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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>

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Issue date: 2021-05-12

CHAPTER 2 Local party organization

2.1. Introduction

This chapter investigates what goes on at the local level of ANO's party organization to understand whether this party organizational feature helps the party electorally. First, the literature is reviewed, and the main general theoretical concepts in the area are discussed. Then, the chapter continues with the debate about methodology and finally, with the analysis of the empirical evidence. The previous introducing Chapter 1 revealed that this dissertation investigates the role of three aspects of party organization in the electoral success of ANO. This chapter explores what the role of one of these aspects - the local branches is. There are various aspects of the local party organization. However, for the purposes of this research, a local party organization is defined as a combination of two factors – *local organizational density* and *local organizational autonomy* (refer to Figure 2.1 for their conceptualisation). Density refers to the extensiveness of the party's presence, that is the size of the local party organization. This variable is operationalized by mapping the number of local branches by region, to conduct a comparable regional analysis. Local organizational autonomy refers to the rights of local branches to make decisions at their constituency level. The more autonomous the local organization, the more decisions it can make itself. Autonomy is operationalised by looking at the local branches' rights concerning the process of candidate selection. Both of these aspects of local party organization are treated theoretically and empirically in separate sub-sections.

Scholars' views on the role of local party organization (in particular its density) in facilitating the electoral success are divided across the discipline, despite the continuous debate in the political science literature. Several authors, such as Katz (2002) or Szczerbiak (1999), perceive the role of densely-built local party organization in facilitating better electoral outcomes as insignificant. This view is in contrast with Frendreis, Gibson and Vertz (1990), Pimlott (1973), Hopkin and Paolucci (1999), Norris and Lovenduski (1995), Coleman (1996) or Tavits (2013). These authors believe that densely-built local party organizational structure matters for the electoral success of parties because it provides parties with the capacity to mobilise voters in the long-term better. The first group of scholars, such as Szczerbiak (1999), studying parties in post-communist countries, noted that the impact of local organizations' density on the electoral success of parties is minimal. Because of that, a low priority is said to

be assigned by parties to building local structures, and a centralized pattern of decision-making and a high level of autonomy over local decisions is given to the national party leadership as a result. On the contrary, for the latter authors, the densely-built local party organization is seen as electorally beneficial, due to its ability to forge connections with the local electorate. The density of the local organizational network is seen as being associated with parties' capacity to create more meaningful ties locally via conducting active local campaigns and events, which is likely to reflect positively in their long-term electoral success (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999; Coleman 1996; Tavits 2013; Scarrow 2007). According to these authors, parties invest in their local organizational presence to create such closer connections with the potential electorate at the local level. This chapter explores which of these theoretical views on the local branches' role in the electoral success is more relevant for ANO. The next section discusses both of the above-mentioned theoretical views in more detail.

2.2. The Role of Local Party Organization in the Electoral Success

Refer to Figure 2.1, which illustrates the theoretical relationships between density and autonomy of local branches and electoral success. This section starts with the two mentioned theoretical views concerning the electoral role of local organizational density. The first view sees densely-built local presence as insignificant in the process of achieving electoral success, which is said to explain the low motivation of new parties to invest in its cultivation. According to Szczerbiak (1999), it leads to a situation, where new parties in the post-communist region are more likely to develop along the lines of the catch-all party (Kirchheimer 1966), the electoral-professional party (Panebianco 1988; Mair and van Biezen 2001) or the cartel party (Katz and Mair 1992; 1994; 1995). Such party organizational models do not, in theory, emphasise the importance of densely-built local organizational structure. In these types of parties, the dense local party organization is not perceived necessarily as an electoral resource, nor are such parties investing in its cultivation. Such a strategy is even regarded as an organizational burden by these parties because local organizational network built that way is not easily controllable by parties. The mass parties with large locally spread party organization have been gradually replaced by the types of parties mentioned above, that are intentionally built only to fulfil one function - to succeed in elections. It transforms them into so-called 'public utilities' (Van Biezen 2003). Such parties have no roots in society and only focus on campaigning or holding of public office.

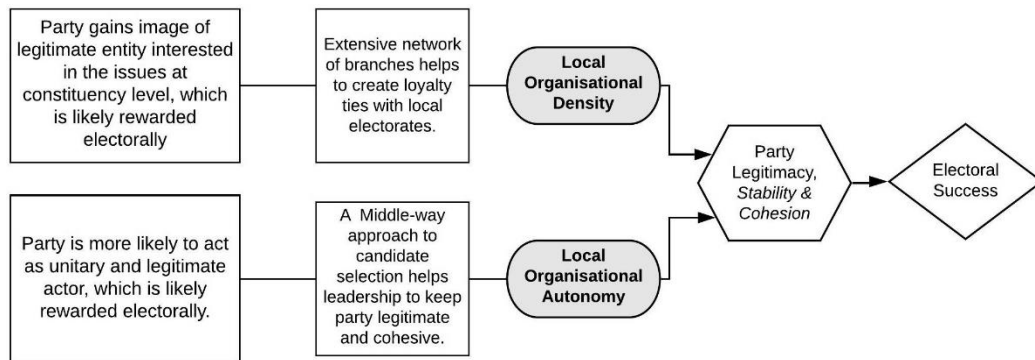
The importance of local party organization for parties is also said to diminish over time. It is the case due to “anti-party trends, such as declining partisanship of the electorate, popularization of candidate selection, the appearance of amateurism among party activists, and the separation of candidate campaigns from local organizations” (Gibson, Cotter and Bibby 1983, 217). These authors perceived that the modern approach to campaigning, especially the growing use of mass media and internet technologies have taken over the functions previously fulfilled by the network of local branches. These included responsibilities like the provision of information to potential voters and setting up communication channels locally between the party and the electorate, which could forge voter loyalty (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002). The changes mentioned above, both internal and external, are seen to alternate the role that local branches may serve in helping to facilitate electoral success. The above authors downplay the role that densely-built local branches may play in achieving electoral success. The question is if parties themselves also downplay their role and do not build them. Investigating the development of local party organizational presence of ANO since the establishment of the party will help to answer this question.

Although the above theory suggests that parties do not necessarily need densely-built local party organization, there are also many scholars, who argue the opposite. These authors empirically support the view that parties care about local branches’ cultivation (Spirova 2007) and local branches matter electorally (Gherghina 2012). Local branches are said to still matter in the contemporary online-dominated world, because they remain relevant in democratic politics as a space connecting localities with political processes (Sadioglu and Dede 2016; Loughlin, Hendriks and Lidström 2012; Baldersheim 2018; Kostelecký 2002; Ram 2003). This line of thought sees the density of local party organizational structure as an electorally beneficial asset for parties because it should provide the resources locally to connect with voters more effectively during elections. Local branches are said to function as effective communicators of the party's central organization's campaign message (Coleman 1996). The local organizational density should also increase the local visibility of the party, sending a message to the local electorate, that the party exists in their area and cares about them and their local issues (Tavits 2013). In this way, as explained in greater detail in the introductory Chapter 1, the density of local party organization is said to boost party legitimacy. A densely-built network of local branches should allow local voters to approach the party with their problems and ideas (Shin 2001), and help parties to get involved in local politics. As such, it allows them

to test out new campaign tactics, work with coalition partners and train new candidates for national elections without risking more costly failures from incompetence and coalition debacles in high-stake national politics (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Tavits 2013). Being more densely organizationally present at the local level enhances the party's visibility and legitimacy. As a reward, voters are said to attach long-term loyalty to those parties that show more consideration of their daily problems at the local level. Local organizational density, in theory, relates to the electoral success, because the strong and consistent ties with voters at local level allow parties to rely on stable shares of votes irrespective of changes at the national level. The locally densely-spread parties with numerous branches should take advantage of having their personal connections with local knowledge and contacts in the area, using them to mobilise voters more effectively than parties lacking such a local network. Parties with densely-built local presence should electorally benefit from local branches organizing independent electorally-relevant activities, and party-themed events, such as locally-based rallies or party meetings for the public (Freundreis, Gibson and Vertz 1990; Schlesinger 1966; 1991). The mere density of local organization mirrors in the increased opportunities for such locally-based activities (Foster 1982).

As the above-reviewed literature yields, there are two theoretical views on the role of local branches' density in facilitating electoral gains. However, there are authors sceptical about the electoral relevance of densely-built local party organizational structure, the research community by large continues to conduct empirical studies focusing on the relationship between these classic indicators, which is the case of this research as well. It is expected that the local organizational density should support the electoral performance of the party by increasing visibility, enhancing its communicational capabilities, and should help to forge ties with the local electorate. Being more connected with the local voters is crucial for the image of the party as a legitimate entity. As mentioned in the introducing Chapter 1, party's ability to present itself as a legitimate entity has, in turn, positive impact on electoral outcomes, because voters are more likely to support a party that is visible and known to them, and communicates to them locally.

Figure 2.1 Local Party Organization and Electoral Success



The second aspect of local party organization discussed theoretically in this section is local organizational autonomy. The distribution of power within parties is not a permanent state; it changes over time. It depends on changes in the party statutes, personal relations between party elites, electoral outcomes of the party, and other factors. The balance of power and autonomy of different organizational levels within the party may continuously shift over time between the national party and locally-based organizations (Hanham 1956). Local organizational autonomy may be demonstrated on many factors. Local branches may struggle to exercise control over various aspects of the party's operation. These may include the decisions related to the recruitment of new members, selecting candidates before elections, campaign strategies, party program, coalition agreements, party financing, or personnel and leadership choices. The empirical analysis in this chapter will focus solely on the process of candidate selection because it is most closely relatable to the electoral performance of parties. The freedom to select candidates is one of the most contested and most publicly visible aspects, in which local branches may have the autonomy to make their own decisions (Szczerbiak 1999). It sends a message to voters that their problems are addressed by local candidates recruited among them in their local area, with whom they may identify (Hennl 2014). Apart from selecting candidates, voters do not necessarily need to have any interest in the degree of local branches' autonomy. Such internal party affairs may be visible to party activists, but far less to the voters. When referring to local branches' autonomy, the process of candidate selection is chiefly meant. Like in the case of local organizational density, the theoretical views on the role of local branches' autonomy in facilitating electoral success also differ. The role of local organizational autonomy in the electoral outcomes of parties can be viewed as double-edged. There is a thin line when

it comes to providing or limiting the autonomy of local branches by parties, that is between decentralisation or centralisation of decision-making within the party. There are two major views on these two processes. The former may negatively affect the capabilities of local branches to connect with local voters, while the latter may negatively impact the cohesion within the party and thus endangers its organizational stability. As a result, parties should ideally strive for a balance between the two, as explained in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Regarding the first view, some scholars associate greater autonomy in the hands of local branches with the electoral success of parties positively (Gherghina 2012; Ellinas and Lamprianou 2016). The locally managed candidate selection should help parties electorally because the local electorate is more likely to be familiar with candidates nominated at the constituency level. Local candidates are also expected to know the issues facing the local voters more personally and have a similar experience as their potential voters. Only autonomous local branches can mirror citizens' day-to-day issues into policy issues because their locally selected candidates know them. As such, the autonomy of local organizations should help parties to reach relevant decisions locally, which should provide the basis for a strong connection with the local electorate. Directly associated with this, the electoral importance of autonomous local organizations is based on these parties' actual local activities both the range and scope of activities the party undertakes at the local level and their ability to do so autonomously (Ellinas and Lamprianou 2016). The more freedom the local and regional branches have, the more activities they can get involved in, and the more likely they should succeed in mobilizing voters via their contacts and networks. Locally-known figures with their networks, having a free hand over managing their activities, should be better equipped to get the sympathy of the locals. Any step towards centralizing decision-making processes could diminish the work of locally-based organizations; it can potentially harm parties electorally by leading to dealignment of citizens from such parties as a result (Ellinas and Lamprianou 2016). To live up to their full potential local branches need political power in the form of autonomy. Availability of autonomy helps them to create a linkage with the current and potential electorate (Gherghina 2012). Freedom to make decisions locally allows branches to establish and maintain tighter relations with voters. Any strategy made by parties to bring the candidate selection closer to the voters should be rewarded in elections. Locally-known individuals are expected to show that they care about their voters' issues more authentically, and thus more likely to form connections striving their re-election (Pennings and Hazan 2001). Parties granting rights to the local branches to select

candidates locally are said to send message to voters that they care about their concerns as local candidates are more familiar with the specific local issues (Gherghina 2012).

However, keeping autonomous local branches is not only associated with the operation of parties in a positive way but as it often stands, no benefit comes without costs. Katz (2014) and (Hanham 1956) emphasise that the maintenance of autonomous local branches may represent a risk for party stability. Local organizational autonomy can trigger internal conflicts. Such conflicts can potentially lead to party divisions and medialised scandals which could prevent parties from being able to achieve electoral success by losing legitimacy. The logic here is the following – too much autonomy of local branches can lead to factionalism within the party and the associated risk of losing control over the territorial structure (Hanham 1956). Having some form of influence over the candidate selection by the national party office may represent one of the tools of achieving control over local branches' autonomy. It should, in theory, help the national leadership to keep local branches in check. When local elites rely on their positions on the national party office' decisions, they can be expected to be more loyal to them and not form internal opposition. Only stable cohesive, tightly organized and highly disciplined parties are likely to electorally succeed in the long run, because they can effectively manage internal conflicts and scandals (Katz 2014). Such parties can act as unitary actors in elections and coalition negotiations, and send homogenous messages to voters to persuade them to acknowledge the party's capacity to represent their interests. Parties that have mechanisms in place to control the autonomy of local branches should be more successful in dealing with the internal opposition and issues at the local level that can endanger their public image. Having influence over candidate selection should equip parties with the capacity to handle internal opposition (as well as the scandals at the local level) more efficiently, which helps parties to tackle the negative publicity. It is thus expected that electorally successful parties find an ideal in the form of a middle way when it comes to the autonomy of the local branches. The compromise between centralization and decentralization of decision-making is meant. An electorally successful party should find a balance between these two strategies. Doing so, parties should benefit from having local branches capable of connecting with voters locally, whilst maintaining control over the cohesion and stability of the party. Such balance can be achieved by selecting candidates locally but preserving control over their selection by other means, for instance, by having a veto right at the national level. Following such strategy, ANO

would respect the choices made locally, but keep overriding powers at its disposal when concerns would arise or when facing organizational crises.

2.3. Methodological Approach

The above theoretical overview yields that parties with more densely-built local presence should be better equipped to communicate and connect with voters at the local level, which is likely to enhance their public image as legitimate entities. Secondly, finding a balance in regards to the autonomy of local branches in selecting candidates should boost party's ability to connect with local electorate without risking party stability by preventing branches from forming an opposition against the party leadership. Party organized in such way should be visible locally and capable of efficiently managing local conflicts and scandals, and as such should be rewarded electorally.

How is the relevance of these theoretical arguments tested? In regards to the local organizational density, a cross-regional comparison is conducted, correlating the electoral outcomes of ANO by region with the local party organizational data available for the same period (number of local branches per region). Density is measured at the organizational level of local branches, which is the smallest organizational unit type that party registers. The reason behind this choice is pragmatic. It proved pointless to empirically analyse the number of area organizations or regional organizations. ANO is fully organizationally represented at these two levels of the organization, with a party structure fully covering seventy-six former districts and fourteen regions on the Czech Republic. Attaining party organizational representation at the area (district) and regional levels is thus not a challenge for ANO (nor it is challenging for the vast majority of parties in the country for that matter). It makes far more sense to study the number of local organizations, where the party's representation is not complete and is highly unequally spread across the country. This comparative method demonstrates whether there is any relationship between the local organizational density and electoral performance. The empirical analysis is set up in three layers. First, the relationship is empirically captured per region, then per number of municipalities in the region, and finally, per number of eligible voters in the region. These are compared vis-a-vis the attained electoral performance of ANO per region. The investigation set up in this way brings more accuracy to the analysis because Czech regions differ significantly in terms of their population and territorial size. Refer to Appendix 20 that includes a map of regions of the Czech Republic with their names.

Concerning the local organizational autonomy, the process of candidate selection is analysed. The formal situation in the statutes is investigated first (ANO 2013; 2015; 2017), then the aggregate patterns in quantitative data of candidates' backgrounds are explored. This approach allows demonstrating the national party's influence over candidate selection. The analysis of backgrounds of candidates from two general elections enables to identify the proportion of locally selected candidates and candidates' renomination. The list of candidates differentiates between two kinds of candidates - either people are candidates in their constituency where they live (registered as permanent residents), or they are candidates parachuted from other parts of the country to fill in the candidate list. It should demonstrate how the national party office can potentially meddle into selecting of candidates before elections, identifying the degree of autonomy of local branches. What kind of data is used? Electoral statistics, as well as the data mapping number of local branches by region, are collected, together with basic demographic data of registered eligible voters. In regards to local organizational autonomy, party statutes and candidates' backgrounds are used. Party statutes allow presenting the formal rights and obligations that local party branches officially have. Full candidates' lists from two elections with their backgrounds, in particular, home addresses are analysed to demonstrate the level of renomination. Interviews with ANO's politicians are used to support the findings of both analyses. Interviews were conducted with ANO's party elite in September 2016 and in June 2017. The actual identity of interviewees was anonymised. The interviews were conducted with party representatives that included party leader, the first deputy party leader, several ministers appointed by the party, regional party leaders and local party leaders. Such a varied sample covers members of the party elite with different experience and perspectives. The analysis of quantitative data (local organizational data, electoral statistics, party statutes and candidate backgrounds) will test the existence of general patterns that will demonstrate relationships between density/autonomy and electoral performance. The stories shared during the interviews will be included to set the findings into the context and help to formulate the argument.

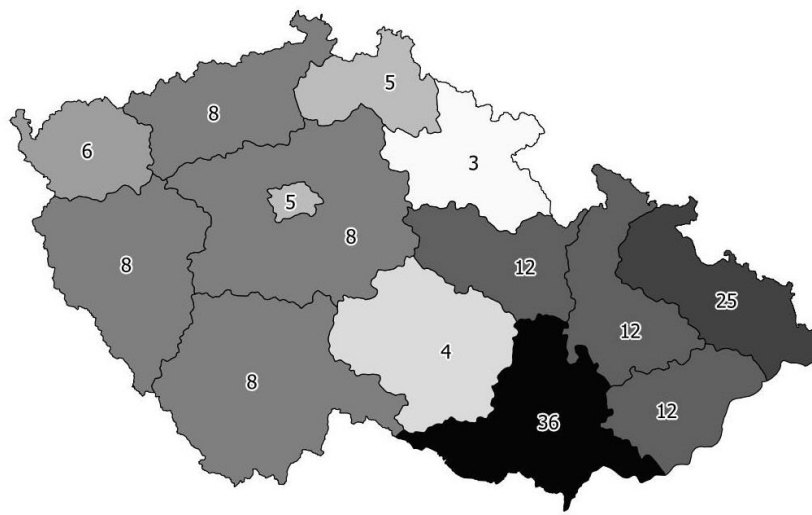
2.4. Empirical Analysis

2.4.1. Local Organizational Density

In regards to the local organizational density, it is noteworthy that in the Czech context, cultivating densely-built local party structures was never seen as a priority by the majority of

political parties. It has been the case for most parties except for KDU-ČSL and KSČM, which come closest to the definition of the mass party (Hanley 2004; 2008; 2012; Kopecký 1995). Other scholars, who focused on the party organizational structure of Czech parties, claim that the reason for this lack of attention lies in the fact that Czech parties focused mainly on preparations for the upcoming elections or, when elected, on the responsibilities associated with holding public office (Van Biezen 2004; 2003). New parties have restricted building their organizations to parliament almost exclusively (in particular due to little time caused by their involvement in high politics) and failed to establish an extra-parliamentary organizational structure (Van Biezen 2004). Therefore, mapping the development and density of local organizational structure of the new electorally successful party is in itself of scholarly interest.

Figure 2.2 Local party organization network, March 2015

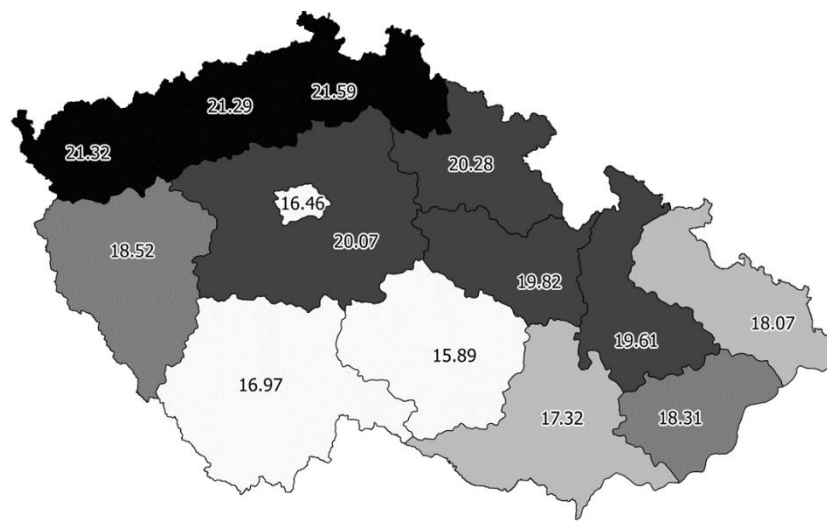


Source: ANO.

The four figures included in this section present data mapping the number of ANO's local branches by region collected two years apart to show how it developed over time. This graphical presentation is just a basic overview of the data that are later expanded using more detailed analysis. Figure 2.2 shows the number of ANO's local organizations in 2015 by region (the contrast of shading of colours refers to the number of local branches in the region). The data indicate that there is a high imbalance in terms of the number of local branches across regions. ANO's local party organization is by far most densely-built in Jihomoravský region with thirty-six local branches, followed by Moravskoslezský region with its twenty-five local branches. On the other hand, in Královéhradecký and Vysočina regions, the party only

managed to establish three and four local branches respectively. Altogether the data show a highly unequal local organizational distribution in different regions. The unequal distribution may be associated partially with the newness of the party or its inability to build its organization at a similar speed in every region. Later in this chapter, more focus is paid to the Jihomoravský region, where ANO is the most organizationally present. The view of the party leader from this region is shared later to shed light on the organizational strategies implemented by the party staff in this region, and to explain why is ANO so densely-built in this area. More attention will also be paid to the Královéhradecký region, where ANO has one of the lowest local organizational presence. Information gathered during the interview with a regional politician responsible for this region are also included. This interview focused on the reasons behind the lower local organizational density of ANO in this region and on the strategies of the regional party leadership aimed at increasing the number of branches there.

Figure 2.3 ANO's Electoral results, 2013 General elections



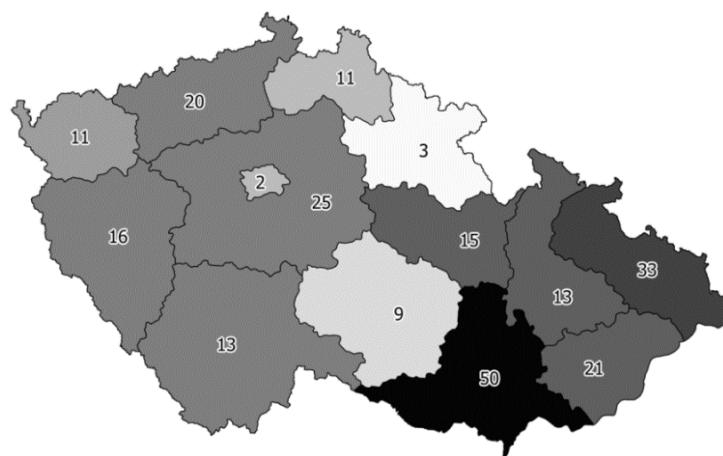
Source: ANO.

Figure 2.3 presents the electoral performance of ANO in 2013 general elections. The data indicate several insights. Notably, one can see that the electoral performance of ANO is more or less stable across the entire country, around nineteen per cent of votes. The lowest electoral result was acquired in the Vysočina region with just nearly sixteen per cent of votes. Interestingly, the regions of Karlovarský, Ústecký, Liberecký and Královéhradecký (all situated in North Bohemia), became ANO's strongholds, even though ANO has the nearly lowest organizational presence in these regions. On the other hand, in Jihomoravský region,

where ANO has the highest local organizational density, it attained the fourth weakest electoral result. This ANO's main region (when it comes to the density of its local party organization) should be this party's stronghold, but it is one of its worst electorally performing regions. As such, it suggests that on the first sight, there is no significant linkage between local organizational density and electoral outcomes in case of ANO.

In Figure 2.4, data mapping number of ANO's local organizations in 2017 is presented to show the progress of building local branches in time. The data illustrate that a similar trend in the regional density variation as in 2015 prevails. The highest density can be seen in Jihomoravský and Moravskoslezský regions. Královéhradecký region remains the region with the lowest number of local organizations. It is the only region with the same number of local organizations in the two-year comparison – three local branches. On the other hand, the other regions with weak organizational presence, such as the Vysočina region or Ústecký region more than doubled their number of local branches in the studied two-years period. Unlike it has been suggested in the existing theory (Van Biezen 2004; 2003; Hanley 2004; 2008), ANO invests resources and establishes more branches over time. Some of the scholars (Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1992; Mair and Van Biezen 2001) pointed out that nowadays parties are more likely to downplay the role of densely-built local party organization and do not care about its cultivation. However, ANO seems to care about its territorial organizational presence and invests into its development over time.

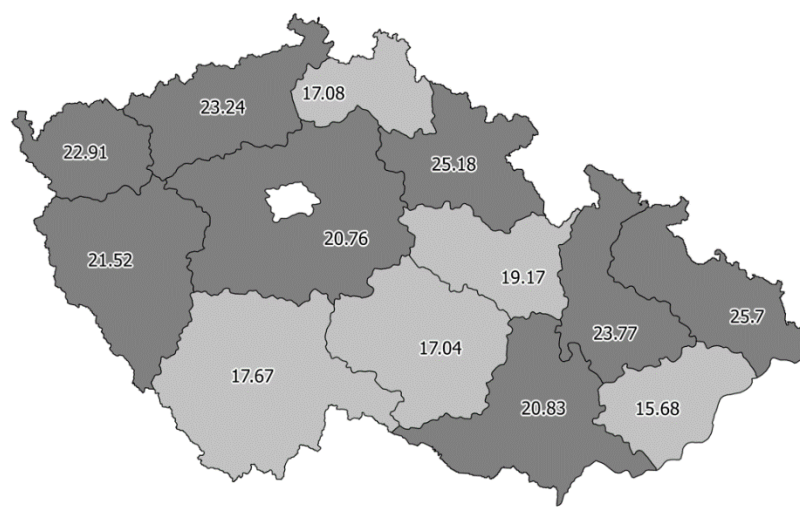
Figure 2.4 Local party organization network, March 2017



Source: ANO.

Figure 2.5 illustrates how the electoral performance of ANO varied across regions of the country in the 2016 regional elections. The electoral support of ANO is relatively stable across all the regions, around twenty per cent of votes. Only in five regions of the country – Vysočina, Pardubický, Liberecký, Jihočeský and Zlínský ANO performed below twenty per cent of votes, where (except for Liberecký and Vysočina regions) the party is strongly organizationally present. For instance, in Zlínský region - a traditional stronghold of Christian Democrats, where ANO has a relatively strong organizational presence it only attained over fifteen per cent of votes.

Figure 2.5 ANO's Electoral results, 2016 Regional elections



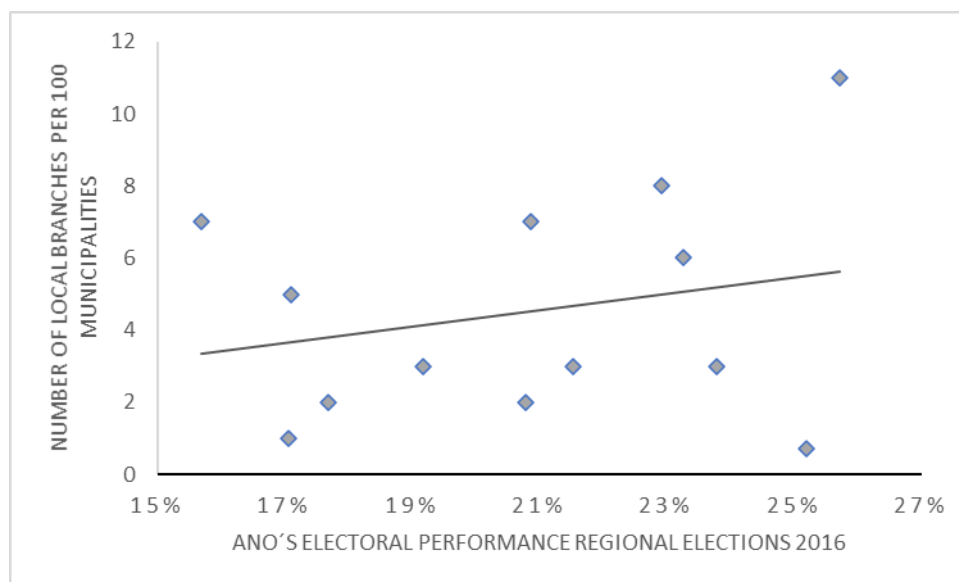
Source: ANO.

On the other hand, ANO was most electorally successful in Královéhradecký region (where it attained over twenty-five per cent of votes), although its organizational presence is the weakest in this region (only three local branches were established there). In the case of ANO, the density of local organizational structure, at least at its current stage of building the territorial organizational presence, does not seem to have a substantial impact on the electoral performance. The theory suggested that the more densely-built the local organizational structure, the more likely the party is to succeed electorally. The findings so far suggest otherwise – the local organizational density does not seem to facilitate better electoral outcomes for ANO. As the above figures with data mapping number of local branches demonstrate, there does not seem to be a strong link between the number of local branches per region and attained electoral performance.

2.4.2. Local Organizational Density by Municipalities

As mentioned previously in the methodological section of this chapter, another layer of empirical analysis concerning the local organizational density is incorporated here to provide more accuracy. Previous analysis per region has its limitations because the regions of the Czech Republic differ significantly in terms of their territorial and populational size. Other layers of analysis are integrated to illustrate the relationship between the local organizational density and the electoral performance more accurately. The analysis starts with exploring the relationship between the density and electoral outcomes of ANO at the level of municipalities. In Appendix 1, the following data are included: number of local branches per region, number of municipalities per region, local organizational density measured in the number local branches per 100 municipalities, and ANO's electoral performance per region. Correlation is conducted between the two latter indicators. This approach allows me to determine whether a general pattern that would demonstrate the relationship between local organizational density (measured by the number of local branches per one hundred municipalities in different regions) and the electoral outcomes of ANO per region (in 2016 Regional Elections) exists. See Figure 2.6 that graphically illustrates how are the two above indicators related.

Figure 2.6 Local organizational density by municipalities



Source: ANO, refer to Appendix 1.

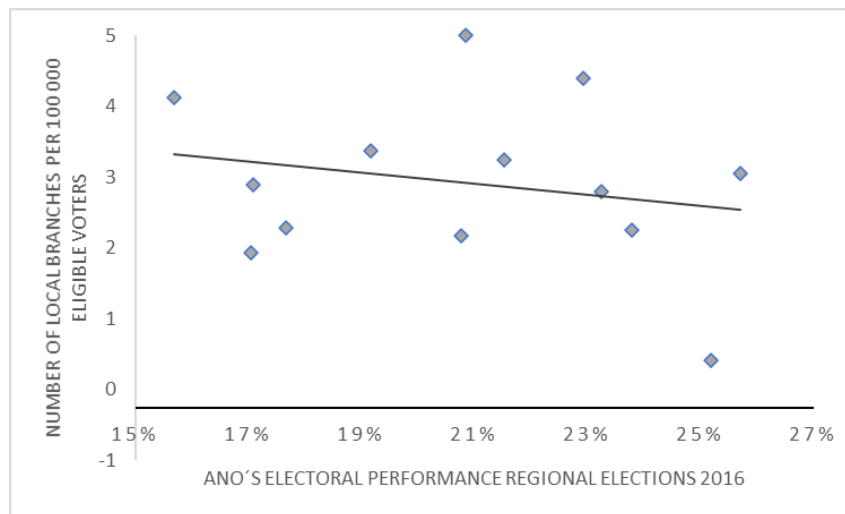
There is a weak positive correlation (the correlation coefficient 0.238) between the local organizational density per number of municipalities in different regions and electoral performance of ANO per region. This finding indicates that there is no statistically significant

linear relationship between these two variables. The local organizational density measured per number of municipalities in the region does not seem to have a substantial effect on the electoral outcomes of ANO. When referring to Appendix 1, the more detailed overview demonstrates that Královéhradecký region has the lowest organizational density (the lowest number of organizations per municipality) and Moravskoslezský region has the highest organizational density (highest number of organizations per municipality). However, although the Moravskoslezský region has more than ten times denser organization than Královéhradecký region, the electoral performance of the party is nearly identical in these regions. In both regions, ANO attained 25 per cent of the vote, and the difference is only in decimals.

2.4.3. Local Organizational Density per Number of Eligible Voters

In addition to investigating the relationship between the local organizational density and electoral performance of ANO per number of municipalities, another layer of analysis per number of voters is conducted to provide even more accuracy. Municipalities do differ in population size, geographical distances between municipalities also differ by region, which can affect the impact of territorial organizational coverage of parties. The following data are included in Appendix 2: ANO's electoral performance per region, number of local party organizational branches by region, number of total registered voters by region, and the number of ANO's local branches per 100 000 eligible voters. The 2016 Regional Elections have been selected pragmatically based on the availability of data on the number of local branches for the same year, making the outcome of analysis more precise. The chosen approach allows me to demonstrate how many potential voters per one local organization live in each region of the country, and whether more branches per voter translate into higher electoral outcomes. Figure 2.7 illustrates the relationship between ANO's local organizational density (measured in the number of local branches per voter) and the electoral performance of ANO per region.

Figure 2.7 Local organizational density by number of voters



Source: ANO, refer to Appendix 2.

There is a weak negative correlation (the correlation coefficient -0.216) between the number of ANO's local branches per 100 000 eligible voters in different regions and the electoral performance of ANO per region (in 2016 Regional Elections). This finding indicates that there is no statistically significant linear relationship between these two variables. The density measured per number of voters does not seem to have a strong effect on the electoral outcomes of ANO. A closer look into the data in Appendix 2 indicates that by far the lowest organizational density (the highest number of eligible voters per one local organization) is in the Královéhradecký region (nearly 150 000 voters for one local organization). On the other hand, the highest local organizational density (the lowest number of eligible voters per local organization) is in Jihomoravský region, where one local organization 'serves' only 19 000 potential voters. The theory proposed that higher local organizational density should translate into better electoral performance. The findings seem to suggest otherwise. ANO is more electorally successful in the regions where the party is not very well organizationally-implanted. Specifically, in Královéhradecký region (where ANO has the lowest density by far), it attained not only higher electoral outcome than in Jihomoravský region (with the most densely-built coverage), but the party also acquired the second highest electoral result from all regions in the country (over twenty-five per cent). This finding, combined with the previous findings, strengthens the perception that the local organizational density does not seem to have a very strong impact on the electoral outcomes of ANO.

Two interviews were conducted with regional party representatives from the two regions mentioned above (with most extreme local organizational presence) to probe this observation further. The party representative from the Jihomoravský region (with the most robust organizational presence) shared that high local organizational density is a result of a proactive approach and precise planning designed to establish more and more local branches. The increased build-up of local organizational presence in this region mirrors the aspiration of regional leaders to gain a stronger position for their region within the party at the national level (Interviewee 8). It has been shared that the average electoral performance in this region (despite party's extensive regional presence there) is attributed to the strong position of the other parties, especially ČSSD and KDU-ČSL in the smaller towns and villages. In contrast, the representative from the Královéhradecký region (with the lowest organizational density) shared a different view. The role of organizational density was downplayed, not giving the mere quantity of local organizations too much emphasis; stating that in terms of sheer numbers of local branches, they prefer quality over quantity. The influence of organizational presence on the electoral outcomes was said to be questionable because having local branches somewhere does not have to reflect in the volume, quality and impact of members' and sympathisers' activities. It has been emphasised that their electoral outcomes in the region are related to the activity of their activists rather than the number of branches (Interviewee 9). This experience of regional party leader highlights that the local activism of 'the party on the ground' may matter electorally, rather than the number of local branches (a view that the previous findings support too). This however, is just a subjective account of several regional politicians, and should only be considered as such. This subjective view however shows that the activism of locally-based party members may still make the local branches relevant electorally; it is just a different aspect than what we usually study as their indicator of electoral influence.

Building on above politicians' experience, other members of ANO's national party elite were interviewed to share their views too. During these interviews, ANO's politicians from other regions have also emphasised that the electoral success of the party is not related to the density of local branches, but the authentic zeal of activists working for the party locally. It has been shared that although having some branches present locally is advantageous because under them activists can meet with locals to gather information and provide this as useful feedback to the party (Interviewee 3; 7; 8; 9), it is not about branches' quantity at all. It is about the party activists with the local knowledge of the terrain and real issues, who are the real asset that is

valuable for the central party office that does not know the local issues facing the potential electorate (Interviewee 5; 9). Because regions in the Czech Republic are spread to many small towns and villages, local branches' activities are crucial in regards to the party's contact with voters. Under the umbrella of local branches, party activists are responsible for many activities. These include chairing discussions and meetings with the public, overseeing the distribution of leaflets and other materials, organizing local events (rallies, farmers' markets, kids' days, garden parties and other party themed events), and especially managing direct contact campaigns (Interviewee 2; 3; 6; 8). Outside the official party events, local activists, using their contacts in the area, help to support the positive image of the party among potential voters in daily life situations (Interviewee 2; 3; 5; 8; 9). It has been emphasised that the personal contacts and activists' enthusiasm are the key to connect with local voters. According to ANO's politicians, it is through the authentic and individual work of local activists, that loyal connections and relationships get forged between the voters and the party (not through the density of local branches' network). The above views of ANO's politicians are only subjective experience and merely illustrate that the electoral success of this party amongst voters from local communities could potentially be attributed to the actual work of local activists. Based on these subjective accounts of ANO's politicians, it seems to be the activism over the numbers, or 'quality over quantity', in regards to local branches' influence on the electoral performance of ANO.

The above experiences of ANO's party elite may remind us of the so-called subcultural party, a term coined by Enyedi (1996). This type of party is known for being strongly embedded within local communities via various authentic activities organized by local activists. A wide array of mainly non-political party events, such as communal lectures, dancing classes and other meetings aimed at "strengthening the party's 'social presence' image" were organized by the subcultural Christian Democrats in Hungary (Enyedi 1996; 392). Although in case of the Hungarian Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), the nature of their party events was closely associated with the religious subculture of Christian Catholic church and its satellite organizations, this party's strategy can in many respects be compared to that employed by ANO. Like in that case, ANO also seems to rely on the mostly non-political activities organized by its local activists 'on the ground' to find its way into the heart of local communities. In the smaller towns, when the party gets renowned locally for its events, people should more likely identify with it. It is especially the case when local citizens identify with the party activists with

whom they are likely to know each other from various circles (workplaces, sport and other pastime networks). The Hungarian example has shown that when the locals know the party activists, they are more likely to identify with the party itself and are likely to reward such identification in elections as a result (Enyedi 1996). This similarity in the way local activists approach their communities does not mean that ANO relies on the same network of civil society organisations as KDNP did in the past. The analogy between ANO and KDNP ends with the similar strategy to approach local communities with mainly non-politically themed party events. The next section focuses on the analysis of the role of local organizational autonomy in the electoral success of ANO.

2.4.4. Local Organizational Autonomy

According to the official party statutes, ANO distinguishes between three types of party organizations – local, area and regional. Listing them accordingly to the internal hierarchy, fourteen regional organizations oversee the operation of area organizations at the level of former districts, which manage local organizations below them. Each party organizational level has its chairman, executive board/committee, assembly and treasurer, and is represented in the party hierarchy by its leader (chairman of the local, area or regional executive board/committee). The local, area and regional levels of party organisation are all represented by their assemblies, executive boards/committees, control and revision commissions and treasuries at their constituency level. The party bodies on the central national level are the Congress, Executive Committee (předsednictvo strany in Czech) – sometimes also referred to as a National Executive Committee (NEC), and Control and Revision Commission and Appeals Committee. The members of Executive Committee are elected at the Congress that takes place at least once in every two years. The Executive Committee solely decides over the establishment, merging or dissolution of the regional, area and local organizations. All three types of territorial organizational levels of the party are also bound financially. The distribution of entrusted resources is decided solely by the national party within the approved budget. Also, in case of any conflict, scandal or disagreement, the party board has a right to dissolve the entire organizational unit in question.

In regards to responsibilities of selecting candidates, special attention was paid to the roles of local branches and national party board in regards to who is the selectorate and who approves selected candidates (see Hazan and Rahat 2010). In ANO, local branches only fulfil

the selectorate role, while national party leadership has sole responsibility for the approval of candidate lists (but can delegate these obligations onto the regional leadership). Unlike in the established parties in the country, such as ODS or ČSSD (where the selectorate at the constituency level is also responsible for candidates' approval), in ANO it is the Executive Committee that approves candidates selected by local branches at all constituency levels. ANO's regional, area and local branches only function as selectorates, who draw-up drafts of candidate lists for the Executive Committee to approve the names and position of candidates. This rule may function as a universal veto right for the party leadership in any type of election.

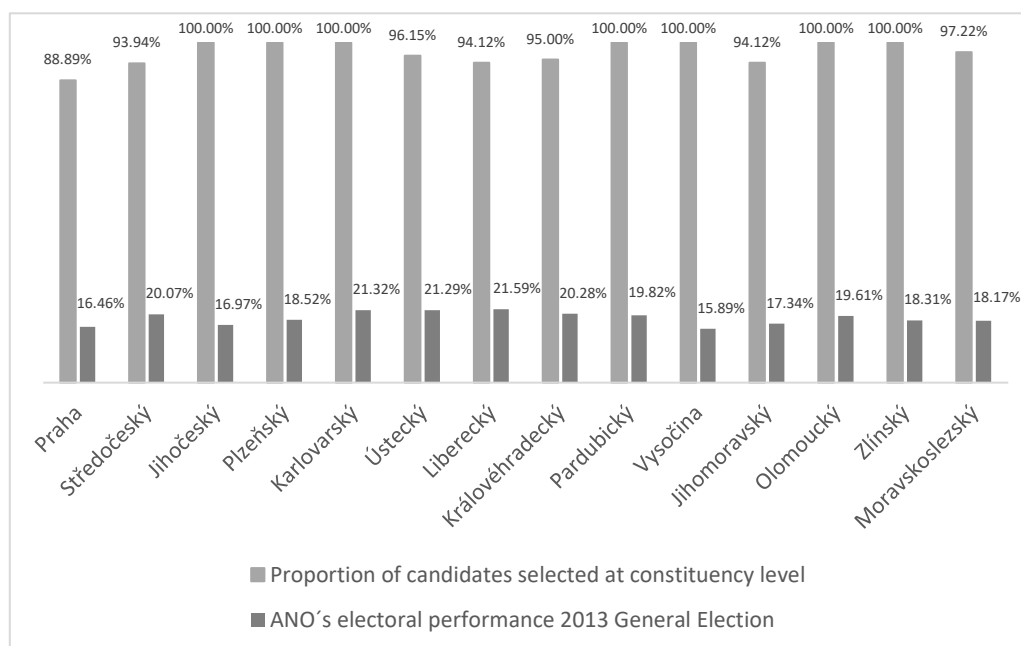
In 2017, after the party congress, ANO implemented changes in party statutes that further limit the autonomy of local branches. Apart from ANO's national party board having full control over the members' recruitment (which will be discussed in Chapter 3 focusing on the party membership), in regards to the candidate selection, national party leadership's rights also strengthened. ANO's leader himself has a sole veto right to change the order and presence of individuals on any candidate list of the party in any type of election, even after Executive Committee approved the candidate lists. Such a measure is highly unusual in Czech party politics. No other party in the country has such a clause in their statutes. It alters the power of party leadership (and party leader in particular) considerably in its favour and gives them another chance to influence decisions of local branches. Party statutes clearly show that the national party leadership severely compromises local organizational autonomy. In particular by the party leader, who can overwrite their decision related to the selection of candidate at any point. This restriction of local branches' autonomy supports ANO's ability to control and oversee the operation of its territorial organizational structure. These formal rules were raised during interviews with ANO's party elite to probe this finding further. It has been confirmed that local branches *de facto* do not select candidates, at least not entirely. They only suggest names of potential candidates, which need to get approved in the strict top-down fashion by the national party board (Interviewee 2, 3, 6). As a last resort, the national party board, respectively the party leader, has a right to step in whenever candidates are somehow unacceptable to delete their name of the list and to expel them from the party too (Interviewee 6). The above experience of ANO's politicians illustrates that the formal rules altering the distribution of power within the party are indeed enforced in real-life situations. ANO leadership exercises power embedded in the party statutes at the expense of local branches' autonomy.

In regards to candidates' backgrounds, this analysis looks at the aggregate patterns, which allow demonstrating the national party's influence over candidate selection (at the expense of local branches' autonomy). The analysis of candidates' backgrounds from two general elections will help to determine the proportion of locally selected candidates and candidates' renomination. Both of these findings will demonstrate the potential meddling of national party office into selecting candidates (identifying the degree of local branches' autonomy in the process of candidate selection). Complete candidate lists of ANO in the national elections in 2013 and 2017 serve as the source of data in this analysis. The less autonomous the local branches are in selecting candidates, the more likely the party can achieve and preserve party stability and cohesion. Weaker local party organization in terms of its autonomy, the less likely an opposition will be formed that could cause conflicts within the party leading to factionalism. Simultaneously, the more control the national party leadership has over the selection of candidates, the more likely it can decide, who will become elected as MP after the elections, and thus will form the future party elite. Influence over the composition of the elite circle is crucial, as it may facilitate party cohesion. When party leaders and his close allies can handpick the future MPs, they can effectively minimise party dissent and mute internal opposition. This analysis uses full candidate lists of ANO and investigates two aspects - whether candidates are selected locally within their region, and whether same individuals appear on the candidate lists in two successive elections. Both analyses allow me to shed light on how ANO approaches the selection of candidates and if the national party office influences creation of candidate lists and to what degree.

Concerning the selection of candidates, candidate lists are explored by region. The analysis divides candidates into two groups – locally selected (those whose candidacies take place within the region, where they have a permanent residence), and not locally selected (those who have been placed on the candidate lists in a region where they do not reside). The logic behind this division is to map the proportion of candidates, who have been placed on the lists outside of their place of residence. It should suggest that the national party office has appointed these individuals from above. One's place of residence is a variable determining the existence of his/her links to the region, where the candidacy takes place. The higher the proportion of candidates, who have not been selected locally, the higher the potential that the national party office meddled into the candidate's selection at the cost of local branches' autonomy.

Appendices 3-7 summarize the following information – total number of candidates³ by region, number of locally selected candidates by region, number of nationally selected candidates by region, the percentual proportion of locally selected candidates by region, and the electoral performance of ANO by region in the respective elections.

Figure 2.8 2013 General Election Locally Selected Candidates



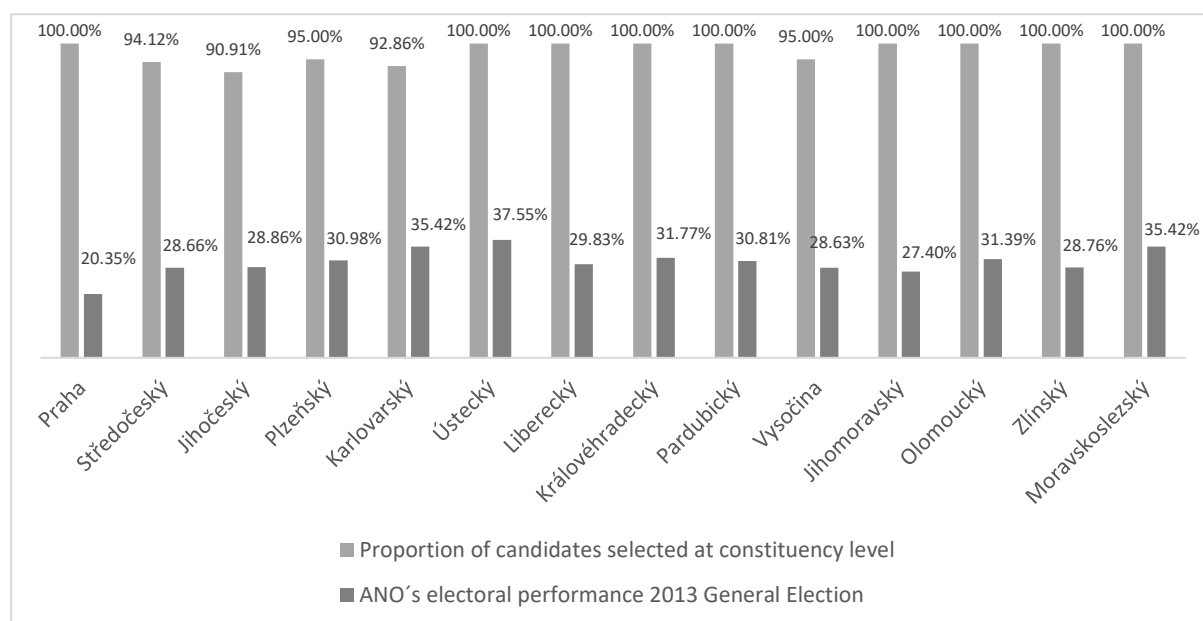
Source: ANO, refer to Appendix 3.

Candidates' backgrounds of 2013 general election are attached in Appendix 3. There, one can observe that the majority of candidates (96,49 per cent), is selected locally. The region with the lowest proportion of local selected candidates is Prague (however this finding is questionable because Prague is administratively considered a region, but its non-local candidates are from Středočeský region surrounding the capital). In all the other regions, over ninety per cent of candidates are locally selected from their region. Figure 2.8 graphically illustrates the data from Appendix 3, demonstrating the relationship between two indicators - the proportion of locally selected candidates by region in the 2013 election and electoral performance of ANO by region in that election.

³ The complete data on regional variation of locally selected candidates are attached as Appendices 3 and 4.

Figure 2.8 shows that the vast majority of candidates in all regions are selected locally. Although ANO's electoral performance differs across regions, the proportion of locally selected candidates is around ninety per cent in all regions. This finding suggests that ANO selects the vast majority of its candidates locally, local branches seem to have a word in selecting their candidates at the constituency level.

Figure 2.9 2017 General election locally selected candidates

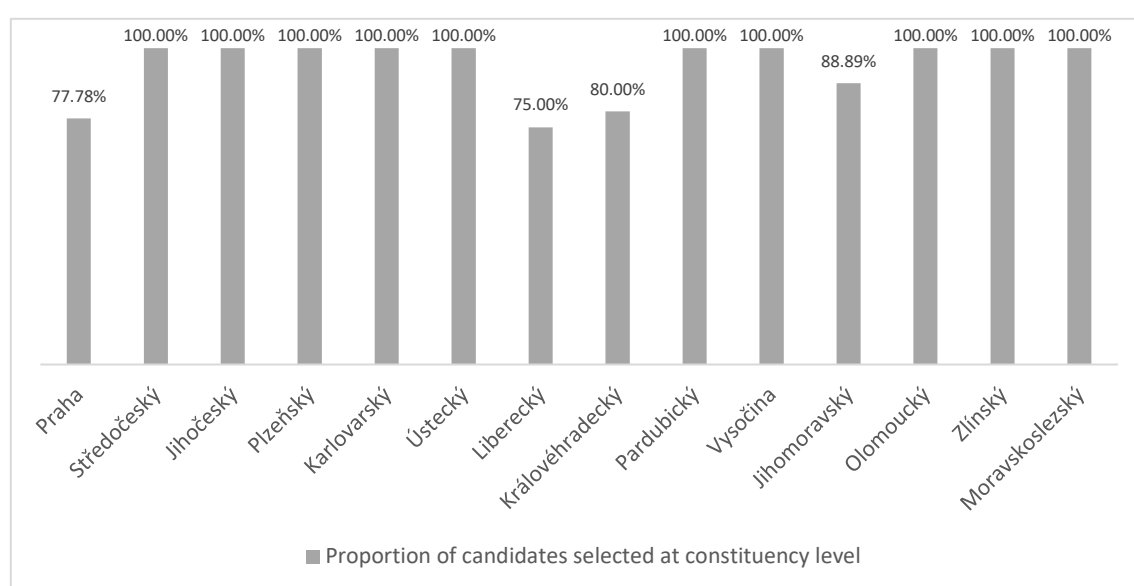


Source: ANO, refer to Appendix 4.

Data in Appendix 4 relate to the candidates of ANO in the latest general election taking place in 2017. The data indicate that in the majority of regions (ten out of fourteen), 100 per cent of candidates were selected locally. In the case of the other four regions, on average, only 5,75 per cent of candidates were not selected locally. In overall from all regions, only a mere five candidates were not selected locally from their region (which translates to only 1,46 per cent of candidates, who were not locally selected). This finding again demonstrates that a vast majority of ANO's candidates are selected from their home regions, which suggests that ANO allows local branches to exercise right to create candidate lists locally without intervention from above. Refer to Figure 2.9 that presents two indicators - the proportion of locally selected candidates and the electoral outcomes of the party per region, for more details.

The scope of analysis has been reduced from looking at the complete lists of candidates to the top twenty-five per cent of candidates on candidate lists in each region to provide a more detailed perspective into the candidate selection. The motivation behind this step is to explore what proportion of candidates at the positions, which are likely electable, are selected locally or nationally. When considering only the top twenty-five per cent of candidates on candidate lists for 2013 election (presented in Appendix 5), we can see that still a vast majority of candidates (94,38 per cent) were selected locally. It is a very similar value as when analysing the entire candidate list for this election. Figure 2.10 illustrates how the proportion of candidates selected at the constituency level differs regionally.

Figure 2.10 2013 General election locally selected (top 25% candidates)

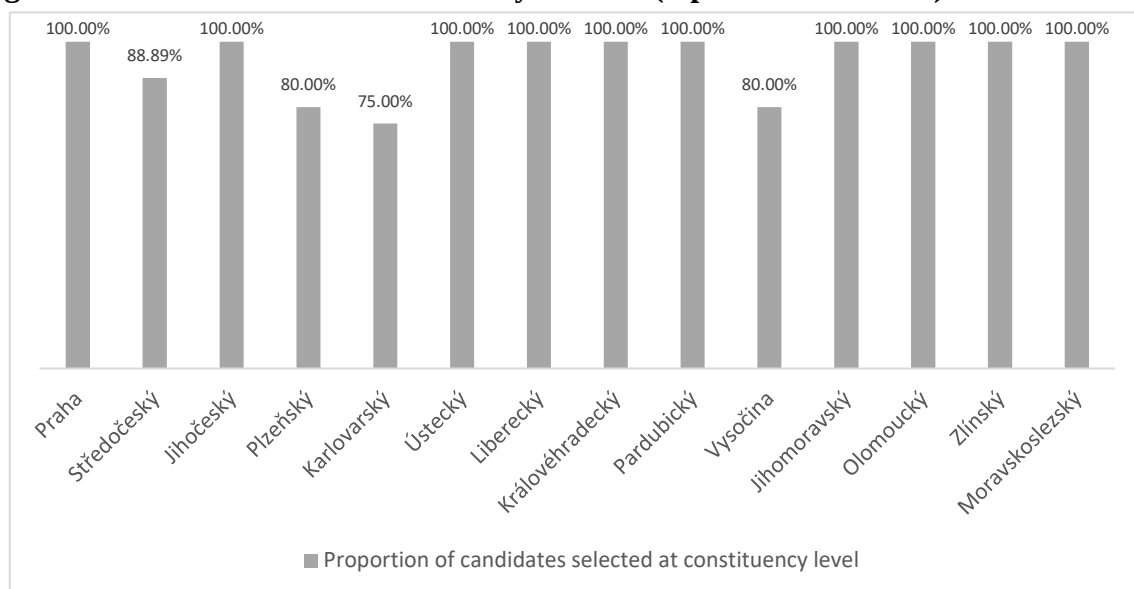


Source: ANO, refer to Appendix 5.

When taking a closer look at the data in Appendices 5 and 6, in most cases, the candidate list leader is the individual appointed nationally. For instance in Jihomoravský region, one of the prominent faces of the party, Martin Stropnický, led the candidate list, although being resident of Prague (to support the party electorally in its first election). However, the fact that the majority of top list candidates were selected locally demonstrates that this so-called ‘parachute strategy’ (Roniger and Gunes-Ayata 1994; Koop and Bittner 2011) was not used extensively by ANO. Such parachuting took place even less in the more recent 2017 election, which may signal several things. Firstly, that within four years, ANO managed to build some local organizational structure, which generated local and regional elites that took up the preferential

places on candidate lists. Secondly, that ANO's national party office realised that locally based candidates might stand a better chance to attract voters than individuals, who are not associated with the region and are appointed by the national party office from Prague. Concerning the latest 2017 election, refer to Appendix 6 presenting data of the top twenty-five per cent of candidates on candidate lists. Here, again the data indicate that a vast majority of candidates (95,51 per cent) were selected locally (only four out of the total of eighty-nine candidates were not selected locally). Still, a majority of candidates were selected locally, a similar finding as to when analysing the entire candidate list for this mentioned election (refer to Figure 2.11 for the graphical illustration of the regional variation of candidate selection and electoral performance of the party).

Figure 2.11 2017 General election locally selected (top 25% candidates)



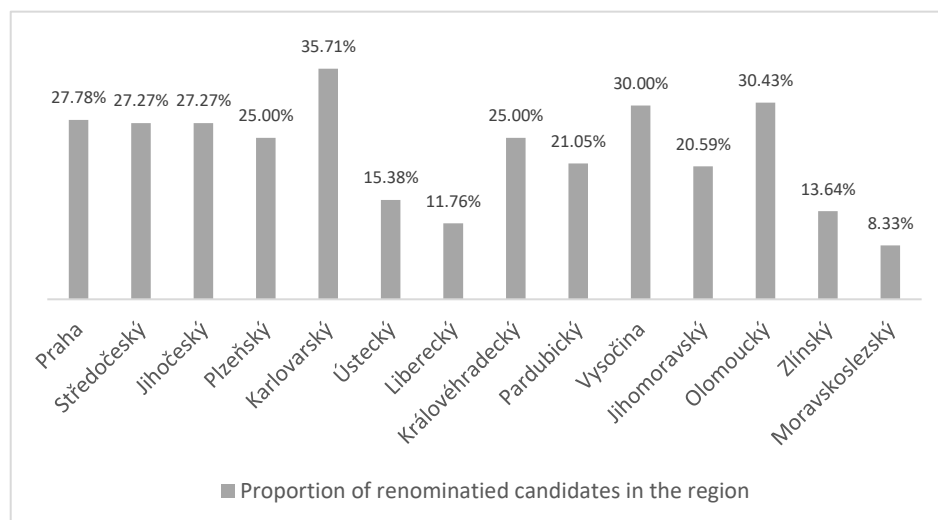
Source: ANO, refer to Appendix 6.

The analysis of locally selected nominations revealed that there had been some parachuting at the top level of candidate lists, but very limited. The vast majority candidates in both general elections were selected locally from the region where they reside. What does this entail? Although all the candidates in ANO are endorsed nationally (considering this party's statutes, where national leadership, in particular the party leader, approve all candidate lists), these candidates are locally embedded. Therefore, even though ANO's national leadership has the rights and capacity to select all the candidates nationally, the candidates are locals. The party has complete control over the candidate selection, but selects, by the vast majority, locally embedded candidates. By this strategy, ANO achieves two things. Firstly, the locally-known

candidates help the party to connect with the local electorate, boosting its legitimacy. Secondly, the capacity to control the candidate selection from above assures the party can preserve its stability. The party leadership allows local branches to nominate locally-embedded candidates that will more likely tune to the voters' needs. However, it still maintains the veto right to override their decisions if any scandals would arise with candidates.

In addition to the above candidate selection analysis, renomination of ANO's candidates between elections is also analysed. Appendix 7 presents data that illustrate how many candidates of ANO that were placed on candidate lists in the 2013 general election, appeared on the list for the 2017 general election as well. The motivation behind this analysis of repeated candidacies is to demonstrate whether any pressures exist to replace candidates between elections and to what degree. The findings indicate that only twenty-two per cent of candidates appeared on candidate lists in the two successive elections. Nearly eighty per cent of candidates have been replaced between the two elections (refer to Figure 2.12 for the variation of renomination across the regions).

Figure 2.12 2013 – 2017 Elections re-nomination



Source: ANO, refer to Appendix 7.

The findings presented in Figure 2.12 shows that there is a considerable regional variation in regards to the renomination of candidates between general elections. Media articles focusing on the municipal and regional politics have been explored, looking for the coverage of local events, attempting to find sources of such these trends. Because of the local nature of these examples of local branches' issues, mostly local media outlets served as the source of information. The national newspapers and other media outlets rarely focus on local issues. The

situation in seven regions, where ANO replaced most candidates, was closely followed to find clues. The collected evidence revealed that incidentally, the party faced major organizational issues in those regions. These included party splits, local party coups, factionalism or breakups of municipal council coalitions. These events often led to the dissolutions of local branches, and in some cases of entire area organizations.

This investigation has exposed that ANO's renomination is the lowest in those regions, where its local organizational structure faced the most significant hardships. Real-life examples demonstrate that the replacement of candidates between elections is closely related to the conflicts and scandals taking place at the local, district and regional levels of party organization. In those regions, where the local branches experienced the most dramatic turmoil, the party leadership closely observed the events and reacted accordingly. The party adopted a strategy that included dissolving entire branches, terminating membership statuses of all members, and replacing candidates for more loyal individuals, learning from these negative experiences.

Perhaps the most dramatic situation occurred in the South-Bohemian region. There were major conflicts and discontent between party members reacting angrily to some of their colleagues, who were awarded party posts for their servility and loyalty and not for their skills and activism. It led to the dissolution of the entire area organization in Prachatice district (Kopřiva 2016). Many party members left local branches in České Budějovice, Dačice, Jindřichův Hradec, Český Krumlov and Vimperk as a reaction to this widespread exchange of 'trafikas' (an exchange of posts to reward loyalty, a form of party patronage - see Kopecký 2012). The organizational crisis was not helped by the lack of transparency in decisions made by the regional leader, which escalated the situation further and led to the dissolution of the local branch in Strakonice (Kopřiva 2016).

In Karlovy Vary region, the local organizational structure also fell victim to conflicts between party members. In particular, between those who were newer and more loyal to the party leadership, and the more senior party members who initially established local branches (Novinky 2016). The local party organization in the regional capital Karlovy Vary itself was dissolved. The long-serving party activists disagreed with the national party recruiting many new members (to outnumber them for internal voting purposes) and complained about lack of transparency concerning new members' recruitment (Novinky 2016). In the South-Moravian region, the situation did not escalate so dramatically. However, ANO also faced significant

issues there. It dissolved two local organizations in this region, one in Brno-North (Echo24 2017) and one in Hodonín (ČTK 2015a). In Brno-North, the operation of the local branch was discontinued because of members' arguments and the inability to elect a local leader (Echo24 2017). In the case of Hodonín, the local organization disintegrated because two opposing factions quarrelled together slipped to unethical behaviour, and could not reach a joint agreement (ČTK 2015a). The national leadership decided to step in to save the party from the negative publicity.

Similarly, the Moravian-Silesian region experienced crises at the local level, when the national party board had to look into a power struggle between two factions in the local branch in Opava. Their dispute caused the dissolution of the local branch. Subsequently, it led to the annulment of party membership for all involved (including the mayor of the city at the time). It also resulted in the breakup of the municipal coalition government (Aktuálně 2015). Issues also escalated in Frýdek-Místek, where the local branch was dissolved following the coup of the majority of its city councillors leaving the party due to internal disputes (Deník 2017). In Olomouc region, in the city of Prostějov, the disagreements over the voting behaviour in city coalition did not lead to the dissolution of the local organization. Still, they resulted in twelve out of the total of thirty-eight members leaving the party, which demonstrated how disunited was the local organization (Forum 24 2016). Like in other cases, the national party leadership immediately stripped the involved individuals of all posts and party membership status.

Continuous disagreements and conflicts also affected local branches in the Liberec region, where the local organization in Frýdlant and in Liberec itself fell victim to scandals (Deník 2016). Both the local and regional leaders were caught by surprise when the national party board dissolved their branches (Deník 2016). They have not even been invited to Prague to discuss the matter. The decision was based on accusations of local branches being privatised by these individuals and not recruiting new members to protect and control their position (Idnes 2016). As a result, the mayor of Liberec, as well as other council members both in Liberec and in Frýdlant had their membership annulled, and the municipal council coalitions were under threat as a result too (Idnes 2016). Ústí nad Labem region also witnessed scandals in its regional capital's organizational structure, where ANO did not only dissolve the local branch in the city but the entire area organization as well. It happened in reaction to continuous disputes and accusations of wrong-doing between party members. These conflicts culminated into a coup at the municipal council level against the mayor elected for ANO (Deník Referendum 2015).

Across the entire country, many local and area branches were dissolved by the national party leadership, and several party activists left or were compelled to leave the party. These events even led to the creation of a new nationally-spread movement of many former ANO members called PRO 2016 (Hlídací Pes 2016). The impulse to establish a new party out of ANO's expelled members came from the South-Bohemian region, where the organizational conflict was among the highest in the party. ANO's former party activists complained mainly about the centralistic leadership of the party and a ban on the communication with other party members across regions. Disrespect of local level in the creation of candidate lists, and a complete lack and filtering of party communication, which was only led one-way in top-down fashion were also emphasised as reasons for their discontent (Hlídací Pes 2016).

How do the renomination levels relate to the organizational crises experienced by ANO? In Moravskoslezský region (8,33 per cent renomination), two large local organizations dissolved (Opava and Frýdek-Místek). In Ústecký region (15,38 per cent re-nomination), dissolution of entire area organization in the regional capital of Ústí nad Labem took place. In Liberecký region (11,76 per cent renomination), two main local branches dissolved (Frýdlant and Liberec). There is a link between the party's negative experience with local branches' scandals and organizational issues and higher replacement of candidates between elections. In those regions, where local party structure fell victim to conflicts and subsequent branches' dissolvments, ANO meddled more into local affairs replacing more candidates on the lists for new individuals. It can only be speculated that these changes were motivated by the loyalty of new candidates to the party leadership. The obedience of local activists and candidates is crucial for the party leadership to control the regions. It is especially the case for the regions, where the party failed to address scandals in the past. ANO's elite was questioned about the struggle of local branches and the party's response to it during interviews. Interviewees 2 and 3 have previously shared their experience of party leadership meddling into the creation of candidate lists. More attention was paid to other possible internal mechanisms enabling control of local branches' operation considering the low renomination linked to the scandals across the regions.

One of the interviewees shared interesting insights into the practices within ANO's local branches that reflected his/her experience in the party. This Interviewee 4 pointed out that the autonomy of local branches is compromised by the operation of the corporate network (a group of individuals professionally associated with the party leader and his business), that

controls the operation of local branches. The interviewee mentioned that there are three ‘layers of control’ over the regions. These include regional leaders, regional managers and the control and revision committee. It has been shared that the party staff at the posts mentioned above is professionally associated with the party leader’s business and thus loyal to him. Simultaneously, regional leaders appointed to the national party board were said to be offered leading positions on the candidate lists in return for their loyalty. They are often women who were said to be controlled and influenced more easily. When there is a conflict at the regional level, local and area leaders within that region were said to be offered positions on candidate lists in exchange for their support to the regional leader. The interview shared that party activists are compelled to play by the rules of the regional leaders, who are unquestionably loyal to national party leadership.

Similarly, the regional managers responsible for overseeing the operation of the whole territorial organizational structure of the party are selected based on personal loyalty to the party leader. It has been pointed out in this interview that the party leader used the corporate structure of his business company Agrofert and built the initial regional organizational structure on the existing network of his business firm. His employees were responsible for finding people with political experience to establish new area and local branches. The very first thing Babiš did, according to this interviewee, was to recruit twelve loyal regional managers, who were professionally associated with his Agrofert company or otherwise linked to himself. Allegedly, these individuals oversaw the building of local and area organizational structure, and the recruitment of local party activists into these new branches. The interviewee also shared that concerning the resolution of potential conflicts or scandals within the party, the chairman of control and revision commission is HR Director of Agrofert as well. This party body which decides the dissolvments of local organizations (and about members’ expulsions) was said to be in the hands of the individual, whose career is associated with the corporate empire of party leader.

Based on the insights from this interview, additional information has been gathered to examine whether these alleged links exist. The professional backgrounds of all ANO’s regional leaders and regional managers were analysed (refer to Appendices 13 and 14 for details). The data included in the appendices indicate that a proportion of both regional leaders and regional managers is indeed professionally associated with the party leader’s business (as former or current employees of Agrofert). Four out of fourteen regional leaders have direct professional

links with the leader's business (and one other regional party leader is an owner of Agrofert's affiliate company). At the same time, three out of fourteen regional managers also have business links with Agrofert. The coordinator of regional managers (the recruitment position of all regional managers within the party), Kateřina Reiblová is professionally associated with Agrofert as well, providing insurance to the conglomerate. All regional managers are responsible to the general party manager Pavel Pustějovský, a Production Manager of DEZA, a subsidiary of Agrofert. The chairman of control and revision commission in ANO is Daniel Rubeš, HR Director of Agrofert. The above evidence points out that crucial posts within ANO's party organization are indeed infiltrated by individuals professionally associated with party leader's business. Such organizational setup based on party-business overlap creates dependencies between the party leader and part of the party elite. This strategy is advantageous for the party leader when it comes to controlling the local party organization and resolving internal conflicts and scandals. When the party leader's business pays some of the regional leaders and regional managers, they can be expected to be more loyal to him in exchange. The loyalties based on financial dependencies of these party leaders' employees translate into their obedience. In turn, these trusted associates, who are reliant on the party leader with their careers, can be expected to help him to keep the entire party organization in line.

The control of local branches by a group of obedient associates of party leader aids with the resolution of internal conflicts and scandals. If a party activist does not hold the party line and misbehaves in any way, he/she can easily be replaced from the top. As demonstrated previously on the scandals of the whole local or area branches, same goes for them. When faced with scandals or conflicts, the party does not hesitate to dissolve entire branches. When the local branches and their members rely on the party leader and his loyal allies with their position within the party, they are more likely to manifest loyalty too. But how can these internal party affairs reflect on ANO electorally?

Controlling the local branches' autonomy via the formal rules and reliant loyal personnel embedded into the local organizational structure helps the party to resolve local scandals decisively. The fast and efficient resolution of scandals and conflicts can help ANO's electoral success because it diffuses negative publicity. Unlike its established counterparts in the past (in particular ODS and ČSSD), ANO, using the organizational setup described above, manages to 'put out the fire before it spreads'. In the Czech context, such scandals, often of corruption and criminal nature, were the plague of the major parties (for party-captures by

mafia-like groups and clientelist networks see Klíma 2015). Numerous widely infamous scandals of the above two parties that started at the local level but scaled up nationally, negatively affected their public image (party legitimacy). The lack of transparency and firmness in resolving these scandals negatively affected the legitimacy of these parties in the long term. It ultimately cost them political points in the years to come. Very often the incompetence and indecision of national leaders in ODS and ČSSD to persecute culprits were caused by the strong position of regional party elite (with allies throughout the entire party organizational structure of these parties).

The following paragraphs focus on the scandals of ČSSD and ODS to provide some out of the countless available examples. In ODS, the widely medialised fraud scandals in public companies of Ivan Langer from Olomouc region negatively influenced the image of the entire party for many years (Slonková and Holecová 2018); and the party did not manage to part with him anyway. In the end, it was the voters who cast him away, not the party leadership of ODS (ČTK 2015c; Hrbáček 2019; 2020). In ČSSD, the fraud and manipulation of public procurement contracts also gained media and public attention, which negatively influenced this party's legitimacy. Like Langer in ODS, ČSSD's Jiří Zimola from South-Bohemian region was also involved in a serious scandal regarding public spending projects, but the party did not react in time either (Euro.cz 2017; Příbyl and Tröster 2020). Due to his strong position within the party, this scandal only cost him his position at the candidate list, and he later resigned himself (Palička 2017). The strong position of regional branches in ČSSD manifested itself immediately after the 2013 General Elections, when a faction around regional party leaders in Brno, the second biggest Czech city, organized an attempted leadership coup against the party leader Bohuslav Sobotka (Perknerová 2013; Kopp, Neprašová and Kouřimský 2013). The conflict between the two factions took weeks to resolve. It severely weakened the position of Sobotka within the party, as well as the position of ČSSD in the newly-forming coalition government with ANO (Ovčáček 2013).

Both major parties became to be notoriously known for covering their party members that were involved in any scandal, which cost them much in the long run. While ODS and ČSSD managed to squander their public image by decades of inaction and incompetence to tackle the corruption and other scandals of their politicians, not the same can be said about ANO. Where the other parties failed to address these scandals to protect their public image, ANO did not manifest any hesitation in parting with individuals accused of any wrongdoing.

The only exceptions to this approach are few ‘V.I.P.’ party members like the leader of the party Andrej Babiš, and his close associate Jaroslav Faltýnek, the first deputy party leader, chairman of ANO’s MP club and Babiš’s long-standing ally from Agrofert (Mach 2019; Zíta 2019; Tománek 2019). I focus on Babiš’s major scandal and how it resonated amongst ANO’s party elite in greater detail in Chapter 4 related to the party elite. In the following discussions I focus only on local examples of ANO handling its scandals. It is noteworthy here, that when focusing on ANO’s ability to handle scandals regionally, my design of empirical analysis omits the potential influence of Babiš’s owned media outlets. As such, I do not pay attention to their role in supporting the party (and himself) during these scandals. Similarly, I do not empirically explore the potential role of ANO’s PR machinery in this regard. Both of these aspects can indeed support ANO’s ability to manage the regional corruption (and other) scandals of the party. This is an avenue for additional research of ANO in the future.

Nevertheless, how does ANO’s efficiency in handling scandals at the local level look like in real life? Typically, as soon as any accusations of malpractice or offence arise, the individual in question is requested to come to Prague to the party headquarters for questioning by the national party board (Interviewee 2). Party follows the moral codex, signed by every member, in case of any accusation of a criminal offence, the membership status is suspended, the presumption of innocence does not apply (Interviewee 7). For instance, in Varnsdorf, Stanislav Horáček, the mayor elected for ANO was immediately expelled from the party in the reaction of being taken to the custody for alleged participation in the fraudulent contract for the provider of road radars (Zavoral 2019; ČTK 2019a; ČTK 2019b). In this case, the party leader shared that the decision to act had to be quick because the good name of the party was at stake and the damage of ANO’s reputation in the region was imminent (Právo 2019). Another local politician, Tomáš Kratochvíl from Brno lost his position at the municipality council, as well his party membership status for undermining the positive image of the party locally (EuroZprávy.cz 2015). Four years later in Brno, following the corruption scandal that was exposed publicly in 2019, ANO did not hesitate to take quick action. Two of its highly-ranked local politicians Švachula and Liškutin were immediately dismissed as party members (Euro.cz 2019; ČTK 2019c). Both were expelled from their posts in the municipal council as well. The regional leader Petr Vokřál emphasised that the situation was handled correctly and swiftly to send a clear signal that ANO does not tolerate and hide corruption and other scandals (ČTK 2019d). The scandal was blamed to the personal failure those involved, and the party offered

full cooperation to the relevant authorities, stressing that such excesses should not be let to damage the good name of the party (Echo24 2019). In Ostrava, Vladislav Koval, a member of the city council, was expelled from the party immediately following the accusation of requesting a bribe (Právo 2015). In České Budějovice, three municipal councillors, Eliška Richtrová, Filip Šmaus and Pavel Matoušek, were quickly stripped of their membership status for disobedience, following a coup against the mayor appointed by ANO (Vácha and Orholz 2015). Their dismissal was supported unanimously by the national party board (ČTK 2015a; ČTK 2015b; Profant 2015). The above examples of ANO's decisiveness in handling local scandals fast are in great contrast to the practice of the established parties.

2.5. Discussion and Conclusions

The first part of this chapter focused on the role of the density of local branches in facilitating electoral success. Tavits (2013), Pimlott (1973) or Janda (1980) saw the density of local party organization as an instrument helping parties to attract and mobilize voters more effectively, which supports electoral performance. Other scholars (Coleman 1996; Kopecký 1995; Mair 1997; Perkins 1996; Szczerbiak 1999) were more sceptical of the role of densely-built local party organization in delivering electoral gains. The findings presented in this chapter indicate that local party organizational density in itself does not seem to have a significant impact on the electoral success of ANO. The more densely-built local party organization does not seem to facilitate better electoral results for this particular party. However, the structure of local branches still seems to play a positive role in supporting the electoral success of ANO differently. Specifically, the nature and extent of activities organized under the umbrella of these local branches may play a role in regards to the electoral performance. The examples of the local media mapping the activities of local activists, supported by the subjective views of ANO's politicians show that the activism of local branches may play its role. Public discussions, informal meetings with local citizens and various events, especially those that are not politically-themed helped the party to spread the good name amongst the public in smaller municipalities or more remote areas of the country (Interviewee 2; 3; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9). The fact that the party does not limit local branches in organizing these events helps to make them look authentic. All the gatherings such as farmers' markets, kids' days, charity runs or public barbecues are organized without any interference from the party headquarters (Interviewee 2; 3; 5). The national party only provides the general visual background for leaflets, billboards

and slogans (Interviewee 5). The campaign materials are synchronized to keep the party message homogenous nationally, and the local topics are decided regionally by the area and local branches to tune to the needs of the local electorate (Interviewee 3). Their activities are not limited, as long as they stick to the official party visuals to propagate party in a unified manner. This strategy seems to be electorally advantageous for two reasons. The authenticity stemming from the locally selected topics helps potential voters to identify with the message because the topics are more relatable to them. On the other hand, the unified party branding allows the party to present its message unitary. It helps members of the public to recognise the party when it stands for elections at the national level. Notably, many of these party-themed events are financed or co-organized by party leader's companies. They provide catering, transport and other services at the locations (Břešťan 2017). It illustrates how strongly are the two worlds of ANO's party politics and Agrofert's business entangled.

The second part of this chapter was devoted to the autonomy of local branches in selecting candidates and their impact on the electoral outcomes. Exploring the formal rules in party statutes, as well as the practices within the party unveiled several facts. On the one hand, ANO is a party that, by the vast majority, allows local branches to select candidates at the constituency level, which helps the party to connect with local voters. But because ANO's party leadership has the veto right at its disposal (to make changes to the candidate lists), it maintains control over the local branches. Therefore, ANO's candidates are nationally endorsed but locally embedded individuals. Locally-known candidates selected from the same region are more likely to connect with the local electorate and better tailor the party message to them. When these locally embedded candidates organize the party events, they can also choose the type of event that matches the locality because they are more likely familiar with the local needs and expectations of the public there. This finding is thus closely associated with the previous findings related to the benefits of locally-based activities of local branches helping the party electorally.

On the other hand, the strict rules in party statutes concerning the candidate selection, combined with the low renomination of candidates between elections showed that the national party leadership preserves control over the candidate selection. These findings have been supported by the experience shared by Interviewee 4, who described how Agrofert's corporate network controls the autonomy of local branches. Many individuals with Agrofert past at crucial party posts have been identified. The control of local branches by a group of obedient

associates of party leader aids with the resolution of internal conflicts and scandals. Activists, who do not hold the party line or misbehave are replaced. Disobeying branches are dissolved from the top. In such environment, party activists spread across different regions are more likely to manifest loyalty. Those, who are not loyal or cause scandals are parted with. All of the above helps ANO to avoid negative consequences on the public image, something that haunted the established parties in the past.

To conclude this chapter, firstly the findings collected in this chapter indicate that in this particular case, the nature and extend of locally-based activities seem to help ANO electorally. Organizing various party-themed events locally (with the support of party leader's businesses) seems to strengthen the role of local branches in making the party visible, connecting with local voters. Local party activists know the most-pressing issues citizens face in their cities, towns and villages (specific infrastructure projects, lack of kindergartens or dentists, outdated facilities in local hospitals among those mentioned during interviews). Local branches tailor the topics of their campaign message around these issues. This locally-tailored party communication is produced under the standardised party branding, and Agrofert supplies catering to events where this message gets delivered to potential voters, boosting party legitimacy. Secondly, allowed by the setup of formal rules, as well as by the corporate network of financially dependent employees in crucial party posts, ANO's leadership has the capacity to control the autonomy of local branches, but only uses it when necessary to diffuse negative publicity. In regards to selecting candidates, ANO allows local branches to select them at the constituency level but keeps the right of veto. As a result of this practise, nationally endorsed, but locally embedded candidates are selected. These individuals connect with local voters more successfully. On the other hand, the strict rules (as well as the corporate structure of loyal individuals at the party posts with influence) help the leadership to tackle conflicts and internal opposition at the local level effectively. The ability to take action on scandals quickly and efficiently is crucial for protecting the positive image of the party. It is crucial, especially when considering this party's roots and rhetoric. ANO was built on the strongly pronounced anti-establishment promise of 'draining the swamp of corruption and clientelism' (referring to the corrupted political system maintained with the help of established parties). For a party running on an anti-corruption ticket (targeting its established counterparts as culprits of the corrupted system), the incompetence in addressing its own party members' scandals and corruption would be fatal to its public image. The other parties in the country used to cover for the scandals

of their politicians. Such practise became de facto a norm and resonated very negatively with the public. The inability of established parties to tackle corruption was one of the main triggers behind voters' frustration with the political establishment, as discussed in introducing Chapter 1. Such disillusionment brought new anti-establishment parties into high politics. ANO learned from the mistakes of the established parties and is 'well-managed' and responsive in this respect. ANO's national party leadership does not think twice or compromise in breaking any ties with party activists who committed any malpractice with potential negative public consequences. Voters are more likely to support a party that is visible and connects to them locally via locally-based activities organized by locally-embedded candidates. It looks trustworthy for them because it transparently and swiftly addresses any potential scandals or wrongdoing of its politicians.