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Michał Klonowski,
Maciej Onasz**

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of the Staroste.
Evidences from Poland

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Czech and Italian
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Reviews:

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The Influence of the Position of Political Parties in the District Council on the Election of the Staroste. Evidences from Poland

Kamil Glinka, Michał Klonowski,
Maciej Onasz¹

Abstract

Despite the growing number of studies devoted to the intricacies of the functioning of local government units in Poland (communes, districts and provinces), it is difficult to point to a scientific study that focuses on districts and the influence of the position of political parties operating at the level of legislature on the election of the staroste as the chairman of the executive. The paper is intended to fill this urgent research gap. The conducted research based on the use of methods and techniques – mainly comparative analysis and statistical analysis – as well as the nationwide data leads to the conclusion that the position of the staroste party (in the district) is weaker than the position of the president party (in the commune) and the marshal party (in the province). In other words, the leading parties operating in districts have the weakest position among the leading parties in all types of local government units included in the study.

Keywords: staroste; district; local politics; political parties; coalitions; Poland

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1. Introduction

It is difficult to disagree with the statement that the system of relations between actors operating at the local government level - namely the actors serving as, on the one hand, an legislative authority, and on the other, an executive authority - takes various forms, regardless of what local/regional regime reflects the socio-political reality (cf. Elkin, 1987; Stone, 1989; Stoker, 1991; Stoker & Mossberger, 1994; Glinka, 2020a). A review of the extremely extensive literature on the subject, as well as local government practice, proves that the possible variants of mutual positioning are reflected in a continuum between a full support (and the consent as to the directions of the action of the executive) and its complete lack (understood as obstruction of the executive's actions).

It is impossible not to notice that the issue of the relationship between the legislature and the executive at the local government level is a subject of many studies. An attempt not only to illustrate, but also to 'intend' these relationships is a characteristic of numerous publications - and in this case not only comprehensive analyses, but also papers and partial chapters. It is worth pointing out in this context the works that aim to provide a theoretical (conceptual) understanding of these bilateral relations (see Boynton & Wright, 1971; Svava, 1987, 1990, 1999, 2003; Heyes & Chang, 1990; Morgan & Watson, 1992; Mouritzen & Svava, 2002; Pelissero, 2003; Schragger, 2006). However, it should be noted that the dominant analyzes focus on large and medium-sized cities and their mayors. Therefore it is worth pointing out studies exploring the phenomenon of mayoral leadership embedded not only in the context of the relationship between the executive and the legislature (see Sweeting, 2002; Haus & Sweeting, 2006; Alba & Navarro, 2006; Denters, 2006; Gresley & Stoker, 2008, 2009; Teles, 2014; Sancino & Castellani, 2016; Hlepas, Chantzaras, & Getimis, 2018; Navarro, Karlsson, Magre, & Reinholde, 2018; Egeberg & Trondall 2009), but also within the concept of governance defined through the prism of network relations of public, private and social actors (see Verheul & Schaap, 2010; Cepiku & Mastrodascio, 2011; Haus & Erling Klausen, 2011; Orr & Bennett, 2017; Sweeting, 2017; Denters, Steyvers, Klok, & Cermak, 2018; Kinder, Stenvall, Six, & Memon, 2021; Sancino, Carli, & Giacomini, 2023; cf. Ospina, 2017; Bryson, Sancino, Benington, & Sørensen, 2017; Craps et al., 2019; Cristofoli, Trivellato, Sancino, Maccio' & Markovic, 2021).

The situation in which the mode of selecting an executive authority is indirect, rather than direct, seems to be particularly interesting. In other words, this is a situation in which the executive authority is not elected by citizens, but is a subject of arrangements made at the level of the legislative authority, between political parties. The activities of the staroste [Pol. *starosta*] in Poland, who being the chairman of the district board [Pol. *zarząd powiatu*], is elected by the members of the district council [Pol. *rada powiatu*] belonging to particular political

parties, is an example of such an interesting, however rarely examined, situation. Therefore it is difficult to point to a scientific study that focuses on districts [Pol. *powiat*] and the influence of the position of political parties operating at the level of legislature on the election of the staroste as the chairman of the executive. In this sense, the paper is intended to fill this urgent research gap and, consequently, provide an answer to the question about the relationship between the balance of power in the legislature (the district council and the position of political parties operating in it) and the choice of the executive (namely the staroste whose choice is dependent on the support of these parties). The main goal of the paper is hence to illustrate the influence of the position of political parties represented in the district council on the choice of the staroste.

As the results of the research on other local government units in Poland - namely the commune [Pol. *gmina*] and the province [Pol. *województwo*] - prove the question about the relationship between the legislature (and the political parties represented in it) and the executive is current and fully justified. It turns out, as Maciej Drzonek (2013) and Kamil Glinka (2020b) write about the executive in communes (city presidents), or Robert Alberski (2010, 2024) and Tatiana Majcherkiewicz (2021) write about the executive in provinces (province marshals), that the position of the parties operating in the legislature, respectively, the so-called presidential parties in the commune council and the so-called marshal parties in the province assembly, plays a fundamental role. In this sense, the paper is the first comprehensive attempt to illustrate the influence of political parties represented in the district council (so-called staroste's parties) on the election of the staroste, precisely in relation to the aforementioned communes (and the position of the presidential parties) and provinces (and the position of the marshal's parties). It is assumed that the data used (namely the data from around 2,800 local government units in Poland) and the applied methodological approach (quantitative analysis) will allow for a reliable, in-depth analysis of this influence.

The structure of the paper was subordinated to the implementation of the research goal. First, a theoretical conceptualization based on a review of the literature on the subject and the main directions of research on the relations between the legislature and the executive in Poland were discussed. The hypothesis and research questions were presented. The research methodology and the data used were presented in the following part. The next part of the part is analytical in nature. It focuses on illustrating the influence of the position of political parties represented in the council on the choice of the staroste. In accordance with the adopted assumption, the considerations presented in this part are related to communes and provinces and the position of political parties that operate at the level of legislatures in these two types of local governments units. Key conclusions and potential directions for conducting research in the future are presented in the summary.

2. Theoretical conceptualization

As already indicated in the introduction, the relations between the legislature and the executive are the subject of many analyses by researchers of local self-government. However, there is a lack of research – and it is worth emphasizing this once again – devoted to these relations at the district level in Poland. The special, because extremely rarely analyzed case of the district makes it justified to compare the district with other local government units where the functioning of political parties, also in the context of the relations between the legislature and the executive, is the subject of an incomparably greater number of scientific studies.

Firstly, we are talking about the commune and the relations between the council (as legislative) and the political parties operating at their level and the commune head/mayor/president of the city (as executive) (see Swianiewicz, Klimska, & Mielczarek, 2004; Swianiewicz, 2007; Antoszewski, 2012; Drzonek, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2019a, 2019b, 2022, 2023; Sidor, Kuć-Czajkowska, & Wasil, 2017; Glinka, 2020b; Tomczak, 2020). This is clearly the dominant perspective. Regardless of the case analyzed, the authors investigate the conditions, mechanisms and results of support (or lack thereof) of political parties operating at the council level for the commune head/mayor/city president who is elected in direct elections. They examine the conditions and reasons under which coalitions are formed. Among many analyses, it is worth mentioning those whose authors consider the impact of changes in electoral law on the position of parties represented in the commune legislative (see Sidor, Kuć-Czajkowska & Wasil, 2015; Gendźwił & Żótkak, 2016, 2020; Flis & Stolnicki, 2017; Onasz & Klonowski, 2018; Michalak, 2018a, 2018b; Rakowska-Trela, 2018a, 2018b; Czapiewski & Miszczuk, 2019; Glinka, 2021; Klonowski & Onasz, 2021; Onasz, 2022; Glinka, Klonowski, Niemczyk & Onasz, 2023). Also, in research on the functioning of communes, it is worth noting the approach related to the study of leadership, mostly mayoral one (Michałowski, 2008; Pawłowska, 2008; Sidor, Kuć-Czajkowska & Wasil, 2020; Wasil, 2023) and governance concept, mostly urban governance (Swianiewicz & Klimska, 2003; Glinka 2023).

Secondly, we are talking about the province and the relations between the province assembly, in which political parties operate, and the province marshal elected in indirect elections. The number of studies on this subject is not as large as in the case of communes, although still greater than in the case of districts. Reading of the works by Robert Alberski (2010, 2024), Bartłomiej Kulas and Jan A. Wendt (2017) or Tatiana Majcherkiewicz (2021) leads to the conclusion that it is difficult to point to one that provides the most comprehensive answer to the question about the influence of political parties represented at the legislative level on election of the executive in the mode of indirectly. What is important and noticeable, however, is that this influence is noticeable, especially since provincial legislatures are an area of increased activity of nationwide political parties that

want to control regional policies. The creation of coalitions is subordinated to the achievement of this goal.

The dominance of communes and provinces in research on the system of relations between the legislature and the executive, which requires emphasis, draws from the key position of these local government units in the local government system in Poland. The differentiation of the local government structure into three basic levels is reflected not only in a fundamentally different catalog of public tasks that they must perform, but also, and perhaps above all, in a different mode of their selection (see Kulesza, 2008; Regulski & Kulesza, 2009).

As shown by the analysis of the data presented in Table 1, the basic dividing lines between the commune, district and province can be analyzed in two contexts.

The first, completely basic, comes down to the election of members of the decision-making bodies. It turns out that in the case of commune councils, two types of electoral regulations apply: majority (when it comes to the communes with up to 20,000 inhabitants) and proportional (when it comes to the communes with more than 20,000 inhabitants, including cities with district rights). *In contrario* to communes, in the case of districts and provinces, elections of legislative bodies are based on the provisions of the proportional electoral system.

The method of selecting executive authorities is the second, but equally important, context in which the differences between local government units should be analyzed. It should be emphasized that only in one case – namely communes – the commune head, mayor or city president is elected in direct elections. As argued by Andrzej Antoszewski (2012) this mode of election measurably strengthens his/her legitimacy to exercise power and determines a relatively strong position in the local political arena. In the case of a district and a province – namely the staroste who is the chairman of the district board and the marshal who manages the work of the province board – the indirect mode of election needs to be emphasized.

Table 1:
Bodies of local government units in Poland and the method of their selection according to types and subtypes

Type of local government unit	Legislative body according to local government unit subtype	Executive body
Commune	Commune council (city council) - general elections:	Commune head/mayor/president - direct election by citizens in general elections
	Communes with up to 20.000 inhabitants - majority elections	
	Communes with over 20.000 inhabitants, including cities with district rights - proportional elections	
District	Districts council - proportional elections.	County board, including the staroste (chairman of the board) - indirect election, made by the district council
Province	Province assembly - proportional elections.	Province board, including the marshal (chairman of the board) - indirect election, made by the province assembly

Source: The author.

The lack of scientific studies devoted to the relations between the legislature and the executive in the district is not the main reason why the authors of this paper analyze the influence of the position of political parties in the district council on the election of the staroste, placing them in the context of the relations between the legislature and the executive in the commune and the province. For the purposes of this paper, it is assumed that there are certain clear, although as yet unexplored analogies between, on the one hand, the district and, on the other, the commune and the province, which concern the functioning of political parties and their relations with, on the one hand, the staroste and, on the other, the commune head/ mayor/city president and the province marshal.

It is hard to disagree that the position of the presidential party which nominates a candidate for the commune head/mayor/president of the city and then, after winning the elections, supports his/her activities during the term of office is the key element determining the relationship between the legislature and the executive in communes (see Gendźwił 2020). It is therefore possible to say that the strong position of the presidential party is a *sine qua non* condition for stable support provided to the commune head/mayor/president of the city. Thus, as Drzonek (2013, 2014, 2016) and Glinka (2020b) prove, the stronger the presidential party (measured by the number of seats won), the greater the probability of

effective governance by the president. Although the optimal situation is one in which the presidential party has a majority in the council and is the dominant party, it should also be remembered that it is not always possible to achieve it. Situations in which the presidential party forms coalitions with other parties represented in the council prevail. These are the so-called presidential coalitions. The formation of the coalition is burdened with many risks, starting from the need to agree on common goals and directions of city policies, and ending with satisfying the particular interests of individual parties related to the filling of positions (not only in the council, but also in the municipal office headed by the president).

Similar conclusions are drawn from the analysis of research results relating to provinces. Alberski claims that not only the election of the marshal (and this is a situation analogous to the situation in districts) is a derivative of the position of the marshal's party in the province assembly. The author argues that this position plays a fundamental role in the effectiveness of governance understood as the performance of public tasks by the marshal who heads the province board (see Alberski, 2008). Just as in the case of a commune, the most common situation is one in which party coalitions are created in order to create a majority supporting the marshal (see Majcherkiewicz, 2018). However, this does not mean that the position of the marshal's party loses its importance. On the contrary, it is the 'size' (counted as the number of seats) in the entire coalition that is a key determinant of the election of the marshal, and then support for the activities he/she implements (cf. Kulas & Wendt, 2017).

Taking the above into account, it is assumed that the election of the staroste (as well as the commune head/mayor/city president and the province marshal) depends on the position of the staroste's party in the legislature. It is assumed that a stronger position of the staroste's party (following the results of studies relating to the position of the presidential party and the marshal's party) facilitates his/her election. For the sake of the paper, it is adopted that the staroste's party is defined as the political grouping from which the staroste comes (the one which put forward his/her candidacy in the elections) and which is represented on the district council supporting the activities he/she implements. Once again, presidential parties and marshal parties refer to such groups represented in the commune council or province assembly, which put forward candidates for, respectively, a commune head, a mayor or a president (in the case of a commune) and a marshal (in the case of a province). All three types of parties - the staroste's party, the presidential party and the marshal party - can be collectively called leading parties.

The aim of the paper is, therefore, to illustrate the influence of the position of the parties represented in the district's decision-making body (district council) on the election of the chairman of the district's executive body (staroste). It should be emphasized that this analysis is set in the context of a comparison

of these relationships with other local government units in Poland, i.e. the commune and the province.

For the purposes of the paper, a hypothesis is formulated according to which the position of the staroste's party is weaker than the position of the presidential party and the marshal party. The way the hypothesis is formulated is by no means accidental. It is assumed that a significantly higher level of party fragmentation at the level of district councils (compared to commune councils and province assemblies) translates into an objectively weaker position of the staroste's party. In other words, the weaker position of the staroste's party means that it is more difficult for a staroste to have a stable base in the district council, than is the case with a commune head, a mayor or a president (in the case of a commune) and a marshal (in the case of a province).

The hypothesis is accompanied by the two research questions:

Question no. 1 (Q1): What is the political position of the staroste's party in district councils?

Question no. 2 (Q2): How does the position of the staroste's party (district) differ from that of the presidential party (commune) and the marshal party (province)?

The way of formulating research questions is based on the analysis of the results of the previous research on communes and provinces. As indicated, there are certain analogies between districts and communes and provinces in relation to the position of the leading parties and the choice of the executive. The aim is to examine to what extent the position of the staroste party is different from the position of the presidential and marshal parties. The position of these parties is generally stronger and results from the less complicated process of formulating coalitions at the legislative level in communes and provinces based on the less fragmented party scene.

When comparing the influence of the position of political parties in the district council on the election of the staroste with similar relationships in the commune and the province, one should remember about the objective differences indicated above, which are primarily a result of the executive election procedure (cf. Table 1). Importantly, the direct election procedure in the commune is the factor that builds the advantage of the commune head/mayor/president over political parties in the council, including the presidential party, as demonstrated in their works by Monika Sidor, Katarzyna Kuć-Czajkowska and Justyna Wasil (2020, 2017, 2015).

The previously mentioned issue of forming a coalition at the level of the commune council and the province assembly, although important and worth noting, is not the dominant thread of the authors' considerations focused on coalitions in the district council. This issue, due to the complex and multi-threaded nature of the functioning of political arenas in communes and provinces, requires a completely separate study.

3. Methodology

It should be emphasized that the authors of this paper are interested in the functioning of around 2,800 local government units in Poland. Therefore, all types of local government units were subjected to the study: districts, as well as communes and provinces. Within the communes, three subtypes were distinguished:

1. communes with up to 20,000 inhabitants,
2. communes with over 20,000 inhabitants,
3. cities with the status of a city with district rights.¹

The study excluded the communes in which no executive body was elected as a result of general elections and those in which no voting took place in the elections of the decision-making body (i.e. where all seats were distributed without voting²).

Two main data sets were used for the study. With regard to the election results of the decision-making bodies of communes, districts and provinces and the executive bodies of communes, these were the data from the National Electoral Commission [Pol. *Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza*] and the National Electoral Office [Pol. *Krajowe Biuro Wyborcze*]. However, taking into account the elections of the chairmen of executive bodies in districts and provinces (districts' *staroste* and provinces' *marshal*, respectively), it is worth emphasizing the analysis of resolutions of district councils and province assemblies.

Importantly, the political affiliation of the chairmen of executive authorities in districts (*staroste*) and provinces (*marshal*) was determined, first of all, taking into account which electoral committees they represented in the elections to the district's council or the province assembly, respectively. In those cases in which the elected chairman of the executive body (*staroste*, *marshal*) did not run for election to the decision-making body³, one took into account his/ her political activity (in particular public functions performed at the time of election), the political group putting forward his/ her candidacy for the 'race' for the executive function, and where necessary – reports from local media.

The most important research methods and techniques used for the purposes of the paper include the comparative method allowing for capturing key similarities and differences between the studied cases (Della Porta, 2008) and statistical analysis (Marchant-Shapiro, 2014). The captured results were illustrated in the form of tables, figures and box figures which, in the opinion of the authors of the paper, allows drawing attention to the most important trends and, consequently, promotes the clarity of the argument. However, the key role should be assigned to the use of two parameters. This concerns, firstly, the percentage of seats obtained by the leading group in the legislative authority (the commune/citycouncil, the district council and the province assembly), and secondly, the Shapley-Shubik power index (cf. Nwokora & Pelizzo, 2018; Jarmara, 2024).

The Shapley-Shubik power index has already been used in research by political scientists, including the previous text of one of the co-authors of this paper, which was devoted to the impact of changes in the electoral system on the political position of presidential parties in communes in Poland (Onasz, 2022)⁴ The usefulness, and therefore the explanatory potential, of the Shapley-Shubik power index emphasized in the previous text results from the fact that it allows for capturing the political position of those political parties that have been defined as leading, and in the analyzed case they are: staroste's parties (district), presidential parties (commune) and marshal parties (province). The index therefore makes it possible to illustrate the position they have within, respectively – the district council, the commune/city council, the province assembly (Onasz, 2022, p. 85).

According to Mikołaj Jasiński the power indexes, and therefore the Shapley-Shubik power index, can be treated as '*functions that determine the position of individual participants in collective body*' (2010, p. 50). Importantly, they are analyzed in the context of formulating possible coalitions (Jasiński, 2010, p. 50). For the purposes of the paper, it is assumed that the game in the district council, the commune/city council or the province assembly, depending on whether we are talking about a district, commune or province, can be written as: $\{q; s_i; s_j; s_k\}$, where:

- (1) s_i refers to the weight of a particular player i (namely the number of representatives of a political party in the district council, the commune/city council or the province assembly, depending on the subject of the study),
- (2) q denotes the weight required for the winning coalition (i.e. one that has a majority that determines the stability and therefore required ability to govern a district, commune or province, depending on the subject of the study) (Onasz, 2022, p. 86).

Moreover, it is assumed that a coalition can be defined as a winning coalition only if the sum of the weights of the taken into the account players, and in the analyzed case – political parties, is higher or equal to q (Jasiński, 2010, p. 52, via: Onasz 2022, p. 86). Additionally, it is also worth to mention that if, as a result of player i (a political party, which may be a staroste's party, presidential party or marshal party) joining a losing coalition (namely the coalition with a weight lower than q operating at the district, commune or province level), this particular coalition becomes a winning coalition capable to govern effectively the particular local government unit, the already mentioned player i should be defined as a decisive player. According to the adopted assumption, the Shapley-Shubik power index for player i (ϕ_i) should be treated as equal to the percentage of the total number of coalitions in which the already mentioned player i acts as the decisive player, depending on whether we are talking about the district, commune or province level (Kliber, 2015, p. 180–181; via: Onasz, 2022, p. 86; cf. Maschler, Solan, & Zamir 2020).

The index can be characterized in a following way: (1) the sum of the ϕ values for all the players (political parties operating at the district, commune or

province level) is equal to 1; (2) if $\varphi_i=1$, then player (political party) i is a dictator player in the district council, the commune/city council or the province assembly; (3) if $\varphi_i=0$, then player (political party operating at district, commune or province level) i is a player who is not taken into account and therefore can be defined as an irrelevant one; (4) the value of φ_i is in the range from 0 to 1 (Kliber, 2015, p. 181, via: Onasz, 2022, p. 86).

It is worth to mention adopted designations as: φ_{PW} for the Shapley-Shubik power index for the leading party (staroste's party, presidential party or marshal party, depending on whether we are talking about a district, commune or province) and φ_i for the Shapley-Shubik power index of any other party operating at the district, commune or province level, also for one that is not crucial from the point of view of the ability to create coalitions (Onasz, 2022, p. 87). Importantly, s is the percentage of seats, s_{PW} is the percentage of the seats of the leading party, namely staroste's party, presidential party or marshal party and s_i is the percentage of the seats of each other party.

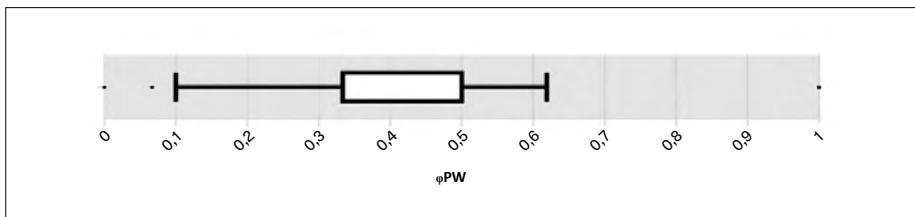
The essence of the conducted analysis is reflected in the following sequence of activities (Onasz, 2022, p. 87):

- The values of φ_{PW} in districts in 2018 were taken into the consideration.
- The frequency of obtaining the highest φ value and the highest s value by the leading party in districts was examined – in both cases in the variants allowing and excluding draws ($\varphi_{PW} \geq \varphi_i$, $\varphi_{PW} > \varphi_i$ oraz $s_{PW} \geq s_i$ oraz $s_{PW} > s_i$, respectively).
- The average value of φ_{PW} was compared in the types (namely districts, communes and provinces) and subtypes of local government units (cf. Table 1).
- The frequency of the leading party, namely staroste's party, presidential party or marshal party obtaining the position of dictator player ($\varphi_{PW} = 1$) was compared in the types (namely districts, communes and provinces) and subtypes of local government units.
- The frequency of the leading party, namely staroste's party, presidential party or marshal party achieving the position of an insignificant player ($\varphi_{PW} = 0$) was compared in the types (namely districts, communes and provinces) and subtypes of local government units.
- The frequency of obtaining the highest the Shapley-Shubik power index value by the leading party, namely staroste's party, presidential party or marshal party in the types of local government units (namely districts, communes and provinces) was compared in the variants allowing and excluding draws ($\varphi_{PW} \geq \varphi_i$, $\varphi_{PW} > \varphi_i$, respectively).
- The frequency of obtaining the highest number of seats by the leading party, namely staroste's party, presidential party or marshal party in the types of local government units (namely districts, communes and provinces) was compared in the variants allowing and excluding draws ($s_{PW} \geq s_i$, $s_{PW} > s_i$, respectively).

4. Analysis. In search of the position of the staroste' parties against the background of the presidential and marshal parties

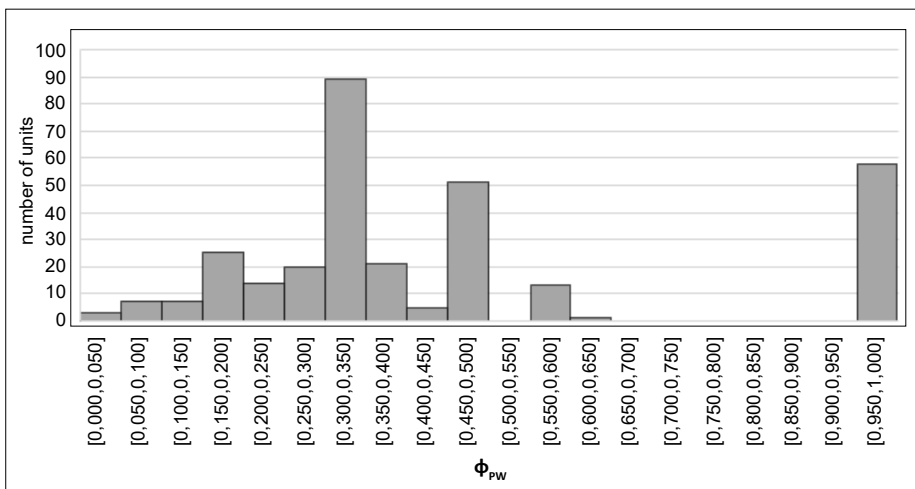
As mentioned, the verification of the hypothesis as well as answering the research questions will be illustrated in the form of table, figures and box figures⁵. In an attempt to answer the first and, what seems to be, fundamental research question (Q1), the value of the index of party power of starostes in districts was examined. The results of the analysis are presented in Figure 1a and Figure 1b. Statistically significant values are presented in Table 2.

Figure 1a:
 Φ_{PW} values in districts in 2018



Source: The author.

Figure1b:
 Φ_{PW} values in districts in 2018



Source: The author.

Table 2:
Statistically significant values

Minimum value	1st quartile	Median	3rd quartile	Maximum value	Mean	Dominant
0,000	0,333	0,333	0,500	1,000	0,468	0,333

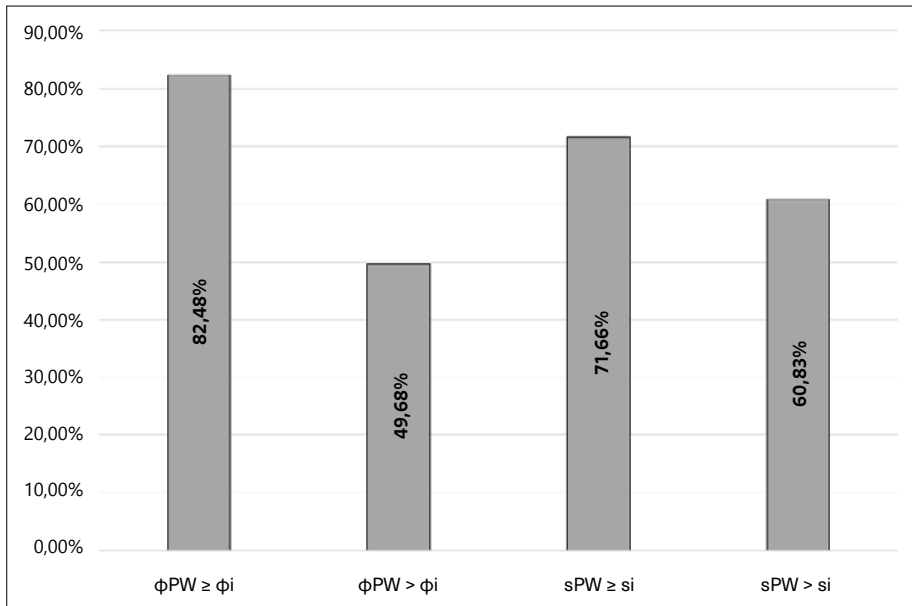
Source: The author.

As Figure 1a shows, the middle half of the scores range from 0,333 to 0,500. This is even more important if we take into account the median value equal to the value of the first quartile (0,333). This is due to the clear overrepresentation of the situations in which only three important parties – players are represented in the district council, none of which obtained the position of dictator.⁶ In such a situation, an agreement between any two of them creates a winning coalition. This situation occurred in 88 out of 314 (28,03%) district councils.⁷ The value of the first quartile and the median are equal to the value of the dominant, which confirms that in a significant part of district councils there is a balance of power between (important) players. In $\frac{3}{4}$ of the cases, the value of the strength index did not exceed 0,500. Among the outliers, special attention should be paid to the staroste's party gaining the position of a dictator player ($\varphi = 1$), which occurred in 58 cases (18,47%), and the position of an unimportant player – in 3 cases (0,96%). It may be puzzling to elect a staroste representing a party with the position of an insignificant player, but in these cases (the Mogilno and Radziejów districts in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Province and the Bochnia district in the Lesser Poland Province) it resulted from the divisions within individual groupings between the elections of the decision-making body and the election of staroste.

A deeper analysis of the observed values is possible using a histogram (Figure 1b). The values in the range (0,300, 0,350] dominate, which confirms the previous observations. Confirmation is also provided by a significant share of values contained in the ranges (0,450, 0,500] and (0,950, 1,000]. It should be noted that all values contained in the latter range were in practice 1 (the staroste's party obtained the strongest possible position, i.e. the position of dictator).⁸

To deepen the answer to the first research question, the authors analyzed, firstly, the frequency of obtaining the highest power index value by the staroste's party, and secondly, the highest number of seats (in the variants allowing and rejecting ties) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2:
Frequency of obtaining the highest ϕ value and the highest percentage of seats in the district by the staroste's party, including and excluding draws
 ($\phi_{PW} \geq \phi_i$; $\phi_{PW} > \phi_i$; $s_{PW} \geq s_i$; $s_{PW} > s_i$)



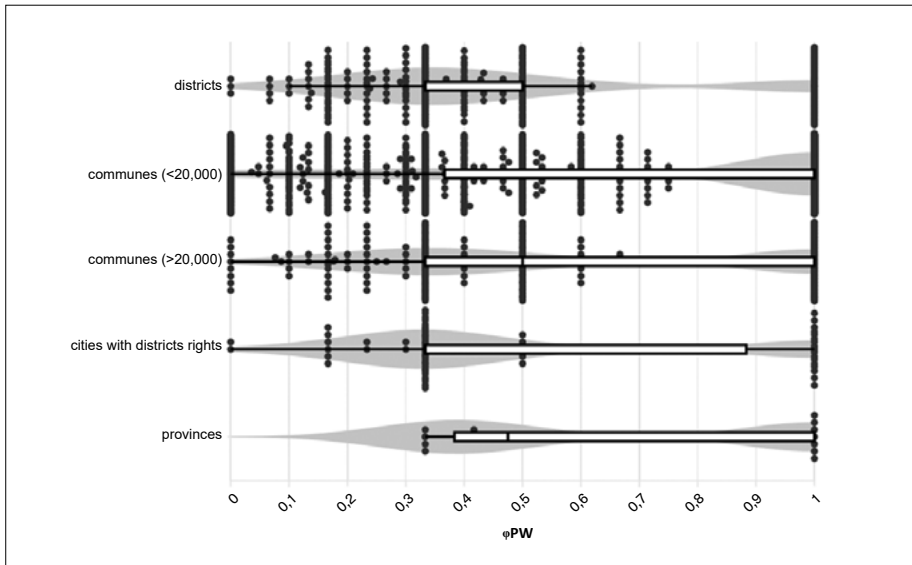
Source: The author.

Even a cursory analysis of the data presented in the figure allows one to assume that the most frequently elected staroste came from the party that obtained the highest power index value (regardless of any draws). A clear difference should be noted between the frequency of obtaining the highest power index value and the highest number of seats by the staroste's party. While the staroste came from a party with a lower power index than the highest value in 17,52% of cases (55 cases), in as many as 28,34% (89 cases) he/she came from a party that did not obtain the highest mandate result. The importance of the coalition potential is also confirmed by comparing the mentioned values with variants that reject situations in which draws occurred. While in the case of the number of seats the difference is 10,83 percentage points, in the case of the power index value it is as much as 32,80 percentage points. As a consequence, in 39,17% of cases (123 out of 314) the elected staroste did not come from a party that could be clearly considered victorious in the elections in terms of the number of seats (obtaining the highest mandate result on its own), and in terms of the value of the power index it had this place in slightly more than half (50,32%) of cases (158 out of 314).

In search of an answer to the second research question (Q2), it was decided to compare the position of the staroste's party with the position of other leading parties – presidential parties (commune) and marshal parties (province).

First, the significant statistical values of the strength index was examined in relation to individual leading parties (see Figure 3 and Table 3).

Figure 3:
Significant statistical values of ϕ_{PW} in types and subtypes of local government units



Source: The author.

Table 3:
Significant statistical values of ϕ_{PW} in types and subtypes of local government units

	districts	communes (<20.000)	communes (>20.000)	cities with districts rights	provinces
1st quartile	0,333	0,367	0,333	0,333	0,383
Median	0,333	1,000	0,500	0,333	0,475
3rd quartile	0,500	1,000	1,000	0,883	1,000
Mean	0,468	0,743	0,578	0,494	0,657
Dominant	0,333	1,000	1,000	0,333	1,000

Source: The author.

The values observed for districts significantly differ from those observed for other types of local government units (excluding cities with district rights). It should be emphasized that in relation to communes (both subtypes) and in relation to provinces, significantly lower values were observed for both the median, the 3rd quartile, the mean and the dominant.⁹

Compared to other types of communes (both communes with up to 20,000 inhabitants, in which the decision-making bodies come from majority elections, and communes with over 20,000 inhabitants, in which the decision-making bodies

come, as in the case of cities with district rights, from proportional elections), the differences are very clear. Such large differences cannot be explained only by a completely different method of electing staroste (by the decision-making body) and commune leaders (commune heads/mayors/city presidents elected in direct elections), because in the case of leading parties in provinces, the average value of the power index is clearly closer to the values observed for communes than for districts. The biggest differences were observed in comparison to small communes, where the leading party's position is objectively the strongest. At the same time, however, it is worth noting the clear differences in comparison to larger communes (excluding cities with district rights) and provinces. These differences can be explained in several ways.

Firstly, in relation to communes, it should be emphasized that the leading parties in communes are 'based' on the person of the mayor/city president, his/her achievements and proposals formulated during the election campaign (cf. Skrzypiński, 2012). Elected in direct elections, he/she gathers local political elites around him/her and, as a consequence, as Paweł Swianiewicz and Jolanta Krukowska (2018) point out, he/she gains a strong position. This is manifested in a relatively strong position in relation to political parties representing the commune council. This position is incomparably stronger than that of starostes, who are to a greater extent dependent on the current balance of power in the district council. This strong position of commune heads/mayors/city presidents is particularly visible in communes where they hold office for several terms (in some cases even continuously for over 20 years), as indicated by Maciej Drzonek's research (2019a, 2022, 2023). In this sense, there are situations in which a strong commune head/mayor/city president does not have to make the effort to form a coalition, because his/her party has an independent majority in the council.

Secondly, in relation to provinces, it should be emphasized that although the method of electing the staroste and the marshal is similar (indirect election mode), the staroste's position is much weaker (cf. Buczkowski, 2021). This difference can be explained by the penetration of provinces' legislatures by nationwide political parties (cf. Alberski, 2010; Tomczak, 2019; Glinka, 2024, p. 23-24) which strive to gain a dominant position in the province assembly, resulting in full control over the election of the marshal. In other words, unlike district councils, where local election committees dominate, in the case of provinces, one can observe a significant influence of nationwide political parties on the formation of coalitions in province assemblies, and these parties try to implement coalition patterns from the central level to the province level (cf. Majcherkiewicz, 2011).

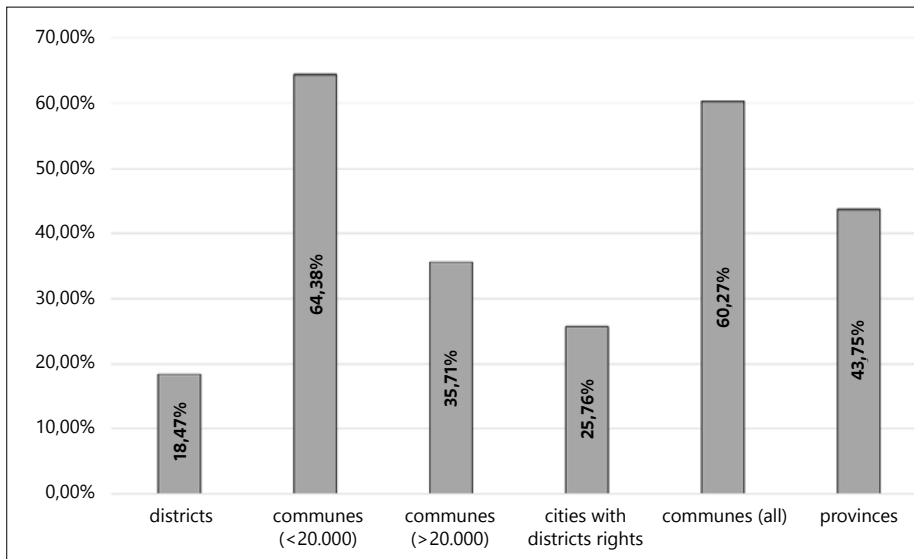
Summing up, this may be due to the weakness of both local government bodies at the district level, as well as the districts as a point of reference in identity terms. The concentration of identity at the commune level makes it difficult to build strong district-wide organizations. Moreover, it may lead to the situation

in which the election results at the district level reflect to a greater extent political preferences at the level of individual communes. In the case of provinces, we are dealing with the different process – elections to province assemblies to the greatest extent reflect the political preferences of voters at the national level.

In order to provide a full answer to the second research question, the authors conducted the analysis of the frequency of obtaining the position of dictator by leading parties in local government units in 2018 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4:

Frequency of obtaining the position of dictator by the leading party ($\phi_{PW}=1$) in types and subtypes of local government units in 2018



Source: The author.

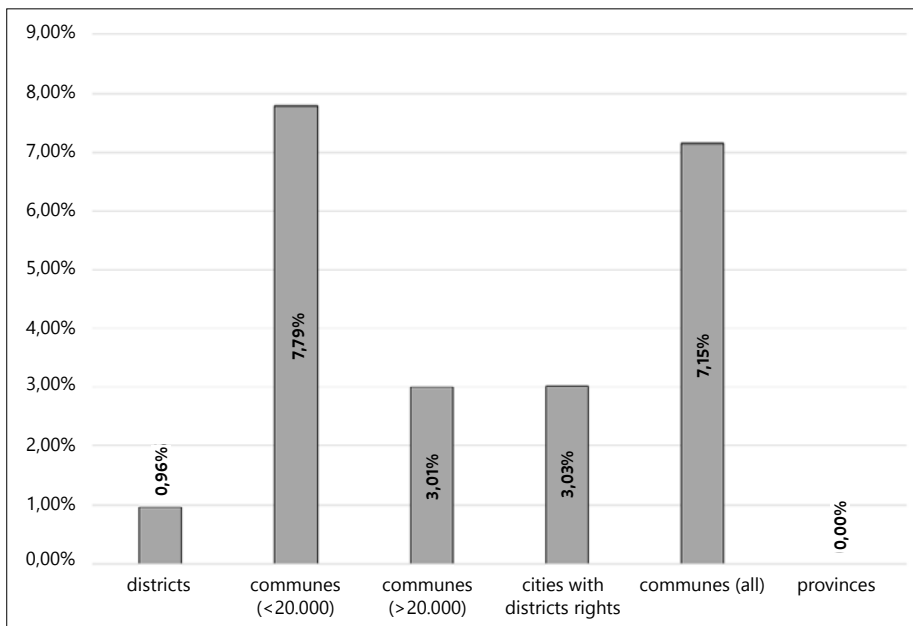
It should be emphasized that the obtained results are consistent with previous observations. The frequency of obtaining the position of dictator by the leading party ($\phi_{PW}=1$) at the district level is clearly lower than in other types (including subtypes) of local government units. Only in the case of cities with district rights can we talk about values that are at least slightly similar. The differences between districts and the smallest communes and provinces are particularly clear. At this point it is worth pointing out the factors that influence such a clear differentiation in the frequency of obtaining the position of dictator. At this point it is worth pointing out the factors that influence such a clear differentiation in the frequency of obtaining the position of dictator.

Particularly at the commune level, this should be associated with the very strong position of the one-person executive body (cf. Drzonek, 2013; 2019a, 2022, 2023; Swianiewicz & Krukowska, 2018; Glinka, 2020b). It is often so strong that the commune head/mayor/city president is actually able to permanently

dominate the local political scene and hold his/her position for several consecutive terms.¹⁰ The difference between districts and larger communes and cities with district rights is smaller, although still noticeable, which confirms earlier conclusions by one of co-authors of this paper (Onasz, 2022) about the unequivocal positive correlation between the use of the majority electoral system based on single-member constituencies and the frequency of obtaining the position of dictator by the leading party, as opposed to the proportional electoral system, which limits such a probability. The reasons for this state of affairs can be also found in the previously mentioned multi-faceted weaknesses of districts and their institutions.

The study also examined the frequency of the leading party obtaining the position of an insignificant player ($\phi_{PW}=0$) in local government units in 2018 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5:
Frequency of the leading party achieving the position of an insignificant player ($\phi_{PW}=0$) in the types and subtypes of local government units



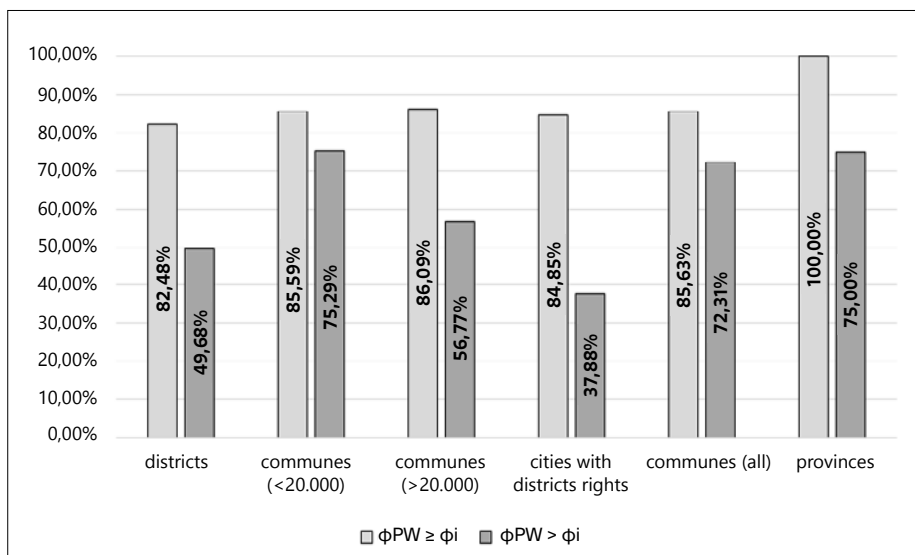
Source: The author.

The analysis of the content presented in Figure 5 allows one to state that the phenomenon of the leading party gaining the position of an insignificant player occurs in districts with very little frequency. The cases that took place in 2018 resulted from the decomposition of individual groups represented in the composition of the district council before the election of the staroste. In this respect, the position of the leading party in districts and provinces is very similar (no such case was observed in the latter, however, a small number of provinces should be

taken into account – 16 compared to 314 districts). The situation is completely different in communes, where approximately every fifteenth commune head or mayor/president does not have significant support in the decision-making body.¹¹ The difference in this area results from a different way of creating the executive body in communes than in districts and provinces. As it has already been indicated, in the case of communes, the executive body is elected in general elections, while in other types of local government units, the executive body is elected by the decision-making body. The findings relating to districts and the position of the staroste's party are consistent here with the results of research on coalition formation in communes (cf. Drzonek, 2013, 2014, Swianiewicz, Klimska & Mielczarek, 2004; Swianiewicz & Krukowska, 2018; Glinka 2020b) and provinces (cf. Alberski, 2010; Tomczak, 2019; Majcherkiewicz, 2011; 2018).

Importantly, the authors of this paper are also interested in the frequency of obtaining the highest value of the power index by the leading party in local government units. The obtained results are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6:
Frequency of obtaining the highest ϕ value by the leading party in types and subtypes of local government units in 2018, taking into account and excluding ties ($\phi_{PW} \geq \phi_i$; $\phi_{PW} > \phi_i$)



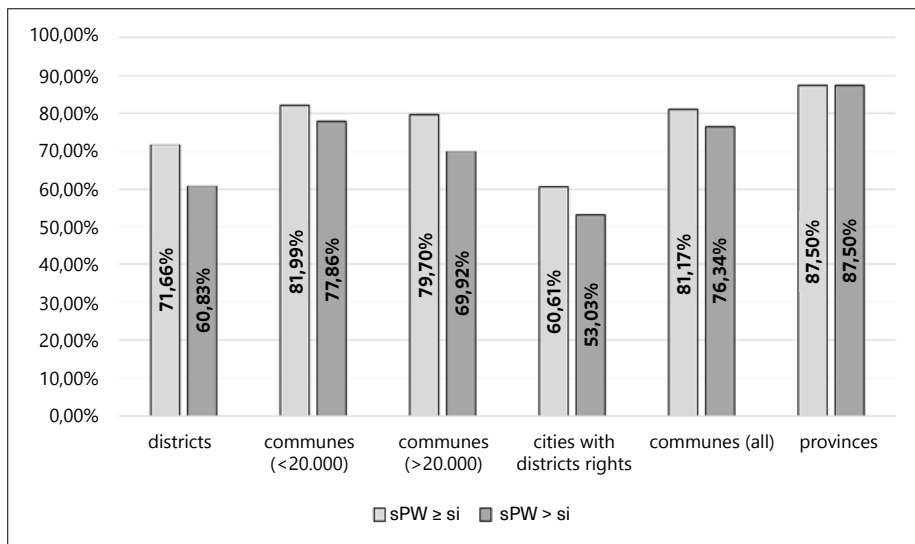
Source: The author.

With regard to obtaining the highest value of the power index by the leading party in districts, no clear differences were observed compared to communes. In the case of provinces, the frequency of obtaining the highest value of the strength index is clearly higher (applies to 100% of provinces), but it should be remembered that the number of provinces is small (16). In the variant excluding draws, more visible differences were observed. Only in the case of cities with district rights is the frequency of obtaining the highest value of the power index

by the leading party lower than in the case of districts. Especially in the case of the smallest communes (up to 20,000 inhabitants) and provinces, the difference is very clear. This proves more equal political competition in decision-making bodies in districts.¹² This is obviously related to the objectively higher level of party fragmentation in districts (on the subject of district see more: Jarosz & Springer, 2017, 2018; Sienkiewicz, 2011).

The last stage of the study was to analyze the frequency of obtaining the highest mandate result by the leading party (in variants allowing and excluding draws) in local government units. As the analysis of Figure 7 shows, in all types and subtypes of local government units (excluding cities with district rights), the frequency of the leading party obtaining the highest number of seats is higher than in the case of districts. In relation to all communes, the difference is 9,51 percentage points and in relation to provinces - 15,84 percentage points. An even greater difference concerns the variant excluding draws (15,51 percentage points and as much as 26,67 percentage points, respectively).

Figure 7:
Frequency of obtaining the highest percentage of seats by the leading party in types and subtypes of local government units in 2018, taking into account and excluding draw ($s_{PW} \geq s_i$; $s_{PW} > s_i$)



Source: The author.

Again, this proves more equal political competition in the bodies constituting this type of local government units. It should be emphasized that in approximately 2/5 of the district councils there is a competitive grouping with the leading party with no lower (and in the case of 28,34% of the districts - higher) potential for creating winning coalitions. The situation is a result of the specific nature of party

rivalry in districts. The party scene in districts is much more fragmented than in the case of communes and provinces. These are results that clearly correspond with the findings of other studies on territorial self-government in Poland and proves that the functioning of the district council has its specificity due to the applicable solutions related to the election of the staroste (cf. Sienkiewicz, 2011; Lewandowski & Wituska, 2012).

5. Conclusions

As shown, the staroste's parties are, next to the presidential and marshal parties, important players that demonstrate the ability to create coalitions and, therefore, to constitute the political base of starostes. However, what is worth noting is the fact that they have less power than the parties supporting commune heads/mayors/city presidents and province marshals. It is worth to mention that the influence of the starosts' parties on the election of starosts should be stressed, although it is smaller than in the case of the presidential and marshals' parties. In this sense, the conducted research procedure allows not only to answer the research questions but also leads to the conclusion that the hypothesis can be verified in a positive way. In other words, the position of the staroste's party seems to be weaker than the position of the presidential party (in communes) and the marshal party (in provinces). As it results from the analysis based on the comparison of statistical data, the leading parties in districts have the weakest position among the leading parties in all types of local government units included in the study. This is an observation that fills the gap in studies focused, as has already been indicated, on communes and provinces in Poland.

Moreover, the use of data from nearly 2,800 communes, districts and provinces in Poland proves that obtaining the highest strength by the party represented in the district council (the staroste's party) is still an important determinant of gaining influence on the choice of the staroste as a result of the ability of the coalition's creation. However, what is worth noting is that one cannot look for some kind of automatism in this, especially in comparison with the provinces. This results to a large extent from the frequent obtaining of equal (and the highest in a given district council) strength by more than one grouping, as a result of which in more than half of the studied cases – and we are talking about districts – the staroste does not come from a grouping with independent (and therefore excluding ties) strength. Taking into account the findings so far, one may be tempted to say that the process of forming a coalition in the district council, treated as a condition for providing support to the staroste, is a space for the influence of many political actors (not only the staroste's party) and, therefore, for the clash of various, often different interests of other parties.

In summary, certain analogies between, on the one hand, districts and, on the other, communes and provinces do exist and are noticeable. However, placing

the influence of the position of parties represented in the district council on the election of the staroste in the context of communes and provinces proves that this election has its own specificity, which is determined by the system of relations between the legislature and the executive. This specificity is determined not only by the number of political parties (there are clearly more of them than in the case of communes and provinces), but also by the nature of political parties (these are to a large extent local committees, not nationwide parties, which strongly penetrate commune's legislatures, especially in large cities, and even more strongly provincial legislatures).

While searching for the directions for further research on the influence of the position of the staroste's party on the choice of the staroste as the chairman of the district executive one should take into account other, in a sense unmeasurable factors that determine this position. In this case, the point is to expand the research instruments to include the achievements of sociology and political psychology, as well as to take into account a broader time perspective allowing for analyzes to be conducted in a longitudinal perspective, which is also a potential direction for further research. In this case, it is means research that takes into account a larger number of local government elections and, therefore, allows for in-depth comparative analysis of the examined cases.

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Endnotes:

- 1 The criterion for distinguishing subtypes (communes) is to organize the elections based on a different type of electoral law. It is worth adding that a city with district rights is not a district, but only performs the tasks assigned to it. For this reason, cities with this status are not classified as districts.
- 2 In a situation where the number of candidates nominated in a constituency in the elections of the local government body is equal to the number of seats to be allocated in that constituency, no voting is held and the mandate is automatically awarded to the only candidate. In practice, this only applies to communes with up to 20,000 inhabitants. In the 2018 elections, this affected 3,062 seats. Moreover, in the case of 11 commune councils, this situation occurred in all constituencies, as a result of which no vote was held in the entire commune and mandates were awarded without voting.
- 3 This type of situation concerned as many as 29 districts (Łaski, Aleksandrowski, Rypiński, Jaworski, Legnica, Janowski, Krasnostawski, Łęczyński, Łukowski, Opole, Gorzów, Międzyrzeczki, Żagań, Zielona Góra, Gorlicki, Siedlce, Sokołów, Wołomin, Krapkowicki, Brzozowski, Lubaczów, Sanok, Grajewski, Tczew, Nidzicki, Konin, Leszczyński, Słupca, Turek) and 3 provinces (Lublin, Łódź, Świętokrzyskie).

- 4 Theoretical findings regarding the Shapley-Shubik power index were the subject of considerations presented in one of the earlier texts devoted to the impact of changes in the electoral system on the political position of presidential parties in communes in Poland by the co-author of this paper (Onasz, 2022, pp. 85–87). For this reason, the findings presented here, due to their fundamental nature and basic assumptions that are difficult to change, are based directly on this earlier text, in some parts literally.
- 5 It should be emphasized that in certain fragments of part four of this paper (Analysis), the presented findings also refer to earlier text devoted to the impact of changes in the electoral system on the political position of presidential parties in communes in Poland by one of the paper co-authors. The reference consists mainly in the presentation of the findings in the form of tables, figures and box-figures (Onasz, 2022, pp. 87–92).
- 6 This may mean obtaining representation only by 3 parties, but also by a larger number of them, provided that only 3 of them obtain a position other than an unimportant player. The division of seats: {13: 7, 7, 7, 2, 2} for which $\varphi = \{0,333; 0,333; 0,333; 0; 0\}$ is an example.
- 7 Of these, in 31 cases in the council 3 parties were represented, in 37 cases 4 parties, in 14 cases 5 parties and in 6 cases 6 parties.
- 8 The distribution of results is not consistent with the normal distribution, what is more - some of the ranges remain empty: (0,500, 0,550], (0,650, 0,950] (which in practice is equivalent to the range (0,650, 0,999]). The lack of indications for the second range in particular should not be surprising, considering the specificity of the coefficient used. The possible values of φ depend on the number of players and the distribution of shares between them. In practice, in the 2018 district council elections, the number of groups that obtained seats in a given district council (i.e. the number of players) ranged from 2 to 8, with councils with 4 to 6 players dominating (over 75%). The number of players mechanically limits the maximum possible player power, excluding the dictator position. The odd number of seats in each council (no ties) is another limiting factor. The highest possible power index value lower than 1 in a 4-player game with an odd number of shares and a simple majority requirement is 0.500. For the remaining numbers of players, respectively: 2: 0,000; 3: 0,333; 5: 0,600; 6: 0,667; 7: 0,715; 8: 0,750. Taking this into account, obtaining a power index value in the range (0,75; 1) under the conditions of these elections was not at all possible. Of course, the empty range is wider: (0,650;1), but obtaining a value from this range requires the participation of at least 6 players, and there were only 54 such situations in these elections (17,20%), with games with 6 players dominating in this group. 7 or 8 groups appeared in only 12 cases (3,82%). It should be remembered that obtaining the highest possible value of power, excluding the dictator position, requires a special balance of power in the council.
- 9 Only the value of the 1st quartile is similar in all types and subtypes of units. The differences between districts and other types of units are most clearly visualized by the range of 50% of the middle observations (the space between the 1st and 3rd quartiles) - despite similar values of the 1st quartile, only in the case of districts the value of the 3rd quartile is only 0,500, while in the remaining groups it reaches a value close to the maximum (MNPP) or the maximum (other subtypes of communes and provinces). For none of the other types and subtypes of local government units did any of the statistically significant values take a value lower than for districts. This indicates a significantly lower position of the staroste's party compared to the leading parties in the remaining units, in particular compared to the smallest communes where the position of the presidential party is the strongest.
- 10 The limitation of the number of terms of office of commune heads/mayors/city presidents to two is a separate issue. The change was introduced by the legislator in 2018. Due to the fact that the limitation will come into force in 2029, it does not affect the situation in local arenas analyzed by the authors.
- 11 This should be treated as a limitation of this phenomenon in time. It is worth mentioning that in 2014 this phenomenon affected every tenth commune.
- 12 Not without significance here is the frequency of obtaining an independent majority (dictator's position) by leading parties in small communes and provinces, which was analyzed in one of the previous points.

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

Tomáš Cirhan, Mattia Collini²

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.

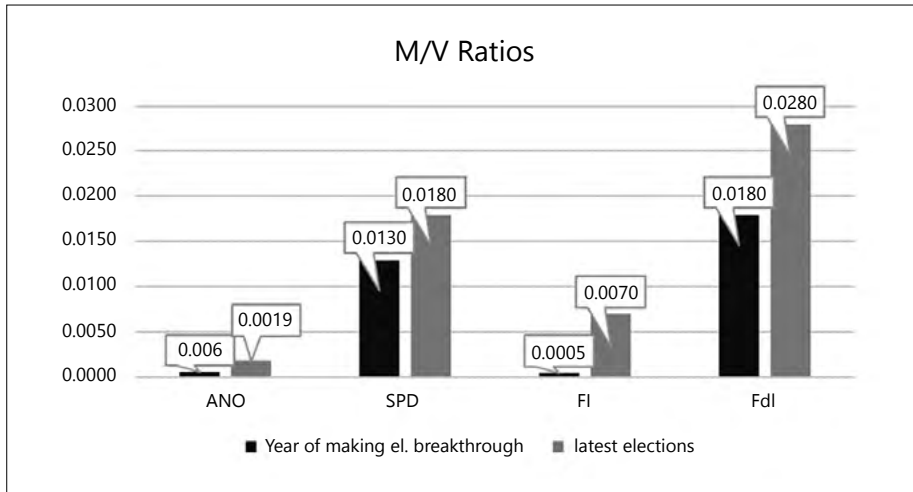
SPD relies on a significantly centralised hierarchical structure of organisation with nearly all decisions made in a top-down manner by the Executive Com-

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).

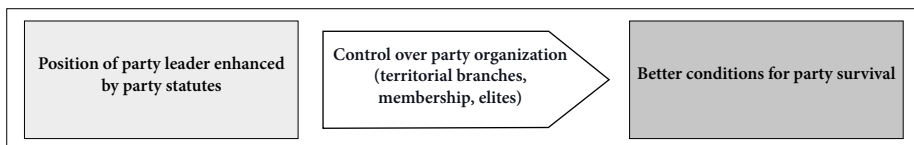
The corporate-party structures fusion in ANO and FI props party leaders' positions in their parties. The loyal financially-dependent employees from their companies are less likely to rebel against the leadership, which greatly enhances these parties' cohesion and stability. Together with control over 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:

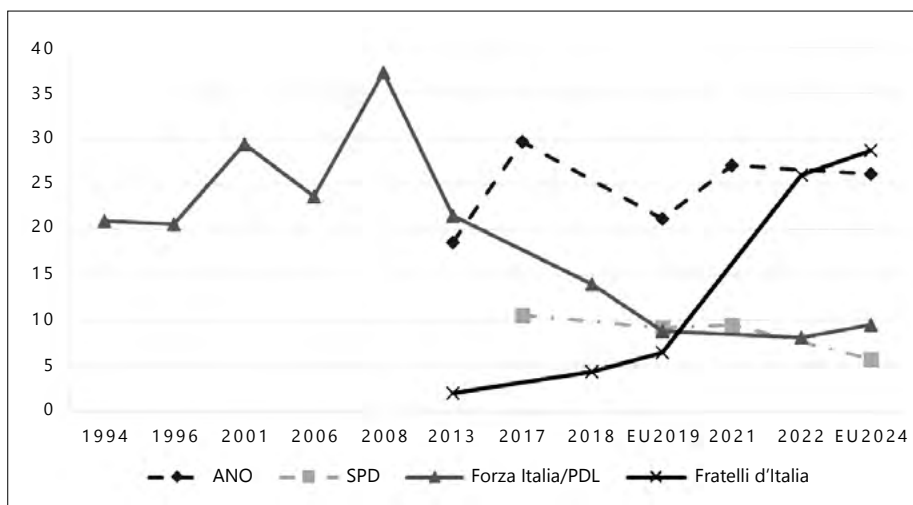
Appendix 1: Overview of some of the most relevant entrepreneurial challenger parties⁶ in CEE and Western Europe (as of 2023)

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 Prestigiacomo	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.

Kevin Vallier:

All the Kingdoms of the World (On Radical Religious Alternatives to Liberalism)

New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2023, 320 pages.

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Let me start with a showbiz story. At the end of October 2024, a Czech tabloid reported on the civil court case involving a famous Czech, Slovakia-born top model Taťána Kuchařová (Miss World 2006) and her former husband Ondřej Brzobohatý, a well-known Czech actor. Seemingly, there is nothing of scholarly interest in this case, focused on the ‘airing of dirty laundry’ from the ex-couple’s private lives. However, one notable detail emerged. The model had chosen Ronald Němec to represent her, an attorney who had previously made headlines in Czech public life for representing then-Archbishop of Prague, Cardinal Dominik Duka.

In 2022, the Czech Constitutional Court dismissed the complaint brought

by Cardinal Duka and Němec, who had demanded an apology from two theatres in Brno. They claimed a violation of their personal rights due to the staging of two controversial plays at a theatre festival, even though the Archbishop himself had not seen the performances but still found them offensive. The court ruled against Němec and his client, citing freedom of speech and artistic expression. According to the Constitutional Court, judges should not act as guardians of morality, as the plaintiffs seemed to expect.¹ Let’s return to the model’s case: According to the tabloid, her attorney Němec made quite an impression in court with his demeanour. He reportedly came across as very self-assured, even arrogant, frequently asserting the primacy of

ecclesiastical (i.e. canon) law over other laws, which, as the article's author Lukáš Vltavský remarked, is 'quite bold in a country with one of the highest atheist populations in the world. And frankly, quite irritating'. Němec went further, openly questioning the credibility of the opposing lawyer, Robert Vladyka, saying, 'You're not credible to us; you're not a Catholic.' After the hearing, Němec clarified his statement to the tabloid press: 'I didn't mean it disrespectfully. I just wanted to point out that, from the perspective of canon law, he doesn't meet all the qualifications required for the role, which, among other things, includes being baptized.'²

This rather bizarre Central European case seems like a fitting introduction to this review of the recent book by political theorist Kevin Vallier, which addresses this trend in political and legal theory—a trend that can broadly be described as Catholic integralism. In a nutshell, as Vallier aptly describes, integralism is based on the idea that '[t]he church has the right to rule the baptized, the state has the right to govern its citizens, and the church has the right to direct the state in a confined range of cases. (...) Whatever form the state takes, an integralist regime is one where the state submits to the church. (...) Such submission also implies a certain degree of integration between church and state; their constitutions, laws, and procedures aim at a certain harmony. Society is thus dually governed: it has a governing dyarchy. The ideal integralist government is a successful dyarchy. Church and state effectively advance their aspects of the common good'

(p. 34). 'Integralism's moral standard is the whole common good: natural and supernatural, temporal and eternal, earthly and heavenly' (p. 33). 'Integralists think that governments should reinforce some conciliar legislation and papal decretals. They affirm the church's supreme legal authority, and they would make such authority palpable for entire societies' (p. 43).

The champion of this movement, especially within American jurisprudence, is Harvard law professor Adrian Vermeule, a Catholic convert who has coined the term 'common good constitutionalism' (Vermeule, 2022), known not only for his admiration of Carl Schmitt's ideas but also for his habit of blocking dissenters on the social network X – assuming he's active there and not taking one of his regular breaks. Vallier briefly mentions Vermeule within the first few pages of his book, placing him within the broader integralist family.

As the description of this latest intellectual movement suggests, Catholic integralism can be seen as a radical, reactionary response to postmodernism and the recently dominant social liberalism. It is a continuation of the dream of 'unity between throne and altar', a notion that has been present in some marginal Catholic conservative circles for several years now, as I have pointed out elsewhere (Sekerák, 2015). Not long ago, these ideas defended by a minority of reactionary thinkers could have been dismissed with an ironic smile or brushed aside with a wave of the hand as 'political Catholicism is, *ipso facto*, dependent on social support; in democratic states, its goals could hardly be

realized without such backing from society' (Šabatka, 2009, p. 74). However, such dismissal is no longer an option, given that integralism is a rising ideological current – not only in American intellectual circles, as demonstrated by the unusual, though illustrative, Czech case mentioned at the beginning of this review.

Integralists, Vermeule included, are rightfully self-confident. Euro-Atlantic societies seem weary – if not outright disillusioned – with the freedoms and opportunities liberal democracy offers, particularly with what some call the 'ideology of human-rightism' (Míčka, 2017; David, 2020) or 'human rights fundamentalism' (Kinley, 2007).³ As a result, society is reaching for various alternatives. Christian – or, more specifically, Catholic – integralism is one of them, alongside post-liberalism and national conservatism (itself strongly rooted in religious traditions). And let's be honest – it's one of the more bizarre options. Integralists dream of a social and political order not far removed from medieval Christianity, which, as Rawls (1996, xxiii) aptly noted, 'was an expansionist religion of conversion that recognized no territorial limits to its authority short of the world as a whole'. Their goal, as Vallier reminds us, 'is not gradualism but counterrevolution' (p. 131) or, differently put, it is 'victory, not compromise' (p. 17). Paradoxically, they strive to pursue such a vision despite the fact that 'Catholicism has 5,600 bishops from nations and cultures worldwide, and none openly affirms integralism. No pope has embraced integralism since Pius X' (p. 140).

In his book, Vallier takes integralist arguments seriously, engaging with them thoughtfully and in great depth, including those related to the Church-authorized state assisting the (particular) Catholic Church and its hierarchs 'by devising coercive policies' (p. 98). Although he admits at the beginning of the second chapter that he is not Catholic but sympathetic to Orthodox Christianity, Vallier demonstrates an impressive command of Catholic intellectual traditions. His knowledge of ecclesial history and canon law is both breathtaking and admirable – qualities essential to exploring a movement grounded in Catholic doctrine, even if it selectively picks the aspects that suit its purposes. Since this review is published in the *Czech Journal of Political Science* and opened with a story from the Czech context, I would like to highlight that Vallier's book also includes several references to Jan Hus.

For many of its proponents, 'integralism may describe a feasible ideal', as Vallier correctly notes (p. 92), however unreasonable or even unacceptable this may seem to those who do not support it. While I agree with most of Vallier's arguments and fully sympathize with his appeal in the epilogue for 'a self-critical and tolerant liberalism that welcomes the formation of broad political coalitions' and 'collaboration between the liberal Right and Left' (p. 274), I will now take issue with some of his claims and even play the role of *advocatus diaboli* where needed. This may help us to reflect more deeply on the case of integralism and its proponents.

As mentioned above, the integralist state is envisioned as a 'prolonged', se-

cular arm⁴ of the local Church. Let me emphasize this aspect of locality or particularity, as it is not only highly improbable but also legally impossible to create a universal integralist state or to expect that such an idea would be globally embraced or even endorsed by the papacy. While it is conceivable that some future popes might sympathize with this idea, it remains unlikely.⁵ By particularity, I mean individual churches, i.e. those ‘in which and from which the one and only Catholic Church exists, are first of all dioceses, to which, unless it is otherwise evident, are likened a territorial prelature and territorial abbacy, an apostolic vicariate and an apostolic prefecture, and an apostolic administration erected in a stable manner’, as described in Can. 368 of the *Code of Canon Law* (in Latin, *Codex Iuris Canonici*; hereinafter, CIC).

In an integralist regime, a dyarchic model of Church-state relations is applied, as noted earlier. Vallier suggests that ‘[d]yarchies cannot dispel private judgment. Citizens must still use private judgment to decide whether to obey the law in cases where it seems to require sin’ (p. 190). However, if I understand the model correctly, it assumes the moral superiority of the Church and the primacy of the CIC. It is difficult to imagine that the Church would ever compel the state’s citizens to sin in any way.⁶ But even if the state were to do so – given that those who govern are themselves sinful and fallible, and thus capable of producing sinful laws – the CIC would still take precedence over any secular law. This prioritization could effectively prevent both morally wrongful actions and the dilemma for citizens regarding

whether to obey a law that may lead them to sin. This brings us to the idea that something like judicial review can exist in integralist regimes. This could presuppose that secular laws must be compatible with the CIC, and that canonical tribunals can pursue this in the same way constitutional (or supreme) courts do in many democratic countries.

In any case, let us remind that in the past there were numerous conflicts between religious and secular authority, such as the Investiture Contest, the creation of the Avignon papacy, and the English Reformation, as Vallier enumerates them (p. 185). It should be remarked that these situations have placed not only individuals but entire nations in a rather tricky moral dilemma regarding which authority takes precedence. It is not unlikely that the dyarchic model in an integralist regime could provoke similar situations once again.

Although Vallier effectively questions integralists and their ideas, he presupposes that they ‘are loyal to the Catholic Church alone’ (p. 136). I am somewhat sceptical about that. Let’s imagine that a strongly liberal pope is elected who supports not only institutional but also social liberalism; some of his views might even be labelled ‘woke’. I assume integralists could not only oppose such a pope but also challenge his authority and legitimacy, much as some ‘Rad-Trads’ (i.e., radical traditionalists) do today with Pope Francis. Furthermore – and this is even more significant – no post-Vatican II Catholic can sincerely adhere to integralist principles without abandoning a substantial part of the Church’s teaching, which do not fa-

your any integralist political schemes. I think even Vallier himself is aware of this when he refers to the integralist fidelity to Church teaching as ‘purported’ (p. 215). If integralists were to at some point distance themselves from loyalty to the Church and its Supreme Pontiff, they could endanger their own salvation. They would find themselves in a paradoxical situation: they would respect the state authorities of the integralist regime, but parallelly question the ecclesiastical ones, at least some of them. Let us remind that in *Lumen gentium* Council Fathers declared that ‘the Church, now sojourning on earth as an exile, is necessary for salvation. (...) Whosoever, therefore, knowing that the Catholic Church was made necessary by Christ, would refuse to enter or to remain in it, could not be saved’ (para. 14). By questioning papal authority, a Catholic effectively distances herself from the ecclesial community, even though she formally remains in the Church and has not been excommunicated.

Anyway, the above-cited statement has nothing to do with any political regime. It concerns only the issue of salvation, an area in which the state is not expected to intervene. Any decision related to personal salvation is entrusted to the individual and depends on his/her earthly deeds. Furthermore, the Fathers teach elsewhere that ‘[t]he Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person. The Church and the political community in their own fields

are autonomous and independent from each other’ (*Gaudium et spes*, para. 76). Obviously, the dyarchic model proposed by integralists can hardly be endorsed by the Church.

Thus, I really wonder whether an integralist Catholic truly aligns her conscience with official Catholic teaching in this regard. It should be added, though, that she may still legitimately oppose political liberalism, her archenemy, even invoking certain post-conciliar statements critical of liberalism, such as the one by St. Paul VI in his apostolic letter *Octogesima Adveniens*, where he noted that ‘we are witnessing a renewal of the liberal ideology. This current assert itself both in the name of economic efficiency, and for the defense of the individual against the increasingly overwhelming hold of organizations, and as a reaction against the totalitarian tendencies of political powers. Certainly, personal initiative must be maintained and developed. But do not Christians who take this path tend to idealize liberalism in their turn, making it a proclamation in favour of freedom? They would like a new model, more adapted to present-day conditions, while easily forgetting that *at the very root of philosophical liberalism is an erroneous affirmation of the autonomy of the individual in his activity, his motivation and the exercise of his liberty*. Hence, the liberal ideology likewise calls for careful discernment on their part’ (para. 35, italics added).

When criticizing integralist assumptions, Vallier occasionally resorts to arguments that are not always convincing or logically sound. For example, he argues that ‘[o]nce the state learns that

Catholicism is the true religion, it faces trade-offs. It must choose between building hospitals and establishing inquisitorial courts. In some cases, it chooses health. In others, it chooses the true religion' (p. 111). In my view, this presents a false dichotomy. An integral Catholic state would likely indeed place great emphasis on enforcing norms among its baptized Catholic members (as Vallier analyzes in depth elsewhere), but the form of such enforcement can vary. It should certainly avoid physical coercion or punishment, as that would contradict the Church's moral teachings. However, adhering to religious norms, including dogma, does not mean abandoning its social role, especially considering that such a state would likely apply Catholic Social Doctrine in its social policies – a point with which not only integralists but many other Catholics would likely agree.

This pertains also to another point. Vallier assumes that integralist states will have to sacrifice or at least reduce their economic growth. 'A nonintegralist state will grow far wealthier than the integralist order within a century. The nonintegralist order can better fight poverty and guarantee healthcare. The stabilization costs to integralism include the opportunity costs of the regime's other priorities', he claims (p. 197). In my opinion, this is a mistaken prediction. Let us assume that the integralist regime will conscientiously adhere to Catholic Social Doctrine, that its citizens will be relatively consistent moral agents preferring honesty and integrity in economic interactions, and that the main principles of business ethics will

be thoroughly applied and enforced by the state. In such a case, it is reasonable to expect that integralist regimes would be competitive enough with their non-integralist counterparts, and perhaps even more economically efficient, thereby better contributing to the well-being of their citizens.

In the above-mentioned dichotomy, Vallier mentions the alleged need to establish inquisitorial courts. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that an integralist state would establish such tribunals or anything similar. Even the Vatican City State, which is not only a Catholic state *par excellence* but also an elected absolute monarchy, has no such thing as an inquisitorial court. Its own judicial system is nothing of the sort. Similarly, the judicial system of the Roman Curia, represented by the Apostolic Penitentiary, the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura, and the Tribunal of the Roman Rota, bears no resemblance to anything of that nature.

Vallier assumes that an integralist regime could function democratically. He also points out that '[i]f nonintegralists can vote and run for office, integralist democracies will destabilize. Voters may oppose integralist arrangements on many grounds. They will push their leaders to shed integralist constraints, even constitutional limitations. Anticipating democratic machinations, some integralists recommend restricting voting rights to Catholics' (p. 185). If I were an integralist theorist, I would propose an even stricter restriction on voting rights, specifically tying this right to active sacramental life, particularly regular participation in the Sacrament

of Penance and the Eucharist. Of course, this would apply only if a believer were mentally capable of doing so. However, I assume that a believer who is mentally incapable of receiving the Sacrament of Penance would hardly be able to exercise her franchise. Naturally, every regime maintains its stability, and it does so through various measures. In an integralist regime, this seems to be a conceivable condition for the exercise of voting rights. Moreover, it would have a strong motivational aspect for non-Catholics: those who wish to fully benefit from democracy would have to become Catholics through baptism and live a regular sacramental life. This would ensure their path to salvation, which would hold immeasurably greater significance for their lives than merely participating in democratic governance.

As a self-appointed devil's advocate, I feel obliged to defend at least one other point Vallier criticizes within an integralist theoretical scheme – namely, the notion of absolute Catholic obedience to canon law regardless of the behaviour of prelates. Vallier deems this stance 'perverse' (p. 220). I fully understand the author's disgust or outrage, but this has nothing to do with integralist ideas as such. It is an orthodox Catholic principle to align with Church teaching and to respect both its norms and hierarchical leaders. This has been reiterated many times in conciliar and post-conciliar documents. For example, *Lumen gentium* states that '[b]ishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak

in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent' (para. 25).

Even the CIC explicitly states that '[c]onscious of their own responsibility, the Christian faithful are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors, inasmuch as they represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church' (can. 212). This obligation, naturally, extends to the *Code of Canon Law* itself, as it has been promulgated by the Supreme Pontiff and amended by his legitimate successors. Similarly, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* reinforces this obligation, teaching that the faithful 'have the duty of observing the constitutions and decrees conveyed by the legitimate authority of the Church. Even if they concern disciplinary matters, these determinations call for docility in charity' (para. 2037).

St. John Paul II is even more emphatic when it comes to Catholics' respect for their pastors and alignment with the Church's teachings: 'While exchanges and conflicts of opinion may constitute normal expressions of public life in a representative democracy, moral teaching certainly cannot depend simply upon respect for a process: indeed, it is in no way established by following the rules and deliberative procedures typical of a democracy. *Dissent*, in the form of carefully orchestrated protests and polemics carried on in the media, is opposed to ecclesial communion and to a correct understanding of the hierarchical constitution of the People of God. Opposition to the teaching of the Church's Pastors cannot be seen as a legitimate

expression either of Christian freedom or of the diversity of the Spirit's gifts. When this happens, the Church's Pastors have the duty to act in conformity with their apostolic mission, insisting that *the right of the faithful* to receive Catholic doctrine in its purity and integrity must always be respected' (*Veritatis splendor*, para. 113; italics in original). One could object that such a view should be read in the historical context in which the Pope felt obliged to defend the Church's (and his own) authority against numerous public dissenters from within. It remains, however, a valid teaching of the Church, even though it was not pronounced *ex cathedra*.

Vallier concludes his book with an illuminating chapter on Confucianism and Islam, or more accurately, some of their quasi-integralist currents. Let me confess that it taught me a lot. Although valuable for the information provided, this chapter seems more like a mandatory supplement, intended to make the entire text better align with its title. In fact, the core focus is on Catholicism, where the author's expertise is undoubtedly strong.

What I consider to be at least an idealistic or romantic notion is the author's proposal presented to integralists in the book's epilogue. Vallier calls for the creation of small integralist republics modelled after the Monastic Republic of Mount Athos. I am not sure whether such a compromise would satisfy the integralists, although I understand the author's motives that led him to formu-

late it, albeit only very briefly outlined. After all, integralists are integralists not only because they want to embrace their (Catholic) faith in an integral way but also because they want to subjugate the state to ecclesiastical norms in a complex, integral manner. They have set out to change the current liberal-democratic regime according to their vision and will do whatever it takes to achieve that. They do not aspire to become a marginalized group, a 'small republic' excluded from the rest of the population, to which – in the best case – people will come to observe like animals in a zoo.

Having begun this review essay with a quote from Czech tabloid press, allow me to conclude with cite one of the Czech's obscure Catholic websites, titled – and here comes the surprise – Integral Catholics. In the 'About Us' section (last updated August 9, 2014), one can read: 'Integral Catholics view all issues – theological, moral, political, social, and legal – through the lens of the Church's tradition, which transmits the truths revealed by God – Catholic faith. 'Without faith, it is impossible to please God' (Heb 11:6), therefore the integrity of faith is so important. [...] The state can impose order through repression, surveillance, and punishment for crimes (if they are discovered), or through the propaganda of good (but how can it know what is good when it denies the existence of an objective moral order?). One thing is certain: the less virtuous people are, the more totalitarian the state must be to maintain order'.? That's a bit scary, isn't it?

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- 1 https://www.christnet.eu/zpravy/31231/kardinal_duka_a_pravnik_nemec_nevysoudili_omluvu_od_divadel_us_stiznost_zamitl.url
- 2 <https://www.super.cz/clanek/celebrity-myten-soud-vyhrajeme-chlubil-se-cirkevni-pravnik-kucharove-advokata-brzobohateho-pote-urazil-protoze-neni-katolik-1509271>
- 3 One of the most prominent political critics of the alleged 'human-rightism' is former Czech President Václav Klaus. In one of his numerous public speeches, he noted: 'I feared – but insufficiently – the gradual shifting away from civil rights to human rights. I did not see the power of the ideology of human-rightism and did not anticipate the consequences of it. Human-rightism has nothing in common with practical issues of individual freedom and free political discourse. It is about entitlements, claims, positive discrimination and political correctness'. <https://www.klaus.cz/clanky/3209>
- 4 I adopt this term from Vallier himself, as I deem it a well-suited and clear expression of the state's role under an integralist political regime.
- 5 Moreover, as Vallier emphasizes, '[t]he college of cardinals might elect an integralist pope, but future popes may disagree' (p. 197). This illustrates not only the papal power to (re)shape the overall course of the Church and even its doctrine (in some cases), but also that integralists, in pursuing their vision, can hardly rely on Rome – at least in the long term.
- 6 Of course, there have been instances in history where Church authority has been involved in policies or actions that could be considered morally dubious (e.g., the Inquisition, forced conversions, etc.). This does not necessarily invalidate the Church's moral authority, but we should consider this historical context to avoid overgeneralizing about the Church's infallibility or its inability to err.
- 7 <https://www.ikatolici.cz/integralni-katolici/>