this article could ultimately result in a growing strain on party unity and, thereby, on one of the key elements of representative democracies. This resonates with discussions about the role of parties in general and the decline of the traditional mode of partisan government based on stable majorities. However, it is important to note that such an outcome is not inevitable and maybe even not be probable. Given that *parliamentary* socialization also leads to less defection, and—according to our results—especially so for MPs that are no “party animals” (Ohmura et al. 2018), and given that loyalty is only one out of several “pathways to party unity” (Andeweg and Thomassen 2011), declining engagement in political parties does not necessarily undermine the traditional functional logics of parliamentary systems.

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ENDNOTES

1. Saalfeld (1995, 231–45) indeed includes MPs' party offices in his analysis of defection rates in the German *Bundestag*. However, his analysis is not clear on whether party offices prior to or during an MP's mandate are considered. Additionally, it lacks controls of discipline and electoral factors (e.g., executive office, mandate type) and ends in 1990.

2. There are several reasons for why we restrict our argument to *party* offices and do not also consider electoral (i.e., *public*) offices at the local/regional level. Tavits (2009) argues that experience in *public* offices at the local level (e.g., council member or mayor) encourages MPs to build personal reputations which help them becoming more independent from their party, due to (1) having built an own electoral support base that does not only consist of partisan voters, (2) generating more individualist attitudes, and (3) opening career options outside the party. Empirically, she found that experience in local-level public offices is a strong predictor of being a maverick in parliament. This is the opposite of what we expect from holding *party* offices. Therefore, we refrain from including elected public offices in our party socialization variable.

3. Consequently, the party-socialization variable has only some missing observations for MPs who entered parliament before 2009 and were not included in Küpper's (2013) dataset. Details on the used data sources can be found in Appendix A in the online supporting information. They largely rely on self-reported information by MPs. An informational bias according to which primarily those MPs who regard party socialization important actually report their party offices in their biographies cannot be ruled out. However, we regard it unlikely that this informational bias is related to our dependent variable, that is, that primarily MPs mostly toeing the party line for whatever reason report party offices on the local/regional level.

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Appendix S1