

Does party identification associate with consumer preferences? Analyzing Finnish consumers in 2009 and 2014

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Abstract

This article examines the association between Finn's political orientation and preferences regarding hedonistic and mundane consumer activities. Data derived from national-level surveys collected in Finland in 2009 ($n=1,202$) and 2014 ($n=1,351$) suggests that political party identification is an important predictor of perceived consumption, even after controlling for the effects of key socio-demographic factors. In general, supporters of the right-wing National Coalition Party consider themselves as high-level consumers more often than the supporters of other political parties do. The results also show that there have been very few temporal changes in the association between party identification and consumption preferences. The effect of party identification is stronger for hedonistic activities than for mundane activities. It is argued that political party identification has similar impact on individual's consumer preferences as other lifestyle and social network factors have. The findings offer us new possibilities for further research addressing consumer activities, and other behavioural correlates of political orientation.

KEYWORDS

consumer preferences, Finland, party cleavages, Party identification, survey research

1 | INTRODUCTION

Preceding research shows that political affiliation continues to be connected with a citizen's socio-economic and demographic background (e.g., Heidar, 2004; Karvonen, 2014; Westinen, 2015). However, much less is known about the behavioral associations of political affiliation, especially in the context of private consumption. The starting point of our study is that various cleavages continue to manifest in party politics. Especially in Nordic countries, political parties have been formed on the basis of class and regional cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). However, nowadays, cleavages can be shaped by cultural and other social factors such as lifestyle orientations (Bornschieer, 2010). Accordingly, political affiliations are likely to have significance in many other social activities in addition to voting or other forms of citizen participation, especially in the case of consumer preferences, which are the focus of examination here.

It is often argued that people attempt to communicate more than ever through consumption in terms of self-presentation and self-image management. Furthermore, consumption is used to make oneself more attractive to a desired social group in seeking acceptance (e.g., Featherstone, 2007; Wilska, 2002). Even though political affiliation has been a crucial dependent variable regarding attitudes

about social security (e.g., Forma, 1999; Vilhjalmsson, 2016), there are no recent studies concerning associations of political affiliation and consumer preferences.

Individual political background may associate with personal consumer preferences. Here, political affiliation or membership can be viewed as a result of, personal interest, in addition to the adoption of different cultural values and views (e.g., Verba, Schlozman, & Burns, 2005). This means that an individual's personal ideology is perceived as an explanatory factor, which influences behavior in the same way as conventional structural factors (i.e., education or professional status). It follows that information on political affiliations can be used in the empirical analysis for understanding, attitudes or values that reflect important lifestyle orientations.

In this article, we argue that political affiliation can be manifested in a variety of ways in the consumer preferences of daily life. In order to test this assumption, we form a research frame based on perceived consumption expenditure and political party identification, which offers us a measure of respondents' political affiliation. Thus, by utilizing two national-level surveys collected in Finland in 2009 and 2014, we analyze how party identification associates with respondents' perceived consumption expenditure.

Our research interest is in the comparison between the key consumption dimensions that can be detected from a set of typical commodity spending. Following this, identifications with different political parties can provide us with concrete information about the political affiliations of Finnish consumers and how these affiliations associate with perceptions of their patterns of spending. In order to emphasize these associations, we take into account the effects of respondents' socioeconomic factors in terms of education and income.

The research questions of the study can be summarized as follows:

RQ1. *How did political party identification associate with perceived consumption expenditure in 2009 and 2014?*

RQ2. *Was the effect of party identification similar in different education and income levels when explaining perceived consumption expenditure?*

This study contributes to international consumer research by opening a new empirical approach to study consumer preference disparities. The findings of the study encourage scholars to further examine different social and cultural factors when explaining the actual consumption behavior. Our findings are also valuable in recognizing cleavages in the current Finnish political spectrum. We integrate theoretical approaches regarding the determinants of the consumer preferences and political orientation. On this basis we develop our conceptual background and define hypotheses for our empirical investigation. We then shortly describe our analytic techniques and findings. We conclude by summarizing broader theoretical and practical implications on the association between party identification and consumer preferences.

2 | SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER PREFERENCES

Consumer preferences of individuals and households can be understood as determined to a great extent by surrounding economic, social, and various cultural factors. To provide a basis for a social scientific understanding of spending, different socio-cultural and economic factors have been examined. The general idea is that certain patterns of consumption may remain distinct for certain groups of people over time. Such structurally determined differences, which often recur over time, relate to many activities.

In the sociology of consumption, economic resources and class position, gender, age, type of household and place of residence have traditionally been stressed (e.g., Nicosia & Mayer, 1976; Warde, 1997). In more recent studies, also lifestyles, values, and practices have been discussed when identifying consumer preferences (e.g., Kahle & Kennedy, 2013; Rössel & Schroedter, 2015; Warde, 2015). In this line of analysis, the goal is to combine descriptions of certain consumer preferences with a holistic view of life situations. In the interpretation of consumer preferences, however, it is possible to assume that there are always cer-

tain underlying principles that both constrain and enable many activities. These principles are typically structurally determined and become visible through various economic, social and cultural characteristics.

What is important here is that many factors, ranging from disposable income to educational qualifications, may therefore lead to systematic differences in consumer preferences among people. Different factors are relevant for understanding different types of preferences. For example, some activities tend to associate merely with socioeconomic factors, while others associate with basic socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., Aro & Wilska, 2014; Purhonen & Gronow, 2014; Räsänen, 2006). Naturally, if possible, the analysis should control for the effects of other possible sources of variation, such as individual or household income, level of education or socio-economic position.

Therefore, from a sociological perspective, we may understand and also utilize measures of political affiliations from the perspectives of restricting and enabling factors. Accordingly, regarding our first research question (RQ1), we summarize our hypotheses as follows:

H1: *Respondents' party identification is associated with their perceived consumption expenditure in the same fashion as conventional structural factors do.*

H2: *Despite recent postmodern interpretations, we also assume that structural factors, such as occupation or socio-economic status, income and age still determine Finnish consumption expenditure.*

3 | POLITICAL PARTIES AND VOTER CLEAVAGES IN FINLAND

In terms of political party structure, Finland is a fairly homogenous country with a tradition of stable majority governments and strong coalitions between left-wing and center, as well as right-wing parties (Karvonen, 2014). The six biggest parties in Finland are: The Social Democratic Party, The Coalition Party, The Centre Party, The Finns, The Greens, and the Left Alliance (see Figure 1)¹. Traditionally, Finnish political parties have represented different group-based class interests (Karvonen, 2014, p. 24). The Social Democrats and the Left Alliance represent the interests of the workers and their unions, the right-wing party typically represents the interests of employers and the center-agrarian party represents the interests of farmers and the self-employed (see Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Forma, 1999).

Historically, the Social Democrats have been the dominant political party in the Nordic countries (Heidar, 2004, p. 43), but Finland is at least partly an exception in this regard. The Centre agrarian party has been bigger than in other Nordic countries. Further, of all of the political parties, the Centre Party has traditionally sought reforms for the improvement in the quality of life of the rural population (Forma, 1999). Respectively, the Greens and Coalition Party are strongly supported by "urban professionals" or the members of the "creative class" (see Westinen, 2015). The right wing Coalition party had been weaker

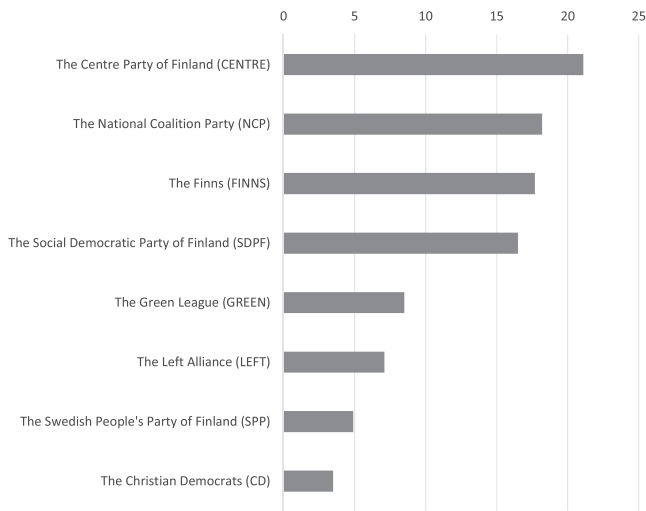


FIGURE 1 Finland parliamentary elections 2015, in percentages

than the Centre and Social Democrats until the economic recession of the early 1990s.

Recently, some scholars have claimed that a linkage between parties and citizens is weakening (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Scarrow, Webb, & Farrel, 2002, p. 129). It has also been demonstrated that people are no longer as interested in party politics as they were during the modern era of the 1980s (Dalton, 2002, p. 19; Whiteley, 2011, p. 22). For example, the number of people belonging to political parties is constantly on the decline (van Biezen & Poguntke, 2014), voter turnout has been decreasing in most (post)modern societies (Dalton, 2008, p. 37), and a growing amount of voters switch parties from election to election (Karvonen, 2014, p. 107).

However, empirical research has indicated that people still feel a closeness to political parties (see, e.g., Hooghe & Kern, 2015) and voting behavior is still associated with political affiliation and party identification (Papageorgiou, 2011). It is also argued that, especially in Western Europe, the political sphere has polarized into new cleavages based on libertarian-universalistic and traditionalist-communitarian values (Kriesi, 2010, p. 638). In many western countries the dominance of the traditional class-based mass parties appears to be under threat due to new populist parties. Notably, the populists Finns in Finland have gained significant electoral success during this decade.

Even though traditional class voting has declined in Finland, it is still more prevalent than in most western countries (Westinen, 2015, p. 290). Nowadays, class is only partly associated with voter choice. The new middle classes have ambiguous voting preferences and this is changing political alignments of democracies (see Nieuwbeerta & Dirk De Graaf, 1999; Dalton, 2008, pp. 147–150). New politics-related values are associated with, for instance, environmental quality, social participation, minority rights and alternative lifestyles (Knutson, 2004, p. 77).

On the other hand, the emergence of the Greens and the Finns can be regarded as an indication of how much the political system and identification have changed in Finland. The Finns' rise in influence can

be thought have originated from the lack of trust in politics among some groups, particularly with regards to older parties. Their support has fluctuated significantly since 2011. On the other hand, the Greens have been emphasized as a liberal-values and an ecological urban party (Karvonen, 2014; Westinen, 2015).

Although, it has been argued that political party preference is more than the result of one's early socializing experiences or class position (e.g., Franklin & Jenkinson, 1983), we assume that the political party is, at least partly, associated with respondents' societal status. Therefore, with regard to RQ2, we also hypothesize:

H3: *Party identification has significant interaction with education and income level when examining perceived consumption expenditure.*

Next, before turning into the empirical results, we present our data, measures and statistical methods.

4 | EMPIRICAL STUDY

Our data are derived from two cross-sectional mail surveys "Finland 2009 and 2014—Consumption and way of life." The surveys were based upon random samples of Finns aged 18–74. Representative samples were drawn from the Finnish population register database. Response rates varied from 46% to 49% constituting the final samples with $n = 1,202$ (2009) and $n = 1,351$ (2014). The data with a total of 2,553 respondents represent the Finnish population relatively well. Minor bias in terms of age and gender were corrected with adequate weight coefficients (for details, see Koivula, Räsänen, & Sarpila, 2015; Sarpila, Räsänen, Erola, Kekki, & Pitkänen, 2010).

4.1 | Measures and descriptive analysis

Our central predictor variable is *party identification*. It refers to the political party that respondents perceive to be the most important for them. The party identification refers to more permanent and ideological choice than, for example, actual voting behavior. Party identification is also a generally used indicator when predicting voting behavior (Bartels, 2000; Campbell, Converse, Milner, & Stokes, 1960; Papageorgiou, 2011, p. 212). It is also essential that the question asked about party preference come close to individual political parties unlike questions about political preference via left-right scale. This way, we can provide concrete information about the profile of parties' supporters and interpret the significance of single parties.

Results from the descriptive analysis of the party items are shown in Table 1. The data represent the power relations of parties in the Finnish parliamentary relatively well. In particular, the latest wave of the survey has captured those characteristics that have entered the field of party politics during recent years (for details, see OSF, 2015). The main source of bias in the data is the distributions of the supporters from the Greens and the Left Alliance. The Greens seems to be popular in our surveys with relation to the results of elections, whereas the Left is

TABLE 1 The most important parties for Finns in 2009 and 2014, the six largest parties

	2009		2014		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
The National Coalition Party (NCP)	230	20.6	243	19.4	472	19.9
The Centre Party of Finland (CENTRE)	174	15.6	219	17.5	393	16.6
The Finns (FINNS)	114	10.2	225	17.9	339	14.3
The Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDPF)	213	19.1	205	16.3	418	17.6
The Green League (GREEN)	169	15.2	154	12.3	323	13.6
The Left Alliance (LEFT)	58	5.2	66	5.3	124	5.2

generally more popular in elections than in our surveys. Some parties with the minor distribution, including the Christian Democrats and the Swedish People's Party, are grouped into the other category and excluded from the presented results.

As for dependent variables, we use sum-variables measuring respondents' perceived consumption expenditure. While private consumption may be seen as an activity, perceived consumption expenditure represents a social condition or even a way of life. In this respect, respondents' perceived consumption could be understood as a general factor behind the apparent ubiquity of acts of consumption in everyday life (Räsänen, 2003, p. 13). In the questionnaires, the respondents were asked to compare their spending on different goods and services with

an average consumer using the Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 = I spend much less than average; 5 = I spend much more than average). However, we must also take into account the subjectivity of respondents' own estimations. According to Wilska (2002, p. 199), for example, the underestimation of one's actual spending is typical in Finland. This will be taken into consideration when we interpret our findings.

The original set of questions included a total of 15 commodities and services. All of the items were employed in the Principal Component Analysis (PCA), which was conducted by using forced factor solution and Varimax-rotation. On the basis of factor solutions, we established two summed variables for further analyses, as Table 2 shows. As we can observe, the first factor, *Hedonistic*, includes services and goods addressing luxury and selfish consumption. The factor includes items focusing on home electronics, recreational travel, alcohol, social life and entertainment, sports, studying, culture services, beauty care, and self-indulgence. In literature, such commodities are typically referred as hedonistic, visible and unnecessary (e.g., Wilska, 2002; Rössel & Schroedter, 2015).

The second factor, *Mundane*, is constituted by respondents' perceived spending on unselfish and necessary items. Factor items here focus on spending in terms of children's accessories, housing, health care, domestic appliances, food, and transportation

Despite the forced solution, the two factor model functions relatively well, explaining almost 40% of the total variance of variables. Both factors also meet the criterion for the eigenvalue being greater than 1. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for both of the variables are over 0.6 and the mean levels are at the middle of the scale (from 1 to 5).

Our control variables consist of occupational class, education, gender, residential area, household size, economic activity, income, and age. On the basis of the ISCO-08 classification, we recoded occupation into three class groups: "High," "Medium," and "Low." The high group includes respondents from the first and the second major ISCO groups. The medium group is made up of the third, fourth, and tenth major groups. Entrepreneurs are included in the "Medium" group as well. The rest of the respondents are grouped into the "Low" group.

The education variable consisted of four categories, including "Basic," "Upper-secondary," "Bachelor," and "at least Master" degrees. Size of household was categorized into three groups: "1 person," "2 persons," and "Over 2 persons." Respondents' residential area was

TABLE 2 Principal component analysis including means and standard deviations of single items

Items	MEAN	(SD)	Factor 1 <i>Hedonistic</i>	Factor 2 <i>Mundane</i>
Home electronics	2.2	(1.0)	0.55	0.16
Recreational travel	2.6	(1.2)	0.60	0.23
Alcohol	2.1	(1.1)	0.53	-0.06
Social life and entertainment	2.3	(1.0)	0.78	-0.02
Sports	2.7	(1.1)	0.51	0.21
Studying	2.1	(1.0)	0.53	0.00
Culture services	2.2	(1.1)	0.64	0.16
Beauty care	1.9	(1.0)	0.59	0.20
Self-indulgence	2.4	(1.0)	0.72	0.12
Food	2.9	(0.9)	0.20	0.59
Housing	2.9	(0.9)	0.04	0.64
Health care	2.5	(1.0)	0.02	0.51
Kids'toys and access	1.8	(1.1)	-0.01	0.68
Domestic appliances	1.5	(0.9)	0.14	0.64
Transportation	2.7	(1.1)	0.21	0.42
% of Variance			23.2	15.2
Cronbach's Alpha			0.82	0.64
Mean of factor			2.25	2.38

TABLE 3 Perceived spending on Hedonistic and Mundane consumption by background variables and party identification, OLS regression models

VARIABLES		Hedonistic				Mundane			
		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
Gender	Male	-0.007	(0.024)	-0.006	(0.024)	0.038	(0.023)	0.028	(0.023)
Age	Age(10 years)	-0.095***	(0.009)	-0.096***	(0.009)	0.031***	(0.008)	0.027***	(0.008)
Income	Q2	0.085*	(0.036)	0.080*	(0.036)	0.168***	(0.034)	0.164***	(0.034)
	Q3	0.252***	(0.040)	0.233***	(0.040)	0.250***	(0.038)	0.238***	(0.038)
	Q4	0.361***	(0.041)	0.334***	(0.041)	0.374***	(0.038)	0.351***	(0.038)
Education	Upper-Secondary	0.040	(0.036)	0.044	(0.035)	0.035	(0.033)	0.037	(0.033)
	Bachelor	0.158***	(0.037)	0.139***	(0.037)	0.024	(0.034)	0.014	(0.034)
	Master	0.206***	(0.044)	0.176***	(0.044)	0.070	(0.041)	0.065	(0.041)
Occupation	High	0.097**	(0.037)	0.079*	(0.037)	0.053	(0.034)	0.043	(0.034)
	Medium	0.048	(0.032)	0.043	(0.032)	0.051	(0.030)	0.050	(0.030)
Household	2 persons	0.069*	(0.029)	0.064*	(0.029)	0.098***	(0.027)	0.091***	(0.027)
	Over 2 persons	-0.001	(0.033)	-0.005	(0.033)	0.384***	(0.031)	0.377***	(0.031)
Residence	Urban	0.100***	(0.027)	0.079**	(0.028)	-0.037	(0.025)	-0.040	(0.026)
Economic Activity	In working life	-0.049	(0.029)	-0.032	(0.029)	0.033	(0.027)	0.043	(0.027)
Surveyed year	Year 2014	-0.024	(0.024)	-0.012	(0.024)	0.023	(0.022)	0.022	(0.022)
Party identification	NCP			0.227***	(0.038)			0.148***	(0.036)
	CENTRE			0.042	(0.039)			0.024	(0.037)
	FINNS			-0.032	(0.043)			0.010	(0.040)
	SDPF			0.089*	(0.038)			0.044	(0.036)
	GREENS			0.112**	(0.043)			-0.058	(0.040)
	LEFT			0.054	(0.058)			-0.033	(0.055)
Constant		2.290***	(0.062)	2.251***	(0.065)	1.784***	(0.058)	1.796***	(0.061)
Observations		2459		2459		2468		2468	
R-squared		0.173		0.190		0.174		0.185	

Standard errors in parentheses.

Omitted variables: Female, Q1 income quartile, Basic education, Low occupation, 1 person household, Rural area, Year 2009, No party identification.

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

measured in the survey by asking respondents to choose from two options: "rural" or "urban." In order to measure respondents' economic activity, we observed respondents' current employment situation: either "working" or "not-working."

In addition, we controlled for respondents' gender, age (as continuous), and income. Income was recoded into groups on the basis of quartiles. The income variable was based on the respondents' own estimations of net income per month. The frequencies and means of background variables by respondents' party identification are given in the Appendix.

Finally, we acknowledge that there are apparent temporal changes in the Finnish political system, which may have consequences on the assumed effects of party identification. However, due to the lack of preceding research, we do not know whether this has led to a stronger or weaker effect in 2014 when compared with 2009. It is also possible that some of the observed differences are results of the bias in the single survey. Therefore, we control for the effect of the surveyed year and examine whether there are potential interactions between year and party identification.

Multivariate analysis was conducted by using ordinary least squared (OLS) models. The aim of the explanatory analysis was to evaluate the effect of party identification on respondents' perceived consumption. The models are shown in Table 3, including non-standard regression coefficients (B), standard errors, explanatory powers of models, and statistical significances.

In the second stage of analysis, we analyzed the base models separately in the different classes of respondents' income and education. In addition, we conducted models with interaction between party identification and the surveyed year. Results of the interaction analysis are presented as marginal effects by utilizing coefplots (Jann, 2014). Marginal effects illustrate an instantaneous rate of change in dependent variables across different classes of independent variables, which is why they are more easily interpreted than regression coefficients, especially in terms of interaction analysis (e.g., Cameron & Trivedi, 2009).

4.2 | Explanatory analysis

We do acknowledge that consumer preferences typically vary by respondents' sociodemographic and socioeconomic factors. Thus, we

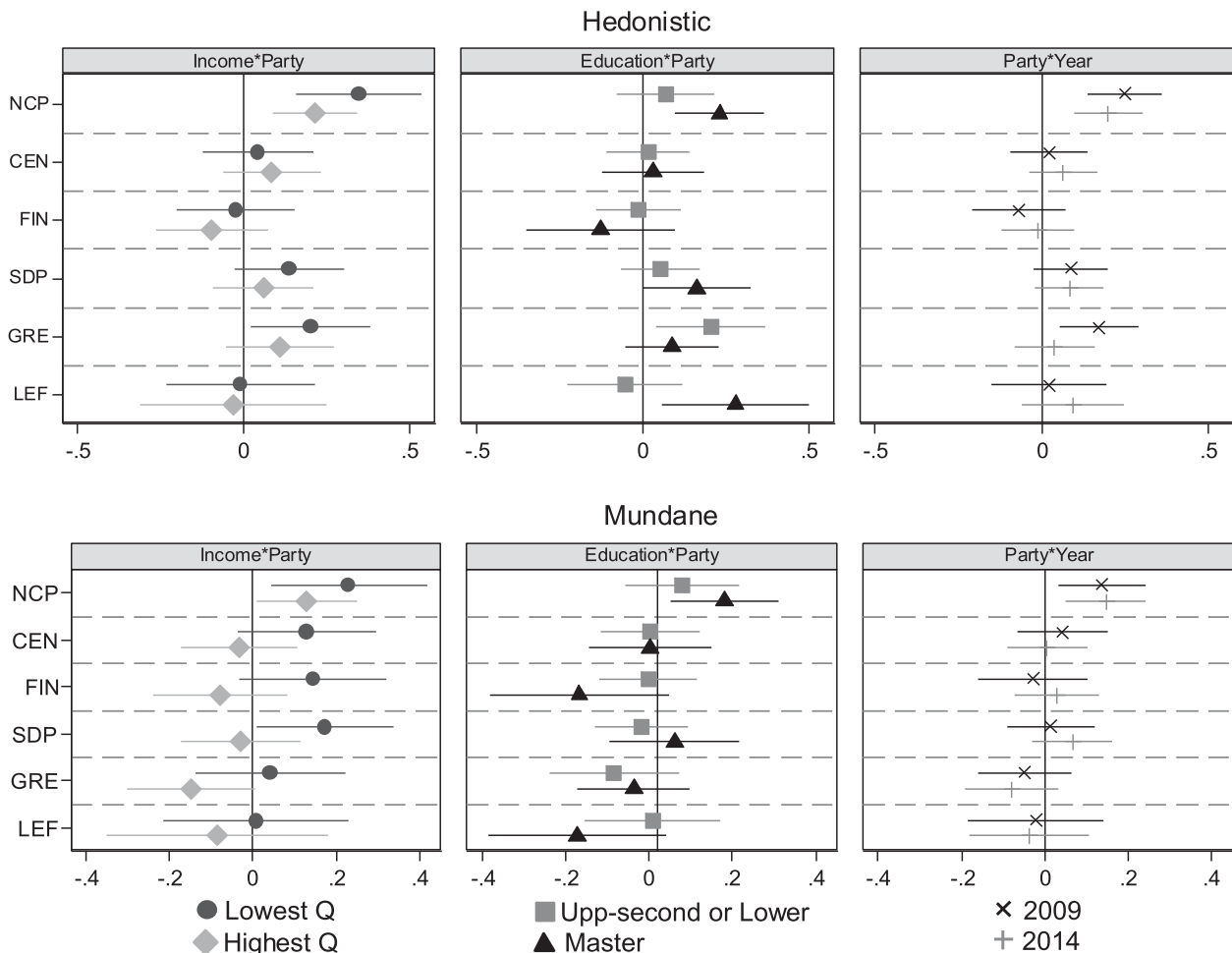


FIGURE 2 Perceived spending on Hedonistic and Mundane consumption by party identification at the different levels of income and education, and a comparison between years, average marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals

begin our analysis by modeling the variation of respondents' perceived spending with these background variables. Dummies were created from categorical variables before entering them into the regression models.

The results of regression analysis are shown in the Table 3. As we can see, education and income are the strongest predictors of hedonistic consumption. Respondents' income can be viewed as a strong determinant when explaining mundane consumption as well.

Next, we added different party identification variables into the models. Models reveal a statistical association between party identification and perceived spending. What is noteworthy here is that party identification plays a statistically significant role in explaining respondents' perceived spending after controlling for background variables. As we can see, the supporters of the right-wing (the National Coalition Party) are perceived to spend more on hedonistic items than the supporters of all other parties. The next highest estimates can be observed for the supporters of the Greens and the Social Democrats. The less-consuming groups are constituted by the supporters of the center-right (The Centre and the Finns) and the left-wing (The Left Alliance).

The second factor (Mundane) does not produce as much variation among the supporters of different parties as the first factor. However,

the supporters of the right-wing (NCP) seem to be emphasized with regard to this second dimension of consumption as well. In contrast to the first factor, the supporters of the Green party can be viewed as less-consuming and the Finns as high-consuming in terms of mundane consumption. However, either the supporters of the Finns or the Greens do not differ statistically from the population average.

Next, we took a look at how party identification interacted with respondents' income and education, and also with year. Figure 2 gives average marginal effects for different party supporters at the lowest and the highest levels of income and education. Here, marginal effects illustrate how much each party group differs from the population average at selected levels of independent variables. Similarly, the figure shows average marginal effects for the different party supporters in 2009 and 2014.

In general, the results are in line with the main-effect models shown in Table 3, especially for hedonistic consumption. In other words, the supporters of NCP seem to be the high-consuming respondents despite income or education level. However, the models also reveal that there are notably differences among the parties. The perceptions of hedonistic consumption did not increase steadily starting from lower income and education brackets among those identified with the Green party. Interestingly, there is a similar effect in education

for those identifying with the right-wing NCP and the Left. In both cases, supporters with high education perceive themselves as consuming more than the highly educated in general.

Regarding mundane consumption, we observe that there are no significant differences between parties among the lowest income quartiles or lowest education levels. However, those identifying with the NCP appear to be different from the population average compared with when examining hedonistic consumption.

Finally, we see that there are few notable changes in these associations between years 2009 and 2014. The Greens express a slightly lower level of hedonistic consumption in 2014 than in 2009. Other parties, however, report approximately the same levels of perceived consumption in both years.

5 | DISCUSSION

In this article, we argued that party identification can be understood in a relatively similar manner as conventional structural factors such as occupation or education that associate with individual behavior and attitudes, either directly or indirectly. Many of the influential social categories, and therefore also their effects, are likely to be connected with political preferences. We tested these assumptions by examining the structural features of Finnish citizens' perceived consumption in 2009 and 2014.

Our results show that party identification has potential explanatory power when examining perceptions of one's own consumption expenditure. Not only did hedonistic and mundane dimensions of perceived consumption associate with party identifications, but also associations remained statistically significant even after controlling for key socio-economic and demographic variables.

We found that those identifying with the right-wing party NCP perceived themselves as consuming more in both consumption dimension when compared with other respondents. Despite the recent changes in the Finnish political system, we found only minor changes in perceived consumption expenditure between 2009 and 2014. However, it seems that supporters of the Greens have become more critical towards hedonistic consumer preferences over time.

On the basis of the findings, we suggest that the effect of party identification is more visible when analyzing hedonistic activities than when analyzing mundane activities. In this respect, our results are compatible with recent studies on consumer attitudes (e.g., Rössel & Schroedter, 2015; Rössel & Pape, 2016), showing that consumption addressing leisure and luxury is influenced by lifestyles and social networks, as well as by socioeconomic factors.

It is obvious that party identification alone cannot explain consumer preferences. What is noteworthy here is the interplay of different forms of capital and resources, which we may illustrate by referring to the idea of social embeddedness (e.g., Granovetter, 1983; Zukin & Dimaggio, 1990). The embeddedness can of course take many forms, ranging from purely structural to cultural forms. Nevertheless, in social embeddedness, linkages to certain ideas, people and resources provide resources for individuals' social behavior. Here, we also assume that political conceptions of individuals make certain attitudes more likely

than others. Individuals sharing similar political ideas are probably also more likely to define their decisions, and perceive themselves as citizens, when compared with those with different political views.

Acknowledging the interpretations described above, the political party divide in given societies can be seen as a reflection of the disparity trends on the individual level and party positions. The party has a constant presence as a type of social network, which is held together through shared interests and identities (e.g., Goren, 2005; Greene, 2004). There are broader interests behind different life changes, which apparently manifest, for example, in consumer attitudes and choices. To put it another way, party affiliation can be used as a powerful explanatory factor in the empirical analysis of individual behavior, attitudes or values that reflect important lifestyle orientations.

Simultaneously, however, we need to bear in mind that the changing voting preferences and public attitudes towards political parties are an integral feature of the current democracies all over Europe. In Finland, the populist Finns party has mixed up the political party structure after scoring an electoral victory in 2011 (Karvonen, 2014). However, our findings indicate that support for the Finns is not necessarily a strong determinant of consumer preferences. Moreover, our results point to the existence of libertarian-universalistic and traditionalist-communitarian values. In our sample, the right-wing party NCP and the Greens can be seen as libertarian-universalistic parties that are strongly supported by, for example, young urban professionals (see Westinen, 2015). Therefore, it is not surprising that those who identify with NCP and the Greens report spending more than others on hedonistic commodities.

Finally, we need to acknowledge that our study obviously has its limitations. First, our examination was based on party identification among the respondents. In this respect, we are aware that party identification often differs from voting behavior and other forms of political engagement. In other words, although our analysis provides a meaningful look at the Finnish adult population's political affiliation, it is not directly comparable with the actual political trends over the time period in question. Especially in terms of historical context, national retail companies and cooperative organizations S-group and Tradeka have had a distinct political identity in the past. In future research, it would be beneficial to analyze whether there are associations between the regular customers of these cooperatives and party identification.

Second, our dependent measures were based on respondents' own perceptions. In other words, we cannot argue how different parties stand in relation to each other when analyzing the objective spending patterns of Finns. Third, our study utilized two comparable waves of random samples, which were drawn from the national population register. Despite this, the data do not represent panel samples in which the observations come from the same respondents each year. Finally, our data came from one country alone.

Even though our empirical data and measures are not ideal in every respect, the findings are important for scholars to consider, and future researchers should further investigate the behavioral implications of partisan affiliations. In contemporary consumer research, it is generally argued that individualistic choices are more

important than collective and structural interests. While we are not making a strong argument for political affiliation as the most significant explanatory factor for social activities, we can say that perceived consumption expenditure on hedonistic and mundane commodities, nonetheless, can be understood relatively well on the basis of party identification. In these respects, international comparisons should be encouraged in future studies. Political ideologies connect with many influential spheres of culture and society. Thus, it is plausible to argue that citizens' position in the social strata of contemporary societies are not connected with class and status cleavages. On the contrary, we can note that the individual's possibilities for expressing attitudes and preferences are restricted by their own political identifications.

NOTE

¹ Two other small parties in the parliament are: The Christian Democrats (3.5% of the vote) and The Swedish People's party (4.9% of the vote).

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APPENDIX

<i>Distribution of background variables by party identification, percentages</i>							
Variables	NCP	CENTER	FINNS	SDPF	GREENS	LEFT	Total n
<i>Gender</i>							
Men	56.9	51.8	67.7	46.6	32.1	60.3	1,199
Women	43.1	48.2	32.3	53.4	67.9	39.7	1,155
<i>Residential area</i>							
Urban	86.4	59.8	74.1	84.1	90.3	86.5	1,800
Rural	13.6	40.2	25.9	15.5	9.7	13.5	471
<i>Size of household</i>							
1 person	19.1	20.1	23.9	25.0	26.7	36.7	551
2 person	42.3	43.2	38.1	46.9	34.8	50.0	986
Over 2 persons	38.6	36.7	38.0	28.1	38.5	37.4	831
<i>Occupational Status</i>							
High	47.5	24.5	12.4	19.8	34.3	21.8	584
Medium	25.2	23.5	19.4	26.3	29.6	22.8	544
Low	27.3	52.0	68.2	54.0	36.1	55.3	1,031
<i>Economic activity</i>							
In working life	60.3	56.5	61.0	50.9	61.1	53.0	1,365
Non-working	39.7	43.5	39.0	49.1	38.9	47.0	1,004
<i>Education</i>							
Basic	7.1	11.6	18.2	16.9	8.1	12.2	265
Upper-secondary	23.3	40.0	48.8	43.5	28.8	47.6	812
Bachelor	39.8	33.9	27.5	29.0	34.1	22.1	736
Master	29.8	14.4	5.5	10.6	29.0	18.2	391
<i>Age quartiles(average age in parentheses)</i>							
I (26 years)	27.2	27.0	29.2	20.1	50.1	36.0	622
II (44 years)	34.6	26.5	41.3	25.7	30.9	15.1	623
III (58 years)	23.3	26.2	19.6	31.1	13.3	32.9	620
IV (69 years)	14.9	20.3	9.9	23.1	5.7	15.9	618
<i>Income quartiles</i>							
I (Under 1,200 €)	14.9	22.6	24.2	21.4	25.3	32.1	562
II (1,200–1,799 €)	14.9	24.4	26.1	29.5	19.1	27.8	642
III (1,800–2,399 €)	22.4	22.0	22.3	25.3	26.9	23.4	605
IV (Over 2,400 €)	47.9	31.1	27.4	23.8	28.7	16.7	744