

Table 5.5: Reasons given by members who have become more active

	%
Response to national political events	35
Have acquired position of responsibility	26
Response to local political events	13
More demand for my party work	11
I have more free time	10
Step in building a political career	1
Other	4
Total	100

Source: Fine Gael members' questionnaire, question 15.

Note: Responses were received from 19 per cent of members (weighted). Since question 15 was completely open, the categories used are devised by the authors.

- Because if I didn't do the work no-one else would
- I have no choice: the few depend on me, no-one wants to do anything.

We saw earlier that for some members developments at local level had had the effect of diminishing their enthusiasm. For others, though, some local event has had an invigorating effect; for example, a friend or relative has contested an election, or an energetic politician has inspired the local organisation:

- My brother was elected as a member of [local] County Council last June for Fine Gael
- I am more active because I personally know our local TD
- A young friend has joined the council
- More active new local candidate in the area who is promising in terms of his potential
- Satisfaction gained from introducing constituents to helpful politicians, i.e. Michael Noonan
- Because we have a new TD representing us and he is holding monthly clinics in our parish, the first Fine Gael TD to do this in years. His name is Michael Ring. A gift from God to Fine Gael
- A person who was going for local election, I backed them all the way and worked hard for her because she was the best person for the job. If we don't get it right at the bottom how can they get it right at the top?

Finally, there are members whose life circumstances have changed in such a way as to allow them to devote more time to the party:

- I have more time, business is going well, that's why I'm more active
- Joined when I was 17, now older and more interested in the political world around me
- Retired, more free time, tired of Fianna Fáil government
- The longer I have been in, the more contacts I have made, and I have self belief in helping Fine Gael.

The reasons given by those members who had become less active are shown in Table 5.6. Given the age profile of members that we discussed in chapter 4, it is no surprise to find that age and poor health, sometimes both, are the largest factor in leading to reduced activism. Examples of responses from members who said that they have become less active due to old age or ill health are:

- I am retired from farming, I am 77 years old, I no longer drive a car
- Getting old, the only reason I'm involved now is that there are no young people joining
- Not as young as I used to be, prefer gardening nowadays
- I have been working for the party for 45 years and I think the young people should take over.

A close second to age and ill health is that many members have less free time due to changes in their life circumstances:

- Busy in work, haven't got much time
- I was single when I joined and for some time after, now I'm married with children
- Pressure of work but very active at election times.

Taking these two factors together, just over half of the members can be said to have become less active due to changes in their own situation, which would be likely to have led to their becoming less active in any organisation that they might belong to, rather than to specifically political factors. Fine Gael might take some comfort from this, in that most of the decline in activism does not result from discontent with anything it has done or failed to do. The remaining reasons given by members for becoming less active are all related to politics. Foremost among these is a reduction in political commitment or interest, or in many cases a simple disillusionment with politics. As we saw above, the plethora of

Table 5.6: Reasons given by members who have become less active

	%
Old age or ill health	29
I have less free time	27
Reduced political commitment	12
Behaviour of FG at national level	10
Behaviour of FG at local level	9
Less demand for my party work	7
Have given up position of responsibility	4
Other	2
Total	100

Source: Fine Gael members' questionnaire, question 15.

Note: Responses were received from 31 per cent of members (weighted). Since question 15 was completely open, the categories used are devised by the authors.