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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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CHAPTER 3 Party membership

3.1. Introduction

This chapter⁴ investigates the relationship between the electoral success of ANO and the second aspect of party organization – party membership. Party membership is closely associated with the other party organizational features, in particular with the local party organization. The previous chapter looked thoroughly at the relationship of local branches' density and autonomy with the electoral success of ANO. This chapter theoretically and empirically looks at the closely related but conceptually different aspect of party organization that is party membership. Local branches and party members are indeed related because very often we associate the density of local branches with the *extensiveness of party membership*. But there does not have to be any relationship (whenever referring to the extensiveness of party membership, the number of party members, is meant). There can be an overlap between the local organizational density, and the extensiveness of party membership because local branches consist of members (more branches should reflect in more extensive membership network). However, there does not have to be a relationship, because there can be a party that has a perfectly extended network of local branches, but there can be only a few members in each of them.

When looking solely at the numbers (i.e. the relationship between the density of local branches and the electoral performance of ANO), the analysis in the previous chapter did not show a strong relationship. However, when the investigation progressed further, the local party organization turned out to be electorally beneficial for ANO, although differently. One of the findings of Chapter 2 was that ANO provides the autonomy to the local branches to select locally-embedded candidates (who organize local party-themed events for the public), and the party benefits from this strategy electorally. Simultaneously, national leadership's capacity to control the autonomy of local branches seemed to translate into the better able to address any potential scandals at the local level; boosting party cohesion, stability and legitimacy. In light of this, this Chapter 3 will look not only at the numbers (i.e. the relationship between the extensiveness of party membership and the electoral success of ANO) but will explore ANO's

⁴ Part of the data used in this chapter was published as a co-authored article, see: Cirhan and and Stauber (2018).

party membership beyond that. Investigating other specific aspects of its ANO's party membership should enlighten more potential implications it may have electorally.

The definition of party membership may vary from one political party to another; each party may even hold to a concept of membership, “peculiar to it” (Whiteley, Seyd and Richardson 1994, 19). As such, party membership might describe multiple types of relationships between parties and their supporters. Many parties experiment with various affiliation options, such as registering ‘sympathizers’ or ‘party friends’ (Ponce and Scarrow 2014, 1). Traditional individual members can be distinguished from the other forms of membership by the privileges granted to them (or the obligations imposed on them) by the party. Common obligations include “the injunction to refrain from joining rival parties, and the requirement to contribute to party funds. Common privileges include the right to participate in candidate selection, and the right to influence programmatic decisions” (Scarrow 1996, 16). The contemporary literature dedicated to party membership distinguishes between six forms of political participation (see Table 3.1 for their distinction). Throughout this dissertation, I refer to these different types of relationship between citizens and parties as to different types of party membership. As a result of parties experimenting with various forms of party membership, traditional individual members are said to lose their former relevance for parties. Many closely inter-related external factors (the increased availability and importance of mass media, spread of the use of modern technologies and online mobilisation on social networks), and internal factors (highly professionalized campaigning or personalisation of politics) are said to play their role in traditional individual members’ losing their importance within parties (Gallagher and Marsh 2004; Fisher, Denver and Hands 2006).

Table 3.1 Party Membership Types

Type of party member	Obligations, rights and activities of member
Traditional individual membership	heaviest obligations and most political rights
Light membership	lower dues and fewer benefits
Cyber-membership	formally registered, only online activities
Sustainer	supporter with financial links to party
Social media follower/friend	joined the party's online network, but has no obligations
News audience	only one-way communication from the party

Source: Scarrow (2015, 30-31).

Simultaneously to the above trends, parties are compelled to seek for the alternatives to traditional individual members to compensate that increasingly fewer people are interested in becoming members. Parties are often seen as ‘abstract and anonymous institutions’ (Hartenstein and Liepelt 1962) or ‘impersonal bureaucratic institutions’ (Hooghe and Kern 2015) that offer no immediate material advantage to its members, which demotivates citizens from joining them. Traditional individual membership, one of the most time and cost-intensive forms of political activism, has severely suffered from widespread public dissatisfaction with politics and party dealignment (Bruter and Harrison, 2009; Katz et al., 1992; Mair and Van Biezen 2001; Scarrow, 1996; Seyd and Whiteley, 2004; Van Biezen and Poguntke 2014, 2015). Some scholars have even predicted that in the near future, a radicalized member-less form of the business-firm party will be electorally successful (Mazzoleni and Voerman 2016, 9). This chapter contributes to this theoretical discussion and explores how ANO approaches its party membership; what forms of party membership are prevalent within the party, and whether and how party members influence its electoral outcomes.

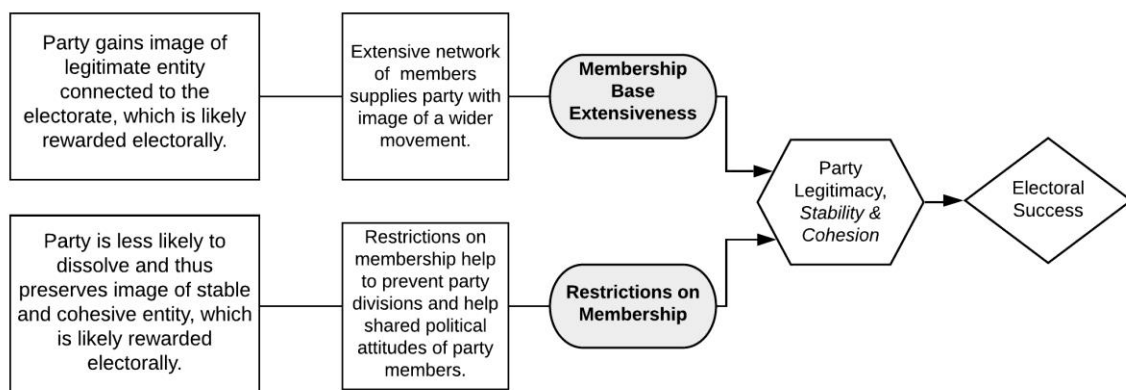
The theoretical arguments in this chapter are the following. Party membership should matter electorally on two levels. On the one hand, an extensive network of party members should support party legitimacy by helping to create the image of the party as a rooted broader movement of people. Having more members should also be electorally beneficial via supporting the party with volunteer labour helping it to communicate better with the potential voters; mobilising votes more effectively. On the other hand, implementing restrictions on party membership should help the party leadership in controlling party stability and cohesion. Preventing internal conflicts and party divisions (and keeping shared political attitudes) is easier in tighter organizations. As explained in detail in introducing Chapter 1, the resulting party cohesion, stability, and legitimacy are likely to resonate with voters positively. The electorate who should more likely support such party in elections. See Figure 3.1 that illustrates these theoretical arguments regarding the relationship between ANO’s membership features and its electoral success. The following section focuses on the theoretical discussion concerning the role of party membership in the electoral success of parties.

3.2. Role of Membership in the Electoral Success

Traditionally, party members have been in the centre of academic research related to party politics for some time. They have been referred to by many terms, comparing party

membership to ‘an electoral cushion’ (Levitsky 2003, 13), ‘the party leadership’s antennas on the ground’ (Seyd and Whiteley 2004, 362), ‘grassroots linkage units’ (Whiteley, Seyd and Richardson 1994), or ‘the backbone of political parties’ (Rohlfing 2015, 18). Several scholars analysed various roles that party members may fulfil within parties. These authors perceived members as grass-roots activists helping to form programmatic policies (Scarrow 1996, 11-13; Bruter and Harrison 2009), as loyal voters (Scarrow 2000; Levitsky 2003, Hooghe and Dassoneville 2014, 376), as a resource pool for recruiting and socialising future candidates and political leaders (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000, 7; Kopecký 1995; Hazan and Rahat 2010, 8; Gherghina 2014, 292; Selle and Svasand 1991; Arter 2016, 20), or as contributors to the party financing (Whiteley, Seyd and Richardson 1994; Scarrow 1996; Ibenskas 2014). Because this chapter is concerned solely with the electoral relevance of party members, only the theory relevant directly to party membership vis-a-vis parties’ electoral success is discussed here.

Figure 3.1 Party Membership and Electoral Success



The impact of party members on the electoral success of parties is viewed differently across the discipline and time, ranging from essential to irrelevant (Van Haute and Gauja eds. 2015). However, two main views prevail. The first view perceives the extensive party membership as electorally beneficial because it supplies party legitimacy. This view is in many ways similar to the theoretical argument discussed in the previous Chapter 2 regarding local branches’ density. This argument is based on three closely-related components. Having more members should boost party legitimacy by supporting party’s visibility, by improving party’s ability to connect with voters, and by enhancing party’s capacity to conduct broader campaigns using its members’ volunteer labour.

Firstly, extensive party membership is seen as an electoral asset because it proofs to the potential electorate that the party has significant roots in society, serving as a valuable source of visibility and legitimacy (Scherlis 2014). Having more party members helps parties to be more visible, voters can know the party better and more likely identify with it (Rohlfing 2015). Secondly, the extensive party membership is said to help parties to connect with voters more efficiently. Party members should cultivate electoral support for the party by multiplying the party's electoral base through their contacts besides the centralized media campaigns (Weldon 2006; Levitsky 2003; Scarrow 1996; Scarrow and Gezgor 2010). With more extensive party membership, the potential voters are more likely to know someone in their social circle who is a party member, and who can persuade them and positively influence their opinions about the party. As such, party members can act as party ambassadors in the local community (Whiteley, Seyd and Richardson 1994), representing important electoral linkage mechanism for political parties with voters (Hooghe and Dassoneville 2014). Several scholars have observed that these personal links are irreplaceable by modern campaign techniques (Scarrow 1996; Whiteley and Seyd 1992; Whiteley 2011). Thirdly, parties with extensive party membership should electorally benefit from utilising member's free labour during campaigning efforts. Broader campaigns can be conducted thanks to the volunteer work of party members (Rohlfing 2015, 18; Scarrow 2015, 102) locally. Such work may include the assistance with approaching citizens, the distribution of various party materials or other means of spreading the party message (Scarrow 1996; Whiteley 2009; Whiteley and Seyd 2002; Kolln 2014).

The second view perceives extensive party membership as a substantially less important factor for achieving electoral success than other factors (like party marketing or sophisticated and expensive mass media campaigns) (Kopecký 1995; Mair and Van Biezen 2001; Olson 1998; Van Biezen 2003). It even sees party members as costly 'organizational burdens' in regards to parties' stability and cohesion (Scarrow 1996, 27). The relations within parties (especially between party elite and party members) are crucial for their stability and cohesion; these relationships depend on the outcome of ongoing negotiations or so-called 'organizational power games' (Panebianco 1988, 22; Sandri and Amjahad 2015). More members may mean more opinions that can stir more internal conflicts. As such, larger parties can be seen as more fragile and more easily divided (Panebianco 1988, 187). The more extensive membership can motivate the creation of factions that may endanger party stability; the inclusiveness of party membership has an impact on the cohesion. When the inclusiveness is high, and recruitment is

restricted, party membership becomes a privileged club with homogenous political preferences and high loyalty. In the opposite case, a more open model of party membership with higher societal reach, may undermine the stability of the organization as the loyalty and attitudinal consensus (party cohesion) of its members is comparatively lower (Bolleyer 2009; Volden and Bergman 2006). Seen this way, the screening of potential party members' background (including their ideological views) before granting them party membership status, may reveal their future political attitudes, which can prevent future party divisions (Berry 1970, 80). Small (in terms of the number of party members) highly-centralized parties are said to be more politically cohesive due to rigid entrance conditions and careful selection of new members. Thus, preventing excessive organizational expansion may be in line with party leaders' plan to minimise future divisions. More extensive party membership may be unappealing, as it could create a potentially powerful source of conflict inside the party (Kopecký 1995, 519). When parties get divided into several factions, they lose legitimacy due to increasing levels of their fragmentation, which can quickly discredit them in front of their voters (Scherlis 2014).

The above-reviewed theory yields the following. Party membership should matter electorally on two levels. Having more party members should support party legitimacy (the party is more visible among voters, active party members link potential voters to the party, broader campaigns are possible due to free labour provided by these party members). On the other hand, restrictions on party membership should support party stability and cohesion. Party with smaller party membership can keep shared political attitudes and in turn prevent internal conflicts and party divisions more easily than a party with extensive party membership.

3.3. Methodological Approach

How is the relevance of the above theoretical arguments tested? The empirical analysis of the role of the number of party members in the electoral success has more layers. A cross-regional correlation between ANO's electoral outcomes and the number of party members (M/E ratio disaggregated on the regional level) is conducted. Networks of different types of party members are compared, the difference between their sizes should demonstrate ANO's preferred form of party membership. Obligations and rights of different types of party membership within the party are investigated, and the rules concerning the recruitment of members are explored to identify the potential restrictions on ANO's party membership.

What kind of data do the above analyses depend? The party officials have provided the party organizational data concerning the number of different types of party members. Party statutes enable the analysis of the formal rights and obligations of various forms of party members within ANO. Regional membership statistics and regional electoral statistics are used in the correlations.

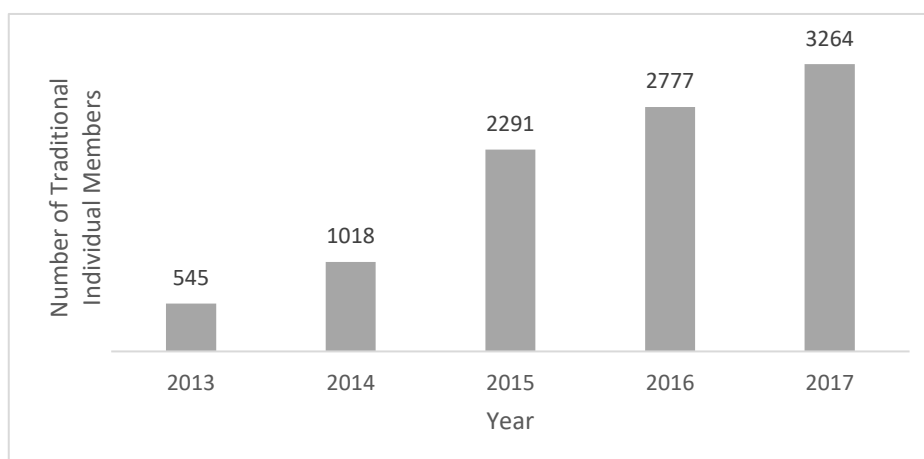
3.4. Empirical Analysis

Following Scarrow's (2015) distinction of party membership typology, ANO differentiates between three different types of party members. These include traditional individual membership, light membership and social media followers/friends. Light membership in ANO is known as party sympathisers (whenever referring to party sympathisers, the light membership is meant). This empirical section is set up in the following way. The development in the number of ANO's traditional individual members is explored and discussed first. Then, the rules concerning the recruitment of traditional individual members are reviewed. The discussion proceeds with the analysis of the relationship between the number of traditional individual members and electoral success. Finally, the role of light membership (party sympathisers) and social media followers/friends (the development of their network's size over time, their rights and obligations within the party) is explored.

3.4.1. Traditional Individual Membership - Size

As a new electorally very successful party, ANO naturally attracted a lot of people who were interested in becoming part of its electoral success (Válková 2014). As such, we should see its traditional individual membership multiplying to reflect this interest (refer to Figure 3.2 with the overview of the development of ANO's traditional individual membership).

Figure 3.2 Number of ANO's Traditional Individual Members



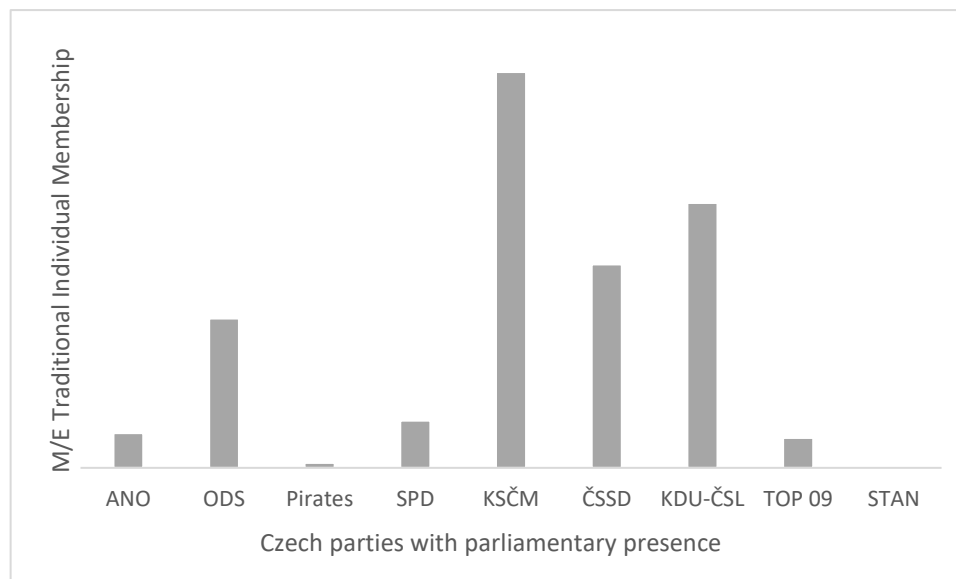
Source: Mazancová (2018), Linek (2015), Spáč (2013, 232–233), Válková (2013, 2014).

The above figure shows that although ANO's traditional individual membership is gradually extending, its growth keeps a slow pace. ANO was established around Babiš (as a party leader) with only several party members. In 2013 (the year when it competed in general elections for the first time), it had only 545 members. However, because it was highly electorally successful and made an electoral breakthrough, it was quickly awarded by a massive influx of new applications for traditional individual membership (see Válková 2014; Cirhan and Stauber 2018). In the following year, the size of its traditional individual membership doubled to one thousand members. In 2015 (following several elections at different constituency levels, all very successful for the party), ANO doubled its traditional individual membership again to over two thousand party members. However, its size is still far from those of the established parties in the country. To present ANO's traditional individual membership in the context of other parties in the country, Figure 3.3⁵ presents the comparison of all Czech parties with parliamentary presence. M/E ratio (member/electorate ratio dividing the number of these

⁵ Figures 3.3 and 3.4 present membership statistics of all parties in represented in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic are from 2017, following the legislative elections of that year.

parties' traditional individual members by the total number of votes in the election) is used as the indicator for this comparison (Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke 2017).

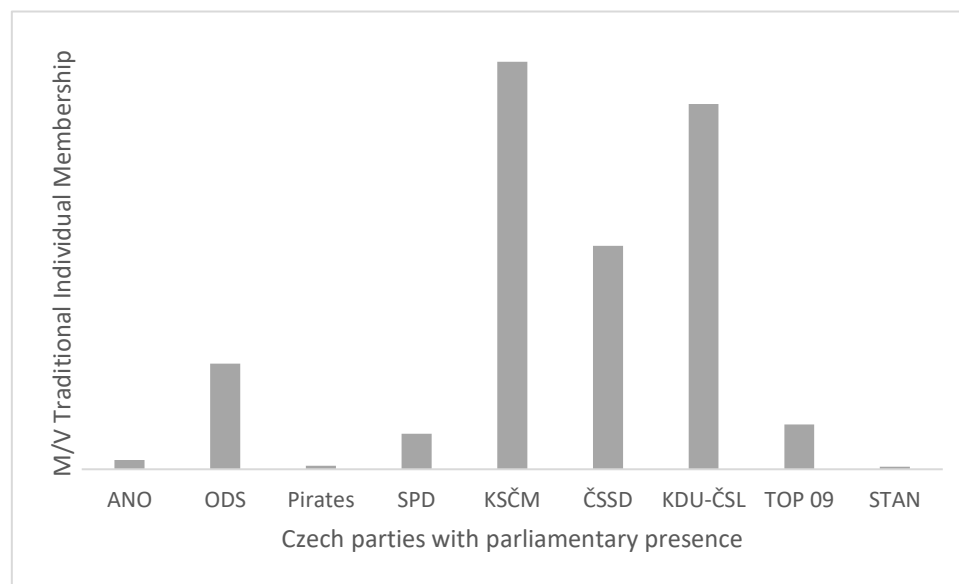
Figure 3.3 M/E Traditional Individual Membership, Year 2017



Source: Rovenský (2018), Brodníčková (2017), Mazancová (2018), Janáková (2018).

When compared with the formerly electorally successful established parties (ODS or ČSSD), the number of ANO' traditional individual members does not come even close. It is indeed, even more, the case when comparing it to the minor parties with traditionally extensive traditional individual membership (KSČM or KDU-ČSL). However, ANO's traditional individual membership is compatible with the 'new' parties, such as Pirates, SPD, TOP 09 or STAN. How do these parties' memberships compare when their electorates are concerned? M/V ratio (member/voter ratio dividing the number of traditional individual members by the number of party voters) is used as the indicator for this comparison (Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke 2017). Refer to Figure 3.4 illustrating parties' variation in M/V ratio.

Figure 3.4 M/V Traditional Individual Membership Czech Parliamentary Parties



The newer parties (ANO, Pirates, SPD, TOP 09 and STAN) have the lowest number of traditional individual members in regards to the number of their voters. Pirates and STAN have even lower M/V ratio than ANO, which can be attributed to their newness in the national politics, as well as to their recent electoral successes. On the other hand, the established parties (mainly KSČM, ČSSD and KDU-ČSL) have built extensive traditional individual membership in the past, but their electoral performance recently stagnated. The effect of this indicator is strengthened for some of the established parties (ODS and ČSSD) that were electorally successful in the past, but recently witnessed a decline in regards to their electoral performance. Unlike the established parties in the past (and similarly to other new parties), ANO cultivates only minimal traditional individual membership. Following its initial electoral success, ANO decided to take a restrictive approach towards traditional individual membership. The party introduced a robust screening recruitment process to reflect the pressures to expand its traditional individual membership. As a result of this strategy, ANO had (at the time shortly after the first competed in legislative elections) over 6,500 pending applications for traditional individual membership (Válková 2014). Such influx of new applications demonstrates the popularity of this particular party, especially when taking into account that all the established parties in the country experience decreasing interest from new prospective members, and even struggle to keep their existing traditional individual membership stable (Rovenský 2018;

Brodníčková 2017; Mazancová 2018; Janáková 2018). The next section focuses on the restrictions on traditional individual membership in more detail.

3.4.2. Restrictions on Traditional Individual Membership

ANO's traditional individual membership can be characterised as extremely exclusive (Kopeček and Svačinová 2015, 188). According to the party statutes, "an internal norm, which can be subject to a change at any point, sets the restrictiveness of new members' recruitment" (ANO 2017). However, the interviewed party leaders pointed out that in reality, several restrictions and requirements are in place. These include sending a full CV, record of personal debt, criminal record, and following six months of probation period (Interviewee 2, 5, 7). These elaborate requirements are unusual in the context of Czech party politics. ANO's membership exclusivity is also characterised by the fact prospective party members are compelled to take psychological tests (Kopeček and Svačinová 2015, 188). This corporate-like culture of the recruitment process in ANO can be seen as a symbol of the party's proximity to the business world of Agrofert. The above restrictions on traditional individual membership may be seen as harsh. Still, according to the interviewed party elite, such measures are necessary to protect the party from careerists (or otherwise unsuitable individuals) that could potentially harm the public image of the party (Interviewee 2, 5). The emphasis on the good name of the party was mentioned a lot during these interviews. The goal was to demonstrate that ANO differs from 'the corrupted parties of the past' (Interviewee 2). ANO's effort to distinguish itself from the established parties (that 'failed in the eyes of their voters') was also evident in the previous Chapter 2 related to the local party organization too. Where local scandals were quickly dealt with by the national party leadership to diffuse negative publicity for ANO.

During the interviews with ANO's elite, the previously-mentioned backlog of traditional individual membership applications was not attributed to the restrictions on party membership, but rather to the lack of organization within ANO's regional administration that failed to cope with the high influx of these applications (Interviewee 5). As discussed briefly before, during the screening of new applicants, they are required to provide many personal documents and information about their background. These include their full employment history, their history of party membership, as well as a full record of personal financial situation and business activities. The collection of this information allows party officials to conduct a complete background check, based on which the applicants will be either accepted or refused

as party members (Interviewee 2, 5, 7). These rules resemble an application for a job rather than for membership in a political party (Interviewee 4) and demonstrate ANO's full consent to control and minimise potential risks associated with party members' potential future conflicts or scandals. Interviewed party activists emphasised that although they first found these rules strict, they allowed the party to swiftly get rid of individuals, who caused conflicts within the party, which helped to keep the party united (Interviewee 5, 7).

After the 2017 party congress ANO implemented changes in regards to its recruitment rules and further restricted them. Since then, all applications for traditional individual membership are sent to the national party office (to undergo screening) before being sent to the relevant local branch. Simultaneously, party members, whose applications have been declined by the local branch, are welcomed to appeal to the national party office. In reality, this means that national party office acquired complete influence over the recruitment of party members. The party leadership solely decides who is recruited and who is refused as a party member. Having such an impact over the admission process represents a crucial tool in the hands of the party leadership in regards to controlling the party organization. As mentioned in the previous Chapter 2, the party posts responsible for recruiting (and expelling) party members are held by the individuals professionally associated with Agrofert (the business company of the party leader). By having all membership applications sent to the national party office, where the HR director of Agrofert and his team screen through them, the party leadership de facto achieves complete control over the recruitment process. Party leadership's influence over the admission of traditional individual members implies the party cohesion. The shared political values of members are supported by a requirement of filling-in a questionnaire related to applicants' political views and opinions, as well as by the necessity to provide a supporting reference from two existing members of ANO during the recruitment process (Paclík 2013). This administration step allows ANO's party leadership to select its members based on their political attitudes. The screening enabled by the combination of all the above mechanisms will likely prevent individuals with different values from entering the party. Simultaneously, by having such control over the recruitment process, the national party leadership can also put a cap on the size of traditional individual membership. When fewer people are admitted (and the size of the traditional individual membership is kept compact), it is easier for the party leadership to identify and prevent the formation of internal dissent (which could represent a risk for leadership's position within the party). All of the above restrictions on party membership likely

help the party leadership to avoid party divisions. The following paragraphs will demonstrate the relationship between these restrictions and ANO's ability to tackle any attempts to establish internal opposition on real-life examples from the media. Controlling the party membership in this way helps the party leadership to attain and preserve party cohesion and stability, which is electorally beneficial, as explained in introducing Chapter 1.

The restrictions on party membership in ANO are not limited to party members' recruitment; it is equally simple for the party leadership to part with any member after granting them membership status. ANO has an elaborate preventive system in place to control traditional individual membership. The party leadership can swiftly get rid of anybody, who does not comply with its decisions, who presents a threat to it, or who represents a liability to the public image of the party. The annulation of party membership status for disobedient members turned out to be an efficient strategy for boosting the loyalty of party members and disabling internal opposition. The examples from the media show that ANO has proven to make good use of such an approach on numerous occasions. For instance, in České Budějovice, or in Brno, where ANO's central party office terminated party membership of all members of three local branches. The conflicts over the creation of candidate lists and national party's response to the local corruption scandals created internal opposition against the regional leadership in Brno. These conflicts led to the expulsion of the majority of party members there and culminated in the legal dispute (expulsed party members sued the party leadership) (Koutník 2020). ANO's national party leadership decided to support its regional leader fully, and immediately ended the membership status of all party members, who disobeyed his authority. Similarly, in Prostějov, twelve members were compelled to leave the party following a disagreement with the regional leadership (Růžička 2016).

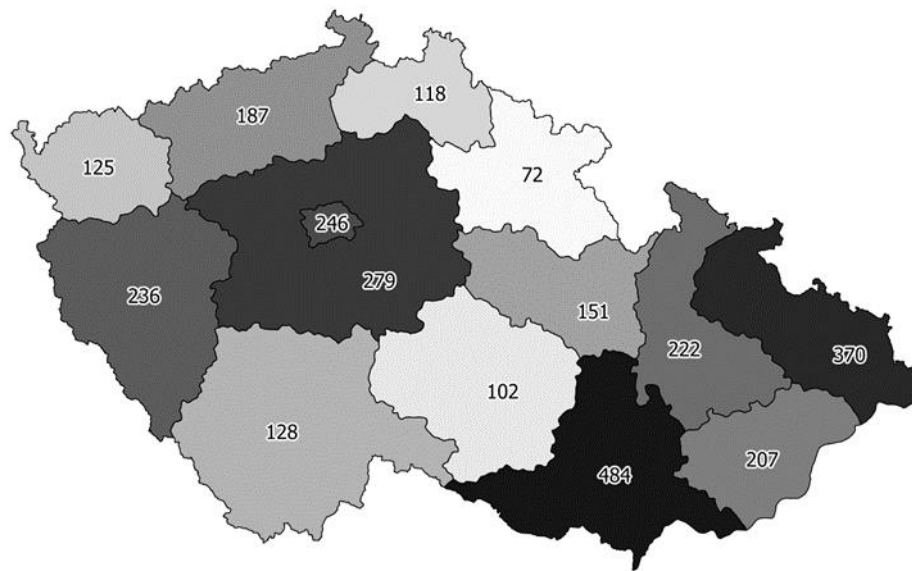
There were numerous other examples when ANO treated the annulation of party membership status (or threat of it) as a tool to enforce obedience and discipline (or to penalize opposition) within the party. It was always the party member, who disobeyed the party leadership that was forced out of the party. Getting rid of individuals who were not loyal to the party leadership helped ANO to prevent divisions within the party. Like in the case of local party organization discussed in the previous Chapter 2, we see a similar successful attempt to take control of the party organization, in this case, over the party membership. In the case of local branches, dissolving entire local branches from above was a common practise when local scandals or any form of internal dissent occurred. In this case, the control over the party

membership is also enabled by the arrangement of rules in statutes, and exercised by the individuals recruited from the corporate network of party leader's business. Babiš's companies pay these close associates (or used to pay them), so they are loyal to him as a result (not to risk having a negative career or financial consequences), and the party relies on them to keep the party membership in check. These individuals, professionally-associated with the party leader, have a full authority to decide over the admission and the expulsion of traditional individual members. When party members get into disagreement or conflict with their regional leadership, they will very likely be compelled to leave the party (as the examples from media show). The national party committee deciding over their fate within ANO will be chaired by the party leader, having a significant say in it (Kozák 2019). When expelled party members would attempt to appeal against such decision, the case would be handled by party's revision committee chaired by close, loyal associates of the party leader (in particular Agrofert's former HR manager). One could even see such arrangements transforming this party's approach towards party members into a quasi corporate-like human resource management. This hunch may be strengthened by the fact that in several cases the party leader made public comments to the media confirming the annulation of party membership statuses even before the committee (voting and deciding over the members' status) met (Kozák 2019).

3.4.3. Number of Traditional Individual Members and Electoral Success

The relationship between the number of ANO's traditional individual members and the electoral success is analysed by correlating the regional variance in the number of these members with party's electoral performance by region (refer to Appendix 8 for the data used in this analysis). As the two last columns in this appendix show, there is a highly unequal regional variation in terms of the number of traditional individual members by region. ANO should be more electorally successful in regions with more registered members if they are electorally relevant. Figure 3.5 illustrates the variation in the size of traditional individual membership across the regions of the Czech Republic (the contrast of shading of colours refers to the number of traditional individual members registered in the region).

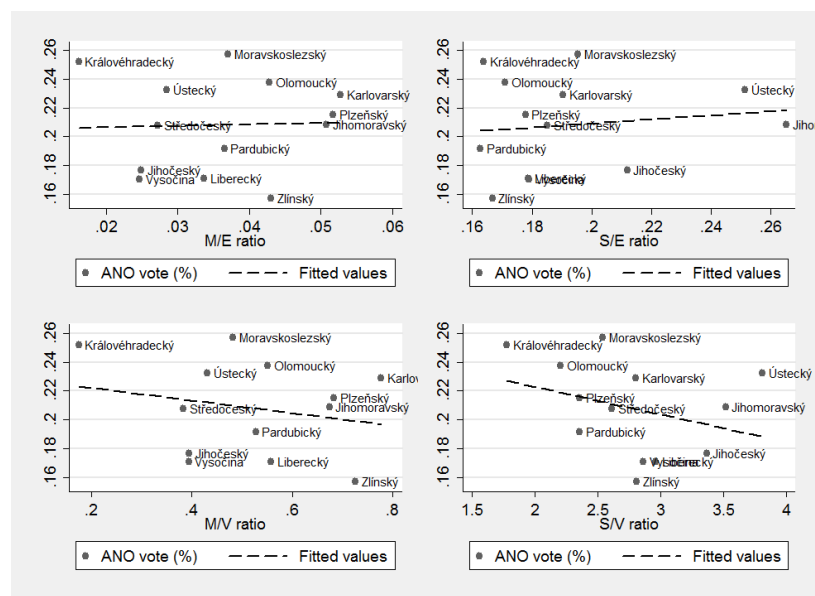
Figure 3.5 Membership base size by region



Source: Cirhan and Stauber (2018).

A correlation between two indicators is conducted to investigate whether a general pattern is suggesting a relationship between them exists. Specifically, ANO's electoral performance in the 2016 Regional elections (disaggregated on the regional level) and ANO's traditional individual membership size (measured as M/E ratio disaggregated on the regional level) serve as the indicators for the correlation. Figure 3.6 graphically illustrates that no pattern suggesting any significant relationship between these two variables exists. The impact of the number of traditional individual members on the electoral outcomes of ANO seems to be insignificant. ANO's electoral performance is stable and nearly identical across the regions, independently of the number of traditional individual members that party registers regionally (which differs sharply from one region to another). Spearman's coefficient shows a low level of correlation (0.12) (Cirhan and Stauber 2018). The outcome of this analysis yields that the number of ANO's traditional individual members does not seem to facilitate better electoral outcomes for the party. The next section focuses on another tier of ANO's party membership – light membership, known as party sympathisers.

Figure 3.6 Electoral relevance of party membership for ANO

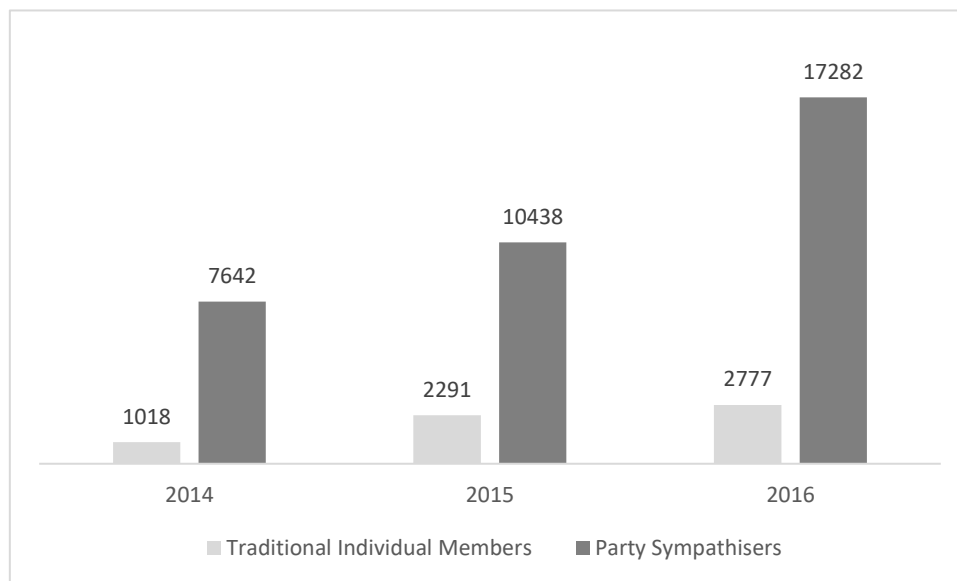


Source: Cirhan and Stauber (2018).

3.4.4. *Light membership - Party Sympathisers*

Following the above analysis of electoral relevance of the number of traditional individual members on the electoral success, this section explores the role of light membership (party sympathisers) in ANO's electoral success. Refer to Figure 3.7 that presents an overview mapping the development of party sympathisers' network over time. When compared with data in Figure 3.2 presented previously, one can see that ANO keeps several times larger party sympathisers' network than that of the traditional individual members.

Figure 3.7 Number of ANO's Sympathisers vs. Number of Traditional Individual Members



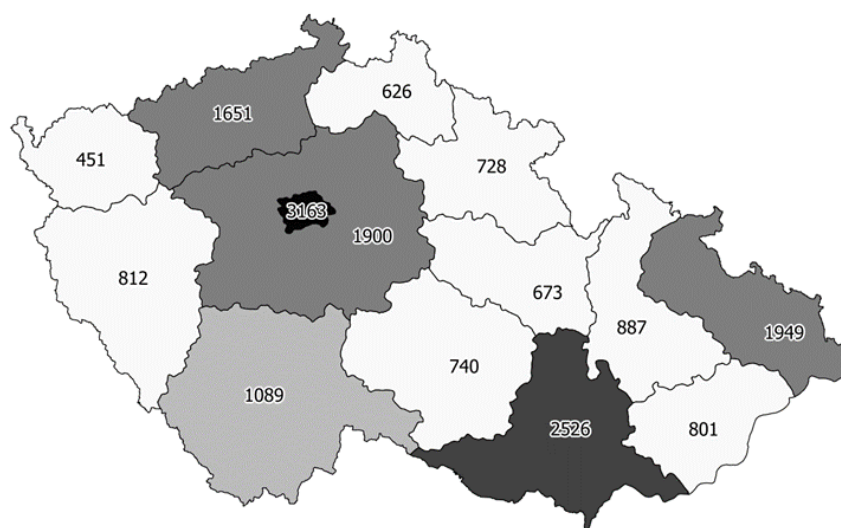
Source: ANO.

ANO has managed to establish a vast network of party sympathisers, consisting of more than 17,000 people (compared to only around 3000 traditional individual members). Such a big difference between the number of traditional individual members and party sympathisers demonstrates ANO's strategy focusing on the latter type of party membership. Simultaneously, it may show that more people are interested in becoming party sympathisers than traditional individual members. At the individual level, light membership is less time-consuming and does not involve the bureaucracy and responsibilities often associated with the traditional individual membership. Additionally, in the country where parties are seen as less trustworthy institutions (ČTK 2019), not as many people can be expected to be willingly associated with political party officially as traditional individual members. The prevalence of party sympathisers over the traditional individual within ANO reflects this party's overall approach towards party

membership. The maintenance of party sympathisers' network is organizationally much less demanding than that of the traditional individual members. The quasi unofficial status of party sympathiser as a supporter is beneficial for the party because party sympathisers are easily managed, and do not present any costs or risks for parties organizationally, this relationship will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Does the number of party sympathisers have any impact on ANO's electoral success? Figure 3.8 illustrates the variation in regards to the number of party sympathisers per region. The same correlation as in the case of traditional individual membership has been conducted to explore the relationship between the number of party sympathisers and electoral outcomes of ANO. ANO's electoral performance in the 2016 Regional elections (disaggregated on the regional level) and S/E ratio (sympathiser/electorate ratio dividing the number of party sympathisers by the number of voters disaggregated on the regional level) have been introduced as indicators for this correlation. The impact of the number of party sympathisers on the electoral success of ANO seems to be insignificant (refer to Figure 3.6 for the graphical illustration of this correlation). ANO's electoral performance is stable and nearly identical across the regions, independently of the number of party sympathisers (that differ sharply from one region to another). A low effect is observed when the number of registered sympathisers is taken into account. The Spearman's coefficient shows a low level of correlation, reaches only 0.14 (Cirhan and Stauber 2018).

Figure 3.8 Sympathiser network size by region



Source: Cirhan and Stauber (2018).

The correlation demonstrated that the relationship between the electoral performance of ANO and the number of party sympathisers is not significant. However, similarly like in the case of local branches' density discussed in previous Chapter 2, it does not have to mean that this light membership cannot be relevant for ANO electorally in a different way. Lewis (2000) emphasises that it is not merely the size of a party membership base that affects the electoral outcomes of parties. The way party perceives the role of its party members and motivates their activism is what matters electorally. It should give the party its unique character that the electorate is likely to appreciate. The next section investigates the role of party sympathisers within ANO in greater detail.

3.4.5. Party Sympathisers' Rights and Obligations

Party sympathisers are a crucial aspect of ANO's party organization. Not only that they strongly outnumber their traditional individual counterparts, but they also play a symbolic role. As a part of its marketing message, ANO often highlights the image of a movement, and if anything embodies this image, it is the wide network of party sympathisers. However, party sympathisers' role in ANO's public image is not reflected in the rights that they are given within the party. Unlike traditional individual members, party sympathisers in ANO are granted virtually no decision-making rights. Direct-democratic and participatory principles are not incorporated when it comes to this light membership and these light members' rights within the party at all. Party sympathisers' role in ANO is only informal. The party statutes do not explicitly mention them at any point, giving them no privileges associated with their party sympathiser status. Because this form of light membership is not formally institutionalized, party sympathisers cannot influence the functioning of ANO's party organization in any way. Such organizational setting is convenient for the party leadership, being able to control party organization effectively. When the organizational structure consists mostly of individuals who do not have any impact on the internal decision-making, it is easier for the party leadership to maintain control over the party organization.

However, when it comes to their duties, party sympathisers fulfil the identical role as traditional individual members. The interviewed ANO's politicians shared their experience with the party using party sympathisers and emphasised that ANO relies heavily on their work during the electoral campaigns (Interviewee 1, 2, 3, 6, 8). Party sympathisers participate in

them directly and provide free volunteer labour, helping to approach the potential electorate in the same way traditional individual members would. These light members connect with the potential voters during local party events that they organize themselves (Interviewee 6, 8). These events include various activities such as goulash cooking contests (Město Jemnice 2019), cleaning events (Uklidmecsko.cz 2020), kids' days or half-marathons (ANO, tohle je Karlovarsko 2013). Interviewed party activists mentioned that it is not about the quantity (the number of members), but about the involvement of party members and their authentic input into propagating the party. From the beginning, ANO did not try to push toward a broader party organization.

According to ANO's elite, the party members do not necessarily have to be traditional individual members because party sympathisers are 'as good as them' (Interviewee 1, 2, 5). Party sympathisers can inform people about the party's goals, and as such, they can mobilise votes as successfully as traditional individual members would (Interviewee 1, 2). It has been shared during these interviews that having a lot of party sympathisers is ANO's concept (Interviewee 2, 6). It can be interpreted in a way that ANO cares about its members' input and activism, and not necessarily about their membership status. It has been pointed out that ANO tries to build a network of party sympathisers in every town and village at the local level (Interviewee 1, 2). These light members do not need to be registered as traditional individual members; party sympathisers are enough to spread the positive word about the party in the communities (Interviewee 2). Interviewee 3 went even further stating that "members are important, but sympathisers are far far more important than members, the supporter of our idea is more crucial, I do not think we should aspire to have tens of thousands of members. It is about quality for me, not quantity, but sympathisers can do everything anyway, apart from voting in the party". Party sympathisers may be regarded as appetisers to traditional individual membership status (that will not necessarily follow), who can do everything labour-wise to support party fully (Interviewee 6). In ANO's party leaders' perspective, party sympathisers de facto replace traditional individual members in their relevance for the party. This light membership is treated like traditional individual members in other parties. They fulfil the same role when it comes to their duties within the party. Because they are available and easy to manage organizationally, ANO relies on them.

ANO's interviewed politicians also noted that the most significant advantage of having many party sympathisers (apart from their support during party-related events) lies in their

numerous contacts, which help the party with voter mobilization (Interviewee 3, 6). Party sympathisers successfully use their social circles at the time of elections to persuade their family members, friends and acquaintances to support the party electorally. Interviewed party leaders revealed that party sympathisers represent a valuable source of information for potential voters, having an extended network of party sympathisers helps the party to be visible and gain more votes. To be able to do so, party sympathisers are regularly updated about the party's vision and events in ANO's internal newsletter (Musilová 2014). Simultaneously, nearly every local branch of ANO in the country has its group on social media (Facebook), where the sympathisers' activities are organized. As such, the network of party sympathisers is connected to the other tier of ANO's party members - social media followers/friends (which will be discussed in the next section). Party sympathisers' influence on potential voters may be seen as even stronger in case of celebrities and publicly-known figures sympathising with the party (ANO 2019b). These 'V.I.P.' party sympathisers and their life stories were visible on ANO's website since party's establishment, and the party, and in particular the party leader, repeatedly made use of these famous connections in the public propagation of the party.

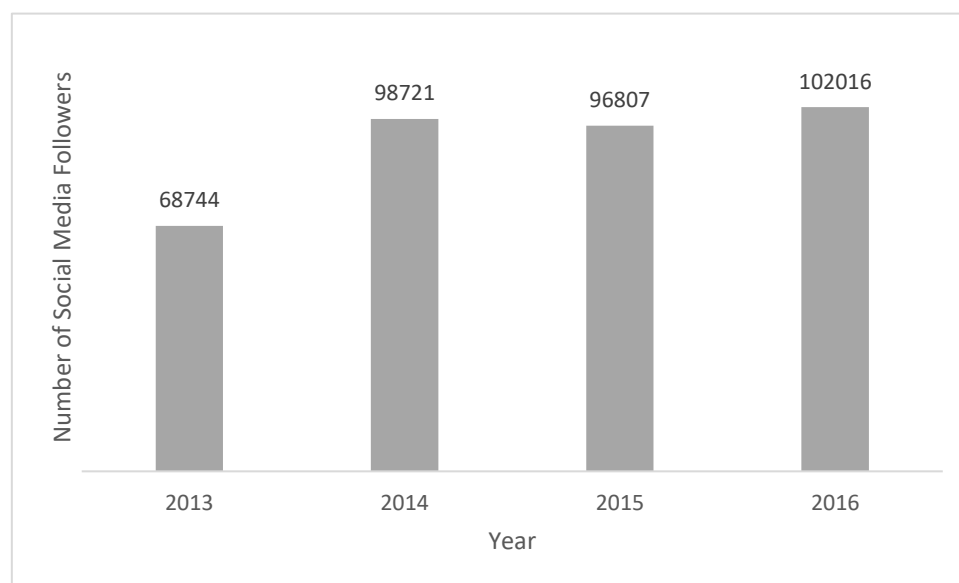
Another example of the party's usage of its party sympathisers' network was the collection of feedback during the regional election campaign in 2016. In this project, an online forum launched by the party was designed to acquire views on specific policies using a questionnaire. In the second phase of this project, party sympathisers using the forum also had an opportunity to create their topics and discussions. From this project, ANO received feedback from more than 24,000 respondents, which was a huge success in terms of the amount of information gathered (ANO, 2017b). This valuable feedback helped the party with the creation of the program for the upcoming elections. This example clearly shows that ANO is indeed interested in the cultivation of a broader community of light members that can provide the party with feedback on questions of programmatic nature. However, this openness to party sympathisers ends when it comes to granting them rights. Their feedback is welcomed, but this is not reflected in ANO's willingness to provide them with any rights within the party nor any other privileges.

3.4.6. Social Media Followers/Friends

The lastly discussed tier of party membership in ANO is the network of social media followers/friends. The importance of online activism becomes more prevalent nowadays,

considering that more and more voters use social networks, and gather information online. ANO built an extensive network of social media followers/friends to reflect this current increasingly important phenomenon of online political activism. Facebook fans group of ANO serves as the sole source of data to map the size of this type of party membership. The decision to include the Facebook online social network as the chief and only source of data is straightforward because the frequency of usage of other social networks, such as Twitter is negligible when compared to that of Facebook in the Czech Republic. Figure 3.8 illustrates the development of the number of ANO's social media followers/friends on Facebook over time.

Figure 3.9 Number of ANO's Social Media Followers/Friends in Years Comparison



Source: ANO (2017a).

ANO did not underestimate the importance of online party presence. From the beginning, the party presented itself as a modern and online marketing-oriented party. As such, it has an extensive network of social media followers/friends. This approach is directly associated with its emphasis on online presence and considerable investment in the professional marketing channels. ANO even established a specialized social networks team. As ANO's lead party marketer has emphasized, the party increasingly uses a social network structure before the elections to spread a party message to mobilize votes (Cirhan and Stauber 2018). Social media followers/friends successfully take up the voter-mobilisation role formerly fulfilled by traditional individual members on the ground. One social media follower/friend can have

access to more people online than any individual distributing party documents in person could dream of. When compared to the options of offline propagation of the party, online party communication also has the advantage of social networks' algorithms targeting individuals based on their preferences and behaviour online (Murthy et al. 2016; Woolley and Howard 2016). As such, online activism can potentially have a much stronger positive impact on the potential electorate (connecting them to the party) than the traditional individual membership would in campaigns in person.

Social networks indeed represent a new arena for parties to propagate their program and candidates, and ANO has demonstrated the capacity to utilize its potential in this respect maximally. In this new arena, social media followers/friends fulfil the role of party activists on the ground. They share and like party posts, videos and other materials with a wider than ever audience of potential voters. ANO can de facto overcome its organizational deficit in the size of its traditional individual membership. Online presence of ANO represents another area of party membership, where ANO skilfully compensates for its limited traditional individual membership (that is a subject to many restrictions). Like in case of party sympathisers, online supporters have no rights nor any privileges granted by the party. Their only impact on the party is in the form of provision of free labour (in this case in the online party propagation and voter-mobilization on social networks), without representing any organizational costs for the party.

3.5. Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter pursued an argument about various features of ANO's party membership and its electoral success. One part of this chapter focused on the role of the number of party members in facilitating higher electoral outcomes. The theory associates having more party members with a better electoral performance for parties by helping them be more visible to voters, who should more likely identify with them (Scherlis 2014; Rohlfing 2015). Parties with more party members should also mobilize voters more effectively by multiplying the party's electoral base through their contacts and social circles (Weldon 2006; Levitsky 2003; Scarrow 1996), and by providing labour during campaigns (Scarrow 2015; Whiteley 2009; Kolln 2014). The analysis of the role party membership size in the electoral success empirically distinguished two types of ANO's party membership – traditional individual membership and light membership (party sympathisers). The findings presented in this chapter indicate that the number of either type of

party members does not seem to have a substantial impact on the electoral success of ANO. Looking solely at the number of traditional individual members/party sympathisers and the electoral performance of ANO demonstrated that the relationship is not significant. ANO's electoral performance is stable across the country. It does not reflect the variation in the number of traditional individual members or party sympathisers that are unequally distributed in different regions. Although having more party members does not seem to be significant for the electoral success of ANO, party membership still seems to matter for it electorally via affecting party stability and cohesion.

Panebianco (1988) and Sandri and Amjahad (2015) saw the control and the exclusiveness of party membership as crucial ingredients of the cohesion and stability of the party organization. Bolleyer (2009), Volden and Bergman (2006) and Berry (1970) claimed that the screening of new party members (with the focus on their ideological views and political attitudes) could prevent party divisions. Scherlis (2014) argued that when parties lose control over their party membership, they get easily divided, and get discredited in front of their voters as a result. The findings presented in this chapter indicate that the exclusive character of ANO's traditional individual membership aids this party's cohesion and stability. The restrictions on traditional individual membership (manifested in the rules concerning their recruitment and dismissal) transform ANO into an institution that functions as an exclusive club, inside which is very complicated to get. This confirms the argument made by Bolleyer (2009), whose research has demonstrated that restrictions on party membership help parties to attain stability because it is easier for the leadership to control the party organization. The following logic applies here, once you are admitted into the party, your position is never granted and relies solely on your good relationship with the party leadership. Volden and Bergman (2006) also perceived exclusivity of membership and restrictions on recruitment of members as a crucial aspect of parties' ability to avoid splits and conflicts. This organizational strategy seems to be electorally advantageous for many reasons. The shared political attitudes are stemming from these restrictions on traditional individual membership help to prevent party conflicts and divisions. Like in case of Bolleyer (2009) and Berry (1970), my findings show ANO's management of party membership helps to keep the party more cohesive and allows for more efficient control of party organization by the party leadership. The real-life examples from the media illustrate that ANO regularly strips off party membership of those who misbehave in any way. When the individuals professionally-associated with the party leader have the

institutional backing to terminate membership status of those, who are not loyal to the party leadership, the leaders can effectively mute any internal opposition. By using the membership status as a tool to institute obedience within the party organization, the leadership's position becomes more secure. This argument is very similar to one made in the previous Chapter 2 related to the control over local branches' autonomy. Like for Scherlis (2014), the findings here show that the resulting cohesion and stability are electorally beneficial because the fast and efficient resolution of scandals and conflicts within the party helps ANO's electoral success by diffusing any negative publicity. Voters are more likely to support a party that is not divided by conflicts and scandals because it appears more competent and trustworthy to them.

The restrictions on traditional individual membership go hand in hand with a strong emphasis on building a wide structure of party sympathisers. This party organizational strategy is beneficial for ANO because party sympathisers are not limited in regards to the duties and labour they provide for the party but have no rights nor any privileges are granted to them. This arrangement allows ANO to utilize the perks associated with having many activists on ground propagating the party while enjoying the luxury of not having to pay any costs for it organizationally. ANO relies on their voluntary labour during the campaigns. These light members organize the locally based party-themed events conducted by local branches (that were discussed in the previous Chapter 2). These events help the party to connect with the electorate. Local branches do not need many traditional individual members, because they depend on the wide network of party sympathisers. ANO also seems to benefit from the numerous contacts and societal circles of its party sympathisers, connecting the party with far more people, who are more likely to support it in elections as a result. By implementing restrictions on traditional individual membership, ANO tackles any source of internal dissent, thus remaining cohesive and stable. At the same time, the network of right-less party sympathisers provides access to a broad community of volunteers on the ground. The same goes to the social media followers/friends, who are numerous and are used excessively to mobilise votes online but cannot negatively influence cohesion and stability of ANO's party organization.