

# The reins of intra-party power in the Italian political parties (1990-2011)

by Piero Ignazi and Eugenio Pizzimenti

**Abstract:** This article investigates the centre-periphery power relations within Italian political parties in the last twenty years. Following Katz and Mair approach in their study on party organization, the present work relies on the ‘official story’ of political parties: it analyses the parties’ statutes, internal organizational regulations and balance sheets in order to assess the power relations between the centre – the national headquarters – and the local party structures at regional level. The analysis focuses on three crucial domains of the party organization, whose control is critical for the centre to impose its power over the sub-national level. The research demonstrates that Italian parties display a loose top-down hold and they have moved toward a stratarchical pattern. Moreover, Italian parties appear clearly aligned along the left-right continuum with respect to their level of central control.

*Keywords:* Party organization, centre-periphery, Italy, official story, stratarchy.

## 1. Introduction

This article deals with the recurring, and yet unresolved, question of *intra-party power* using Italian political parties for an empirical case study. Thirty years ago Kunt Heidar (1984) lamented that the topic of party power was an ‘unfilled classic’. Since then a number of authors, starting with Kenneth Janda (1980, 1983) and Angelo Panebianco (1988, or ed. 1982), have revived the scholarly tradition of intra-party studies focused on the organization dynamics, a tradition dating back to Roberto Michels (1911).

That framework of analysis has inspired the present article. In fact, we investigate the intra-party power relationship between two party *structures* at different territorial levels: the national/central headquarters on one side, and the sub-national/regional unit on the other side. There is a potential for conflict between these two party structures, or layers, because both compete to control a set of “zones of uncertainty” (Panebianco 1988: 33ff). According

Piero Ignazi, University of Bologna, Italy – [piero.ignazi@unibo.it](mailto:piero.ignazi@unibo.it)

Eugenio Pizzimenti, University of Pisa, Italy – [eugenio.pizzimenti@sp.unipi.it](mailto:eugenio.pizzimenti@sp.unipi.it)

to Panebianco this term identifies the crucial symbolic, structural and financial resources over which intra-party groups compete in order to acquire power within the party organization. The organizational resources at stake are numerous. We concentrate on three domains in this article: the definition of the organizational setting, the process and inclusiveness of the political personnel selection, and the management of financial resources. Both layers – the central and the regional – compete for maximum control over these domains. On one side, the centre attempts to impose rules on the sub-national unit intruding on the latter's operations and conduct. On the other hand, the sub-national units fight to retain autonomy and independence from the centre.

The relationship between the centre and the periphery concerning these three domains is usually codified in a party's statutes and regulations. The creation of these rules – and their implementation and interpretation – is the result of a *bras de fer* between the two layers of the party organization. In this article, however, we do not focus on the dynamics that created party statutes and formal regulations, but rather on the final outcome of these rules. The party statutes provide cues to understand *who* holds the 'formal right' to exercise power within the party structure *and to what extent* they wield it. As Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1992, 1994) suggested, a party's 'official story' identifies the power relationship between different party components.

## 2. Leadership domination vs. strataarchical accomodation?

The different structural approaches to party analysis share the same premise: resources are distributed unevenly in the party arena. Panebianco (1988) stated that the party leadership has a competitive advantage in respect to the rank-and-file because the former possesses many exclusive assets: legitimate ownership of the party's 'trade mark', material resources, prestige, competence, access to the media, and institutional forums for expressive activity (see on the same vein, Offerlé 2012). Kenneth Janda (1980, 1983) agreed with this perspective and suggested that the locus of intra-party power lies in the "national party organs (that) concentrate the effective decision making" (Janda and Coleman 1998: 619).

Despite their divergent methods of analysis – Janda measuring intra-party power with a series of indicators, and Panebianco identifying the crucial resources at stake through theoretical premises – both authors concurred that the party elite has a privileged position in the acquisition and maintenance maintain of power vis-à-vis other layers of the party.

Samuel Eldersveld's (1964) strataarchical approach – recently re-framed by Kenneth Carty (2004, 2013) and Nicole Bolleyer (2012) – offers a different interpretation. While Panebianco and Janda's approach emphasises disparity

and skewness in intra-party power distribution, the stratararchical approach argues that there is reciprocal autonomy between central and local party structures. According to Eldersveld (1964: 9), the “proliferation of the ruling groups and the diffusion of power prerogatives” at different party layers (see also Carty 2013: 25) produce a sort of “reciprocal deference structure. (...) Control from the top (i)s minimal and formal” (Eldersveld 1964: 100). The central party restrains itself from exercising direct and imposing control on the lower echelons, leaving the local strata with an ample degree of freedom in their activity. In exchange, the leadership is not contained by the party’s lower level units. The local leaders, thanks to their freedom to manoeuvre, are able to develop and manage their own resources autonomously. This includes having financial independence, developing a local network of notable people, mobilizing membership, and developing privileged relationships with local interests. This framework depicts a centre-periphery relation almost free of conflict since each level – the central and the local– controls and enjoys its own resources. In Eldersveld’s (1964: 10) terms, there is a relationship of “accommodation” between centre and periphery. However intra-party conflict may still arise because, in the stratararchy, “hierarchical elements” are present (see Bolleyer 2012: 318). Eldersveld himself admits that the centre takes advantage of its ability to sanction deviations that might occur at the local level. Similarly, Kenneth Carty, discussing his franchise party model, suggests “the central office can penalize a local affiliate if it fails to meet the organization’s standard” (Carty 2004: 10). Even in the stratararchy a differential of power – i.e. of control over resources – exists. Therefore there is still a potential for conflict. This conflict emerges when the central party intrudes on the local level, or vice-versa, when the local level attempts to influence decision making at the national level or radically diverges from the national headquarters’ party policies.

In this article, following Nicole Bolleyer’s (2012) acute reformulation of the stratararchical-hierarchical question, we intend to test the different allocation of “competence and resources (e.g. *candidate selection*, *conflict resolution*, *finances*)” among the different party’s strata, and highlight “whether and how one level is capable of dominating the other” (Bolleyer 2012: 319 our emphasis). Diverging from Bolleyer we do not consider “conflict resolution” in our analysis. Instead we introduce the question of who has autonomy/control over the “organizational structuring” of the local unit. In alignment with Bolleyer we do consider financing and personnel selection. Through these three “competences and resources” we will assess the evolution of the intra-party territorial (i.e. centre-periphery) power relations in Italian parties from 1991 to 2011.

The centre-periphery relations have been largely interpreted in terms of ‘intra-party democracy’ (see Cross and Katz 2013 for a recent survey). A

number of studies have demonstrated that in the last fifteen years or so the central elite has devolved power to party members. Parties now show “greater inclusiveness and openness” (Cain *et al.* 2003: 253) and “a global trend [...] that transfers new powers to individual party members” is in action (Scarrow and Gezgor 2010: 826). The pro-membership reforms can be interpreted as the “desire to reduce the oligarchic tendencies of parties by creating a participatory revolution [...]: they were designed to overcome an intra-party democratic deficit” (Kenig 2008: 241). However, the party elites have promoted this trend themselves: they have devolved power to the membership. Why has the central party been so ‘generous’? A series of general explanations have been suggested: to respond to the public’s increasing participatory drive (Dalton *et al.* 2011); to be more in tune with the democratic principle that characterizes the political system in which parties operate (Caul Kittilson and Scarrow 2003); and to counteract the growing deficit of legitimacy (Ignazi 2014, Kopecky 2014, Kriesi 2014).

There is also another interpretation of this process proposed by Katz and Mair, together and separately (Katz and Mair, 1994, 1995, Mair 1994, Katz 2002, 2013). They argue such devolution is a malicious trick devised by party leadership to impose itself by using plebiscitary appeal to bypass the intermediate party structures and the middle level elites. These intermediaries can act as a filter, or even an obstruction, to the bottom-up influx of wills and demands (see Saglie and Heidar 2004). If this is the case, the openness and inclusion of the membership has produced a *dispossession of power* at the intermediate level of the party organization (Detterbeck 2012: 84; see also Rahat 2009, Rahat and Hazan 2010): their role in the decision-making process is restricted or totally by-passed (Mair 1994: 16ff).

While a large number of studies emphasise the role of party membership, the party is still a complex organization divided in different territorial levels following the administrative structure of the state (van Biezen and Piccio 2013: 43). Only recently the relationships between different party structures rather than just the relationship between members and leaders have been considered (see Deschouwer 2003, 2006; Fabre 2008; Thorlakson 2009; Van Houten 2009; Pedersen 2010; Detterbeck 2012). In this work we follow this new line of research and focus precisely on the relations between different territorial layers of the political party – the national centre and the regional/sub-national one – in order to test the intra-party centre-periphery dynamic.

On the basis of the above discussion, and in particular on the intra-party centre-periphery conflict over party organizational resources and the leaderships’ competitive advantage in this dynamic, we can formulate two main research questions and hypotheses:

1) Has the central party dispossessed the sub-national units and thus reduced the autonomy of the sub-national units and increased the verticalization<sup>1</sup> of power? Or rather, have the local units kept or conquered a high degree of autonomy, thus preventing the verticalization process? If the former question were true, the skewed distribution of resources would be confirmed; if the latter were true the reciprocal autonomy postulated by the stratarchical approach would be confirmed.

2) Are there any difference among the parties on the basis of their political alignment and organizational origin? In principle one could argue that if the party has an ideological and organization tradition linked to the left and/or to the mass party model, (that is, it displays a tendency to a high institutionalization) then the party should remain more verticalized; and if the party is linked to a moderate-conservative tradition and/or cadre-party organization, (that is, it displays a tendency to a low institutionalization) then the party should be less verticalized.

### 3. Data analysis

To test empirically the outlined hypotheses we focus on three crucial domains which engage the central party elite and the sub-national party ranks in a power relation: 1) Organizational structuring; 2) Personnel selection; 3) Party finance.

The first concerns the ability of the centre to determine the activities of the local structures as well as the role the local representatives can play in national bodies. The tendency toward using uniform, nationally-defined standards at the local level, thus reducing the uncertainties created by the different ways local units may structure themselves, assures higher institutionalization and a firmer control from the national party. Such control further increases if the local representatives only play a limited role in the national

<sup>1</sup>In this article we adopt the term verticalization rather than the more common term centralization (see Deschouwer 2003:215 for a similar approach). The rationale for this preference is that verticalization implies a *vertical* relation, and refers to the captivation of power at the top echelons *vis-à-vis* the lower echelons of the party; while centralization implies an *horizontal* relation, and refers to the limitation of the power of national *and* collective party organs in favour of a national, *restricted* elite. In other terms, verticalization taps the *centre-periphery dimension* where the periphery (local units) loses power in favour of national/central organs, whereas centralization implies the concentration of power in few hands compared to larger bodies *at the same national level*: in the latter case no process of verticalization is in action. Given the aim of our analysis we rest on this conceptual differentiation and thus adopt the term verticalization.

bodies. The more the sub-national level follows the rules and the templates proposed by the central elite, the more the central elite is confident in its control of the local unit.

The second domain investigates the formal rules that allow the centre to survey and monitor the selection of the candidates for representative and party offices. The more the process is under national leadership control, the more limited the ability of sub-national units to make autonomous choices, and thus the higher the verticalization.

The third domain concerns the management of financial resources. If the sub-national unit is able to retain money from membership fees, local donations and state reimbursement – and can also manage these resources freely – it maintains a high level of autonomy. In such situations power verticalization is contained.

Each dimension is articulated in three variables:

1) *Organizational structuring*:

- Organizational autonomy (OA)
- Member recruitment procedures (RP)
- Role in the national executive (NE)

2) *Personnel*

- National leader selection (NL)
- Regional leader selection (RL)
- Parliamentary candidate selection (CS)

3) *Financing*

- Financial autonomy (FA)
- Membership fees (MF)
- State funds / Electoral Reimbursement (ER)

Concerning the dimension *Organizational structuring*, the variable Organizational Autonomy (OA) focuses on the powers held by the sub-national party units in self-regulating their form and activities: the more detailed and pervasive the mandatory standards set by the national statute are, the higher the control exerted by the national party is. The same logic applies to the second variable related to the intra-party arrangements set for the procedures of Member Recruitment (RP): if the national statute controls the management of this function, then the organizational structure of the party will be more verticalized. The third variable evaluates the role of sub-national representatives in the National Executive party organ (NE), from having a mere presence to obtaining the right to vote: the more limited the role granted to them, the higher the verticalization of the party structure.

The second dimension focuses on the composition of the party organs involved in *candidate* and *national party leaders selection*, as well as in the related procedures. The first variable concerns the involvement of sub-national representatives in the national party organ that selects the party National Leader (NL): both inclusive selective organs and extended regional power are associated with a less verticalized party organization. The second and the third variables concern the involvement of sub-national party units in selecting the party Regional Leader (RL) as well as in Selecting Candidates for national elections (CS); both variables assess the capacity of the national level to control the nomination procedures

The management of *Party finance* is the third dimension to be analysed. The first variable considers the Financial Autonomy (FA) of the sub-national party with respect to the national headquarters: verticalization depends by the type and depth of the involvement of the national party in managing and supervising the financial operations of the party's periphery. The second variable concerns the share of Membership Fees (MF) retained at the sub-national level – or devolved by the centre to the periphery. The third variable concerns the quota of the State Funds (EL) provided for regional elections that are distributed by the national party head-office to the sub-national level.

Variables are operationalized through a specific coding scheme<sup>2</sup>: party-by-party, each variable receives a score from 1 to 5<sup>3</sup> (see Appendix). The lowest level of verticalization receives a score of 1, while the highest receives 5<sup>4</sup>. The parties considered here are the main Italian parties<sup>5</sup> – PDS-DS, PD,

<sup>2</sup>For different coding proposals see Thorlakson (2009) and Fabre (2010).

<sup>3</sup>The codes have been assigned by the authors with the assistance of researchers and colleagues of the Universities of Bologna, Pisa, and Rome La Sapienza.

<sup>4</sup>Score 1 is assigned when sub-national party units or sub-national party representatives wield substantive regulatory, selecting and financial powers and prerogatives in party organizational articulation and procedures. Score 2 covers those cases in which the sub-national party is only partially constrained by the national regulatory framework as well as those situations in which sub-national party representatives are massively involved and provided with voting right, in national organs and decision making processes. Score 3 stands for those cases where national and sub-national levels share competences, within the regulatory framework set by national party organs. Score 4 indicates that the decisions are formulated at the central level, while sub-national party units/representatives play a consultative role. Score 5 indicates a national level which leaves no significant autonomy to sub-national party units/representatives. In case of no specific provision, 0 is assigned.

<sup>5</sup>The PDS transformed itself into the DS in 1998, and the PPI transformed itself into the DL in 2002 (Bardi 2007; Ignazi et al. 2010). Given the strict and direct lineage in these two passages, in many circumstances we will consider PDS and DS as one party, as well as for PPI and DL.

PPI-DL, FI, PDL, AN (see note 5 for full names)<sup>6</sup> – from 1991 to 2011, a period which starts with the (dramatic) transformation of the PCI (the Italian Communist Party) into PDS, and ends with the consolidation of the PD and PDL (Bardi 2007, Newell 2010).

TABLE 1. *Party scores per party statute*

Party	Statute	OA	RP	NE	NL	RL	CS	FA	MF	ER
PDS	1991	3	2	3	3	2	3	1	1	4
PDS	1997	2	1	2	2	2	5	1	1	-
DS	2000	2	2	2	5	1	3	1	2	-
DS	2005	2	2	2	5	1	3	1	2	5
PPI	1995	3	1	2	2	2	3	1	2	3
PPI	1999	2	3	2	2	0	3	1	1	-
DL	2002	3	3	2	2	2	4	1	3	-
DL	2004	3	3	2	2	2	4	1	3	-
DL	2006	3	3	2	2	2	4	1	3	4
PD	2008	3	2	2	5	2	3	1	1	2
PD	2010	3	2	2	5	2	3	1	1	2
AN	1995	3	2	3	2	5	4	4	2	4
AN	2006	5	2	3	2	3	4	5	2	4
FI	1997	5	4	2	2	5	4	3	2	5
FI	2004	5	4	2	2	5	4	3	2	4
PDL	2009	5	4	5	2	5	5	3	2	5
PDL	2011	5	4	5	2	5	5	3	2	5

Note: 5 highest verticalization; 1 lowest verticalization

As already stated, the data for the coding of the variables are provided by the *official story* of Italian parties i.e. party statutes, financial reports, balance sheets, and internal organizational regulations<sup>7</sup>. The study of the official story of political parties as a means to understand organizational dynamics has

<sup>6</sup> AN: *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance); FI: *Forza Italia* (Go Italy!) PD: *Partito Democratico* (Democratic Party); PDL: *Popolo della Libertà* (People of Freedom); PDS-DS: *Partito Democratico della Sinistra-Democratici di Sinistra* (Democratic Party of the Left-Left Democrats); PPI-DL: *Partito Popolare Italiano-Democrazia è Libertà* (Italian Popular Party-Democracy is Freedom).

<sup>7</sup>The statutes considered in the period 1991-2011 are 17. The missing or obscure information in the statutes have been supplanted by internal regulatory documents. The balance sheets of the electoral state funds for the regional elections in 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010 have been provided by the respective editions of the Official Bulletin of the Italian Republic: *Gazzetta Ufficiale Repubblica Italiana - Serie Generale n. 290 del 11-12-1999 Supplemento Ordinario*; *Gazzetta Ufficiale Repubblica Italiana - Serie Generale n. 292 del 13-12-2002 Supplemento Ordinario*; *Gazzetta Ufficiale Repubblica Italiana - Serie*



been aptly considered in the last years (see Katz and Mair 1992; Fabre 2010; Smith and Gauja 2010, Bolleyer 2012, von den Berge *et al.* 2013). The analysis of changes in the statutes and the rules over time assesses which party layer has gained, or lost, power at the expense of the other party layer. Beyond this cross-time, party-by-party, investigation, a cross-party comparative analysis will provide a picture of the ideological/organizational influence in determining the respective parties' profile.

### 3.1 Organizational structuring

The variable Organizational Autonomy (OA) investigates the self-regulating powers of the local party units in shaping their articulation and activities. Verticalized parties tend to leave no regulatory power to the periphery: their statutes prescribe stringent guidelines the local party should follow quite strictly. On the contrary, stratarchical patterns emerge where the national statutes leave the local structure ample freedom of for self-regulation.

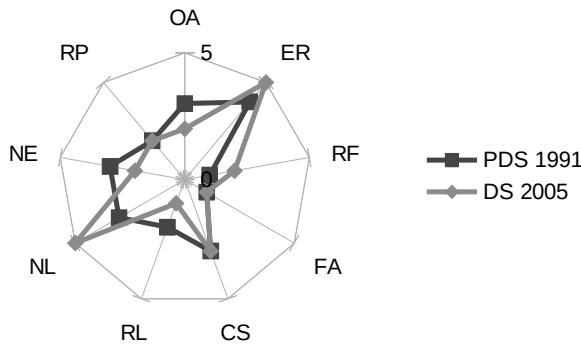


FIGURE 1. Organizational evolution of the PDS-DS

Empirical evidence shows there is very little change within parties over time, thus there is limited intra-party variance. Only the PDS-DS had a dramatic increase in the autonomy that its sub-national units enjoyed (see Figure 1): this occurred when the party moved from its first post-communist statute to a new one in 1997, whereupon it finally abandoned its organizational legacy of firm vertical control (Ignazi 1992; Baccetti 1997). On the contrary inter-party variance – or the difference between parties – is visible and follows a left-right

partisan alignment. This variance can be interpreted as a consequence of the different degrees of party institutionalization at sub-national level, both at organizational and institutional level. Well-organized parties, with deep-rooted institutional presence in local government at municipal, provincial and regional levels are expected to have more autonomy at the periphery. The data confirms this hypothesis. The centre-left parties – PDS-DS and PPI-DL – display the highest levels of Organizational Autonomy. These parties inherited a widespread network of local structures and a complex organizational form in line with the mass-party characteristics of their predecessors (PCI and DC, respectively). Furthermore they had a well established and encompassing presence in local governments, although it was not standardized on the national level (Diamanti 2003).

On the political right, all parties display a very high level of verticalization. However this commonality hides the quite different organizational profile of the two older parties (AN and FI). AN, the “post-fascist” party born in 1995 from the “neo-fascist” MSI (Italian Social Movement) (Ignazi 1998) kept a sub-national form in line with the mass-party model of its ancestor. However, before 1995, organizational institutionalization coupled with a very limited presence in local governments. The MSI was considered an anti-system party and had almost no chance of entering government coalitions, even at local level. In addition, party sub-national units were heavily dependent from the national headquarters, in line with the caesaristic party management culture (*ibidem*). This original synthesis of mass party organization with caesaristic leadership style continued even after the AN evolved into a pro-system, legitimate party. On the contrary, FI, the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi in 1993, had neither an organizational articulation nor an institutional representation at sub-national level until the late 1990s when the party scantily and unevenly institutionalized (Poli 2001, Paolucci 2008). The process of party formation followed strict top-down approach that left no significant autonomy to the sub-national units. When FI and AN merged into the PDL (McDonnell 2013) in 2009, the organizational legacies of the two founding parties passed on to the new one. PDL statutes strictly regulate the structure and the activities of the sub-national units.

The second variable focuses on the procedures for member Recruitment Procedures (RP) (see Table 1.2). Managing this procedure – the so-called ‘pork barrel’ – allows the local party leader to control packages of party members, whose loyalty to local party leaders might influence the internal power relations. Contrary to its mass-party ideological-organizational development, verticalization affects the right more than the left. The PDS-DS is in fact the least verticalized party: the local party branches are allowed to manage and keep their members’ registration forms. This kind of arrangement has been adopted also by the PD, which even requires the sub-national units to organ-

ize membership recruitment campaigns. Somewhat deviant from this trend is the case of the PPI-DL (see Figure 2): the 1999 party statute extended the prerogatives of the national headquarters on this field. This move toward verticalization can be understood by considering that the party underwent a series of splits (Baccetti 2007) that produced high organizational uncertainty and thus pushed the national party to directly control member recruitment.

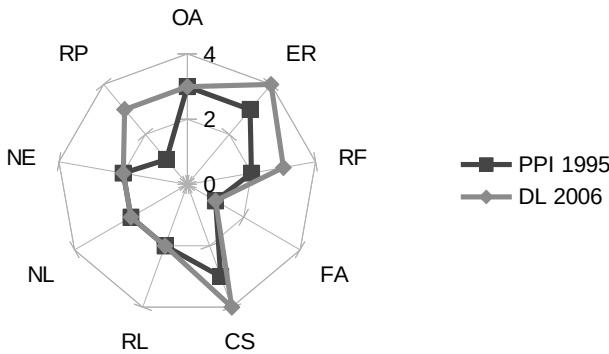


FIGURE 2. Organizational evolution of the PPI-DL

On the other side of the political spectrum the national headquarter of AN sets the general guidelines for sub-national units to abide by managing member recruitment, in accordance with the MSI organizational model; this means that the centre guides and monitors the local units in this activity. FI shows the most top-down approach, in line with the general tendency of its party-building process: the aspiring members send their registration form and the fee to a central office (the National Membership Bureau), which is also in charge of maintaining the members’ register. The PDL inherits the FI organizational legacy, as the national party primarily manages party membership.

The third variable seeks to determine the role of sub-national party representatives within the National Executive committee (NE), from having just a mere presence to having a right of vote. If sub-national delegates are provided with the right of vote, then their influence at the national level is higher and the degree of verticalization decreases. (See table 1.3) In mass parties the presence of sub-national representatives was granted by the chain of command ‘from below’. However this has not been always the case in Italian parties. In the first (1991) PDS statute, the limited number of regional secretaries in the national executive committee only had the right to give speeches and make proposals. Inclusion and empowerment increased in the following statutes when all regional and federal secretaries became *ex-officio* members wielding full voting rights. Also a *sui generis* mass party such as AN limited the pres-

ence of ex-officio members in the national executive and did not grant them any right of vote. Quite surprisingly, FI, the most outlying party to any mass party development, appears to be less verticalized than all the other parties (see Figure 3). However the score assigned to FI needs some clarification. Even if all FI regional secretaries are members ex-officio with voting right in the executive committee, they are *directly nominated by the party leader* (Berlusconi): this means that their presence and role are ‘subordinated’ to the leader’s will. Therefore, the score of this variable should be understood considering this caveat.

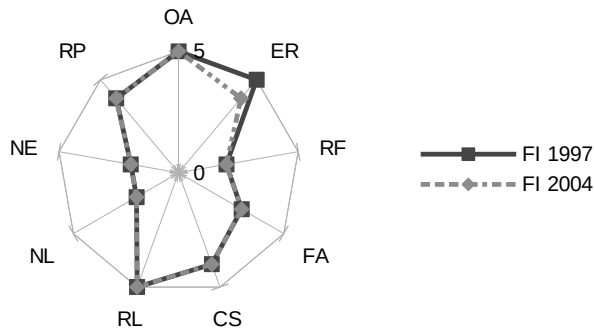


FIGURE 3: Organizational evolution of FI

### 3.2 Personnel selection

The procedure for personnel selection is at the heart of intra-party democracy and political representation. As many scholars have observed (Mair 1994; Katz and Mair 1995; Carty 2013), in the last decades the selection of the national leader has assumed an increasingly plebiscitary flavour, especially where intra-party open primary elections have been introduced. This openness in terms of member involvement has generally been welcomed, because it increases of the party’s democratic standard. However, it can be argued that the direct appeal to the membership actually increases the level of internal vertical control. In fact, openness and democratization is offset by the marginalization of the intermediate structures in favor of the membership. Moreover, the leadership’s direct appeal to the membership, and even to the voters, has a high manipulative potential, whereas delegated democracy traditionally limited that potential through the intervention of the intermediate bodies. This is why we qualify provisions that skip the role of the subnational units in the party personnel selection as highly verticalized, even if the local structures were in favour of members and/or voters participation.

The first variable concerns the inclusion of sub-national representatives in the National Leader selection (NL) (see table 1.4). Mass parties tended to provide the national assembly – an organ mainly composed by delegates from sub-national levels – with the power to elect the national leader. However, the process of party “presidentialization” (Calise 2005, Poguntke and Webb 2005) has modified this pattern. The PDS-DS offers a clear example of the spread of this tendency. The party rules changed from having its sub-national delegates election the leader, to having the party membership directly elect the leader. The PD also implemented such a rule in 2007, which introduced open primaries<sup>8</sup>. As explained above, we consider the leader selection to be highly verticalized when the sub-national structures are circumscribed in favour of members and voters’ direct involvement. This is why the PD shows such a high value in this variable (see Figure 4).

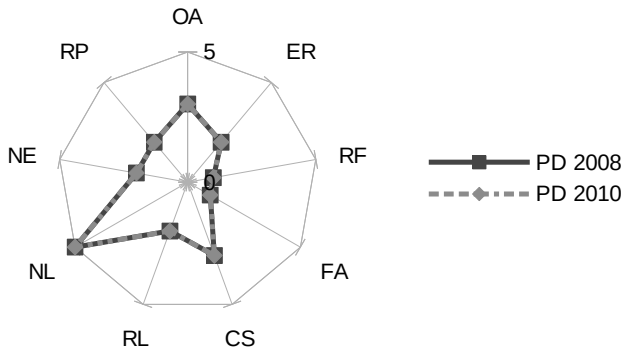


FIGURE 4. Organizational evolution of the PD

On the contrary, the centre-right parties (and the PPI-DL) have preserved the role of the subnational structures. Nevertheless, a note of caution is needed with respect to the role of Berlusconi in his ‘own parties’ – FI and PDL since in both parties the leadership election has never been contested: a plebiscitary style supersedes the formally prescribed delegated democracy.

Whereas in this case the left-right divide is not clearly evident, it re-emerges when analyzing the procedures for the selection of the Regional Leader (RL). (see table 1.5) This variable allows us to analyze to what extent the national party intrudes in the regional leader election process. In the PDS-DS, as well as in the PPI-DL, the process is characterized by the significant degree of autonomy granted to the sub-national level. The PD follows this style

<sup>8</sup> An overview of the primaries in Italy is offered by Pasquino (2011)

as well: the statute indicates that the selection ‘*could be open*’ to members as well as to voters. This means the regional assembly is left with the final power of selection. The regional organ enjoys real autonomy in decision-making<sup>9</sup>. On the political right, top-down nomination by the national leadership is customary. The AN has been the only one to relax this procedure (see Figure 5), when in 2006 the party allowed the regional assembly to elect its leader (formerly nominated by the party leader). On the contrary, FI’s vertical model for the appointment of the regional leaders has been unwavering, as they are directly nominated by the national leader. In line with FI, the PDL also leaves the selection of sub-national leaders in the hands of the national leader.

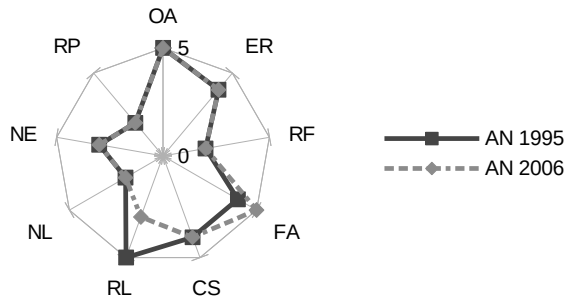


FIGURE 5. Organizational evolution of AN

On the whole the national elites control Candidate Selection (CS) to parliamentary elections: no party allows significant autonomy to the sub-national units. AN and FI present similar and highly verticalized procedures in selection since their national executive organs hold the ultimate power to approve candidates. The PDL goes even further: the party leader and his associates – formally assembled in the Presidency Committee (designated by Berlusconi himself) – select and set candidatures. The left-wing parties grant somewhat more autonomy to the sub-national level. With the exception of its 1997 statute, the PDS-DS allows both the regional and the national levels to be involved in the selection process. This places the party at a middle level of verticalization. The PPI follows suit, whereas the statutes of DL are less clear on this aspect, as the national headquarter has the power “to evaluate the reputation and the political reliability of the candidates”<sup>10</sup>. The PD also scores in the middle between autonomy and control: candidacies are defined at the regional level by the regional secretary, in accordance with an *ad hoc*

<sup>9</sup> In this circumstance we rather valued the autonomy element in spite of the plebiscitary option included in the statute.

<sup>10</sup> See the statutes of DL (2002, 2004, 2006), art. 27, par.4.

national organ<sup>11</sup>, but a high number of candidates are 'proposed' by the national secretary.

### 3.3 Party finance

The third dimension analyses the management of financial resources, a crucial asset in the intra-party power relationship. This dimension does not present a neat left-right divide in two out of three variables.

The only variable that presents a clear left-right cleavage is the one that concerns the degree of control and supervision of the national level over the Financial Activities (FA) of the periphery. All left-wing parties allow for the highest level of financial autonomy of their sub-national bodies. Conversely, the AN national administrative committee has the power to supervise and coordinate every financial activity at any organizational level. FI leaves some financial autonomy to the local level, but at the same time limits such autonomy through the strict guidelines of its national statutes. The FI's 'medium' level of financial autonomy also characterizes the PDL, whose national statutes list a large number of administrative activities that cannot be carried out by local organs.

As far as distribution of Membership Fees (MF) and State Funds (ER) are concerned, the parties' positions do not follow any pattern. In the early nineties the PDS entitled the sub-national levels to collect and retain the entire amount of the contributions raised through their recruitment campaigns. Later, the DS required a very limited share of the fees to be sent to the national level. In the PPI two-thirds of the fees are retained at the sub-national level, while in DL 50% of the fees are retained. The PD maintains the methods of the PDS, demonstrating the minimum level of verticalization. In contrast with their verticalized profile among the other variables, the AN partitions its registration fees between the sub-national level (70-80%) and the national level (30-20%), In the FI, while the fees are collected centrally, the sub-national units are reimbursed up to 80% of the total amount. The PDL roughly follows the pattern of FI. The above-mentioned lack of financial autonomy accorded to the sub-national units weakens the power of the local units vis-à-vis the central party (see Figure 6).

<sup>11</sup> The electoral lists are integrated with candidates nominated at the sub-national level and approved by the National Conference.

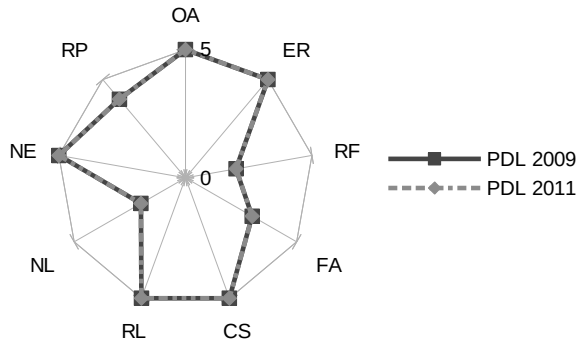


Figure 6. Organizational evolution of the PDL

A similar inter-party variation disconnected to the left-right cleavage affects the territorial distribution of the State Funds (ER) for regional elections. Until it was abolished in 2014, Italian legislation (Pizzimenti and Ignazi 2011) prescribed that state funds for regional elections shall go to the national party headquarters, which were totally free to decide the amount to be delivered to the periphery. All parties – save the PD that leaves all the money to the regional level – devolve only a small share of the electoral reimbursement to the sub-national level. The PPI-DL has increased its verticalization over time, retaining up to more than the 80% of state funds for regional elections in 2005. The AN national headquarters returns a very low percentage of the contributions received to the regional level: 11% in 1995, and only 5% in 2005. As FI had not yet implemented any sub-national organizational structure in 1995, the total amount of public funds for that election remained in the hands of the national centre, while in 2005, the national level distributed around 12% of the state funds to the regional structures. The PDL, similar to FI in its early years, keeps all the state funds for regional elections.

#### 4. Conclusion

The aim of this article was twofold. First, we were interested in assessing, through an extensive analysis of Italian political parties' official stories, if and to what extent the party at the national-central level reduced the autonomy of the sub-national units over time. Secondly, we investigated whether the intra-party variance in the organizational patterns is linked to its location on the right-left spectrum and/or to the party's organizational imprint.

In regards to the first research question, the analysis of the parties' official stories demonstrates that Italian parties display a rather low level of verticalization in the twenty years considered. Additionally, the sub-national



party units are afforded a high level of autonomy (and inclusiveness). As Table 2 shows, parties' sub-national levels are significantly empowered on the whole. Scores indicating a high level of autonomy (1 and 2) are the majority in most of the variables considered: in fact the low scores are the most numerous in 6 of the 9 variables.

TABLE 2. Number of score per variable (all parties and all statutes)

Score	OA	RP	NE	NL	RL	CS	FA	MF	ER
1	0	2	0	0	2	0	11	5	0
2	4	7	9	12	8	0	0	9	1
3	6	4	1	1	1	7	4	3	1
4	0	4	1	0	0	7	1	0	8
5	7	0	5	4	5	3	1	0	4
TOT	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	14*

Source: party statutes (1991-2011)

Note: 5 highest verticalization; 1 lowest verticalization. \* party balance sheets (1995-2010).

In particular, the sub-national party level enjoys abundant freedom in regards to financial activity. In 11 of the 17 statutes examined, the national party does not interfere in any way with how the sub-national party manages its money. A similar, albeit less pronounced, level of autonomy is granted to local structures in the allocation of the membership fees: in most cases (9 out of 17) the fees are largely kept by the subnational structure, and in some cases (5 out of 17) the fees are even totally retained at the local level. Also the procedures for the recruitment of party members, the process of selection of both national and regional leaders, and the role credited to sub-national representatives in the national executive display low levels of verticalization.

In three aspects of the intra-party relationship the national party holds on to the reins of power. The central office controls the organizational regulation of the sub-national level, the selection of candidates to national elections, and the allocation of state funds. The latter two prerogatives are especially sensitive in terms of internal power relationships. The national leaderships' control of these three stakes in self-organization, personnel selection and money further demonstrates that while there is a stratarchical relationship within Italian parties, it has not fully developed.

The political left has progressively relaxed central control with the passing of time. In the PDS-DS the highly centralized organizational legacy of the PCI was substantially loosened: sub-national units are provided with significant degrees of freedom in defining their internal organization, choos-

ing their leaders and managing their financial activities. The PPI and DL, on the other hand, followed a less linear path. The DL appears to be even more verticalized when compared to its father-party PPI. The convergence of PDS-DS and PPI-DL into the PD have kept and even reinforced the PDS-DS tendency of reciprocal autonomy between the national and the sub-national party layers. However, the relaxation of the central party control has been offset by the diffusion of a plebiscitary style of leadership selection – as previously introduced by the DS. The direct appeal to the membership, and the consequent marginalization of sub-national representatives, has reinforced, in our view, the role of the national leadership. This interpretation explains why in the dimension of personnel selection – *but only in this dimension* - the PD is considered to be more verticalized than its predecessors.

The right-wing parties have only partially moved towards granting more autonomy to the subnational units. AN shows a vertical organizational profile in line with its predecessor (MSI), with the partial exception of the personnel selection that was devolved in 2006 to the sub-national units. In FI, the charismatic profile of Berlusconi's leadership shapes the party, and a top-down approach is quite plain and consistent with many of its organizational traits. Only the membership fees are left to the periphery; however this 'generosity' should be viewed in the light of the party's disregard for the membership recruitment – except for a very limited period in the late 1990s. Furthermore, while the election procedures for the national bodies appear to be quite open, they are mastered by the uncontested and charismatic party leader. On average, the PDL reflects, and even reinforces in certain aspects, the top-down approach of its founders.. Even if Berlusconi's disdain for party affairs has actually left some room of manoeuvre to sub-national level, the centre (e.i. Berlusconi himself) holds the formal (and informal) means to intervene.

In sum, *the first hypothesis of a growing level of verticalization of intra-party power is not confirmed*. The trend in fact goes in the opposite direction; only in a few niches has the leadership maintained total control. Such trend would have been even more dramatic if we had not 'weighted' direct national leader elections as evidence of verticalization.

The second hypothesis, concerning the link between level of verticalization and a party's location on the left-right political continuum as well its organizational/ideological origin, is largely confirmed by the data – with some conditions for the latter aspect. A neat divide between centre-left and centre-right parties emerges in most of the variables, highlighting the importance of the political divide. *The centre-left parties present, on average, lower values of verticalization compared to the centre-right parties* (Table 3).

TABLE 3. Party scores: mean values

Party	OA	RP	NE	NL	RL	CS	FA	MF	ER	Average Value
PDS-DS	2,2	1,7	2,2	3,7	1,5	3,5	1	1,5	4,5	2,4
PPI-DL	2,8	2,6	2	2	1,6	3,6	1	2,4	3,5	2,4
PD	3	2	2	5	2	3	1	1	2	2,3
AN	5	2	3	2	4	4	4,5	2	4	3,4
FI	5	4	2	2	5	4	3	2	4,5	3,5
PDL	5	4	5	2	5	5	3	2	5	4

Note: 5 highest verticalization; 1 lowest verticalization

As for the ideological-organizational imprint in defining internal power relations, it should be noted that all Italian parties share the mass party model, except for FI (Bardi et al. 2007). Berlusconi's FI represents an outlier, since the other right-wing party, AN (as well as its ancestor MSI), also shares the mass party model, albeit with a strong caesaristic legacy. The traditional emphasis on the leadership by the right-wing parties, even reinforced by the hold of Berlusconi on the FI and PDL, are at the core of the limited power devolution to the sub-national units in those parties; on the contrary, the collective style of intra-party relations coming from the leftist tradition has prevented the verticalization drive and fostered more openness and autonomy in the left-wing parties.

In conclusion, while centre-left parties have progressively displayed tendencies towards stratarchical organizational templates – by increasing the reciprocal autonomy between the national and the sub-national party (despite a shift towards a plebiscitary style in the leadership selection) – the centre-right parties have maintained and even accentuated vertical dynamics .

Before concluding that a “stratarchical imperative” – as coined by Carty (2004) – has affected Italian parties, we can question why it has occurred. In other words, we can speculate whether the recent devolution of power implies that the traditional resources used by party leadership to control the local units have either been *removed* thanks to a direct and explicit activity by the subnational structures calling for more democratization and voice, or have been simply *let go* by the party's central leadership.

In the first case the conquest of autonomy would be the result of a fight between centre and periphery. However, the story of Italian parties does not provide evidence of this conflict (Cerruto 2013, Ignazi *et al.* 2013). In fact the parties' regional units have cooperated with the centre in all but a few exceptions. In almost no instance has the regional level advanced grievances against the centre on political/organizational issues: where conflicts did arise, they came from regional leaders seeking more say at the national level in order

to advance their own career, rather than advocating autonomy for their own subnational structure. Thus, the conquest of more flexibility in the intra-party dynamic occurred smoothly and quite consensually.

Therefore the second case – a tranquil and conflict-free devolution of power by the leadership – seems to be the guiding principle. This raises the hypothesis, and the suspicion, that the parties' leaderships were no longer interested in most of the organizational resources we have discussed, here and were rather keener to gain control of other resources *outside the traditional reach of party organization*.

The first case demonstrates the process of 'decentralization - democratization'; in this way Italian parties' territorial and hierarchical devolution of power follows the general path of contemporary democracies as noted by recent works on "party democracy" (see Cross and Katz 2013). Italy has finally come to join the group, even if not every party shares the same profile. In the second case we have a 'discarding of relevance' of the party's territorial hierarchical dimension by the leadership itself: what the local units do, or even their own existence and activity, are no longer important for the centre.

In the latter case we deal with a new perspective that leads us to reconsider what are *effectively* the most important resources for a central party elite. Beyond Panebianco's (1988) "zones of uncertainty", which depicts the parties' realities at the end of the 1970s, other crucial assets seem now to be at the core of national leadership needs. In particular, two assets – which are themselves intertwined - are beyond the party rules: communication, and 'personal leadership', i.e., the image of the leader him/herself. As Kirchheimer had already envisaged fifty years ago, the leadership groups have become more and more autonomous from the constraint of the lower party ranks and the membership thanks to their direct and exclusive access to the media. What was embryonic at the time of Kirchheimer has become the standard rule today. Currently the relevance of communication is so high and the media are so focused on the party leader (see Balmas *et al* 2014), that intra-party relations centered on the other more traditional resources analyzed in this article are bound to lose their centrality. This means that the "reciprocal free hand" in the intra-party relationship hypothesized by Katz and Mair (1994) has come to fruition. As we have shown above, some resources, in particular personnel selection and distribution of public funds, still remain strictly in the control of the central leadership. But new ones, such as communication, *are not statutory defined* and thus escape the centre-periphery dynamic because they are, by definition, reserved only for the leadership. Other competing party leaders – at the national or local level – can attempt to compete over the resource of the 'access to the media', but since this is not defined in any way by party rules it is difficult to prevail over the party leadership in this field. Competition

occurs mainly outside the party realm: on the mass media stage, and on the Internet in the immediate future.

In conclusion, our analysis of the official story of Italian political parties has largely confirmed their tendency towards the *stratarchy accommodation* that we argued in the first section of this article. This outcome may however hide a ‘knight’s move’ by the leadership. Because the centre monopolistically exploits the crucial resources of access to the media and ‘leader image’, it does not have to rely solely on the rules codified in the parties’ statutes in order to control the sub-national units and it could leave room to them. In sum, stratarchy strikes back with vengeance in Italian parties.

**Funding:** The research has been funded by MIUR, PRIN financing n. 2007JW3T8R\_003: I rapporti centro-periferia nei partiti italiani. L’impatto delle modificazioni istituzionali e del processo di “stratarchizzazione” interna (Centre-periphery relations in the Italian political parties. The impact of institutional changes and the process of stratarchization).

## References

- Baccetti, C. (1997). *Il PDS*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Baccetti, C. (2007). *I post democristiani*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Balmas, M., Rahat, G., Sheaffer, T., & Shenhav, S. R. (2014). Two routes to personalized politics Centralized and decentralized personalization. *Party Politics*, 20(1): 37-51.
- Bardi L. (2007), Electoral Change and its Impact on the Party System in Italy. *West European Politics* (30)4: 711-732.
- Bardi, L., Ignazi, P. & Massari, O. (2007). *I partiti italiani*. Milano: UBE.
- von dem Berge, B., Poguntke, T., Obert, P. & Tabei, D. (2013). “Measuring Intra-party Democracy”, Heidelberg: Springer.
- Bolleyer, N. (2012). New Party Organization in Western Europe: Of Hierarchies, Stratarchies and Federations. *Party Politics* (18)3: 315-336.
- Cain, B., Dalton R. J. & Scarrow, S. (eds) (2003). *Democracy Transformed?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Calise, M. (2005). *Presidentialization, Italian Style*. In T. Poguntke, P. D. Webb (eds), *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Carty, K. R. (2004). Parties as franchise system. The stratarchical organizational imperative. *Party Politics* (10)1: 5-24.
- Carty, R. K. (2013). *Are Political Parties Meant to be Internally Democratic?* In W.P. Cross & R.S. Katz (2013), (eds.). *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press;
- Caul Kittilson, M & Scarrow, S. (2003). Political Parties and the Rethoric and Realities of Democratization. In B. Cain et al. (eds) *Democracy Transformed?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Cerruto M. (2013) Il divario incolmabile. Rappresentanza politica e rendimento istituzionale nelle Regioni italiane. In S. Vassallo (a cura di) *La classe politica regionale*. Bologna: Il Mulino, pp. 89-108.
- Cross, W. P. & Blais, A. (2012). Who selects the party leader?. *Party Politics*. (18)2: 127-150.
- Cross, W. P. & Katz, R. S. (2013), (eds.). *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press;
- Dalton, R. J, Farrell, D.M. & McAllister, I. (2011). *Political Parties and Linkage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Deschouwer, K. (2003). Political Parties in Multi-Layered Systems, *European Urban and Regional Studies* 10 (3): 213-226.
- Deschouwer, K. (2006). Political parties as multi-level organizations. In R. Katz & W. Crotty (eds), *Handbook of party politics*. London: Sage Publications.
- Detterbeck, K. (2012). *Multi-Level Party Politics in Western Europe*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan,
- Duverger, M. (1951). *Les partis politiques*. Paris: Colin.
- Eldersveld, S. (1964). *Political Parties: A Behavioral Analysis*. Chicago: Rand McNally.
- Fabre, E. (2010). Measuring party organization: The vertical dimension of the multi-level organization of state-wide parties in Spain and the UK. *Party Politics* (17)3: 343-363.
- Harmel, R. & Janda, K. (1982). *Political Parties and Their Environment: Limits to Reforms?* New York: Longman.
- Harmel, R. & Janda, K. (1994). An Integrated Theory of Party Goals and Party Change. *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 6(3): 259-287.
- Heidar, K. (1984). Party Power: Approaches in a Field of Unfilled Classics, *Scandinavian Political Studies* 7(1): 1-16.
- Ignazi, P. (1992). *Dal PCI al PDS*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Ignazi, P. (1998). *Il polo escluso. Profilo storico del Movimento Sociale Italiano*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Ignazi, P., L. Bardi & O. Massari (2010). Party Organisational Change in Italy (1991-2006). *Modern Italy* (15)2: 197-216.
- Ignazi, P. (2014). Power and the (il)legitimacy of political parties: An unavoidable paradox of contemporary democracy? *Party Politics* 20(2): 160-169.
- Janda, K. (1980). A Comparative Analysis of Party Organization: The United States, Europe, and the World. In W. J. Crotty (ed.) *The Party Symbol: Readings on Political Parties*. San Francisco: W.H. Freeman.
- Janda, K. (1983). *Political Parties: A Cross-National Survey*. New York: The Free Press.
- Janda, K. & Coleman, T. (1998). Effects of Party Organization on Performance during the 'Golden Age' of Parties. *Political Studies* 46(3): 611-632.
- Katz (2013). *Should we Believe that Improved Intra-Party Democracy would Arrest Party Decline?* In Cross & R.S. Katz (2013), (eds.). *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Katz, R. & Mair, P. (eds.) (1992). *Party Organizations. A Data Handbook on Party Organizations in Western Democracies: 1960-90*. London: Sage.
- Katz, R. & Mair, P. (eds) (1994). *How Parties Organize. Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies*, London: Sage.
- Katz, R. & Mair, P. (1995). Changing Models of Party Organisation and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party. *Party Politics* 1(1): 5-28.

- Kenig, O. (2008). Democratization of party leadership selection: Do wider selectorates produce more competitive contests?. *Electoral Studies* 28(2): 240-247.
- Kriesi, H. P. (2014). The Populist Challenge. *West European Politics* 37(2): 361-378.
- Mair, P. (1994). Party Organization: From Civil Society to the State. In R. Katz & P. Mair (eds), *How Parties Organize. Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies*, London: Sage.
- Mair, P. (2008). The Challenge to Party Government. *West European Politics* 31(1-2): 211-234.
- McDonnell, D. (2013). Silvio Berlusconi's Personal Parties: From Forza Italia to the Popolo Della Libertà. *Political Studies* 61(S1): 217-233.
- Michels, R. (1911). *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der moderne Demokratie*. Leipzig: W. Klinkhardt.
- Newell, J. (2000). *Parties and democracy in Italy*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Offerlé, M. (2012). *Le partis politiques*. Paris: PUF.
- Panbianco, A. (1988, or.ed.1982). *Political Parties: Organization and Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Paolucci, C. (2007). Forza Italia. In L. Bardi, P. Ignazi & O. Massari (eds) *I partiti italiani*. Milano: UBE.
- Pedersen, H. H. (2010). How intra-party power relations affect the coalition behaviour of political parties. *Party Politics* (16)6: 737-754.
- Pizzimenti, E. (2007). La galassia postdemocristiana. In L. Bardi, P. Ignazi & O. Massari (eds) *I partiti italiani*. Milano: UBE.
- Poguntke, T. & Webb, P. D. (eds). *The Presidentialization of Politics: A Comparative Study of Modern Democracies*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Poli, E. (2001). *Forza Italia. Strutture, leadership, radicamento territoriale*. Bologna: Il Mulino.
- Rahat, G. (2009). Which Candidate Selection Method is the Most Democratic?. *Government and Opposition* (44)1: 68-90.
- Rahat, G & Hazan, R. Y. (2010). *Democracy within Parties: Candidate Selection Methods and their Political Consequences*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Saglie, J. & Heidar, K. M. (2004). Democracy within Norwegian Political Parties. Complacency or Pressure for Change?. *Party Politics* 10(4): 385- 405.
- Scarrow, S. & Gezgor, B. (2010). Declining memberships, changing members? European political party members in a new era. *Party Politics* (16)6: 823-843.
- Smith, R. & Gauja, A. (2010). Understanding party constitutions as responses to specific challenges. *Party Politics* (16) 6: 755-775.
- Thorlakson, L. (2009). Patterns of Party Integration, Influence and Autonomy in Seven Federations. *Party Politics* (15)2: 157-177.
- Van Biezen, I. & Piccio, D. (2013). *Shaping Intra-Party Democracy: on the Legal Regulation of Internal Party Organizations*. In Cross & R.S. Katz (2013), (eds.). *The Challenges of Intra-Party Democracy*. Oxfors, Oxford University Press;
- Van Biezen, I. & Kopecky P. (2014). The cartel party and the state Party–state linkages in European democracies. *Party Politics* 20(2): 170-182
- Van Houten, P. (2009). Multi-Level Relations in Political Parties: A Delegation Approach. *Party Politics* (15)2: 137-156.

