

Czech and Italian Challengers' Survival Comparative Analysis of Party Organisation and Leadership of FI, Fdl, ANO and SPD Parties¹

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Abstract

Our paper explores the organisational and leadership strategies of new challenger parties in Czechia and Italy. The electorally volatile party systems in the countries of Central-Eastern and Southern Europe are associated with the constant emergence of new parties. Czech and Italian party systems are great examples of this phenomenon. Whilst many newcomers make electoral breakthroughs, only some outlive their initial electoral success. Organisational survival and the role of party leaders often precede the parliamentary survival of these parties.

We compare the organisational and leadership strategies of four such parties. Our case studies include Forward Italy/Forza Italia (FI), YES2011/ANO2011 (ANO), Brothers of Italy/Fratelli d'Italia (Fdl) and Freedom and Direct Democracy/Svoboda a přímá demokracie (SPD). All four emerged running on the anti-establishment ticket challenging the established parties. Simultaneously to being formed as challenger parties, the former two are considered the pioneers of entrepreneurial parties. The latter two, represent the most successful populist radical right parties in their respective countries.

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Analysing their statutes and organisational affairs, we explore the internal decision-making and positions of party leaders. Leader's decision-making capacity, interventions to the autonomy of territorial structures, and parties' policy towards membership form the basis of our comparative analysis.

It allows us to determine what they have in common in regard to the studied variables, and if these play any role in their survival. Centralised hierarchy combined with a strong position of party leaders are expected to influence it. The similarity between the studied cases helps to empirically test these expectations.

Keywords: challenger parties; populist radical right parties; party survival; party organisation; party elite; party membership; local party organisation

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1. Introduction

Party systems in many European countries witness a phenomenon of fluidity – new challenger parties making electoral breakthroughs; however, many of these newcomers disintegrate shortly afterwards.¹ Our article explores the role of party organisation of such parties on their survival. Our comparative analysis draws on the data of four case studies from two countries, where the above phenomenon occurs with significant impact on party systems – Italy and Czechia. The emergence of such parties in both Italy and Czechia, represented by populist radical right (PRR) parties and entrepreneurial parties with a broader, looser appeal, prompted us to undertake this perhaps unconventional comparison between countries from Central-Eastern (CEE) and Southern Europe. The choice of Czechia and Italy is further justified by the enduring presence of successful entrepreneurial parties in their respective party systems, particularly when compared to both the regional context (as in the case of Czechia) and the broader European context, as in the case of Italy (see Appendix 1 for a summary of these parties). Furthermore, Italy is notable as the country that witnessed the birth of what can arguably be considered the prototypical entrepreneurial challenger party in Europe: Forward Italy/Forza Italia (FI). Our cases include two Italian and two Czech cases – FI, Brothers of Italy/Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), YES2011/ANO2011 (ANO) and Freedom and Direct Democracy/Svoboda a přímá demokracie (SPD). We discuss the case selection criteria as part of the methodological section.

Our cases are all part of the phenomenon of new challenger parties. By definition, such parties are ideologically anti-establishment, i.e. positioned in opposition to the entire political establishment, succeeding at the expense of established

parties (Sikk, 2012; Jankowski et al., 2022, Cirhan, 2023). These parties are defined as political parties that challenge the dominance of established parties without necessarily seeking to overhaul the entire political system, as anti-system parties do (see: Sartori, 1976). Challenger parties can be relatively new or marginal actors that aim to disrupt the established party system and alter the political landscape. Such newness², also often includes other aspects like rapid electoral success, anti-establishment appeals, political outsidership or a so-called ‘purifier image’ these new parties share (Havlík & Hloušek, 2014; Haughton, Novotná, & Deegan-Krause, 2011; Hanley, 2012; Hanley & Sikk, 2014). These new challengers position themselves as viable alternatives to the mainstream, criticising incumbents for their failures or neglect of key issues (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). This paper does not concentrate on Czech or Italian party politics per se. Rather than that, it provides comparative analysis of cases that are part of this wider phenomenon.

We focus on the conditions supporting party survival, i.e., what helps such parties survive after their electoral breakthrough. By survival, we refer to a state preventing their factionalism that often leads to the disintegration of the party organisation (Spirova, 2007, p. 26). Such immunity to conflicts and splits not only facilitates organisational survival, but crucially affects parties’ public image externally, which matters to their potential voters (Deschouwer, 2008; Tavits & Letki, 2014). To that end, we empirically examine their party organisational features and party leadership strategies. As we will demonstrate throughout this paper, control of party organisation has a significant role in survival of our concerned parties, and the strong position of party leaders elevates this relationship by challenging the other aspects of party organisation.

We start by looking at the background of both party systems. The Czech party system has undergone dramatic changes in recent years. The most defining trends would be growing unpredictability and fragmentation. This has been the case before the Covid-19 pandemic hit, which sort of accelerated this process even further.

Unlike the majority of other post-communist countries since revolutions of the 1990s, Czech Republic experienced relative stability in regards to political competition, embodied by the constant competition for executive power between two major parties Civic Democrats (ODS), and Social Democrats (ČSSD). A clearly ideologically driven struggle to get more votes and win elections between them, represented by a neoliberal right view on one side, and a more social welfare approach on the other (Hanley, 2008a, 2008b; Berglund & Dellenbrant, 1991). In addition to these two main parties, several small parties had parliamentary presence, such as Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) or Communists (KSČM), accompanied by centrist parties with short survival.

Such a situation could be witnessed at least until the general elections of 2010, that many referred to as earthquake elections. This year de facto represents a tipping point on the Czech party system’s journey towards its gradual

fragmentation and destabilisation (Cirhan & Kopecký, 2024). The protest vote that followed was utilised by several new challenger parties, seeking to position themselves on the anti-corruption platform (Klíma, 2015).

The political change that occurred in 2010 was just a start of the new process, which has been on-going ever since. It led to the entry of not one, but two completely new parties – Public Affairs (VV) and TOP 09. VV's success did not last long, the party fell apart shortly due to internal conflicts and factionalism (Cirhan & Kopecký, 2017), which almost brought down the whole coalition government. However, it signalled the existence of electoral space for a new protest party. The fragmenting tendency not only did not stop, but even took a faster pace. 2013 elections, which were preceded by a major corruption scandal of the government led by ODS led to major change fuelled by unpopular austerity measures. ANO benefited from this situation, and so did Dawn. The set trend continued in 2017 elections with the electoral breakthrough of three new parties – SPD, Mayors and Independents (STAN) and the Pirates. Instead of two main parties competing with each other, we have a fragmented political arena consisting of one bigger party (ANO), and many smaller parties.

Reacting to ANO's strength, two coalitions of five parties were set up just before the 2021 elections. SPOLU (Together) aimed at the more conservative electorate, and consisted of ODS, KDU-ČSL and TOP 09 parties. The second coalition called Piratstan was made up of Pirates and STAN targeted the liberal centrist spectrum of voters. The gamble of both coalitions paid up, they secured enough seats to not only get into the parliament, but also to form a coalition government, which they now preside over. However, ANO remains the biggest parliamentary party, although in opposition. Many predict its time to return to power will still come, especially when we acknowledge that the current government presides over the current challenging period.

Regarding the Italian party system, since the early 1990s, it has already been known for its relative instability and fragmentation, accompanied by relatively frequent changes in the electoral system (1993, 2005, 2017). This instability began with the collapse of the so-called 'First Republic' (indicating the period 1948–1994 and the related party system) following a series of corruption scandals which involved most of the traditional parties and a significant share of MPs. This led to major political changes that resulted in what has been known as the Italian 'Second Republic' (Guzzini, 1995). The delegitimization of the traditional parties, together with the 1993 electoral reform establishing a mix of proportional representation and plurality system, paved the way for the emergence of new political parties, such as FI. The Italian party systems thus underwent a significant restructuring that gradually stabilised around a bipolar system, with the centre-right pole on one hand, mainly represented by FI, AN, Lega Nord (Northern League), and the centre-left on the other mainly represented by the Ulivo ('Olive Tree') coalition. Still, in this period, we also had the significant presence of minor centrist and

radical left parties, often joining or coordinating with one of the two main coalitions. The golden age of the Italian bipolar system was between the 2001 and 2008 general elections (see, for instance Bartolini et al., 2004), and in 2008 we reached the minimum of party fragmentation in Italy in recent years, with over 70% of the votes distributed between the unitary centre-right party *Popolo della Libertà* (People of freedom, PdL) led by Silvio Berlusconi and the unitary centre-left *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party, PD). Thus, for over a decade, the political competition was essentially a bipolar one between a centre-left and a centre-right camp; the system was characterised by an unstable stability and relative predictability, with most changes happening within the two main poles.

However, in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the Italian party system started facing new political challenges, combined with an increasing distrust in parties and representative institutions. This favoured the emergence of new challenger parties, such as the Five Star Movement (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*, M5S), a newcomer 'pure populist' or 'valence populist' (Zulianello, 2020) party created by the former comedian Beppe Grillo, reshaped the bipolar system into a multipolar one, moving beyond the traditional left-wing and right-wing competition (Tronconi, 2016; Conti & Memoli, 2015).

Since 2013, the Italian political landscape has undergone several major shifts, with Italy proving to be a breeding ground of populism. The last decade also saw significant shifts in the balance of power within the centre-right: 2018 marked the end of the leadership of Silvio Berlusconi and his party within that camp, which has been a constant in the Italian party system since 1994, with the sceptre first ceded to Salvini's *Lega* (The League) (2018) and, more recently, to Giorgia Meloni's *Fdi* (2022). The 2018 elections saw further losses for the traditional parties of the centre-right (FI) and centre left (PD), while populist parties obtained over 54% of the votes, thanks in large part to the striking success of M5S (32,6% of the votes), alongside Salvini's *Lega*, which reached also its historical high (17,3%). However, in the 2022 general election, both M5S and *Lega* lost about half of their votes compared to 2018, a fate shared by FI, which reached its historical low at just above 8%, alongside a stagnant centre-left led by the PD. Nonetheless, votes for populist parties still surpassed half of the total votes (50,5%), thanks to the success of *Fdi* (26%) – the highest vote share for the radical right in Italy – that could also benefit from having been the only party in opposition to the government of national unity led by Mario Draghi (2021-2022).

With the steady decline of FI and the death of its leader, it is unlikely that the party will return to play a major role in Italian politics, although it may remain a necessary coalition partner within the centre-right camp, while the current success of Giorgia Meloni's *Fdi*, despite looking solid and currently unchallenged, cannot be given for granted in the longer term, considering the frequent changes witnessed in recent years within the Italian party system.

2. Theoretical discussion

Many new challenger parties make electoral breakthroughs across European countries, but only a fraction of them survive. This section is thematically divided into two parts to cover the theoretical argument concerning relationship between parties' survival, their party organisation, and leadership. Survival of new parties is attributed to many factors, such as ideology (Sikk, 2012), marketing (Henneberg & Eghbalin, 2002), leadership (Bittner, 2018) or party organisation (Harmel et al., 2019; Tavits, 2013). Others, like Engler (2023) associate survival of such parties to different electoral strategies, ranging from politicizing corruption themes, reframing protest strategy or muting on the anti-establishment rhetoric and instead choosing to blend with the political mainstream. Survival may be affected by many systemic factors like the state of political competition or the state of economy and politics in general, that parties cannot influence. Scholars looking at new parties in CEE context emphasize they build primarily on dissatisfaction with the old parties (Haughton & Deegan-Krause, 2020). We focus chiefly on the factors that are within their control, specifically party organisational features, which have a long-standing tradition in empirical party politics research. We realize that other factors, such as financing could also be explanatory factors of several concerned parties' survival, especially considering the involvement of political entrepreneurs as their founders. Reflecting this importance, we would like to focus on financing these parties in our potential future publications.

2.1 Party Organization

Several studies see party organisation as one of the main aspects affecting how parties survive in the longer term (Coleman, 1996; Tavits, 2013; Bolleyer, 2013; Cirhan, 2023). Others argue otherwise (Scarrow, Webb & Poguntke, 2017; Poguntke, 2002). As part of the latter group, Haughton and Deegan-Krause (2020) add that performance of new parties in governance determines their survival more than the way they organize. Rather than empirically looking at organisational features, such as party staff or financing, our article only deals with three party organisational features – territorial branches, membership and elites. These aspects have a long-standing tradition in party politics research. Existing studies see the impact of these three party organisational features on party survival via impacting their cohesion, stability and legitimacy. We pursue our theoretical arguments in such a direction. Stability is a crucial aspect of parties' survival as well as their public appearance, as it expresses competence. Parties haunted by internal divisions are not trustworthy which reduces their potential in elections. Cohesion is very closely related to stability, as it effectively prevents such divisions, common attitudes in the party help to avoid internal conflicts. Legitimacy,

on the other hand, can be seen as a facade of stability and cohesion, as it represents the image the party maintains in public. Together, these three factors influence how party organisation relates to survival of parties.

Controlling autonomy of territorial branches is related to party survival via affecting stability. When parties control their territorial party organisation, they can effectively tackle conflicts within the party and also avoid factionalism (Katz, 2014; Tavits, 2013). This can also help the leadership to control and moderate dissent within the organisation, which can prevent divisions and risk of internal coups (Coleman, 1996). In addition to territorial party organisation, cohesion and stability within party organisations may also stem from membership (Scarrow, 1996, 2015). When the entry restrictions for prospective members are strict, the party becomes more exclusive and closed, and as a result more cohesive (Bolleyer, 2009). Cohesion results from filtering members, which nurtures common attitudes. When members rely more on the party elites with their status within the party, it effectively mutes conflicts and opposition (Panebianco, 1988). Parties that control members in this way prevent divisions and institute loyalty and obedience amongst them (Kopecký, 1995). To that end, alternative forms of membership can be seen as a perfect compromise for such parties by granting them the needed volunteer labor, while not representing any risk, nor influence in regards to their internal decision making and other party organisational affairs (Cirhan & Stauber, 2018).

Like territorial branches and members, party elites also have a direct influence on cohesion within parties. Concretely, when elites share certain aspects of their background, for instance educational, occupational, social class, it is said to reflect in shared political attitudes (Andeweg & Thomassen, 2010). This attitudinal consensus stemming from homogenous backgrounds of elites in turn facilitates cohesion, crucial for the survival of parties (Mills, 1956). Especially new parties, when such cohesion is absent, quickly fall victim to conflicts between elites, which precedes their organisational crisis (Cirhan & Kopecký, 2017). When facing scandals and pressures of holding public office, parties are especially prone to divisions and conflicts. This being said, party elite homogeneity can help to minimise the risks of such factionalism, by facilitating cohesion, homogenous elites form informal networks in the party (Eldersveld, 1964; Janowitz & Marvick, 1956), which helps to protect it from the negative media attention the disunity brings upon parties (Knoke, 1993). When elites are homogenous in regards to their backgrounds, they are said to more likely stay united in times of crises, which supports their survival (Lazer, 2011). In turn, their public image and reputation is propped, and the trust of their voters saved as a result (Lodge, 1993).

As such, the existing theory yields that parties recruiting elites with homogenous backgrounds, controlling autonomy of territorial branches and rights of members are more likely to survive in the long-term. The cohesion and stability resulting from such arrangement provides them the capability to be more likely

immune to conflicts and division, a state that directly affects organisational survival. Simultaneously, it will likely reflect positively on such parties' public image, enhancing legitimacy for their electorate. Based on the above theory, we form the following expectation.

E1: We expect challenger parties to restrict rights of territorial branches and members and group a homogenous party elite, which will support their survival.

2.2 Party Leadership

Existing studies dealing with party leadership largely overlap with those on political personalization, a process in which the prominence of individual actors in politics is gradually strengthened at the expense of political institutions, in particular parties (Pedersen & Rahat, 2021, p. 211). Some scholars mitigate these worries, claiming that although individuals are more visible and significant than in the past, parties still remain important (Bušítková & Guasti, 2019; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018).

Personalization theory perceives this change taking place on three levels – media (the changing style of coverage of politics), behavioural (the behaviour of politicians and voters). and institutional (the structure of political institutions) (Poguntke & Webb, 2007; Rahat & Kenig, 2018). We empirically examine only the latter aspect, that is the institutional personalization – referring to the statutory rules within concerned parties. These changes to the power balance within parties can be manifested for instance on the statutory rules granting veto powers to leaders regarding recruitment of members, or selecting candidates (Rahat & Kenig, 2018). A proportion of the literature sees personalization as an electoral advantage of sorts. More personalised parties are said to better forge links between the individual politicians and voters, which should help in elections (Pennings & Hazan, 2001). Regarding party organisation, increasing personalization is associated with decreasing intra-party democracy (Gunther, 2001; Scarrow, 2005), which directly affects the party organisational features we analyse. When more and more decision-making powers are concentrated within the centralised party leadership structures it translates to diminished role of the rest of party organisation (Ignazi, 2020), namely territorial structures and members, which leads us to our second expectation.

E2: Connected to our first expectation (of restricted local and grass-roots party structures), we expect party leaders of challenger parties to maintain a strong position within their party organisations, at the expense of the rest of the party.

3. Methodological Approach

3.1 Case selection

The analysis involves parties of current Italian PM Meloni, and former Czech PM Babiš, infamous across the EU for his scandals, or the late Berlusconi, whose party is by many considered a pioneer of so-called business-firm parties (Hopkin & Paolucci, 1999; Paolucci, 2006) as well as the champion of the Czech PRR, Tomio Okamura's SPD. These parties have a fundamental influence on the party systems in their respective countries, but a more complex investigation of how they function is not broadly explored by existing literature (with few notable examples about FI such as Raniolo 2006 and McDonnell 2013). Our goal is to help fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis concerning these cases, exploring what role party organisation plays in their survival.

Our cases share many similarities, such as their ideological origin as challenger parties, and their longevity within their respective party systems. On one hand, FI and ANO can organizationally be considered as the pioneers of parties set-up by political entrepreneurs (see: Hloušek, Kopeček and Vodová, 2020; Morlino, 1996) and ideologically originated on a more mainstream and moderate/centrist platform akin to centrist challenger parties (Hanley and Sikk, 2016; Engler, 2023). On the other, FdI and SPD ideologically embody the most significant PRR players at their domestic scenes.

Concretely, our case selection is based on the two following criteria – the party origin as challenger party, and long-term survival within the party system. Additionally, to these two criteria met by all four cases, we consider three of them, FI, ANO and SPD, as more similar in regards to their party organisational origin – as entrepreneurial parties. The fourth case (FdI) can therefore be treated as a control case due to its organisational origin that varies from the remaining parties. However, the ideological origins of all four parties can be considered as challengers, which is the focus of this paper. Indeed, Italian politics, for more than three decades has not been devoid of numerous examples of challenger parties across several parts of the political spectrum, including the very successful cases, in recent times, of the Lega or M5S (Tarchi, 2018).

By taking advantage of the long-lasting persistence of challenger parties in Italy (or at least of parties that entered the political arena as such) we can compare the organisational nature, and the evolution of challengers across different times, akin to a life-cycle approach, where older challengers tend to become more institutionalised. Nonetheless, given the more proliferous number of lasting challenger parties in Italy, compared to the Czech Republic, an additional selection has to be made in order to allow for a detailed analysis. We also excluded regionalist parties due to the peculiar nature of such parties compared to other challengers. Notably, we excluded Salvini's Lega, due to its lack of newness as an evolution and

continuation, albeit on a different/revised (nationalist) ideological platform, of the old Lega Nord, whose defining ideology at the time of emergence (late 1980s to early 1990s) involved chiefly federalism, and regionalism for northern regions (Zulianello, 2021) and made the party closer to a regionalist party (Albertazzi, Giovannini & Seddone, 2018). Although anti-establishment/challenger appeals existed in Lega, the regionalist component of its ideology was more prevalent. Thus, we consider Lega Nord more as having a regionalist, rather than challenger party origin.

We also excluded the M5S due to the peculiar nature of the party at its inception, that of a movement party (Ceccarini & Bordignon, 2016; Della Porta et al. 2017; Vittori, 2017), and the subsequent changes in leadership and nature of the party over the years. The M5S at its origin, has been a party with a central role played by the founder, Beppe Grillo, but severely lacking in party organisation and based, formally, on a bottom-up approach (Vignati, 2015; Vittori 2019). Furthermore, according to Vittori (2019) it remains controversial to locate this genuinely new party in either traditional or challenger party families.

Indeed, FI also underwent several organisational changes during the past thirty years, even before the death of its leader, but we can witness a trend consisting of a progressive institutionalisation and stronger role of party organisation, while with FdI we have a new challenger that, due to its origin/roots, already starts with a higher focus on party organisation.

Furthermore, the case selection allows for a symmetrical comparison between two parties that at least in their initial inception can be defined as more mainstream centrist challenger parties, and two new(er) challenger parties from the PRR family.

ANO started in 2011 as a party, fuelled by Czechs' disillusionment with the political establishment. Founded by Andrej Babiš, a billionaire owner of Agrofert (agricultural, chemical and media conglomerate), running on anti-corruption and anti-establishment ticket, and technocratic populist solutions (Havlík, 2019; Havlík & Voda, 2018; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018). It made an electoral breakthrough with most votes ever recorded for a new party in Czech history, utilising these long-existing tendencies in society (Dvořáková, 2003).

SPD has always been a smaller PPR, representing a specific segment of society. It was established in 2015 by Tomio Okamura, after the coup in his first party called Dawn (see: Cirhan & Kopecký, 2017). Its breakthrough symbolises a crucial return for the Czech far-right, which lacked representation at least since 1998 when the Republicans left the parliament (Kopecký & Mudde, 1999). It has always been an opposition party targeting anti-EU, anti-ethnic minority, and anti-muslim sentiments.

FI was established by Silvio Berlusconi in 1994, and its emergence led to immediate electoral success (Raniolo, 2006), largely due to the the timing when the political establishment in Italy went through serious crisis, but also due to

the popularity of Berlusconi caused by his story of successful businessman new to politics. As a new alternative against established parties (Paolucci, 2006), FI utilised Berlusconi's background and know-how in mass-media. These resources of political communication, bordering on a quasi-monopoly, represented a significant advantage against its competition (Statham, 1996). The extensiveness of campaigns it allowed were seen as revolutionary in political marketing (Seisselberg, 2007). Although FI's participation in governments brought many controversies, it stayed as a significant political player for over two decades. In our analysis, we focus on the initial phase of the party, prior to the formation of the unified centre-right party, Popolo della Libertà (PdL, People of Freedom), in 2008, and after its reconstitution in 2013 up until the death of Silvio Berlusconi in June 2023, which resulted in significant statutory and organisational changes.

FdI was created as a splinter party of PdL ahead of the 2013 elections by a group of MPs opposing Berlusconi's course of action at the time. It began as a minor populist radical right party (Puleo & Piccolino, 2022) to become the largest party in Italy and the dominant force within the centre-right camp in less than a decade, with an undeniable role played by the charismatic figure of Giorgia Meloni. The party combines an identity mixing post-fascist radical right elements with more moderate conservative approaches and stances. It can be defined a 'rooted newcomer', relying on pre-existing organisational resources and symbolic elements already familiar to the electorate when the party was formed (Baldini, Tronconi & Angelucci, 2022). This cultural legacy traces its roots to the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement party, active between 1948 and 1995, and its more moderate successor, National Alliance.

3.2 Operationalization

The theoretical discussion yields that our analysis comprises two areas - party organisation and leadership, and together deals with the following research question:

RQ: What is the role of party organisation and leadership in the survival of challenger parties?

The following paragraphs enlighten how our analysis is operationalized (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:
Operationalization of Comparative Analysis

Unit of analysis	Concept	Analysis/Data
Territorial Branches	Autonomy of territorial branches Impact of territorial branches on decision-making	Party statutes Candidates selections rules
Members	Impact of members on party Openness of party to grass roots	Party membership figures Membership recruitment rules Membership rights Preferred types of membership
Party Elites	Homogeneity of party elites Professional links of elites Links between elites and leader	MPs career background data MPs professional pathways Party leader business vs. party elites past
Leader Position	Level of party leader's autonomy	Party statutes Organisational structure hierarchy Unsupervised decisions made by party leader

Source: The author.

Regarding party organisation, we look at three aspects – territorial branches, membership and elites. Analysis of territorial branches concerns their autonomy; exploring party statutes helps us understand at which level of party organisation the decision-making takes place; we are particularly interested in the process of candidate selection. Concerning membership, we empirically look at the rules and restrictions regarding their recruitment and rights. We pay attention to so-called alternative forms of membership and their role. The investigation of statutory rules will enlighten how inclusive is the membership status in each concerned party. Regarding elites, we focus chiefly on two factors – their career backgrounds and potential professional links between them. Analysis of career pasts helps us indicate the proportion of elites who share career types prior to their participation in their parties. We rely on elites' personal profiles on parliamentary and party websites with this analysis. Likewise, the analysis of the professional links helps us understand how the proportion of elites that are professionally associated with each other. A special attention is paid to links between elites and the businesses

owned by party leaders. Our analysis of party elites concerns MPs elected by our parties in their first term following their electoral breakthrough (FdI – 2013, FI – 1994, SPD – 2017, ANO – 2013).

Regarding leadership, we analyse the leader's position, measured on modifications to the rules that would enhance the party leader's decision-making power. We rely on party statutes as our primary source of data, to explore the means of centralization of decision-making processes in the context of formal and informal practices, such as largely autonomous decisions of the party leader regarding financial or personnel policies.

4. Empirical Evidence

Firstly, we focus on party organisation, divided into the analysis of territorial branches, membership and elites.

Figure 2:
Party Organisational Features: ANO, SPD, FI, FdI

Party name	Territorial Branches	Membership Rules	Elites	Leader Position
ANO	Branches controlled by leadership: candidate selection and all personnel decisions overwritten by party leader veto	Limited membership size. Systematic screening procedure of prospective members, six months probation period. Alternative members preferred	Large proportion of elites share managerial career backgrounds. Extensive network of party elites professionally linked to party leader	Strong position of party leader. Leader controls party structures via corporate network of loyal party officials: also has veto power at disposal to keep party in line
SPD	The Executive Committee maintains decision-making powers to control candidate selection, recruitment, personnel and other crucial decisions.	Highly developed screening procedure of potential members; 2 years' probation period. Membership status as reward for loyalty by leadership	Large proportion of elites share managerial career backgrounds. No professional links between party elites	Strong position of party leader. Party leader has veto power and can influence all decisions made within the party
FI	Special branches "clubs" established, no rights to influence any decisions made within the party in any respect	Complete ban on recruitment of regular members. Alternative members preferred	Less than half elites share career background. Extensive network of party elites professionally linked to party leader	Strong position of party leader. Leader controls party structures via corporate network; party statutes favor decisions made by party leadership
FdI	Organized regional and local branches, the central party and leadership still holds the most considerable power.	Mass party style. Membership increased over time. Possibility to be online members.	Most of the party elite shares career background in predecessor parties or related organizations	Strong position of party leader

Source: Authors' elaboration based on party statutes.

Starting with the analysis of territorial branches, our findings show that ANO, SPD and FI approach them in a similar way. In general, their statutes institute strict control over territorial branches by the party leadership, although with some differences (see Figure 2). Party statutes of ANO and SPD on the first sight do not deviate from the standard rules adhered by different Czech parties, there are however several abnormalities.

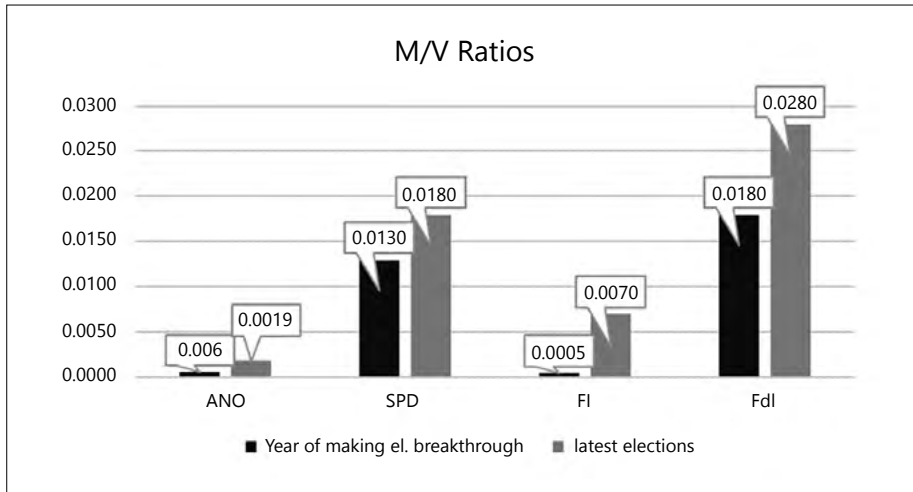
SPD relies on a significantly centralised hierarchical structure of organisation with nearly all decisions made in a top-down manner by the Executive Com-

mittee. This de-facto makes the territorial structures irrelevant organizationally. In ANO, the leadership reserves the right to influence the majority of decisions delegated to the 'lower' level of party organisation, such as regional branches; this is the case for most types of key decisions, such as personnel, financial or campaign-related, especially concerning selecting candidates. In fact, even the leader himself maintains veto power to override any decision adopted by territorial branches. A similar strategy can be seen in SPD, where the leader also has veto power at his disposal. In reality this is mostly visible on the leadership of both parties meddling in by changing the order on the lists or replacing candidate names completely. Unlike in SPD, in ANO this position of territorial branches is further compromised by their control over regional managers, many of whom are former managers recruited directly from the business owned by party leaders (see: Cirhan & Kopecký, 2017).

Unlike SPD and ANO, who achieved control of party structures in a more soft way, FI did the same by more direct means, by establishing its territorial organisation in the form of so-called clubs that have virtually no rights (Raniolo, 2006). These clubs have no influence over any decision-making within FI, which comes at great advantage regarding maintaining cohesion and stability. Territorial branches provide labor, organise events, but do not influence policy views and cannot represent opposition. In such setup, all personnel and other decisions, like candidate selection are made by the party leadership in a top-down manner (Seisselberg, 2007). After being established, FI spread the network of these clubs across Italy, and similarly to ANO, these were managed by individuals from party leaders' companies (Hopkin & Paolucci, 1999, pp. 323–324; Morlino, 1996, p. 16).

Historically, the Italian far-right, and the post fascist tradition, followed a model that combined strong party leadership with a mass party structure. According to Vampa (2023) they tended to delegate great powers to individuals, usually men, who had considerable authority within the party (despite the existence of internal factions) but also enjoyed a high degree of external recognition. FdI follows this model and its legacy. The party leader also wields considerably strong formal powers given by the statute (Puleo & Piccolino, 2022). The party is organised with a strong central structure and regional and territorial branches, but very 'presidentialized', in a way that resembles FI (Vampa, 2023). Also, the territorial branches mimic the presidential central structure in their organisation. All in all, territorial branches and youth organisations have a role in defining the line of the party, as well as providing some candidates in the (national) electoral lists; however, the party remains overall a substantially centralised structure, with a top-down approach.

Figure 3:
Membership (year of electoral breakthrough vs. latest elections)



Source: party websites; Režná, 2018, p. 26; Brodníčková, 2023.

Concerning membership, like in their approach towards territorial branches, we see a similarity between ANO and FI regarding their membership size (see Figure 3). From the beginning, ANO and FI did not focus on expanding their membership, instead both focused on alternative forms of membership at the expense of admitting regular members. In its first years of existence, ANO started with having around two thousand members, and in 2023, their number only reached over 2500 members (Brodničková, 2023). In both parties, this situation is a result of strict restrictions on recruitment, which, in the case of FI, largely changed with the death of Berlusconi and the new statutory changes (2023).

In ANO, potential members have to provide a record showing their debts, CV and follow a probationary period of six months (Cirhan & Stauber, 2018). FI went even one step further, and shortly after being established with mere 4000 members, put a ban on recruiting members into place (Seisselberg, 2007; Cirhan, 2023).

SPD also tried to protect itself from risks associated with extensive membership, and introduced several restrictions, for instance, prospective members need to adhere to a two years probationary period during which they have no rights. Nevertheless, SPD's Executive Committee can modify the length of the probation, or omit it completely to reward loyalty of certain members. Interestingly, unlike in FI and ANO, these restrictions in SPD did not lead to a limited membership. In 2017, when achieving electoral breakthrough, it had around 7000 members (Režná, 2018, p. 26). Lately, the party registered over ten thousand members in 2022 (Brodničková, 2023), which is in sharp contrast mainly with ANO that is the biggest parliamentary party with four times lower membership.

As mentioned above, while SPD invested in expanding its membership, ANO and FI focused on alternative forms of membership, in ANO titled as party sympathisers, in FI as *benemeriti*. These light members not only outnumber party members, but importantly have no rights to influence these party organisations. They only provide volunteer labor during campaigns and online.

Unlike ANO and FI, and similarly to SPD, FdI built a relatively extensive network of rank and file members. Looking at party members, FdI always strove to gain a large popular base, although it started with just a small core of supporters. Nonetheless, the membership steadily increased over time, according to public declarations and figures, with no significant barriers for new members. Members formally have a wide range of democratic powers alongside duties and obligations. In absence of publicly available official data, the number of party members for the electoral breakthrough year of FdI has been calculated based upon the declared revenues for that year, which would amount to ca. 12,000, for a M/V ratio of 0.018. This estimated value is still higher than all other parties. According to party officials, FdI membership in 2022 reached 204,128 party members, an increase of over 40% compared to the previous year. This translates to a M/V ratio of approximately 0.028, calculated against the votes received for the lower chambers at the latest elections in September 2022 (about 7.3M). This value is significantly higher compared to parties such as FI and ANO, and more in line with ‘traditional’ mass parties or legacy parties such as the Democratic Party in Italy. As such, these membership findings demonstrate that the control case of FdI is deviant from the other parties in our case selection. Unlike FdI, the other cases organized alongside the entrepreneurial party organizational model seem to approach membership differently, which validates this variation between our cases.

Figure 4:
Elite Backgrounds (year of electoral breakthrough)



Source: party websites, LinkedIn profiles, parliamentary websites, refer to Appendices 1-4.

Regarding elites, we focus on two aspects – their career backgrounds and professional links. Regarding the former, managers³ represent the most widely present career type among concerned parties' MPs (see Figure 4). Most managers can be found in ANO and SPD. Less than half of FI's MPs were managers before their political career, many were also lawyers (12%) or journalists (13%), consistent with Berlusconi's background in media. In FdI, less than 20% of the original party elite has managerial backgrounds, the smallest share among the four parties analysed, with several being journalists, lawyers, or career politicians.

Regarding the latter, i.e. the professional links of elites, we did not find any professional associations between SPD's MPs. In sharp contrast, the analysis of professional backgrounds between FI's and ANO's elites enlightened a significant presence of MPs, who were employed at companies owned by their party leaders. In the first elections for FI '14 MPs were coming from Publitalia', a company owned by Berlusconi (Morlino, 1996, p. 18). Managers from his businesses were also crucial for establishing the network of FI's clubs all over Italy and in building the marketing message (Paolucci, 2006). Similarly, ANO's party organisation is equally dependent on the personnel overlap with party leader-owned Agrofert company at every level of its party organisation (Cirhan & Kopecký, 2017), providing assistance with running the party, its events and campaigns. Some seventeen percent of elites in ANO have been recruited from Agrofert (Cirhan, 2023).

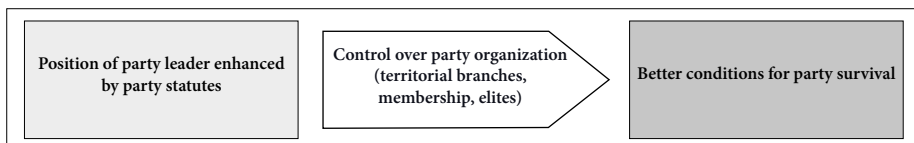
The corporate-party structures fusion in ANO and FI props party leaders' positions in their parties. The loyal financially-dependent employees from their companies are less likely to rebel against the leadership, which greatly enhances these parties' cohesion and stability. Together with control over their territorial branches and alternative rightless form of membership, the party leadership in these parties has full control over party organisation. The impact of this setup became evident, when both parties faced significant crises (dealing with them fairly effectively in comparison to most parties). Both held together by loyalty shared by the employees from their private businesses infiltrated into party structures, for instance when FI dealt with various scandals and conflicts within coalition governments (see: Vassallo, 2007; Vercesi, 2013) or during tensions between Berlusconi and new PM Meloni. In FI the control over candidate selection facilitated that close associates of Berlusconi were in electable positions (Pasquino, 2003), whilst in ANO the careful selection of trustworthy associates to important party posts later functioned as a bulwark against internal dissent and divisions (see: Cirhan, 2023). For example, the chairman of ANO's MP club, a manager from Agrofert company oversaw the disciplined voting behaviour of MPs (Procházková, 2018), or when Babiš faced pressure during accusations of committing a public funding fraud (Neurope.eu, 2016) and the entire party stood behind him (see: Nohl, 2023). When the party faced similar challenges at regional level, it dissolved the branches to save its public reputation, and the statutes allowed it to do so swiftly.

Although Okamura in SPD did not have this advantage of relying on associates from his business, he has so far managed to keep the party in line, and mute, part with everyone who represented opposition to him (Čemusová, 2019). In such cases, he did not hesitate to dissolve the entire regional branch to safeguard his position within the party (Česká Televize, 2019).

Regarding FdI and professional links between its party elites, most of the members of the core FdI elite have a background that can be associated either with the former post-fascist Italian Social Movement (Movimento Sociale Italiano, 1946–1995), or its successor national Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN, 1995–2009). As noted by Baldini, Tronconi and Angelucci (2022), the cultural and organisational roots and Meloni's populist leadership have strong ties to the old MSI or its youth organisation, where Meloni also militated in her youth (she started being involved in politics around the age of fifteen). Furthermore, a smaller number of party officials worked in the right-wing newspaper 'Il Secolo d'Italia'. In more recent times, the leadership of Giorgia Meloni has also been strengthened by the appointments of key loyal figures who have a direct personal or family relationship with her. Party loyalty has also been proven crucial in withstanding smaller or larger scandals involving the party elite and figures associated with FdI; and the party always unanimously defended the position of Meloni and all key figures.

The above analysis shows that the position of party leader is very strong in SPD, ANO and FI, although every party achieved it in a different way. The same could be said about FdI, where Meloni's position strengthened over time, and particularly after she became PM. Whilst in SPD, the party statutes favouring Okamura by providing veto powers on all decisions secured his position, in FI and ANO, mainly the corporate networks prop leader's positions at the expense of the rest of the party organisation. This indeed points to a significant level of institutional personalization, something that several scholars refer to as a form of centralised institutional personalization (Pennings & Hazan, 2001; Rahat & Kenig, 2018: 119). For a summary of our findings, please see Figure 5.

Figure 5:
Findings' summary



Source: Authors' elaboration based on party statutes.

5. Conclusions

In our analysis, we were chiefly interested in the role of party organisation and leader position in the survival of anti-establishment parties.

Our findings indicate that party organisation has a significant role, and that three of our concerned parties, ANO, SPD and FI institute control over their party organisation. Consistently with our first expectation, the findings show that this can be attributed to the combination of strong control of territorial branches, restrictions on membership and, in the case of ANO and FI, also on professional links of party elites.

Regarding our second expectation concerning the strong position of party leader, our findings are consistent with our expectation. In ANO and SPD, the party leaders challenge the autonomy of territorial branches by having influence on all personnel decisions, including candidate selection (in the form of veto rights). FI went even further and set up all its branches as special clubs with no rights. When ANO had issues at local level, it simply dissolved the ‘problematic’ branches, in some cases even entire district branches. The same approach was evident in SPD. Regarding FdI, we can also observe a strong influence of the party leadership and national organs over local branches, although they enjoy stronger statutory independence compared to some of the other parties.

These findings show that control of territorial branches helped parties to mute dissent and factionalism, and protect its stability, as the existing theory proposed (Katz, 2014; Tavits, 2013; Coleman, 1996).

Similarly, in case of membership, ANO and SPD introduced harsh methods to restrict its membership, which helped these parties to institute cohesion and stability, consistently with the existing literature (Scarrow, 1996, 2015). Long probationary periods for prospective members, and restrictions on their recruitment resulted in relatively limited membership of ANO (but not in SPD). In FI, a complete ban on members’ recruitment had to be compensated by other means. To that end, FI and ANO relied on alternative forms of membership that provided the needed labour on the ground, but without influencing these parties’ stability, in agreement with previous research in the area (Cirhan & Stauber, 2018). On the contrary, the main deviant case is represented by FdI, which relies on a traditional form of membership that tends to favour the constitution of a large party members’ base, without significant restrictions.

Regarding party elites, the analysis revealed that SPD and ANO recruited a homogenous elite consisting mostly of managers, while FI grouped MP with more varied career backgrounds. The inquiry into professional links between elites showed that while in SPD none of the elites shared professional associations from the past, in ANO and FI many individuals were recruited directly from private businesses owned by party leaders. These so-called corporate networks proved to be crucial when these parties dealt with serious crises. Consistent with

the existing theory (Knoke, 1993; Lazer, 2011; Lodge, 1993), our findings show that in ANO and FI, the professional reliance of party elites on party leaders propped their parties' cohesion and stability and helped them to stay unified when facing scandals. Regarding FdI, the reliance was mostly on common origin that dates back to the roots of the party, where the elite was already part of the MSI, its collateral organisations, and/or AN. This allowed the formation of a strong and united core leadership and elite, enhancing stability and cohesion for the party, although with the recent successes of the party, such a small elite is beginning to show its limits.

The above conclusions, in our view, show that in concerned parties, the party leader's role is strengthened at the expense of the rest of the party organisation, embodying the case of institutional personalization (Pennings & Hazan, 2001; Rahat & Kenig, 2018). The control over the different aspects of party organisation described above facilitates this personalization, and in turn seems to also help these parties' stability and survival.

To that end, it is particularly interesting to look how the situation will evolve in FI, given how much it was centred around its founder and leader. Indeed, with Berlusconi's death in June 2023, FI – already a party in decline since 2018 – has been facing renewed and tough challenges, which are also linked to resources and organisation. The party is also strongly dependent on the Berlusconi family for financial support.⁴ To point out the main organisational repercussions, on July 15 a new party figure, that of Party Secretary, was established, and the position was taken by the former vice-president and national coordinator Antonio Tajani. At an extraordinary meeting of the National Council held at the beginning of August 2023, an amended Statute was approved, and a National Congress was called, to be held in February 2024, preceded by provincial congresses to elect the delegates. The main tasks of the congressional delegates were to elect a new party secretary and the members of the National Council. Furthermore, the party put new emphasis on widening its membership. The February 2024 Congress saw Tajani unanimously elected as national secretary of the party (confirming a trend that avoids internal confrontations in congresses). Looking at the state of the party, at the beginning of November 2023, party secretary Tajani declared that they reached 100,000 members, underlying renewed interest in the party, which is reinforced by encouraging results obtained at the 2024 European elections – held almost exactly one year after Berlusconi's death – where FI received almost 10% of the votes, surpassing a declining Lega and returning the second-largest party in the centre-right coalition, albeit far away from FDI. Nonetheless, it is useful to stress that the importance of the legacy and figure of the FI founder is still so relevant, that the party pointed out how, writing down the name of Berlusconi in the open-list system used to elect Italian MEPs, would still be considered a valid vote for the party according to Italian electoral laws. The importance of the figure of Berlusconi has also been enshrined in the very first article of the new statute

which defines the figure of Berlusconi as founding president (Presidente Fondatore).⁵ The future events regarding FI will show us how the party organisations of personalised parties can cope with the departure of its leader, something that is at this point unclear.

Indeed, we are aware that party survival, or even more parties' electoral success, cannot be exclusively linked to one factor, such as party organisation. In this regard, a further research can be done focusing on wider-ranging aspects, such as the role of programmes and ideology for the parties, comparing those favouring radicalism versus pragmatic 'programmatic-ness' attitudes, alongside how they can adapt to changing times and voter's sentiment.

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Appendices:

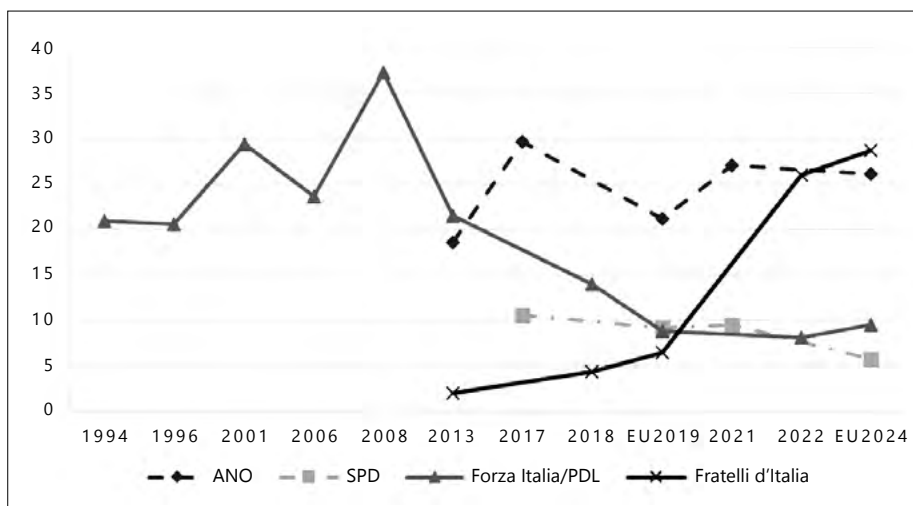
Appendix 1: Overview of some of the most relevant entrepreneurial challenger parties⁶ in CEE and Western Europe (as of 2023)

Country	Party name	Political entrepreneur	Years active	% votes first election	% votes max (year)	% votes last election	N seats last election
Austria	Team Stronach	Frank Stronach	2012-2017	5.73		11	
Austria	Alliance for the Future of Austria	Jörg Haider	2005-2010	4.10	10.7 (2008)	3.53	0
Bulgaria	Attack	Volen Siderov	2005-now	8.14	9.36	0.40	0
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Business Bloc*	George Ganchev	1991-2001	1.30	4.93 (1997)	4.93	12
Bulgaria	Volya	Veselin Mareshki	2007-now	0.25	4.15	0.27	0
Czech Republic	Action of Dissatisfied Citizens	Andrej Babiš	2012-now	18.65	29.60	27.13	72
Czech Republic	Public Affairs	Vít Bárta	2002-2015	10.88 (2010)		24	
Czech Republic	Dawn/SPD	Tomio Okamura	2013-now	6.88	10.64 (2017)	9.56	20
Italy	Five Star Movement	Beppe Grillo	2009-now	25.55	32.78	15.43	52
Italy	Lega per Salvini Premier	Matteo Salvini	2017-now	17.37 (2018)		8.77	66
Italy	Forza Italia	Silvio Berlusconi	1994-2008 2013-now	21.01	29.43 (2001)	8.11	45
Italy	Northern League	Umberto Bossi	1991-2019	8.65	10.07 (1996)	4.08	18
Latvia	People's Party*	Andris Šķēle	1998-2011	21.19 (1998)		19.70	23
Latvia	New Era Party	Einars Repše	2002-2011	23.9 (2002)		16.50	18
Lithuania	National Resurrection Party	Arūnas Valinskas	2008-2011	15.09		16	
Netherlands	Party for Freedom*	Geert Wilders	2006-now	5.89		23.49 (2023)	37

Poland	Your Movement*	Janusz Palikot	2011-2023	10 (2011)		-	0
Poland	Kukiz'15	Paweł Kukiz	2015-now	8.81 (2015)		0.35	0
Poland	Modern	Ryszard Petru	2015-now	7.6 (2015)		1.70	6
Romania	People's Party – Dan Diaconescu	Dan Diaconescu	2011-2015	13.98	13.98	13.98	47
Romania	People's Movement Party*	Traian Băsescu	2014-now	5.35 (2016)		4.82	0
Slovakia	Freedom and Solidarity*	Richard Sulík	2009-now	12.2 (2010)		6.30	11
Slovakia	Ordinary People and Independent Personalities	Igor Matovič	2011-now	8.60	25.03 (2020)	8.90	13
Slovakia	Party of Civic Understanding*	Rudolf Schuster	1998-2003	8.01 (1998)		13	
Slovakia	Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia*	Marian Kotleba	2010-now	1.33	8.04 (2016)	0.84	0
Slovakia	We Are Family	Boris Kollár	2015-now	6.60	8.24 (2020)	2.21	0
Slovakia	Network*	Radoslav Procházka	2014-2022	5.60		10	
Slovakia	Idea*	Pavol Rusko	2001-2017	8.01 (2002)		1.22	0

Source: The author.

Appendix 2: Electoral results of the analysed parties (lower chamber)



Sources: Czech Statistical Office, Italian Ministry of the Interior

Appendix 3: ANO MPs

Name of MP	Career background
Andrej Babis	manager, owner of Agrofert
Helena Valkova	lawyer, lecturer
Jiri Zlatuska	politician at municipal level, senator
Jiri Holecek	entrepreneur - real estate agency business industry
Matej Fichtner	analyst
Milos Babis	manager, owner of car showroom chain
Jaroslava Jermanova	manager in company Aksamite
Kristyna Zelenkova	manager and owner of Czech Hotel Consulting
Stanislav Berkovec	journalist
Pavel Cihak	manager in the department of transport
Ivana Dobesova	manager of two secondary schools, a former teacher
Radka Maxova	manager (Agrofert)
Roman Kubicek	manager in a multinational company
Josef Vozdecky	manager in the wine industry, former general manager at Bohemia Sekt
Jan Volny	the business manager of HOPI, co-owner of Vypex and JJV99
Pavel Sramek	manager and co-owner of Milknatur and Active Immuno Systems s.r.o.
Roman Prochazka	director of a museum in Cheb
Zdenek Soukup	A Czech TV reporter and moderator
Richard Brabec	manager (Agrofert)
Vlastimil Vozka	mayor of Most, a manager in energy companies
Bronislav Schwarz	director of municipal police in Most
Stanislav Pflieger	entrepreneur in construction industry
Martin Komarek	journalist
Jana Pastuchova	nurse, conference manager
Pavel Plzak	surgeon
Ivan Pilny	former general manager of Microsoft CR, president of Tuesday Business Network
Martina Berdychova	entrepreneur in the drink industry (Fruitstrue)
David Kasal	manager in hospital in Chrudim
Martin Kolovratnik	manager in Czech Radio, journalist
Josef Kott	product manager (Agrofert)
Zuzana Sanova	lecturer (University Hradec Kralove)
Martin Stropnický	actor, stage actor, diplomat
Roztislav Vyzula	professor (Masaryk University Brno)
Karel Rais	rector VUT Brno
Bohuslav Chalupa	tax office clerk
Miloslav Janulik	director of the hospital, vice-president of the paediatric society
Milan Brazdil	manager of regional ambulance service
Jaroslav Faltynek	manager (Agrofert)
Ladislav Oklestek	entrepreneur (transport industry), mayor of Vysovice
Radek Vondracek	lawyer
Margita Balastikova	manager

Name of MP	Career background
Pavel Vojcik	neurologist
Jana Lorencova	journalist
Josef Hajek	various positions in the mining industry
Jan Sedlacek	business manager
Martin Sedlar	entrepreneur - Natura Data
Igor Nykl	cardiologist

Source: Party websites and parliamentary websites.

Appendix 4: FI MPs

Name	Career background
Alberto Acierno	business owner/manager
Valentina Aprea	headteacher
Paolo Arata	company manager, public official
Giacomo Archiutti	business owner/manager
Giacomo Baiamonte	university professor
Augusta Lagostena Bassi	lawyer
Alessandro Bergamo	dentist
Silvio Berlusconi	business owner/manager
Giorgio Bernini	university professor, lawyer
Maurizio Bertucci	journalist
Vincenzo Bianchi	insurance agent
Alfredo Biondi	lawyer
Emma Bonino	political activist
Mario Bortoloso	business owner/manager
Gian Piero Broglio	business owner/manager
Maria Burani Procaccini	journalist, writer
Emanuela Cabrini	business owner/manager
Michele Caccavale	banker
Giuseppe Calderisi	civil engineer
Riccardo Calleri	business owner/manager
Onorio Carlesimo	university professor
Francesco Cascio	surgeon
Mariella Cavanna Scirea	public relations officer
Umberto Cecchi	journalist
Antonio Cherio	architect, building contractor
Sergio Chiesa	hotelier
Salvatore Cicu	lawyer
Roberto Cipriani	business owner/manager
Manlio Collavini	business owner/manager
Edro Colombini	surgeon
Gianfranco Conte	business owner/manager (service sector)
Raffaele Costa	lawyer, journalist

Name	Career background
Alberto Cova	business owner/manager
Rocco Crimi	pharmacologist
Giacomo de Ghislanzoni Cardoli	business owner/manager (agriculture)
Fabrizio Del Noce	journalist
Raffaele Della Valle	lawyer
Angelo Raffaele Devicienti	doctor
Alberto Di Luca	business owner/manager
Pietro Di Muccio	government official
Vittorio Dotti	journalist
Mario Francesco Ferrara	business owner/manager
Ilario Floresta	business owner/manager (telecommunications)
Antonio Fonnesu	business owner/manager
Giancarlo Galan	business owner/manager
Giacomo Galli	business owner/manager
Giacomo Garra	state councilor
Enzo Ghigo	business owner/manager
Giuliano Godino	business owner/manager
Antonio Guidi	surgeon
Giancarlo Innocenzi	business owner/manager
Giorgio Jannone	business owner/manager (paper factories Paolo Pigna SpA)
Roberto Lavagnini	business consultant
Giuseppe Lazzarini	business owner/manager
Lucio Leonardelli	journalist
Marianna Li Calzi	lawyer
Silvio Liotta	retired
Domenico Lo Jucco	an employee of a private company
Vittorio Lodolo D'Oria	surgeon
Tiziana Maiolo	journalist
Paolo Mammola	business owner/manager
Paola Martinelli	business owner/manager
Antonio Martino	professor of economy
Antonio Martusciello	business owner/manager
Mario Masini	business owner/manager
Piergiorgio Massidda	specialized doctor
Riccardo Mastrangeli	pharmacist
Amedeo Matacena	business owner/manager
Cristina Matranga	business owner/manager
Francesco Mele	pharmacist
Alessandro Meluzzi	university professor
Andrea Merlotti	insurer
Gianfranco Micciché	business owner/manager
Paolo Sandro Molinaro	business owner/manager

Name	Career background
Luigi Muratori	surgeon, university professor
Enrico Nan	lawyer
Emiddio Novi	journalist
Giampaolo Nuvoli	journalist
Paolo Oberti	business owner/manager
Paolo Odorizzi	business owner/manager (construction)
Pierangelo Paleari	business consultant
Giuseppe Palumbo	professor of gynaecology and obstetrics
Tiziana Parenti	lawyer
Riccardo Perale	surgeon, university professor
Giovanni Pilo	business owner/manager
Maria Gabriella Pinto	business owner/manager
Beppe Pisanu	business owner/manager (public company)
Antonio Piva	business owner/manager
Stefano Podestà	university professor
Stefania Prestigiacomio	business owner/manager
Paolo Romani	journalist (publisher)
Roberto Rosso	lawyer
Alessandro Rubino	business owner/manager
Enzo Savarese	business owner/manager
Paolo Scarpa Bonazza Buora	business owner/manager
Vittorio Sgarbi	philosoph
Attilio Sigona	business owner/manager
Michele Stornello	doctor
Lorenzo Strik Lievers	University professor
Paolo Emilio Taddei	lawyer
Marco Taradash	journalist
Vittorio Tarditi	lawyer
Adriano Teso	business owner/manager
Roberto Tortoli	political activist
Nicola Trapani	teacher
Sandro Trevisanato	lawyer
Giuliano Urbani	university professor
Carlo Usiglio	business owner/manager
Mario Valducci	business owner/manager
Antonietta Vascon	journalist
Paolo Vigevano	journalist (publisher)
Elio Vito	sociologist

Source: Party websites and parliamentary websites.

Appendix 5: SPD MPs

Name	Career background
Marian Bojko	paramedic
Jaroslav Dvořák	neurologist
Jaroslav Foldyna	entrepreneur, ship captain, manager (state train company)
Jaroslav Holík	entrepreneur, owner of JH Pento
Jan Hrnčíř	entrepreneur, owner of institute of tertiary education
Tereza Hythová	primary school teacher
Monika Jarošová	nurse
Pavel Jelínek	manager at Makro and MERIT group
Jiří Kobza	entrepreneur, diplomat
Jiří Kohoutek	entrepreneur
Radek Koten	manager of OK Comp
Jana Levová	manager of TOJA Professional
Karla Maříková	nurse, editor at cable TV
Ivana Nevludová	manager at Pohl.consult, accountant
Tomio Okamura	entrepreneur
Zdeněk Podal	electrician
Miloslav Rozner	concert organizer Argema band
Radek Rozvoral	manager of PLAST
Lucie Šafránková	manager
Lubomír Španěl	entrepreneur, electrician
Radovan Vích	army official, colonel
Lubomír Volný	manager at Color Inovations, teacher

Source: Party websites and parliamentary websites.

Appendix 6: Fdi MPs

Name	Career background
Edmondo Cirielli	law-enforcement officer (Carabinieri)
Daniela Garnero Santanchè	entrepreneur
Ignazio La Russa	lawyer
Pasquale Maietta	accountant
Giorgia Meloni	journalist
Bruno Murgia	journalist
Gaetano Nastri	insurance agent
Giovanna Petrenga	art historian
Fabio Rampelli	architect
Walter Rizzetto	N/A
Marco Tagliatalata	public manager / civil servant
Achille Totaro	clerk

Source: Party websites and parliamentary websites.

Endnotes:

- 1 The majority of these parties are run by so-called political entrepreneurs, who use them as personal vehicles; being referred to as entrepreneurial or business-firm parties (Cirhan, 2023; Hloušek, Kopeček, Vodová, 2020).
- 2 Extensive scholarship already exists in the area of new parties, in particular in the context of CEE (see: Sikk 2005; Havlik & Voda, 2016; Charvat & Just, 2016; Naxera, 2023 among others).
- 3 For the purpose of our article, the managerial background refers to the following: directors of private corporations, individuals in leading positions and entrepreneurs.
- 4 In September 2023 the heirs of Silvio Berlusconi (his sons) extended a bank guaranty worth approximately 90 million Euros to cover the party's debts.
- 5 Article 1 of the 2024 party Statute of Forza italia 'Silvio Berlusconi Presidente Fondatore', states that 'The Political Movement Forza Italia is an association inspired and created by Silvio Berlusconi, who is its Founding President. It has developed, operated, and will continue to pursue its goals based on his teachings, political insights, and leadership' (Forza Italia, 2024).
- 6 Parties formed on a challenger origin (see introduction, p.2, for the definition) by political entrepreneurs were considered.