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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 6 Conclusions

This dissertation dealt with the electoral success of new anti-establishment parties. Such parties succeed electorally at the expense of their established counterparts. This relatively recent phenomenon takes place in the majority of European countries. Many of these newcomers disappear quickly after their electoral breakthrough. This research empirically explored the relationship between party organization of anti-establishment parties and their electoral success. The analysis of party organization has a tradition in party politics research. However, party organization is only one aspect that can influence the electoral success of parties. Other aspects, such as party ideology, party leader or marketing, were not empirically analysed as a part of this research. The analysis of the role of the party organization in the electoral success was based on the single case study of the Czech party called ANO. The main objective was to find evidence indicating which of the three studied party organizational features matter for electoral success. The single case study results were validated by implementing a comparative element with three other anti-establishment parties.

6.1. Cohesive, Stable and Legitimate Party as a Formula for Electoral Success

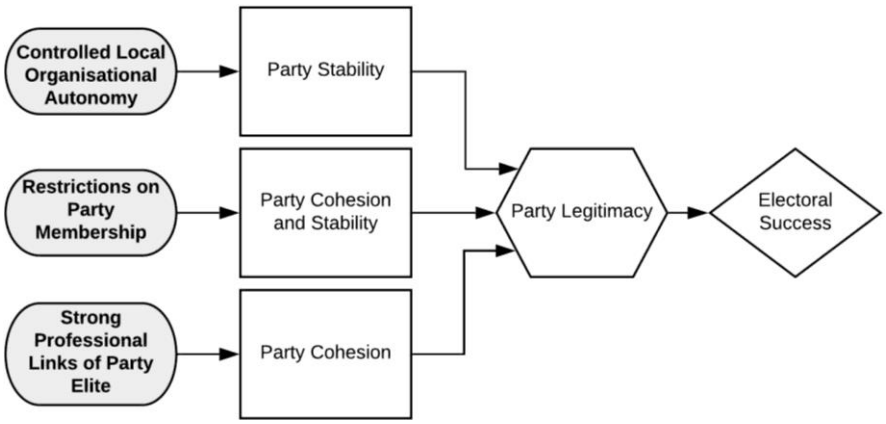
How did ANO (unlike the other new anti-establishment parties) manage to continue succeeding in elections? What helped this party to remain immune to the pressures associated with its participation in high politics (especially to the scandals that were a plague to the other new anti-establishment parties) (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2018)? The existing theory attributes the ability of political parties to repeatedly succeed in elections to various aspects, ranging from their party organization, party ideological profile, charismatic party leadership, marketing strategies and others. This dissertation empirically focused only on the party organization. The goal of this research was to explain the role of party organization in the electoral success of new anti-establishment parties, and ANO in particular. This single case study whose validity is proved by limited comparative analysis comprised of three individually studied party organizational features (local branches, party membership and party elite). The research objectives were achieved by conducting an in-depth single case study. And then, by expanding the analysis by incorporating a comparative element with three other cases that attained different electoral outcomes.

Consistent with the previous research focusing on the role of different party organizational features in shaping the electoral success of parties, the findings in this

dissertation indicate that different aspects of party organization play a significant, influential role in the electoral success of ANO. More specifically, the findings demonstrated that the capacity of limiting local organizational autonomy and implementing restrictions on party membership together with grouping a professionally-associated party elite helps to facilitate party cohesion, stability and legitimacy (that are necessary for achieving electoral success). All of the theoretical discussions concerning the role of party organization in the electoral success in this dissertation were underpinned by the relationship between these three intermediary concepts (of party cohesion, stability and legitimacy).

Party stability helps parties to avoid party divisions, which aids to preserve positive public image as stable and trustworthy entities in the eyes of potential voters. When the party does not fight and is not factious, it is more likely to enjoy support among the voters because it is perceived as more competent, credible and convincing. Party cohesion is a crucial component of party stability. Shared political attitudes are important in preventing party divisions and as such, stability depends on cohesion as a safeguard to internal conflicts. Party legitimacy is a state, in which party achieves positive public image preferable by the potential electorate by appearing as a competent, reliable and trustworthy entity. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5, the comparative element that has been incorporated into the research included four anti-establishment parties founded by political entrepreneurs (ANO, TS, FI and OľaNO). Building on the conclusions of this comparative analysis, this dissertation yields the following outcomes, outlined in the following paragraphs (refer to Figure 6.1 for the summary of findings).

Figure 6.1 Findings Party Organization and Electoral Success



In theory, the limited autonomy of local branches is associated with party stability. Controlling local organizational autonomy helps parties to prevent internal conflicts, party divisions, and the creation of internal dissent (Katz 2014; Hanham 1956). The findings in this dissertation show that in the electorally successful concerned parties, the party leadership maintains power to meddle into local branches´ autonomy. In one of the parties (ANO), the party leader himself can override the decisions made by local branches in regards to candidate selections. In the other one (FI), the local branches are set up as clubs that have no decision-making rights within the party at all. Similarly, another party (OľaNO) did not even set up any local branches at all, which equals to a complete level of control. These control measures over local branches´ autonomy help parties to be more stable; these parties did not experience any significant issues or conflicts at the local level. Unlike them, the electorally less successful party (TS) did not introduce any precautions nor any control measures over the autonomy of local branches. Its inability to keep control over the local branches quickly spread into party organizational crisis. The conflicts at the local level gradually led to the creation of internal opposition against the national party leadership. Internal conflicts started to mount locally and quickly translated into party divisions within the MP club.

In regards to the party membership, the restrictions on party membership are in theory related to party cohesion and stability. Members may represent a potentially powerful source of conflict, endangering the stability of the party (Panebianco 1988; Kopecký 1995). Restrictions on party membership facilitate party cohesion because shared political attitudes are easier to attain in smaller membership base (Bolleyer 2009; Berry 1970; Volden and Bergman 2006; Cross and Young 2002). The findings in this dissertation indicate that electorally successful parties in the sample implement strong restrictions on party membership. The number of traditional individual members is limited by many recruitment restrictions (or even a complete ban on their recruitment). Instead of relying on traditional individual members, those electorally more successful of the concerned parties build extensive networks of light members (with no decision-making rights within the party). These rightless light members still provide free labour to the parties but do not represent a risk in regards to the party cohesion and stability.

In regards to the party elite (in particular to the professional links of party elite), the electorally successful parties group strongly professionally-associated party elite. Previous studies associate strong professional links of party elite to party cohesion. Party elite that shares

professional links have similar occupational socialization experiences and thus hold similar political attitudes (Lodge 1969; Moore 1979). The common professional links of party elite lead to the dual hierarchy within the party organization, which translates into the overlap of affiliations (Janowitz et al. 1956; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008). Party elite sharing professional links forms an interlocking network. Especially at the time of crises, the party cohesion is crucial because it helps parties to stick together. In the absence of party cohesion parties quickly fall into internal conflicts, and party divisions occur following the media coverage of their scandals (which cost parties valuable trust of their voters who punish them in the next elections).

The findings in this dissertation concerning the party elite indicate that the electorally less successful of the concerned parties did not recruit professionally-associated party elite (and their party elite did not hold together). MP clubs of these parties witnessed many internal conflicts and party divisions. In one case (TS), these crises speeded up the process in which the party completely lost its relevance. The cases of ANO and FI demonstrated that when the party elite is professionally-associated with the party leader´s business network, they are more likely loyal to the leadership (because they get paid by their company). The financial reliance of party elite on party leader translate to dependencies, which transform into their obedience and loyalty. This setup leads to a quasi firm-like hierarchy within the party organization (which enhances party cohesion and stability). Consistent with these findings, other scholars who focused on ANO noted that its capacity to control and unify the party organization is based on the existence of corporate links between ANO´s elite and the leader´s business background. Kubát and Hartliński (2019) argued that when Babiš faced resistance within the party, he quickly replaced the party elite with loyal individuals from his business corporation that he could easily control. “The greatest conflict occurred in 2013 when he (Babiš) stifled the rebellion of four (out of five) of his deputies who, notably, were not related to Agrofert. Since then, he has surrounded himself only with checked and loyal associates” (Kubát and Hartliński 2019, 111).

To summarize, the findings in this dissertation demonstrated that party organization matters for the electoral success of anti-establishment parties. The combination of the control of local branches´ autonomy, the restrictions on party membership and the professional association of the party elite seems to help new anti-establishment parties to succeed in elections. Although the electorally successful parties relied on controlled autonomy of local

branches and restricted party membership, the most significant difference between them (ANO and FI) and the two other parties lies in the strong professional links of their party elite. More or less, it seems to be the combination of the studied aspects of party organization that together helped these parties to be more electorally successful.

In regards to the main research question, the chief objective in this dissertation was to find the evidence demonstrating which party organizational features are most likely to make the electoral success of new anti-establishment parties possible. The following aspects of party organization have turned out to be most important in this matter. Firstly, the party cohesion stemming from professional links between party elites helped to manage party conflicts and scandals more effectively. This lack of internal conflicts (also supported by party elites´ loyalty derived from their financial reliance on party leader´s business), supported the party legitimacy. We may only speculate whether the professional links themselves, or the actual financial reliance of party elite on party leader´s business (stemming from this professional association) play a more significant role in forging loyalty and obedience. Secondly, there is a benefit of the membership management strategy of reliance on the light form of membership. It provides volunteer labour and other advantages but does not represent any costs organizationally in regards to party stability. The cultivation of rightless light form of membership, in combination with a cohesive party elite, translates into stronger control of party organization by the leadership. The control of party organization helped to create a positive public image of trustworthy entity, a state preferrable by voters. That is why these two aspects mattered most for the electoral success. In other words, the two mentioned aspects of party organization enable the leadership to control the party organization more efficiently, which helps to create conditions favourable to the electorate. What mattered less is building of the structure of local branches and of the membership base.

6.2. General Outcome of the Research

The above-described party organizational setup (based on limiting the autonomy of local branches, implementing restrictions on party membership, and grouping professionally-associated elite) seems to depend on one common aspect. This common aspect is the intersection of party leaders´ businesses and the party organizational structures. The corporate network (of individuals professionally-dependent on party leader´s business) enables this party organizational setup to exist in ANO and FI. The influence of the party leader´s business on

the party organization reappears as the chief unifying theme throughout all the findings concerning different party organizational features of ANO and FI. These two parties intentionally built their party organization around the corporate network of their party leaders´ companies. Agrofert and Fininvest form the backbones of FI´ and ANO´s party organization. The business-firm infiltration defines how these parties are internally organized. This de facto corporate capture of their party organization is visible at all party organizational levels that were subject to this research. From the professionally-associated party elite on the one hand, or the regional managers recruited from the party leaders´ firms (overlooking operation of regional and local branches) to the business associates controlling the party membership on the other.

Organizing the party in this way seems to be convenient for Babiš and Berlusconi for several reasons. It allows party leadership to keep tight control over the organizational structure to a degree unimaginable in the established parties. As the earlier discussion has shown, the infiltration of business associates into their parties helped ANO and FI to avoid the establishment of internal party dissent (that would endanger these parties´ cohesion and stability). Party leaders´ strong position in these parties remains secure thanks to this arrangement. Previous studies have demonstrated that FI heavily utilised the personnel resources from Berlusconi´s business company (as well as its procedural and financial resources). This strategy of relying on the human resources and organizational know-how of the party leader´s business firm helped FI to set up a functioning party organizational model. As mentioned in Chapter 5, in party research, this model is known as the business-firm party (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999). This organizational strategy represented a substantial advantage for FI against its political competitors in Italy at the time. The intersection between party and business structures helped FI to dominate the entire political scene of Italy for years to come (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999). When compared to FI (that existed within the Italian party system for several decades), ANO is now nearly at the beginning of its journey. However, (as the findings in this dissertation point out) it already benefits from its reliance on the intersection between its party organizational structures and Babiš´s business networks. As discussed previously in Chapter 2, 3 and 4 in greater detail, this business-party alliance aids ANO to navigate itself successfully through the obstacles of high politics (by helping the party to preserve the image of a cohesive, stable and legitimate entity).

The above discussion concerning the party organization of ANO and FI may challenge our views on how political parties operate. It may be the case, especially when the democratic division of power within parties is concerned. In theory, intra-party democracy should be something that parties pursue. In case of these two parties, what prevails instead is the picture of a corporation that expanded its area of business to politics. A business enterprise invested resources and expertise to build a facade resembling the basic characteristics of a political party. While inside de facto operating more like a corporation. And yet, these two parties are preferred by voters and are electorally very successful (despite functioning in a fundamentally undemocratic way). These findings go against the conclusions made in the literature focusing on intra-party democracy (Stokes 1999; van Biezen 2004; van Biezen and Piccio 2013; Cross and Katz 2013). In this case, implementing restrictions on party membership or hindering local´ branches rights should not be appreciated by voters. Despite what many scholars have been arguing (Webb 2005; Ebert-Stiftung 2005; Scarrow 2005; 2013; Ikeanyibe 2014; Ajah and Chinonso 2018), the limiting of intra-party democracy seems advantageous in regards to the electoral success of these two parties.

The findings discussed in this dissertation provide specific evidence showing that different party organizational features matter electorally. But the party organization is not and cannot be the sole explanation of new anti-establishment parties´ electoral success. As a complex process, electoral success has many explanations. As such, it is not possible to explain its cause by analysing only certain factors, such as party organization. Rather than attempting to explain why anti-establishment parties succeed electorally, this dissertation focused on determining which party organizational features matter for electoral success. Because many other factors (that were not within the scope of this research) may contribute to the electoral success, it was not the aim of this research to find a complete explanation for such a complex phenomenon by merely analysing one factor. Instead, the chief objective in this dissertation was to gather and analyse enough empirical evidence to demonstrate which aspects of party organization have an impact on the electoral outcomes (and how). As such, this dissertation empirically treated only one factor with the potential of influencing the electoral success of parties and only did so on a single case study whose validity was proved by a limited comparative analysis. Many other alternative explanations of new anti-establishment parties´ electoral success may indeed exist. If one would consider to empirically look at different factors

such as the party ideology, party leader, marketing or party financing, numerous other alternative explanations of anti-establishment parties´ electoral success would arise.

Within the universe of explaining the electoral success, the empirical analysis in this dissertation comprised only a proportion of the overall explanation. Only in combination with the other factors (for instance some of those mentioned above), one would see the full picture. In some cases, the alternative explanations may also be better suited than the party organization. For example, in the case of ANO (and FI), the professional links between the party elite and party leader´s business seem to function as the main source of party cohesion. However, in other new anti-establishment parties, the party cohesion does not have to come from this source at all. While in case of these concerned parties it is the corporate interlocking network within the party elite that provides party cohesion, in different parties it may originate from elsewhere. For instance, other factors, such as common party ideology, may provide party cohesion. All four parties considered in this research are ideologically shallow, and their party cohesion falls back on the strong professional links amongst their party elite. However, in different parties that are ideologically determined, the common ideology can be a source of cohesion in those cases instead.

6.3. Directions for Further Research

The future research of anti-establishment parties and their electoral success should incorporate a detailed analysis of the role of political entrepreneurs´ financing in their parties. The investigation of potential usage of corporate finances for party purposes would further enlighten the influence of political entrepreneurs´ businesses on their party organizations. Simultaneously, research based on a broader sample of anti-establishment parties modelled around political entrepreneurs would highlight the relevance of the findings made in this dissertation (and shed more light on the role that business firms´ involvement has on party politics). Investigating potential relationships between the party organizational structures and corporate networks on a wider sample of cases would also further verify the role of party organization in contemporary parties´ electoral outcomes. As such, to fully empirically explore and describe the relationship between businesses and political parties, future researchers should include the investigation of party funding and an in-depth analysis of different types of donors. It would help us to understand the degree of political entrepreneurs´ financial involvement in their parties (as well as the financial involvement of their close associates, affiliated companies

and other related corporations). Such analysis would be enlightening, considering that new anti-establishment parties found by political entrepreneurs can be expected to rely financially on their party leaders´ businesses, especially in the initial phases of their party formation. This speculative expectation should be verified on an extended sample of such parties. The detailed analysis of ANO´s financing would help to explain how the party was founded and whether the relationships within the party (and outside of it) have any connection to the source of party financing. Scholars who have already conducted a similar empirical analysis found out that ANO was from the very beginning primarily funded by Andrej Babiš and his Agrofert[17] company (as well by its affiliates and business associates). This party funding was facilitated in the form of loans to the party and represented a large proportion of this party´s income (Brunnerová 2018). Analysis and overview of more anti-establishment parties´ financing (especially when conducted on a wider cross-national comparative sample of cases) would help us understand the role of political entrepreneurs and their wealth within these types of parties. Party´s financial reliance on the party leader´s financial resources could potentially represent another example of dependency that would, in turn, help the leader to control the party organization. Some authors have claimed that Babiš can make most decisions regarding the party freely because he is the main funder the party (Kopeček 2016). Perhaps because Babiš largely pays for ANO to operate (and the party is indebted to him for that), he can implement the control measures over the party organization that were discussed throughout this dissertation. Future academic studies investigating the above relationships would, in my view, enrich our understanding of anti-establishment parties´ formation, operation, and grounds for their electoral success. To understand and draw some general insights on ANO, the next section concludes with a theoretical debate regarding the significance of ANO in the light of my findings.

6.1. Further Discussion About the Role of ANO in Czech Politics

ANO´s electoral success represents one of the most significant political changes in the Czech Republic since the fall of communism. Anti-establishment sentiments gradually mounted in Czech society for many years (Stolarik 2016). The protest vote strengthened with every new

[17] According to the Czech branch of Transparency International, Agrofert provided at least 30 million CZK (around 1.2 million EUR) to ANO between 2012 and 2015 (Transparency International 2016).

corruption case that involved high-ranking politicians of one of the two major parties. The frustration with the established parties culminated with the media coverage of so-called Nagy-gate case (Havlík, Hloušek and Kaniok 2017, 45) based on the accusation of PM´s chief of staff (and lover) for misusing her position to spy on PM´s wife. This complex case exposed bribing and misuse of power among the highest post in ODS and led to PM Nečas´s resignation and fall of his coalition government in June 2013 (Právo 2013). Shortly afterwards, in October 2013, the Czech political scene witnessed an electoral earthquake that was unexpected by many.

A new era of Czech billionaire Andrej Babiš and his party called ANO has just begun (Roberts 2018). This new electorally very successful anti-establishment party emerged overnight. It represented an unprecedented political change that has no comparison in contemporary Czech politics (Havlík and Voda 2016). In the course of the next seven years, ANO became the strongest political player in the country, winning a vast majority of all successive elections in different electoral arenas. Since the 2013 legislative elections, with ANO making a swift entry into Czech party system, scholars and media commentators alike start witnessing a new phase of the Czech politics characterised by the strong position of one party. It can remind us of Italian politics under Berlusconi a few decades ago. Although Czech politics is by far not yet dominated by one party 'owned' by its party leader (and his business), ANO very quickly became the main party at the Czech political scene. From the formerly virtually invisible billionaire, Babiš built a party that holds public office at every single level of state administration, and at the time of completing this dissertation nearly nothing happens in this country´s politics without his name being mentioned. The electoral success of Babiš´s party significantly changed Czech party politics; the following paragraphs will enlighten how ANO influenced it.

In the years following the Velvet Revolution, the Czech parliament witnessed the initial stage of institutionalization, professionalisation and democratic learning (Simon, Deegan-Krause and Mansfeldová 1999). The years to come were marked by the political competition based on the clearly defined ideology-driven conflict between two main parties. This continuous struggle over the control of political power was between left-wing (democratic socialism of ČSSD) and right-wing (neoliberalism of ODS) ideologies representing opposing views on the country´s politics and economy (Vachudová 2008; Cirhan and Kopecký 2019). Out of these two competitors, the right-wing neoliberalism of ODS modelled on the British

Conservatives was more successful in the first years after the fall of the communist regime (Hanley 2008). However, during these times, increasing public distrust in the political establishment and the institutions of the state (Kunštát 2012) was mounting, fuelled by voters´ frustration from numerous corruption scandals (Havlík 2011). The atmosphere amongst Czech voters could be characterised as disillusionment (Linek 2010). The hopes that were invested in the change of regime in 1989 remained unfulfilled for many Czechs (Balík et al. 2017). Gradually, both of these major parties started to lose the support of voters, and the dynamic of the Czech party system was changing (Szczerbiak and Hanley 2006).

Ultimately, right-left two-party completion ended with Babiš´s entry into politics and electoral breakthrough of his ANO. Unlike it was the case for these two parties, ANO represents a new phenomenon in the Czech context - a phenomenon of so-called centrist populism (Havlík and Pinková et al. 2012). Parties ideologically defined in this way increasingly gain ground within the region of Central Eastern Europe (Učeň 2004; 2007), the Czech party system is only one example where it takes place. Although, the first signs of established parties losing support were evident long before Czech voters heard of the name Andrej Babiš (Roberts 2010). One of the first times that the frustration with the political establishment manifested itself strongly was in the 2010 general elections (Berglund et al. 2013), which were referred to as an 'electoral earthquake' (Havlík and Hloušek 2014; Hloušek and Kaniok 2010; Stegmaier and Vlachová 2011). The results of these elections not only weakened the position of the two major established parties, but two new parties also entered the parliament (Haughton, Novotná, and Deegan-Krause 2011). As discussed in greater detail in introducing Chapter 1, in 2010, a new anti-establishment party called VV made an electoral breakthrough. Like in the case of ANO, VV´s electoral success can also be seen as a part of the wider phenomenon of political entrepreneurs infiltrating the Czech party system (Hloušek, Kopeček and Vodová 2020).

In addition to VV, the electoral space occupied by ODS and ČSSD also shrank considerably because TOP 09 a new conservative party entered the lower house parliament (Skalnik Leff 2019, 179). Rather than a genuinely new party, some have categorised TOP 09 as a breakaway party of KDU-ČSL (Hanley 2012, 123). Unlike TOP 09, VV was the first party running on the anti-establishment appeal that made an electoral breakthrough in twelve years (Hloušek 2012). In the Czech context, VV can be seen as a model for other subsequently founded anti-establishment parties with populist rhetoric (e.g. ANO, Dawn, SPD) that achieved

greater electoral success than VV at the time (Kubát and Hartliński 2019, 107). Its only predecessor, SPR-RSČ that combined anti-establishment appeals with the extreme right-wing rhetoric, left the lower house of the Czech parliament in 1998 (Havlík 2012). In contrast to SPR-RSČ, VV did not have a clearly defined ideological profile, and its identity was built solely on the criticism of the entire political establishment and its corruption (Havlík and Hloušek 2014). As mentioned previously, VV participated in the national government led by ODS. However, the party did not manage to hold together due to internal party conflicts triggered by the scandals of MPs and gradually fell apart (Cirhan and Kopecký 2017).

As a result, the position of the government was unstable. ODS had to count on the votes of TOP 09´s MPs and part of former VV´s MPs that remained in the government under the newly formed LIDEM party (Havlík 2012). The government´s issues with VV were only a presage of its future fall. The previously discussed scandal that led to the collapse of Nečas´s government was followed by the caretaker government set up by the Czech president (Hloušek and Kopeček 2012). This cabinet of independent bureaucrats continued to govern illegitimately ignoring the ruling of the Czech Constitutional Court that announced early elections (Balík 2011). The 2013 early general elections were preceded by great instability in Czech politics. The trust in the established parties (that was already at its lowest before the 2010 general elections) hit a new bottom, the frustration with the political establishment mounted (Havlík 2014). In this atmosphere, ANO appears branded as the new savour and as the main critique of all the established parties (in particular of ODS and ČSSD that have managed to squander their political capital completely). These two major established parties, to which some authors referred as clientelist organizations for their close connections to lobbyists, private businesses and even criminal entities (Klíma 2013), were anything but ready to face this new competitor. ANO´s steadily rising popularity stemmed directly from its image as a new 'outsider' party and as a clearly pronounced opposition to all established parties discredited by scandals (Hloušek, Kopeček and Vodová 2020). ANO´s electoral success symbolises the beginning of a new era in Czech post-communist politics.

The Czech party system was previously considered as consolidated, stabilised and institutionalised (Cabada, Hloušek and Jurek 2014; Berglund and Dellebrant 1991; Hanley 2008; Lewis 2000). ANO´s entry fragmented its composition into one bigger party and many smaller parties. Simultaneously, ANO´s electoral breakthrough changed the dimensions of the political competition. The conflict between parties became to be no longer primarily ideology-

driven, but interest and marketing-driven. ‘ANO´s era’ will be remembered for the greater interest of parties in the professional party marketing and strong emphasis on their public presentment rather than on their political program or party ideology. Reliance of parties on marketing experts did, of course not commence with ANO´s involvement in politics, but the importance of marketing and public presentment indeed increased. Additionally, one could even go further and argue that the intersection between business and politics in the case of ANO also changed our perception of the role of parties in society. From political actors responsible for forming and proposing new policies into institutions existing de facto solely to produce highly professionalised marketing messages to win over public opinion. Babiš´s ownership of several mainstream media outlets (two major daily newspapers, radio station and internet TV) also altered our perception of (and tolerance to) the concentration of power in the hands of politicians. What was previously unimaginable in Czech high politics quickly became a new ‘norm’. Especially when this second-richest Czech purchased the country´s largest print media house providing him with media power inaccessible to his political competitors. When combining such media power with his vast economic power of Agrofert business empire (Roberts 2018) and the newly acquired political power of ANO, Czechs find themselves in a situation highly unusual and inconceivable in the established democracies west of the country´s borders.

In terms of party ideology, ANO´s electoral breakthrough can also be perceived as part of a self-sustaining anti-establishment supply to the electorate frustrated with the politics of the main parties, and ODS in particular (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015). As such, ANO´s victories marked the end of the right-wing politics of ODS. In its place, we see ANO as a broad movement of the centre, something for which the demand lasted from the first days of Civic Forum. In one interview Sean Hanley emphasised that with ANO´s entry to the party system, the specific kind of technocratic populism of Andrej Babiš replaced the former right-wing politics of ODS (Willoughby 2017). This technocratic populism entails that ANO combines anti-establishment rhetoric with the centrist managerial-like technocratic politics (Havlík 2019). Unlike the other European anti-establishment parties either on the radical right (Party for Freedom in the Netherlands) or the radical left (Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain), ANO is positioned in the centre. Its ideology of hostility against the entire political establishment combines with centrist, technocratic policies (Havlík and Voda 2018). Because ANO (and previously VV as well), relies on populist slogans in its communication to the electorate (in

addition to the strongly pronounced anti-establishment appeals), it is often referred to as a populist party too.

The contemporary literature refers to populist parties as to those that claim to represent the will of ordinary citizens (Aalberg et al. 2017), while opposing the political elites (Stanley 2008; Roberts 2017), labelling them as corrupted (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013; Mude and Kaltwasser 2017). ANO´s and VV´s kind so-called centrist populism (Stanley 2008) is closely associated with the party politics of post-communist countries of Central Eastern Europe (Učeň 2004; 2007). In other EU countries, populism is more often associated with the radical right (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Mudde 2004; 2007; 2010; Norris 2005; Pirro 2015; van Kessel et al. 2020) or with the radical left (March and Keith 2016). For the majority of Europe´s extreme right or left parties, the core of their ideology lies in anti-elite salience (Polk et al. 2017). With the notable exceptions such as Italy's Five Star Movement that combines anti-establishment rhetoric with centrist voter preferences (Mosca and Tronconi 2019), in southern and western European party systems, populist appeals are often combined with nationalism or xenophobia (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Zaslove 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Minkenberg 2015). In the Czech context, not all new parties (that can be classified as populist parties) are positioned ideologically in the centre either. VV and ANO merged populist themes (and anti-establishment appeals) with the centrist ideological position. Others, notably Tomio Okamura (with his Dawn and SPD parties) combined these two aspects of political ideology and communicational strategy with the radical right-wing politics. Unlike Okamura´s right-wing populism that is running on the anti-immigration, anti-Muslimism and anti-EU ticket (Kopeček et al. 2018; Císař and Navrátil 2019), ANO introduced the technocratic populism into the Czech political context.

But what does ANO´s version of technocratic populism entail? As mentioned in introducing Chapter 1, ANO built its ideology and party image on the idea of managing the state efficiently, like running a private business-firm. Chiefly, it includes appeals for fixing and centralising the state administration, tackling the incompetence and the corruption of civil servants, and introducing vast infrastructure projects. Babiš repeatedly emphasised that only experienced managers can run the state effectively (Havlík 2019), ANO´s overall rhetoric and party communication towards public stemmed directly from Babiš´s appeals of this kind. The technocratic approach of ANO is closely related to the managerial background of its leader and his close associates (as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, which focused on ANO´s party

elite.) The hands-on experience of ANO´s elite from business circles mirrors in their managerial-like approach to politics and the set of technocratic policies they introduce (Buštíková and Guasti 2018). The technocratic approach of ANO shows that the anti-establishment rhetoric in Central and East Europe is not necessarily combined with other elements of populism. These classic themes established in the political science literature like people-centrism, radical ideology, or the invocation of general will are not present in the case of ANO (Canovan 1999; Engler, Pytlas and Deegan-Krause 2019). ANO´s opposition to the entire political establishment goes hand in hand with its technocratic, managerial problem-solving rhetoric because of the notorious incompetence of previous governments in planning and executing concrete reforms and projects. In the past, the established parties were repeatedly targeted by media for their failures to resolve many issues regarding the administration of the country. In particular, the criticism was aimed at the pension reform, reconstruction and building of the infrastructure or the investment into the medical system. Consequently, ANO´s anti-establishment appeals work together with its technocratic promises of functioning state administration. However, ANO´s technocratic populism (symbolised by the managerial problem-solving approach) has similar limits like the neoliberal right-wing politics of ODS; it can quickly fail with the voters once "the myth of expert competence is exposed" (Buštíková and Guasti 2018, 322).

In addition to the technocratic approach to policies, from the very beginning, ANO built its party communication on the criticism and strong opposition to all established parties. Babiš´s strongly pronounced anti-establishment rhetoric may look paradoxical to those familiar with Czech politics because of his close relationships with many politicians from major parties of the past (both ODS and ČSSD). However, this marketing strategy of distancing from the political establishment (despite the apparent links to politicians from the established parties) is common amongst the leaders of new anti-establishment parties. Deegan-Krause (2017) observed that many leaders of such parties could be recognised as an elite in regards to their wealth or prominence. In many cases, their fortune is even a result of their political connections in the past. Their apparent anti-establishment distancing from the current political elite is visible as a part of their marketing strategy (Deegan-Krause 2017). Scholars, who focused on anti-establishment parties in the post-communist context noticed that their anti-establishment stance is of more importance than the classic populist themes. "Particularly in post-communist countries, anti-establishment rhetoric tends to be a feature of many (new) parties, making a

distinction between populist and non-populist parties arguably less meaningful" (van Kessel 2015a, 33). In the Czech context, the anti-establishment stance amongst new parties reflects the frustration of the voters with the established parties haunted by corruption scandals of the past. Within such an environment, even new non-populist parties, like Pirates, often make strong anti-establishment appeals as well.

When ANO gradually acquired more political power and managed to replace the established parties in the national government, many journalists and public intellectuals alike started to ask whether its involvement in politics represents a risk for Czech democracy. Because Babiš started to concentrate more economic, media and political power, his rise in Czech politics could not go unattended by the political scientists either. Hanley and Vachudova (2018) focused on ANO as a part of the discussion on the democratic backsliding in Central Eastern Europe. They compared the new political situation in the Czech Republic to that already experienced for some time by Poles and Hungarians. Unlike it was the case for the governing parties in Hungary or Poland (that relied mainly on illiberal nationalism), ANO started its attempts for the concentration of power in the name of technocratic efficiency. In contrast to PiS or Fidesz, ANO lacks "a similar nationalist justification for centralizing authority, though to some extent it uses the fight against corruption and traditional parties as a stand-in" (Vachudova 2019, 5). The sequence of events that led to the concentration of power has also been different in the Czech Republic. Babiš´s journey followed the opposite trajectory than that of his counterparts in Poland or Hungary. The concentration of his tremendous economic and media power as oligarch preceded his gain of political power (that came later with the electoral success of his party) (Hanley and Vachudova 2018, 283). Although in the past Babiš was not politically active in public, he used his political contacts within ČSSD and ODS to facilitate acquisitions of many formerly state-owned companies, which helped him to accumulate economic power (Kmenta 2017; Pergler 2014). Unlike in Poland or Hungary, in the Czech case, all the power has been accumulated into the hands of one person.

But have there been any significant consequences of Babiš´s concentration of power for Czech democracy? Several publicly-known intellectuals warned that Babiš as prime minister (in cooperation with the Czech president Miloš Zeman) might attempt to dismantle liberal democracy in a way paralleling with the political changes seen in Poland or Hungary (Příbáň 2017). On this note, Hanley and Vachudova (2018, 289) conclude that the economic, media and political power accumulated by Babiš amplify one another (and some of his ideas

border with stripping away checks and balances of the democratic system in the name of efficiency). However, according to them, ANO does not represent a threat comparable to the nationalist and illiberal PiS or Fidesz. Unlike these parties, ANO´s technocratic rationale and lack of parliamentary majority (which translates into its dependence on smaller parties to form and sustain the national government) prevent Babiš from eroding the liberal democracy in the Czech Republic (Roberts 2020). On the other hand, ANO´s participation in politics de facto embodies what Innes (2016), who has closely studied party–state relationships in the Czech Republic, referred to as a corporate state capture. The incorporation of ANO´s politicians (who are often closely professionally associated with Babiš, as this dissertation also confirms) into public administration raises concerns while we consider that Agrofert is one of the major recipients of public funding. Moreover, NGOs, such as Transparency International refer to European Parliament´s resolution regarding Babiš´s ongoing conflict of interest (Pearson 2020). This evidence is especially paradoxical when we acknowledge that at the beginning, ANO campaigned with strong emphasis of being the champion of anti-corruption. As mentioned in the introducing Chapter 1, ANO even formulated its initial public proclamations closely on the cooperation with several NGOs, in particular with Rekonstrukce Státu (Rekonstrukce Státu 2020). Now the same sector calls for Babiš to get rid of his business (now with ownership transferred to two trust funds) or resign.

Other scholars added that although it remains unclear what risk will ANO represent for the liberal democracy in the Czech Republic in future, there are already some red flags visible today. For instance, “the erosion of informal democratic norms that goes hand in hand with the polarization of party systems” (Vachudova 2019, 705), is a phase we already start to witness now. The plans for dissolvement of some institutional checks and balances were also mentioned by Babiš (Lorenz and Formánková 2020). In his book, Babiš shared ambitions to amend the constitution, aiming to make it more efficient, to disband the Senate, regional level of governance and to reduce the size of the parliament (Tucker 2017). It thus remains unclear what the future will bring.

At the time of completing this dissertation, ANO remains as the leading political player in the Czech Republic, leading the country´s government. Currently, it is the biggest party in the lower house of Czech parliament, it leads all the electoral polls, and its position seems unchallenged by any of its competitors. Several observers shared the irony (or perhaps even the geniality) of Babiš using an anti-corruption platform to acquire and maintain vast political

power while simultaneously struggling with his scandals that border with corruption, misuse of public funding and conflict of interest. In the past, several new anti-establishment parties in the Czech Republic disappeared quickly after making electoral breakthrough (in particular VV and Dawn). These parties became victims of the internal conflicts triggered by the scandals of their party elite. Unlike for these parties, ANO´s presence in high politics proved to be more long-term. A number of similar patterns between these parties and ANO are visible; such as the speed with which they have emerged and gained the attention of public and media and skilfully utilised the widespread discontent with the established parties to made electoral breakthrough. Despite these similarities, ANO prevailed, and the other parties disappeared as quickly as they appeared (mainly due to their inability to stay united when facing challenges and pressures). Their disunity translated into incompetence to tackle negative publicity following the media coverage of their elite´s scandals (Cirhan and Kopecký 2017) and foreshadowed their fall. ANO´s elite, in the particular the party leader himself faced similar (in fact even far more severe) scandals like the elite of the other two parties. Nevertheless, ANO did not fall apart, and its public image did not suffer as a result of it. Unlike in the other parties, the scandals of the party leader did not translate into the party organizational crisis within ANO. The findings presented in this dissertation indicate that due to the stable and cohesive party organization, ANO remains immune to adverse impacts of party leader´s scandals (and other pressures associated with its participation in the government).

Other scholars, like Van Kessel (2013) differentiated two types of factors that affect the electoral success of new anti-establishment parties – factors on demand and supply sides. Political scientists, who focused on 'the demand' noted that new anti-establishment and populist parties more likely electorally succeed during the times of crises (Pirro and van Kessel 2018). ANO equally benefited from the crisis of the political establishment and the impact of the economic crisis at the time. Like in the case of the 2008 financial crisis, the migration crisis or the Brexit negotiations, the current crisis around the global pandemic will likely offer fruitful opportunities for populist and anti-establishment parties to shine as well. Because such parties are characteristic for utilising voters´ frustration, some scholar refers to them as to 'agents of discontent' (van Kessel 2015b). These types of parties were told to thrive only when "a substantial part of the electorate feels dissatisfied with the political elite, which generates a truly conducive environment for populist parties" (van Kessel 2013, 194). However, because 'the demand' can only explain the emergence of new parties, not their electoral success in the

longer term (as explained in greater detail in the introducing Chapter 1), this dissertation did not empirically treat the demand-side factors. In regards to 'the supply', van Kessel (2013) adds that even when the conditions are favourable in times of crises (as described above), the new anti-establishment parties need to pose themselves as credible alternatives to their established counterparts to maintain lasting electoral success. What van Kessel (2013, 194-195) means by the 'electoral credibility' is closely related to the leadership and organizational stability. According to van Kessel (2013), the electoral credibility (enabled by the party stability) supports parties´ ability to convey a resonant convincing message to their electorate. As the findings summarised in the previous section indicated, ANO´s ability to achieve the party cohesion and stability is essential for its 'electoral credibility' (legitimate public image), which is a crucial part on 'the supply' side attracting its voters.