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POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES IN ACTION

the survival of the mass party

DANIELE ALBERTAZZI • STIJN VAN KESSEL • ADRIAN FAVERO
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Completion of this monograph proved challenging. By far the most serious difficulty we faced was the loss of our good friend, colleague, and co-author Niko in 2023, due to illness. Niko was the engine behind data collection in Finland; in addition, he played a key role in reviewing relevant literature, designing our interviews, analysing the data, and drafting parts of this book. As a team, we were able to benefit enormously from Niko's knowledge, not only of Finnish politics, but also of media, communication, and political studies more generally. Although, in the end, Niko never saw the very last draft of this monograph, we like to think that it meets the very high expectations he had for it. Niko's passing was devastating for us, and our thoughts are with his family. We will remember him as a kind person and an excellent scholar who contributed innovative research in political science and communication. We

are very grateful to Niko's wife, Saara Kuusinen, for agreeing to keep Niko's name on the cover of this book as our co-author.

Before losing Niko, and starting in 2020, we had to overcome the challenge of the Covid-19 pandemic, which disrupted our intended research plans. The countries we were studying (Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, and Finland) went into lockdown—and not all in the same period—right at the time when we were conducting our fieldwork. We therefore took the decision to complete our interviews with party representatives and members remotely. In the end, the book relies on a combination of face-to-face and online encounters. Luckily, by the time the pandemic struck we had already visited the parties under study here (the League, the Swiss People's Party, Flemish Interest, and the Finns Party) to collect whatever documentation was not easily accessible online.

We are extremely grateful to the party representatives and active members of the selected parties for agreeing to talk to us, and for doing so during the unsettling period marked by the pandemic and its aftermath. It is often said that radical right representatives and members are suspicious of academics and reluctant to talk to them, but we found over 200 representatives and members willing to share their insights and experiences with us, thus providing the essential data for our project. Finding a sufficient number of respondents was a challenge in some specific areas, but here we could rely on further assistance from people we had previously interviewed. A special thanks goes to those who helped us with finding additional interviewees.

We are very grateful to our colleagues from our institutions for supporting us with their encouragement, comments and suggestions. When the project started, it was run from the Department of Politics and International Studies of the University of Birmingham, where Daniele was based at the time. Daniele moved to the University of Surrey in September 2021, and the management of the project moved with him. In addition, we would like to thank colleagues at the following institutions: Queen Mary University of London, the University of Helsinki, the University of Groningen, the University of Edinburgh, the University of Aberdeen, and the University of Trieste. We were also given the opportunity to present our work at conferences and upon invitation by colleagues at other institutions. The comments we received at these occasions certainly also contributed to the quality of our work.

We would not have been able to make it, given the obstacles we found in our path and the general struggles of book writing, without the constant encouragement and support of our close friends and family. We are grateful to each and everyone of them for being there for us throughout the years.

We were also very fortunate to find an outstanding publisher for our book. We want to thank the staff at Oxford University Press, and particularly Dominic Byatt and Kayley Gilbert, for commissioning the book and for supporting us throughout the process of completing it and amending it. We are also grateful to the anonymous reviewers for seeing the merit in our project and for their critical comments that have helped us to clarify our definitions and improve the quality of our analysis. We were struck by the encouraging, constructive and thus exemplary way in which the reviewer reports were written. Naturally, we remain solely responsible for the final iteration of this work.

Completing this book together has been a very important experience for us, both because of the friendship we were able to develop between members of our team and for what we have learned from each other. We now release it into the world and hope that you, the reader, will also find it interesting and stimulating.

This book is dedicated to Niko Hatakka (1985–2023).

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Introduction

The Survival of the Mass Party

> *When we meet among ourselves, it's a community. It's a family, made up of people who work and fight for a goal, often without any rewards […] And what is the point of having such an organized party? That everyone feels part of it. If there is a need to do something together, the people make the sacrifice and come. (LSP, R10)*

Scholars in the field of party organization have claimed that political parties in Europe are losing their traditional function of bridging the gap between citizens and the political elites (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Mair 2013; Kriesi 2014). While the first half of the twentieth century saw the rise of political organizations which were rooted in local communities and characterized by clearly identifiable ideologies, the so-called mass parties (Duverger 1954), this organizational model is now widely assumed to be outdated and belonging to the past (Young 2013, 2). Several other models have been proposed that are ostensibly better suited to describe party organizations from the second half of the twentieth century onwards (see Krouwel 2006). Otto Kirchheimer (1966), for instance, introduced the concept of the 'catch-all party' which was marked by a more diffuse ideological message and a weakening reliance on grassroots members for electoral mobilization. Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995) argued that, in a subsequent stage, traditionally dominant catch-all parties morphed into 'cartel parties'. In essence, this model entails that established parties in power collude to preserve their privileged position, becoming increasingly dependent on the state, not least for their funding. Given that they hardly rely on grassroots members any longer, they become actors of the state rather than representatives of society.

Yet the dominant position of traditional parties in the ideological centre is in fact eroding. Established centre-left and centre-right parties are not only characterized by falling memberships, but also by shrinking electoral support (van Biezen et al. 2012; Mair 2013; Albertazzi and Vampa 2021b). Newly founded parties across the ideological spectrum started to emerge from the

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1970s onwards and gained an increasing foothold in European party systems. They are benefiting from voters' increased distrust in, and decreased loyalty towards, established parties. The question is what this means for theories of party organization and evolution: what forms do insurgent parties take, and is there a need to refute or revise previous theoretical concepts such as that of the 'mass party'? Do newly successful parties potentially provide a new impetus to bringing together voters and their political representatives?

It is clear that several new parties take the shape of 'electoral-professional' parties (Panebianco 1988) whose leaderships communicate directly with potential voters without seeing the need to develop member-based party organizations (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2021). Furthermore, in the age of social media, old as well as new parties are incentivized to experiment with new technologies that allow them to reach out to the electorate without the need for extensive face-to-face interaction. We nevertheless contend that it is too early to certify the death of the societally rooted mass party. Particularly among those parties challenging the traditional political establishment (or 'cartel'), the mass party model has proven to be resilient, and indeed successful (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016; van Kessel and Albertazzi 2021). Therefore, while there is no doubt that parties are adapting to the modern age and use new technologies to reach out to voters, this does not necessarily entail them giving up on rootedness in local communities or an end to active grassroots political participation.

In this book we focus on the specific category of populist radical right parties (PRRPs), which possibly pose the most serious electoral threat to traditional, so-called mainstream parties in Europe. According to Cas Mudde (2007), PRRPs are defined by their nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. In Western Europe, they are characterized by an aversion to immigration and culturally liberal elites that supposedly act against the interest of the 'ordinary' native citizens. While PRRPs have been extensively studied in the past decades, a still under-researched feature of these parties is precisely their willingness to buck the trend of disengagement from grassroots activism that ostensibly characterizes their competitors. Despite the existence of prominent and important exceptions, such as Geert Wilders' extremely leader-centred Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV—Party for Freedom) in the Netherlands (Vossen 2016), several members of this party family have in fact continued to build mass organizations, and invested in the creation of communities of loyal partisan activists (van Kessel and Albertazzi 2021).

Previous studies have already emphasized the importance of party organization and activists to PRRPs' success (Carter 2005; Art 2011), putting into doubt the assumption that PRRPs are organisationally light-weight and/or

particularly prone to rely on 'charismatic' or 'personalistic' leadership to mobilize support (see Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Zaslove 2004; Pappas 2016; Eatwell 2018; Böhmelt et al. 2022). We go one step further and start from the premise that some PRRPs exemplify the 'survival' of the mass party. Our study thus provides a new point of view on the populist radical right (PRR) as a party family, allowing us to re-evaluate the traditional wisdoms of party organization theory, and to show how traditional forms of party organization adapt to changing political contexts and communication environments. Looking at PRRPs' organizational structure also adds more nuance to the public and academic discourse on these parties' electoral successes, by forcing us to consider potential connections between organizational structures and member/voter mobilization. Yet our findings also have broader implications for the literature on the organizational evolution of political parties in general, and PRRPs are a logical focus for our study in this regard: unlike most of their competitors, many PRRPs witnessed not only a rise in electoral support in recent years, but also a growth in their memberships (Gauja and Van Haute 2015, 192; Bardi et al. 2017; Dassonneville and McAllister 2023).

Importantly, for PRRPs, the creation and fostering of closed communities of political activists can lend credence to their populist claim that they are *of*, as well as *for*, ordinary people, and able to understand their needs and speak on their behalf (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008). Hence our objective is not just to understand organizational choices, but also to interrogate the extent to which these choices are 'ideological products' (Scarrow 2015, 20–21). To achieve this, we investigate why the mass party model is being preserved, from the perspective of *both* party members and elites. We rely on unprecedented access to a selection of PRRP organizations, and extended primary research of life within them. First, we consider why the leaderships of several PRRPs go against the 'tide of disengagement' characterizing their competitors, by exploring what, in their eyes, are the advantages of adopting rooted models of party organization. Second, we explore why people become activists of PRRPs, what they contribute to their parties, and why they continue to invest time and effort to help their organizations in an age of partisan dealignment, and when it is quite evident that they as individuals risk stigmatization and get little demonstrable political influence in return. This part of the research will show that these parties' ideologies and policies matter greatly when it comes to convincing activists to volunteer time and resources to their parties.

Our book thus ultimately has three key aims: (1) to interrogate the enduring relevance of the mass party model; (2) to assess the motivations of PRRP

elites to invest in this organizational model; (3) to assess why PRRP members, especially the more engaged activists, are willing to sacrifice time and effort to the benefit of their party. The knowledge generated allows us to challenge the still-prevailing assumption that the strength of PRRPs in Europe is due largely to 'charismatic leadership', and to draw lessons for the academic literature that can be applied to party organizations more generally. Indeed, our study challenges conventional scholarly wisdom that we are witnessing a unidirectional shift away from the 'mass party' and towards lightweight electoral-professional organizational models.

Moving on to presenting our book and justifying our choices, we will first cover our methodology, and then summarize the content of each chapter in the subsequent section. The concluding section offers an outline of our main findings.

Research methodology and analytical approach

For our research we have adopted a comparative case study approach (Gerring 2007). The project's multi-level approach has examined the mechanics of activists' and representatives' reaction to, and reconstruction of, the social world of political participation, and the parties' relationships with their members. It has addressed different levels of social life, from the macro-levels of party structure and ideology, through the meso-level of social interactions in party activities, to the micro-level of individual histories, motives, and experiences; thus showing how party organizations actually function.

Our project has focused on a sample of four PRRPs which all show the essential characteristics of mass parties. Although we certainly do not deny that some (successful) PRRPs have adopted a lean and leader-centred organization, the aim of our study is not to explain variation in terms of PRRP organizational models. It is rather to investigate the functioning of PRR mass party organizations from the perspective of party elites as well as grassroots. The project's sampling has ranged horizontally, between nations, parties, and branches, as well as vertically, as our methods have penetrated different levels of the party as a social system (local, regional, and national). The parties selected for investigation are all seasoned PRRPs which are well established within their party systems: the Lega per Salvini Premier (LSP—League for Salvini Premier, until recently: Northern League), the Vlaams Belang (VB—Flemish Interest), Perussuomalaiset (PS—the Finns Party), and the Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre (SVP/UDC—Swiss People's Party/Democratic Union of the Centre).

These parties can all be seen as crucial cases of PPR mass parties (Favero 2021; Hatakka 2021; Sijstermans 2021; Zulianello 2021). As we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, in which we compare various party organizational models, we distil the following key features of the mass party ideal type from the literature: (a) the drive to recruit a large activist membership; (b) rootedness on the ground and the provision of a variety of activities to members (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015); and (c) the preservation of 'collective identities through ideology' (Panebianco 1988, 268). As far as organization is concerned, this party model is characterized by constant interaction between party elites, members and sympathizers, a clear division of power, and control of partisan channels of communication, through which parties mobilize their base.

Two clarifications are useful to make at this stage, before they are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2. First, in line with Maurice Duverger (1954), we do not treat absolute membership numbers as a key attribute in determining whether or not an organization can be defined as a 'mass party'. It is the drive to enlarge its membership, and to shape members' views and very identities via the party's ideology that *makes* the mass party, not the numbers (which anyway will vary considerably depending on national context and political culture). In this respect, what matters is whether a *mass-party logic* can be observed. Second, we reject the idea that internal democracy should be seen as a defining feature of the mass party, which is also in line with the classic literature (Michels 1962). In other words, we warn against mistaking participation in political activities with the actual power to set party strategy, define policies, or select candidates for public office.

This is not to say that party membership is trivial. Since party elites socialize members to politics and, in turn, can rely on them to effectively support the party when needed, the mass party model allows for the creation of a political talent pool, out of which promising individuals can be recruited for political office. From the perspective of the party leadership, therefore, membership can be an essential source of candidates for local, regional, national, and possibly supranational institutions. Party membership is also essential for carrying out in-person canvassing and campaigning (Bale et al. 2019). Last but not least, organizational choices can also offer a way for a party to circumvent attempts by rival parties to marginalize them. Being rooted in the local community, and able to rely on committed activists to canvas the public, can allow parties to break their isolation and gain visibility and legitimacy. This can be particularly useful to PRRPs, which despite their recent growth and normalisation (Mudde 2019), remain controversial political actors, and

are sometimes still subjected to a fully-fledged *cordon sanitaire* (Zulianello 2020).

While the cases we have selected for our research are consistently PRR and characterized by the key mass party characteristics, the selection offers variation in terms of their national setting (federal vs. unitary systems; EU vs. non-EU countries), foundational characteristics (ex-nihilo organizations, such as the VB, vs. converted parties, such as the League, PS, and SVP/UDC), and executive experience (all parties to varying degrees, except for the VB, which has none). The variation in the conditions just mentioned increases the representativeness of our sample (Gerring 2001, 181–183), while the small-N research design allows for in-depth qualitative investigation, and the gathering of rich, valid data. This offers both a nuanced perspective and a solid point of departure for further research on (PRRP) party organizations. Ultimately, we do not explore the different histories of these parties, nor do we consider how their development may have affected their organizational models—which no doubt is an interesting question for another project. Rather, we take a snapshot of where these organizations are *today*, both in ideological and organizational terms. The main objective is understanding to what extent the mass party model appears to suit these parties *here and now*.

Party competition in recent decades has been structured differently in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) compared to Western Europe, as in CEE countries the consolidation of party politics 'remained partial' (Enyedi and Casal Bértoa 2018, 447). This provided a strong incentive for restricting our sample to parties in Western Europe. This choice has maximized the comparability of our cases but ultimately restricts claims of generalization to this regional context. As we say in Chapter 6, we aim to inspire scholars to take our ideas beyond the confines of Western Europe (and the PRR party family) in future research.

At the intra-party level, our sample covers three areas for each party (see Table 1.1). We have compared locations where support has traditionally been strong (e.g. Lombardy, Antwerp, Satakunta, Zurich) with others in which the parties have grown more recently and/or with more difficulty (e.g. Emilia-Romagna, East Flanders, Central Finland, Geneva). In other words, in our selection of areas at the subnational level we have sought to include both 'strongholds' and 'battlegrounds' (Ammassari 2023a), allowing us to reveal diverging cultures and narratives within each party. This has helped us to provide a holistic picture of the varied ideological and organizational features of these parties at the local level.

Table 1.1 Selection of regions

Country	Region	Description
Belgium	Antwerp	The party's historical stronghold. Key leaders such as Filip Dewinter, Gerolf Annemans, and Tom van Grieken are all from the city or nearby towns.
	East Flanders	The VB has traditionally been weaker in East Flanders' key city of Ghent, but has grown very strong in the Denderstreek region, which includes the party's strongest town, Ninove.
	West Flanders	Not a traditionally strong area for the VB, but the party witnessed increased success in West Flanders from the end of the 2010s onwards.
Finland	Satakunta	Satakunta was a stronghold for the Finns Party's predecessor, the *Suomen Maaseudun Puolue* (Finnish Rural Party—SMP), already in the 1970s. It remained the region in which the Finns Party has its strongest levels of support.
	Southwest	The Finns Party has become strong in Southwest Finland, but only since the 2010s.
	Central	Central Finland was not a region in which the SMP had a strong backing, but support for the Finns Party has grown during the 2010s. However, the region could still not be regarded as a stronghold for the party at the end of that decade.
Italy	Emilia-Romagna	Traditionally not an area of strength for the League, having been dominated by the left for decades after the Second World War. However, the party started growing rapidly here from 2010 onwards, at a time when it was still known as 'Northern League' (see Chapter 2)
	Lombardy	Lombardy and Veneto have been the two traditional strongholds of the League throughout its history, accounting for around 60 per cent of the votes gained by the party in national elections. However, Lombardy has always been the dominant region within the party, since its foundation.
	Veneto	The League has enjoyed great electoral success in this region, although most positions of power (both within the party and when it served in successive governments) have been held by Lombards.
Switzerland	Zurich	The canton of Zurich has long been a stronghold of the SVP/UDC, together with Berne. Its branch has had a significant influence on the national party's radicalization, mainly due to the influence of its leader Christoph Blocher.
	Bern	In Bern, the SVP/UDC has been a more centrist moderate party, compared to Zurich. However, as far as electoral support is concerned, the two cantons are perfectly comparable. Since the start of the century, the SVP has enjoyed the support of circa one third of the electorate in federal elections in both areas.
	Geneva	When established in 1987, this cantonal branch of the SVP/UDC could not rely on an established organizational structure and was more liberal than the Zurich branch. The branch remains small—during the 2000s the party has attracted roughly half of the electoral support in comparison with Zurich and Bern—but it has now radicalized its positions in line with Zurich.

In order to study the parties' formal and informal organizations, and to analyse party members' and elites' motivations, a variety of methods have been deployed. First, we have produced organizational charts mapping the structure of each party at national, regional, and local levels, and the relationships between these levels. Useful data and information were also collected through party sources (such as statutes, websites, and manifestos), not only to map organizational characteristics but also to provide a description of where the selected parties stand today in terms of ideological features and their defining policies.[1] One-to-one interviews with party representatives and ordinary members, to which we turn next, were partly used to verify and complement our data.

The extensive deployment of interviews, intended to foster self-reflexivity among respondents, has produced most of our original findings throughout the book. We thus add to the growing body of research that advances our knowledge of what happens inside PRRPs by means of this method, defying the practical hurdles associated with interviewing people with a greater inclination to be wary and sceptical of academia (e.g. Art 2011; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Damhuis and de Jonge 2022; Ammassari 2023a; 2023b; 2024). Our reliance on qualitative methods has allowed us to explore the cultural constructs and narratives through which individual and collective meanings are shaped (Silverman 2004).

The interviewees were recruited through purposive sampling, which is used to identify the respondents who are likely to provide relevant and valuable information (Kelly 2010). In line with our research goals, we interviewed party representatives and party members (see below), and snowball chains developed with those who agreed to be interviewed. Respondents were sought until we reached theoretical saturation, which 'refers to the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights emerge from data and all relevant conceptual categories have been identified, explored, and exhausted' (Hennink et al. 2017, 592).

The first step in this process was conducting 125 original semi-structured elite interviews (EIs) with (leading) national and local party representatives and executives, divided almost equally between our four cases (see Appendix A; indicated with 'R' for 'representatives' after quotes in Chapter 4). Of these, 23 were pilot interviews, and 102 interviews were conducted by following a finalized interview guide. There was some variation between our cases in terms of the permission we received to reveal the identity of representatives—even though a majority of interviewees agreed to it—so we decided to fully

[1] Where possible, this information was cross-checked against the Political Party Database (PPDB), which contains data on parties' resources, structures, and internal decision-making, including measures on formal decision-making procedures and intra-party democracy (Poguntke et al. 2016).

anonymize the interviewees in our book. Yet we can safely say that our sample included a well-balanced mix of high-profile national representatives (including MPs, national leaders, and former leaders), regional representatives (e.g. regional councillors), and local representatives (local councillors, mayors, etc.).

Party elites' calculations about the net utility of different organizational forms are key to explaining which particular organizational model a party ultimately adopts (Scarrow 2015, 15). Hence, interviews with party elites are very revealing when seeking to identify motivations that are not evident in other forms of data (Mosley 2013, 5). In our case, interviews with party elites were mainly used to identify and explain the reasons behind the fostering of the mass party organizational model by PRRPs, which can shape our understanding of party organizational development more generally.

We deployed a thematically common interview schedule through which interviewers elicited accounts of organizational practice (see Appendix B). Although based on an original set of questions we had devised ourselves, our exploration was inspired by previous scholarly work, specifically Susan Scarrow's (2015, 102) conceptualization of the roles that members fulfil inside and outside party organizations, and Richard Katz's (2002, 108) list of incentives that parties have to retain a large membership. From the evidence collected, we identified the party-building strategies of the party elites and the reasons for investing in and socializing the grassroots (as discussed in Chapter 4). We also interpreted similarities and differences between the parties under investigation. This facilitated a reappraisal of theories of political participation, party development, and party organization in light of the identified strengths of the mass party model and its particular suitability to PRRPs.

The second step was to conduct and analyse extended interviews with one hundred 'ordinary' party members across the same geographical areas—circa twenty-five from each party, between seven and nine from each area (see Appendix A; indicated with 'M' for 'members' after quotes in Chapter 5). Interviewees were classified as 'ordinary' members when they carried the party card but did not have any formal roles within their parties above the local branch level. We again deployed a thematically common interview schedule which allowed us to focus on the reasons why different individuals join and become activists of PRRPs, why they stay, and what they contribute to the parties (see Appendix C). This interview guide was inspired by the one devised by Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (2006) to allow for comparison with extant research. It accounted for members' entrance trajectories, level of commitment, ideology, processes of socialization, and views about the party. Our findings in this phase of the study enabled us to understand the reasons for activism from the members' perspectives, engaging with

the literature on party member motivations in general (e.g. Whiteley and Seyd 1996; Gauja and Van Haute 2015; Bale et al. 2019), and contributing to the sparse literature on radical right member and activist motivations in particular (Klandermans and Mayer 2006; Whiteley et al. 2021; Ammassari 2023a). Our party member interviews also allowed us to triangulate what we had gained from party representatives, especially concerning the party community and lived experiences within it.

As we discuss in Chapter 5, in this part of the study we have focused on party members who show some degree of active involvement in their organizations—not passive ones. While this means that our findings are not necessarily representative of the party membership as a whole, we have been able to rely on the interviews to open the 'black box' of PRRP organization and explore the practices, lived experiences, and ways of doing things of those who make it possible for these organizations to function. In an age in which people are no longer expected to be willing to invest time and resources into traditional party activism, it was important to explore whatever PRRPs can offer today in terms of engagement and participation from the perspective of the members who do the volunteering and keep the party machine ticking.

In interviews with grassroots members we gave participants an opportunity to talk freely about what incentivized them to spend time being active within the party. Was their involvement, for instance, driven by a desire to be among ideologically like-minded people, a more general search for companionship, or a conviction that party membership gave them an opportunity to shape politics in their region or country? And how did they evaluate the opportunities provided by party elites not only to be involved in, but also to have a say in internal party affairs? In order to systematically engage with these questions, we sought inspiration from Peter Clark's and James Wilson's (1961) analytical categorization of party member incentives and motivations.

The data collected in both sets of interviews were analysed in two main ways, using structured queries via NVivo text analysis software. First, by party activity—for example asking how activities (including formal meetings as well as social events) shaped members' views and relationships to the party, according to the representatives and ordinary members. Second, by individual respondent, allowing us to address whether interviews gave a univocal or divergent account of motivations, intra-party processes, and organizational performance.

By focusing on inter-party comparison and by incorporating and triangulating the analysis of interviews with the preceding analysis of formal party structures, we were able to provide a complete picture of the perceived

costs and advantages of the mass party, according to both party elites and activists. We thus provide the first comprehensive comparative analysis of the reasons behind the adoption of the mass party model by PRRPs. Our work, furthermore, offers a more general theoretical contribution to rethinking theories of political participation, party development, and party organization.

Structure of the book

We have organized our book into six chapters. Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter provides the detailed theoretical and conceptual framework for our empirical study. Here we offer a definition of the populist radical right (PRR), and describe how, in recent years, PRRPs have reshaped political agendas in Europe by presenting themselves as the alternative to political and economic elites bent on imposing cultural change and uncontrolled migration on their societies (e.g. Mudde 2007; Inglehart and Norris 2019). Chapter 2 also provides a more detailed discussion of the mass party model, and compares it with other models that have been proposed in the literature on party evolution. In order to nurture collective identities, mass parties, unlike 'catch-all' parties (Kirchheimer 1966), preserve a distinctive message and ideology, which sets them apart from their competitors. As far as organization is concerned, mass parties are characterized by subnational and local branches, and a clear division of power (leading to the enforcement of party discipline, whenever necessary). They also control partisan channels of communication, through which they mobilize the traditional party base.

Having presented the main conceptual and theoretical premises in Chapter 2, the subsequent chapters analyse the ways in which the selected PRRPs structure their organizations, and consider the lived experiences of party elites and grassroots activists. Chapter 3 introduces the history and key ideological features of the four selected parties, and provides an assessment of their organizational structures. Key questions are how each party is organized at national and subnational levels, and what formal and informal hierarchies and power relations exist between these levels and different organizational bodies. In particular, the chapter considers the selected PRRPs' degree of centralization and power concentration, as well as the means the parties offer for grassroots participation and influence. The analysis will show that, despite considerable cross-national variation, the four parties under observation display the key elements of the mass party organizational model.

In Chapter 4, we present an analysis of the data we gathered from interviews with party elites. Here we delve into the motives of PRRP representatives to sustain a mass party organization, and describe the activities and communications used by the selected parties to foster participation, shape ideological consent, and create communities of activists. We show that these parties rely on complex and centralized organizational structures, invest in local party branches and activities, and deploy mechanisms of value infusion and socialization of members as key means to achieve visibility, legitimacy, and ultimately, electoral success and organizational survival. Whilst face-to-face activities and events remain crucial in this regard, social media are also considered to be an important means for the present-day mass party. Yet new means of communication and community-building usually complement, rather than replace, face-to-face interaction, which is still seen as essential for the party to achieve its aims.

Shifting the focus from party elites to the grassroots, Chapter 5 presents the results of our extended interviews with ordinary members. It will reveal our key findings concerning their routes into activism, motives for joining and reasons for staying, experiences of party life and engagement in certain activities, as well as their relationship with other members and party representatives. We also reveal the activists' perspectives on the functioning of party organizations, including reflections on the distribution of power and internal democracy. One key question we explore is why grassroots activists appear happy to participate in party organizations that grant them relatively little decision-making power. Ultimately, and bearing in mind the centralization of power within these parties outlined in Chapter 3, we observe that all selected parties offer 'participation without power' (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021) to their members, but also that this does not seem to be a huge problem for the grassroots.

Finally, in Chapter 6 we draw together the findings from the previous chapters (on party structures, party elites, and party activist perspectives), by offering a holistic portrayal of life inside PRR mass parties and by reaching general theoretical conclusions. By demonstrating how the PRR mass party model challenges conventional scholarly wisdom, the study offers a timely and substantial contribution to the theory on party organization and development in West European democracies. Our study also helps to advance theories of political participation and party membership by moving the analysis beyond the point at which people join parties and by shedding light on what happens inside them afterwards. After observing the 'life of the party' inside PRRPs we are therefore able to assess whether parties can still fulfil an important role as intermediaries between citizens and political elites.

Key findings and conclusions

We end this chapter with some key comparative observations and findings. As shown in the rest of the book, our research finds that the four parties under observation foster the traditional mass party organizational model, although the degree to which they approach this ideal type of party organization varies. More specifically, they shape their organizations depending on their individual circumstances and the political context they find themselves in. Yet all of our selected PRRPs have complex organizations, which are hierarchically organized and characterized by local branches which contribute to value infusion and socialization of grassroots members through a variety of activities.

Party representatives are clear about the perceived advantages of the mass party model and establishing strong relationships with party supporters. These include practical benefits, such as 'feet on the ground' for election campaigns, but also increasing the parties' legitimacy and visibility, as well as safeguarding organizational and electoral survival. There is a clear drive to gain an aura of authenticity and respectability, and to present the parties as the voice of the ordinary 'forgotten people' in local communities. In line with their populist appeal, PRRPs are keen to signal societal rootedness and 'closeness to the people'. Our findings thus confirm Susan Scarrow's claim about organizational choices being, to an extent, 'ideological products' (Scarrow 2015, 20–21).

It should be noted that, within their countries, all four parties are more present (and/or active) in some regions than in others. For instance, the SVP has only recently managed to gain a foothold in some French-speaking areas, and the number of activities that are organized vary widely between locations. Furthermore, the League is clearly very committed to fostering the key features of the mass party in its historical strongholds of Northern Italy. Yet it has only just started to replicate such organizational features and practices in the south, and not without difficulty. Even where they face challenges, however, what matters is that these parties continue to invest in rootedness and participation, and strive to grow their membership and benefit from the commitment of their members and sympathizers.

As far as communication with members and the public at large is concerned, three of our parties (the League, the VB, and the PS) stand out for their ability to effectively deploy internet platforms and social media in ways that facilitate and complement initiatives by activists on the ground. Social media are used effectively to encourage sympathizers to become involved in party life at the local level, which may then lead to them formally joining the party. In addition to running websites at all organizational levels (national,

regional, and local), and being active on all the major social media platforms, these parties have also been noted for the success and visibility achieved by some of their leaders through online means. Online media also enable widespread interactions within party organizations, facilitating communication with and between members, and the organization of meetings and events. In other words, social media, far from being seen as an *alternative* to face-to-face interaction, are often essential to *facilitating* the organization of in-person activities and face-to-face initiatives that allow members to interact both with the public and with each other.

The cantonal branches of the SVP/UDC are also active via social media channels, but the success enjoyed by their online endeavours (and the professionalism they demonstrate) varies widely. Ultimately, the party's social media outreach trails behind other PRRPs, especially that of the Finns Party. Much of the political activism relevant to the PS's performance (e.g. the recruitment of voters, new activists, and even candidates) takes place online, and beyond the party's formal organizational boundaries. While the party thus benefits from a lively online infrastructure, officials sometimes experience difficulties with maintaining control over, sometimes extremist, social media content produced by members or sympathizers.

In line with previous research, we also find that internal democracy remains underdeveloped within the chosen organizations (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016). Our selected parties are all characterized by considerable concentration of power in the hands of the party leadership and/or party executive. Not necessarily consistent with what is stated in party statutes, representatives from the the League, the VB, and the PS generally admit that real executive strength lies with the party executive. Thus, in practice the party leader, alongside a restricted group of representatives serving in the party executive, dominates party strategy, administrative and financial management, as well as the enforcement of internal discipline.

In the case of the SVP/UDC, the typical tendency towards power concentration in the hands of a restricted party elite is partially mitigated by the features of Swiss political culture and the country's institutions. In the end, complete internal and external coherence and absolute dominance of federal party organs over cantonal branches remain inconceivable in a country in which parties are networks of cantonal associations. Nonetheless, even in this case the federal bodies of the party have acquired more power and influence in recent decades, and ordinary members have very few opportunities to affect the party's strategy at the federal level or shape its key policies.

In general, then, the ability of ordinary members to influence decision-making, formal party positions, and the selection of candidates is limited, although this may be partly mitigated by the representatives' informal responsiveness to local activists. Interestingly, however, interviews with local members reveal that there often is no real desire or expectation to be involved in central party decision-making. Moreover, we find that lack of power does not translate into *lack of efficacy* on the part of grassroot members. While they generally recognize that their individual input into how their parties are run remains limited, members do believe they are influential via the party *as a collective*, potentially bringing about change within their societies.

There is no doubt that the PRRPs in our study are generally disciplined and pyramidal. We have found that the existence of complex and rooted organizations can allow party elites to shape members' interpretations of political developments in their countries, which facilitates the creation of closed communities of like-minded members. Yet the same parties are also very able to foster participation and interaction between their members. Our study thus shows that internal democracy should not be conflated with the opportunity to take part in a variety of activities, to interact with other members, to discuss and interrogate political events, and possibly even to criticize the choices made by party elites.

Indeed, interviews with ordinary members reveal that they appreciate the sense of community that exists within the parties, and treasure the opportunity to defend and promote the party's ideas, which they feel are not generally accepted by the wider population. The key narrative of PRRPs—that they stand up for ordinary people and against cosmopolitan and unpatriotic elites—is clearly echoed in conversations with grassroots members and activists. That they are hardly in control of crucial party decisions and procedures appears to be of secondary relevance.

In terms of more general implications, our study challenges the idea that the mass party is an organizational model of a bygone age, or that there is a uniform trend away from grassroots involvement in party politics. Indeed, different ideal-typical party models can coexist alongside each other (Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1995), and be moulded to meet the demands of new realities. Traditionally dominant centrist parties, which find it hard to cling on to their erstwhile electoral support, may find inspiration in the way PRR mass parties organize and mobilize. In the observed process of radical right 'normalization' a key part has been the dissemination of the frame that PRRP supporters represent the 'common people', as opposed to the out-of-touch liberal cosmopolitans that support the PRR's ideological

antagonists (Mudde 2019). Being organizationally rooted in local communities may help other political parties to formulate a credible retort against the PRR's claim to be the only legitimate 'voice of the people' (see Mueller 2017). At the same time, adopting key features of the mass party may contribute to halting or even reversing the trend of partisan dealignment and citizen disengagement that scholars have lamented (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Mair 2013), and enthuse citizens to rally behind a political cause they believe in.

The next chapter will provide more detail about our theoretical and conceptual starting points, unpacking the concepts of the mass party and the PRR. After this we will be able to take a closer look, in Chapter 4, at how our chosen PRRPs are organized, and what ideologies and key messages characterize them. This will open the way to an analysis of the lived experiences of party elites and grassroots activists in the subsequent chapters of the book, giving us the opportunity to open the 'black box' of PRRP organization in the twenty-first century, and to identify implications for the evolution of political parties more generally.

2

The Populist Radical Right in the Context of Party Evolution

> *That's how it works; the party would have a really hard time to operate without the people on the ground who keep in touch with the party, with the voters, with people in the municipalities. (PS, R14)*

In recent years, populist radical right parties (PRRPs) have reshaped political agendas in Europe. One of their main claims is that they constitute the only true 'voice of the people' and the only genuine alternative to political and economic elites. The latter are invariably depicted as being corrupted and self-serving, taking away from ordinary people what is rightfully theirs (whether it is their prosperity or their very identity) (e.g. Mudde 2007; Inglehart and Norris 2019). In terms of their own party organization, several PRRPs also conceive the relationship between members and representatives differently from their competitors. That is, some of these parties still invest in an organizational model that relies heavily on the involvement of their grassroots, and the active shaping of their members' political identities (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016). This model, we will argue, is that of the 'mass party', as initially described by Maurice Duverger (1954). The resilience of the mass party model evidently challenges supposed trends that party organization literature has identified: a shift towards 'catch-all' (Kirchheimer 1966), 'cartel' (Katz and Mair 1995), 'electoral-professional' (Panebianco 1988), or 'business-firm' (Hopkin and Paolucci 1999) organizations. We contend that such models may in fact coexist alongside each other (see Koole 1996). Different models, including the mass party, can also best be seen as *ideal types* that individual parties approach to different degrees in practice.

In this chapter, we provide the detailed theoretical and conceptual framework for our empirical study, which analyses how the selected PRRPs bring the mass party model into practice by considering their formal organization, but also the lived experiences of party elites and grassroots members. We start with an overview of the party models that have been identified in the scholarly literature describing the organizational and functional evolution

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of parties in Western Europe. We then provide a more detailed conceptualization of the mass party model, and present the definition that is central to our research. Afterwards, we describe how PRRPs have been among the most prominent parties to break the supposed 'cartel' of traditionally dominant parties in the ideological centre, and discuss how the mass party model may serve their needs well. We conclude by spelling out the theoretical contribution of our study.

Party evolution: theories and concepts

Throughout the past two centuries, political parties in Western Europe have evolved in terms of their core (democratic) functions and their relationship with, on the one hand, civil society and, on the other, the formal institutions of the state. Based on such functional and organizational characteristics, scholars have theorized and identified various party 'models' or 'types' which appeared (and disappeared) across time (Duverger 1954; Kirchheimer 1966; Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1995; Krouwel 2006). It is worthwhile noting that the types discussed in this chapter, which are first and foremost applicable to the West European context, are certainly not the only ones that have been proposed (e.g. Gunther and Diamond 2003; Neumann 1956; Rahat 2024). Furthermore, the theory behind, and empirical applicability of, individual party models have remained contested (e.g. Wolinetz 2002).

As most party scholars seem to agree on, it is ultimately best to consider each of these models as *ideal types* or, in the words of Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995, 19), as 'heuristically convenient polar types, to which individual parties may approximate more or less closely at any given time'. In fact, while it is often assumed that the days of the mass party were numbered around the middle of the twentieth century (see Table 2.1), we seek to nuance this by means of our research. Given that the mass party model and its continued relevance is the key focus of our study, we offer more conceptual detail about its key features in the next section of this chapter. We start here with a brief and selective overview of the emergence and evolution of different proposed party types in Western Europe.

The first stage of party development dates from the mid-nineteenth century, when political parties represented a narrow constituency (see Table 2.1). Given the heavy limitations on the scope of suffrage, whereby women and working-class citizens were excluded, these 'cadre', 'caucus', or 'elite' parties represented socially and economically privileged segments of society. Early parties with conservative and liberal ideologies were typical examples of this

Table 2.1 Key characteristics of theorized party models

	Cadre	Mass	Catch-all	Cartel	Electoral-professional
Primary period	Nineteenth century	1880–1960s	1945–present	1970–present	1980s–present
Electoral appeal and social support	Limited to upper social strata	Ideology-based, appealing to specific groups based on social cleavages	Focus on political competence to attract a broad dealigned electorate	Focus on campaigning expertise to attract a largely disengaged electorate	Focus on personalized leadership; issue-based campaigning
Character of membership	Small and elitist	Sizeable, active and socialized; close-knit community and partisan identity	Less active, marginalized, declining	Individualized, offering legitimacy/pool for recruitment	Minimal and irrelevant; focus on electorate instead of members
Relations between ordinary members and party elite	No distinction	Elite formally accountable to members	Members organized as cheerleaders for elite	Limited; mutual autonomy	Power concentration at the top; reduced reliance on activists
Communication channels	Interpersonal networks	Party's own channels and later also the mass media	Increasingly mass media	Privileged access to state media	Mass media
Principal source of party resources	Personal contacts and wealth	Members' contributions, ancillary organizations	Interest groups, state subsidies	State subsidies	Interest groups; state subsidies

Note: Based on Panebianco (1988); Katz and Mair (1995); Krouwel (2006).

party type, and represented established (aristocratic) elites and a new class of wealthy entrepreneurs, respectively (Bale and Rovira Kaltwasser 2021). As such, cadre parties did not genuinely act as a link between the state and the population at large. Extra-parliamentary party organizations remained small and parties were dominated by locally organized caucuses composed of individuals from the higher echelons of society. As the party's key function was the recruitment of candidates and campaigning for them, the party organization was largely dormant outside of election periods.

The emergence of mass parties towards the end of the nineteenth century can be seen as a reaction against the closed nature of political competition. This is consistent with the description by Katz and Mair (1995, 6) of the historical development of political parties as 'a dialectical process in which each new party type generates a reaction that stimulates further development'. Mass parties typically had an extra-parliamentary origin, mobilizing and organizing politically disenfranchised groups, with socialist or social democratic parties representing the most typical example of the early mass party (Michels 1962). These organizations aimed to redistribute social, economic, and political power to the benefit of the large working-class population. This aim of social integration went hand in hand with large member-based organizations that actively involved members in party activities, and socialized them through local branches and by offering a range of services. Formally, party elites and representatives were accountable to ordinary members, and the focus thus shifted from the parliamentary party to the party 'on the ground'.

Unlike the cadre party, the mass party's function was not the advancement of the supposed 'national interest' through the lens of privileged societal groups, but the representation of a clearly identified segment of society—the cohesiveness of which was partly socially constructed through the party itself. With the extension of suffrage to most adult citizens, parties adopting the mass party model could flourish electorally, and the idea of political parties forming a link between civil society and the state became 'normatively desirable' (Katz and Mair 1995, 11). Already existing cadre parties were therefore incentivized to adopt a mass party structure as well, if only to signal their democratic credentials. These parties were, however, less dependent on membership fees for their survival and had to appeal beyond their relatively small group of privileged core voters to safeguard their electoral positions.

In this regard, the needs of former cadre parties of the centre right were better served under the model of the 'catch-all party' which emerged in the mid-twentieth century (Kirchheimer 1966). These parties were not characterized by the ambition to represent a clearly defined social group, but instead

sought to portray themselves as the most competent managers of the state, adopting issue positions that were widely shared by the voters (cf. Stokes 1963). The emergence of this new party model went hand in hand with the process of partisan dealignment. Electoral competition became structured much less by group and party identities than it had been before due to a number of societal developments, including the shrinking of the industrial working class and the secularization of society (the declining importance of religion in people's lives). These processes weakened the bonds between political parties and their erstwhile constituencies, damaging the electoral prospects of the traditional mass parties on the left as well as Christian democratic mass parties located in the centre of the political spectrum.

Facing shrinking core electorates, parties had to widen their nets and appeal to a less specific segment of voters. In practice, this amounted to campaigning on the basis of less distinctive ideological messages and communicating with potential voters through mass media—not least television—instead of party channels and door-to-door canvassing. In terms of party organization, national party leaders became primarily accountable to the wider electorate, instead of the organized party membership. The function of ordinary members became more that of 'cheerleaders' for the party leadership, and levels of political activism declined.

This trend away from socially rooted politics has often been lamented, and the mass party model has rightly or wrongly been taken as 'the standard against which everything should be judged' (Katz and Mair 1995, 5–6). While the presumed 'golden age' of the mass party (that is: around the mid-20th century) should not be romanticized as the pinnacle of democratic politics, there has been an unmistakable decline in party membership across Western Europe in the second half of the twentieth century (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; van Biezen et al. 2012).

Katz and Mair (1995; 2018), furthermore, sketched a rather pessimistic picture of the era since the 1970s, which they argued was characterized by the emergence of yet another party type: the 'cartel party'. The authors argued that dominant mainstream parties became increasingly intertwined with state institutions, dividing the spoils of public office between them, while ties with their grassroots members further weakened and citizens turned away from participating in partisan politics (see also Mair 2013). According to the cartel party thesis, parties relied ever less on ordinary members to finance party activities, instead benefiting from increased state subventions legislated by themselves. With a limited number of established parties 'colonizing' the state, party competition became contained and managed: cartel parties sought 'to ensure their own collective survival' (Katz and Mair 1995, 5).

The running of campaigns became even more the domain of media experts and consultants, and the distinction between members and non-member supporters ever more blurred.

It is questionable if traditional mainstream parties were ever able to dominate West European politics to the extent that Katz and Mair suggested (Koole, 1996). The authors did predict, however, that the cartel would generate its own opposition, and the declining electoral supremacy of traditionally dominant parties in the past few decades arguably supports this supposition. As we will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, parties of the populist radical right (PRR) have been among the most prominent challengers of traditional parties, and indeed keen to describe the latter as a colluding cartel that lost touch with ordinary citizens.

In terms of PRRP organization, one common perception of such parties is that they are organized primarily as a vehicle for their 'charismatic' leader (see Eatwell 2018).[1] A proposed party type that is largely in line with this description is that of the 'electoral-professional' party proposed by Angelo Panebianco (1988). This party type shows the features of de-ideologization, weak electoral links and increasing dependence on expert outsiders that also characterize catch-all and cartel parties. Crucially, Panebianco also identifies weak institutions and the pre-eminence of personalized leadership as features of the electoral-professional party. Introducing an alternative concept and using the Italian Forza Italia as an example, Jonathan Hopkin and Caterina Paolucci (1999) speak of 'business firm' parties and describe these as organizations with highly restricted bureaucracies and a great degree of centralization of control. Business-firm parties rely on professional marketing experts and can adjust their political messages to prevailing public opinion. Yet their survival is typically very much intertwined with the electoral fate of their leader, who tends to use the party for their particularistic interests. In a more recent article, Gideon Rahat (2024) also engages with the supposed trend of personalization of politics, and proposes several new 'personalized' party types of which several PRRPs are listed as examples.

In our study, we seek to challenge the notion that most PRRPs can best be described as 'personal', 'electoral-professional', or 'business firm' parties. First of all, it is incorrect to assume that PRRPs typically fit the description of electoral-professional parties in that they refrain from organizing 'stable collective identities' (Panebianco 1988, 268). PRRPs are in fact characterized

[1] This also applies to the broader category of populist parties, including cases such as Silvio Berlusconi's 'personal party' Forza Italia (McDonnell 2013).

by very recognizable ideologies, and many have developed a stable core support base, putting into doubt the perception that they rely primarily on fickle protest voters (Voogd and Dassonneville 2020). Second, and even more relevant for our research aims, many of these parties do not opt for setting up a leader-centred and light-weight organization (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016; van Kessel and Albertazzi 2021). In fact, we start out from the assumption that for many PRRPs the mass party model offers specific advantages. To provide the conceptual basis for this study, the next section explains in greater detail our definition of the mass party and the individual attributes through which it can be operationalized.

The mass party in the twenty-first century

Noting that there are certainly alternative conceptions of the 'mass party' (e.g. Sartori 2005; Wolinetz 2002), we primarily draw inspiration from the seminal accounts of Duverger (1954) and Panebianco (1988). We distil the following as the key features of the mass party organizational model: (a) the drive to recruit a large activist membership as a way to reach out to the public through canvassing, campaigning, and other means; (b) rootedness on the ground and the provision of a variety of activities to members (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015); and (c) the preservation of 'collective identities through ideology' (Panebianco 1988, 268), by creating close-knit political communities of activists, by promoting social integration among them, and by shaping their interpretations of political developments. In order to achieve this, mass parties preserve a distinctive message and ideology, which distinguish them from their 'catch-all' competitors. In other words, they have a clear and distinctive ideology and set of policies that they can be seen to 'own' (see Budge and Farlie 1983).

The above definition excludes elements related to the social basis of mass party membership. Early mass parties appealed to clearly defined social groups, not least workers and people adhering to a particular religious denomination. Changes to the social composition of West European countries—for instance due to the shrinking of the industrial working class—mean that electorates 'have become more socially and culturally heterogeneous, and less controllable by parties' (Panebianco 1988, 266). This is not to say that electoral competition has become completely random. Notably, new conflict lines have emerged around sociocultural issues (Inglehart 1997). Hanspeter Kriesi and colleagues (2008) have famously argued that a new structural conflict in Western European countries has materialized, pitting

so-called 'winners' and 'losers' of globalization against each other. The former are typically more highly skilled citizens with cosmopolitan attitudes; the latter individuals who identify strongly with the national community and who lose out, or *perceive* themselves as losing out, from globalization (see also Gidron and Hall 2020). The so-called losers of globalization are thus more likely to be against immigration and to support the PRR.

While party support, including for PRRPs, can thus clearly be related to socio-demographic characteristics such as social background and education (see Oesch 2008; Rydgren 2012; Bovens and Wille 2017; Van Hauwaert and van Kessel 2018; Inglehart and Norris 2019), bases for party support have changed and party identification has, overall, declined (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Traditional political subcultures have not been replaced by equally strong new ones. As a consequence, the concept of the mass party would not travel particularly well to the current day if we defined it based on bygone levels of party and group identification. We consider it much preferable, therefore, to focus on the organizational and functional characteristics—as expressed in the definition we presented—that allow for studying the mass party concept throughout time. For this reason, we also exclude the reliance on funding by members from our definition (Duverger 1954, 63), and we accept that mass (and social) media are now important communication means for *all* types of parties. But more crucially, we assume that strong mass party institutions may still exist despite the overall weakening of political subcultures.

It is clear that we thus engage in a certain extent of 'reconceptualization' in order to make the mass party concept suitable to the current age. Given our adaptations, there arguably is a case for referring to the 'modern mass party' in our research instead—in the same way as Ruud A. Koole (1994) coined the 'modern cadre party' concept.[2] We prefer, however, not to use such an alternative label for three reasons. First, there has not been one undisputed definition of the mass party to serve as a fundamental benchmark. Second, as Susan Scarrow (2015) pointed out, the ideals and practice of the mass party model have always diverged: large memberships were never the norm, and the narrative of mass party decline is thus 'simultaneously true and exaggerated' (Scarrow 2015, 36). Third, we deem the key organizational and functional attributes of the concept more important than elements that are more sensitive to a particular time period (not least: the sociological composition of their membership).

[2] This was a sensible suggestion by one of the reviewers of the manuscript.

As far as these key organizational and functional attributes of the mass party are concerned, we argue that this model is characterized by constant interaction between party elites and members, a clear division of power (leading to the enforcement of party discipline, whenever necessary), and control of partisan channels of communication, through which parties mobilize their base. In line with Duverger (1954), we reject absolute membership numbers as the guiding principle in determining whether or not an organization can be defined as a 'mass party'. What is regarded as essential instead is the *type of relationship* between party elites and the grassroots—in the same way as the 'cartel party' concept refers to the relationship between the party organization and the state (Katz and Mair 1995). While the *actual* number of members a party has will invariably fluctuate, also depending on the political culture and varying levels of party penetration within society, a party can be considered a mass party if it continues to *strive* to enlarge its membership base, organizes its members, shapes their views of politics and identities via the party's ideology, and uses members to reach out to the voting public. When all of these things apply, a 'mass-party logic' can be said to be at work. Clearly, the mass party must have enough members for it to be able to organize activities both internally (to shape its members' views) and externally (to reach out to the public). However, it is not possible to establish a membership threshold above which a party can be defined as 'mass'.

It is also worth noting that not all members within a mass party organization are equally active (Wolinetz 2002). There is a continuum stretching between, on the one hand, dormant members who offer little else than a membership fee and, on the other, genuine 'activists' who spend considerable resources (not least time and energy) in the party, and for whom party membership plays an important role in their life. As this book will emphasize throughout, it is this core of activists that is in fact essential to the functioning of the mass party.

A final key point to stress here is that we reject the idea that internal democracy should be seen as a defining feature of the mass party (in line with Saglie and Heidar 2004, 387, but contra Cross and Katz 2013, 173). As Daniele Albertazzi and Davide Vampa (2021a) have argued with reference to the Lega Nord (LN—Northern League), the evidence shows that PRRPs are perfectly able to offer *participation* to their members without offering them much *power*. The evidence shows that this is exactly the idea of the mass party these organizations have in mind: rooted on the ground, able to shape identities, reliant on their members for success, but also centralized and firmly in the hands of their leaders when it comes to ideological direction, party strategy, and the selection of candidates.

We expect to see similar characteristics in the other PRR mass parties that we selected for this study. We explain in more detail why in the next section, which also clarifies our conceptual approach to this party family.

The populist radical right today

As previously noted, if there ever was a 'cartel' of colluding centrist parties, this has come under increasing pressure. Established centre-left and centre-right parties are not only characterized by falling memberships, but also by shrinking electoral support (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021b). Meanwhile, newly founded parties across the ideological spectrum have emerged and started to play an increasingly important role in West European party systems. One key party family that has been at the forefront of challenging established parties in recent years has been the PRR, known in particular for its opposition to immigration and cultural change.

Unlike their centrist competitors, many PRRPs have seen their electoral weight increase, offering them opportunities to enter government and/or to affect the political agenda (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Albertazzi and Vampa 2021b; Inglehart and Norris 2019; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2022). As alluded to earlier in this chapter, in long-established democracies in Western Europe, the rise of PRRPs needs to be understood by considering processes of partisan dealignment, as well as realignment along new lines of political conflict (Kriesi et al. 2008). Citizens have gradually become more 'available' to parties that challenge the traditional establishment and that address salient issues, such as immigration and multiculturalism (van Kessel 2015). Generally speaking, the PRR in Western Europe has been successful in mobilizing support on the basis of these 'new' cultural issues, benefiting from voters' increased distrust in, and decreased loyalty towards, established parties.

While the electoral strength of individual PRRPs varies across countries and between elections, most West European countries now have well-established member(s) of this party family represented in their party systems that attract a considerable share of the nationwide vote (often well over 10 per cent, and closer to 20 per cent or above in countries such as Italy, Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland). It is increasingly normal to see PRRPs in pivotal positions in national party systems (Zulianello 2019; Zulianello 2020). This is expressed in several of them entering office (e.g. in Austria, Italy, Finland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) or offering parliamentary support for minority coalitions in exchange for the implementation

of some of their key policies (e.g. in Denmark and Sweden). Arguably an even more important measure of their success is their impact on the political debate and the positions of their centrist competitors, which are often seen to incorporate PRR policies and to copy their rhetoric—whether in a watered-down form or not (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Mudde 2019; Habersack and Werner 2023).

In what follows, we first provide more detail about the definition of PRR we apply in our study, and then theorize the potential of the mass party organizational model for this party family.

The ideology of the populist radical right

Following the definition of Cas Mudde (2007), the PRR party family combines the ideological elements of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism. Nativism is the PRR's core element, which Mudde (2007, 22) defines as 'an ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state'. In our view, this definition is too stringent as few PRRPs openly advocate limiting residence to 'natives'—however defined—only. We instead seek inspiration from Hans-Georg Betz's (2019) conception of nativism, which entails (a) the claim that non-native people living within the border of a community are, *ipso facto*, a threat; (b) the prioritization of 'the natives' when distributing resources (e.g. welfare); and (c) a (symbolic) defence of national culture and identity.

Authoritarianism, the second key attribute of the PRR, can be defined as 'the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely' (Mudde 2007, 23). This belief is typically expressed through support for strict law and order policies, but usually also in a traditionalist conception of society with reference to family, gender roles, and sexuality. PRRPs' positions on such 'moral-cultural' issues nevertheless tend to be complex, and an appeal to ostensibly 'liberal' values is not uncommon among these parties. It is not unusual for them to defend (their conception of) liberty and free speech, and some have rhetorically defended Enlightenment values, too, as well as the rights of gay and lesbian people, and gender equality (Akkerman 2015; Moffitt 2017; van Kessel 2021). They appear to do so, however, mainly as part of their anti-Islam discourse; Islam, in this context, is portrayed as a misogynistic and homophobic religion, incompatible with Western civilization.

Populism, finally, can be interpreted as a set of ideas revolving around the normative distinction between 'the people' and 'the elites' (Mudde 2004). That is, PRRPs, like all populist parties, side with 'the people' and defend the principle of popular sovereignty—a feature that sets them apart from extreme-right parties, which reject democracy in itself (Mudde 2007). PRRPs are very critical of what they see as the unnecessary complex and slow procedures of *liberal* democracy that supposedly stand in the way of the direct expression of the 'popular will', and they lambast the political, economic, and/or cultural 'elites' for their alleged arrogance, unresponsiveness, and/or corruption (Canovan 1999).

Similar to the category of 'natives', the two central concepts of populism ('the people' and 'the elites') can be conceived of as 'empty signifiers' (Laclau 2005) to be filled by understandings of these two categories that can vary widely. The interpretation of who belongs to either category is informed by the host ideology adopted by a particular case of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). Nativism permeates the notion of 'the people' embraced by the PRR and shapes the specific understanding of the capital enemy: 'the elites'. The native group is not only identified, but also glorified on the grounds of sociocultural and ethnic features, while the 'elites' are typically portrayed as disrespectful of, and disconnected from, traditional culture and customs, to the point of threatening their very existence.

While sociocultural issues, not least immigration and questions of ethnic and cultural diversity, are key to the programmes of PRRPs, their economic agenda has also received considerable scholarly attention. It is debated to what extent PRRPs have a coherent socio-economic profile (e.g. Betz 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1995), have shifted to more centrist or 'left-wing' positions over time (e.g. de Lange 2007; Afonso and Rennwald 2018), or whether they are consciously vague about their positions on economic issues (Rovny 2013; Rovny and Polk 2020). An increasing body of research nevertheless shows that, in terms of social policies, West European PRRPs converge around a 'welfare chauvinist' position, implying that 'non-natives' should be excluded from, or only have limited access to, welfare provisions (see e.g. Andersen and Bjørklund 1990; De Koster et al. 2013; Rathgeb and Busemeyer 2022). In other words, the PRR's socio-economic agenda is, at least in part, informed by its nativist agenda (Ennser-Jedenastik 2016; Otjes et al. 2018): socio-economic measures should primarily, if not exclusively, benefit 'deserving' natives (Abts et al. 2021; Chueri 2023).

The region-specific element of Euroscepticism is not a defining feature of the PRR (Rooduijn 2019), but its ideology makes European members of the

party family prone to be sceptical of the European Union, at least how it currently functions (Vasilopoulou 2018). All populists are disposed to dislike the complex EU decision-making processes which, they argue, stand in the way of the direct implementation of the popular will (e.g. Canovan 1999; Taggart 2004; Pirro et al. 2018). The EU can also easily be depicted as an elite-driven organization with no connection to ordinary citizens. PRRPs, furthermore, typically portray the EU as an entity that threatens the sovereignty and cultural traditions of their member states, and that opens the borders for further immigration. However, members of the PRR are not necessarily opposed to every form of European integration—indeed, few explicitly advocate for leaving the EU altogether (van Kessel et al. 2020; Heinisch et al. 2021; Lorimer 2021). It is not uncommon for these parties to emphasize the shared cultural heritage of European nations (Lorimer 2024), and they may see a role for the EU in dealing with 'outside threats' they identify, not least immigration from non-Western countries.

The mass party's potential for PRRPs

In terms of organization, the PRR party family has often been associated with centralized and 'charismatic' leadership (see e.g. Carter 2005; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Eatwell 2018), suggesting that the activists' involvement in party life is not valued by populist elites, or is even treated with suspicion. While this analysis applies to a handful of examples of parties, such as Geert Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV—Party for Freedom) in the Netherlands (de Lange and Art 2011), both country-specific (Albertazzi 2016; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2005; 2010; 2015; Arter 2016) and comparative studies (e.g. Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016; van Kessel and Albertazzi 2021) have demonstrated that many PRRPs deploy a model that heavily relies on the establishment of complex structures through which to interact with members, sympathizers, and the public at large. In other words, as well as criticizing the ideology, policies, and conduct of mainstream parties, several PRRPs conceive the relationship between people and party elites differently from their competitors. By heavily investing in the active shaping of political identities they borrow quite clearly from the mass party model.

We argue that the key features of the mass party suit PRRPs well since the creation and fostering of partisan communities can lend credence to their populist assertion that they are of, and for, ordinary people. What is more, the creation of communities of loyal partisan activists allows these parties to influence the views of the electorate via an army of volunteers and canvassers,

hence reaching out to voters regardless of the PRR's (sometimes conflictual) relationship with the country's media. Hence, organizational choices can also offer a way for a party to circumvent their opponents' attempts to marginalize them (Art 2011). The most effective weapon in this respect is the opportunity the mass party offers to foster the existence of tight-knit communities of committed members and sympathizers—that also *look* like ordinary citizens—and to create a subculture that binds them together.

The existence of a committed pool of activists is also essential because the mass party needs to be 'seen' on the ground and perceived as doing something concrete for ordinary people. This party image is built day after day, and cannot be achieved if grassroots activities are confined to election times. The physical presence of members and sympathizers on the ground can feed into voters' perception of the party as a political organization that is entrenched 'in the real world'. If activists are perceived as 'ambassadors to the community' (Scarrow 1996, 46), and being on the side of ordinary people, they can reach the public at large more efficiently and credibly and, at the same time, be regarded as trustworthy and capable of listening to societal demands and grievances.

From a more practical perspective, the mass party model also allows for the creation of a political talent pool. In other words, party elites socialize members to politics, and often provide opportunities for them to be trained via 'political schools' and other initiatives. In turn, elites can rely on party members to effectively support the party when needed, for instance by providing the organization with candidates for local, regional, national, and European elections. In this way, the party can also secure organizational survival in the longer run, which is typically a problem for purely leader-centred parties. Through the mass party model, PRRPs can establish rooted and complex organizations that are future-proof, but also centralized with strong leadership (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016).

The mass party model does not suit PRRPs *only*, of course—it has evidently originated on the left. However, it has been adopted, at least partially, by many PRRPs as a model that can fulfil their ideological and practical needs. Beyond the important quest for legitimacy and practical advantages, key features that link the mass party model and the PRR are (a) the presence of a clearly defined ideology, which translates into political objectives party members are asked to focus on (Kirchheimer 1966, 190; Duverger 1954); and (b) the claim to represent a particular milieu, or constituency, that feels previously ignored by traditional parties (Kirchheimer 1966, 190).

We are not the first scholars to stress the importance of activism, presence on the ground, and canvassing activities for PRRPs. Bert Klandermans and

Nonna Mayer (2006) pay close attention to the ideology of what they call 'extreme right' parties, the reasons why people join them, and the activists' personal trajectories. However, they say little about: (a) party organization; (b) the activities members engage in and how such engagement shapes their views and degree of adherence to the party's ideology; (c) how activists, in turn, shape their parties. David Art (2011) develops a useful typology of activists within the radical right, demonstrating the importance of internal factors (party organization and the quality of activism) for electoral success. However, his study tells us little about the activists' views, attitudes, and reasons for getting involved, and about how these are shaped by party organization and activities.

One other important point of reference for us is the comparative project by Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (2016). These scholars and the contributors to their edited volume provide us with an excellent basis to investigate European PRRP organizations, which they describe in much detail. The authors point out that it is precisely PRRPs that have embraced aspects of the mass party legacy theorized by Duverger and many others, while mainstream parties seem to have moved to professional-electoralist modes and types of party organization (Krouwel 2006; Katz and Mair 1995). Hence, many PRRPs are shown to have undertaken efforts to develop (or preserve) an extensive structure, to institutionalize internal processes of decision-making and interaction, and to achieve a local presence ensuring a connection between the grassroots and the leadership. For example, the LN under Umberto Bossi was clearly heavily dominated by an authoritarian and centralized leadership, but the party's organization was highly reminiscent of a traditional Italian mass party (Albertazzi 2016; Albertazzi and Vampa 2021a). Even in cases where centralization restricts the input of ordinary party members and where decisions taken by party organs such as party congresses are more formal than substantive, the organization serves as an important linkage between the activist base and the leadership, which typically tend to reinforce each other.

Yet there is still a serious gap in our knowledge concerning how party organizations operate, in particular regarding the role of members and activists, and what happens *after* these individuals join a party (Gauja and Van Haute 2015). By advancing our knowledge of what happens inside PRRPs via in-depth comparative analyses of selected case studies, we can therefore address the serious shortage of comparative party research on this topic. Several PRRPs are willing to buck the trend of disengagement from activism that ostensibly characterizes their mainstream competitors and more recent political upstarts (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Webb et al. 2002; Mair 2013).

With our study of how party representatives and activists experience their lives within the party and how they see their commitment and activism, we seek to challenge ideas of party development suggesting a one-way, 'one-size-fits-all' teleological movement away from the mass party.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed theoretical and conceptual framework for our empirical study. We have explained how we distinguish the mass party from other organizational models covered in the literature, and what its potential strengths are from the perspective of PRRP elites. Indeed, the mass party provides apparent advantages to these organizations, as they attempt to break the supposed 'cartel' of traditionally dominant parties without always being able to rely on a friendly reception from the media (see de Jonge 2019). We indeed expect the desire to gain visibility and legitimacy through activists 'on the streets' to be a key driver for adopting the mass party model.

By demonstrating how a fuller understanding of PRRPs' organizational models challenges conventional scholarly wisdom, this study will offer a timely and substantial contribution to the theory on party organization and development in West European democracies. In addition to this, the project will help reconfigure theories of political participation and party membership, by moving the analysis beyond the point at which people join parties and by shedding light on what happens inside them afterwards. Before investigating the lived experience of elites and members, however, we need to say more about the parties themselves and how they (formally) operate. Hence, the next chapter provides an overview of their ideological and organizational features, as a way of preparing the ground for the deeper analysis of what happens *inside* them in the rest of the book.

3
Party Organizations Mapped

> *Such a member structure is incredibly important because it's the backbone. In your party, your membership structures, your branches, your party organizational members, are those you can fall back on when things are going wrong or when you lose an election.* (VB, R15)

In the previous chapter we have offered a detailed theoretical and conceptual framework for our empirical study. We observed that, unlike many of their competitors, the leaderships of several populist radical right parties (PRRPs) seek to foster an active party community, conveying their closeness to ordinary grassroots members and preserving the organizational model of the 'mass party' (Albertazzi 2016; Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016; van Kessel and Albertazzi 2021). We have provided a definition of this organizational model that focuses on the *relationship* between party members and party elites. According to our understanding of the 'mass party', what really matters is whatever parties *do* with members and how they shape their views, more so than actual membership numbers and the overall size of party organizations.

Laying the groundwork for our empirical study, this chapter provides an assessment of the selected parties' key ideological features and organizational structures. It considers each of the parties selected for our research in turn: the Lega per Salvini Premier (LSP—League for Salvini Premier), Perussuomalaiset (PS—the Finns Party), the Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre (SVP/UDC—Swiss People's Party/Democratic Union of the Centre), and Vlaams Belang (VB—Flemish Interest). We first require a proper understanding of the parties' ideological nature and organizational structures before genuinely opening the 'black boxes' of their organizations in the subsequent chapters (4 and 5), which provide a unique insight into the lived experiences of their representatives and members. The key questions we address in this chapter are therefore the following:

1) What are the key ideological characteristics and issues of the four PRRPs?
2) How is each party structured at national and subnational levels?

Populist Radical Right Parties in Action. Daniele Albertazzi et al., Oxford University Press.
DOI: 10.1093/9780191986307.003.0003

3) What formal and informal hierarchies and power relations exist between organizational levels, and the various organizational bodies within the parties?

Accordingly, the chapter will first define the four parties under investigation as parties of the 'populist radical right' (PRR) (Mudde 2007) and provide a justification for it. We discuss how the PRRPs' key ideological attributes—nativism, authoritarianism, and populism, as defined in the previous chapter—translate into specific issue positions across the four cases, noting similarities but also differences. As for party organization, we consider the parties' degrees of organization, centralization, and power concentration (see Janda 1970). Providing organizational charts for each party, we show how their organizations are structured in terms of the relationship between party bodies across different levels. We also reflect on whether and how the selected PRRPs stand out organizationally when we compare them to other major parties in their respective party systems. In the chapter's concluding section, we offer several comparative reflections.

Ultimately, we show that, cross-national variation notwithstanding, the four parties in our sample set up complex party organizations which can be associated with the 'mass party' organizational model. At the same time, the cases are characterized by considerable concentration of power in the hands of their party leadership. Indeed, the parties' strategies, administrative and financial management, as well as the enforcement of internal discipline, tend to be dominated by their leader, alongside a restricted group of representatives. This should not be regarded as evidence that party leaders are dismissive about the input of their members. As will be shown throughout the book, PRRPs may well offer 'participation without power' (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021a), but members and activists are considered essential to the parties' success and very survival.

The League for Salvini Premier

The LSP was officially created in 2017 and coexists organizationally with the older Lega Nord (LN—Northern League). The LN was established by Umberto Bossi at the beginning of the 1990s as a populist regionalist party (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015), and saw defending the interests of Italy's 'North' as its core mission. The party established itself as a

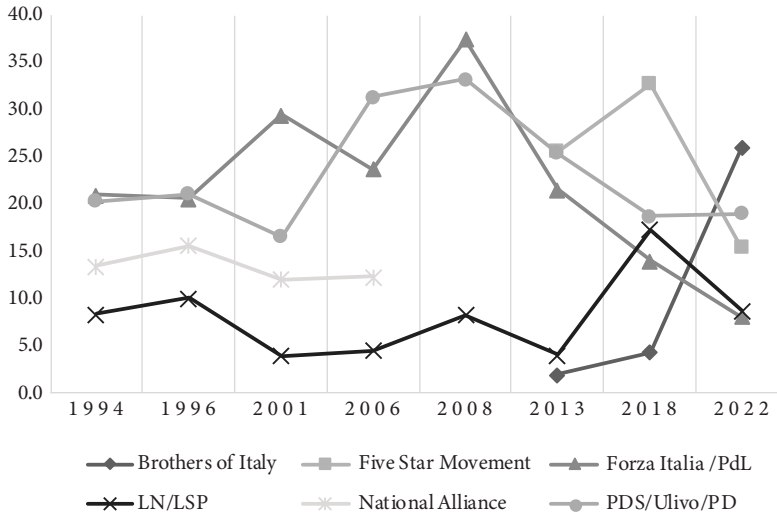

Figure 3.1 National election results of major Italian parties

Source: Data from Eligendo (2022)

stable feature of the Italian party system (see Figure 3.1) and was part of several coalition governments. The foundation of the LSP coincided with the sidelining of populist regionalism, and denoted an embracing of Italian nationalism and a radicalization of the party's right-wing ideology (Albertazzi et al. 2018). In terms of party organization, the LN's organizational model, rooted in the North, was exported to the rest of the Italian peninsula (Zulianello 2021).

Beyond strategic and ideological motivations, the foundation of the LSP was also justified by pressing financial concerns. In 2017, after Umberto Bossi was put on trial and found guilty of misappropriating public funds, judicial authorities demanded that the party return a total of €49 million to the Italian state. The creation of a brand new party allowed the new leader, Matteo Salvini, to establish a division of labour between two distinct entities, which ultimately benefited his political project. Hence a 'good company' was established—the LSP—which aimed to inherit the pre-existing organization of the LN, alongside its representatives and members. This move gave the LN representatives and members the opportunity for a 'fresh start'—free from the burden of the LN's large debt. Meanwhile, the LN continued to exist as a 'bad company', responsible for the reimbursement of the €49 million, but deprived of any political function whatsoever (see Zulianello 2021). In other words, the LN became an empty shell, and in this book we will therefore focus on the LSP.

Ideology

The PRR ideology of the LSP has been investigated by focusing on the 2018 general election manifesto, and the publication *Il Populista*, which has been its 'propaganda tool par excellence' between 2016 and 2020 (Tizian 2021). We additionally rely on social media communication, and Matteo Salvini's speeches at the party's annual gathering at Pontida.

The PRR's core attributes of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism can clearly be traced in the LSP's ideology. The LSP's nativism has economic, social, as well as symbolic dimensions. By framing non-natives as job competitors, the party has argued that national authorities turn a blind eye towards foreign workers who are deemed to undercut Italians in the workplace (LSP 2018a, 9). The party has rejected the idea that immigration is economically necessary, typically framing immigrants as a burden on the welfare state. As a proposed alternative to immigration, Italian youth should be supported to create new families (LSP 2018a, 51). The party's opposition to immigration has also often been justified on the basis of cultural, rather than economic, arguments—what Hans-Georg Betz (2019) calls 'symbolic nativism'—especially since the 9/11 terrorist attacks of 2001. Salvini's leadership has been characterized by a great reliance on Christian symbols as a way to promote an Islamophobic agenda, and by a discourse centred on 'saving' Western freedoms (Salvini 2019a), including women's rights (see also LSP 2018a, 23). It is typical for the LSP to conflate discussions on immigration, particularly from Islamic countries, with those on law and order and the repression of crime (Il Populista 2019). In other words, in much of the party's discourse the suggestion is repeated that mosques, as potential hotbeds of extremism, should be kept under observation (LSP 2018a, 8). The party has also depicted illegal immigration as a crime rather than an administrative offence (LSP 2018a, 31), while framing asylum as a security issue.

The LSP's authoritarian nature becomes apparent when considering the party's idea of the good society as one that should follow traditional norms (LSP 2018a, 51). The party has opposed so-called 'gender theory' (Salvini 2021), as well as formal marriage or adoption rights for same-sex couples (Salvini 2017). Notably, the LSP does stress the importance of defending women's rights, as we have mentioned, however this has primarily been part of broader anti-Islam statements. As maintained by Salvini (2016), 'Islam tries to impose not only a religion, but a way of life! In my house women have the same rights as men.'

Under the leadership of Salvini, who has defined himself as 'proudly populist' (Il Populista 2017), the very meaning of the 'pure people' as defined

in the League's discourse has substantially changed. Having turned Southern Italians into an integral part of the native in-group, the anti-elitism of the party now mainly targeted the supranational level (Albertazzi et al. 2018, 649), referring for instance to 'the elites and strong powers [that have occupied] Europe in the name of finance, banks, speculations and out-of-control immigration' (Salvini 2019b). Yet the LSP has also attacked various domestic actors, including (typically centre-left) politicians as well as intellectuals and journalists, who are portrayed as 'cultural elites' (Salvini 2018a).

The LSP's Euroscepticism has generally been of the 'soft' variant (Taggart & Szczerbiak 2004, 3–4), although not always consistently so (Heinisch et al. 2021). Salvini has attacked the EU, which has been accused of attempting to 'wipe out our roots' (Salvini 2018a) and of instigating 'mass immigration and job insecurity' (Salvini 2018b). However, leading party figures have also reiterated the importance of the EU to Italy's economy (Iasevoli 2019). The LSP has not advocated 'Italexit' (LSP 2018a; Walt 2018), despite its mantra that 'national interest comes first' (Il Populista 2018) and despite the LN's previous attacks on the common currency (LSP 2018a, 9).

Typical for a PRRP, the LSP's positions on socio-economic issues are hard to pinpoint on a simple left–right dimension. Electorally strong among artisans and self-employed workers, the LSP has talked much about the need to reform the tax system and introduce a flat income tax (at 15 per cent) (e.g. Lorusso 2019), while not necessarily calling for reduced state expenditure. It has defined pensions as 'a non-negotiable right for those who have worked their entire life' (LSP 2018a, 5), campaigning for the reintroduction of old-age pensions (*pensioni di anzianità*), and for making it easier for self-employed workers to retire early if they have worked for a set number of years (Salvini 2019a). The party has also displayed protectionist stances, stressing that duties and controls are needed "to defend the 'Made in Italy"' (Salvini 2017). Overall, the League can be defined as a typical PRRP which in part adopts a neoliberal economic agenda (e.g. Salvini 2019a), but nevertheless claims to protect key sectors of the national economy and 'deserving natives' (e.g. people working for the manufacturing industry, artisans, and pensioners) (Abts et al. 2021).

Party organization

Degree of organization

Italy has maintained substantial levels of party membership, at least compared to other advanced democracies (van Haute and Gauja 2015). This is

despite falling membership numbers after the collapse of the so-called 'First Republic' in the 1990s (Sandri et al. 2015), leading to the disappearance of the parties that had dominated politics after the Second World War, and the emergence of new ones. Membership figures for 2019 and 2020 of the main Italian parties are as follows: the centre-left Democratic Party: 412,000; the valence populist Five Star Movement: 197,000; and the populist radical right Brothers of Italy: 130,000 (Adnkronos 2021). According to the Federal Enrolment Manager of the League, Alessandro Panza, the party had more than 100,000 members in 2020 (Adnkronos 2021). This compares unfavourably to the 'golden years' of Umberto Bossi's leadership (around 2010), when the League reported that it was able to rely on 180,000 members (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015, 39).

Lacking official figures (which the party is no longer willing to release), and based on our extensive interviews with party representatives and members, we suspect that the 2020 figure has in fact been inflated. Nevertheless, despite the declining numbers, it is important to stress that the League maintains the most important feature that distinguishes it from the other parties in the Italian party system, namely its dedication to preserve a core of loyal activists who are even given differential status from less active members, and who constitute the backbone of the party on the ground. Hence activist members (*soci militanti*) enjoy more rights (and also have more duties) than supporter members (*soci sostenitori*), and constitute the 'engine' behind all party activities at the local level. This distinction is inherited from Bossi's LN, and its rationale is fostering activism on the ground and encouraging commitment by those members the party knows it can trust. These are also the members that are usually put forward as candidates in elections at all levels (local, regional, national, and European). This reliance on an elite of activist members to achieve success is typical of the mass party organizational model. Alongside its reliance on local activists, the LSP also distinguishes itself among Italian parties for its focus on value infusion and the socialization of its members. In fact, much of what the party does relies on the effective management of the work of its activists—it had only nine paid employees when the fieldwork for this chapter was conducted in 2020 and 2021.

Italian political parties tend to be present across the peninsula, except for a few smaller regionalist parties. All the major parties in the system, i.e. Brothers of Italy, the Democratic party, and the Five Star Movement, have always been statewide parties since their foundation, even though their rootedness on the ground varies across regions. The League is the obvious exception, as its organization has only started to extend to the whole country after 2017 (Albertazzi et al. 2018), and this results in a stronger organization in

Northern regions versus a much weaker one in the South (Zulianello 2021). The LSP nevertheless maintains a high degree of organization in several regions. Together with a clear structural articulation and vertical linkages (see Figure 3.2), these are also important features of the mass party organizational model (Panebianco 1988).

In terms of formal organization at the national level (defined as 'federal' level in party communication), the key bodies are the Federal Secretary (*Segretario Federale*), the Federal Council (*Consiglio Federale*), the Federal Congress (*Congresso Federale*), and the Organizational and Territorial Federal Officer (*Responsabile federale organizzativo e del territorio*).[1] The Federal Secretary is the party leader, and coordinates and oversees all party bodies, being granted extensive formal and informal powers to influence party life. Generally speaking, as we heard from a party representative: 'nothing moves unless Salvini says so' (LSP, R12). This situation mirrors that of the LSP's predecessor, the LN, which was dominated by its 'father-founder', Umberto Bossi, until he was forced to step aside in 2012 due to a damaging scandal (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021a).

The Federal Council is summoned and chaired by the party leader and includes, inter alia, the chairs and representatives of the regional branches. It convenes every three months, and among its extensive formal prerogatives are the ability to determine the party's general course of action and to decide on a wide range of topics. Even though debates *do* take place during meetings of this body, the leader 'dictates the political line and the Federal Council tends to take note of it' (LSP, R12). The existence of an Organizational and Territorial Federal Officer, who is appointed by the party leader, provides a clue as to the party's determination to maintain a mass-party organization in the North, and to export it to the rest of the peninsula. Indeed, the key difference between the organization of the LN and that of the LSP is organizational extensiveness (Janda 1970, 106), as the LSP extends across the whole of Italy, and strives to develop organizational networks where the party is still weak. Finally, even though the party statute provides details concerning the Federal Congress, it is worth stressing that this congress has never been held since the party was created in 2017 and up to the time of writing in 2024.

The LSP is structured into four territorial levels: federal (i.e., statewide), regional, provincial, and municipal. Each subnational level of the organization is subordinated to the level above it, and almost perfectly mirrors the bodies of the federal party on a smaller scale. Hence the party resembles

[1] Even though Italy is not a federal state, the organization of the LSP is inspired by federalist principles, like that of the LN before it. (LSP 2018b).

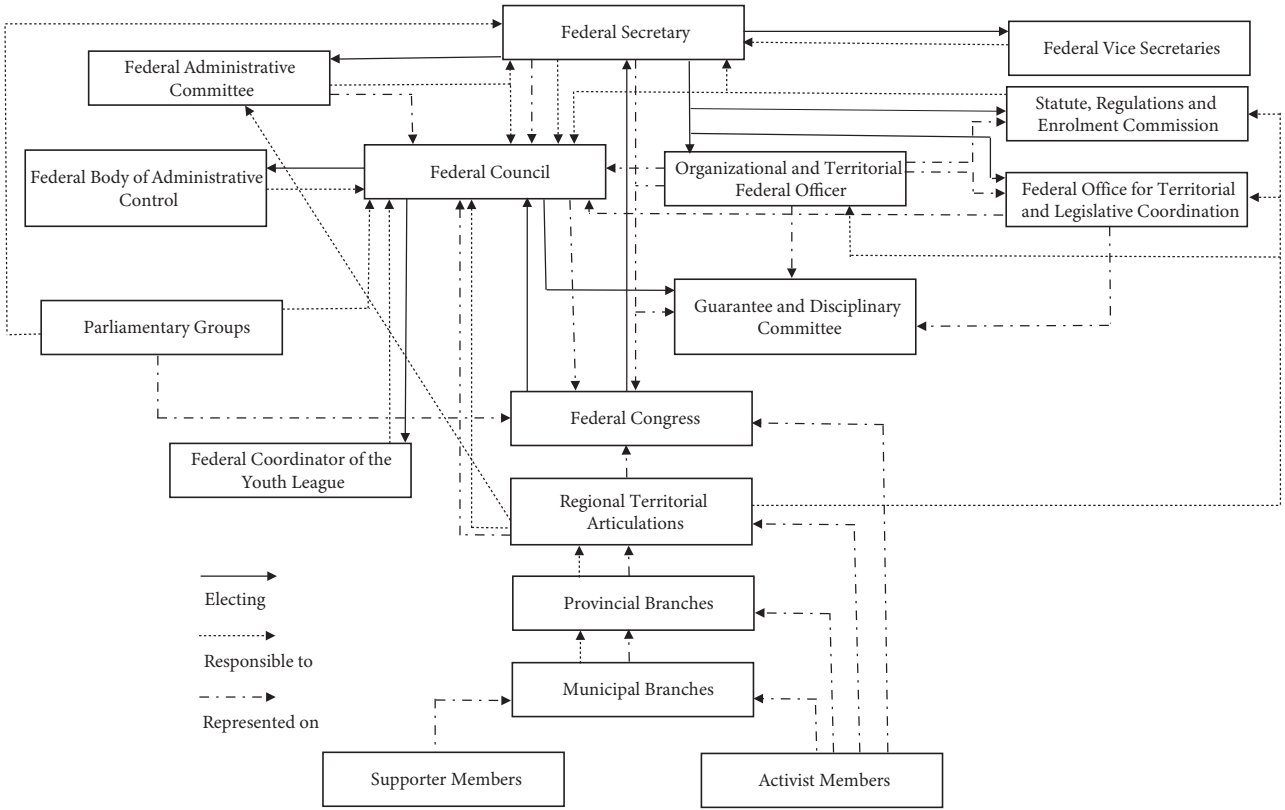

Figure 3.2 LSP organizational chart

a matryoshka doll. The twenty-two regional territorial articulations of the party are formally bestowed with organizational, administrative, patrimonial, and financial autonomy, while its provincial and municipal branches are referred to as 'territorial delegations'. The provincial branch coordinates the activities of municipal branches, in which activists meet each other on a regular basis. The municipal level plays a decisive role in terms of the recruitment of members, value infusion, as well as member socialization and control.

The key bodies at the local level (i.e. within municipal branches) are the Municipal Secretary, the Congress, and the Directive Council. Local branches enjoy limited autonomy, especially in Southern regions (see below). Northern party representatives revealed that local branches meet on a regular basis (at least once a month, sometimes weekly) and emphasized their decisive role in achieving territorial rootedness. Indeed, besides carrying out canvassing activities they were said to act as 'listening points' of citizens' concerns (LSP, R7; R21), and to be essential to show that 'the League is a real party, with a concrete territorial organization' (LSP, R31).

Finally, it is worth noting that there are important differences between Bossi's LN and Salvini's LSP in terms of their degree of organization. Firstly, various representatives underlined that, even in the North, it is no longer possible to ensure the physical existence of local branches if there are only few activists left in a locality. Hence, some branches have been merged into 'super-municipal' branches. Secondly, while the LN featured a plethora of ancillary organizations, most of them have now been dismantled. The important exception is the *Lega Giovani* (Youth League)—a privileged channel for the recruitment and training of the representatives of the future. In other words, the LSP is present in the whole of Italy, but has much fewer ancillary organizations; moreover, as we have seen above, it has fewer members than the LN once had.

Degree of centralization

The LSP is characterized by a disproportionate concentration of power in its three federal bodies: the Federal Secretary (i.e., party leader), who enjoys a dominant position; the Federal Council; and the Organizational and Territorial Federal Officer. According to party representatives, the LSP follows the principle of 'democratic centralism' (LSP, R10) at all levels—this is the core organizational imperative of traditional Marxist-Leninist parties, from which the LSP takes its organizational model (despite being very distant from them in ideological terms). Hence it is widely accepted that, once a matter has been discussed, the party leader ultimately 'dictates the line' (LSP, R30) and takes all necessary decisions. Indeed, Salvini has been able to secure a remarkable

degree of loyalty to himself throughout the LSP's history. The enforcement of these decisions happens via the Organizational and Territorial Federal Officer (appointed by the party leader), who 'cascades the directives down', as we heard in our interviews (LSP, R19; R29), to all levels of the organization that will have to implement them.

That the party leader ultimately controls the activities of the LSP at all levels, directly or via trusted people within the party, has been especially obvious during the first years of the party's existence. In this period Salvini and his loyal collaborators made sure that party rule-making was still shaped by informal rules, rather than whatever the statute would have dictated (Zulianello 2021; see also Brancaccio et al. 2021). As mentioned before, no Federal Congress was held between the party's foundation in 2017 and the time of writing in early 2024, even though the statute stipulates one should be held every three years. Notably, Salvini was never formally elected as leader of the LSP; he was in fact elected as leader *of the LN*—which is a different legal entity, as we have discussed—through closed primary elections rather than by the party's Congress.[2]

Furthermore, the transition from the old to the new party was carried out via the deployment of *commissariamenti*, that is: the appointment of commissioners enjoying full powers over given territorial areas. This has made the LSP even more centralized than the LN ever was under Bossi. Broadly speaking, the federal level dominates the subnational levels through a 'system of control and guarantees' (*sistema di controllo e garanzia*) (LSP 2018b, 12), which allows those in the higher echelons to monitor everyone else below them.

In comparative terms, LSP's power concentration is not altogether unusual given that Italian political parties tend to have highly centralized organizational structures. This certainly also applies to the major new PRRP in the Italian party system: Brothers of Italy (Puleo and Piccolino 2022). Its statute suggests that powers are centralized in the hands of the leader and a few functionaries around her (Fratelli d'Italia—Alleanza Nazionale 2019). Most key powers have been concentrated in the hands of the 'National President', currently Giorgia Meloni, who became the country's Prime Minister in 2022. On the other hand, the 'valence populist' Five Star Movement (see Zulianello 2020) has sought to develop a very distinctive organizational structure which is grounded on the claim that every party member and representative must

[2] The power to elect the leader formally resides with the Federal Congress, according to the LN statute (LN 2019). This is indeed further proof of the extent to which rules can in fact be ignored within the League, a situation that is not dissimilar to what happened under the previous leader, Umberto Bossi (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015).

count exactly the same when it comes to taking decisions. However, from the very beginning this claim was put into doubt by the swift use of disciplinary measures to silence dissenting voices within the party (Tronconi 2015). An exception to the general trend of centralization is the case of the centre-left Democratic Party, which has been characterized by a history of factionalism and internal divisions, and which is certainly not dominated by its leader.

The Finns Party

The Perussuomalaiset (PS—Finns Party) was founded in 1995 around a core of activists from the Suomen Maaseudun Puolue (Finnish Rural Party—SMP). While the SMP was a populist agrarian party focusing on a constituency of small-scale farmers, the PS has become a clear member of the PRR party family. Timo Soini became PS leader in 1997 and served in this capacity for twenty years. During this time, the party was characterized by left-leaning economic policies, a populist discourse and increasing Euroscepticism. Since the general election of 2011, the PS cemented its position as one of the three largest parties in Finland (see Figure 3.3). The party's parliamentary group split in 2017 due to the election of Jussi Halla-aho, an outspoken radical right candidate, as party leader. However, the party did not suffer

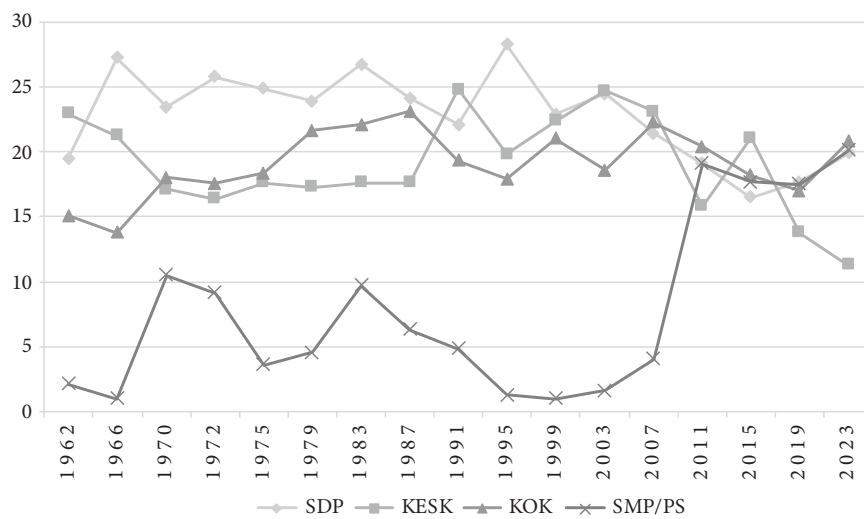

Figure 3.3 National election results of major Finnish parties

Source: Data from Tilastokeskus (2023)

lasting damage, whether in terms of its organizational functioning or its electoral appeal. According to the party activists' informal online database, only fifty-four out of 770 party municipal councillors defected to the newly created, more moderate but less successful, 'Blue Reform' party that had originated from the split (Hommaforum 2020). The PS ended in second place in the 2019 parliamentary election, and gained over a fifth of the vote four years later.

Ideology

The ideology of the Finns Party has been analysed using a combination of primary and secondary sources. We focused on the party programme for the 2019 parliamentary elections (PS 2019a). In addition, we refer to various programmatic documents focusing on specific policy areas—on immigration (PS 2019b), the economy (PS 2019c), social policy (PS 2019d), and the media (PS 2020)—as well as the 2019 European parliamentary election manifesto (PS 2019e).

The conflict between the Finns' two main factions (more moderate vs. PRR) had been brewing for years prior to the party split in 2017 (e.g. Jungar 2016; Ylä-Anttila 2017, 27–29; Hatakka 2017). Since then, however, the PS has moved to the economic right and has mixed populism with increasing doses of nativism. Hence, in recent years, the party's rhetorical construction of 'the people' has shifted from ordinary taxpayers and 'the common man' to 'patriots' (*isänmaalliset*), 'the nationally minded' (*kansallismieliset*), and 'opponents of immigration' (*maahanmuuttokriitikot*). At the same time, whereas Soini's idea of the 'elites' used to appeal to general anti-establishment sentiments and a 'non-socialist class struggle' (Palonen 2017), in more recent years the party has criticized 'ecologically minded left-wing liberals' and systems of power allegedly corrupted by 'cultural Marxism' (e.g. Hamilo 2017).

The PS has formally retained a non-ethnic conception of its cherished culture: according to the PS, 'any person living in Finland has the chance to become Finnish enough, insofar as they adopt the Finnish culture and the country's norms' (PS 2019b). However, while in earlier manifestos 'Finnishness' tended to be associated with being honest, hardworking, persistent, entrepreneurial, patriotic, and Christian (Mickelsson 2011, 156), in more recent years the party has more explicitly emphasized that Western European cultures are at risk due to an alleged lack of assimilation by Muslim immigrants (PS 2019a, 3). According to recent PS manifestos, the cultural

influences brought to the country by immigrants pose a direct threat to the Finnish language and the country's cultural norms (PS 2019b; PS 2020, 5). The party has thus radicalized its positions, proposing strict border controls and the relocation of immigrants (PS 2019b, 9).

Among the key ingredients of PRR ideology, authoritarianism is the least prominent in the PS's discourse. Even so, the party's programmes have displayed an appreciation for rule-of-law principles, discipline, and societal order (not least by proposing to invest in the police and the military) (PS 2019a). The party has also supported stricter punishments for certain crimes (and deportation of foreign criminals), especially regarding drug-related offences, sexual violence, and paedophilia (PS 2019a). The PS manifestos also contained elements of sociocultural authoritarianism (Rydgren 2007), especially with respect to traditional family values and gender roles (PS 2019d, 11). Yet the party has recently shed some of its more socially conservative stances, and post-2017 manifestos have avoided mentioning issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage altogether (Mickelsson 2011; Westinen et al. 2020).

The party's economic profile is strongly influenced by its nativism. The PS has associated immigration from the Middle East and North Africa with rising unemployment among 'native' workers and has argued that migration has negative consequences for the welfare state (PS 2019d, 1). Beyond such welfare chauvinist appeals, the PS has become increasingly supportive of curbing taxation and public spending, according to the principle of what it calls 'economics of common sense' (PS 2019c, 3). In other words, the party moved away from the positions of the 1990s, when it portrayed itself as a great defender of the welfare state. Concerning the international market, the Finns Party has described free trade as 'essential to our economy' (PS 2019d, 5), but it has also viewed the European single market and free trade agreements with suspicion, because of their perceived potential to undermine national sovereignty. Euroscepticism has indeed remained a core ideological characteristic of the party (PS 2019e, 3).

Organization

Degree of organization

There are nearly 300 officially recognized organizational entities within the PS, including the municipal associations at the local level. As is typical of mass parties, the PS is linked to twenty-three special interest associations that are not officially member associations of the party, but exist alongside it and

support its activities. There are also two support associations: the Suomen Perusta think tank and the Pekasus centre for intra-party training.

Similar to the League in Italy, the PS also relies heavily on volunteers and activists for its functioning and success. In terms of its development, the PS built on the SMP's network of municipal associations to develop a new party organization, with its expansion truly taking off in the early 2010s (Hatakka 2021, 298–299). This has happened mainly via the party's commitment to found new municipal and special interest associations, as well as reactivating defunct regional and local SMP associations. Showing its interest in fostering activism and presence on the ground, the PS—together with the Green League and the Left Alliance—remains an exception in Finland: its membership numbers have almost consistently risen throughout the 2010s, while 'the traditional major parties, namely the Centre Party of Finland (KESK), the Social Democratic Party of Finland (SDP), and the National Coalition Party (KOK), are still struggling due to diminishing party membership' (Koivula et al. 2020, 808). The PS membership was estimated to be around 14,000 in 2020 (Hatakka 2021, 298), and most of the party activism takes place at the regional and local levels. The expansion the party has enjoyed throughout the 2010s has increased the PS's organizational presence to a respectable 82 per cent of Finnish municipalities by the elections of 2017. This allows the party to campaign on the ground in the great majority of municipalities. The recruitment of new members and the activation of the member base also take place in the municipal associations that constitute the party's primary organizational presence on the ground (Hatakka 2021, 299).

The official subnational bodies of the Finns Party are its sixteen regional associations, which are each subdivided into varying numbers of municipal associations (see Figure 3.4). There are several additional associations that are not officially part of the registered party, but are nevertheless represented on specific party organs.[3] The party organization pays the salary to a total of twenty-one people, all of whom are officially located in Helsinki, either at the party central office or in parliament (PS 2023a, PS 2023b). This number, which is in line with that of other parties in the country, does not include parliamentary aides (thirty-five in 2022), whose salaries are paid for by the Finnish parliament.

At the national level, the party consists of its registered organizational bodies: the Party Congress, Party Executive, Party Council, Parliamentary

[3] For example, the leaders of the youth organization and the women's organization may attend the meeting of the Party Executive (PS 2009).

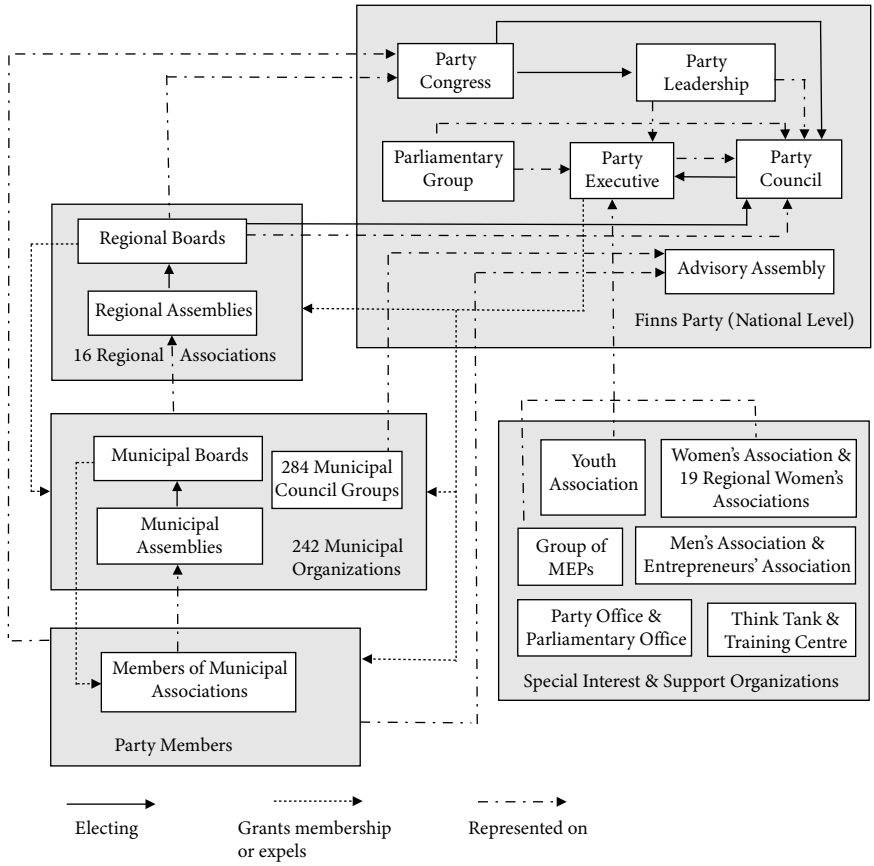

Figure 3.4 PS organizational chart

Group, and Advisory Assembly. Representatives from the municipal associations (either from the municipal boards or the municipal assemblies) elect representatives on the regional boards, who in turn are represented on the Party Council—forming the basis for party democracy. The Party Congress (*puoluekokous*), attended by party members and representatives from the regional associations, convenes every two years to elect the party leadership and to ratify possible changes to the party statute.

The Party Executive (*puoluehallitus*), made up of thirteen people, is the single most powerful executive organ within the party. Matters related to party membership, budget allocation, party programmes, party staff, and disciplinary actions all fall within its remit. Interestingly, the party leadership—which consists of the party leader, three vice leaders, and the party secretary—has no formal powers, besides having automatic representation on the Party Executive and Party Council. While the Party Council, which

meets only once a year, appoints and oversees the Party Executive, its actual influence is relatively limited. In addition to overseeing party finances, the Party Council further co-decides about government participation—together with the Party Executive and the Parliamentary Group, which organizes the party's representation in the national legislature.

The Advisory Assembly (*puolueneuvosto*), finally, is a forum that is held every two years. It is devoid of formal powers, although it provides an opportunity for members to make proposals which can feed into the party's manifestos. Party members can exert influence in two other ways: first, every two years they elect the party leadership at the Party Congress (PS 2021); second, they can apply for membership in a municipal assembly, which gives them the right to elect representatives on the regional boards and the Party Council. In turn, regional assemblies elect the chairpersons and the other members of the regional boards. The chairpersons of these boards have automatic representation in the Party Council, and throughout the 2010s there have been three or four additional seats on the Party Council for each regional association. The influence of the different regions varies, as only seven of the sixteen regional associations can have representation on the Party Executive due to the latter's limited size (PS 2021).

Degree of centralization

The PS statute is somewhat ambiguous about the party's internal decision-making process. Due to the power of the Party Congress, which chooses the party leadership, the party hierarchy can experience rapid change. However, this is only possible when the Party Executive refrains from using its powers to police internal cohesion, for instance by expelling unwanted individuals and taking control of dissident associations.

During Timo Soini's leadership, the centralization of power in the hands of the party's inner circle in fact caused widespread intra-party strife. According to a party representative interviewed by us, this contributed to the replacement of Soini by Jussi Halla-aho as new leader. Other party elites interviewed for this book told us that the party has tried to foster a more decentralized participatory culture since the mid-2010s, for instance by allowing municipal associations to run their own affairs. The party has also developed processes to include members at the drafting stage of the party programmes via the municipal associations and the Advisory Assembly (Hatakka 2021, 304–305).

However, following a revision of the party statute in 2021, the Party Executive, if anything, has become more powerful than it was before. For instance, when it comes to national elections, this body can replace up to one fourth of the candidates that regional associations select (following recommendations

by the municipal associations). Moreover, the drafting of manifestos is not a particularly transparent process, and is usually dominated by a relatively small number of high-ranking party officials. Despite the Advisory Assembly theoretically being the forum where party manifestos are discussed, the Party Executive retains the ultimate decision-making power over finalizing these documents.

The most apparent difference between the PS and other party organizations in Finland concerns precisely the power and role of the Party Executives. Generally speaking, other parties award more power to either their Party Councils or the regional or local levels of their organizations; within the PS, power is very centralized in the hands of the Executive. In addition to this, the role of the Party Congress also differs considerably when comparing the PS with the other Finnish parties. The latter conceive of Congress as the venue where members discuss and vote on a wide range of issues. Besides selecting the party leadership, PS Congress delegates are merely able to accept or reject amendments to the party statute that are presented to them.

The Swiss People's Party

Throughout the 1970s and 80s, the Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union Démocratique du Centre (Swiss People's Party/Democratic Union of the centre—SVP/UDC) was a conservative party rooted in rural areas that promoted the idea of the small state and free market economics. It gradually radicalized its positions on migration and the EU throughout the 1980s and 1990s, due to the influence of its Zurich branch leader: the businessman Christoph Blocher (Mazzoleni 2008). The party has also centralized and professionalized both its organization and electoral campaigns (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015, 55–56). This has resulted in considerable electoral gains from the mid-1990s onwards: since 2003, the party has polled over a quarter of the nationwide vote (see Figure 3.5). The party's representation in the consociationalist Federal Government reflects its electoral strength: the SVP occupied two out of the seven seats at the time of writing in 2024.

Ideology

The SVP/UDC's ideology has been evaluated mainly by means of its 2019 party programme and its statute. In addition, we relied on election manifestos, position papers, and statements by Chistoph Blocher, who is still

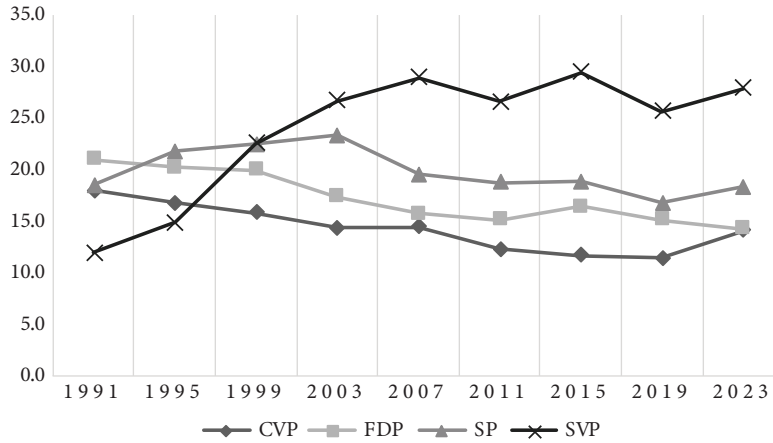

Figure 3.5 National election results of major Swiss parties

Source: Data from Bundesamt für Statistik (2023)

the SVP/UDC's dominant figure in terms of the party's programmatic and ideological orientation.

The adoption of more radical positions by the Zurich branch, and Blocher's success in persuading the national party to oppose European Economic Area (EEA) membership, were crucial factors in establishing the Zurich wings' programmatic and ideological dominance over the more moderate Bernese branch (Kriesi et al. 2005; Mazzoleni 2015)—these being the long-time leading cantonal branches within the party due to their electoral success. The SVP/UDC's ideology became more coherent during the 2000s, as Blocher's PRR line became dominant (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016, 92). In terms of its nativism, the party has made a distinction between Swiss citizens (who are described as self-reliant) and foreigners (usually portrayed as a threat to the native Swiss) (Hildebrand 2017). Within the latter category, the party has made further distinctions between migrants entering the country from within the EU (with which Switzerland has signed free movement agreements) and 'economic' migrants from outside, many of whom are alleged to falsely pose as refugees (SVP/UDC 2019b, 46). Both categories of immigrants ultimately stand accused of bringing down native workers' wages (SVP/UDC 2019b) and placing a burden on Swiss taxpayers by drawing on generous welfare benefits (SVP/UDC 2019a). The SVP/UDC has argued that public money used for asylum seekers or paid into the EU cohesion fund (to which the country has agreed to contribute) should instead be used for improving pensions and other social provisions for Swiss people in need.

As for symbolic nativism, the party has portrayed Switzerland as the homeland (*Heimat*) that needs to be cherished and protected (SVP/UDC 2019b).

Said to be built on Christian foundations and to be characterized by unique traditions and institutions, such as direct democracy and neutrality, Switzerland has been defined as a unique country (*Sonderfall*), whose culture should be defended against malign foreign influences. Presumed foreign threats have included, first and foremost, Muslim migrants, but also international organizations such as the UN and the EU. European integration has remained one of the most controversial topics in Switzerland since the Swiss rejected EEA membership in a referendum held in 1992—the SVP/UDC being the only major party to oppose membership (Mazzoleni and Skenderovic 2007). The claim that the country should have looser relations with the EU has remained key to the party's very identity (Blocher 2019a, SVP/UDC 2019c; on this topic see Church 2003, 8). The SVP/UDC has argued that Switzerland must intensify its efforts to trade with the world, and not focus exclusively on the EU.

Not unexpectedly, the party's nativist discourse on migration and authoritarian law and order policies are linked. Open borders have been framed as an economic as well as a security threat, due to the supposed influx of foreign criminals (SVP/UDC 2019b). The SVP/UDC has launched several referendums, calling for the deportation of criminal foreigners (2010) and the restriction of immigration (2014). The party's alleged aim to strengthen the country's security extends to the army: the SVP/UDC has advocated for the continuation of the country's traditional armed neutrality and for generous military funding (SVP/UDC 2019b, 60). The party has also displayed authoritarian positions on moral-cultural issues, for instance by adopting a conservative conception of the family based on marriage between a man and a woman (SVP/UDC 2019b).

Regarding its populism, the SVP/UDC has presented itself as the sole defender of the Swiss people's values, prosperity, security, and freedom against a corrupt political establishment, as well as financial and cultural elites. In the words of Christoph Blocher (2019b): 'like voracious caterpillars and maggots, the power-hungry, selfish political elites aim to hollow out and destroy our prospering Switzerland like a fresh apple'. While this rhetoric has been less common in French-speaking Switzerland than it has been in Zurich, there is no doubt that the party has fully embraced populist rhetoric in recent decades, and that it pits the 'good Swiss people' against their rulers.

As far as its socio-economic agenda is concerned, the SVP/UDC has generally favoured tax cuts, the reduction of government expenditure and development aid, cutting bureaucracy, and giving greater economic freedom to businesses (SVP/UDC 2019b; also Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015). The SVP/UDC has favoured maintaining tax competition within Switzerland, which allows cantons and communes to operate their own tax

regimes, competing with one another to attract companies and businesses. The party has also expressed support for reforming the social welfare system to prevent its abuse. However, its anti-statism has been less evident whenever farming is discussed, due to the party's roots and popularity in rural areas (Wirz 2011).

Related to this, and unlike most other PRRPs in Europe, the SVP/UDC has explicitly acknowledged the challenges posed by climate change—as many in the farming community the party still seeks to represent tend to be in favour of eco-friendly measures. The SVP/UDC has nevertheless been wary of the economic impact of such rules, regulations, and prohibitions (SVP/UDC 2019b), and climate change has been a topic with the potential to generate intra-party disagreement, and to increase disputes with farmers. This tension is illustrated by a statement from the designated new party president Marcel Dettling (a farmer), who declared in January 2024 that 'global warming is not bad for farmers' (Donzé and Triaca 2024) because it allows them to plant new crops and to leave the animals outside for longer. This statement was criticized by the president of the powerful Swiss Farmers' Union, Markus Ritter (a farmer and member of the CVP), who anticipated more negative effects for the farmers' community because of climate change.

Party organization

Degree of organization

Swiss party organizations have been described as traditionally weak, and marked by a 'small and largely voluntary party apparatus, limited financial resources, and the lack of centralization and internal homogeneity' (Ladner 2001, 132). The Swiss cross-cutting cleavages based on language and religion, and the country's federal structure, are important reasons for this (Mueller and Bernauer 2018). In a country where strong central party institutionalization is evidently not the norm, the contemporary SVP/UDC can be seen as unusual in investing in member socialization, community building, and an extensive network of local sections. In recent years, the party has strengthened its territorial extensiveness by increasing its cantonal party branches. The party is represented in each Swiss canton and has dozens of local branches in most. However, according to a former leading SVP/UDC official interviewed for this book, the party has yet to reach its full potential in French-speaking Switzerland (SVP/UDC, R04). Other Swiss parties have a longer history of operating in all cantons and are more evenly established across Switzerland.

The SVP/UDC depends on a ramified network of over one thousand local sections that help to pursue its political objectives. Comparing these numbers with official figures from the other large parties represented in government—obtained from the parties themselves upon request—the SVP/UDC has more branches than the Social Democrats (SP) (805 branches), but fewer than the Liberal FDP, which has 1,500. All sections combined, the SVP/UDC had around 80,000 members in 2020. The FDP, with 120,000 members, and the Christian Democrats (CVP) with around 100,000 members, are larger in size, whereas the Social Democrats (SP) are smaller with only 33,000 official members. In other words, the SVP/UDC was the third largest Swiss party in terms of membership in 2020. Despite having fewer members and branches than some other parties, the SVP/UDC shows comparatively strong characteristics of a mass party organization. The party's reliance on loyal activists and grassroots mobilization (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016), and the ability to preserve collective identities through ideology (Favero 2021)—especially after its radicalization in the 1990s—distinguish the SVP/UDC's mass organization from other parties in Switzerland.

The organizational chart presented in Figure 3.6 shows a high level of structural articulation expressed in a well-defined set of party bodies, as well as vertical linkages. The SVP/UDC's statute specifies the membership of each party organ, and the relevant election procedure. Members of all party bodies are elected for a period of two years, with the exception of members of the federal Parliamentary Group and federal councillors. The degree of the SVP/UDC's organizational intensiveness is high (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016, 86): the party operates with, and depends on, a large network of activists and small units that help to pursue its political interests—it only has sixteen paid staffers working at the party secretariat on behalf of the national organization. In its current organizational form, the party is constituted of its cantonal branches (formally independent organizations), and the units at the lowest level are known as local branches (*Ortsparteien*) or sections (*Sektionen*). Several sections combined form an electoral district.

At the Delegate Assembly of 23 April 2016, the SVP/UDC amended its organizational structure (SVP/UDC 2018). The Party Executive Committee (*Parteileitungsausschuss*) was created as part of this process. Its nine members manage the day-to-day business of the SVP/UDC Switzerland and are responsible for the financing and running of campaigns. The Committee exercises the right to nominate candidates for all of its national leadership bodies. It also acts as the only body that has a right to represent the party externally. Neither the members of the Head Office nor the Party Committee are authorized to do so. These are far-reaching powers that have increased the party's overall centralization, as we will further discuss below.

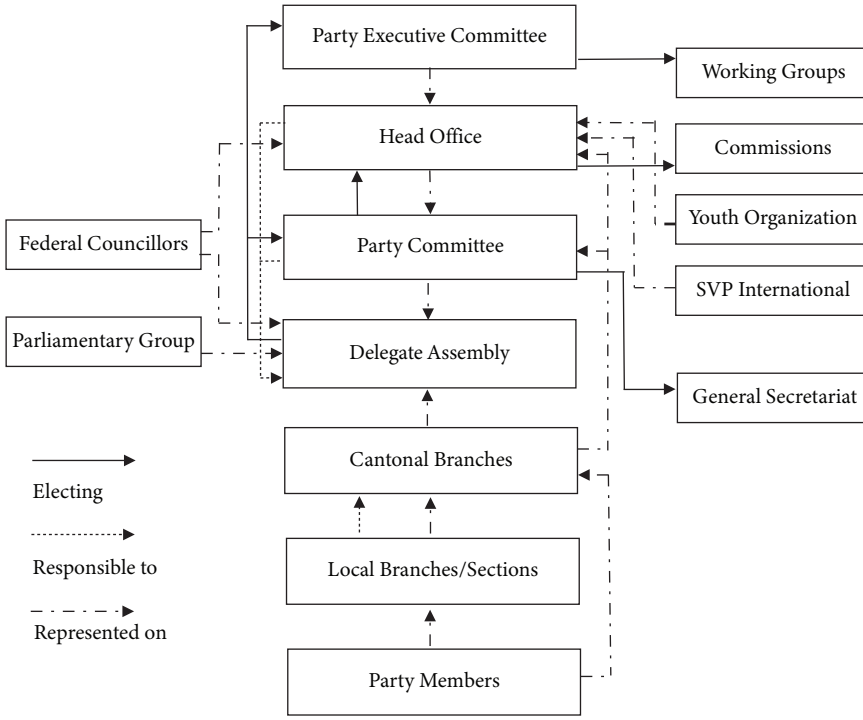

Figure 3.6 SVP/UDC organizational chart

Another central organ, the Head Office (*Parteileitung*), consists of twenty-nine members and is largely responsible for strategic planning and the ideological direction of the party. It supervises the preparation and conduct of federal elections. In addition, the Head Office regulates communication between different levels within the party (e.g. coordinating the cooperation of party bodies, and maintaining contact with cantonal branches). It also deals with human relations and personnel issues (e.g. solving disputes, determining membership fees) as well as financial matters (e.g. approving the party's budget). Some of the Head Office members are representatives of the Young SVP/UDC Switzerland and the SVP/UDC International, which represents young members and Swiss citizens living abroad, respectively.

The Party Committee (*Parteivorstand*) represents a more deliberative body with less direct strategic influence than the Head Office. While members of the Head Office meet every month, the Party Committee usually meets one day before the Delegate Assembly, around four times per year. It has 125 members and its main tasks are the preparation of Delegate Assemblies, debating the party's positions on national votes insofar as they are not

taken by the Delegate Assembly, and deciding whether or not the SVP/UDC launches referendums on specific topics at the request of the Head Office or the cantonal branches. The Party Committee also decides on sanctioning cantonal party bodies if they are deemed to have contravened the party's interests, or individual party members who fail to pay their membership fees. The Party Committee also elects the Secretary-General and members of the Head Office.

The Delegate Assembly (*Delegiertenversammlung*) consists of around 835 delegates from all cantonal parties, the Young SVP/UDC and the SVP/UDC International. It elects the party president, vice presidents, and members of the Party Committee, and votes on the party's official position in forthcoming referendums. It amends the statute, adopts important programmatic documents, and decides whether to launch popular initiatives (i.e. constitutional amendments initiated by the people by collecting 100,000 signatures within eighteen months). It also handles appeals against sanctions by the Party Committee. According to the party statute, each cantonal party is entitled to send eight representatives (delegates) to the Assembly. The other delegates are assigned to the cantonal branches based on the number of votes cast in the National Council elections. This means that large branches attracting more votes have more influence in the Assembly, as they can send more delegates. Each cantonal branch is entitled to send one representative to the Party Committee, but they gain an additional Party Committee delegate for each 20,000 votes received in National Council elections. The result of the above rules, as a party representative pointed out to us (SVP/UDC, R05), is that larger cantonal branches ultimately wield more power within the organization.

Degree of centralization

In its statute, the SVP/UDC calls the Delegate Assembly 'the supreme party organ' (SVP/UDC 2018), but when examining the power of other bodies, this definition ultimately appears misleading. The radicalization of the party originating within the Zurich branch provided the foundation for a strongly centralized party, with the newly created Party Executive Committee having become the SVP/UDC's real centre of power. Due to the dominant role of this body, decision-making processes, strategic planning, and party communication require little coordination and time, as we heard from a party representative (SVP/UDC, R04). The Party Executive Committee discusses all personnel issues and submits suggestions to the Head Office. The Delegate Assembly formally elects officials, but only after candidates have been vetted by the Executive Committee, the Head Office, and the Party Committee. Unsurprisingly given the amount of power that is now concentrated

at the top of the party, some subnational representatives in our interviews described national officials as being too distant from the local level, as power hungry, and as not being in touch with their base.

Despite the powerful role of the recently created Party Executive Committee—and illustrative of the Swiss federal system of government—cantonal branches still possess a certain degree of legal and organizational autonomy. They are able to devise canton-specific policies and strategies, and are responsible for recruiting new members. Nonetheless, and despite their emphasis on the importance of cantonal branches, national party organs continue to dominate cantonal bodies (Mazzoleni and Rossini 2016). The SVP/UDC's level of centralization is thus relatively strong, and its decision to create a Party Executive Committee with strong (de facto) decision-making authority is unique, and testimony to the desire of its leaders to concentrate powers at the top of the party, to the extent that this is feasible in the Swiss system.

The SVP/UDC's overall organizational structure is, formally speaking, rather similar to other Swiss parties, which all describe their respective Delegate Assemblies as their supreme bodies (CVP 2020; FDP 2022; SP 2022). Yet also in other parties, such a bottom-up model does not necessarily guarantee that power between branches is distributed equally. Dominant cantonal and local branches in all large Swiss parties are allowed to send more delegates to party assemblies. Only in the Canton of Geneva do we find a different system. Here, unlike other parties, the SVP/UDC invites all of its 300 members to attend the cantonal Delegate Assembly—which is likely due to its comparatively small size. In addition, within all four major parties, certain issues are previously discussed and decided by leadership committees before the Delegate Assemblies are asked for approval.

Flemish Interest

The party Vlaams Blok (VB—Flemish Block) was founded in 1978 as an amalgamation of various radical Flemish nationalist factions. The party's original key aim was for Flanders to become an independent state, but in the mid-1980s the VB's electoral strategy shifted towards opposing immigration and criticizing the alleged corruption of the established parties (Van Haute and Pauwels 2016, 51). The party was renamed Vlaams Belang (VB—Flemish Interest) in 2004 after a Belgian court determined that it had violated anti-discrimination law. The ruling engendered few organizational or ideological changes beyond a symbolic moderation of the party (Erk 2005).

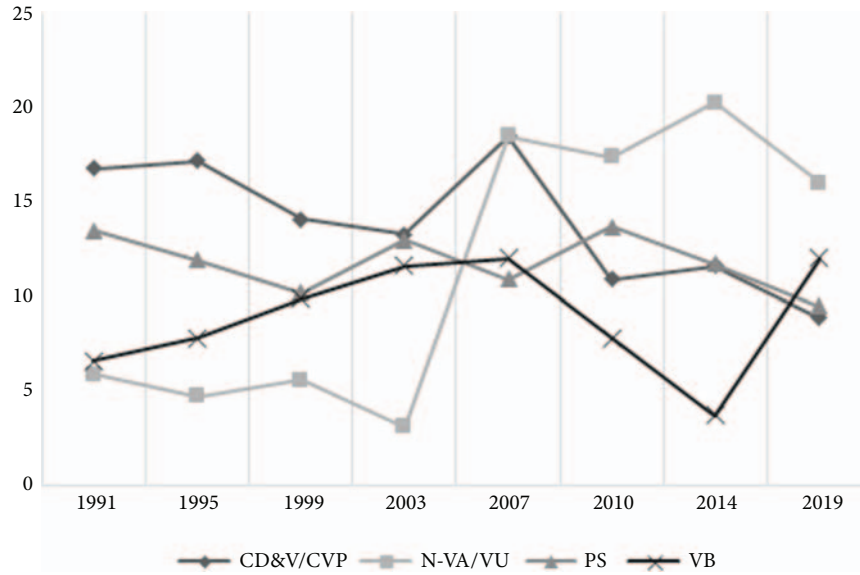

Figure 3.7 Federal election results of major Belgian parties

Notes: Figure includes the largest parties as of 2019. In 2007 CD&V and the N-VA ran in an electoral coalition
Source: Data from: https://verkiezingsresultaten.belgium.be

Electorally, the party extended its support across federal and subnational levels after 1987, reaching a peak in 2004. As shown in Figures 3.7 and 3.8, the party witnessed a sharp electoral downturn in the subsequent elections, but the 2018 local elections and 2019 national elections showed a resurgence of its popularity. The party has nevertheless been blocked from entering government by a strong *cordon sanitaire*, agreed in 1989 between all other Belgian parties. These agreed to rule out forming coalitions with the VB, although the cordon was broken at the local level after the local council elections of October 2024. At the time of writing, it still holds at the regional and federal levels.

Ideology

The ideology of the VB has been investigated by focusing on the May 2019 general election manifesto, and six editions of the party's monthly magazine (December 2018 to May 2019) which is distributed to members and archived on the party website. This data has been triangulated with secondary literature on the party's past ideological evolution.

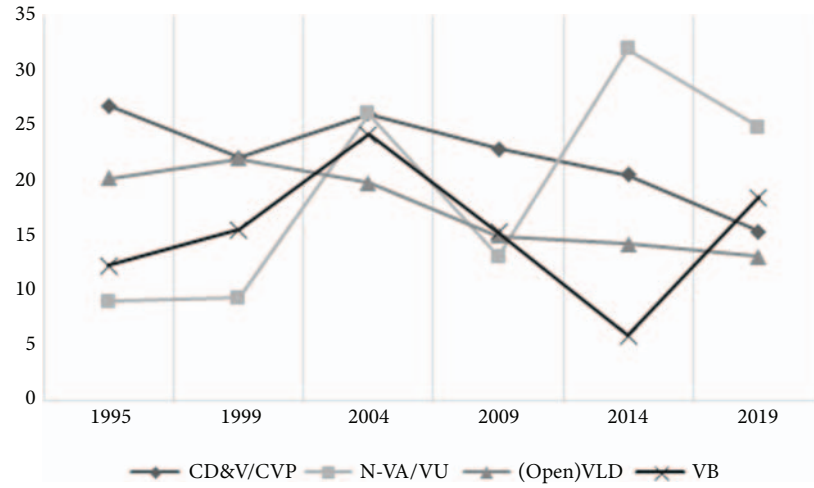

Figure 3.8 Flemish election results of major parties

Notes: Figure includes the largest parties as of 2019. In 2007 CD&V and the N-VA ran in an electoral coalition
Source: Data from: https://verkiezingsresultaten.belgium.be

Initially, the party stemmed from the autonomist Flemish Movement and emphasized substate nationalist positions. As it turned towards more nativist policies and rhetoric in the late 1980s, it experienced some internal unrest and the departure of some party members (Van Haute and Pauwels 2016, 51). However, the party was ultimately able to maintain both the nativist and nationalist elements of its policy platform and to encompass both 'hard-line' and more moderate rhetorical approaches. This duality was enabled by the presence of high-profile figures who represented different views within the organization, specifically Gerolf Annemans and Filip Dewinter. The debate on radicalization versus moderation became especially salient when the party sought to find ways to stem its electoral decline after 2004 (Van Haute and Pauwels 2016, 54). In more recent years, the VB has shifted from predominantly expressing the radical style of Dewinter towards the more moderate approach of its current leader, Tom Van Grieken (Lucardie et al. 2016).

The VB's 2019 electoral programme and party magazines were nevertheless infused with nativist and populist messages. These PRR core characteristics intertwined with the party's continued demands for Flemish independence, welfare chauvinist socio-economic policies, and critique of European integration. Symbolic nativism (Betz 2019) has been the most common form of nativism in VB documents, with migrants (particularly Muslims) being

framed as a threat to Flemish culture. As for the VB's idea of 'the people', this has largely been informed by the party's ethno-regionalist appeals to 'Flemmishness' and comparisons with allegedly 'undeserving' immigrants (VB 2019a: 11–12; 62). In the VB's discourse, the 'corrupt elite' has consisted mainly of the Belgian (francophone and left-wing) political class, although 'global' (financial) elites have also been criticized. Suggesting a perverse pact between political elites and migrants against the Flemish people, former leader Filip Dewinter has called migration the 'wet dream of the left', as it supposedly helps them to gain more votes (Vlaams 2019c, 13). The *cordon sanitaire* has been held up as a prime example of the political elite's supposed lack of democratic credentials. Critiques of the *cordon* have particularly been levelled at the New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), the centre-right party with most ideological affinity to the VB, which has been blamed by the latter for taking a hypocritical position (VB 2019b, 15).

Relative to populism and nativism, authoritarianism has been less prominent in the party's discourse of recent years, but where it appears it is often in combination with anti-immigrant positions. Through tough law and order policies, the VB has sought to 'protect' Flemish people from migrants, particularly Muslim migrants (VB 2019a, 45). The party has also expressed the need to tackle terrorism emanating from Belgium's Muslim community. Beyond law-and-order positions, the party has called for the protection of the 'traditional family' even though it has also taken a tolerant, albeit not positive, stance on some LGBTQ+ issues. The limits of its tolerance were shown by the party's opposition to adoption rights for same-sex couples and its view that gender-neutral toilets are 'ridiculous' (D'Hoore 2019).

Similar to our other cases, the party's economic and social policies have demonstrated the interrelatedness of 'economic' and 'cultural' issues. For instance, the VB has opposed migrants' use of social housing, unemployment, and children's benefits, and has argued for limiting access to social security based on 'length of stay and minimum work performance' (VB 2019a, 61). The party's economic positions have been based on 'chauvinist' as well as 'producerist' principles, whereby only the 'deserving natives' should be entitled to access welfare provisions (Abts et al. 2021). The party has, for instance, focused on protecting older people, who are seen as disadvantaged by migrants' alleged abuse of the welfare system (VB 2019a, 62). The VB has also opposed 'economic immigration', promoting reliance on native-born workers rather than migrants. The party's Euroscepticism can also be interpreted in light of its opposition to 'open borders'. While not vehemently opposed to the principle of European integration, the VB has rejected the EU in its current (institutional) form. The EU has also been associated with the

perceived malign effects of globalization, not least 'unfair competition' and a 'distorted free market' (VB 2019a, 35).

While the above description indicates that the VB has broadened and refocused its ideological agenda (from Flemish nationalism to immigration), support for an independent Flanders has remained a central feature of its programme. Its 2019 manifesto expressed the need for 'actively preparing [Flanders] for the end of Belgium' (VB 2019a, 8). The VB argued that, like migration, Wallonia drains Flemish economic resources, and the party has consistently expressed the need to defend the Flemish language and culture against francophone influences.

Party organization

Degree of organization

Under the leadership of its founder, Karel Dillen, the VB was a small organization run by volunteers (De Witte and Scheepers 1997, 421). Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, the party eventually developed its organization and opened new local branches. Following the party's electoral and organizational growth, the period from 2004 onwards saw shifts both in terms of membership and organizational capacity. The latter was impacted by fluctuations in the amount of state funding, which by law is linked to a party's electoral support. The number of staff, and the party's organizational capacity, plummeted during electoral downturns in 2009 and 2014, and increased again after its success in 2019 (VB, R2, R4). At the time of the interviews in 2020, the party had approximately one hundred full-time equivalent (FTE) members of staff, with the majority of FTEs being allocated to federal and provincial legislative activities (VB, R4). The rest of the party staff was tasked with party communication, legal affairs, financial matters, event organization and running the VB's think tank and youth wing.

Membership numbers have also fluctuated alongside electoral support. The VB membership peaked at 25,000 in 2007 (Van Haute et al. 2013) but dropped to 17,063 by 2012. After its electoral growth of 2019, the VB reported that it had 18,763 members in 2020, and 22,194 in 2021 (VB 2021). Notably, the overall number of party members in Belgium has declined steeply between 2017 and 2023 (by 50,000 individuals in total) (Dufourmont and Wouters 2024). In this context, the VB's membership numbers have remained steadier than traditional competitors. Mainstream political competitors such as the Christian Democrats (CD&V), Socialist Party (PS/Sp.A/Vooruit), and liberals (Open VLD) have all lost members both in

the long term (since 1979) and short term (since 2017). Contrarily, both in the long term and in recent years, the VB has grown. Since 2017, the only other party to grow its membership numbers was the radical-left Labour Party (PVDA).

It is clear that the VB has actively sought to attract members—seemingly more so than other parties. For example, the party is different from other Belgian parties in lacking prerequisites for party membership other than paying a (low) membership fee and endorsing the party statute (Sandri and Pauwels 2010, 1250). Other parties in Belgium have minimum age requirements, require exclusivity of membership, and ask members to subscribe to the party's basic principles (Van Haute 2015). The VB also offers 'private' membership for those who fear the stigma of PRRP membership.

The VB has also poured resources into gaining an online followership (Sijstermans 2021). As of 2024, the party had 175,000 more followers on Facebook and 50,000 more Instagram followers than its nearest competitor, the N-VA. Ico Maly (2020) documented the way that the party not only recruits followers online, but also interacts with them. The party has collected and used follower data and has sought to engage with followers through online platforms' 'gamification' processes. For example, the party has provided customized profile picture frames, which are added on top of a user's profile picture to show that user's support for the Vlaams Belang. Facebook users who engage significantly with Vlaams Belang Facebook pages may also be designated 'top fans' by the platform. Such 'rewards' and customizations on social media platforms entice users to stay engaged. The VB's mastery of social media tools has meant that the party is at the 'centre of the political attention economy in Belgium' (Maly 2020, 446). In this way, the party has excelled in gaining support from a wider range of supporters, including what Susan Scarrow (2015) called 'digital supporters' and a 'news audience'.

Alongside other parties that have historically been outside of the 'mainstream', such as the Green Party and far left PVDA, the VB is one of the most important parties still holding onto the mass party organizational model in Belgium. They buck the trend of declining party membership and place an emphasis on recruiting and engaging with party members, supporters, and online followers.

Considering its formal structure (see Figure 3.9), the Party Council is the VB's most powerful body, according to its statute, and meets on a monthly basis. This body includes all members of the Party Executive, the MPs, the youth leader, delegates from provincial and regional bodies, and selected former parliamentarians and ordinary party members (whose inclusion is approved by the Party Council itself). The Party Council has usually

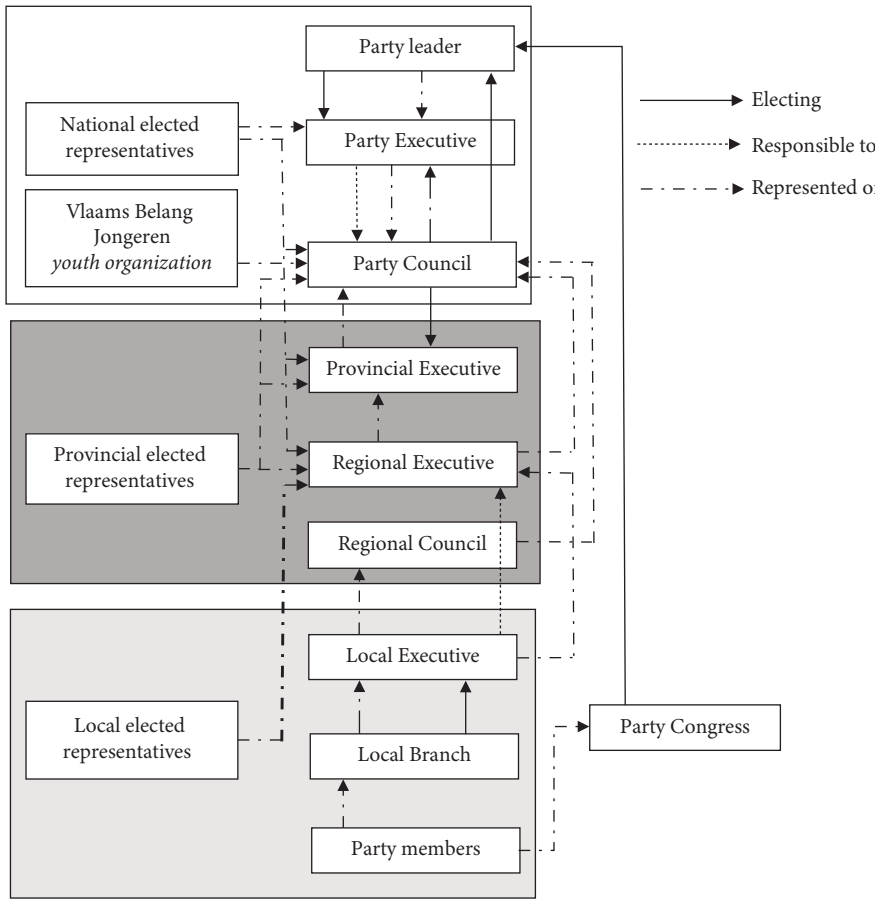

Figure 3.9 VB organizational chart

consisted of around one hundred individuals, yet the number rose to 140 after the successful 2019 elections, as these elections resulted in an increase in the number of VB MPs. Its formal responsibilities include setting the party's strategy, overseeing the Party Executive, finalizing the agenda of the Party Congress, conducting disciplinary procedures, approving electoral lists and the party budget, and amending the statute. In practice, however, the Party Council is seen within the party as a 'ratifying' body, rather than a decision-making one, and it does not determine the direction of party strategy or policy. For instance, an MP explained to us that 'The Party Council will not often go against them [meaning: the proposals made by the Party Executive] because the most important people are actually in the Party Executive' (VB, R10). A local staffer noted that decisions were already made before they were brought to the Party Council (VB, R14).

The powerful Party Executive consists of a select number of members, including the party leader, the deputy leader, the party leaders from the Chamber of Representatives, Flemish parliament, and the Senate, the treasurer, and the chairman of the Party Council. The party leader selects the remaining members of the Party Executive (which includes a minimum of twelve individuals). The body deals with urgent political events, party strategy, and the daily management of the party. Statutorily, it has 'residual powers' over issues not set out in the statute. The Party Executive meets every week, except during parliamentary recesses.

Given that they have control over membership of the Executive, party leaders have significant power. The leader also proposes the agenda for each Executive meeting and can convene extraordinary meetings. Decisions are made by consensus, but when this cannot be reached, the party leader casts the deciding vote. Given their power over the Executive agenda, the party leader is responsible for the party's policies and direction, and has independent power over disciplinary matters. They represent the party in legal terms and in the media. As one MP explained to us, it is the leader who 'in large part sets out the ideological direction' (VB, R10) of the party. Leaders serve for a four-year term and there is no term limit for this role.

The selection of the leader, as well as the ratification of party manifestos, happens at the Party Congress. In an interview, a central figure within the party defined the party's congresses, which are open to all party members, as the 'pinnacle of the party's political operations' (VB, R6). However, a longtime local representative noted that he had very rarely seen any opposition being expressed when votes are cast during congresses (VB, R8). Special congresses are also organized by party staffers working for the research team. These meetings occur once or twice a year, and provide a forum to discuss specific policy areas which are politically salient or central to the party's policy platform, such as welfare policy or immigration. They are notably open to members and non-members alike and are seen as a way for the party to engage with a wider range of supporters.

Other party organs worthy of closer discussion are the local branches, which provide the main points of contact for ordinary members. Local branch executives are composed of a minimum of three members, but vary in size. All members who have been in the party for more than a year are given the chance to apply for a position in the local Branch Executive, yet we have been told by a party representative that open competition for these roles is uncommon (VB, R4). The local Branch Executive is responsible for monitoring the work of representatives in the local councils, and organizing party life on the ground (in the form of events, campaigns, and recruitment). In

between the national and local levels are two different layers: provincial and regional. The provincial level aligns with elected provincial councils and parliamentary electoral boundaries. Vertical party relationships are maintained by a system of delegation, with members being delegated from each lower level to the next. Delegated members ensure clear communication from the local to the national level, and vice versa.

Degree of centralization

The VB also exemplifies the strong centralization we have identified among the other selected PRRPs. In Belgium, elite-level party negotiations are particularly important because the fragmented party system and federal state structure require parties to coordinate regularly and extensively among themselves to form a government, to maintain cabinet stability, and to ensure cohesive policy outcomes (see De Winter and Dumont 2013). Party elites need significant power and independence within their political parties to make decisions, in order to negotiate effectively and flexibly. The imperative for party elites to be able to make quick decisions encourages making political parties more centralized. Even in this context, the VB is characterized by the most powerful leader of all Belgian political parties (see Wauters and Pittoors 2019), and the lowest degree of intra-party democracy. Van Haute and Pauwels (2016) also find that VB members have the least powers of any Belgian party as they have no influence over the selection of leadership candidates, and thus little effective say in leadership elections.

The formal primacy of the Party Council notwithstanding, the most important decisions are made by the party leader and Party Executive: candidate and personnel selection, policy and strategy-making, and party communications are all areas ultimately managed by a few leading party officials. Although it is not made explicit in the party statute, the Party Executive is also the most influential actor when it comes to finalizing electoral candidate lists. Its members consult local provincial leaders, determine 'list leaders' for elections, and decide whether to place candidates in 'electable' positions on the lists. There is, in other words, a mismatch between the formal role of the Party Council and its actual influence. Some of our interviewees noted that the Party Council does not make the key decisions on strategy, and that it does not use its power to hold the Party Executive to account, let alone to sanction its members. A national party representative explained to us that 'The Party Council is more a conduit of information' (VB, R16). Another MP said to us: 'the Party Executive still decides everything, always' (VB, R24).

Statutorily and in practice, the Party Executive enjoys significant disciplinary reach into the life of local branches. Local and regional executives

are usually tasked with disciplining members in the first instance, or with trying to achieve resolution in case of conflict. However, many conflicts escalate quickly to the Party Executive, which has the power to suspend or expel members. One member explained to us that: 'it's all handled internally. And our leader, Tom van Grieken, is really engaged in that. He always knows everything everyone is doing' (VB, M50).

Throughout the years the VB has seen several leadership changes—and various leaders have enjoyed a significant amount of informal power in shaping party strategy. In terms of leadership elections, a single candidate is first selected by a secret ballot in the Party Council, and then party members (who have been members for over a year) can ratify or reject this candidate. Aside from the case of Gerolf Annemans, who became leader in 2012 after a contested election, the Party Council has otherwise always been presented with a single candidate. Furthermore, the Party Congress has never rejected a leadership candidate. This being the case, it is fair to say that leadership elections in fact take place behind closed doors.

Conclusion

In this chapter we assessed the key ideological features and organizational structures of our selected parties, laying the groundwork for the following chapters that reveal elite and grassroots perspectives on party life. Defying still prevailing common wisdom about this type of party, and the direction of party evolution in general, the PRRPs analysed in this book are committed to maintaining extensive and complex organizational structures and rootedness on the ground, via local branches. As we theorized in the previous chapter, and test in the next one, these parties may be motivated to create and foster close communities of political activists because this can lend credence to their populist claim that they are of, and for, ordinary people, and that they are able to understand their needs and speak on their behalf.

We have shown that all four parties share this quintessential populist discourse, in addition to the other key ideological components of the PRR: nativism and authoritarianism. In line with Mudde's (2007) theorization of the PRR, nativism has indeed become a central ideological feature for all four parties, even though, historically speaking, two of them previously focused more on the aim of independence for their subnational region (LN/LSP and VB), and two others drifted from conservatism to the PRR due to the increasing dominance of their radical wing (SVP and PS). All of our cases have come to adopt strict immigration policies and have identified Islam

as a threat to the survival of their national identity. The latter is a sign of the strong 'symbolic' nativism these parties share. They have also adopted a comparable Eurosceptic stance, associating the process of European integration with a threat to national sovereignty, even though they rhetorically defend European identity and culture. This is consistent with the stances of most PRRPs in the 'Old Continent', which tend to be 'pro-European but anti-EU' (Lorimer 2020, 1393). Our four PRRPs take somewhat different stances on how the economy should be run. The SVP/UDC, for instance, is traditionally a party of entrepreneurs, while the PS has only recently departed from a more left-wing economic agenda. In general, modern PRRPs' positions on the state–market axis can be rather 'blurry' (Rovny 2013; Zulianello and Larsen 2024). In terms of their welfare agenda, however, all of our cases essentially converge around a principle of 'exclusive solidarity', whereby deserving natives should be protected from unfair competition, often in the form of foreign workers or migrants said to be abusing the welfare system (Abts et al. 2021).

Altogether, while our parties have different ideological roots, in their current incarnations they can be firmly placed in the PRR category. It is worth noting that this does not necessarily make them political 'outsiders' devoid of power. Indeed, three out of the four cases have spent time in office and the SVP/UDC has been the largest party in Switzerland ever since the turn of the twenty-first century. Only the VB remains ostracized due to the *cordon sanitaire* set up by its competitors. While most of our PRRPs are thus well integrated in their national party systems—which is reflective of a broader trend—the VB remains one of the few genuinely 'anti-system' parties in Europe (Zulianello 2020).

This chapter has further shown that our four selected PRRPs have in common key structural features of mass parties, not least in terms of the adoption of complex and socially rooted organizations (Favero 2021; Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016; Hatakka 2021; Sijstermans 2021; Zulianello 2021). Instead of opting for an organizationally lightweight 'electoral professional' model (Panebianco 1988), our cases maintain an extensive structure with an institutionalized local presence. All four parties in our sample maintain a high degree of organizational articulation, as well as vertical linkages to regional and local areas. While it is beyond the scope of our study to systematically compare the selected PRRPs to other (established) parties within their system, it appears that our cases aim to buck the trend of partisan dealignment that characterizes all four countries in our study. While not necessarily the largest in terms of membership numbers—which is also not a crucial characteristic of the mass party as we define it—they certainly stand out in their

party systems in terms of actively investing in member recruitment, mobilization, as well as socialization. To be clear, to properly ascertain whether the parties approach the mass party ideal type, we need to consider not only formal organizational structures but also the lived experiences of party members and elites. For instance, do the latter actively aim to socialize members in order to forge collective identities? The next chapters will provide precisely such an analysis.

What is notable in any case is that, despite local rootedness, the parties analysed in this chapter tend to be highly centralized, offering few opportunities to their members to influence key decisions about internal governance, choice of candidates, and ideological direction. Thus, these parties' strategies are typically dominated by their leader alongside a restricted group of representatives serving in the parties' executives. The central leadership is usually able to instruct and guide those at lower levels, and if need be to enforce internal discipline. What is more, assemblies on which members are represented may formally be the supreme party organs, but in practice these tend to have very few opportunities to affect the party's strategy or to shape its key policies. Informal rules and power relations, in other words, can be more important than the statutes of these parties.

The centralization of power is certainly not at odds with the mass party concept (Duverger 1954). The LSP and the VB provide the perfect case studies of PRRP mass parties in this respect, as they are socially rooted but also disciplined, pyramidal, and run from the centre. This also broadly applies to the other two cases, albeit with some variation. In the case of Finland, the PS combines decentralization and radically democratic elements in its Party Congress and Advisory Assembly with a very powerful Party Executive that faces little accountability. In the case of the SVP/UDC, power centralization is mitigated by the features of the Swiss political culture and federal system of government. The party maintains a highly centralized party apparatus at the federal level, where a professionalized leadership has the ability to shape its ideology and key messages, but cantonal and local branches retain some degree of autonomy due to the highly decentralized political system.

PRRPs may claim to speak in the name of the 'ordinary people' who have ostensibly been ignored by political elites, but this does not mean they give their members and activists a meaningful say over party affairs and ideological direction. In the next chapter we seek to reveal why party elites are nevertheless willing to invest in a mass party model that relies heavily on party members and activists. In Chapter 5, we subsequently investigate what motivates party members to accept their parties' offer of 'participation without power' (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021).

4

Why Do Party Elites Preserve the Mass Party?

> *And in my opinion, this makes a difference in terms of public perception: if you add up all the Giovannis [relatable LSP members] out there, one says: 'Well, those of the League are not Nazis… they are Giovanni'.* (LSP, R29)

One of the key findings of the previous chapter was that all four parties central to our study—the Lega per Salvini Premier (LSP—League for Salvini Premier), the Vlaams Belang (VB—Flemish Interest), Perussuomalaiset (PS—the Finns Party) and the Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre (SVP/UDC—Swiss People's Party/Democratic Union of the Centre)—have adopted the formal structures typical of mass parties. Based on the views of party elites, this chapter aims to describe the life within our parties in practice, and to identify and explain the reasons behind the adoption of the mass party model. By talking to party representatives, we have dug deeper into actual experiences of party life and elicited accounts of organizational practice and modes of activism. This allowed us to identify what really mattered to the interviewed representatives as far as their parties' organizational model was concerned. Relying on our unique data from 125 elite interviews across the four cases, the chapter answers three interrelated research questions:

1) How closely-knit are the communities created by populist radical right (PRR) mass parties?
2) How are collective identities shaped via such communities?
3) Why do party elites within these organizations preserve the mass party model, despite the considerable organizational cost and effort required to achieve this?

The chapter will deal with each of these questions in turn. As we have outlined in Chapter 2, the building of communities via local branches is a

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key characteristic of mass parties, and it is this aspect of the organizational model this chapter focuses on. We interrogate to what extent, and in which ways, party elites seek to provide a variety of activities to members in order to strengthen collective identities. The chapter shows how our four parties succeed, albeit to different degrees, in building close-knit communities, irrespective of the occasional conflicts and rivalries. While new social media have facilitated information exchange and communication within these parties, it is also notable that traditional real-life organized activities remain crucial to their party-building strategies.

In answering the third question stated above we shift from describing the life inside populist radical right parties (PRRPs) to asking why party elites, on balance, consider the mass party model to be advantageous. As we discussed in Chapter 2, there are good reasons to accept that parties have fewer incentives to rely on activist members than in the early and mid-20th century. In an age of mass communication and new forms of media, through which voters can be reached effectively and at little or no cost, it is unsurprising to find a general trend towards disengagement from activists and the adoption of 'lighter' models of party organization (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Webb et al. 2002; Mair 2013). Previous studies concentrating on West European democracies have pointed out dwindling membership numbers as well as an overall decline in levels of activism (Gallagher and Marsh 2004; Pedersen et al. 2004; Saglie and Heidar 2004; Seyd and Whiteley 2004). From the perspective of party elites, activists may be seen as a hindrance (Young 2013) as they can limit their autonomy, for instance in terms of setting strategy, choosing candidates and maintaining organizational stability.

Yet party members can also offer various benefits to a party that may counterbalance costs and risks (Katz 2002; Scarrow 1996; 2015; Art 2011). Party elites socialize members into politics and, in turn, can rely on them to effectively support the party when needed. From the perspective of the party leadership, membership can be an essential source of candidates for local, regional, national, and supranational institutions. Party membership is also essential for carrying out in-person canvassing and campaigning (Bale et al. 2019). Last but not least, certainly in the case of PRRPs, which may still find it hard to gain broad public acceptance given their radical positions, organizational choices can offer a way for a party to circumvent opponents' attempts to marginalize them. In other words, being rooted in the local community and able to rely on committed activists can help parties to break their isolation. Getting people to interact with, and support, one's organization adds to its visibility and legitimacy in the eyes of voters and the media (Cirhan and Stauber 2018, 459). Most notably, research has highlighted that this is not

only relevant to PRRPs that still operate at the margins of the political scene: indeed, 'even more consolidated and mainstream PRRPs are still engaged in a never-ending struggle for legitimacy at the public level', and some of them 'seek to become more legitimate players by investing in grassroots activism at the local level' (Favero and Zulianello 2023, 10–11).

Parties therefore still have incentives to enrol full members and to offer new creative ways to get people on board, depending on those potential members' willingness to commit time and resources to the organization—some may merely want to serve as 'digital activists' rather than street campaigners (Gibson et al. 2017, 91). Taking inspiration from Susan Scarrow (2015, 20–21), who notes that organizational choices can be 'ideological products', we expect that relying on publicly visible activists may be particularly attractive to PRRPs because it lends credence to their populist message of being 'close to the people' and supported by ordinary folks—rather than extremists.

Based on our analysis of the interviews, we find that party representatives indeed tend to highlight these identified advantages. More specifically, they identify three main (interrelated) reasons for keeping the mass party alive. First, the model is considered conducive to spreading the party's message via the recruitment and mobilization of members (during, but also beyond, election campaigns), therefore contributing to electoral success (*campaigning prowess*). Second, activism in local communities allows parties to claim legitimacy as parties 'of the people', and build an image as responsive (but also responsible) representatives in political institutions (*legitimation*). And, finally, a strong, rooted and tightly-knit mass organization is believed to help foster organizational longevity and to overcome periods of crisis (*organizational strength and longevity*).

Let us consider below how party representatives discussed these topics in their interviews. In the four sections that follow we will subsequently cover how party representatives speak about the community of party members; how they describe their party's efforts to shape collective identities through organized activities; what they consider to be the advantages of the mass party model; but also what they see as the drawbacks. The final section concludes and considers the implications of our findings.

Perceptions of the party community

In the previous chapter we have shown that the selected PRRPs maintain a high degree of organizational and structural articulation, as well as vertical linkages, which enable the coordination of frequent party activities

across different organizational levels. Ultimately, this helps to maintain close communities of activist members. What are the views of party representatives on such communities? How do they describe social relationships inside the party, and to what extent do they deem the party community relevant to the party's functioning?

Across our cases, the party membership is constantly praised for keeping a community of like-minded people alive. Members are seen to support each other—and the party—whenever necessary. Representatives describe the existence of friendships and support networks among members, and often use the term 'family'. These representatives from the PS and VB described the party communities their members create exactly in these terms:

> People sometimes stay loyal to a party their whole lives, work for the party, volunteer for it. Because it's become a kind of family: a group of acquaintances and friends they go out with and have a bond with that they appreciate. (VB, R15)

> There are so many different kinds of personalities! So it makes the party feel alive. It feels like a family, so it makes you feel safe. When there's a party congress or something else, you feel very much like you're with family, and I've heard this from several other people too. And I hope that's something that never disappears. (PS, R10)

> The party is sort of like a large family, and the members of the family want to help each other. So people want to put knowledge forward and help out in whatever we're doing. (PS, R22)

Such sentiments are particularly prevalent in the League. The following comments were very common in interviews with representatives of this party:

> The feeling that you had and that you have when you go to certain demonstrations is to be all part of a single family. So you see people that you meet for the first time as your brothers. (LSP, R12)

> When we meet among us, it's a community, it's a family, made up of people who work and fight for a goal, often without earning anything at all … And what is the point of having such an organized party? That everyone feels part of it. If there is a need to do something together, the people make the sacrifice and come. (LSP, R10)

Among SVP/UDC representatives—who are not so inclined to speak about their organizations by using emotion-laden terms, as we will continue to observe—we also encounter the 'family' reference. In the context of this party, however, it is common for this analogy to come with qualifications,

for instance through the suggestion that not all members will necessarily feel the same way: 'There are some for whom [the SVP] is like a second family .... It is like a family substitute ... Those members are very close and they tell each other a lot of personal stuff' (SVP/UDC, R15). Nonetheless, we can clearly see that, also in the Swiss case, the idea that party members look after each other is very widespread:

> The community is very homogeneous and we are connected beyond political issues… I can say that. We take care of each other. If somebody is ill, the members call this person. … If I know somebody has to go to the hospital, I will visit them. (SVP/UDC, R7)

Across our four cases, the feelings of closeness and friendship within the organization appear to be strengthened by the particular situation these parties find themselves in: many interviewees feel they are regarded as 'outsiders' and 'extremists' by many, and particularly by those who belong to their countries' political and media elites. We therefore explore this theme next.

'Us against them'

Linked to the idea that the party provides a 'second family' to members, and that members support each other, is the observation that the community's cohesion is strengthened even further as a result of the parties' pariah status. The 'us' versus 'them' discourse that characterizes PRRPs appears to serve not only as a powerful strategy to attract potential voters (Wodak 2015), but also to increase harmony within the organization. Perhaps unsurprisingly given the *cordon sanitaire* that is erected around the party, VB representatives were particularly keen to emphasize the bond that is created through the party's ostracization by political opponents:

> I think there is a mentality of 'everyone versus one person'. You see that often when we organize activities, and also in the discussions. You see that they say: 'the world is against us, or the media is against us, or the political parties are against us'. Togetherness is strengthened by that. (VB, R9)

> And we stand up for each other. I won't have to tell you that if someone is fired because they're a member of the Vlaams Belang, or kicked out of the Unions, then that puts a lot of responsibility on other Vlaams Belangers who want to help that person. So there's a lot of mutual solidarity and that's really nice, actually. It's fantastic. (VB, R27)

Interestingly, similar observations were also made by representatives in Switzerland and Finland, where no *cordon sanitaire* exists, indicating that an outsider image can also be discursively cultivated by the parties themselves:

> They [the media] wrongfully put us in a corner where we don't belong. I often say: the SVP is not populist; they make us look like populists. (SVP/UDC, R34)

> We probably have a good common enemy. We have a strong will to act according to the interest of the ordinary people, and when you have a lot of conditions that are against the Finns Party, for example when the media often writes nonsense about us or writes falsehoods or accuses us of something, that unites us. (PS, R14)

> We, as the League, have been mistreated and bullied in journalistic and sometimes even physical terms [laughs], for very long periods … And so your community becomes essential, not in order to lock yourself inside it, but to give each other strength … the League is not part of the mainstream. (LSP, R10)

Having said this, representatives also emphasized what they see as the many positive reasons for people to come together and support each other, and these do not necessarily have to do with the feeling of being excluded from society. The following quote, from a PS representative, illustrates this point very well:

> So everything is done in good cooperation and with smiles on people's faces and with good humour on the side. So it's the sense of togetherness. Sometimes an outsider watching us has asked, 'does it ever happen that you don't have fun?'. (PS, R14)

More measured appraisals of the community

While representatives usually speak of communities that are not only ideologically cohesive, but also closely knit and socially integrated, there are notable exceptions. These are certainly worth highlighting given the presumed inclination of interviewees to speak positively about their organizations. A minority of respondents were open about the differences that—inevitably in their view—emerge between people within their parties, sometimes because of generational divides:

> In my circle, we are a bit like a family… otherwise, in my opinion it is a bit divided. There are the old SVP guys everyone knows and the young generation. And there

> is a divide, you can see that. But there is respectful interaction [between the two groups]. (SVP/UDC, R25)

> I always say: in political parties it is not different to any football club. You get along well or very well with 20 per cent, you talk less to another 20 per cent, and with 60 per cent you have no problem but are not very close. (SVP/UDC, R12)

> I wouldn't go as far as saying there's a Vlaams Belang community. In my free time, I don't always have to hang out with other Vlaams Belangers. (VB, R17)

Some representatives are also open about the intrapersonal rivalries that can occur. Competition between members to fulfil certain posts—either within the party or in political institutions—is clearly a factor that can impede cohesion. Representatives from all the selected parties commented about this, although claims such as the following ones remain, overall, quite rare:

> The group is cohesive, a bit like all parties, as long as we are talking about ideas, programmes, and not candidatures… When the race to become candidates kicks off, there is also a bit of internal competition, of course, as the question of whether or not people get along with each other, and their different strategies, all come to the fore. (LSP, R11)

> We have intra-party rivalries, especially for certain positions. Before the city council elections, we are all rivals… you can feel that… especially among the people who want to get elected. (SVP/UDC, R7)

> The party is able to provide a sense of community. But politics is also very cruel, and when there are a lot of actors there will also be quite a few people who will be disappointed, ones who don't get to become candidates … or if one gets more votes but doesn't get a good [municipal] committee seat that is given to somebody else. (PS, R5)

> You always have to be a little careful about people who will take your ideas behind your back. For me, it's not a big deal, but for a lot of people it is true that they want to get re-elected …. Because there will be people who are just interested in their own position and in being well-known. You get that in all parties; Vlaams Belang is not an exception in that sense. (VB, R24)

In other words, party representatives do not necessarily try to hide that unity, and a sense of common purpose, are harder to maintain whenever the interests of individual members start diverging. It is also clear from our conversations with party representatives that undesirable individuals, such as opportunists, can undermine the cohesion of party branches. As we saw in

the previous chapter, the central party elites retain a large amount of authority to deal with such cases and potentially expel unruly activists. Clearly, such examples of intra-party rivalry are acknowledged, and, as we shall see later on in this chapter, also frequently mentioned as disadvantages of the mass party model, which, by definition, is always on the look-out for new members. Disciplinary measures are often triggered not by ideological differences between individual members and their parties, but because of people having acted in ways that are perceived to damage the party (for example, by criticizing the leadership online, or by intentionally disclosing confidential information).

However, as a rule, the community the party is able to foster is depicted in very positive terms, and is said to provide refuge and support to individuals and party activists who sometimes feel marginalized in society. How is this sense of purpose and unity maintained within the parties, despite the inevitable differences and clashes that any organization experiences? In what follows we will look more closely at the (purpose of) activities and initiatives that parties organize in order to shape the views of their members (and the public at large). In short, how do party elites seek to ensure that members and sympathizers feel 'at home' within their organizations?

Shaping collective identities through organized activities

As we discussed in Chapter 2, among the key characteristics of the mass party model as we define it are rootedness on the ground, the provision of a variety of activities to members (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015), and the preservation of 'collective identities through ideology' (Panebianco 1988, 268). To what extent do these characteristics feature across our cases, and what types of activities are employed?

The interview data reveal that our selected parties regularly organize a variety of in-person activities (some of which were temporarily suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic of the early 2020s). These include closed branch meetings at the local level and training sessions which, inter alia, prepare activist members for campaigning and speaking to journalists, as well as thematic seminars with invited speakers for both members and sympathizers. Not all activities are formally geared towards political discussions; all our parties organize regular social events, too, such as barbecues and festive meals, annual family days, New Year's receptions, spending time at the sauna and cultural visits, to cite just a few examples. Besides these internal

activities, parties also aim to reach out to the wider public. Consistent with the mass party model, this is done in no small part through committed activists on the ground. 'Market place' canvassing activities of various kinds are very common among the selected parties, and facilitate the recruitment of new members, while also increasing the party's visibility and support more generally. Such events are key to establishing a presence and salience in local life and thus 'rootedness on the ground', as well as providing a low-threshold opportunity for locals to approach the party via a physical presence in town. Some organized party events are thus instrumental to gaining new members and spreading the party ideology.

Party activities (in person and online) and their purpose

As for informing members and making sure they remain 'on message', branch meetings and training sessions usually have a fundamental role to play. One of the main purposes of these meetings appears to be making members aware of the central party line on various topical issues via the local chairs. In a second stage, party messages will then filter through to the public at large. As these representatives from Belgium and Finland explained to us:

> The purpose [of branch meetings] is actually to create a support base for your programme. You have a programme, including but not limited to socio-economic policies, migration, poverty… so you make your full programme known to the people. And you can do that via your members if you make your members able to look at your programme. (VB, R7)

> [For] municipal elections we are organizing training on how decision-making works in municipal politics, on what kind of a party the Finns Party is, what kind of programmes and values we have. So we familiarize people with these kinds of things. (PS, R21)

> Primarily we aim, or at least I have, to liven up membership so that it isn't just filling in some registry but that there is a point in it. This training is part of it: it offers something. People often seem to be interested in training. So that puts some meat on the bones of membership, with information and knowledge. (PS, R8)

Other events, the various social outings not least, are more oriented towards creating a social bond and keeping members motivated to remain active

within the organization. What is considered important in this regard is getting people to think that they are receiving something back in exchange for their activism. In the words of these representatives from Belgium and Italy:

> As a party you must have something to offer to your members. You can't expect people to become a member of your party and then to be happy with the magazine they get every month. … And I think that it's the essence of a party: that you are among the people, members and not members. You meet them there physically. (VB, R27)

> There are different purposes [behind organizing events]. First, it's to keep the movement together, of course. Second, it's to constantly motivate the activist members and then work to increase the number of votes, which is the goal of every political party. (LSP, R16)

In order to boost motivation and morale, the selected parties are keen to communicate to members that they are much valued by their organizations—sending Christmas cards is one of the more mundane examples. The parties also aim to convey the approachability of the party leadership, signalling that party elites are down-to-earth individuals who are keen to be out among the grassroots. A key purpose is to show that everyone, from ordinary members to leaders, is equally important to the party's success. These representatives describe how the perception of being close to influential politicians can motivate members to remain active—this being is a recurrent idea among all the four parties:

> If you look at our MPs, they are very down to earth, and they are often very actively present in different kinds of events, so contacts with the national level are common. So the members have the possibility to communicate their issues to the MPs. The fact that people are allowed to be themselves is a specific characteristic of the party or the party's community spirit, and that is what also motivates me to go on being involved. (PS, R10)

> The big men, the party leaders, are there. You are among them. You can just go to [national party leader] Tom van Grieken and say: 'congratulations' or 'thanks for everything you are doing for our party'. And Tom will always be available to speak with you. And can you take a photo with him? Not a problem … And that does give a sense of togetherness that we want to keep creating. Other parties also do that.

> And that is the thing that you can give to people. It's a very small thing you can give to people to thank them for their support and their dedication. (VB, R32)

> The goal is now that every member of parliament from the SVP Switzerland meets people in his/her area or somewhere else, after every parliamentary session. Meaning … the local branch rents a room in a little restaurant and invites all members and sympathizers, and then the National Councillor talks about what happened in the last parliamentary session. (SVP/UDC, R22)

> I don't have any experience of other parties, but in my opinion what distinguishes us from the others is… that there is this bond… that is, you don't see any difference when we meet, you don't see the difference between activist members or supporter members, and deputies, senators, or [party leader] Salvini himself… Because when we are all together, there is no difference. (LSP, R8)

Several party representatives across our four cases stress the importance of creating a community spirit that goes beyond ideological agreement. Party representatives describe the events the party organizes as means to provide an informal environment, which is conducive to discussing political matters. Eventually, representatives always come back full circle and stress the importance of the community spirit that they say permeates their party:

> We have also organized more important events with high-profile guests, because in this way we can create and strengthen a group. Because, basically, while at the beginning we were a group of people who shared the same political interests, with the passing of time we became friends. (LSP, R30)

> It keeps a party together. It's good business if people know each other, appreciate each other and create a bond. So that they're also more engaged to do what they have to do. (VB, R15)

> Well, the premise is that there would be social bonding, so that one can informally discuss things in this kind of a 'sauna environment', and form interpersonal relationships. That's the goal. … So bonding and the forming of personal relationships. (PS, R3)

Social activities, where political issues do not explicitly take centre stage, are therefore key to fostering community spirit within the parties. Such events tend to be culturally specific—the sauna, for instance, features regularly in interviews in Finland. Social gatherings tend to reflect the ideal-typical place and community based on traditions and national values the party says it

wants to preserve—alluding to a romanticized 'heartland', in the words of Paul Taggart (2000). Hence, despite these activities mainly having a social character, they also have a strong ideological connotation. This quote from an SVP/UDC representative provides an illustration:

> We try to revive the roots of this country and the traditions and the solidarity. This is something that we in the SVP still live for. And I think this is indeed what we try to include in all our events: the cosy atmosphere and being together. Just our traditions. And this is, I think, something that is very important to us: those traditions, which somehow convey a sense of home [*Heimatgefühl*], and we pass that on. (SVP/UDC, R13)

One notable development that sets the current age apart from the era that saw the birth of mass party organizations over a century ago is the emergence of the internet and online communication. The literature has shown how the interaction between online (social media) activities by party members and sympathizers, on the one hand, and the parties' organizational practices, on the other, are 'breathing new life into the party form' (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley 2016, 285). In other words, parties are being rethought and reshaped via new technologies and media. The latter do not necessarily serve as replacements for in-person activities and interactions between party members and with sympathizers. Arguably, 'new forms of digital affiliation intertwine with "traditional" party membership to varying degrees' (Gibson et al. 2017, 103). In addition, online interactions can deepen 'party-related engagement by offering new avenues by which party members can provide parties with support, feedback, and resources', while also broadening 'party-related engagement by enabling those who are not party members to get involved' (Vaccari and Valeriani 2016, 297). In other words, online activities may well act as enablers and amplifiers of what happens face-to-face, and help the party to reach out to new audiences. Therefore 'digital media should be considered part of the solution rather than the problem of party crisis' (Vaccari and Valeriani 2016, 305).

Many of the party representatives we have spoken to indeed appeared to embrace the idea that social media served as an important enabling platform for party building. Our interviewees generally underlined the need for their party to be active on social media, and referred to the existence of online party communities. Many of them saw social media as important in shaping the views of party members, and instrumental in reaching out to sympathizers. In the words of this PS representative: 'Our biggest secret and guarantee for

success is that we have such active people both on social media and on the ground. So we're fighting on the ground, at sea and in the air' (PS, R4).

This League representative agreed that the entering of the digital age had consequences for the way the party had to be organized and managed:

> Obviously, the structure of the mass party is a structure that refers to the big parties at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was a different era… that was the time of the industrial revolution, while we are in the digital revolution. It's clear that we need to update the organization a bit … so that it can take into consideration the needs of a party structure as well as the needs of modernity. That's what we are trying to do. (LSP, R11)

Unsurprisingly, the generational gap between young social media-savvy adherents and an older cohort of members was acknowledged across the board. That is why the importance of face-to-face interaction and older forms of communication, such as newsletters, was also mentioned alongside social media. SVP/UDC representatives, in particular, stressed that traditional means of communication remained important to their party, not least due to the high average age of their membership: 'In our party, we are overaged, that is unfortunately the case, and we reach more people with letters than through the WhatsApp group' (SVP/UDC, R10).

Despite the fact that all of these parties make use of new technologies and grasp the opportunities to deepen engagement with their members and broaden the party audiences via social media, many representatives were nonetheless wary of encouraging merely superficial online engagement (or 'slacktivism'). Hence many interviewees underlined how crucial it was for members to keep meeting face-to-face, too. This is particularly interesting for us, since it requires maintaining a rooted structure on the ground with sufficient volunteers. Indeed, participating in activities in-person is often described as a sign of genuine commitment, and more meaningful than simply contributing to an online discussion:

> I believe that people still need to meet each other, to see each other, to physically meet. And yeah, how can that happen? At the café, with parties, with meetings in venues, and more. You see that a lot with all those protests that are announced via Facebook. A Facebook page comes up and you see 700 people saying that they're going to come, and you stand there and they're happy if they have ten people. That has to do with the fact that all those social media are without obligation … When people speak to each other, at meetings or events, and motivate each other and say, 'let's do this', it's different. (VB, R15)

> Being present in the street, not with posters, but being present among the people. Word of mouth publicity is still the best. There have long been studies that show merely putting up posters during election campaigns doesn't work. You have to be present in the street, or they think you no longer exist. (VB, R8)

In other words, in-person meetings, social events, and face-to-face canvassing remain key, according to party representatives. Indeed, through their online strategies, the parties often seek to *facilitate* face-to-face contact, rather than to replace it. This is still seen as a crucial form of interpersonal engagement, indispensable to build loyalty to the party brand. This conviction is widely shared by respondents from all parties, and captured by this Italian interviewee:

> The face-to-face meeting is absolutely fundamental, for the simple reason that even just the fact of doing something together, as a group, increases the feeling of involvement. Because in the end writing only on WhatsApp, or looking at each other via a webcam … it is true that there is a human being on the other side, but it is surely less… how shall I say it, there is less contact. Even just emotionally, in order to understand each other. (LSP, R24)

Challenges and reservations about party activities

As we saw previously, representatives do not exclusively paint a rosy picture of what happens within their parties. With reference to party activities, representatives openly discuss members' varying levels of commitment and interest. In other words, shaping views and identities is not always said to be a simple or straightforward process, as the party competes with members' other personal priorities:

> Especially in a big city [keeping members engaged] isn't easy. Because we often don't see those members; a lot of members also don't come to the activities. They just want to support the party or to show that they are in agreement with the programme but… actually of our members, it's usually the same group that we see coming everywhere to activities and such. (VB, R17)

> … there are many people who are only members in the party but not in any local association, and these people are the people who remain passive actors within the party. Sure, everybody does exactly what they want; one can be simply a member and support us and that's fine with us. They're still going to vote for us and support us with their own actions, so that will be just fine anyway. (PS, R22)

One common issue for political parties in Western democracies is the ageing of their membership and the lack of younger recruits (e.g. Cross and Young 2004; Heidar and Wauters 2019), as we have already pointed out earlier on. Some party representatives expressly acknowledge how difficult they find reaching out to people from younger generations, whom they regard as less likely to be engaged in party politics and traditional forms of activism, and yet are needed to counterbalance the ageing of their membership. Proposed solutions include addressing political issues that are important to younger generations and providing political career opportunities at an early stage, so as to entice the young to get involved. But across the four parties, engaging young people is said to be a challenge:

> Our problem, as some of my colleagues probably already mentioned to you, our problem is over-ageing. Our members are just old, and young people are difficult to motivate. (SVP/UDC, R6)

> Young people don't become members that easily. I have kids and grandkids, and young people get engaged for a project but less for a lifetime membership. That time has passed. People get involved in a concrete project. And that is where it stops at. (VB, R15)

> The most challenging thing is, I'd say, to activate the under 40-year-olds. I think that this kind of 'culture of associating' has dwindled. I don't know why it is not as popular as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. (PS, R21)

> In the past, we did a five-a-side football tournament, we organized it just for younger people. It was our intention to create a sort of group of young people who were struggling to find each other at the time, so this five-a-side football tournament was organized. (LSP, R12)

Taken together, our findings show that party representatives see the relative passivity of some members and the inherent interpersonal tensions and rivalries that emerge between people as inevitable challenges to be addressed, and not necessarily as problems to be hidden from view. PRRP representatives are open about the difficulties of building well-functioning mass parties, in terms of organizational functioning, as well as member recruitment and engagement. This is certainly the case in areas where there is no strong core of activists, as this PS representative illustrates:

> There are towns where things are more dead, or the people are older or tired, or the old activists have moved out or died and there are only few who remain. And it can

> largely hinge on personalities, whoever happens to live in some town and takes on a leadership role. (PS, R4)

Yet most of the representatives from the four PRRPs still see considerable value in building active communities of party members. As we have seen, these appear to not only be connected by shared political views, but also by a more general sense of companionship. The next section analyses the reasons representatives give as to why they still foster the mass party and usually appear to believe in it.

Motivations for keeping the mass party alive

In all four of our cases party elites have opted to invest in recruiting new members, building local branches, and organizing activities for the grassroots and party sympathizers. As we have seen above, these activities (sometimes aided by the deployment of new communication technologies) include politically oriented meetings with prominent speakers, training sessions aimed at supporting volunteers in carrying out their duties, but also social events aimed at socializing existing members and attracting new ones. Yet what are the reasons for party elites to adopt the mass party model in the first place? What is in it for them and the party? After all, running complex mass organizations requires considerable time, effort and resources. Furthermore, involving members and activists may have a destabilizing effect, especially in those cases in which not all members agree with party elites regarding, for instance, strategic decisions or choice of candidates.

For our analysis, we devised five main categories pertaining to the specific questions about the perceived advantages of the mass party model and member participation (see Appendix B for the questionnaire). These were inspired, in particular, by Scarrow's (2015, 102) conceptualization of the roles members fulfil inside and outside party organizations, and Richard Katz's (2002, 108) list of parties' incentives to retain a large membership. Two categories relate mainly to the public image of the party (public support and legitimacy) and three more to the party's internal operations (organizational functioning, funding, and creation of a community).

Our coding procedure is tailored to the specific nature of the information at hand, i.e. in-depth qualitative interviews with party representatives. We excluded the twenty-three pilot interviews with party representatives from this coding exercise, given that these were not yet based on the finalized

interview schedule. Each remaining interview was coded in a holistic way: the entire text of the interview was read and assigned the value of 1 when a given category was present, or 0 if it was not. This method bears some similarities with the holistic grading devised by Kirk Hawkins (2009) to measure populist discourse; however, unlike the latter, we are interested in uncovering differences in kind (i.e. respondents mentioning a given category, or not) rather than degree. To put it differently, our method can be defined as a content analysis that is holistic (since it focuses on whole documents, rather than unitizing text), but also adopts a checklist (since it assesses whether a given property is present or not). This allows us to measure the overall frequency of each category listed in our coding scheme.

Table 4.1 provides an indication of the relative weight of each of the categories, with three standing out: organizational functioning, public support, and legitimacy. As we will reveal below, in our interviews respondents insisted on what they saw as the many benefits of maintaining a complex structure and local activists 'on the ground'. Concretely, this party model was considered beneficial in terms of: (a) campaigning prowess, by informing the public about the party's ideology and helping it shape the views of voters, which can translate into additional electoral support and further membership growth; (b) legitimation, by boosting the visibility of the party in local communities (also outside of election periods), thus adding weight to its claim to be a 'party of the people' and helping to make the party look as an 'ordinary' (i.e. non-extreme) organization. This is an important objective for parties that are usually depicted as radical and xenophobic; (c) organizational strength and longevity, by means of creating a tight community

Table 4.1 Perceived advantages of a party model based on membership and activism

	LSP n=27	PS n= 21	SVP/UDC n=28	VB n=26	Total n=102
Organizational functioning	24 (88.9%)	16 (76.2%)	9 (32.1%)	19 (73.1%)	68 (66.7%)
Public support	11 (40.7%)	12 (57.1%)	17 (60.7%)	20 (76.9%)	60 (58.8%)
Legitimacy	24 (88.9%)	7 (33.3%)	14 (50%)	12 (46.2%)	57 (55.9%)
Community	23 (85.2%)	4 (19.0%)	5 (17.9%)	3 (11.5%)	35 (34.3%)
Funding	7 (25.9%)	2 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	2 (7.7%)	11 (10.8%)

Note: Values indicate number of interviews (and percentage of interviews) per case in which a category was coded at least once

that people value, and an efficient party machine. This allows the party to survive in times of crisis, including when leaders are changed or forcibly removed (an important difference between the 'mass' and the 'personal' party models).

Key advantages of the mass party

In line with Emilie van Haute's and Anika Gauja's claim that a well-functioning party organization 'contributes to the systemic functionality of political parties' (2015, 2), we found that party representatives frequently describe the community in very practical terms: as one that serves the needs and electoral goals of the party. In the words of this SVP/UDC representative:

> In my opinion, the benefits [of running a mass organization] are very big. [It's] the only way the SVP can function. That distinguishes us [from other parties]. We can mobilize, we have a high level of mobilization. We have a pool of helpers that we can access for actions. (SVP/UDC R15)

The answers are, generally speaking, consistent across our cases. Interviewees typically describe their members as 'unsung heroes' who volunteer for the party without reaping any concrete benefits from it. Far from suggesting that their party could nowadays thrive with few members and a minimal presence on the ground, many of the representatives stress the benefits of an active membership willing to volunteer time and resources to their organizations. One SVP/UDC representative described these active members to us as a 'standing army which can be activated at any time' (SVP/UDC, R6). Party activists are valued, even venerated, because of the time and effort many of them are willing to invest, without necessarily asking for anything in return. As these League and PS representatives put it:

> So there are militants who have perhaps been operating street stalls for thirty years and have never even managed to get into a municipal council, but they are the first to get up in the morning, to mount the stall at 7am on Saturdays and Sundays, and maybe they even arrive before me. (LSP, R10)

> We have a lot of people who are not especially striving for any positions of power; they just want to be involved. They are probably the most excellent people, who are willing to take part in the hard work of organizing events and setting up the tent and so forth. So we are trying to remember these folks. (PS, R17)

Across our cases, observations related primarily to organizational functioning were made less frequently by SVP/UDC interviewees. Their answers tended to focus more narrowly on gaining public support through campaigning activities, suggesting that the running of the party was seen more as the responsibility of the top SVP/UDC leadership. In other cases, however, we found that party officials were keen to describe the existential importance of activists in the running of the party apparatus:

> What keeps the whole thing on its feet is the grassroots … If you have members who put in effort and participate the movement remains alive. (LSP, R20)

> [the Finns Party] would have a really hard time operating without the people on the ground who keep in touch with the party, with the voters, with people in the municipalities, with the municipal institutions, and also with other stakeholders. (PS, R14)

> It needs to be a pyramid from the top to the foundations. And the foundations must be as broad as possible and have a large carrying capacity. Because otherwise the party leaders can't hold on. If that foundation isn't strong enough, then the whole system can become unstable. (VB, R10)

As the VB has faced electoral fluctuations, which representatives see as a function of the *cordon sanitaire* it is subjected to as well as judicial sanctions and negative reporting by the media, it is not surprising that having a large group of members is seen as crucial to this party's ability to function. As another VB representative said to us:

> I think that for us a member is more important than for another party because of our societal opposition. If you can directly trust people who are members, then they are your mouthpieces, they're the ones who communicate [with the public]. (VB, R13)

In terms of what activists do for the party, supporting seemingly mundane party activities is perceived as important, given that these activities are key to making the party seem more 'legitimate' and 'ordinary', and in generating public support through public-faced activities. Perceived advantages are thus often believed to be mutually reinforcing, to the point that such reasons, while conceptually distinct, are in fact interconnected in most of the evaluations provided by the interviewees. The pragmatic benefits of the mass party link to the parties' populist credentials, because a close connection to the 'ordinary people' provides organizational and electoral benefits. Many representatives emphasize that being present on the ground is a way to show

the party is close to, cares for and takes seriously the concerns of 'ordinary people':

> It gives a face to the Finns Party for people to see. Like, when we are in the marketplace: 'look, here are the people from the Finns Party, this is what we look like and this is who we are'. So people have the possibility to get to know us. So it creates the impression of being ordinary, as many people can have a very distant and black-and-white image of us. Giving people the opportunity to know us creates and enhances the party's brand. (PS, R8)

> The advantage of having a party with active members is the vitality of the supply. Being active means doing political activism and having interactions with the people, with the real world. The more your members do activities towards… real life people who are outside of parties etc., the more you can create added value for your party. (LSP, R11)

> It shows that we care about the grievances of the public from the borough … we try to take grievances seriously that are shared by parts of the population and talk about them in order to demonstrate that there is someone who cares about these issues and brings them into parliament with a motion. (SVP/UDC, R7)

Some representatives point out that interaction with the public is not always instigated by party members, but that some people feel free to approach activists directly with their grievances and demands. In these cases, the party can claim to act as the conduit of popular demands in political institutions, by showing that it takes people's problems seriously. As a VB representative said to us:

> Questions also come from people themselves. We also find this in the street, that people approach us and complain about things, such as litter, drugs. Well, concerning those things they bring to us, we can ask a question to the city council as city councillors. (VB, R12)

In the Italian case, too, concrete achievements at the territorial level are believed to directly improve and foster the legitimacy of the League, because 'once you reach a goal for your territory, it is something that is recognized by the citizens' (LSP, R11). As explained by another League representative, serving local people and communities is unthinkable without grassroots activism and a constant presence on the ground:

> We are operational twenty-four hours a day and 365 days a year, so we are present among the people … Politics is made every day by trying to solve

> people's problems, twenty-four hours a day. People live life 365 days a year: potholes, problems with your social worker, street lighting, rubbish and recycling, the noise that keeps you awake at night … These are things that you can't address only during the month before an election. (LSP, R11)

Several party officials note that in order to convey the image of a party that represents ordinary people, and which is not 'extreme', it helps to have activists that fit this picture and are visibly diverse:

> If we have a teacher in our party … we think that's really important because we know that a lot of young people are brainwashed by left-wing teachers with left-wing nonsense. … Or a police agent, or a nurse, or a taxi driver, people who spend every day in the real world of our society, we want to make members of them. (VB, R27)

> The television gives you an idea of the League, but you know your plumber, your newsagent, your neighbour, your sister's boyfriend, who is a member of the League. In the North, it is easy to meet someone who is a member of the League, and [this] gives the party a human dimension, with which people can identify, not just because there is Salvini on the television, but also because there is Roberto who is a tobacconist … And in my opinion, this makes a difference in terms of public perception: if you add up all the Giovannis [relatable LSP members] out there, one says: 'Well, those of the League are not Nazis… they are Giovanni'. (LSP, R29)

> If you have people who are in primary, tertiary, secondary [education], and who are of foreign origin … that's great for us. Because the UDC has an image as a racist party. So, if we have people with names that sound foreign, that's fine. (SVP/UDC, R18)

Activists are thus seen as essential to normalize the parties' message and key ideas. Our interviews show this to be especially true in regions where party branches are either weaker or still upcoming, something which applies across all our cases. According to this League representative, the League is 'still a party that is very demonized [and] the territorial presence allows you to counter this demonization' (LSP, R29). Activists and sympathizers are important for the public legitimation and normalization of the League, because they '[show] that there are people who think like us' (LSP, R15). Similarly, in the case of the PS, the party's focus on previously mentioned marketplace events, where local activists set up a stall at a public place to meet and to greet locals, can be explained by its desire to be regarded as legitimate and approachable by the public.

In a somewhat different way, but also connected to the desire to foster the image of being a broad 'people's party', several interviewees from Switzerland emphasized that activists were a good means to show that the party had moved beyond its agrarian roots. They were keen to demonstrate that the party's membership had a broader demographic profile than in the past, representing the people of Switzerland as a whole. One representative phrased it thus:

> The UDC is wonderful in the sense that it is a great party with people of completely different backgrounds. We have farmers, we have lawyers, we have economists, we have political scientists, and we have manual workers. We represent the majority of the population. (SVP/UDC, R27)

In other words, mass party structures are not just functional to the efficient running of a party but indeed essential to provide an aura of authenticity and credibility to these parties' claims to be 'in touch with the people'.

Clearly, however, conveying the image of being an 'ordinary people's' party is not an end in itself for vote- and/or office-seeking parties. Most representatives mention how presence and visibility on the ground translate into increased popularity and electoral support. Activists engaging in traditional canvassing activities or communicating online are therefore also considered as means through which to gain and maintain support:

> It's peculiar that always before elections our support increases … And it's because of the people on the ground. Primarily, or actually, fully. They've had the energy to work hard and to defend this movement and to advance its cause. (PS, R18)

> We are still always a political party, so the purpose is still to get a lot of votes at the elections. If you have an active group, then those are your people who recruit… and who ensure that as many people vote for you as possible. (VB, R9)

> They can mobilize the population. The more active the members, the more they can engage non-members… within their circle of friends. You can put up big advertisements… but it is more important if the statements and arguments come from family and friends. An active party of a certain size has more power and can achieve more … And that is why active members are important. (SVP/UDC, R5)

There is widespread agreement among party representatives that having a well-developed, rooted organization has helped their parties not only to secure popularity and growth, but also to survive during periods of crisis

and electoral decline. Interestingly, this is consistent with published research on the topic (e.g. Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016). As was pointed out to us in interviews:

> If there's one lesson we can learn from the period in which the Vlaams Belang … was in decline, let's say the years 2010 to 2014, it's that we could survive due to the strong structures, the cohesion that we had. (VB, R6)

> Such a member structure is incredibly important because it's the backbone. In your party, your membership structures, your branches, your party organizational members, are those you can fall back on when things are going wrong or when you lose an election. (VB, R15)

> We are definitely reliant on active local activity; this was key in 2017 when the parliamentary group split. The party was able to quickly rebound as the party leadership went immediately on tour to meet the members. I think this is one of the essential factors in our survival and new rise. (PS, R17)

> The League dropped to only 2.5 per cent of the vote in the past [in reality: around 4 per cent in 2006 and 2013]. We took off again because of the grassroots. The electorate was gone, the leader was gone [i.e. when the founder of the party, Umberto Bossi, stood down], there was nothing. We took off again because the grassroots were there. (LSP, R20)

Therefore, it is clear that the mass party structure is also seen by many respondents as something that their organizations can fall back on during periods of crisis, when the very survival of their parties may come into question.

Previously in this chapter, we have detailed how party representatives often use warm words to describe the community of party members. What we can observe in Table 4.1 is that, compared with other categories, the creation of a community tends to be coded less frequently. This reflects the finding that a party community is not necessarily sought for its own sake, as an end in itself, but is rather often perceived as a means through which to serve the organizational and electoral needs of the party:

> Having a closely-knit identity is very important. It is the power, the power of the sense of 'us', that propels us forward. And it will carry us also in times when things are going bad and the polls are going down. So it helps to have faith in the movement; it is the basis of everything, that we do things together. (PS, R18)

> A political party should not be seen as something that ends up with a victory in an election, or as something that will make me achieve an important personal result.

> It has to go beyond all that. You have to get results for the others, for everyone, and to be able to do that you have to create a group, because if you don't have a group of people who support you and who support your idea, you can't get anything. (LSP, R12)

Some interviewees went further and described the party community as something that has genuine intrinsic value—and this sentiment is particularly strong in the League:

> Being a community also brings you friendships, the pleasure of being together with people who maybe don't necessarily share everything but with whom at least you share some battles. (LSP, R10)

> I see an increasingly sad and lonely society and, therefore, if people also see the League as an opportunity to be together to find new people, who share the same passions and, above all, to belong to a group … one is even more motivated. (LSP, R17)

The literature on the creation of the League by its founder and long-time leader, Umberto Bossi, has repeatedly stressed how, at the beginning, Bossi was entirely focused on displacing the pre-exiting left-wing and Catholic cultures, once dominant in Northern Italy (Diamanti 1993). In areas in which the League grew strong, these cultures were replaced by a brand new political subculture inspired by the party's ideas: *leghismo*. Bossi did so by setting up a mass organization from scratch throughout the 1980s and 1990s that strived to build communities infused with the party's values, in ways reminiscent of those parties of the left that it was attempting to displace (the Italian Communists and Socialists) (Albertazzi 2016).

Yet in general, the identified advantages of the mass party typically relate more to a) the functional value of activist members in terms of visibility, legitimation, and helping the party to increase its support; and b) the activists' contribution to the functioning and sustainability of the party as an organization, particularly in times of crisis. These objectives are fulfilled by creating an efficient party machine, and building channels of communication with voters, as expressed by this official in Finland:

> [Without members, the party] would lack credibility, and it would lack the messengers who relay information both ways. The party would lack these small worker ants, the workers in the field who keep the party from collapsing. That's how it works, the party would have a really hard time to operate without the people on the ground who keep in touch with the party, with the voters, with people in the municipalities. (PS, R14)

One final note worth adding is that in our interviews there are very few references to the need to secure party funding from members (see Table 4.1). According to some PS representatives, the party's performance demonstrates that organizing successful political campaigns without access to huge sums of money is in fact possible, and both national and sub-national level representatives directly credit the party-on-the-ground for this: 'The secret of our success has been our collective action, doing things together; screw the money, it entirely destroys the collective mentality of doing things together' (PS, R17).

In other words, party elites within our parties expect their organizations to fund their activities by resorting to sources of income other than their members, and do not regard the latter as being precious primarily because they pay their annual dues. In fact, the costs associated with the administration of complex party organizations are sporadically mentioned as *disadvantages* of having a party with a sizeable membership. It is to these identified disadvantages that we turn next.

Disadvantages of membership and activism

Overall, party representatives speak in positive terms about the benefits of running complex organizations, as we have seen. To come to a balanced assessment, however, we also consider the potential drawbacks of the mass party model as identified by our interviewees. As will become clear from the analysis below, most identified disadvantages relate to the difficulty of managing interpersonal relationships, such as disagreements and the presence of members who do not always act in accordance with the party's interests. This is clear from Table 4.2, which categorizes perceived disadvantages based on an inductive assessment of interview answers. As this League representative sums up: 'human resources are certainly the most delicate and difficult part to manage and to organize' (LSP, R17). Yet representatives from all parties also argue that their parties have developed ways to deal with the identified disadvantages of a socially rooted and member-based organization.

Unwanted individuals and rogue members

Protecting the party from unwanted individuals, be they careerists, extremists, or infiltrators, is a typical concern for our interviewees. As was the case in the study of David Art (2011), we found interviewees being open about the

Table 4.2 Perceived disadvantages of a party model based on membership and activism

	LSP n=27	PS n= 21	SVP/UDC n=28	VB n=26	Total n=102
Unwanted individuals	25 (92.6%)	16 (76.2%)	28 (100%)	19 (73.1%)	88 (86.3%)
Intra-party disagreements	22 (81.5%)	13 (61.9%)	15 (53.6%)	3 (11.5%)	53 (52.0%)
Organizational complexity	16 (59.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (15.4%)	20 (19.6%)
Financial costs	8 (29.6%)	3 (14.3%)	1 (3.6%)	4 (15.4%)	16 (15.7%)

Note: Values indicate number of interviews (and percentage of interviews) per case in which a category was coded at least once

self-inflicted wounds and stigmatization caused by incompetent and extremist members. Some members are seen to use the party purely to further their own political ambitions. As respondents from the SVP/UDC and the League put it (these being parties that have repeatedly been in power at all levels of government): 'in a party that grew so much within the last twenty years, you can't avoid having opportunists' (SVP/UDC, R22); and 'there are a lot of people who now see us as strong and want just to gain something and pursue a career' (LSP, R10). Other interviewees refer not so much to the opportunism or disingenuousness of certain members, but rather to their lack of competence. This Flemish representative expressed their views very clearly: 'There are not really any other downsides [to having activist members] other than if they do something stupid' (VB, R20). While all parties try to screen candidates before they are admitted, representatives argue that there are limits to what can be achieved in this regard. These interviewees, for instance, revealed:

> We're trying to obtain information [about prospective members], but at the best of times, we've had almost 700 membership applications to go through in a single meeting, so one simply cannot manage everything. (PS, R20)

> I think the downside is that the bigger we get, the less oversight we have over who is a member. And the less we are able to screen some people who are members and hold their hands. (VB, R31)

In the case of Finland, the problem of having members who step out of line is exacerbated by the relative levels of autonomy enjoyed by the local branches

of the party. This means that the local branches can select their own leadership, organize their own activities, use their funding as they please, and plan how to take part in municipal elections. Most problems that have to do with local leaders, according to party elites, concern their alleged lack of initiative, the absence of interpersonal skills, or the fact that people may not be getting along well. However, the actions of certain individuals are said to have jeopardized the existence of entire associations. In addition, according to many Finnish interviewees, the online activities of individual party members (and some representatives) have had adverse effects, too. Party representatives have expressed concern to us about how 'inappropriate', aggressive, or outright racist social media communications by elected representatives or activists may have impacted negatively on the party's attempts to establish legitimacy as a 'normal party':

> If people keep talking in the party's name … then the perception of our positions might not correspond to our actual views … The risk is that our political line and ability to cooperate may, to a certain extent, be compromised if these negative things keep being associated with us. (PS, R7)

Unsurprisingly given the radical nature of these parties, interviewees regularly refer specifically to the challenge of keeping out individuals with overtly extremist opinions, who could weaken the reputations of PRRPs as parties embedded in democratic systems. This is a problem openly discussed by respondents from all four parties, who invariably claim that the party does not want or need such individuals. The following are typical answers on the topic:

> And that is actually the disadvantage with active members, if they don't think twice before they post something on Facebook, that could maybe be racist or something. Then it's picked up right away by the press. That's a bit of a disadvantage. (VB, R24)

> … we have accepted members who utter things that cause controversy, and we haven't properly investigated people's backgrounds and we have also given candidacies to people who shouldn't be allowed to be candidates. Especially during the era of Timo Soini's party leadership, member applications were accepted way too negligently in my opinion. (PS, R23)

Many respondents, however, add that other parties also face the challenge of dealing with 'rotten apples', careerists, and incompetent individuals. Yet representatives frequently complain that their party will always be the focus of

much more scrutiny by the media and society at large. As a Finnish respondent put it: 'the media always tear us apart' (PS, R9). Or, as one of our Italian interviewees said to us: 'if [a party member] writes a racist sentence … it is clear that there will be an article in [national newspaper] *Il Corriere della Sera* to which I must answer' (LSP, R10).

Several representatives also describe the way in which the party has learned to cope with the presence of unwanted individuals. As maintained by this League representative:

> There are black sheep, because in all families there are some, but if there is unity among the various members of the family, antibodies are also created against those who want to get in your way or create problems. To date, the antibodies, in addition to our people, have been our rules. So, our regulations have been our strongest antibody. (LSP, R12)

Unwanted individuals are, first of all, 'isolated' by the other members of the party (LSP, R17), and those who support extremist positions or damage the party are subject to 'disciplinary action right away, in order to disavow … a position that is not exactly that of the movement' (LSP, R11).

SVP/UDC representatives similarly discuss how the party dealt with less desirable members. According to them, when local sections realize that someone is joining merely to obtain a certain position, but lacks the drive and the competence, they will not support these members' ambitions and candidacies. This mechanism is said to apply to both opportunists and people with overly extreme views, according to this representative's statement:

> The automatic checks work here, also the opportunists … if somebody is a fraud who has nothing to offer and only says dumb things, then we don't put him on the list anymore. Then it is his loss and the same goes for extremists, and for the incompetent. Such people are removed from the system, if I may put it this way. (SVP/UDC, R6)

In Flanders, VB interviewees also discuss the means the party has to discipline rogue actors. One prominent party representative explained: 'We solve all that, and we solve it because we know the people [who are in] the structures and the executives … It's a selection mechanism and a defence mechanism that also happens quietly' (VB, R6). In this way, the problem of rogue members in the mass party is mitigated for most representatives by a clear disciplinary process that leads to silencing or even expelling such actors.

Intra-party disagreements

Leaving perceived troublemakers to one side, many interviewees freely admit that the reliance on activists, including the well-meaning and committed ones, inevitably brings a problem with it: that of managing different views and the disagreements that inevitably emerge between people. In Italy, for instance, representatives often discuss the problems caused by having to deal with 'different ideas' (LSP, R12), 'the clashing of personalities' (LSP, R17) and 'envy' (LSP, R14). Some local branches are even portrayed as 'toxic environments' (LSP, R11). As this representative explained:

> Sometimes it is not easy at all. This ability to mediate between supporters and activist members, on the one hand, and the leadership group, on the other, is quite rare, also because satisfying everyone is not easy. (LSP, R12)

As we have seen, our parties are often described as 'families', thanks to their successful community-building methods typical of mass parties. Clearly, however, quarrels are a common occurrence in even the most intimate of families, and our respondents have been open with us about their existence within their parties. In the words of these League representatives: 'sometimes there can also be a clash: it happens within a family, let alone in a political movement' (LSP, R19); 'as in all big families, someone quarrels, someone trips up, someone thinks they are better… in short, there are some things that need to be managed' (LSP, R11).

As Switzerland's political system is federal, and cantonal party branches have a certain degree of autonomy, tensions between regional party organizations were mentioned to us by some Swiss interviewees, too. Such frictions were often connected to power relations, and interviewees alluded to the privileged status that the most successful branches were said to de facto enjoy. As one interviewee said to us: 'It is important to know that the [French-speaking] UDC in Geneva is very, very widely regarded as a branch of the party in the German-speaking part of Switzerland' (SVP/UDC, R24).

Specific areas of contention include the form and style of the party's communication. For instance, some representatives from outside Zurich (which is usually seen as one of the most radical cantonal sections within the party) criticized the SVP/UDC's aggressive tone (SVP/UDC, R10), while others bemoaned the lack of connection and high-quality information flowing from the national to the local levels, and from the national level to ordinary members (SVP/UDC, R23). Ideological disagreements were also identified as

sources of internal conflict, and the party was sometimes said to struggle to reconcile the views of different societal groups. A case in point are farmers and businesspeople, who represent large constituencies the party targets but which are often characterized by different interests and opinions. As one representative said to us, 'there are frequent internal disputes about certain topics [between these two groups]' (SVP/UDC, R6).

As for the PS, despite members pointing out to us that the organization had lost control of the message on occasions, few were willing to suggest that the party should try to limit the right of individuals to freely express their views. For instance, several interviewees found it difficult to say where the line should be drawn in terms of the appropriateness of online behaviour:

> We have these people who are too abrasive or say inappropriate things, and you notice that many people get intimidated. But on the other hand, there are also people who like that there's a party in which one can call things as they are. (PS, R5)

> The party rules state that a reason for expelling a member can be that one has caused harm to the party. But then, what is regarded as harmful activity? In a party that resembles a citizen movement, there's also tough language, and we definitely are not afraid of this tough language, but you have to do it in an appropriate manner. (PS, R24)

Therefore, the party has decided against engaging in coordinated efforts to educate party activists on whatever is to be seen as 'appropriate' behaviour on online platforms. A member of the party executive argued that doing so would in itself be inappropriate, because 'free speech and individual freedoms are central themes for the party, and thus it would be stupid if we tried to operate in an extremely centralized manner' (PS, R21). Yet the party is quick to intervene when (online) communications intentionally disrupt the party's activities, expose intra-party conflicts, or attack the party's leadership.

Similarly, several SVP/UDC representatives revealed that, despite efforts by the party to shed its extremist stigma, there was a certain degree of leniency when it came to individual members' self-expression and the diversity of people's ideas. Members—especially those who operated outside of the limelight—were apparently given the 'benefit of the doubt' (SVP/UDC, R27) at times, because the party wished to accommodate a broad range of views: 'Well, for people who can cause problems with extremist ideas, you have to

decide whether that person can really damage the image of the party or not. Are they an active member of the party or not?' (SVP/UDC, R8).

Compared with the other cases, intra-party disagreements were not mentioned frequently by VB interviewees. In part, this seems to be a function of elite-induced narratives around party unity. One interviewee explained that internal disagreements and party unity were very much linked to the party's electoral performance:

> If the party is doing well, if it's winning elections, if you're going up in the polls, then everyone is happy. It's when you have election defeats, or when you have internal conflicts … then members also leave …. We try as much as possible to avoid that… I'm one of these people who tries to reconcile different views within the party. In the last few years, there have been no problems because we are always winning. (VB, R16)

Interviewees argued that internal issues affecting the party were often caused by unwanted individuals, rather than the existence of organized dissenting factions. Given that previous electoral declines were attributed to internal disagreements and that the party was performing well at the time of interviews, VB representatives did not seem particularly inclined to stress these kinds of problems within their party organization. For many within the VB, intra-party disagreements and unwanted individuals could be kept under control via centralizing more power in the hands of the national leadership. One interviewee described these dynamics to us as follows: 'That's a sort of top-down [organization], and from the bottom-up it's a machinery of people who are prepared to do what is asked of them' (VB, R6).

Across our cases, interviewees suggested that their parties have developed safeguards and organizational practices to curb the risks brought about by internal dissent, and highlighted the desire not to bring internal conflicts out into the open. As this Finns representative argued: 'You're supposed to have these discussions briskly within the walls of the party, not in public!' (PS, R18). Several League representatives, too, stressed that the mass party structures of the party can act as an effective antidote against internal conflict becoming too apparent to outsiders. The silent mechanisms of intra-party conflict resolution were described as such: 'the quarrel has to be resolved by a meeting taking place in the branch, by closing the door and resolving the issue' (LSP, R27). Ultimately, therefore, while the potential problems of maintaining a sizeable and diverse membership are acknowledged, intra-party disagreements are not usually portrayed as insurmountable obstacles for a well-functioning party organization.

Other disadvantages of the mass party

As alluded to before, rather than seeing the mass party model as a way to generate funding, a relatively small number of interviewees mentioned the management costs of sustaining membership and local branches as a disadvantage of this type of organization. In the words of these interviewees in Flanders and Italy:

> It costs money, eh? I know that sounds very disrespectful, but it comes to that… The membership cost is 12.50 euros. For that they get a magazine eleven times per year, and the printing and distribution of that already costs 35 euros. (VB, R14)

> [Sustaining local branches] comes at a cost. They are a commitment, a sacrifice, because in the morning then you find a dirty shutter, the windows broken by stones, excrement left by the door, etc. (LSP, R25)

Another problem that is mainly highlighted in the Italian case is organizational complexity. Several interviewees referred to the traditionally large and complex nature of the organization (akin to Marxist-Leninist parties), by citing the League's 'heavy' structure (LSP, R16), 'based on the organization of the old mass parties', and noting that it was clearly 'an organization made years ago [when the party was still called 'Northern League'], which was no longer in line with the times' and which 'needed to be made lighter and needed improvement' (LSP, R9).

Finally, particularly in those areas in which these parties rely on limited support, a small minority of the interviewed party elites expressed some doubts about whether investing in activism and public events was even worth it in the first place:

> I've been thinking a lot about whether we did work in vain, using up all of our free time before the municipal elections to organize events, marketplace events, tent events, and to be available to the public in meetings. Because, after all, in the municipal elections only a few people appeared to attract a significant number of votes, while many other candidates, who had been available at these events, got very few votes, and were not even close to getting through. (PS, R23)

On the whole, however, these are isolated voices within the four parties, as most representatives express radically different opinions, and emphasize the value of continuing to bring people together in real life. While representatives are generally frank about the fact that some of these people may be a vice rather than a virtue for their organizations, and realize that their parties have

an image problem, they see the problems this causes as an acceptable price to pay in exchange for the advantages of running a mass organization. Indeed, some interview answers suggest that the mass party model, not least through institutionalized ways of enforcing discipline, can effectively deal with the disadvantages of having a large membership base.

Conclusions

Aware of the importance of ideology and agency in determining organizational choices (Scarrow 2015, 20–21), we have listened to the voice of PRRP representatives explaining what grassroots activism means to them and their organizations. We explored how party communities were created and member identities shaped. We analysed what advantages (and disadvantages) party elites saw in this type of organization.

Representatives frequently described the dedication of active members who contributed to campaigning and other activities, and spoke about the importance of friendships and support networks that exist among activists. In line with the mass party model, we have seen in this chapter that all parties under study actively seek to shape a collective identity through political as well as social events, whereby informal interactions with fellow members as well as party leaders are considered an important motivating mechanism.

That representatives are serious about this is demonstrated by the variety of activities organized by PRRPs for their members, sympathizers and the public at large. These range from informative/purposive events (i.e. those aimed at advancing the party agenda) to activities focused on creating a social bond between members. The former include branch meetings and training sessions preparing activists for campaigning activities, seminars with invited speakers, and meetings with party representatives. The latter include social activities which vary depending on customs and national culture, but ultimately still mix conviviality with politics. Among other things, these help to overcome the feeling of isolation that can derive from the party's pariah status (especially in countries such as Finland and Belgium). Moreover, though not all members are equally active and some demographics are underrepresented, as is generally the case in political parties (e.g. Bale et al. 2019; Pedersen et al. 2004), this is not necessarily perceived as a fundamental problem by party elites—with the possible exception of the SVP/UDC, within which alarm is expressed at the ageing of the party membership.

Yet political parties are not social clubs; they typically have the ambition to win elections and gain power. From this perspective, building a socially rooted organization with activist members is not necessarily a logical choice. Running complex organizations requires considerable time, effort, and resources (Seyd and Whiteley 2004). Furthermore, involving activists may have a destabilizing effect, for instance due to interpersonal rivalries and conflicts, or when unruly or extremist activists taint the party's image (Art 2011). In our interviews respondents certainly highlighted these drawbacks: many were open about the inevitable divisions between members, the rivalries that can emerge, particularly around elections, and the problems that unruly individuals can cause to their organizations. But they often noted that tensions between individuals are a normal occurrence in any organization. They also frequently explained how the institutionalized enforcement of discipline (a key characteristic of mass parties) is effective in dealing with individuals harming the party's interests.

What is more, our interviewees mainly placed emphasis on the *benefits* of maintaining a complex structure and local activists 'on the ground'. In an age when new technologies are widely available and members do not appear to provide essential financial support to parties anymore, this chapter aimed to address what we regard as a very interesting puzzle: why are some party elites still willing to invest in activism and presence on the ground, rather than relying on 'lighter' and easier to manage models instead?

From our data, we concluded that fostering activism was considered especially beneficial in terms of:

a) *campaigning prowess*. Activists were considered key to informing the public about the party's ideology and policy proposals and helping it shape the views of voters, translating into broadening the party's appeal and electoral support, as well as further membership growth;
b) the *legitimation* that comes from having ordinary people represent the party down to the local level, also outside of election periods. This adds much weight to these parties' claims to be 'ordinary' parties 'of the people'. In other words, the organizational choice to foster activism is highly consistent with the ideological image these populist parties wish to convey (Scarrow 2015, 20–21), and important especially to PRRPs that seek to rid themselves of an extremist stigma;
c) *organizational strength and longevity*, by means of creating an efficient party machine and a tight community among members. This allows parties to survive in times of crisis, for instance when leaders are changed or forcibly removed—not a rare occurrence among PRRPs.

All this is not to say that our selected parties are fully returning to old-fashioned ways of organizing and campaigning, or that they are functionally identical to the mass parties of the early and mid-twentieth century. The elites running PRRPs are not Luddites, and have in fact embraced new technologies and social media as a way to socialize their members and to shape their views about current political developments. We also saw that the selected parties do not exclusively hold on to traditional notions of campaigning and spreading information through canvassing the public on the streets. PRRPs have all embraced new technologies, especially social media, albeit to varying degrees. In all cases, the internet allows parties and affiliated politicians to reach out to a wider audience.

Importantly, however, there is widespread agreement among our interviewees that new technologies should be seen as complementary, rather than an alternative, to more traditional in-person interactions, such as meetings, rallies, and events (see Gibson et al. 2017 for a similar observation based on data from France). In-person activities are seen as crucial not only to reach out to potential voters (especially of an older generation) but also to turn sympathizers into activists.

The constant focus on party activities that closely involve grassroots members clearly attests that the four parties in our study depart from the supposed trend of disengagement from activism that scholars have identified as a feature of their mainstream competitors (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Webb et al. 2002; Mair 2013). Hence, based on our findings, we can challenge ideas suggesting a one-way, 'one size fits all' movement from the mass party towards allegedly more contemporary models of party organization—such as the 'cartel party' model described by Katz and Peter Mair (1995) for traditionally dominant parties, and 'electoral-professional' (Panebianco 1988) types of organizations for newer parties. Ultimately, the study of how different models in fact coexist side by side allows us to recognize the uneven and contradictory nature of party-organizational development in the second half of the twentieth century, and the first quarter of the twenty-first.

5

Why Do Party Members Offer Their Commitment?

> *I bring something [to the party] and I want to influence things … and I can influence things. I am able to fight on the front line. And that's the goal. (SVP/UDC, M55)*

In the previous chapter we explained the reasons behind the adoption of the mass party model, by eliciting accounts of organizational practice and modes of activism from party representatives. Why do populist radical right parties (PRRPs) bother to maintain complex (and cumbersome) party structures reliant on the activism of members? We found that the communities shaped via the 'mass party' organization are believed to serve the functional and electoral goals of PRRPs, and to safeguard the parties' longevity. Rootedness on the ground and a widespread organization are furthermore seen by representatives as sources of legitimacy for their parties, as public visibility strengthens their claim to be 'the voice of the people' and helps to project the image of 'ordinariness' they aspire to.

In this chapter, we turn our attention to party members who show some degree of active involvement in their organizations—in other words, our study excludes purely passive members who refrain from attending party activities. This means that our findings are not necessarily representative of the party membership as a whole. In our study, it is especially the 'activists' who spend considerable time and effort in trying to make their organization function, whose perspectives we are interested in. Many of these activists in our sample have a formal function within the local branch of their party. It is these individuals who most clearly go against the identified trends of partisan dealignment and form the potential antidote to party decline (e.g. Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Mair 2013; van Biezen et al. 2012). In an age in which people are no longer expected to be willing to invest time and resources into traditional party activism, the chapter explores what PRRPs can offer today in terms of engagement and participation from the perspective of the active members themselves.

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One key puzzle we address is why grassroots activists are happy to participate in party organizations that, as we have established in Chapter 3, grant relatively little decision-making power to their members—what has been called: 'participation without power' (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021a). In our analysis, we sought inspiration from Peter Clark's and James Wilson's (1961) categorization, as further developed by Daniele Albertazzi (2016). This categorization allows us to analyse the activists' motivations for joining and staying, and to determine the reasons behind their activism. Accordingly, we distinguish between:

a) **Material** incentives, referring to material gains from party membership, including political career opportunities and (financial) benefits for members' businesses. In this category, the gain must come to the individual member or close associates/family, and not to a wider community, or society as a whole.
b) **Purposive** incentives, referring to the belief that membership serves a wider purpose. In this category, members may express agreement with specific party policies, or the motivation to shape/change politics in ways consistent with a certain ideology.
c) **Personal** incentives, which do not relate to specific material gains, but rather to seeking and finding a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction, personal gratification, growth, intellectual development etc. As in the 'material' category, the gain comes to the individual rather than to the community.
d) **Communitarian** incentives, on the other hand, refer to motivations related to the feeling of being part of a certain community, e.g. a 'winning team', a circle of friends or 'family', or else a group of like-minded people.

These categories may overlap in practice and could thus be double-coded in our analysis. For instance, one may find a purpose and/or sense of personal gratification via participation in the activities of a close-knit group.

The chapter will proceed as follows. First, we provide a brief overview of party members' routes into activism and motivations for joining. The subsequent section provides a more extended discussion of the typical life of active members within the party, focusing on their roles, activities, and experiences. In this section we assess whether, in line with the mass party model, the parties manage to integrate their activists into a community of like-minded individuals, thus shaping a collective identity (Panebianco 1988). We then turn our attention to how party members assess their parties' functioning, reflecting especially on more critical evaluations about (a lack of) grassroots

influence and perceived disadvantages of membership. Finally, we discuss what motivates individuals to *stay* in the party, despite the clear drawbacks that many interviewees identified—not least the experience of stigmatization within their communities which can be seen as a deterrent for participation (Ammassari 2024).

If the previous chapter clarified why party representatives wished to foster activism, this chapter will help us clarify 'what's in it' for party members. While there are some studies on why people choose to become active within PRRPs (e.g. Ammassari 2023a; Klandermans and Mayer 2006; Whiteley et al. 2021), whatever makes party members *stay* after they have joined has not yet attracted enough scholarly attention (but see Ammassari 2023b). Therefore, in comparison with most existing studies, we aim to offer a more dynamic account of what motivates PRRP members to remain active within the party (see Gauja and van Haute 2015, 200). Key to our findings is the observation that a *collective* sense of efficacy is key for PRRP members to join as well as stay. While they are often aware of their limited influence as individual members, many of our interviewees emphasize the sense of being part of an efficacious movement that represents their values and beliefs as a key driver of their continued activism.

Routes into activism and motivations for joining

Existing studies have consistently shown that party members are not representative of the population at large in terms of demographic characteristics such as gender and age. Generally speaking, older people and men tend to be overrepresented among party members (e.g. Bale et al. 2019; Cross and Young 2004; Gallagher and Marsh 2004; Pedersen et al. 2004; Van Haute and Gauja 2015). We find a similar skew in our four samples consisting of twenty-six League members, and twenty-five members each of PS, SVP/UDC, and VB.[1] We interviewed party members from all age groups, with a particularly strong representation for middle-aged members (45–55 years old). The average age of interviewees across our parties fell in the lower end of this age bracket. However, with an average age of 51, SVP/UDC interviewees were slightly older. In terms of gender, male interviewees formed the majority in all four party samples (VB 75 per cent; LSP 73 per cent; PS 60 per cent; SVP/UDC 56 per cent). While we consciously aimed to include female interviewees in our samples, we found that there was much more reluctance among female members to be interviewed. Although we were clear with

[1] In one Belgian interview (M46), two members were interviewed simultaneously, so the total number of interviews with VB members is twenty-four.

respondents that we hoped to understand their *personal experiences* and that, for this reason, everyone's contribution was precious to us, women generally appeared more doubtful as to whether they were knowledgeable enough to sit through an interview.

Asking interviewees about routes into joining the party generated interesting qualitative data (see Chapter 4 for details on our holistic checklist method of content analysis, and Appendix C for the questionnaire). Members of all parties revealed that joining their organization had often been encouraged or inspired by people close to them. Roughly half of interviewees across the four cases mentioned that family members or acquaintances played a role in their decision to join. As Bert Klandermans and Nonna Mayer (2006, 270) previously found, family tends to be 'the most important socialization agency' for extreme right activists in several West European countries, most of whom were 'exposed to the same kind of ideas and values since their childhood'. Recent research has similarly revealed that 'having relatives and/or friends who are members of the party reduces the stigma of joining PRRPs, becoming active in them, and talking about politics in public' (Ammassari 2023b, 723). Besides such narratives about recruitment through (or inspired by) social connections, around half of interviewed League and SVP/UDC members revealed that the party had been actively reaching out to them, and similar claims were even more frequent among VB and PS members.

While they were often encouraged by people they knew and/or by the party reaching out to them, interviewees from most of our parties also frequently mentioned specific political events, such as election victories, as the ultimate triggers for joining. League interviewees were the exception, as they regularly referred to the leader being a stimulating force instead. Several older members of the party referred to the party founder, Umberto Bossi, when reflecting on the key reasons for joining, while younger ones mentioned the new leader, Matteo Salvini. In these cases, the leader was often seen as the *embodiment* and *conduit* of the party's values and ideas, effectively connecting personality and ideology (see Moffitt 2016). Extended studies of the League published in the 1990s already stressed how members of this party would argue in interviews that Bossi *was* the party (Biorcio 1997, 237–248). This was meant to signal both that the party could not exist without him, and that whatever the organization stood for was perfectly embodied by the words and deeds of its founder and leader.

When we explicitly asked interviewees about their *motivations* for joining their parties, responses often referred to social networks, the party reaching out, and the appeal of the party leadership as well (also in the cases outside of Italy). Alongside various idiosyncratic reasons, these were coded as 'other' reasons for joining (see Table 5.1). When we consider our main comparative

Table 5.1 Reasons for joining the party

	LSP n=26	PS n=25	SVP/UDC n=25	VB n=24	Total n=100
Purposive	22 (84.6%)	21 (84.0%)	22 (88.0%)	21 (87.5%)	86 (86%)
Personal	3 (11.5%)	6 (24.0%)	13 (52.0%)	4 (16.7%)	26 (26%)
Communitarian	3 (11.5%)	8 (32.0%)	2 (8.0%)	1 (4.2%)	14 (14%)
Material	1 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	9 (36.0%)	4 (16.7%)	14 (14%)
Other	14 (53.8%)	16 (64.0%)	8 (32.0%)	4 (16.7%)	37 (37 %)

Note: Values indicate number of interviews (and percentage of interviews) per case in which a category was coded at least once

categories of interest, the overwhelming majority of our interviewees mentioned reasons that could clearly be coded as 'purposive'. Incentives related to the belief that membership serves a wider political and ideological purpose emerged as crucial among our interviewees. This is in line with previous research on the key incentives explaining participation in party life, stressing the centrality of purposive incentives for joining political parties of various kinds (Bale et al. 2019a; Fjellman and Rosén Sundström 2021; Gallagher and Marsh 2004: 410; Pedersen et al. 2004; Van Haute and Gauja 2015).

Our findings are also consistent with recent research showing that many members of PRRPs 'are driven by a strong sense of political efficacy' that is connected directly to the party family's ideology (Ammassari 2023a, 2). In other words, joining a PRRP is a means through which people feel they can 'most effectively redress' a series of perceived grievances and 'improve their situation and that of "their" people' (Ammassari 2023a, 13). This again highlights the crucial role of purposive incentives, and more specifically the PRRPs' nativist ideology, to explain political participation in the life of these parties. Previously, Klandermans and Mayer (2006, 271) observed that extreme right activists were typically characterized by 'in-group favouritism' and the conviction that foreigners posed a 'threat to the integrity of their people and their culture'. Alongside more general statements denoting ideological alignment and confidence that the party can have a positive influence on the future of their country, the perceived need to curb immigration was mentioned in a considerable number of our interviews, too:

> I want things to go well in my country. And I notice that there are large streams of foreigners coming to us and a lot of replacement of our norms and values. The government also isn't working as it should, and I thought the best way to do something positive is to make sure that the Vlaams Belang keeps growing. (VB, M48)

> I thought that the SVP is the only party that addressed problems such as overpopulation because of immigration… and if you look closer, there are several villages where people don't have Swiss names anymore. This was the reason… this was my main motivation. (SVP/UDC M51)

> [I joined] with the aim of … being masters in our own home. [The moment came] when we started having this invasion of illegal immigrants. (LSP, M51)

> Now that I give it more thought, that was the most important reason for me to even join the Finns Party in the first place. Because the Finns Party opposes this so-called humanitarian immigration, and now we have already seen the problems it has brought, the rapes and such. … The main reason I joined the Finns Party was to resist immigration. (PS, M26)

Personal reasons for joining—related to non-material rewards that include intellectual gratification or a 'thirst for knowledge' (PS, M31)—were mentioned regularly, too. Over half of our Swiss interviewees revealed that they had joined because of the personal satisfaction and experience that came with working in local party branches on topics that interested them. In other cases, personal reasons for joining were less frequently given, but where they were, interviewees typically noted that the party fitted well with their sense of self, their regional identity or family background.

Communitarian incentives for joining—being motivated to become part of a community—were not very common across our interviews. This is not necessarily a surprise given that the nature of the party community would have been largely unknown to members prior to their joining. Among those members who did mention communitarian motivations, this PS member argued that 'the whole party scene fascinated me, because it appeared that the people [within it] were very welcoming and that it would be fun to do things with them' (PS, M48). This 21-year-old Italian interviewee argued that 'being able to join a community was personally making me feel less alone … I finally felt like I belonged somewhere' (LSP, M54). Notably, the importance of communitarian incentives increased as reasons for *staying*, as we will see later in this chapter. Many members clearly started valuing the bond they developed with other members after they joined.

Our results further indicate that material incentives were rarely mentioned as a key motivating factor for joining the selected PRRPs, which is also in line with existing studies on the membership of political parties in general. As Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley (1992, 61) note, the decision to join political parties cannot be explained purely with reference to 'selective incentives'; that is, concrete benefits to the individuals becoming members, such as being able

to embark on a political career. While interviewees sometimes acknowledged certain fairly mundane material benefits, such as being kept up-to-date with networking events in their local and national communities, these were not normally described as instrumental to their decision to have joined. More substantial benefits, such as enhanced career and business opportunities brought about by membership, were also rarely mentioned, with the notable exception of the SVP/UDC (one third of interviewees). This party is known to be a business-friendly party, which is likely related to some of our respondents being open about the fact that joining it had strengthened their business connections, and/or provided them with knowledge that they found useful in their working life.

To the contrary, as we discuss in more detail later on, a considerable number of interviewees revealed that joining a PRRPs had in fact had a *malign* impact on their professional and personal lives. This is in line with previous research highlighting the personal sacrifices that PRRP members claim to have experienced as a result of their party affiliation (Albertazzi 2016, 123).

Roles, activities, and experiences

As we discussed in Chapter 2, among the key characteristics of the mass party model as we define it are rootedness on the ground and the provision of a variety of activities to members, as well as the fostering and preservation of 'collective identities through ideology' (Panebianco 1988, 268). In our interviews with grassroots members we intended to gauge whether our chosen parties indeed meet these particular criteria. In the previous chapter we focused on the efforts of party elites to build a mass party structure through various organized events and activities. In this chapter, we ask whether parties in fact succeeded in creating close-knit political communities of activists, in promoting social integration among them, and in shaping their interpretations of political developments. We also consider whether the generally positive appraisals of elites about the nature of the party community were echoed by ordinary members.

Members' engagement in different types of party activities

The active PRRP members that we selected for our study report that they partake in a rich variety of activities, both within and on behalf of their party. Yet the frequency of engagement appears to vary quite starkly between our cases.

Table 5.2 Member involvement in different types of party activities

	LSP n=26	PS n=25	SVP/UDC n=25	VB n=24	Total n=100
In-person political activities	20 (76.9%)	20 (80.0%)	21 (84.0%)	17 (70.8%)	78 (78%)
Online political activities	19 (73.1%)	24 (96.0%)	11 (44.0%)	16 (66.7%)	70 (70%)
Campaign activities	22 (84.6%)	20 (80.0%)	7 (28.0%)	15 (62.5%)	64 (64%)
Social activities	21 (80.8%)	11 (44.0%)	16 (64.0%)	15 (62.5%)	63 (63%)
Training activities	5 (19.2%)	3 (12.0%)	2 (8.0%)	3 (12.5%)	13 (13%)
Service-oriented activities	6 (23.1%)	1 (4.0%)	3 (12.0%)	1 (4.2%)	11 (11%)

Note: Values indicate number of interviews (and percentage of interviews) per case in which a category was coded at least once

League interviewees appeared to be the most active—with most of them declaring they engaged in party activities at least once a week. The SVP/UDC members we spoke to, on the other hand, were generally active less than once a month, while VB and PS interviewees fell somewhere in between; they often reported to be involved in party activities at least once a month. These differences also expressed themselves in the qualitative interview data that we gathered, as we will discuss in what follows.

Table 5.2 shows the activities mentioned by the members of the four selected parties—the categories were created based on an inductive assessment of the answers. Most respondents in our total sample engaged in in-person political activities, campaign activities, and social activities organized by their parties. Training activities (e.g. on public speaking or preparing for public office) and service-oriented activities related to helping people in the community were mentioned much less often.

Campaign activities were brought up particularly often by League members, especially the street stalls set up to canvas the public. As two respondents explained to us: 'we talk to people, we organize gazebos [street stalls], there is a strong territorial presence everywhere, especially where the League is rooted' (LSP, M45); and 'we don't set up gazebos only when there is an election, we're not present in the square only when there are elections. We

have understood that you need to follow the people, the people are sovereign, the people are sacred' (LSP, M35). It is immediately clear from this example that mixing 'with the people' is not just seen as a way to gain votes, but rather justified in line with the party's populist character. In the League, social activities are particularly prominent too: respondents frequently describe convivial gatherings or other pastime activities. As was also very apparent from interviews with party elites (see Chapter 4), social activities are nevertheless interlinked with politics. In the case of the League, for example, the very popular annual event in Pontida (Lombardy region) is seen as the climax of political as well as social interactions.

Similar to the Italian case, answers by VB members tend to fall primarily in the categories of political, campaign, and social activities. Political activities include speeches and informal visits to local members by party representatives (for example, in local pubs or cafes). Social activities are of great importance to the VB, too, and members mentioned the same events that were also identified by party representatives, such as barbecues and dinner parties, guided walks and other outings. Very much in line with the party's nativist ideology, culturally specific events are important to VB members. These include 'Breughel-style' parties, which use traditional settings akin to the works of the famous Flemish painter to strengthen the feeling of community among party members. As in the case of the League, these predominantly social activities usually include a political element too, for example a short speech by a national-level politician or local representative, thus using entertainment as a wedge for the introduction of serious themes and the reiteration of the party's position on specific issues. This is an important way in which party elites shape members' views, and is arguably more effective than long presentations and meetings in terms of socializing members.

More attuned to the cultural customs in Finland, social activities mentioned by Finns members include going to the sauna, and attending sausage and barbeque parties. Notably, however, social events as part of PS activities were mentioned by fewer than half of the interviewees, which partly appears to be explained by the cold Finnish winter months. Yet also in this case, there is not always such a clear boundary between in-person political and campaign events, on the one hand, and social events, on the other. Prior to elections, for example, so-called 'tent events' stand out as prominent campaign gatherings, which were also described as 'really fun' (PS, M26), given that they provide an opportunity for meeting people whilst enjoying coffee and snacks.

Culture-specific social activities that mix politics with socializing and entertainment, such as 'farmer's breakfasts', are also very common in

Switzerland. The 'Albisgüetli convention' taking place every year in Zurich provides another example of a setting in which politics and conviviality are meant to mix. Here, as SVP/UDC members told us, political speeches can be attended in conjunction with live concerts and the enjoyment of food and drinks. In other words, such an event allows members to spend time together and feel part of a community.

Looking across our cases, we have found that members from all the selected parties generally describe party activities in the same terms as the representatives covered in Chapter 4. Judging from our interview findings presented here, the party organizations succeeded in effectively mixing convivial moments with serious references to the party message, as a way to shape members' opinions without having to always require the attendance of arguably more mentally draining debates and meetings.

There is, however, some noticeable cross-case variation too. It is evident that the Swiss case stands out in terms of the lower number of interviewees actively engaged in campaigning for the party. Several of them appeared particularly apprehensive about the stigma associated with being an SVP/UDC member—a topic which we discuss in more detail below. The most frequently mentioned reason for *not* campaigning is that members felt exposed and faced with negative reactions and hostility within their community, which shows how stigmatization can be an important deterrent for radical right activism (Ammassari 2024). As one member said to us: 'I often thought about putting up one of the SVP's campaign posters in my garden. And then I did not do it because I thought of the neighbours that live close by' (SVP/UDC, M42).

Swiss interviewees also stand out in terms of their more limited engagement with online political activities—fewer than half mentioned that they actively engage online. This is consistent with what we found when interviewing party representatives from this party (see Chapter 4), who often pointed out that many of their members showed a preference for engaging with the party via more traditional means, rather than virtually. The fact that the average SVP/UDC interviewee was somewhat older relative to participants in the other countries may play a role here. Frequently mentioned explanations for steering clear of online activities were a general disinterest in using social media and the perceived importance of face-to-face activities.

On the contrary, virtually all PS interviewees said they engaged in online political activities. One interviewee declared that 'social media is very important in my activism. I haven't been so much present physically' (PS, M36). Yet others expressed more mixed feelings about online types of activism, and we find similar sentiments in our other cases as well. For instance, this League

member in his 30s argued that 'I don't like it. Online activities are quite limiting. I do it, though' (LSP, M37). A fellow member in his 70s lamented that 'nowadays people meet up and everyone's on their phones' (LSP, M38). Overall, it is fair to say that online engagement was sometimes felt to be a necessity rather than a choice, and that older respondents were often more hesitant in extolling the internet's virtues.

Modern-day mass parties can nevertheless hardly ignore the existence and opportunities provided by the internet, and parties such as the VB have actively developed their social media campaigning (Sijstermans 2021). The Corona/Covid-19 pandemic of the early 2020s was a momentous event that forced political parties to shift their activities online. Yet this is generally not seen as a positive development in terms of the enjoyment of party membership. One younger Flemish member, for instance, recalled: 'We did one online event. But it's boring… people want to chat close together, you know, "let's go smoke a cigarette and talk outside with a beer". It's different than being online [talking] to a screen' (VB, M41). This League interviewee shared the following with us: 'because of the pandemic the meetings are done online. I'm not particularly excited about this, because I like human contact, while online is a bit depersonalized' (LSP, M45). One Finnish interviewee went so far as to state that 'there was a lot more of a community [prior to the pandemic], but during Corona it has been miserable' (PS, M26).

In the end, our data show that people from the four parties still very much value in-person activities and the personal fulfilment these tend to generate. In that sense, many activities of our selected parties resemble those of the traditional twentieth-century mass parties, and there is no clear demand from grassroots to change this in modern days. If anything, the Covid-19 pandemic may well have decreased the desire among grassroots members to shift the focus to more online activities.

Party identification and sense of community

Thus far, we have primarily focused on what members *do* and how they describe the activities they engage in. But do they truly feel part of a close-knit *political* community characterized by a clearly defined shared ideology? We have previously observed different levels of engagement across our parties, in general and in terms of specific activities. Do these differences also translate into different appraisals of the party as a community of like-minded and connected individuals?

As was the case in party elite interviews (see Chapter 4), the League has often been likened to 'a family' by its members. Several members revealed to us that the party community has been a place for finding new friends. According to one member: 'the League took half of my life and for me it is my second family' (LSP, M35), while a female respondent told us: 'You work and in your free time you spend time with the League, whereas others go out with friends or practice sports. My boyfriend is also a League supporter, my friends as well. It really becomes like a second family' (LSP, M36). Generally speaking, then, League members appear to identify very strongly with their party, which is in line with findings from previous research (Albertazzi 2016).

If SVP/UDC members appear less keen to spend a lot of time involved in activities that support the party, at least compared to their League counterparts, their identification with the party also seems to be less strong and their emotional bond to it weaker. The sense we get from our Swiss interviewees is that they see the party more pragmatically as a means to achieve their ideological aims. Some SVP/UDC members went as far as saying to us that the party only plays a marginal role in their life, which is not a response one would usually get when speaking to League members. As one interviewee put it, within their life the party 'is one of many things, not something major' (SVP/UDC, M59).

Generally speaking, however, SVP/UDC interviewees did appreciate the party's attempts to stimulate active engagement and to create a sense of community among them. Many events organized by the party serve as opportunities to receive information and to meet political representatives in an informal setting. This, they said, increases the feeling of being part of a community. As one member said to us: 'I think such events are very valuable… to provide an opportunity for normal members to be closer [to party representatives], instead of just seeing them on Swiss Television' (SVP/UDC, M49). Still, within the SVP/UDC many respondents noted that they treated fellow party members more as acquaintances or business partners than as close friends. As one member put it: 'The other members are people I know from the village. We say hello and see each other at municipal events but we did not develop a friendship' (SVP/UDC, M54).

While generally more active in their party than their Swiss counterparts, VB interviewees' identification with the party and closeness to other members also tends to vary. Several said that the VB is central to their community and daily life ('my best friends are all in the party', said member VB M40). Some noted that these friendships began and were cultivated at social events organized by the party, and one even spoke of 'one happy family' (VB, M44).

However, we also found people who treated party activities more as business meetings, and who sounded less interested in events mainly focused on the creation of a community. Several VB interviewees, furthermore, openly discussed conflicts between members during events. Yet, like in the other cases, the metaphor of the party 'as family' was often brought up:

> The Vlaams Belang is actually a family. A family respects you. You care for each other. … That's one of our existential values: members take care of each other, motivate each other, boost each other's morale. Yeah, of course sometimes you can get grumpy with someone… but we are respectful towards each other. (VB, M36)

It is also common for Finnish interviewees to consider the PS to be playing a 'big' role in their lives, with members typically highlighting that they have found many friends in their party, or describing the party community in terms of a family relationship:

> You could say that we are a family. There are some with whom you don't get along so well, and with others it's like: one starts a sentence and another finishes it. So it's a very close relationship. (PS, M43)

> I'd say that my best friends are from the party. Then thinking of the whole community, it is sort of family. While there are 'black sheep' whose actions you don't approve of, it's still your own group. (PS, M46)

Interestingly, these friendships are said to be cemented by a shared sense of purpose and ideology. For instance, this interviewee explained that 'I wouldn't say that they [other party members] are my close friends, but they are my *ideological* friends' (PS, M39, our emphasis). This shows, once again, how crucial purposive incentives are for these parties. Yet also in the Finnish case, clashes and differences of opinion are openly discussed by our interviewees. Not all Finnish interviewees painted an overly idealized image of life within their party, and several described tensions and animosities. Some also described their instrumental approach in seeing party membership primarily as a means to a political end.

Generally speaking, it is clear that commitment to one's own party and closeness to fellow party members vary between but also *within* the four cases analysed in this book. All parties host a core of committed activists who identify strongly with their organizations, even though some are open about seeing their relationship with the party in more instrumental terms: as the means through which political change can be achieved. Yet similar

to party elites discussed in the previous chapter, party members also tend to frequently describe their party community as a 'family' marked by occasional conflict and difference of opinion, but also by a sense of belonging and a shared identity.

Many members thus share the same perspective on the party community as party elites, but do they also perceive those higher up in the party as seriously caring about their efforts, and responsive to their demands? More generally, what is their appraisal of the vertical relationships within the party organization, and are there particular things they are dissatisfied with in terms of the way the party functions? The next section addresses these questions.

Perceptions on power relations and the personal costs of membership

In mass party organizations, grassroot members and party elites fulfil fundamentally different functions. In Chapter 3 it became clear that, as was the case within historical mass parties, it is the elites that genuinely control our selected parties. As we will discuss in what follows, our interviews show that members generally appear well aware of their limited power as individuals: they recognize party ideology is determined, communicated, and enforced by elites. Some complaints notwithstanding, they also tend to accept their lack of influence over internal decisions.

Enforcement of the party line

The focus on making sure members interpret political developments in ways that are consistent with the party's agenda is typical of the mass party organizational model. Our interviewed PRRP members are mindful that party elites aim to shape members' perspectives, and few seem to be bothered by it. Several League members, for instance, explained to us that the party sought to encapsulate members by various means, including setting up political schools for them. One member observed that when decisions were not shared by all members, the party sought to persuade them 'with facts and also with internal propaganda' (LSP, M37).

Within the VB, there is also a clear elite-driven effort to build a like-minded and rooted party community, of which members are very aware, and to which they also do not seem to object. In interviews, members felt that branch and national party meetings, house visits, and organized events were all important ways through which the party aimed to communicate its positions to

ordinary members so as to create a united front. This member described the process of socializing members as one that happened in subtle ways: 'what parliamentarians or the leader will do is go and speak at local events, and in that way they may influence the ideas of members, or they confirm certain intuitions that members might have' (VB, M45).

Informing members about 'genuine' party positions is seen as being particularly important in the Belgian context, as members believe there is not only a political *cordon sanitaire* set up against the VB, but a *cordon médiathique* too (see de Jonge 2019; 2021). In other words, they see the party as being ostracized by the media, which legitimizes the party's attempts to reach out to them to put its viewpoints across. One respondent explained that the party's social media channels are instrumental to this: '[members] come across different opinions from the ones expressed by the [mainstream] media. That really affects people and they think: "yeah that's right what [the VB] is saying"' (VB, M54).

A similar observation was made in the Finnish case, where an interviewee observed that party communication could be seen as a means 'to correct what is being said in the media' (PS, M29). Responses of other activists point to the 'attempts to create an [internal] consensus on important issues' (PS, M25)—'if it is done skilfully', one member noted, 'the people don't even notice they are being steered' (PS, M31). In the Finnish case, too, we detected very little concern about PRRPs trying to influence their grassroots, and a widespread acceptance that this is how parties must operate to present a united front vis-à-vis a hostile world.

In our interviews with SVP/UDC members, by contrast, we did not find concrete evidence of members sensing party elites were trying to 'socialize' them. This finding seems consistent with the more general nature of Swiss political parties being comparatively decentralized and marked by weaker internal homogeneity (Ladner 2001), but it irrespectively makes the case deviate again from our other selected PRRPs. Members saw events organized by the party mainly as opportunities to *receive information* and meet political representatives informally, rather than settings where opinions were consciously moulded. When asked how they felt the SVP/UDC was trying to communicate its values and proposals to members, many respondents emphasized the party provided balanced information during meetings and workshops, rather than identifying attempts to influence members' opinions more explicitly. As one member put it:

> At these meetings we have debates and there is a person for and one against it [any proposals]. We invite external people who are against the position we consider. And we debate and then we vote. It is very democratic. (SVP/UDC, M50)

It is very difficult to envisage a party such as the League allowing such an open debate to take place within its walls (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015). Indeed, among our cases, the League appears to stand out as the most typical case of a mass party, when we consider the sense of community and the party's efforts and success in achieving value infusion and member encapsulation. Judging from experiences of interviewed members, the SVP/UDC stands further removed from the mass party ideal type, and appears less invested in actively shaping what its members think of the party and of political developments.

Relationship with party elites

Overall, most of our interviewees recount positive evaluations of their party organizations and of life within their parties, which is in line with research conducted on other PRRPs (Pirro and Róna 2019, 616–621). Our four parties, therefore, tend to be seen as well organized, efficient, and reasonably well run. We have seen in Chapter 3, however, that PRRPs offer ordinary members few opportunities to influence decisions about internal affairs, policy, and strategy. Did interviewees perceive life within their parties accordingly? If so, did they see this power distribution within the parties as a problem?

When we consider how ordinary members relate to those higher up in the party ranks, all League interviewees reported to feel close to party elites, and no one mentioned a sense of distance or animosity. Party leader Salvini was said to be approachable and friendly, while other representatives were lauded for not having forsaken their community roots. In the Flemish case, almost half of VB interviewees reported that party elites were accessible to them, usually naming specific individuals such as leader Tom Van Grieken or their area's representative in parliament. Some nevertheless felt some distance between themselves and representatives, sometimes related to ideological disagreements or members' newness in the party.

In Finland, just over half of the interviewees perceived more distance than closeness with their representatives. Members who thought there was some distance between members and representatives explained that they were primarily in contact with the local level of the party, rather than the national one. A particularly extreme case was a respondent saying to us: 'the party feels quite distant; it feels more like it's in Helsinki and in Parliament … Somehow it feels pretty foreign compared to my life' (PS, M26).

SVP/UDC interviewees painted a similar picture to the one emerging from Finland. Some mentioned being close to regional or national representatives,

but several others felt more distance, especially vis-à-vis cantonal or federal—as opposed to local—representatives. This is in line with the fact that Swiss parties (including the SVP/UDC) tend to be loose networks of cantonal associations. Some members also felt that national representatives were uninterested in getting in touch with them on a regular basis. As one of them put it to us:

> At events you realize that there is a distance between national councillors and us because they don't really care a lot about the grassroots. They are not as much with the people as you would expect from a people's party [laughs]. (SVP/UDC M38)

Generally speaking, therefore, and with the exception of the League, we can say that several of the members we have interviewed felt it was easier to relate to local, rather than national, party representatives. This again underlines the importance of rootedness on the ground for these parties, as a way to foster a relationship between different levels within their organizations that is conducive to the establishment of trust between members and party elites. Our interviews suggest that grassroot members show particular trust in, and a sense of connection with, the parties' local branches and elites.

Perceptions on grassroots influence

A related topic that we have explored in our interviews is the extent to which party members believe that representatives are willing to *act* upon members' views and proposals. Did grassroots members feel able to influence their parties' ideological course and decision-making procedures? Our data reveal mixed feelings on this matter. The vast majority of interviewees from all parties mentioned at some point during the conversation that members could exercise *some* form of influence within their parties. However, across our cases a considerable minority of interviewees *also* lamented that, in certain areas, members did not have enough power to shape what happened within their organizations. These were often the same people at different moments during their interviews, suggesting that members can have a measured assessment about their relative (lack of) influence within their organizations.

When we consider members' specific statements it becomes clear that official party channels and institutions were seen to provide some opportunities to influence the party, but with clear limitations. Various League members, for instance, stressed the importance of taking part in local branch meetings

and discussions, while others mentioned party congresses or other party organs as the forum to exercise influence. As one member explained to us:

> Certainly [the way to obtain influence] is through the congress, starting with the local congresses and then the provincial, regional and federal congresses. … And it is by being part of the meetings and discussions of the branches. We start from the micro level; we start from the municipal reality. (LSP, M39)

It is worth pointing out that national party conferences have been an extremely rare occurrence within the League since the turn of the century. More specifically, as the League reinvented itself in recent years (see Chapter 3), the party's leadership has exercised strict control over the entire process: national congresses have not been held and several special commissioners were appointed by Salvini to run many of the LSP's local branches. A considerable number of LSP members complained about this situation in our interviews. They called for the restoration of party congresses (and hence more internal democracy) at all levels. As we heard in one interview: 'It's very important that we resume the internal debate. At the moment, under the current leadership of Salvini, it is very limited' (LSP, M47).

Some League members were even more outspoken. One told us that: 'There is no interest in listening to the grassroots' (LSP, M41), while Salvini was accused by his critics of 'dictating the agenda' (LSP, M46), and urged to 'listen to activists' more (LSP, M59). Some members lamented what they saw as the top-down and hierarchical management of the party under his leadership, and reflected negatively on the shelving of the old Northern League as a period during which ordinary people had not been consulted enough. All in all, despite LSP members usually being very positive about their party as a community and feeling close to their leaders, there was also criticism of how power was distributed within the (new) organization.

In line with what we described before, in the case of the SVP/UDC, party representatives were said to be willing to listen to members mainly at the local level. Interviewees especially highlighted the role of the local party president in this respect: 'Sometimes people who have an idea spontaneously approach him at the assembly and ask how it could possibly be implemented. And then he has a look and checks how to best do it' (SVP/UDC, M40). Most of SVP/UDC members' statements had two aspects in common. First, members emphasized the need to show initiative and stand up at assemblies to express their opinions, if they wanted an issue to be addressed. Second, representatives were seen to listen if members presented solid arguments.

Importantly, however, interviewees tended to stress that there was no guarantee that representatives would act on comments and feedback. Some SVP/UDC members were even explicit about the fact that the party did not listen to them much. A few members likened the running of the party to the management of a company, where the board of directors ultimately takes the main decisions. As one member said to us: 'Some people determine the course of action and that is what we do. Members are not involved and their views are seen as subjective. Ordinary members can't really influence anything' (SVP/UDC, M38).

Roughly half of VB members mentioned *informal* contacts with representatives, for instance through email, phone, or social media, as ways to exercise some influence. One member explained to us that: 'We can email them. There are all sorts of social media channels… there are plenty of channels to reach people' (VB, M48). As for more official channels, a minority of VB members mentioned the opportunity to join the party's local, provincial, and national executive boards. A few also cited national congresses and ad hoc meetings as forums to have some influence on party policy decisions.

While VB interviewees thus tended to see informal processes as the best way to reach out to party elites, they were not necessarily convinced that communicating their opinions translated into a change of approach on the part of the leadership. This point of view is not dissimilar to what we have found within the SVP/UDC. One respondent explained this well to us by saying:

> If something happened that really wasn't okay, I would let them know. And I know I would get a response. Whether they would then take that into account, that is something different. But I know for sure that I would get a response. (VB, M39)

And yet, only one Flemish interviewee explicitly argued that internal power distribution was a problem; others did not appear too concerned about party representatives refraining to act on their ideas. As a VB member said to us: 'I also think that our members don't expect that' [i.e. to exercise power within the party] (VB, M34). Interestingly, another respondent thought that it was simply inevitable for members to follow, rather than determine, the party line (VB, M46), suggesting this should not be seen as a problem.

PS was the only party of the four in which members sounded more convinced about their power and influence, and only a small number of interviewees thought that ordinary activists had no or too little influence. Various members stressed the importance of taking part in meetings, and entering in personal contact with party representatives. As one member said to us: 'through personal influence, if you have the time and energy, I'm sure you can make things happen' (PS, M25). More Finnish interviewees mentioned

the Party Congress as a channel to influence decisions. One member went so far as to argue: 'I can say that the Finns Party is a genuine democracy. We are electing a new chairperson next week, and it is the party membership that actually makes that decision' (PS, M25). Another interviewee explained to us:

> When you go to the Finns Party Congress, each member has one and only one vote, so you can say that there is a democracy for the members, more than in any other parties. And in my opinion the Finns Party would not accept anything less. It comes with a certain kind of working-class mood, a degree of hatred towards the elite [laughs], if you could call it that. To have a party elite, which alone can vote, that would never fly. There would be so much resistance. (PS, M28)

While the PS thus stood out as ostensibly the most democratic party among our four cases—corroborating what we found in Chapter 3—for many interviewees exercising actual influence did not necessarily seem to be a key objective. Although most members across our cases said that they can exercise some influence over their party, they also seemed aware of limitations in this respect. While there are some feelings of frustration about this, these are not universally shared. Thus, while previous research has found that PRRP members are often driven by feelings of political efficacy (Ammassari 2023a, 13), this does not necessarily mean that members feel that they can have a considerable impact on their own organizations as *individuals*. Granted, the party is judged to be impactful in terms of political issues members care about, such as migration or the country's independence vis-à-vis the EU; however, this is due to the implementation of strategies that members accept are usually devised by party elites, and not by them.

Besides complaints about the lack of influence within their organization, we were also keen to hear about other personal costs and perceived disadvantages associated with party membership. Given that interviewees may be inclined to provide 'socially desirable' and positive accounts of their party, we explicitly asked about the experienced drawbacks of party membership, and we will turn to these next.

Perceived disadvantages and personal costs

Many of our interviewees are keen to stress that their activism for the party requires great personal effort and sacrifice, a finding that is in line with previous research conducted among League members (Albertazzi 2016, 123). As we heard in one interview: 'The only advantage [of being an activist] is that

you spend a lot of money! There are absolutely no gains from it' (LSP, M51), while a VB member told us that being an activist meant 'giving without taking' (VB M43). While these could be seen as socially desirable answers by people who are keen not to be accused of having joined a party for opportunistic reasons, it is worth noting that we find similar arguments about the social and practical costs associated with PRRP membership across our cases (see also Ammassari 2023b, 723).

Talking about what they see as the price to pay to fight for their ideas, about three-quarters of League and VB interviewees mentioned having experienced social exclusion at some point in time. Specific practical issues mentioned by League respondents range from 'losing followers on Instagram among classmates' (LSP, M48), to being seen as 'extreme', 'blunt', and 'mean' by their acquaintances (LSP, M40). Activism within the League is also said to have taken a heavy toll in terms of the energy and time the party expects members to dedicate to politics. Among VB members, problems reported range from being censored on social media to being confronted by family members, friends, or colleagues. This situation is often said to be the result of the *cordon sanitaire* that exists in Flanders. VB members also reported having been excluded from trade unions, and recalled how fellow partisans were either fired or found it hard to find employment because of their political views.

Along the same lines, as many as two-thirds of SVP/UDC and PS members reported having faced negative consequences due to their political affiliations. SVP/UDC members said that they have been stigmatized for their political views, and labelled as 'right-wing extremists' (SVP/UDC, M51) or 'racists' (SVP/UDC, M41). Some members told us they fell out with family and friends over their party membership, while others said that they were always very hesitant to expose their political affiliation to others. We heard similar stories from Finnish interviewees, who also identified professional risks associated with PRRP membership:

> If you express views aligned with the Finns Party's ideas—not to mention revealing that you are a party member—it closes many doors in this society. There is a risk of it having an impact on getting a job, even keeping your job. There is a risk of being 'cancelled'. (PS, M28)

In terms of social disadvantages, Finnish interviewees also mentioned the breaking down of relations with family members, friends, or acquaintances. This member recollected: 'When I made [the PS membership] public, I almost instantly "became a racist", and some of my friends immediately vanished' (PS, M41).

While similar negative experiences were not reported by all of our interviewees—some in fact stressed that family and friends shared their ideology, or at least respected their views—it is apparent that many PRRP members experience clear downsides originating from their activism. When they have not experienced problems themselves, interviewees often have stories to tell about someone they know who has.

Susan Scarrow points out the potential costs associated with party membership by introducing the concept of 'reputational costs', which she describes as 'economic liabilities and social stigmas that might be associated with partisan affiliation' (2015, 134–135). As scholars have observed in research focusing on the 'extreme right', though, there may be a silver lining to stigmatization. Interestingly, it can also be seen as 'the cement that holds [activists] together because of the feeling of injustice and discrimination it generates' (Klandermans and Mayer 2006, 273). While it is likely to deter some people from joining radical right parties and movements, and being active within them (Ammassari 2023b; 2024), stigmatization may also aid party-building from the perspective of party elites. Once people are 'in' the party, stigmatization generates a process of bonding and focuses members' attention on how much they have in common. In other words, perceived hostility (by other parties, the media, or even one's former friends) can ultimately work as the glue that keeps the community together.

Yet, if we accept what our interviewees are saying, for the members themselves stigmatization can come at considerable personal costs. A final key question we therefore ask is the following: if individuals experience practical and social difficulties due to their PRRP membership—on top of realizing that they can exercise only limited influence within their organizations—what is it that ultimately motivates them to stay within the party? We turn to this key question of our study next.

Why do members stay?

Across our cases, *purposive incentives* were mentioned most frequently across the board as key reasons to stay in the party (see Table 5.3), showing that party members cite political and ideological motivations as fundamental to their continuing partisan commitment. What this implies is that the reasons why many people *joined* their respective parties (i.e. their ideology and policies) remain relevant with the passing of time. It is clear from our interviews that party members saw their collective activities as an effective means to shape politics according to their views of society. Even though they often acknowledged the limitations of their individual influence within their

Table 5.3 Motivations to stay in the party

	LSP n=26	PS n=25	SVP/UDC n=25	VB n=24	Total n=100
Purposive	20 (76.9%)	21 (84.0%)	17 (68.0%)	17 (70.8%)	75 (75.0%)
Personal	19 (73.1%)	17 (68.0%)	7 (28.0%)	4 (16.7%)	47 (47.0%)
Communitarian	15 (57.7%)	19 (76.0%)	7 (28.0%)	2 (8.3%)	43 (43.0%)
Material	2 (7.7%)	5 (20.0%)	1 (4.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (8.0%)
Other	10 (38.5%)	16 (64.0%)	8 (32.0%)	4 (16.7%)	38 (38.0%)

Note: Values indicate number of interviews (and percentage of interviews) per case in which a category was coded at least once

organizations, members clearly believed that membership of their PRRP serves a real purpose. If political efficacy appears crucial to explain members' reasons to join as well as to stay (Ammassari 2023a), this largely has to do with whatever *the party as a collective* is believed to achieve.

Three-quarters of interviewees in Italy pointed to specific party ideas and goals that members want to see implemented, or at least a desire to change 'something', as key reasons for staying in their parties. One member noted that 'I'm still motivated by the fact that, if there is a will, things can be changed, things can be done, from the smallest thing to the biggest thing' (LSP, M42). Another said to us that: 'today I am motivated, above all, by the idea of carrying my ideas and principles into politics' (LSP, M56). In one unusual case, an interviewee suggested that their continued membership hinged *purely* on purposive reasons, despite not feeling at home in their party: 'Why am I still in the League? Well, I don't know. Because there is no alternative. If there was an alternative political actor addressing these issues, I'd say goodbye to everyone and leave' (LSP, M41).

Flemish interviewees often expressed the willingness to help their party spread its ideas and implement policies that were seen to address key societal problems. This member expressed it thus: 'To keep working towards your ideal that you want to implement in society. So it's mostly for that ideal that I keep doing it' (VB, M51). Several responses from VB members in fact suggested that party membership provided them with a sense of personal efficacy, too. One interviewee noted that the desire for accomplishment is 'an itch that really motivates you' (VB, M54), and further stated:

> There are people walking around the street being a bit messed up because they can't achieve anything. Now that I've gotten that chance in the party, I'm actually really happy that I can accomplish something. That's important for me. That I can really stand up for the people. (VB, M54)

The impression that the world is heading in the wrong direction is actively cultivated by the party's rhetoric around a variety of issues. On top of the list is migration, which is felt to be changing the fabric of Flemish society without 'native people' having been given a say in the matter. As one member said to us: 'What will be left for my children in terms of Flemish norms, our society, our European foundations?' (VB, M40). Among the other key objectives pursued by the VB throughout its history is Flemish independence. For several members, their deeply felt sense of injustice originated from the desire to see Flanders 'break free' from the embrace of the Belgian state, as they described it. They believed that only the VB was able to deliver this. For example, one VB member said to us: 'What keeps me motivated is that… the peaceful fight, let's say, that still hasn't been fought. Flanders still isn't independent' (VB, M43). Several VB members thus alluded to the *potential* for their activism having an impact in the future, rather than listing existing accomplishments—which is not surprising, given the VB's continued exclusion from power. For example, one member said that the party provided 'hope for the future that it will get better, that we can turn the tide' (VB, M53).

Two-thirds of interviewees in Switzerland similarly referred to purposive reasons to stay. While many interviewed members were open about not agreeing with every single SVP/UDC policy, they usually argued that the party represented most of their views and that they supported its stated mission to keep Switzerland independent, free, and sovereign. One member highlighted this view by saying: 'for me, the SVP members are the freedom fighters of Switzerland', adding that: 'I feel that I am in the right place. I do not regret [joining the party] for a minute. Maybe that changes, I can't rule it out. But so far it is great and I would do it again' (SVP/UDC, M44). Another member argued: 'I bring something [to the party] and I want to influence things… and I *can* influence things. *I am able to fight on the front line*. And that's the goal' (SVP/UDC, M55, our emphasis).

Purposive reasons also rank highest of all categories among Finns interviewees, with many members referring to PS's ideas or programme as a key reason for staying. This interviewee, for instance, argued that 'I'm personally motivated by my desire for change in how decisions are made in Finland and [the local area of] Jyväskylä' (M39), adding:

> I wouldn't want our nation to slowly turn into [pause]… the same as has happened in France: that certain groups of people are starting to dominate, creating a feeling of unsafety for people, even during the daytime and so on. And that is one motivating factor. (PS, M41)

Several other members also mentioned the chance to have an impact on society. Among them, this interviewee argued that she wanted to 'have an influence in getting the Finnish people's voice heard' (PS, M30), while another member's stated goal was to 'take care of common issues under the flag of the Finns Party' (PS, M37). This interviewee went as far as declaring: 'if nobody does [activism], Finland will be destroyed' (PS, M44).

Beyond purposive motivations, interviewees across our cases also frequently mentioned *personal and communitarian reasons* for staying (see Table 5.3). These are almost as important as purposive motivations in Italy and Finland, but considerably less so in Flanders, where party ideology and policies dominate in our interviews. For VB activists, their sense of efficacy as members of a team that can have an impact on Flemish society remained key. That said, while not paramount to justifying their activism, personal relationships still mattered to members, judging from statements such as: 'Generally speaking, the majority are super cool people and they've all become friends of mine. It's just nice. It's become a tight group, actually, and it's very nice to be part of that' (VB, M41). Another member went so far as to say: 'It's the determination, the love, the camaraderie. We have an unbelievable camaraderie. There is no other political party that has that… the die-hards like me never gave up' (VB, M36).

The Swiss case lies somewhere in between: here 'personal reasons' are important to about half of interviewees as motivations for initially joining the party (see Table 5.1), and are still mentioned by over a quarter of interviewees as important reasons to stay on as a member, at par with communitarian reasons. Some members said that they are happy to be part of the municipal life and to engage in social activities with the local party branch. As one member said: 'The work at the municipal level motivates me. Because I am in two commissions, I can accomplish something' (SVP/UDC, M52). Such statements again illustrate how personal and purposive motivations are sometimes interlinked. This also applies to communitarian and purposive motivations: being part of a 'winning team' provides members with the feeling of efficaciousness which derives from the ability to implement what members want.

The relatively large role that communitarian motivations seem to play for League members points once again at the strong personal connections within the party community. As explained by one female respondent: '[Within the party] I found my boyfriend, a lot of friends, a lot of people from various age groups with whom I get along very well' (LSP, M36). Very similar ideas were reiterated many times in interviews. In many ways, therefore, the community that the party is able to create and foster offers LSP members a sense

of permanence and certainty in what they see as an uncertain world. In the words of this member:

> you know that whatever happens to you in life, whether your girlfriend leaves you or friendships end … you know that on Saturday—morning or afternoon—you are there, at the local branch, and it's some sort of certainty. (LSP, M54)

Several League members also reported feelings of satisfaction and personal fulfilment as being important to them, such as the feeling that 'your work is recognized and rewarded' (LSP, M40). Being praised by party representatives made one 'feel active, feel alive' (LSP, M43). Showing the extent to which purposive and personal motivations may be linked, this member said to us: 'The League has given a purpose to my life'; and added: 'Mine was a life with no great ideals except for the basic ideals of the common man … so the advantage [of membership] has been to find a purpose in life' (LSP, M45).

Within the PS, more than three-quarters of interviewees mentioned communitarian reasons, for instance by stressing a 'sense of solidarity' (PS, M27), and citing the opportunity of making friends or meeting like-minded people. A good example of a personal benefit was provided by the interviewee who argued that membership had 'matured my own thinking a lot' (PS, M28). According to another:

> [party membership] has given me a kind of energy. And since I have made friends there, I have also got power and resources and help for my everyday life. It is not just doing politics, but it is also about relationships and a feeling of community, and that has improved. So I do see that it has given me new opportunities in my life. (PS, M43)

In summary, the desire to stimulate political change is often key to people's decisions to join a party, including a PRRP (see Ammassari 2023a; Bale et al. 2019a; Fjellman and Rosén Sundström 2021; Gallagher and Marsh 2004; Pedersen et al. 2004; Van Haute and Gauja 2015). But it also works as an important factor in keeping people within the party *after* they have joined. This again confirms the importance of putting out messages that are clear, easy to grasp, and recognizably in line with the populist radical right (PRR) ideology. It is ultimately because of their belief in the ideas and values of the party that members feel that the sacrifices they say they have to make are ultimately worth it. Having said this, purposive motivations are often interwoven with personal and communitarian motivations. The general sentiment expressed in interviews is that fighting for what members believe in is

facilitated by relying on a tight-knit community of like-minded people (certainly in the face of perceived ostracization by other parties and the wider community). Being part of that community gives many members a strong feeling of satisfaction and personal fulfilment, and also contributes to their continued motivation to remain an active member.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that PRRP elites generally succeed in creating close-knit mass parties that their members value very much. Between our four cases, the League most clearly conforms to the definition of this organizational model, while the SVP/UDC departs from it somewhat. In particular, while many SVP/UDC representatives and active members show great interest in the organization of a variety of (mainly face-to-face) activities, and while their party seeks to be rooted on the ground, in Switzerland we have found the least evidence of a systematic attempt to use the party's structures to constantly shape the views of party members. Moreover, many SVP/UDC interviewees regarded their party ultimately as a *vehicle*; the means through which to achieve policy changes. They appear less emotionally attached to the organization than members of the other parties we have considered.

Across the four parties—and in line with the literature—*purposive* reasons have emerged as crucial to both convince people to join a PRRP and to make them stay. After joining, many members continue to believe that their activities, at least at a collective level, serve the purpose of changing or shaping politics according to their views of society. While most interviewees certainly do not overestimate their individual influence within their parties, they usually firmly believe that their membership serves a real (collective) purpose. In other words, in an age in which we are often told that parties are unclear about what they really stand for, our research determinedly underlines the continuing importance of *ideology* and of clear communication between the elites and the grassroots.

Purposive motivations to stay within PRRPs are of course often intertwined with personal gratification and the enjoyment of social activities within these parties (i.e. communitarian incentives). A tight-knit community is often seen as instrumental to achieve the party's aims. Moreover, for a considerable share of interviewees, the fulfilment and personal satisfaction associated with membership even becomes part of the reason to continue as part of their organization—despite the negative personal consequences they often report to face. These are all clear signs that the mass party structures are

doing their work in forging close-knitted communities and shaping identities based on ideology.

A 'mass party' is not defined by the number of members, as we have argued, but by the type of party it is: one willing to organize itself down to the local level, characterized by a clear ideology and striving to socialize members into politics and to shape their opinions about political developments. In an era in which people have more freedom to choose the preferred community they wish to belong to (including online communities), we have seen how mass parties can survive, and even thrive. While this possibility is not restricted to PRRPs, the parties included in our project appear keen and ready to make the most out of the mass party structures they have set up. Both their elites and active members appear committed to them, and convinced about the advantages of running their parties the way they do.

The next chapter will consider the lessons learned via our investigation of the survival of the mass party among PRRPs, as well as highlight the wider implications of our research.

6
Comparative Conclusions and Implications

That's my constant motivation: to work together for a better future. (VB, M53)

Our study of four prominent examples of populist radical right parties (PRRPs), which all show key features of the mass party organizational model as we define it, had three key aims. First, we sought to demonstrate the enduring relevance of this type of party organization, which is rooted in local communities, aims to involve people in its activities and to shape their views of politics, and is characterized by clearly identifiable ideologies. This is particularly relevant given the general move away from activism and rootedness by many of the PRRPs' centrist competitors in recent decades, in many countries within and beyond Europe (Seyd and Whiteley 2004; Cross and Young 2004; Gallagher and Marsh 2004; Gauja and Van Haute 2015; van Biezen et al. 2012; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Mair 2013). Our second objective related to assessing the motivations of PRRP elites to invest in the mass party model. Why do they opt for maintaining complex and difficult-to-manage organizations at a time when modern communication methods ostensibly render traditional forms of activism impractical and inefficient? Regarding our third objective, we shifted the focus to the grassroots, and sought to reveal why PRRP activists are willing to 'pay the price' of participation by donating their time and effort to their parties, while getting little demonstrable political influence in return and exposing themselves to the risk of stigmatization.

While our findings have implications for the literature on the organizational evolution of political parties in general, our focus on PRRPs is based on the fact that many of these parties did not only see a rise in electoral support in recent years, but also a growth in their memberships—in strong contrast with many of their competitors (Gauja and Van Haute 2015, 192; Bardi et al. 2017; Dassonneville and McAllister 2023). We expected that the organizational choices of these parties were closely linked to the parties' ideology (see Scarrow 2015, 20–21). In short, relying on publicly visible activists may

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be particularly attractive to PRRPs because it lends credence to their populist message of being 'close to the people' and helps creating an image of 'ordinariness' rather than extremism. Yet given general processes of partisan dealignment and the observed gap between citizens and elites (Mair 2013), such a strategy may in fact appeal to fledgling centrist parties, too. This is precisely why studying these populist radical right (PRR) mass parties can offer not only theoretical, but also real-life lessons for other political actors.

Our book has offered an analysis (in Chapter 3) of the formal structures of our four selected cases: the Lega per Salvini Premier (League—League for Salvini Premier), the Vlaams Belang (VB—Flemish Interest), Perussuomalaiset (PS—the Finns Party), and the Schweizerische Volkspartei/Union démocratique du centre (SVP/UDC—Swiss People's Party/Democratic Union of the Centre). Our results confirm that the PRRPs analysed in this book are committed to maintaining extensive and complex organizational structures, and rootedness on the ground via local branches. While some of our parties have relied on highly personalized campaigns centred on the leader, they maintain a high degree of organizational articulation as well as vertical linkages to regional and local areas. Irrespective of this local rootedness, and fully compatible with the mass party concept, the decision-making power in our cases tends to be highly centralized, offering few opportunities to ordinary members to influence key decisions about internal governance, choice of candidates, and ideological direction.

Drilling down to the lived experiences and motives of party elites and activists, so as to address our second and third key aims, the subsequent two chapters drew on interviews with 125 party elites and one hundred active members across four parties (see Appendix A). Interviewees were classified as 'ordinary' members when they carried the party card but did not have any formal roles within their parties above the local branch level. All of these members engaged at least sporadically in party activities—in other words, none of them were 'passive' members—and our sample is thus not necessarily representative of the party membership as a whole. Yet in our study of the functioning of PRRP mass parties our main interest was in the lived experiences and motivations of those who make it possible for these organizations to function. Party 'elites' were defined as those representatives and members of staff who had taken on responsibilities at the regional or national level – and our sample included several high-profile representatives, including former national leaders. We analysed the views of party elites and grassroots members, focusing not least on how close and integrated the communities created by their respective parties were, and on how collective identities were shaped. We were able to provide a unique perspective on the nature and

scope of party members' engagement with their parties, and their experiences of life within them. Combined, the answers we collected have provided a nuanced and insightful picture of the internal functioning of PRR mass party organizations.

In this final chapter, we will consider, first, how the chosen parties invest in the creation of tight-knit communities of members and how contemporary PRR mass parties function in an era marked by the advent of online communication. Second, we focus on the question of why the mass party model survives among PRRPs, considering both elite and grassroots perspectives. From the elite perspective, we discuss why parties foster interactions (both face-to-face and online) between members, and between members and representatives, despite the considerable organizational costs and pitfalls associated with building such communities. From the grassroots perspective, we identify the reasons why people keep volunteering within these parties, despite having limited influence and risking stigmatization. Third, we discuss the implications of our research for the study of party activism and the future of party organizations.

Our findings indicate that party elites identify several key reasons for the preservation of mass party organizations: campaigning prowess (to gain public support); legitimizing the party (which is particularly important given these parties' radical ideologies); and organizational survival. These advantages are seen to outweigh the operational costs and risks of factionalism that our interviews identify as disadvantages of the model. From the perspective of ordinary activist members, the mass party offers the opportunity for them to fight for the implementation of the ideas and policies they believe in, and the party stands for. In line with existing literature, these 'purposive' objectives are paramount (e.g. Bale et al. 2019; Gauja and Van Haute 2015). The party also offers members the opportunity to become part of close-knit communities they value. While not a key reason for *joining*, such 'communitarian' incentives—alongside continuing purposive motivations—become relevant in explaining why members *remain* active within their organizations. The party communities are instrumental in counterbalancing PRRP members' feelings of exclusion and stigmatization (see Ammassari 2023b; 2024). We can also deduce that many party members are happy to accept 'participation without power' because their organizations give them the opportunity to defend what they believe in as part of a social movement they consider to be consequential. In other words, while recognizing that they, as individuals, have fairly little influence over their parties' ideological course or internal affairs, they feel politically efficacious by being part of a *collective* (cf. Ammassari 2013a). They typically feel part of a movement with the potential

to bring about social change (or to stop what they see as damaging change from happening) (on this, see also Whiteley and Seyd 2002).

In terms of more general implications, one idea we can challenge on the basis of our research is that there is a straightforward trend away from the mass party and towards allegedly more contemporary models of party organization—such as the 'cartel party' model described by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1995) for traditionally dominant parties, and 'electoral-professional' (Panebianco 1988) types of organization for newer parties. These influential scholars themselves acknowledged that different models can *coexist side by side*, and emphasising this allows us to recognize the uneven and contradictory nature of party-organizational development in the second half of the twentieth century, and the first quarter of the twenty-first.

The mass party in practice: tight-knit communities based on ideology

As we explained in Chapter 2, by seeking inspiration from Maurice Duverger (1954) and Angelo Panebianco (1988) we have distilled the following as the key features of the 'mass party' organizational model: (a) the drive to recruit a large activist membership as a way to reach out to the public through canvassing, campaigning, and other means; (b) rootedness on the ground and the provision of a variety of activities to members; and (c) the preservation of 'collective identities through ideology' (Panebianco 1988, 268), by creating close-knit political communities of activists, by promoting social integration among them and by shaping their interpretations of political developments.

All our chosen cases essentially fit the definition of the mass party—though we will see that, between our cases, alignment with this ideal type can be a matter of degree. Yet all four parties unmistakably invest in building party structures that are rooted on the ground and that enable fostering communities of members. The mass party structure helps party elites to shape people's interpretations of political developments (both their members and the members of the public they reach out to). It allows these parties to politically socialize their members, and to turn them into volunteers serving an effective campaigning machine. All this can only be achieved because—unlike catch-all parties and other more contemporary party types—mass parties are characterized by a clear and well-defined ideology, through which they present their analysis of what goes on in the world and what ought to be done with an eye on the future.

As we have found in our study, this ideology and the related policies provide the most important incentive leading people to join PRRPs (see also Ammassari 2023a), but also to stay on as activists. Through their rooted organizations, our selected PRRPs are seen to represent the interests of specific constituencies that have felt ignored by other parties. There is also a clear electoral-strategic incentive for PRRP elites to opt for the mass party model. Visibility of members on the ground is seen to lend credence to their populist claim that they represent the 'will of the people' versus an unresponsive and self-referential elite that is said to have lost touch with society. Furthermore, the more these members come across as 'ordinary' people, the more their presence may help reduce the stigma which, according to PRRP members themselves, is associated with the radical right.

The mass party model is characterized by constant interaction between party elites, members and sympathizers, a clear division of power (leading to the enforcement of party discipline, whenever necessary), and control of partisan channels of communication, through which parties mobilize their base. The evidence provided in this book shows that the chosen PRRPs are often skilled at controlling internal channels of communication with their members and making sure the latter interpret the strategic choices made by the leadership in line with the leaders' own wishes. One of the findings of our research is precisely that the views and perceptions of party members tend to be *congruent* with those of their representatives, with whom they generally report to have a good relationship. Moreover, both interviewed party elites and grassroot members place the party community at the very core of party life. Time and again we have come across evidence of how crucial the idea of community is to the functioning and survival of the mass party. It is therefore to the party community, and the way it is understood within PRRPs, that we turn now.

The nature and functioning of the party community

As Maria Wincławska et al. (2021, 316) say: 'Studying party members, their perception of the party and the way it is managed and controlled, their involvement in party life, and their sense of influence on party decisions constitutes a substantial contribution to understanding political parties, their organization, intra-party dynamics, and decision-making processes'. Our results show that party members within our selected parties commend their party leaderships for what they see as their ability to foster a community spirit within their organizations. In all analysed parties, the communication and

messages intended to build a community of loyal activists are clearly *elite-driven* and coming *from the top down*; yet at the level of the grassroots, these are usually positively received.

The party representatives interviewed for this book frequently referred to the people within their organizations, and the party community as a whole, as a 'family', to highlight the strong perceived bonds between them. Their statements emphasize the closeness of the relations they have with activist members. This is reciprocated by ordinary members we talked to within these parties, although there are also some who feel much closer to the local and regional branches of their party than to its national representatives. Having said this, statements about how approachable national party leaders are, and the efforts they make to reach out to members through organized meetings and events, are very common in our interviews. Hence many grassroot members, especially within LSP, PS, and VB, similarly liken the party community to a 'family' environment with all the advantages in terms of warmth and closeness this kind of relationships implies, but also the tensions that are said to be typical of any family.

Of the four parties selected, the League is the one in which the strong attachment between members, and between members and representatives, is emphasized in the clearest terms. We saw this in interviews with party elites and grassroots alike. In contrast, within our sample the members and representatives of the SVP/UDC are the most hesitant in extolling the virtues of the party's community, or to describe it as being very close-knit. Compared to members from the other PRRPs studied in this book, interviewees in Switzerland are also the most likely to describe the party in purely *functional* terms. In short, many Swiss interviewees see the party as an efficient and well-organized campaigning machine, rather than necessarily the place that is conducive to bonding with like-minded people, or to finding new friends. Finland and Belgium sit somewhere in the middle between the two 'poles' of LSP and SVP/UDC.

It is also important to stress that, while usually being spoken about in very positive terms, the party community is not necessarily perceived and described in the same ways by elites, on the one hand, and members, on the other. For party elites, the bonding between members is primarily seen as a means to create a motivated group of people who can be turned into useful backers of party activities. Hence, what is often explicitly articulated are clear strategic and practical reasons for maintaining a strong sense of togetherness. Ultimately, what is achieved is efficiency, as well as ensuring the resilience of the organization during bad times. In other words, the need to build communities can be predicated based on the party's desire to achieve its institutional

and political objectives. The question of how to make sure parties remain efficient campaigning and 'opinion-shaping' machines remains paramount for their elites. Instead, ordinary members are more likely to describe the party community as something they *intrinsically* value. As we will discuss in more detail later, this is because of the opportunity membership gives them to engage in what they see as meaningful political activity, and to spend time and share experiences with like-minded people.

Our study also revealed complaints about the functioning of the party, not least due to interpersonal tensions and unwanted individuals—though interviewees tended to stress that these problems pose a challenge to any type of (political) organization. As far as the relationship between party elites and members is concerned, the one comment that we found to be reiterated across the four countries was about the local branches of the party not receiving sufficient support from the centre—which shows the challenge of running mass parties at the regional and local levels by relying overwhelmingly on voluntary work. Interestingly, however, this view is also expressed by some party representatives, implying that this issue is not necessarily a bone of contention between grassroots and (sub-national) elites.

We also found some case- and context-specific comments about the functioning of the party. Several LSP representatives, for instance, identified the expansion of the party to areas where it had not existed before as a main challenge. This does not come as a surprise in this particular case, given the League's previous focus on representing only the Northern regions of the country. Interestingly, some ordinary members felt that a stronger hand from the leadership and central party office was necessary in these instances, suggesting that party members are certainly not all set on demanding more influence for themselves. In other words, some ordinary LSP members would welcome even *more* centralization of their party, if this were the price to pay to increase the party's effectiveness. In the Swiss case, on the other hand, interviewed members and representatives sometimes lamented the increasing power of the SVP/UDC Zurich branch, which was often described by branch members from other cantons as overly dominant and influential. Quite typically for the Swiss case, given the federal organization of parties (and the state more generally), these interviewees pointed at imbalances of power between cantonal party branches as an undesirable phenomenon.

In general terms, when talking to us, neither members nor representatives tried to paint an exaggeratedly rosy picture of the way their party organizations work, especially when it comes to the challenges of making sure that local and regional branches—the existence of which are crucial to the

health and success of the mass party—are properly resourced and supported. However, for all the specific challenges pointed out to us in interviews, there is widespread agreement within these parties that they manage to function well as organizations and campaigning machines. This is especially true with respect to the 'classic' strengths of the mass party organizational model: presence and rootedness on the ground and the quality of face-to-face interaction between representatives and members. This real-life interaction is still seen as vital for the functioning and success of these parties, irrespective of the emergence of new social media which ostensibly facilitate a low-cost and more efficient way to communicate with members and supporters. To understand why that is the case, we discuss the role of online means of interaction in what follows.

Online interactions: necessary but not sufficient

Even though some of our PRRPs appear to be more digitally proficient than others, all use new technologies both to strengthen the party community and to better reach out to the voting public. This is part of a more universal trend and certainly not a feature of modern mass parties only. Political parties in general 'are renewing themselves from the outside in' via digital tools (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley 2016, 285), and digital media are seen to offer clear potential for revitalizing party activities (Vaccari and Valeriani 2016). Rather than conceiving of parties as having entered a phase of terminal decline—for which the evidence is lacking—we should therefore consider the many ways in which digital media have proven to be 'part of the solution rather than the problem of party crisis' (Vaccari and Valeriani 2016, 305).

We have seen across our study how digital media can *facilitate* and *deepen* engagement between party members, and between members and their representatives. New social media are used for internal and external communication. In terms of the latter, they help to spread campaign messages and offer parties and their activists cheap and effective ways to reach out to the public at large, hence potentially broadening the party's appeal. Meanwhile, the informal political discussion facilitated by the new media '*broadens* party-related engagement by enabling those who are not party members to get involved' (Vaccari and Valeriani 2016, 295; original emphasis).

This process does carry some risks, too, as we have seen in the case of the PS. Virtually all our Finnish interviewees engage in online political activities, albeit with a varying degree of commitment. In the Finnish case, we were told about purely 'digital activists' (Chadwick and Stromer-Galley 2016, 91), who

may not be formal members of the PS, but still generate trouble online for the party leaders by purporting to speak on behalf of the party, while expressing very extreme views. In other words, while useful and indeed essential nowadays, the existence of digital communities brings with it new challenges for political parties, which need to develop strategies to manage these risks (Hatakka 2021, 300–301). This is especially true of PRRPs that seek to project an image of moderation, something which becomes more difficult when extremist members or sympathizers create their own digital platform in the name of the party.

In the three other parties, social media activity tends to be somewhat less extensive than in Finland, certainly in the Swiss case. In the SVP/UDC there is seemingly more reluctance to (frequently) use social media, especially among older members (although the relation between tech-savviness and age is commented on in the other cases, too). What interviewees also frequently argue is that, while social media have become impossible to avoid as a means of communication, they cannot be seen as a *replacement* for in-person engagement. This sentiment has not changed since the Covid-19 pandemic in the early 2020s, which obviously forced parties to develop their online presence. If anything, the pandemic has seemed to galvanize the appreciation for traditional in-person activities that are widely seen, including by younger members, to trump dreary online meetings. Generally speaking, it is common for party members and representatives both to underline the need to make serious use of new media, as well as to insist on the continued importance of 'real' face-to-face interaction.

What is it precisely that motivates party elites to preserve these extensive communities in the offline world, and that stimulates ordinary members to take part and invest in political organizations in which they are relatively powerless? The next section of this chapter discusses our key findings connected to these questions central to our project.

Why do PRR mass parties survive?

Elites: investing in local structures and socializing the community

Throughout this book, we have argued and observed that the creation and fostering of partisan communities in which members feel at home brings with it several advantages for our parties. Party elites socialize members into politics, which enables parties to rely on them to spread the message far and

wide across the electorate—especially when (still) having to contend with hostile media (see de Jonge 2019)—and to effectively support the party when needed. Indeed, as demonstrated in Chapter 4, interviewed party representatives see increased electoral potential as one key advantage of the mass party model.

Moreover, the mass party model allows for the creation of a political talent pool by testing the loyalty of individuals and by instilling the party's values and ideas in them so that they can eventually be asked to serve the party at all levels, from local to supranational. Ultimately, both the willingness of members to campaign and support their organizations in all sorts of different ways, and their availability to serve in political institutions, guarantee the party's survival and resilience, both during good and bad times. The creation of a subculture that binds members together acts as the glue that allows the mass party to be an efficient and enduring machine.

But the existence of a committed pool of activists is also essential for ideological reasons, as it supports the PRRPs' claims to be 'ordinary' parties for 'ordinary' people (as opposed to hotbeds of political extremism). Many representatives (and members) of PRRPs interviewed for this book have emphasized that only in-person activism allows a symbolic connection between the mass party and society to be created, and have stressed how important it is for people fulfilling ordinary roles in society (e.g. teachers, nurses, or office workers) to be *seen* staffing the parties' street stalls and canvassing on their behalf. PRRPs crave legitimation, and they can find it—to a large extent—via the people they select to represent them.

In addition to the incentives of party elites, our study was also interested in party life from the perspective of members: what precisely is the reason why grassroots activists are happy to fulfil the instrumental needs of their parties for ostensibly little in return? In short, when it comes to volunteering for a party, 'what's in it' for the members on the ground?

Grassroots: joining the party and deciding to stay

As we have seen in Chapter 5, the decision to join political parties cannot be explained primarily on the basis of 'selective incentives' (as defined by Seyd and Whiteley 1992, 61). These are benefits that may accrue to the individuals becoming members and them alone, such as, for instance, being able to embark on a political career, or—as we have heard from some SVP/UDC interviewees—being able to establish stronger business links through the party. As we have found in our own research, there are clearly a large number

of party members that never gain any specific selective benefits from their activism, nor do they think they are likely to ever do so. This means that we also need to think in terms of 'collective incentives', assuming that 'an individual "thinks" collectively rather than individually' (Fjellman and Rosén Sundström 2021, 371).

Our research has found that 'purposive' incentives are paramount for PRRP members. In line with previous research (e.g. Gallagher and Marsh 2004; Gauja and van Haute 2015; Bale et al. 2019; Heidar and Kosiara-Pedersen 2020, 57–58), we found motivations related to agreement with specific party policies, or the drive to shape politics in ways consistent with a certain ideology, to be the most important reason for members to join, and then also to stay. Our findings are also consistent with the sparse existing evidence showing that people tend to join PRRPs because of their strong nationalism and concerns about cultural change, and their support for policies that are seen to 'improve their situation and that of "their people"' (Ammassari 2023a, 13). Many of the members we have spoken to appear to support their party precisely on the issues that PRRPs are seen to own, such as migration, the defence of the country's traditional culture, and the perceived need to protect nation states and national identities against supranational institutions.

Clearly, such ideas need to be successfully expressed and framed by parties to motivate like-minded individuals to join. In Switzerland and Italy, for instance, members of the LSP and the SVP/UDC frequently referred to their admiration for the undisputed party figureheads—Umberto Bossi or Matteo Salvini in Italy, and Christoph Blocher in Switzerland—as important factors that pushed them 'over the line' and finally convinced them to join their organizations. In other words, while it is the party's ideas and policies that often provide the key incentive for joining, the way these are *expressed*, and even *embodied* by the leader (see Moffitt 2016), is said to be instrumental in convincing people to finally 'take the plunge'.

The themes that these parties own and campaign on continue to be seen as important by their members *after* they join. Interestingly, personal and communitarian reasons start playing an important role in motivating members to *stay* active—whereas these were hardly incentives for people to *join* the party initially. In our conception, these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive and can go hand in hand: 'personal' incentives relate to non-material personal gratification and development, while 'communitarian' motives relate primarily to being part of a certain community that is intrinsically valued. Clearly, party members may well experience personal gratification after finding their place and role within a tight-knit group of

like-minded people. Ultimately, our findings underline the importance of fostering relationships within the organization for the mass party to thrive and endure.

Our findings also show that some parties are closer to the 'ideal' mass party than others. The LSP appears to have the closest-knit party community, which is most frequently described as a 'family'. On the other hand, Swiss interviewees rely much less on their party for friendships and for the establishment of close relations. In other words, they seem to have a more pragmatic relation with their political activism than members of the other PRRPs studied, with activism mainly being seen as a means to their political or personal ends. Moreover, several members of the SVP/UDC also say that their party refrains from actively influencing members' opinions and interpretations of political events, something the League in Italy does with *gusto*, and with the full approval of its activists. Compared with the other parties in our sample, the SVP/UDC apparently shows less hesitation to expose its members to ideas coming from its competitors; as we heard in our interviews, the party routinely invites representatives from other parties to events to offer alternative opinions.

Generally speaking, and especially in the cases of the League and VB, members seem to enjoy very limited power within their organizations. This raises the question of why people remain members if they are hardly able to influence the decisions taken by party elites. This is a conundrum that we now need to reflect on more closely: why do members accept 'participation without power' (Albertazzi and Vampa 2021a)? Our study reveals that a lack of individual influence does not necessarily equal a lack of perceived efficacy. In other words, members' conviction that they are fighting for something they believe in trumps their realization that their individual input into how their parties are run remains limited.

Individually powerless yet efficacious: understanding 'collective efficacy'

As we have found in our study, members generally acknowledged that they had few formal means to influence their PRRPs' decision-making. The only exception to this rule were members of the PS, who often felt that their organization *did* regularly hold meaningful conferences during which they could exercise some power (starting from the choice of leader). Across our sample, however, most PRRP members appeared to follow the party line and the organizational norms put forward by party elites *despite* realizing that they

lacked effective means through which to question them—if they wished to. We explain this conundrum by making reference to the notion of 'collective efficacy'.

The concept of 'collective efficacy' has been given different interpretations in different strands of (social psychology) literature, but we largely follow Albert Bandura's (1994: 477) definition. This definition posits 'collective efficacy' as: 'a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments'. We however agree with Francis Lee (2006) that collective efficacy is not necessarily a (shared) group attribute, but can also relate to an *individual's belief* about the group's capabilities. This type of political efficacy thus differs from 'internal efficacy', meaning an individual's belief that they can have an impact *on their own* (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013, 889). As Sofia Ammassari (2023a) has explained, an important characteristic of PRRP members is precisely that they *do* tend to believe their actions can have a political impact, and that they can make a real difference to their countries and/or local communities. Indeed, this is arguably the most important reason why most of them keep volunteering for their parties: they are driven by the desire to contribute to the implementation of their party's ideology through its policies ('purposive' incentives). They can think their party membership is consequential in this regard, because they consider the party efficacious *as a collective*. The fact that their organizations often give them little direct influence over internal party decisions does not detract from this fact.

Moreover, '[c]ollective identification, especially the more politicized form of it, intensifies feelings of efficacy' (van Stekelenburg and Klandermans 2013, 892). As Bert Klandermans et al. (2008) have shown, being embedded in social networks in which discussion of politics takes place increases the chance that people will take action to address their grievances. Ultimately, impact is seen by activists as something that a collective (the party as community) can realistically achieve. In this context, our discussion of the extent to which many of our interviewees saw their parties as efficient and well-run organizations is especially relevant.

This provides further evidence that purposive and communitarian incentives to remain in the party feed off each other. The community spirit and the feelings of togetherness (often in the face of perceived hostility by other parties and society at large) become powerful means through which the party's ideological objectives are pursued and impact is sought. Sometimes, as we have seen in Chapter 5, members feel that their organization is in fact the only one left that is willing—and able—to fight for the ideas they believe in: a society that is rooted in traditional values and that is relatively

homogeneous (ethnically and culturally), and a nation state that retains high levels of autonomy vis-à-vis international organizations.

Although members may not be very powerful individually when it comes to setting the party's strategy or finalizing its electoral lists, PRRP elites nonetheless strive to be seen as accessible and *caring* towards ordinary members. In our interviews, members normally spoke positively not just of their top leader, but of party representatives more generally (particularly local and regional party elites). Some of our respondents argued—perhaps implausibly—that informal contact with party representatives provided them with the means through which to shape what happened within their parties, at least to an extent (see Chapter 5). At the very least, close relationships and contacts may facilitate a sense of mutual trust and a perception that the party is open-minded to members' perspectives. More fundamentally, however, our study revealed that individual influence did not seem to be the key aim of interviewed party members in the first place; instead, they believed their activism made a difference at the *collective* level: by being part of a thriving political movement.

The future of party organizations

Ultimately, our research has shown that it is much too early to leave the study of the mass party organizational model to historians. There is not a one-way teleological movement towards more lean, electoral-professional kinds of party organization. Rather, we notice the coexistence of different models of party organization side by side. While it is true that new memberless entrepreneurial parties have been electorally successful, showing that 'members are not necessary for their existence and success' (Cirhan and Stauber 2018, 458), it is also clear that these 'lean' parties are hardly *the only ones* able to grow and thrive.

When we look beyond the borders of our four selected countries, it is evident that the mass party model is by no means the only type of organization among PRRPs. Indeed, there are prominent examples of leader-centred and lightweight party organizations all over the world. One of the more extreme examples of this is the Dutch Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV—Party for Freedom). The party is tightly controlled by its leader, Geert Wilders, who does not even allow people to join as members in the first place. When we expand our conceptual focus to include the broader category of populist parties, we can identify more 'personal parties' (Kefford and McDonnell 2018). Examples include Forza Italia (FI) of the late Silvio Berlusconi in

Italy, Clive Palmer's United Party (PUP) in Australia, and Andrej Babiš's Akce Nespokojených Občanů (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens—ANO) in the Czech Republic.

Interesting as these cases certainly are, it is also evident that many PRRPs still invest in presence on the ground, by involving and organizing activists and by striving to socialize people into politics and to shape their views (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2016; van Kessel and Albertazzi 2021). While our cases are among those that come closest to the mass party ideal type that was described in Chapter 2, various others appear to see the point of publicly visible activism and rootedness on the ground (as opposed to the 'personal party' model). Therefore, claims about the theoretical link between populism and leadership notwithstanding (Moffitt 2016; Weyland 2001), we should beware of overemphasizing the role of the leader in studying the mobilization of populist parties and movements. The *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD—Alternative for Germany), for example, has lacked a single 'charismatic' leader for several years. Meanwhile, it has developed regional and local party branches across the country, as well as links with radical and extreme right social movement groups and online spheres (Heinze and Weisskircher, 2021; Heinze 2024). The Spanish Vox has also worked 'to achieve rootedness on the ground via territorial penetration, to recruit a large activist membership base, and to create collective identity, including through the use of social networks' (Barrio et al. 2021, 248).

Interestingly, we can also observe several PRRPs in Central and Eastern Europe investing in mass party structures or, at least, seeking to attain a 'presence on the ground' and to connect with grassroots supporters. This is notable given the generally low levels of party membership and partisan alignment in post-communist party systems (Haughton and Deegan-Krause, 2020). For instance, the Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (EKRE—Estonian Conservative People's Party) has made efforts to reactivate and expand its local organization, contributing to it being the fastest-growing Estonian party in terms of its membership (Saarts et al., 2021). Other Central and Eastern European PRRPs, including VMRO—Bulgarsko Natsionalno Dvizhenie (VMRO—Bulgarian National Movement) and Fidesz—Magyar Polgári Szövetség (Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Alliance), have also made conscious efforts to maintain strong links with local communities through activities that give them public visibility (Bankov et al. 2021; Metz and Várnagy 2021). While formal membership numbers remain low and branch development limited, informal affiliations with a variety of like-minded radical right and nationalist organizations enable these parties to organize street actions and to reach out to grassroots sympathizers.

There is considerable variation between PRRPs concerning their organizational features, and also incentives for these parties to steer clear of the mass party organizational model, not least the desire to avoid complicating the management and internal structure of the party, and the risk of factionalism and organizational chaos this is likely to heighten (e.g. Barrio et al. 2021; De Jonge 2021; De Lange and Art 2011; Pytlas 2021). Hence, it would be incorrect to claim that there is a general and full-fledged *revival* of the mass party across all PRRPs. But it is undoubtedly the case that this model *survives* in our day and age, and in many cases manages to thrive. In short, making claims suggesting the final demise of the mass party (Young 2013) is decidedly premature.

It is worth emphasizing, once again, that while PRRPs tend to be particularly centralized in terms of internal power distribution, this is not in fact at odds with the mass party concept. In terms of how power is internally organized, PRR mass parties may not be fundamentally different from parties that have adopted lighter models of party organization. The latter may occasionally rely on 'supporters' or 'sympathizers' for campaign activities; these individuals lack a formal affiliation with the party and thus opportunities for genuine involvement (Cirhan and Stauber 2018, 476–477). Our PRRPs instead appear to have found a way to 'have their cake and eat it': they are able to rely on a very committed group of activists, while *also* avoiding giving them too much of a say over how the party is run, its ideology, and its electoral strategy (van Kessel and Albertazzi 2021).

Ultimately, by advancing our knowledge of what happens inside PRRPs, we have addressed the serious shortage of comparative party research on this topic, and responded to recent calls for more work to be done on what happens within the organizations of this party family (e.g. Gauja and Van Haute 2015; Mudde 2019). As we have been able to show via our research, rather than a uniform and coherent shift towards 'electoral-professional' forms of party organization that rely ever less on active membership and involvement, what we are witnessing is a process whereby different party types ultimately *survive*, *adapt*, and *coexist* side by side (as already foreseen by Katz and Mair 1995, 19; see also Koole 1996). It is worth noting that Susan Scarrow's (2015, 36–68) detailed history of membership-based parties has previously also challenged conventional wisdom about the mass party, finding that the ideals and practice of the mass party model have always diverged. She argues that large memberships were never the norm, and thus that the narrative of mass party decline is 'simultaneously true and exaggerated' (Scarrow 2015, 36). While an ideal type mass party may never have been fully achieved in practice, there are still party elites who aspire to have a large membership

and to closely tie members to their party organizations. The mass party survives—successfully in fact—and continues to provide specific ideological and practical advantages to its adopters, including its characteristic resilience in times of crisis.

By demonstrating how a fuller understanding of PRRP organizational models challenges conventional scholarly wisdom, we have called into question the idea that there is some sort of uniform, 'one-size-fits-all' teleological movement towards a lightweight organizational model taking place across the board. We hope to have inspired scholars to take these ideas beyond the confines of Western Europe and the PRR party family. They can be deployed to critically revisit the evolution of party organizations beyond this geographical area, while a similar methodology can help understand political actors of different ideological kinds.

Our findings also offer practical lessons for old as well as new political parties that struggle to retain their electoral support and are perceived to be losing touch with society. These parties may in fact find inspiration in the way PRR mass parties organize and mobilize. The PRR's claim to be the only genuine 'voice of the people'—whereby 'the people' are seen as homogenous—can evidently be considered problematic from the perspective of those who subscribe to the idea of political pluralism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Mueller 2017). Yet this claim has nevertheless become entrenched in public and media discourse as part of a broader process of radical-right normalization (Mudde 2019), whereby the ideological antagonists of PRRPs are depicted as representatives of out-of-touch and globalist elites. If political parties seek to counter this claim, building locally rooted organizations with visible and active members can be part of the answer. Attempts by party elites to invest in mass party structures are unlikely to be the silver bullet repairing the deficiencies of representative democratic systems—and clearly PRRPs are here to stay as a significant and influential political force. A 'golden age of mass parties' may never have truly existed and is unlikely to ever come. But our interviews have demonstrated how the agency of party elites can get people motivated to rally behind a common cause they believe in. Ultimately, healthy liberal democracies require sufficient levels of political engagement among citizens if they are to survive, and potentially thrive.

APPENDIX A

List of interviewees

Italy—League for Salvini Premier (LSP)

Party representatives

#	Role	Date	Region
1	Secretary of a Municipal Branch	18 December 2019	Emilia-Romagna
2	Federal Council Representative	18 June 2020	Lombardy
3	Youth Officer	20 December 2019	Emilia-Romagna
4	Member of the Regional Council	18 December 2019	Emilia-Romagna
5	Member of the Regional Council	23 December 2019	Veneto
6	Youth Officer	04 December 2019	Lombardy
7	Member of a Municipal Council	19 November 2019	Emilia-Romagna
8	Municipal Branch Officer	10 July 2020	Emilia-Romagna
9	Municipal Commissioner	01 July 2020	Lombardy
10	Member of Parliament	26 June 2020	Veneto
11	Member of Parliament	10 June 2020	Lombardy
12	Municipal Branch Officer	17 June 2020	Emilia-Romagna
13	Member of Parliament	23 June 2020	Emilia-Romagna
14	Member of the Regional Council	17 June 2020	Lombardy
15	Member of a Municipal Council	25 February 2020	Veneto
16	Member of Parliament	24 June 2020	Lombardy
17	Member of a Municipal Council	13 July 2020	Veneto
18	Local Government Officer	06 July 2020	Lombardy
19	Member of the Regional Council	19 June 2020	Emilia-Romagna
20	Member of the Regional Council	13 July 2020	Veneto
21	Member of a Municipal Council	19 June 2020	Emilia-Romagna
22	Member of the Regional Council	03 July 2020	Lombardy
23	Member of Parliament	06 July 2020	Emilia-Romagna
24	Youth Officer	01 July 2020	Lombardy
25	Member of European Parliament	07 July 2020	Lombardy
26	Local Government Officer	08 July 2020	Lombardy
27	Member of Parliament	13 July 2020	Veneto
28	Local Government Officer	01 July 2020	Veneto
29	Member of a Municipal Council	06 June 2020	Lombardy
30	Member of a Municipal Council	13 February 2020	Emilia-Romagna
31	Member of Parliament	02 July 2020	Veneto
32	Member of the Regional Council	29 June 2020	Veneto
33	Municipal Branch Officer	06 July 2020	Veneto
34	Secretary of a Municipal Branch	30 June 2020	Veneto

Note: Several interviewees fulfilled more than one role (e.g. in political institutions as well as the party organization), but only one role is reported to safeguard anonymity.

Party members

#	Date	Location (Region)
35	01 June 2021	Emilia-Romagna
36	27 May 2021	Lombardy
37	02 June 2021	Lombardy
38	07 June 2021	Emilia-Romagna
39	20 April 2021	Lombardy
40	31 May 2021	Emilia-Romagna
41	01 June 2021	Lombardy
42	08 June 2021	Emilia-Romagna
43	07 June 2021	Veneto
44	26 May 2021	Emilia-Romagna
45	31 May 2021	Lombardy
46	28 May 2021	Emilia-Romagna
47	10 May 2021	Veneto
48	20 April 2021	Lombardy
49	27 May 2021	Lombardy
50	28 May 2021	Emilia-Romagna
51	08 June 2021	Lombardy
52	21 May 2021	Veneto
53	14 May 2021	Veneto
54	27 May 2021	Emilia-Romagna
55	26 May 2021	Lombardy
56	20 May 2021	Veneto
57	21 May 2021	Veneto
58	17 May 2021	Veneto
59	07 June 2021	Veneto
60	24 May 2021	Veneto

Finland—The Finns Party (PS)

Party representatives

#	Role	Date	Region
1	Central Party Officer	29 January 2020	Helsinki
2	Subnational Association Board Member	07 February 2020	Central
3	Local Association Officer	07 February 2020	Central
4	Member of Parliament	09 June 2020	Helsinki
5	Member of Parliament	10 June 2020	Helsinki
6	Central Party Officer	12 June 2020	Central
7	Member of Parliament	25 September 2020	Helsinki

Continued

Continued

#	Role	Date	Region
8	Regional Party Officer	07 October 2020	Southwest
9	Regional Party Officer	25 September 2020	Southwest
10	Regional Party Officer	23 June 2020	Southwest
11	Regional Party Officer	08 October 2020	Central
12	Member of a City Council	22 June 2020	Southwest
13	Regional Party Officer	22 June 2020	Central
14	Municipal Party Officer	08 October 2020	Central
15	Regional Party Officer	30 September 2020	Central
16	Member of Parliament	25 August 2020	Helsinki
17	Member of Parliament	17 June 2020	Helsinki
18	Central Party Officer	23 June 2020	National
19	Central Party Officer	18 June 2020	Helsinki
20	Member of Parliament	15 June 2020	Helsinki
21	Central Party Officer	07 October 2020	Southwest
22	Member of Parliament	09 June 2020	National
23	Aide to Member of Parliament	10 June 2020	Central
24	Regional Party Officer	11 June 2020	Central

Note: Several interviewees fulfilled more than one role (e.g. in political institutions as well as the party organization), but only one role is reported to safeguard anonymity.

Party members

#	Date	Region
25	09 August 2021	Satakunta
26	24 April 2021	Southwest
27	26 May 2021	Southwest
28	01 June 2021	Southwest
29	23 June 2021	Satakunta
30	21 May 2021	Southwest
31	26 May 2021	Southwest
32	17 June 2021	Central
33	24 May 2021	Southwest
34	29 June 2021	Satakunta
35	23 June 2021	Satakunta
36	09 June 2021	Central
37	14 April 2021	Central
38	03 May 2021	Central
39	07 May 2021	Central
40	16 June 2021	Southwest
41	25 May 2021	Southwest

Continued

#	Date	Region
42	12 August 2021	Satakunta
43	21 June 2021	Central
44	22 April 2021	Central
45	20 April 2021	Central
46	16 April 2021	Satakunta
47	22 June 2021	Satakunta
48	09 June 2021	Southwest
49	18 June 2021	Southwest

Switzerland—Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC)

Party representatives

#	Role	Date	Region
1	Cantonal Party Officer	02 December 2019	Zurich
2	Cantonal Party Officer	05 December 2019	Geneva
3	Cantonal Party Officer	06 December 2019	Bern
4	Federal Party Officer	03 December 2019	Bern
5	Member of the Grand Council BE	18 June 2020	Bern
6	Member of the Cantonal Council ZH	02 July 2020	Zurich
7	Member City Council, Bern	19 June 2020	Bern
8	Local Branch Officer	31 July 2020	Geneva
9	Member of the Cantonal Council ZH	04 February 2020	Zurich
10	Local Branch Officer	12 March 2020	Bern
11	Local Branch Officer	16 June 2020	Bern
12	Member of City Council, Bern	05 June 2020	Bern
13	Member of National Council	04 June 2020	Bern
14	Member of National Council	11 June 2020	Bern
15	Member of Cantonal Council ZH	12 June 2020	Zurich
16	Member of Grand Council BE	11 March 2020	Bern
17	Local Branch Officer	16 June 2020	Zurich
18	Member of Municipal Council	23 July 2020	Geneva
19	Member of Municipal Council	17 July 2020	Geneva
20	Local Government Officer	19 March 2020	Bern
21	Local Branch Officer	16 July 2020	Geneva
22	Cantonal Party Officer	19 June 2020	Bern
23	Member of Local Council	18 March 2020	Zurich
24	Member of the Grand Council GE	03 July 2020	Geneva
25	Member of the Cantonal Council ZH	10 June 2020	Zurich
26	Member of the Cantonal Council ZH	03 February 2020	Zurich

Continued

Continued

#	Role	Date	Region
27	Local Branch Officer	15 July 2020	Geneva
28	Local Branch Officer	05 June 2020	Zurich
29	Member of the National Council	05 June 2020	Bern
30	Cantonal Party Officer	11 June 2020	Zurich
31	Local Branch Officer	15 June 2020	Bern
32	Member of the Grand Council BE	17 August 2020	Bern
33	Member of the Grand Council BE	24 June 2020	Bern
34	Member of the Cantonal Council ZH	16 June 2020	Zurich
35	Grand Councillor	02 February 2020	Bern

Note: Several interviewees fulfilled more than one role (e.g. in political institutions as well as the party organization), but only one role is reported to safeguard anonymity.

Party members

#	Date	Location (Canton)
36	23 June 2021	Canton of Bern
37	23 June 2021	Canton of Bern
38	08 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
39	23 June 2021	Canton of Bern
40	03 June 2021	Canton of Bern
41	18 May 2021	Canton of Zurich
42	26 May 2021	Canton of Zurich
43	07 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
44	26 May 2021	Canton of Zurich
45	07 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
46	02 July 2021	Canton of Geneva
47	09 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
48	31 May 2021	Canton of Zurich
49	17 April 2021	Canton of Bern
50	05 July 2021	Canton of Geneva
51	26 May 2021	Canton of Bern
52	01 June 2021	Canton of Bern
53	25 June 2021	Canton of Bern
54	16 April 2021	Canton of Zurich
55	11 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
56	03 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
57	04 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
58	24 June 2021	Canton of Bern
59	09 June 2021	Canton of Zurich
60	19 May 2021	Canton of Zurich

Belgium—Flemish Interest (VB)

Party representatives

#	Role	Date	Region
1	Youth Officer	22 November 2019	Vlaams Brabant
2	City Councillor	20 November 2019	West Flanders
3	Member of Flemish Parliament	29 November 2019	West Flanders
4	Member of Federal Parliament	27 November 2019	West Flanders
5	Former Member of Flemish Parliament	22 November 2019	Antwerp
6	Member of the European Parliament	23 June 2020	Antwerp
7	City Councillor	25 June 2020	West Flanders
8	Provincial Councillor	12 February 2020	East Flanders
9	City Councillor	16 December 2020	East Flanders
10	Member of Flemish Parliament	07 June 2020	East Flanders
11	Provincial Councillor	15 June 2020	West Flanders
12	City Councillor	11 June 2020	East Flanders
13	Member of Flemish Parliament	10 March 2020	East Flanders
14	Party Staffer	27 July 2020	West Flanders
15	Member of Federal Parliament	11 March 2020	Antwerp
16	Member of Federal Parliament	24 June 2020	East Flanders
17	Provincial Councillor	12 February 2020	East Flanders
18	Local Executive Member	08 July 2020	East Flanders
19	Member of Federal Parliament	05 June 2020	West Flanders
20	Member of Flemish Parliament	12 March 2020	West Flanders
21	City Councillor	10 September 2020	West Flanders
22	Member of Flemish Parliament	06 July 2020	East Flanders
23	Member of Federal Parliament	11 February 2020	Antwerp
24	Member of Flemish Parliament	14 February 2020	Antwerp
25	Member of Federal Parliament	07 July 2021	Antwerp
26	City Councillor	14 December 2020	East Flanders
27	Member of Flemish Parliament	16 March 2020	Antwerp
28	City Councillor	04 November 2020	West Flanders
29	Provincial Councillor	06 July 2020	West Flanders
30	Local Branch Officer	16 September 2020	West Flanders
31	Party Staffer	17 December 2020	Antwerp
32	City Councillor	16 November 2020	West Flanders

Note: Several interviewees fulfilled more than one role (e.g. in political institutions as well as the party organization), but only one role is reported to safeguard anonymity.

Party members

#	Date	Region
33	10 May 2021	East Flanders
34	20 August 2021	Antwerp
35	02 June 2021	East Flanders
36	14 June 2021	Antwerp
37	23 June 2021	Antwerp
38	14 July 2021	East Flanders
39	24 May 2021	West Flanders
40	18 June 2021	Antwerp
41	07 July 2021	Antwerp
42	11 June 2021	West Flanders
43	13 May 2021	East Flanders
44	07 June 2021	West Flanders
45	06 May 2021	East Flanders
46	16 August 2021	East Flanders
47	03 June 2021	Antwerp
48	16 August 2021	Antwerp
49	08 July 2021	East Flanders
50	30 June 2021	Antwerp
51	29 June 2021	West Flanders
52	08 June 2021	West Flanders
53	12 April 2021	West Flanders
54	14 April 2021	Antwerp
55	01 June 2021	West Flanders
56	29 June 2021	West Flanders

APPENDIX B

Party representatives interview guide

1) **Role within organization**
   1.a When did you join the party?
   1.b What is your official role in the party?
   1.c What are the tasks you perform in this role?
   1.d What other roles have you had in the past?

2) **Activities and communications used to foster participation, shape ideological consent, and create communities**
   2.a How do you recruit party members?
   2.b Roughly, how many volunteers are typically also members of the party?
   2.c What type of activities and events do you organize for your members?
      PROBE: How frequently do these take place?
   2.d Are there specific events reserved exclusively to party members?
   2.e Are there specific events for sympathizers, or the public at large?
   2.f What are these events for, what do they achieve?
   2.g What communication channels do you use to reach out to members?
      PROBE: Frequency/importance of different channels (e.g. traditional vs. online/social media activities). Explore role of face-to-face communication and real (as opposed to virtual) meetings.
   2.h What is your purpose with these communications, besides simply informing people?
      PROBE: Get them to expand in their own words. Do not lead them.

3) **Incentives/service provision**
   3.a What are the key reasons for people to join the party, in your view?
   3.b What would you say are the advantages of being a member of the party?
      PROBE: Practical (for instance, are there specific services provided to members?)
      Personal (for instance, being able to make friends?)
      PROBE: Are there ways in which the party rewards the most committed members for their efforts?
   3.c Are there any disadvantages or reasons why people feel reluctant to join the party?
   3.d Is it necessary to be a party member to represent the party in the institutions? We mean people who serve in local municipalities, parliament, government, etc.
      PROBE: Explore the extent to which the party offers opportunities for a political career to its members.
   3.e Is there any kind of training that you provide to members when they campaign for the party?
   3.f Is there any other kind of training that you provide to members when they serve in the institutions? We mean people who serve in local municipalities, parliament, government, etc.

4) **Effectiveness of party's efforts to create communities**
   4.a Does the party try to turn people from passive members into activists?

PROBE: What are the best ways to achieve this?

PROBE: Are there any challenges that hinder this effort (nationally, or specifically in this region)?

4.b What kind of community is the party able to create for its members?

PROBE: How tight do you think the community is?

PROBE: Do they provide (online) spaces for members to meet?

4.c What role does the party play in the lives of its most committed members?

5) **Reasons behind the adoption of the mass party**

5.a What are the main advantages of having a party with active members?

5.b Can having such a member-based and active organization also lead to difficulties?

PROBE: Is it difficult to create a balance in recruiting people from different social backgrounds (e.g. education, profession)?

PROBE: How does the party deal with people it would rather not recruit (for instance: extremists or opportunists)?

5.c I am aware that this may be a delicate question but I would really like to hear your opinion: Do you have any opinions about how the party should be organized or run?

PROBE: What is missing/defective? What could be done differently?

6) **Institutionalization, stability, coherence, organization**

6.a Have there been many organizational changes over the years?

PROBE [Varies according to country and knowledge of interviewee].

What changes at local level?
What changes at regional level?
What changes at national level?

6.b Are there any parts of the organization whose roles may be less or more important (for examples, via an informal role) than they seem by reading the statute?

PROBE: Role of the leader

PROBE: Dominance and role of particular cantonal/regional branch

6.c To what extent do various local branches coordinate their campaign activities and policies? (Feel free to reformulate in the Swiss context.)

7) **Centralization**

7.a To what extent does the party leadership/executive committee influence decision-making procedures (in terms of leadership selection; candidate selection; personnel selection, etc.)?

PROBE (According to party)

To what extent are parliamentary groups involved in decision-making procedures?

To what extent is the senate/assembly/party congress/parliamentary group involved in decision-making procedures?

To what extent are regional and local branches autonomous in terms of decision-making procedures?

7.b What opportunities do ordinary members have to affect decision-making procedures?

PROBE (According to party, some of these may not be necessary if you already have the answers)

To what extent can members decide about candidatures?
To what extent can they affect the party about ideological matters?
To what extent can they affect the party about strategy?

APPENDIX C

Party members interview guide

PERSONAL BACKGROUND AND ROUTES INTO ACTIVISM

1) **Personal background and role within organization [To be covered briefly]**
   1.a Can you tell me something about your personal and professional background?
   1.b How long have you been interested in politics?
   1.c What made you interested?
   1.d When did you join the party?
2) **Routes into activism, type of activities**
   [*Specifically, look out for: • Critical events (social, political, personal) • Agents of political socialization (e.g. education, family, mass media, peers)*]
   2.a How did you get involved in the party, i.e. what was your route into membership?
      PROBES: If not already part of answer: relevance of personal contacts; party reaching out; media coverage of party?
   2.b Can you identify some specific moments that were particularly significant when you joined?
   2.c How did your social circle react to your becoming involved?
   2.d What were your reasons for joining the party?
      [*Specifically, look out for: • Material, purposive, personal, or communitarian incentives—based on the re-categorization of Clark's and Wilson's (1961) approach carried out by Albertazzi (2016)*]
   2.e Did you perform any activities for the party before applying for membership?

LIFE IN THE PARTY

3) **Current role, responsibilities, and motivations**
   3.a How would you describe your current role in the party? [They may have none at all]
      PROBES: Has your role within the party changed over the years?
   3.b Could you describe your 'typical month' as a member of the party (prior to the pandemic)?
      PROBES. How often do you engage in party activities?
      PROBES: Is it mainly the party leadership or ordinary members who initiate and organize activities?
      PROBES: To what extent are you involved in online political activism (also before Covid)?
   3.c What role does the party play in your life?
   3.d What keeps you motivated to stay in this party today?
      [*Specifically, look out for: • Material, purposive, personal, or communitarian incentives—based on the re-categorization of Clark's and Wilson's (1961) approach carried out by Albertazzi (2016)*]

PROBES: Which parts of party work/activities do you enjoy the most?

PROBES: Could you describe any especially rewarding moments or memories throughout your time in the party?

3.e Are there any advantages of being a party member?

PROBES: Does being a party member provide you with any particular opportunities or benefits? (e.g. in terms of political influence or socializing)?

3.f In your view, are there any disadvantages of being a party member?

PROBES: Do you remember having any negative experiences being a party member?

PROBES: Are there reasons why people would be reluctant to join, or leave the party?

PROBES: Do you feel this is any different for other parties?

3.g Do you think that membership in the party has changed something in your life for better or for worse?

4) **Creation of communities**

4.a How close do you personally feel towards fellow party members?

PROBES: Are there many friendships between members?

PROBES: Are there conflicts or personal animosities between members?

PROBES: How close do you feel to party officials and representatives higher up?

4.b Do you feel the party tries to stimulate active engagement and to build a sense of community among its members?

PROBES: What are the means/activities through which it tries to do this?

PROBES: How does the party deal with potential conflicts or difficult persons within the party?

4.c How do you communicate with fellow members?

PROBES: How often do you communicate with them through various means (e.g. in person, phone, online)?

PROBES: What type of issues are discussed during these communications?

LIFE OF THE PARTY

5) **The mass party and the interaction with party elites**

[*We are primarily looking for comments on the party as a whole, i.e. the central/national level, although we don't want to restrict interviewees if they have comments about the local level. If they only talk about local level, please probe them on national level*].

5.a How do party officials or representatives (politicians) communicate with you?

PROBES: How often do party officials or representatives (politicians) get in touch with you through various means (e.g. in person, phone, online)?

PROBES: Does communication happen mainly with the central/national or regional/local party organization?

5.b We see a trend everywhere in Europe that parties are losing members and that some parties prefer an organization that is mainly built around a party leader. Why do you think the (national) party leadership of your party invests in an active membership and member activities?

PROBES: Do you feel that your members are important for the party's functioning?

PROBES: Do you feel this is any different for other parties?

5.c To what extent does the party leadership listen to ordinary members?
PROBES: Do you feel ordinary members can influence the decisions made by the party, and how does the party facilitate this?

5.d In which ways do you feel the party is trying to shape the ideas and actions of ordinary members?
PROBES: Do you know of examples of how the party responds to members who refuse to follow the party line?

5.e Do you have any other opinions about how the party (as a whole) should be organized or run?
PROBES: What works well?

PROBES: What is missing/defective? What could be done differently?

6) **Party ideology**

6.a In your own words, what does the party stand for?
PROBES: This is really interesting. What else do they stand for?

6.b What does the party stand against?
PROBES: This is really interesting. What else do they stand against?

6.c If there was one thing you could change about the party's positions, what would that be?

7) **Demographics**

[Mention this is for the purpose of our analysis, i.e. finding patterns between types of interviewees, but they can refuse to answer if they want to]

7.a Age
7.b Gender
7.c Profession
7.d Level of education
7.e Place of residence

8) **Final questions**

8.a Is there anything you would like to add?
8.b **Gender specific (women only).** From our own experience doing this research, it was easier to find men than women for our interviews. Why do you think this is? Does the party attract more men than women for some reason?

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