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Is the Mass Party really over?
The Challenge of the Western European Right-Wing Populist Parties

ABSTRACT
The prevalent interpretation in party politics development argues the Western European mass party is over, as its ideological appeal and grassroots membership declined while its dependence on public funding has grown. This article challenges this wisdom showing how the rise of the Western European radical populist right-wing parties might represent a partial recovering of the mass party legacy. Through a comparative analysis among seven successful parties, the paper contends some features of mass party persist, such as a strong party ideology, a differentiated and centralised organisation with concentrated leadership, as well as a strong grass-root membership.

KEYWORDS *Political Parties, Radical Right-wing, Populism, Mass Party*

There is wide-ranging agreement that the so-called radical right-wing populist parties (RRPPs) represent an electoral and political challenge for party systems across Western Europe. In this paper, we conceive of RRPPs as posing a different sort of challenge for West European party systems, namely one that is closely connected with the internal organisational development of such parties. Since radical RRPPs are increasingly relevant as permanent actors within party systems and in government in Western European democracies, (e.g., Akkerman, De Lange, Roodujin 2016), it is incumbent to examine their organisational peculiarities. Specifically, we ask whether the internal organisation of right-wing populist parties, particularly those with enduring success, poses a challenge to the established expectations about party development. This is because RRPPs, as we contend, have adopted aspects of the mass party model.

To date the most influential narrative in the literature on party development in Western European democracies is that of the cartel party thesis (Katz and Mair 1995). According to its principal argument, party organisations become increasingly dependent on the state while being evermore removed from their grass-root membership. One of the correlates of this thesis is that 'challenger' parties, if they want to compete successfully, cannot be any different from cartel parties, especially once they participate in government. This framework leaves little room for alternative paths to success for other traditional party models, in particular for the so-called mass party organisations, often associated with socialists and communist parties. However, the cartel party thesis has been criticized for being deterministic in its evolutionary understanding of party development (e.g., Koole 1996; Kitschelt 2000). Moreover, some empirical studies have found support that mass parties or, better, some of their features do persist in European countries and

may be found not only in socialist but also nationalist and RRPPs (Gunther and Diamond 2001: 9ff; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2010; Albertazzi 2016; Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016). Thus, this article tries to understand how currently successful Western European right-wing populist party organisations are able to challenge the conventional view of party development by representing some crucial features of mass party organisation.

Our analysis is structured as follows: first, we provide a reappraisal of the mass party model and consider its main definitions by drawing on the literature from Duverger (1963) to Katz and Mair (1995; 2009). Secondly, we identify those aspects in contemporary RRPPs in Western Europe that represent the mass party characteristics. Thirdly, we employ this framework for undertaking a comparative analysis of several RRPPs to determine the extent to which mass party characteristics are still present and thus relevant for understanding contemporary party politics.

The limits of the evolutionary model

A growing literature is recognizing that the long-held assumptions about successful RRPPs as representing 'flash' or 'charismatic parties' that were simply leadership-dependent have not been borne out by empirical evidence (e.g. Zaslove 2008: 324). In fact, the literature points specifically to a connection between a strong and durable right-wing populist party and a strong and durable organisation (Art 2011; Carter 2005; Art and De Lange 2012; Johansson 2014). However, scholars have been rarely concerned with the question as to what extent these parties also represent a challenge to conventional assumptions about party development.

A problem for bridging the gap between the analysis of the RRPPs and party development theory has been the difficulty of the latter to accept a principle of path-diversity. Maurice Duverger (1963) and Otto Kirchheimer (1966), Robert Katz and Peter Mair (1995) all provide fundamentally evolutionary perspectives that not only attempt to capture a given reality of party development but also prescribe how that reality is to inevitably evolve (Koole 1996). The underlying rationale is that the dominant model adopted by mainstream parties exerts a taken-for-granted contagion effect on the competitors. For Duverger (1963) this was the 'mass party', for Kirchheimer (1966), it was the 'catch-all party', and for Katz and Mair (1995; 2009) the 'cartel party'. By contending that the cartel party would represent the 'last step' in the development of party organisations in Western European countries, this thesis seems to rule out a reverse trend toward previous party models. Of course, parties are not forced to follow the cartel-party

trajectory but if they do not, they are likely to remain politically marginal. Katz and Mair (1995; 2009) thus seemed to preclude the emergence of other successful party models by not considering hybridized forms among different models or by discounting the persistence of past models. Although the cartel-party thesis seems to capture some widespread trends, for instance the decline in grassroots membership, one of the assumption of the supporters of the cartel party thesis is that 'the mass party is dead' (Katz and Mair 2009: 760).

However, some scholars have suggested that the situation may in fact be more complicated: for one, organisational settings are said to vary significantly, both in the past and in the present (Koole 1996). Similarly, other analyses have shown that the role of the mass party organisation during its supposed golden age may have been overestimated because often its practices and, in particular, the involvement of its membership did not match the rhetoric about its organisational scope (Scarrow 2015: 67ss.). It seems that only a few parties in Western Europe and then only for a few decades fit what may in hindsight be called the classic idea of the membership-mass party. Although the seminal works on democratic mass parties by Duverger and others tended to confound mass parties and left-wing parties, there have been cases where the mass parties developed also into nationalist and religious parties such as in the Netherlands and Italy the Christian Democratic Appeal and the Christian Democratic Party (see also Diamond and Gunther 2003: 16-22). The literature provides us also with evidence that other aspects of the mass party model have survived, confirming, as Panebianco (1988) pointed out, the continued relevance of organisation for party development over time. For example, a recent study on Norwegian parties stressed enduring mass party-related structural aspects such as the influence of members and mid-level activists (Allern, Heidar, Karlsen 2016). Moreover, current trends in party evolution may contradict the widely held notion of the decline of party activism in mainstream parties. A recent study on the Swedish Social Democratic Party found the opposite to be the case: activists were much more influential in the 1990s than in the 1950s (Loxbo 2013). As a result, evidence may point to the existence of other types of party organisation besides the cartel parties that allow these formations to be successful. Moreover, evidence also suggests that relevant aspects of the mass party model may still play a role in many other party organisations. For instance, Elisabeth Carter's work (2005) shows there to be significant variation in party organisations. Whereas some were indeed weakly organized and dominated by a charismatic leader, others boasted strongly developed, centralized organisations to enforce party discipline so as to boost party performance in electoral competition (Carter 2005: 98-99). Other scholarship

has arrived at similar conclusions by showing that several electorally successful RRPPs have developed a great capacity for rank-and-file activism (e.g. Art 2011).

From mass party model(s) to mass party characteristics

In light of the preceding discussion, it makes little sense to assume the mass-based party or mass party organisation are completely over. However, this insight also requires us to consider anew what the mass party is and which aspects would define it. Although there is no universally shared conception and singular definition in the literature, it is crucial to recall some core features *traditionally* associated with the mass party model:

- *Strong ideology:* Mass parties are strongly committed to ideological goals, which provide the clear overall direction and stands in contrast with 'short-term tactical considerations' (Kirchheimer 1966: 190). Ideology provides also a strong incentive for support while shaping political education and socialization. This feature of the mass party model was stressed particularly by scholars in the 1950s and 1960s such as Neumann (1956), Duverger (1963), and also Kirchheimer who mentioned the 'intellectual and moral '*encadrement*" (1966: 184);
- *Specific group-targeting ideology:* regarding its electoral target, the mass party develops a discourse which tries to represent a new and previously excluded electorate. Party ideology is usually based upon a '*classe gardée*, a specific social-class or denominational clientele' (Kirchheimer 1966: 190) instead of a generic maximization of voters;
- *Differentiated and centralised organisation with strong leadership*. Traditionally, mass parties develop an integrated structure to connect the leadership with grassroots activists, the wider membership, and civil society. This includes discreet party organs tasked with decision-making and implementation in terms of program, legislation, political education, campaigning, communication, recruitment, fundraising, and societal linkages (Janda 1970) under a strong party centralisation (Duverger 1954: 52); but does not necessarily imply a very concentrated or personalistic form of leadership (Kirchheimer 1966; Katz and Mair 1995; 2009);
- *Strong party-basis structure:* Mass parties are based on mass membership (usually strong 'membership loyalty', Kirchheimer 1966: 193) in order to support the party through activist mobilisation. Regular payment of membership fees by ordinary members is crucial for party funding. Meanwhile, mass party is territorially articulated in branches or cells and constitute

organisations that territorially spread across entire countries and maintain local branches or cells in every relevant region of the country (Janda 1970; Duverger 1954).

By asking to what extent any features of the mass party are still represented in Western European RRPPs, we propose to develop a theoretical framework explaining the persistence of several of these characteristic under specific circumstances. Such a framework would recognise that by now mass party organisation has evolved and no longer represents all the traditional elements of the classic mass party model, particularly not those reflected in the dominant variants of socialist and communist parties in the 1950s in Germany and Italy respectively. Clearly, the appeal of a powerful ideological left has waned in the face of neoliberalism and the fall communism (e.g. Lipset 2003) and so has the mass party model's educational function in working-class communities. Mass parties are not any longer necessarily built around the trade unionism and labour mobilisation that were characteristic of the Fordist factory system. At the same time, party organisations are not simply by-products of socio-economic changes. In fact, as we argue further below, aspects of the mass party model found in RRPPs represent strategic adaptations that help these parties compete effectively in the political market place.

We agree with Katz and Mair (1995: 5) when they claim that the development of parties in Western democracies has been reflective of a dialectical process in which each new party type generates a reaction that stimulates further development. This suggests that 'new' party types may continuously to emerge. Thus, their traits are connected with their environment and exert, through a shared history and current expressions, a contagion effect. Yet, we also have to be mindful of Leon D. Epstein's critique of Duverger's logic of the party model contagion when he pointed out that, 'while certain social and economic circumstances seem to be prerequisites for certain party organisations, they do not automatically cause these organisations to develop' (Epstein 1967: 101).

Based on the above discussion, we argue that at least three features that are broadly representative of the mass party organisation in the current Western RRPPs:

- First there is *the existence of strong ideological incentives*: Importantly, although populism is inherently ambivalent and flexible (Taggart 2000), ideology functions in RRPPs as a strong incentive for mobilisation. This is necessary to create the 'illusion of community' in order to form a collective identity (Pizzorno 1990: 68-69) while simultaneously avoiding having to undergo the traditional training function (Katz and

Mair (2002: 7). Albertazzi (2016: 127) has described this as "populist identity politics…incentivizing the creation of closed political communities based on post-material, identitarian values, due to populism's insistence on the homogeneity, unity and common interests of the 'good' people versus the 'elites' and also against immigrants and minority groups especially in right-wing parties";

- Second there is the *presence of a differentiated and centralised organisation with strong leadership.* This is necessary for the party to persist and develop a durable and successful party organisations (Carter 2005); As mass parties required an integrated and differentiated structure to connect the leadership with grassroots activists and the wider membership, so does the RRPPs. It depends on structural differentiation. In this manner, discreet party organs can fulfil a variety of necessary functions ranging from decision-making and the implementation of program, legislation, political education, campaigning, communication, recruitment, fundraising to forming societal linkages (Janda 1970). At the same time, the leadership requires organisational centralisation) to maintain control (Duverger 1954: 52.
- Third there is *grass-root membership:* Despite significant increases in public funding for the purposes of party development in recent decades, we expect RRPPs to rely on strong grassroots membership alongside a well-articulated organizational structure that is extensive in scope and reaches, in terms of intensiveness, far down to the local level. This is necessary for rank-a-file campaigning (Van Biezen, Mair, Poguntke 2011: 42; Art 2011: 33-35). Like the traditional mass parties of the left, also RRPPs depend on working-class voters and those feeling marginalised for their political success (e.g., Rydgren 2013). Yet, in contrast to the former, these parties tend to avoid class-based discourses but rather emphasize the 'true people' in a more generic and ambivalent manner (Taggart 2000).

These aspects may thus be considered strategic adaptations that allow RRPP to compete more effectively. Being new formations (either newly formed or insider converted) and also parties of a new type, they face a hostile environment and have distinct organizational needs based on the logic of how they operate. By starting out as outsider-, protest-, or anti-system parties, these groups tend to be politically isolated, facing different versions of a *cordon sanitaire* (Art 2011; Akkermann et al. 2016). Thus, they have been less able to forge linkages to established

institutions, finding themselves typically cut off from the levers of governmental power. To compete on a more equal footing with mainstream parties, RRPPs have had to find different strategy. They require a form of organisation that created a strong party base and an effective local presence, which is nonetheless closely connected to the leadership. By being radical populist parties, they typically wage campaigns that direct rather polarizing, aggressive, and often controversial messages usually articulated by the party leader at their mainstream competitors or established institutions. This can be effective only if the leadership is able to concentrate power such that it has near complete control over the party's communication. More simply put, by operating in the political wilderness, RRPPs have recovered aspects of the mass party model because they found far fewer opportunities to take cartel party route and were not content with remaining niche parties.

A comparison among seven parties

In trying to test to what extent Western RRPPs embody these three features of the legacy of mass party organisation, we selected cases drawn from a group of parties the literature has identified as a) successful right-wing populist, b) operating in West European democracies, and c) as having an enduring presence in the 1990s and 2000s. Included in our comparative study are the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), the Belgian Flemish Interest (VB), the Swiss People's Party (SVP), the Italian Northern League (LN), the French National Front (FN), the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP), and the Sweden Democrats (SD).

All these parties share a common ideological stance. Their positions range from nationalism in the FPÖ, traditionalism and conservatism in the SVP, secessionism in the LN and VB to economic liberalism in the FrP. What unites them are strong nationalist claims against traditional elites, the EU, immigrants and Muslims and, as such, they fit the main definition of the radical right-wing party 'family' (e.g., Mudde 2007). All share in principal idea that people's sovereignty has been betrayed by elites or is threatened by outsiders and thus needs to be reclaimed or especially protected. While these parties all seek to appeal to a variety of constituencies, the core frame resonates especially with voters who feel excluded, marginalised, frustrated, and/or politically ignored. Despite these ideological commonalities, the cases selected vary from an organisational perspective in terms of their national setting (federal versus unitary systems), foundational characteristics (ex-nihilo formations and converted parties), party origin

(protest formations and business-firm parties, regional versus national parties), and leadership characteristics.

The FPÖ and the SVP had existed as established but minor parties long before they developed populist claims. This means they were organizationally rather ordinary and mirrored the conventions of the national party system—in Austria the structure was a federated organization corresponding to Austria's nine provinces and in Switzerland it was cantonal and autonomous. In contrast to the FPÖ's and SVP's origin story, both the FrP and VB were converted personalistic formations, organized top-down and originally shaped by 'charismatic' individuals. The remaining cases started out as ex-nihilo right-wing populist parties. In both the Front National and the Northern League, charismatic individuals dominated their parties, which shaped their organizational evolution from the start. The Sweden Democrats, founded in 1988, are the newest party in the sample, are rooted in far-right ideology and develop a rather original collective leadership, representing to some extent an outlier in our sample.

Despite these considerable differences, we will show RRPPs converge on the common organisational features of the mass party legacy presented earlier. The sources used for this comparison are party statutes, information on funding, membership data, and an analysis provided by country experts largely based on a standardised survey (see Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016).

Party leadership

Right-wing populist parties are often equated with 'charismatic' leadership, an authoritarian *Führerprinzip*, and the precedence of personality over institution. By contrast, our investigation rather supports the thesis that populist organisations does not necessarily require the presence of a strong leader (Mudde and Kalwasser 2014: 386) as our sample shows a large range in leadership formats ranging with more or less concentrated variants (table 1).

(Table 1: about here)

In the NL and in the FN we find the strongest leadership and the centralisation of power at the top, with Umberto Bossi and Matteo Salvini as well as Le Pen,both father and daughter, respectively (McDonnell and Vampa 2016: 113-118; Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016: 136-145). The VB is not a personal party but has instead been shaped by a regional powerbase (Antwerp) allowing a division of leadership roles among several individuals. These reflect both ideological and functional differences: whereas Filip Dewinter became the party's political figurehead, Frank Vanhecke served as its formal leader in charge of party organisation (van Haute and Pauwels 2016: 55-63). The FPÖ and SVP are two parties that seem synonymous with charismatic and dominant leadership figures. Yet, their roles have been less clear-cut than is often assumed because the concentration of leadership can occur in various ways. In the FPÖ, only Jörg Haider was able to ascend to the status of a quasi-authoritarian leader. Generally, the FPÖ's party chair is not automatically as dominant as are the leaders in the FN or LN. Both Jörg Haider and Heinz-Christian Strache required alliances, bargaining, and concessions to consolidate their power in the party, which took years (Heinisch 2016: 29-34). In the structurally more decentralized SVP, the leader remains in the position of the power broker in a relatively non-concentrated organisational model (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016). In the 1990s Christoph Blocher emerged as a national leader but never took the top party post himself (McDonnell 2015).

The FrP started out as a 'personal party' and was strongly associated with, and dependent on its party chairperson Anders Lange. Since the death of the party's founder, the FrP has been an example of a party in which leadership has a collective dimension but is nonetheless centralised: de facto decision-making power lies with the party executive as lesser units have few ways to oppose its rulings. The party chair is chiefly responsible for the party organisation whereas, in the party executive, several leaders are in charge of various policy fields, although the party allows a 'rather decentralised manifesto formation at the national level' (Jupskas 2016: 172). In our sample, the SD are the furthest removed from the conventional assumptions about leadership as being concentrated in a single charismatic individual (Jungar 2016: 200). Instead, they developed a division of power among several top party officials who form an inner leadership circle. Thus, this party represents a 'collective' leadership model, providing significant political authority to the party congress, which is in charge of electing leadership as well as deciding general policies and program (Jungar 2016: 201-202).

Organisational differentiation and centralisation

The variable role of the top leaders reflects different forms of party organisation which require different rules and organs. Our sample shows that all organizations are more or less complex and structurally differentiated (see Table 3), with specific statutes, intermediary organs, subnational and local branches (Janda 1970). This supports our assertion that some of the most durable Western RRPPs are in fact not proxies of 'charismatic parties', according to Panebianco's definition (1988: chap. 7). Nonetheless, a complex organisational structure does not necessarily imply internal democracy given that the level of top-down centralisation is often strong in these parties. However, all the seven parties are territorially structured consisting of regional and local units and covering generally the extent of the area that they claim to represent.

Despite these common characteristics, there is wide variation in the actual organisational pattern between the seven parties (see Table 2). The FN and the LN have adopted a design of the interaction between leadership and organisation that ensures unequalled concentration of power in the hands of the top leader. Thus, the party is characterized by very strong central office and a weaker intermediary structure. Party organs are dominated by individuals close to the party leader, who thus retains full control. Under Marine Le Pen the familial model of top-down leadership and the persistence of a highly centralised hierarchical party organisation have continued. Even the party's congress—although tasked with electing the leader— has traditionally only a symbolic function and little influence in the party's executive bodies (Ivaldi 1998, 2003; Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016: 140-141, 154-155). The FN enjoys an organisational presence across the nation and down to the local level. It has done particularly well in regional and local elections, winning a larger number of mayorships and departmental councils under Marine Le Pen than previously (Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016: 149). However, the executive bureau controls all departmental branches, which have no power in defining policy and party strategy (Ivaldi 1998). Overall, in the FN the power is vested in executive organs, which exert direct control over the local branches.

Within the LN, strong emphasis is placed on the representation of regional branches in federal decision-making bodies (McDonnell and Vampa 2016: 110-118). Among the regions, LN's Lombardy branch plays a dominant role although there had been a considerable intra-party rivalry with the Veneto branch. At the same time, party congresses are generally not convened except for extraordinary circumstances. The party uses gate-keeping, socialisation into the organisation, and demonstrated loyalty as a means of strengthening the central leadership while preventing deviations from the party line. The LN can thus be characterised as a centralised,

hierarchical macro-regionalist party (Massetti 2009: 205), in which the main decision-making organs are formally the federal congress and the federal council and which are themselves controlled by the leader and his inner circle (McDonnell and Vampa 2016).

(Table 2: about here)

Compared with its days as a 'personal party', the FrP has undergone significant organisational development in terms of its both extensiveness and intra-party articulation (Jupskas 2016: 176-179; Jupskas 2015). While it transformed into a multi-level organisation similar to that of the political-administrative structure of the Norwegian State, an organ at the national level, the national council, connects the national leadership with the leaders from all county branches (Jupskas 2016: 167). The leader of the FrP is selected by the party congress but the process of candidate nomination has typically been in the hands of the subnational level (Jupskas 2016: 165-174). Yet, what makes the FrP a rather centralised party by Norwegian standards is the national party's control over policy development and political messaging as well as the use of sanctions against the internal opposition including the expulsion of those who deviate from the party's ideological line (Jupskas 2015: 128).

The VB achieves centralisation by delegating nearly all decision-making power (programmatic and strategic decision-making) to the national executive bodies (e.g., party president, party executive) while the more open party organs, the party congress, and party council, play de facto lesser roles. Recruitment into the party executive is tightly controlled by the leadership, which can interpret the vagueness of statutory rules to its advantage. However, despite its extensive vertical organisation, suggesting an effective curb on the national leadership, VB has developed a model of centralized control from its regional stronghold (van Haute and Pauwels 2016: 55-62). Formally, the party has four different levels of vertical organisation: national, regional, provincial, and local. Nevertheless, the local and national arenas are the most important. Limited to Flemish areas the country, VB was only able to present lists under its name in 175 municipalities, which constitutes 56.8 per cent of the total with Antwerp as its stronghold. Thus, most of the party's officials come from the Flemish capital. Local as well as regional

branches are heavily 'dominated by a party executive that is regionally skewed toward Antwerp' (van Haute and Pauwels 2016: 73).

Achieving leadership centralisation within the FPÖ requires the legitimisation by the activist base and a decision by the party congress. The activist base serves as a check on the leadership and can be mobilized by a renegade faction to unseat the party leaders (as has happened twice since 1986). Once in a dominant position, the party leaders can avail themselves of the vertically integrated organisation to advance their goals and promote loyal confidants into key positions, which in turn helps the leader consolidate power. The FPÖ is organisationally present throughout the country and there are no areas where its reach does not penetrate to the local level. Politically, it has been particularly strong in the provinces Carinthia and Upper Austria (Heinisch 2016: 29-30; Stockemer and Lamontagne 2014:51).

The SVP achieves leadership centralization in a different manner. By pushing for a professional, highly coordinated, and capital-intensive forms of mobilisation, the leadership around the party's strongman Christoph Blocher not only imposed his populist mode and style of campaigning on the rest of an otherwise highly federated party but this also made the other branches financially dependent on the national organisation and Blocher's own Zurich cantonal branch (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016: 87-90). The process of centralisation led to internal factionalism and resistance by some cantonal party branches. However, over time, the SVP became more cohesive, organisationally integrated, professional, and activist dependent and thus, more mass party-like but less like a traditionally canton-based Swiss party. Thus, centralisation took a different form: Blocher asserted his power over the national party by having his confidants occupy positions of influence on the party's central committee and the Swiss federal parliament. Although the SVP was once mainly a factor in the German-speaking cantons, it has since made great organisational strides to boost its following in the rest of the country, thus becoming a genuinely national party. Its strong local presence and linkages to its national-level organs, provide the SVP with tremendous organisational advantages in capital-intensive electoral and referendum campaigns (Skenderovic 2009).

The case of the SD differs in important respects. Despite their origin as a personalized party around a collective leadership, the group at the top pushed for vertical and horizontal organisational development by creating powerful party organs at the national level—the party board, the executive committee, and in 2010 the parliamentary group. The leadership also went about building an organizational infrastructure at the local level to boost representation in

municipal assemblies. As a result, the number of the SD's party district organisations increased from 14 in 2007 to 24 in 2015 and its municipal organisations grew from 69 in 2007 to 188 in 2015 (Jungar 2016: 196). The SD has also permitted the regional and district organisations to take decisions autonomously. At local level, there are municipal associations with local representatives, who have voting rights in the party congress. As a result, local party officials and grassroots members can exercise influence in the party even at the national level (Jungar 2016).

We may summarise this segment, by suggesting that in all cases, we note efforts to develop and consolidate the organization while boosting a local activist presence. This provided these parties with much needed support at the electoral ground game. While every effort is made to ensure loyalty and cohesion, we do see some clear variation of political autonomy when comparing the parties in our sample.

Party-base structure

Since the role of the party activists is taken to be crucial for mass party mobilisation (Duverger 1954, Janda 1980: 127-132, Art 2011), a party leadership that centralises power at the top while engaging in polarising messages and controversies faces significant challenges. Under such circumstances, according to the cartel party thesis, grassroots members find few incentives to remain committed to the party. Thus, the party as a member-based organisation becomes less relevant while the increasing reliance on public funding further reduces the importance of membership organization (Katz and Mair 2009). However, precisely in circumstances of declining membership does the role of activists and, more generally, of party members represent a crucial advantage for the RRPPs in terms of party competition. Members can spread the party's ideological agenda at the local level and foster a political community and thus a sense of common belonging while at the same time contributing to funding the party (Scarrow 2015: 123-125). Although grassroots members have rather limited input in the party's top-down structure (unless in situations of leadership contests and leadership change), they exert some influence in the intra-party decision-making, they engage locally and, above, all they benefit from symbolic incentives related the strong RRPPs ideology.

(Table 3 about here)

The evidence gleaned from our cases fit well with our argument, suggesting that all except two RRPPs in the sample have a relatively stable or growing membership (Table 3). This stands in contrast to the general trends in Western party organisations and also to those in our seven countries (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2011: 43-46). Only the LN and VB have seen a decline in membership and political fortunes in recent years, which was in part the result of specific internal conflicts. Although the NL is one of the parties in the sample with traditionally a large member base, membership collapsed after 2010 from about 180,000 to fewer than 60,000 in 2012. In several parties, membership growth is skewed toward particular groups such as the young in the VB and the FPÖ (van Haute and Pauwels 2016: 57, Heinisch 2013: 57).

Like traditional mass parties, also all our cases organise their membership based on locally-rooted branches or cells. At the same time, parties vary in terms of how membership is conferred so that in organisationally federated formations like the FPÖ and SVP the decision is taken at the regional or local level (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016: 221-241. In the more centralised and leadership-dependent structure typical of RRPPs, the party-base structure seems to provide fewer opportunities for grassroots members to influence the party. For instance, despite the LN's dense network of municipal branches, these organisational units find their local autonomy constrained by a model of restricted full ('activist') membership under the control of the regional organs and the top leadership (McDonnell and Vampa 2016: 111). Nonetheless, party activists are given symbolic incentives to be involved in frequent party meetings and demonstration so as to be able to maintain their sense of common belonging to the party organisation (Albertazzi 2016: 125-126). The situation is similar in the FN because there the local units tend not to have horizontal connections among themselves and ordinary members have no real power. Only recently, have there been discussion about providing for greater intra-party democracy (Ivaldi and Lanzone 2016: 140-141).

The base is not only important for mobilization and supporting the actions taken by the leader but also crucial during a leadership change. It can definitively decide on succession when the leadership is in transition or when there are competing factions. Even in the most extreme case of personalized leader parties in the sample, the FN, where party congresses are largely symbolic affairs, the rise of Mégret and the competition for succession was settled in favor of Marine Le Pen by members' votes at the party congress in Tours. This is especially critical if

there (threats of) party splits, which have the shaped the development of all parties in the sample. In fact, defections, splits, and the elimination of factional rivals can be considered routine mechanisms for making RRPPs, over time, more cohesive and thus strengthening rather than weakening them as a result (see Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016: 221-246).

In general, RRPPs have developed a variety of ways of shoring up the commitment and support by the party base. This includes select areas of local autonomy in decision-making (FPÖ, SVP, SD), rewards for performance, allowing non-professional activists to play key roles as party ambassadors such as in the FN, select training (FrP), and even a two-tier membership system in which loyalty is especially rewarded (LN). It is also worth noting that the least successful case in developing its base structure is also electorally the weakest in our sample. VB has been criticised by the grassroots for a leadership detached from its base (van Haute and Pauwels 2016).

Discussion and Conclusion

This article started out questioning whether RRPPs pose not only a political challenge for Western democracies but also for our conventional understanding of party development. This concerns especially the idea that over time mass parties either develop into cartel parties or remain unsuccessful. As such, in Western Europe the traditional mass party, even if we concede that it hardly ever existed in its ideal-typical form, seems to have disappeared. In this paper, we tried to show how RRPPs are challenging this view as some of them have reclaimed and maintained ideological and organisational features that form what one may define as a mass party legacy. Our argument was that this development represents a strategic adaptation necessary to compete with the other major parties as an outsider. This condition tended to foreclose other strategic options such as political alliances, the easy penetration of public institutions and political organizations, and the mobilization of resources outside its grassroots base and wealth of members of party leadership. The drive to organizational development, greater articulation and a strong local presence is accompanied by a variety of mechanisms to concentrate the power of leadership and enforce party cohesion.

An examination of seven West European RRPPs that have demonstrated some political durability tends to confirm this argument. In almost all cases, we find a centralised organisation with strong leadership even if the notion of the singular and authoritarian leader is in mostly overstated. Instead, power is distributed among different levels of leadership and even in the most

personalistic types; procedural rules and organisational practices are used to ensure centralised control. The range of power of the leadership varies across cases and thus differs in the ability to determine the party's programmatic decisions, candidate selection, budgetary resources, and exercise of sanctions. The centralised leadership may take a single or collective form in the latter of which a functional differentiation of leadership tasks tends to be the result. Thus, all these RRPPs have developed into organisationally complex and durable parties, which allow for the development of more effective linkages to activists at the local level. They have developed strong grassroots support along with a relatively sizeable membership and activist base, which is important for sustaining the party politically and financially. While they have created a variety of organisational structures designed to fit the functional necessities of their respective contexts, they all converge on a pattern that emphasises strong party ideology, a differentiated and centralised organisation with concentrated leadership, and a strong grass-root membership, all of which highlights the persistence of the mass-based party format. Simply stated, regardless of the variety or origin situations, initial conditions, and leadership types, all parties sooner or later embraced organization development and built strong leadership-base structures. While the cases examined tend to reflect the organizational conventions in their respective countries, thus explaining some of the variation among them, they are also typically more centralized and cohesive than their national competitors.

Of course, this does not imply that all RRPPs share all these features related to the mass party model or that the cartel party is necessarily in decline. However, the argument and empirical evidence gathered in this article suggest two rationales. First, party development has to be conceived in a more complex way to avoid the risk of viewing the cartel party from a deterministic and teleological perspective (Koole 1996; Kitschelt 2000, Scarrow 2015). Similarly, there is reason to doubt the isomorphic power of the cartel party model nowadays. Instead, opponent parties are likely to adopt organisational features available in their context. Outsider parties faced with ostracism find turning toward the state hard and naturally pursue alternative growth strategies. Thus, real advantage— and success— can come from solutions such as those that established competitor have abandoned.

Second, we suggest our contribution is relevant also for the study of RRPPs as well as of party politics as a whole. To the extent, that RRPPs represent an enduring and growing presence (e.g. Akkerman, de Lange and Rooduijn 2016), beyond a schematic vision of the leadership power (Mudde and Kalwasser 2014), it seems crucial to comprehend how this 'family'

challenges the conventional theoretical framework by which scholarship conceives of party development in Western European democracies. In this vein, we agree with those (Cross and Pilet 2015; Scarrow, Webb and Poguntke 2017) who recently called for more comparative research on party organisation, membership, and leadership.

Table 1: The of Role of the Top Leadership in 7 RRPPs

FPÖ	SVP	VB	LN	FN	FrP	SD
Concentrated leadership dominates through alliances and loyal insiders but no personal party	Leader is a power broker in a relati-vely non-concentrated leadership model with some factionalism, but dominant regional chapter	Functionally divided leadership format, with high party discipline. dominant regional chapter	Strong personalised leadership; the formal party leader is also the party's figurehead and principal source of authority	Strong personalised leadership, the formal party leader is also the party's figurehead; de facto, the only source of authority	Changed from 'personal' party to strong leader-dependent party, important role played by the subnational level.	Strong collective leadership, relatively non-concentrated leadership with some factionalism

Source: Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016, our adaptation

Table 2: Organisational Structure and Extensiveness in 7 RRPPs

	FPÖ	SVP	VB	LN	FN	FrP	SD
Organisational structure	Vertically integrated and federated **Main components:** -Head Office -Fed. Party Executive -Fed. Congr. -State, local and auxiliary orgs.	Vert.integrated but highly federated. **Main components**: -Head Office -Steering Com. -Central Com. -Assembly of Delegates -Cantonal organizations -Auxiliary orgs.	Vertically integrated, federated **Main components**: --Party Council, - Executive - Congress -Parl. Group -Provincial, regional, local organizations.	Vertically integrated. **Main components** - Secretariat - Council - Congress -Regional branches, -Parl. Group -Auxiliary orgs.	Vertically integrated **Main components**: -Pol. Bureau, -Exec. Bureau, -Central Committee -Nat. Council -Party Congr. -Aux. orgs.	Vertically integrated **Main components**: -Nat.Council, -Exec.Com., -Nat. Congr. -Parl. Group -Provincial and local orgs. -Aux orgs.	Vertically integrated **Main components**: -Party Executive -Party Board -Party Congress -District and municipal orgs. -Parl. Group -Aux. org.
Territorial extensiveness of party organisation	200 local branches; 1,200 cells, 9 provincial chapters	Municipal chapters after 1988. Since 2001 in every canton, strong growth	Limited to Flemish areas. Fielding lists in 175 municipalities in 2012	Regional but concentra-tion with strong presence in the North. 1441 branches,	Strong presence of subnational branches throughout national territory, high number of mayoralships	Present in 19 electoral districts; fielded candidates in 80% of munici-palities	District organization increased from 14 (2007) to 24 (2015); municipal organisations from 69 (2007) to 188 (2015).

Source: Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016, our adaptation

Table 3: Party-Base Structure in 7 RRPPs

	FPÖ	SVP	VB	LN	FN	FrP	SD
Grassroots party base	-Divided into local cells and regional orgs. -Some regional autonomy. -Incentives for activism -Base is important to legitimize leadership	-Subnational branches penetrate to local level in all cantons, Zurich dominates -Some local autonomy -Local grassroots important for mobilization -Resource incentives for loyalty of local activists	-Local and regional branches but dominated by central party. -Limited local autonomy, regionally skewed toward Antwerp. -Dispute over autonomy, some leadership-base conflict	Divided into provincial, (network of) municipal units; Lombardy is dominant; -Two-tier membership system. -Base matters mostly for leadership transition	-Strong presence at municipal and depart. level. -(Symbolic) incentives for non-professional activists. -Base matters mostly for leadership transition	-Organization came late but comprehensive -Municipal and county branches are subdivisions of nat. party. -Bottom-up organization leads to some influence on party decision-making -Incentives and training for activists	Local, municipal, regional organisations and district boards have some autonomy and some influence on national party
Grassroots membership	~40,000/ → growing	59,900/1996 →90,000('07)	25,090/2006 → declining	170,000/2011 → declining	22,400/2011 →51,500/2015	~22,000 /2011	~1000/2003 →15,871/2015

Source: Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016, our adaptation

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