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The role of party organization in the electoral success of anti-establishment parties: ANO in the Czech Republic

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Citation

Cirhan, T. (2021, May 12). *The role of party organization in the electoral success of anti-establishment parties: ANO in the Czech Republic*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3161383>

Version: Publisher's Version

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Issue date: 2021-05-12

Abstract

The majority of party systems in European democracies witness a relatively recent phenomenon of new anti-establishment parties electorally succeeding at the expense of their established counterparts. Many of such parties are formed and led by political entrepreneurs. This dissertation deals with the relationship between the electoral success of anti-establishment parties and their party organization. Currently, these parties successfully enter most party systems in Europe. The majority of these newcomers disintegrate quickly after their initial electoral breakthrough. However, some do not. The chief objective of this dissertation is to find the evidence demonstrating which party organizational features matter for the electoral success of these parties. To achieve this goal, firstly, a single case-study of new Czech anti-establishment party called ANO takes place, analysing three of its party organizational aspects (local party organization, party membership and the party elite). Secondly, a comparative analysis of ANO with three other parties – Austrian TS, Slovak OĽaNO and Italian FI takes place.

The findings indicate that party stability, cohesion and legitimacy (stemming from the controllable approach towards local party organization, party membership and the party elite) facilitate the electoral success of the considered anti-establishment parties. This strategy includes limiting the autonomy of local branches, implementing restrictions on traditional individual membership, and the recruitment of professionally-linked party elite. The above party organizational setup is achieved partially via the existence and operation of a corporate network of individuals professionally dependent on the party leader's business. The anti-establishment party built in the way suggested above seems to be better equipped to react to the scandals and to manage these scandals more effectively to avoid a negative impact on its public image. Such an ability to attain control over the three aspects of party organization seems to help these parties to avoid the negative consequences of their scandals. It translates into parties' positive public image as trustworthy and unified entities; a state that seems to be welcomed and rewarded by their voters in elections.

Keywords: anti-establishment party, political entrepreneurs, party organisation, party elite, party membership, local party organisation, electoral success