Party Leadership and Party Cohesion: Determining Factors of “Government Participation” and Incumbency Success of Right-Wing Parties?

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**Introduction**

Recent developments in radical right-wing parties in Italy, Austria and Denmark have demonstrated how such parties have increased their votes, and subsequently their position of power, in each respective political system. In Italy (AN and LN, 1994 and 2001) and in Austria (FPÖ, 2000), this has resulted in radical-right parties forming part of government. However, while AN and LN in Italy were able to stabilise themselves and to gain votes after their government participation, the Austrian FPÖ witnessed severe vote losses in the 1st election after its coalition with the ÖVP. Thus, incumbency successes differ substantially between the two countries. In Denmark, despite increased votes, the right-wing parties did not obtain the status of a government party any time over the last 15 years despite aspirations. However, recent developments suggest that in contrast to the previous radical right party PP, the new radical right-wing party, DF, is gaining policy influence given its recent ability to have shaped and offered support to various governmental initiatives.

Based on these observations, two main questions arise: first, in contrast to the Austrian FPÖ, why were Italian radical right-wing parties able to gain power and then stabilise themselves amongst other parties? Secondly, why was the Danish radical right-wing party DF not yet able to secure governmental positions *per se* in contrast to its Italian and Austrian counterparts, but how could it nevertheless gain policy influence unlike its predecessor PP? In order to answer *both* questions, this paper argues that attention must focus on the changes in party organisations before and after gaining office, specifically highlighting two dimensions: party leadership and party discipline (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Müller, 1997; Kitschelt, 1999).

There are three main sections of the paper. The first, more theoretical, section starts with consideration of the right-wing party and its characteristics, highlighting the importance of leadership in such parties and the necessity of party cohesion in order to ensure their success. It then offers a more focussed theoretical examination of leadership and cohesion in the run-up of government participation. Here we consider three main institutional variables which may influence leadership centralisation and cohesion in the party: the organisation of parliament and its committees; the investiture procedure; and electoral laws. The section closes with examination of theoretical issues related to leadership developments in right-wing incumbent parties. The second, more empirically based, section links ideas raised in the first section and analyses developments in radical right parties in Italy, Austria and Denmark. Each case study tackles two main questions. The first is what institutional variables allowed the parties to be in a position for government participation or government support? Second, what were the effects of
incumbency on leadership and the internal cohesion of each of the right-wing parties?
The final section offers conclusions and main lessons to be taken from the study.

Section 1 - The Theoretical Context of the Study

The literature on incumbency effects has its basis in the American literature. In their analysis of the effects of incumbency in US Congressional election between 1950 and 1988, Krashinsky and Milne define the ‘incumbency effect’ as consisting of two different dimensions, “the benefit of being an incumbent and the benefit of not running against an incumbent” (1993: 341). Similar to research on USA state legislative elections (Cowart, 1973; Carey, Niemi and Powell, 2000), Krashinsky and Milne’s (1993: 341) work argues that “incumbency is an important influence on voting behaviour […]”. In a similar vein, focussing specifically on US Senatorial races between 1920 and 1924, Highton (2000: 483) seeks to uncover, “what factors have influenced Senate elections outcomes […] (focussing) on three independent variables: state partisan composition, incumbency, national tides […]”, highlighting the importance of the incumbency effect. In sum, as clearly stated in Highton’s work, these studies underline that in order to understand election outcomes attention must also be paid to incumbency.

One may argue that there are two main insufficiencies in this work. The first, most obvious, is that while much attention has been paid on incumbency effects in the United States, comparatively less attention has been focussed on other political systems. The second, perhaps more interesting, is that even if it is reasonable to assume that incumbency is important in explaining election outcomes, less attention has been paid firstly, on the different factors that explain whether or not parties will actually become incumbents, and secondly, on the internal party dynamics once a party becomes an incumbent one.

Given these insufficiencies, the aim of this section of the paper is two fold. First, it concentrates on leadership and cohesion in the run-up of government participation, reflecting on the different institutional variables within which the party has to manoeuvre. One may hypothesise that for populist right-wing parties to gain office, strong and charismatic leadership, coupled with tight party cohesion potentially resembling even undemocratic structures, are necessary. Second, the section deals with leadership and cohesion during government participation arguing that the ‘incumbency success,’ and even lack thereof, of radical right-wing parties in Western Europe may primarily be explained based on the ability, or failure, to move the party organisation from a populist opposition party to a trustworthy governmental one. One may assume that particular importance has to be given to the leadership’s ability to enforce party cohesion and,
moreover, whether it can satisfy the claims made by party supporters and delegates in order to avoid factions. We are aware that both government participation factors and incumbency effects result from internal as well as external reasons. But because this paper seeks to learn more about the internal dynamics for and of incumbency, external reasons are not fully deliberated.

In order to set up the analysis, it is necessary to consider issues raised in distinct bodies of literature that offer theoretical insights of relevance to arguments developed. One main theoretical issue relates to how leadership takes into consideration the different institutional variables and how it uses them to impose party cohesion and to strengthen its own position. Another issue surrounds the role of leadership in right-wing parties before gaining a position of influence and after having attained an incumbent position. We consider these various theoretical concepts in order to show why we have chosen leadership and party cohesion as important internal factors for better understanding government participation and incumbency success of right-wing parties in Italy, Austria and Denmark.

**The Right-wing Party and its Characteristics**

It is often argued that right-wing parties differ from others because of their populist and charismatic characteristics (Harmel and Svåsand, 1993; Pedahzur and Brichta, 2000). Betz states that “the most successful radical right-wing populist parties are led by charismatic figures capable of setting the political and programmatic direction” (1998: 9). Panebianco (1988: 145) highlights that charismatic parties feature: centralized leadership around which decisions revolve, strong loyalty to the leader ensuring tight party cohesion, a minimized bureaucracy, and an ‘anti-party’ following that has no ties to other political groups. Pedahzur and Brichta, (2000: 33) also contend that such parties’ most important characteristic is a strong connection between the leader and the party, while Harmel and Svåsand (1993) also argue that the leader represents the message of the party. Another characteristic of a charismatic leadership is that it exerts major ‘control’ on the party and its members. The advantages of such party structures lie in their ability to respond quickly to new issues, thereby offering the impression of offering dynamic, even malleable, policy positions (Betz, 1998: 9).

Recent literature (van der Brug and Fennema, 2003), however, has considered the evolution of right wing parties from ‘pure’ charismatic parties to entrepreneurial issue ones (EI-parties).\(^1\) In contrast to charismatic parties where the leader is the only message, entrepreneurial issue parties are also characterised by strong and unique policy positions of different issues. As such, while charismatic parties depend heavily on their leader in

\(^1\) Entrepreneurial issue parties are a type of a charismatic party as Harmel and Svåsand (1993: 67) illustrate.
order to gain electoral success, entrepreneurial-issue parties are less dependent on the leader given the equal importance of the party’s policy positions. In this context, EI-parties are more likely to change their leaders in order to cement their institutionalisation in the political system. Harmel and Svåsand (1993:71) argue that (entrepreneurial) parties have three stages in their development: (1) the identification stage, where messages and platforms are developed; (2) the organisation stage, where the party attempts to secure and expand electoral support; and (3) the stabilisation stage, arguably the most significant for its future success, where the party has to show its credibility and reliability.

One may hypothesise that in each stage of party development a specific kind of leader is needed in order to direct the party in the new phase. In the 1st phase, a “diffuser” (Stein, 1973: 15) and “propagandist” (Burns, 1978: 202) is needed to communicate the message. In the 2nd phase, organisational skills – such as future strategies and consensus finding – are demanded. Particularly significant in this stage as well as in the transition to the third is the leader’s ability to impose discipline, a concern which becomes even more acute if the leader is different from the leader during the 1st phase. Particularly problematic is whether or not a leader can curry the favour of party delegates or representatives as the party evolves, potentially gaining governmental positions. And in the 3rd stage, the leader has to sell his/her party as a reliable and credible coalition partner and to maintain the goals achieved.

Regardless of whether or not right-wing parties can be characterised as being ‘purely’ charismatic or entrepreneurial-issue based, both descriptions of right-wing parties show first the importance of leadership and second the necessity of party cohesion in order either to institutionalise the party and thus to open up the possibility to become part of a coalition government, or to gain electoral support. The next sections therefore will focus first, on the relationship between leadership, party cohesion and institutional factors particularly in the run-up of government participation and second, on leadership and cohesion during incumbency.

**Institutional Factors Influencing Leadership and Discipline**

This section seeks to better understand how parties in general can successfully effect governmental polices (and solidify their role in institutions) by more fully considering the concept of ‘party cohesion and discipline’. This literature specifically considers what are the institutional factors that influence a leader’s ability to impose discipline in the run-up for possible government participation, an idea that is particularly crucial for right-wing parties given the importance of leadership in both the ‘charismatic’ and ‘EI’ models as discussed above.

One may argue that there are three institutional features that explain the ease (or lack thereof) with which party leaders can impose discipline and create cohesion,
ultimately helping us determine whether right-wing parties will be successful in gaining (and maintaining) governmental power and/or influencing policy-making. The first relates to the organisation of parliament and its committees; the second relates to the investiture procedure; and the third relates to electoral laws.

Turning to the first of these variables, various authors have examined how committee systems allow different degrees of policy influence for opposition parties (Strøm, 1984, 1990), depending on the extent to which the government can monopolize the committee system. Committees also have a disciplining effect on how backbenchers will behave in terms of sticking to the party line. Cox and Mccubbins (1993) consider that the assignment of committee members is the major tool that party leaders use to coerce backbenchers into the line. Leaders do this by assigning different party members to committees of more or less prestige. This entails that the mechanism securing the party line is partly determined by placement of members in certain committees. Certainly the literature has highlighted that committee power can be assessed along two dimensions, where the first deals with the extent to which committees have the power to re-draft legislation and the second deals with the extent to which committees have control over their own agenda (Strøm and Mattson, 1995). Nevertheless, regardless of the power of each committee in respective states, there is agreement that the party leader is in a privileged position where he or she can determine members’ careers.

More specifically in his analysis of appointment of committee members in European parliaments, Damgaard (1995) argues that the right to assign member to committees varies across states. For example, in the Danish system power is vested in the party leader who subsequently wields much power within the party organisational structure. The committee system in Italy and Austria, however, works differently. In these systems party leadership decides placement of committee members but, as argued below, this authority is somewhat undermined by electoral laws which may ‘water-down’ leaders’ powers to decide where candidates are placed on electoral lists. In such a context, individual delegates are not necessarily constrained by leaders and can thereby exercise more autonomy that may ultimately turn against, or undermine, the strength of party leaders. Another major difference between assignment procedures is that while committee members can be removed from their membership of a committee in the Danish and Austrian Parliament, in Italy this right does not exists (Damgaard, 1995: 319). Thus, the assumption can be made that the leadership’s strength in assigning committee seats relates positively to the degree of party cohesion.

A second variable which influences party leaders’ power relates to the rules for government formation. These rules have obvious consequences for the possibility of right wing parties to gain access to office: variation in investiture rules are likely to play a role in which type of government will form, consequently effecting the power of especially
smaller parties that may form part of minority governments (Bowler, Farrell and Katz, 1999.) The Danish case is the quintessential case of minority governments where radical right-wing parties have had influence on which government formed. The reason for the minority governments forming so often is attributed to the fact that government can be formed when they do not have a majority against them. As a result, right-wing parties can gain influence on which governments form when such a government is formed around parties of the left. In Austria, negative parliamentarism exists as well (Müller, 2000: 90), but unlike in Denmark minority governments are not nearly as frequent. In fact only one minority government has been produced since 1945 (Müller, 2000: 88). Dissimilar to Denmark and Austria, Italian governments have to go through an investiture vote, in which it is required to get the support from more than 50% in both chambers (Verzichelli and Cotta, 2000: 445). In the period from 1946 to 1993 seven minority governments were formed. The high frequency of minority governments in Denmark, the median frequency of these types of governments in Italy, and the almost non-existence of this type of governments in Austria, should all result in varying degrees of influence for radical right wing parties. The effect of this on leadership is that in some states right-wing party leaders may have more room to manoeuvre and subsequently have more of an ability to centralise structures more easily than in others.

A third variable that can have a potential constraining effect on leaders of small parties relates to electoral laws. The argument here is that leadership’s ability to impose discipline and/or to justify (changed) strategies depends on electoral laws and their impact on electoral outcomes. In states such as Denmark where there is a low threshold for parliamentary representation, small parties in particular can easily gain representation given electoral rules leading to the assumption that party cohesion might be of less importance. Less probability to gain representation could enforce party cohesion. This assumption could apply to Austria where government positions have been occupied mostly by a coalition between the two biggest parties. Drastic change in electoral rules could also enhance party cohesion even if connected with a change in party strategies. One may argue that, as happened in Italy in the early 1990s (Giannetti and Laver, 2001), changes in electoral rules may force ‘rational coalitions’ to be pursued: in this specific case, the ‘right’ could themselves as a united front against the ‘left.’ The consequence of this is that in this environment, far-right parties, such as the Italy’s LN led by Bossi, could centralised their own party’s structure under a type of oligarchy (Iltanen, Kritzinger and Chari, 2004) in order to pragmatically join forces with other centre-right parties (particularly FI, led by Berlusconi).
Party Leadership and Incumbency

This section focuses more specifically on leadership developments in right-wing incumbent parties. The question arises whether a party controlled by and depending on the charisma of a single leader can become institutionalised, in terms of becoming a successful incumbent party. In the literature, the probability of ‘institutionalisation’ is considered low on two grounds. First, Panebianco (1988: 67) illustrates that charismatic leaders in government positions are difficult to work with as their behaviour can be unpredictable, such as, for example, deliberate blocking of processes, changing policy positions very quickly depending on the ‘mood’ of the leadership or the changed preferences of party supporters. Second, they base their communication on extreme statements and ideology, which make ‘smooth’ political work for the coalition partner(s) rather difficult and do not work in favour of a party’s credibility and reliability.

Through government participation the likelihood of intra-party conflicts also increases. Decisions and compromises that have to be taken when in government are different from the ideological statements expressed when in opposition. This might divide the party into different factions resulting in a decrease of leadership power. This happens also in the case of electoral losses suffered due to government participation. Incumbency entails, therefore, a higher probability of decreased party cohesion leading also to the weakening of the charismatic leader.

Incumbency implicates an expansion of potential leadership contenders, resulting in the question ‘how likely it is that new leading figures can emerges next to the charismatic leader’? As pointed out in the literature (Pedahzur and Brichta, 2000: 38; Panebianco, 1988), the admittance of new leaders mostly depends on the will of the leader. The same argument works for the change of leadership within charismatic parties. However, the literature also states that a (successful) change is hard to achieve for parties concentrated on their leader. The reasons are two-fold. First, charismatic parties run the risk that with the loss of the leader the party will collapse as it results difficult – if not impossible – to objectify charisma and to separate the message from the leader (Pedahzur and Brichta, 2000: 34). Second, leadership conflicts initiated by members, supporters, activists and party factions are more likely to take place. Unlike the charismatic leader, the new leader cannot rely on the same identification and the unconditional loyalty. Rather, supporters will more easily put into question the new leader as soon as their expectations are not fulfilled. Thus, party or policy changes can only succeed if the leader is in control of a large part of party supporters and party factions, otherwise an eruption of the leadership can be provoked by the latter. As Harmel and Tan point out, party leadership has to be able to negotiate to a certain degree with the most dominant faction in order to remain in office (2003: 410-11). If this is not the case “the leadership might well serve as a point of resistance to rapid or dramatic party change” (Harmel and Tan, 2003: 412)
leaving the leadership of new leaders – particularly in charismatic parties – as particularly vulnerable (Carty, 2004: 21).

**Understanding Government Participation and Incumbency Success of Right-Wing Parties**

Attempting to bridge the different theoretical ideas raised, this paper seeks to better understand which factors are of importance in determining ‘incumbency success’ and ‘government participation’ of radical right-wing parties in Italy, Austria and Denmark. It extends on the idea that the institutional environment determines leadership positions and their possibility to pressurise party members to behave cohesively. And it extends on ideas raised in the leadership in radical right-wing parties by focussing on developments once in power.

We seek to illustrate that for right-wing parties, continuous leadership of a charismatic leader is necessary for their success. As Betz (1998: 9) argues ‘[…] the likelihood that a radical right-wing populist party will successfully establish itself in a Western-style democracy depends […] on the leadership and internal organisation.’ Nevertheless, strong leadership itself is not sufficient because it is contingent, and may be explained, based on institutional variables in the run-up. We thus argue effective leadership – and ultimately the ability for radical-right parties to be re-elected - is also contingent upon not only voter expectations, but also, more significantly, on institutional rules that ultimately help shape internal party structure, and that for right-wing parties, continuous leadership, party cohesion and policy success are determining factors for incumbency success.

The next section considers developments in Italy, Austria and in Denmark. Thereafter we consider conclusions and lessons to be learned from the study.

*Section 2 - Right-wing parties in Italy, Austria and Denmark – from outsiders to government players*

While the first government participation of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) in 2000 caused a major international and European outcry resulting in EU-sanctions for several months, the same event passed rather unnoticed in Italy in 1994 with Alleanza Nazionale (AN) and Lega Nord (LN) joining the coalition with Berlusconi’s Forza Italia (FI). In both countries, parties from the far-right participated in coalition governments, a fact considered impossible just a few months before the elections. The impossibility of
such a participation was based on the assumption that moderate parties would not run the risk of having to work with extremist and unpredictable parties and the possible (negative) repercussions on their electoral support. In Denmark, radical right wing parties, have not been part of the government. But especially the Danish People’s Party (DF) has had considerable influence on governmental policies, due to its status as support party for the Liberal led minority government. We argue that these exceptions emerged due to the institutional rules of the Italian, Austrian and Danish political systems.

In the next sub-sections, for each country we will analyse first the institutional rules that made government participation or government support possible, and secondly, the effects of incumbency on leadership and the internal organisation of right-wing parties.

Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord – from Marginalized to Coalition Parties

Before the collapse of the traditional Italian party system in 1993, AN and LN were both marginalized parties. On the one hand, AN (which was still named MSI until 1994\(^2\)) saw its origins in fascism and was declared to be the successor of the fascist party. On the other hand, LN tried to detach Northern Italy from the control of the central government and became well-known for its anti-immigration policy. However, the reorganisation of the political system made new coalition arrangements possible as most of the old, traditional centre parties collapsed and ‘new’ parties enjoyed the confidence of the voters, even if they were on the far-right spectrum of the political arena.\(^3\) Moreover, the new electoral system (first-past-the-post) introduced in 1993 made right-wing parties pivotal players within the coalition games. Berlusconi’s FI, which attracted most of the disillusioned former Christian Democrats (DC) voters, needed the help of AN in the South and LN in the North of Italy to win the election as any other potential coalition party disappeared. Thus, FI provided the umbrella to unify LN, the party with strong ties in the North, and AN, the party with strong ties in the South, so that in May 1994 the first right-wing government was sworn in.

The same dynamic can be observed in the 2001 elections, which resulted in the second Italian right-wing government, the main players being FI, AN and LN. Once again, the electoral law dominated the composition of the coalition. After the experience of the 1996 election, where LN competed as a single actor withdrawing many votes from the centre-right coalition around FI and AN, eventually, resulting in a victory of the centre-left coalition, it was clear that the right-wing coalition could only win the election if it included also LN possessing strong holds in Northern Italy. Due to the electoral law that

\(^2\) MSI – Movimento Sociale Italiano

\(^3\) AN could triple its votes from 5.3 in 1992 to 13.5 in 1994.
forces parties to agree on coalition collaborations in the run-up to elections, the inclusion of unpredictable right-wing parties is necessary in order to ensure electoral victory.

According to these collaborations agreements, the various candidates are distributed proportionally to their parties’ power in the constituencies. This gives the leader extensive power, first, in ensuring that his/her party will be well represented in Parliament (and therefore pushing for ‘secure’ constituencies) and, second, on deciding which constituency will be assigned to which candidate (and therefore, anticipating the chances whether a candidate will be elected or not.) In 1994, AN and LN did exceptionally well in the assignment of constituencies to their party candidates and compared to FI were both overrepresented in the Parliament giving them extensive power, especially after LN left the government in December 1994.

The power of the two leaders resulted from their party organisations. LN is organised around the leadership, which arbitrarily decides on party strategies, policy positions and communication platforms. The grassroots are used as ‘communications deliverers’ but are not involved in the decision-making procedures of the party (Decker, 2004: 48). AN also features these characteristics. With Fini, AN’s leader since the late 1980s, the party increasingly excluded the grassroots from internal decisions and discussions. Fini transformed the party into a top-centred party, thus, bundling power and enforcing party cohesion (Gallagher, 2000).

Once in government, however, the two parties and their leaders, Fini from AN and Bossi from LN, behaved quite differently. The former was well-behaved, even-tempered and gave the impression of a balanced, mature politician, using government participation mainly to improve the image of AN, nationally and internationally. The latter attracted attention because of his violent, ‘bawling’ speeches. While Fini was able to give the former neo-fascist party a modern and moderate image, LN’s image remained the one of an irresponsible and unpredictable one. Moreover, compared with Bossi’s violent rhetoric, Fini had to look automatically moderate and respectable. Finally, because the media were much more concentrated on Berlusconi and Bossi, Fini was much less exposed to criticism. All this lead to an increase in Fini’s image values making him even more popular than Berlusconi, by the end of 1994.

Regarding party cohesion, the two right-wing parties also differed. Fini could maintain a rather high level of party cohesion amongst the newly established AN resulting from the fact that it has been a well established party for a long time and that Fini was able to act as a mediator between the party in government and the grassroots, whereas in Bossi’s LN the climate was more tense, as some of LN’s MPs could not take pleasure in Bossi’s violent comments and frequent attacks.

Another reason for lower party cohesion within LN lies in the suddenly increased number of MPs. Within a short timeframe, LN had to recruit candidates for the diverse
assigned constituencies. This lead to a break up of the tight party organisation concentrated around Bossi. The overwhelming victory in 1994 opened the party for new MPs that had not been part of the inner circle of the party. Unsurprisingly, when LN left the coalition many of these ‘new’ MPs resigned and changed fronts becoming part of the FI-faction. Thus, an overwhelming increase in parliamentary seats had a negative impact on party cohesion. Party cohesion as imposed by Bossi worked well for a small, rather regional party organisation but was confronted with severe negative aspects ones becoming big and national.

In December 1994, Bossi brought down the government due to the remote commitment of the government to enhance the development of a federal Italy. For Bossi it was evident that he could not achieve his major political goal as being blocked on the one hand, by AN, which aimed at keeping Italy a centralised state, and on the other hand, by FI, which prioritised other issues than the reorganisation of the Italian political system. Not being able to pursue its main policy goal would have resulted in a disappointment of LN supporters and, accordingly, to a loss in electoral support. The consideration of policy positions has always been an important factor in Bossi’s strategy. Before entering in government he feared that the isolation of LN’s policy position through AN and FI could result in electoral losses. Hence, Bossi’s withdrawal from the coalition might have secured the political survival of LN.

Also AN was aware that popular politics can serve as a kick-off, but that voters need also to experience positive policy performance. AN reacted with to two strategies. First, all 5 AN ministers came from the pragmatic wing of the party. Second, AN’s ministers maintained low-key behaviour regarding their policy field resulting in a marginal perception through media and voters (Gallagher, 2000). To sum up, both parties attached great importance to their policy positions and looked out for not being in contradiction with supporters’ and delegates’ wishes. Rather, LN decided to leave government, whereas AN tried to remain unnoticed.

After the failure of the 1st FI-AN-LN government, the two parties developed quite differently. While AN followed its way to become one of the key players in the Italian political system and to acquire a moderate image nationally and internationally, LN moved further into the role of an extremist, unpredictable right-wing party. Unsurprisingly, some of Bossi’s closest party friends left the LN and the political future of the party seemed dark. However, due to Bossi’s strong charismatic leadership that still could satisfy many supporters and attract many voters, the party survived and could win even more votes in the following elections in 1996. Hence, we can observe that government participation led to a type of ‘anchorage’ of Fini’s and Bossi’s leadership.
Thus, in both cases a strong leadership, which was continuous from opposition to government and from government to opposition, combined with commitment to their own policy position ensured the continuous strength of the Italian far-right parties, AN and LN. In terms of institutionalisation, one can conclude that both parties seem to have surmounted the last stage – the stabilisation stage. AN especially became accepted as a credible and reliable political actor, while LN could maintain its credibility amongst its supporters for not giving in the proclaimed policy positions while in government.

**Austrian Freedom Party – from promised party to the ‘bogeyman’ of the nation**

In Austria, after almost 15 years of ‘grand coalition’ between the two major parties SPÖ (the social-democratic party) and ÖVP (the popular party), which both experienced severe electoral losses in the last elections, the FPÖ’s room of manoeuvre increased substantially. From 1995 onwards, the ÖVP had declared regularly that it wanted to take over Austrian’s chancellorship. However, each election determined the SPÖ\(^4\) as strongest party, which consequently claimed the chancellor, leading the ÖVP without any changes for chancellorship. Moreover, the ÖVP had to fight severe electoral losses due to its position of minor coalition partner. The only possibility for an ÖVP chancellorship was a coalition with the FPÖ, which supported the ÖVP-claim.

In the national election of October 1999 the FPÖ for the first time in the after-war period became 2\(^{nd}\) strongest party holding 26.9% of the votes, which represented an increase of almost 5 % of the support gained in 1995. Coalition talks going on for 4 months came to an end at the beginning of February 2000, with Wolfgang Schüssel and Jörg Haider signing the coalition agreement. This new ‘partnership’ sparked outcry, resulting for the first time in EU-sanctions against a member state, ultimately forcing Haider to step down as leader and to assign party leadership to his devoted vice-president Susanne Riess-Passer. Although observers assessed his resignation as a symbolic gesture to calm down Europe-wide protests, many suggest he remained directing the party hiding behind Riess-Passer. His decision to leave, nevertheless, left the party without a leading figure that joined the different factions through his charisma.

The second difficulty the FPÖ had to face at the beginning of its government participation consisted of having problem of recruiting adequate ‘personnel’. Becoming part of the coalition opened up many different office-positions the FPÖ could distribute. However, like LN in Italy, the ‘personnel pool’ the FPÖ could chose from was relatively small as it has been a relatively ‘new’ and also small party for years, which only in the last

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\(^4\) Since 1986 the SPÖ has argued that the FPÖ does not represent a possible coalition partner.
five years has grown exponentially fast. The personnel pool could not keep up with the electoral increases leaving the FPÖ in 2000 with the dilemma to not have enough ‘qualified’/professional persons to assign to the positions available. This was reflected in the allocation of government positions, which were partly occupied by newcomers in the political arena that citizens and supporters have never or little heard of. The ignorance and incompetence of some ministers of the FPÖ in their designated areas attracted the attention of the media and the population. Very soon the reputation of incompetent FPÖ-ministers disseminated leading to the first resignations or rather replacements of the Ministers of Justice, the Ministers of Social Affairs or the Ministers of Infrastructure. Moreover, reallocation of staff members and civil-servants to the various Ministries which the FPÖ controlled, thinned out the competent staff in the party central office leading to a weakening of the personnel situation of the party organisation. Replacement of these competent and well-informed collaborators was difficult to achieve, as the FPÖ – contrary to the other parties – could not resort to a great pool of active and well-integrated party members. Thus, the reorganisation of the FPÖ-party structure in the 1980s and 1990s now affected the personnel sample (Luther, 2001). Since 1986, the FPÖ slowly changed from a ‘member party’ to a ‘voters association’ meaning that the party did not attach too much importance to their supporters but rather to the potential voters in the run-up of elections (Luther, 2001). Consequently, the leadership in government had rather poor links to the party organisation leading to severe repercussions in 2002.

At the beginning of the coalition government the new FPÖ-leadership had the full support of the different factions within the FPÖ, also due to the fact that it ‘descended’ from the in-group around Haider. However, the new leadership’s focus was mainly on neo-liberal policies such as the privatisation of the energy sector and non administrative policies such as the introduction of university fees, shifting some of the dominant factions concerned with immigration and cultural issues away from the pragmatic leadership around Riess-Passer. Under Riess-Passer Immigration issues attained the status of 2nd class issues, leaving a number of FPÖ-delegates with the impression that the new leadership was dominated by the coalition partner ÖVP (Minkenberg, 2001). Moreover, the ÖVP could sell the few decisions considering immigration as its success withdrawing credibility from the FPÖ-leadership. Ironically, the provoked internal disagreements left the FPÖ in an even weaker position towards its coalition partner than before. Hence, party cohesion decreased substantially over policy differentiations between the grassroots and the leadership reflecting the deeply polarised FPÖ, which had to move between neo-liberal supporters and activists with xenophobic ideas.

Decreasing party cohesion was also caused by Haider’s continuous and provocative interferences in coalition politics which mostly were diametrically opposed to Riess-Passer’s line. Haider’s behaviour put into question Riess-Passer’s leadership, her
credibility was dismantled and it signalled that the party did not have a coherent political line creating divergent but competing images of the party in the public (Carty, 2004: 13).

Interestingly, the new leadership received support from FPÖ-supporters, which was not the case for most FPÖ-delegates. The positive perception amongst supporters was due to different events in 2002 that shifted supporters’ and also adversarial political actors’ opinion into Riess-Passer’s favour: for example, Haider’s trip to Saddam Hussein was considered as needless and counterproductive and his deprecatory and indifferent behaviour during the flood catastrophe in Austria was not appreciated by a great part of FPÖ-supporters. However, most of the delegates continued to be loyal towards Haider and could not get familiar with the pragmatic leadership of Riess-Passer.

The loss of supporter support and Riess-Passer’s increasing political importance led to a crisis between the federal FPÖ-leadership around Riess-Passer and Haider. Riess-Passer, Haider’s loyal ‘governor’, was becoming too autonomous, was successful with her own political style and was respected amongst the diverse political actors. Moreover, surveys showed that Riess-Passer was becoming more popular than Haider. In other words, she was becoming to powerful and was putting into question Haider’s ‘hidden’ leadership position. Haider therefore tried to fetch back the FPÖ-leadership in June 2002, a challenge which Riess-Passer successfully fought off, but which weakened party discipline even further.

Incited by the leadership conflict, the cleavage between Riess-Passer and her team and great parts of the FPÖ grassroots (the far-right grassroots) finally grew too big. Combined with differences in policy positions – such as the purchase of the tactical airplanes ‘Eurofighter’ or the tax reform – the resignation of the FPÖ federal leadership in September 2002 was indispensable (Luther, 2003). The tensions between the leadership inspired by neo-liberal ideas and the delegates inspired by racist, xenophobic and even authoritarian ideas became insurmountable. As stated in the literature, policy differences and failures to meet and fulfil delegates’ expectations caused leadership conflicts (Carty, 2004: 20). The new leadership was unable to control the dominant faction and, thus, could not control and direct the party anymore. As Luther anticipated “the hard political decisions and compromises that are an inevitable feature of government responsibility will most probably be unwelcome to the party on the ground and to the FPÖ’s provincial functionaries” (2001: 26) leading to a rise in internal party tensions.

That the delegates did not represent the view of the supporters and did not act according to supporters’ desires to follow Riess-Passers leadership became obvious in the massive electoral defeat in the elections of November 2002. The electoral support for the FPÖ decreased dramatically in which the FPÖ could only win 10,2 % of the votes. Riess-Passer definitely was a leader capable of moderation and stabilisation amongst certain (liberal) parts of the party and was acknowledged as credible politician by other adverse
political actor but she failed to build a consensus within the different parts of the FPÖ (mainly the ideological, anti-immigration part, the ‘modernisation-losers’) and to disseminate the perception that a coalition party has to behave differently from an opposition party and that former incalculable FPÖ-behaviour is not acceptable anymore if the FPÖ wants to be taken seriously by other political parties. The missing party discipline triggered off the long existing fractionalisation of the party, which made it also quite impossible for Riess-Passer to give the FPÖ a clear policy direction.

Hence, the FPÖ had to learn that the retirement of Jörg Haider as party leader affected its foundation it has build on for years: the charismatic party and its characteristics. The FPÖ is certainly a leader-driven party heavily dependent on its ‘creator’ and not yet ready to become institutionalised per se in a traditional political system. The success of the FPÖ is its leader Jörg Haider. As Decker points out he is the one that possesses authority, can hold together the party and can surmount the ideological differences of the various factions and finally has the ability to mobilise his supporters (2004: 35).

Denmark: From a Balkanised Progress Party to a Cohesive Danish People’s Party

The Danish case provides insight on how radical right-wing parties can gain influence on policies without being part of the government. As governments form through negative parliamentarism far right parties have generally been supportive of the formation of liberal/conservative led minority governments. From the point of view of far right parties, this government composition gives an opportunity to influence polices because such parties can be used as ‘support parties’.

As electoral rules are comparatively very proportional (Lijphart 1999: 162), new parties have good possibilities to gain representation and since 1973 far right parties have gained Danish parliament representation. The fact that representation is gained relatively easy, makes it a credible strategy for major factions within a party to threaten the party leadership. As a consequence party leadership – especially in newly formed parties where the leadership might be contested – has to be aware of potential threat from faction to form new parties. One strategy to avoid factions is to set up screening mechanisms for new members and for potential candidates. This has allowed parties to centralise leadership and create cohesion.

There have been two periods in which Danish far right parties have had the possibility of influencing governmental policy. The first period is from 1987 to 1993

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5 Creation in the sense that Jörg Haider pushed the FPÖ to the far-right spectrum of the political arena.
6 This strategy was used by Axel Larsen, who formed the Socialist People’s Party in 1959 after having left the Communist party.
where the PP (Progress Party) was in a position to act as support party for the conservative led minority government, and the second period started from 2001 until present, where DF (Danish People’s Party) – formed by a splinter group from the PP – has been in a position where the liberal led minority government needed it as a support party. The two parties had markedly different degrees of influence, which is explained by the internal dynamics of the two parties.

One might have expected that the PP – being the support party in the 1st period – would have played a major role within government’s policy decisions. However, this is not the case: the Progress Party actually left its mark for playing an insignificant role. The main reason for this lack of influence in this structurally favourable environment has been ascribed to the party’s lack of cohesion and hence reliability. The main reason for the lack of cohesion relates to contestation for leadership: Ringsmose (2003: 33-4, 48-9) shows that the PP lost strength and influence due to continuous internal debate over the legitimacy of the leader, Pia Kærsgaard. Thus, the lack of cohesion in the party proved to be a major obstacle for it to credibly commit to what had been decided. It could not be expected that the government would negotiate with a party incapable of behaving as a unitary actor. The only major piece of legislation that the party supported was the 1989 Budget. Despite the lack of results, the party nevertheless proved to have a secure electoral base. In the period from 1987 to 1993 three elections where held with the party gaining from 4.8 % to 9% of the vote (Bille, 1999: 293). Hence, the PP had electoral success even though policy positions could not be achieved. One may argue that this success was possible because the party was not ‘officially’ part of the government, making it possible for the leadership to argue that it remained ‘anti-establishment.’ Unlike the Austrian case, voters did not find the right-wing party responsible for governmental actions.

DF has proven to be comparatively more successful in gaining influence: unlike the PP, DF is playing a major role in the legislation process of the minority government. The Budgets since the current government was formed in November 2001, have all been supported by the DPP and the party has gained influence on immigration issues and welfare enhancements for the elderly (Parliamentary Yearbooks, 2001-2002). More significantly the party has behaved as a unitary actor in situations where the party received the status of a pivotal player, which has been the case in the budgets. The party has further proven its credibility by informally negotiating deals of ‘political accommodation,’ which are characterised by the opposition gaining veto power over a policy area, in exchange for voting for the proposals that the accommodation covers.

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7 Danish People’s Party was formed in 1995 by four members of the Progress Party. See Ringsmose (2003) for an analysis of the period leading to the formation of the party.
8 Ringsmose (2003) argues that the support for the budget in 1989 caused sever internal conflicts.
9 See Strøm (1990) and Christiansen (2003) for a discussion of the characteristics of these accommodations.
In order to be incorporated into policy coalitions, the DF had to convince potential policy partners that the days of internal strife were over. At their founding Congress a set of rules giving the party leader great influence over the candidate selection and the exclusion rights were decided. Several institutional features are important to stress. First, the DF’s executive committee is in control of the candidate selection. This entails that representatives to be elected by the party have to go through a screening process. All potential candidates have to be approved by the national committee. Second, in order to become member of the party the national committee has to accept the membership. Third, party leadership is in control over the exclusion of party members. According to party discipline rules, leadership enjoys enhanced control over members and delegates that can be expelled at any time. All these provisions should have the consequences that grassroots as well as elected representatives are more homogenous and hence, increase party cohesion.

Interestingly, similar rules can be found for the PP. Bille (1998: 118) argues that despite a lack of codified rules for candidate selection, the national committee had de facto control over the candidate selection. This control showed itself through the national committee having the authority to reject potential candidates. In 1992 this right was codified and became a part of the party rules. One smaller difference between the party rules for the PP and DF is that prospective members have to be accepted by the executive committee, which is controlled by the party leadership.

This entails that the major problem in the PP was the continuous battle over the legitimacy of the leadership that occurred when the party founder, Mogens Glistrup, returned from prison and reclaimed party leadership his re-election in 1987 (Bille, 1999: 106–7). The destabilisation of the party and, consequently, the party’s lack of cohesion, was a result of two factions, one supporting Mogens Glistrup and the other voting for Pia Kærsgaard. The result of the struggle was that the DF was formed by Pia Kærsgaard and three other members of the PP. Thus the lack of ability in the PP to commit to deals made by the leadership, paved the way for the formation of DF, a party that would hold the same views on policy, but would be able to behave as a more centralised and cohesive unitary actor (Ringsmose, 2003).

After having formed the DF, Pia Kærsgaard won 7.3 % of the vote in the 1998 election (Bille, 1998: 293). Her leadership has been largely uncontested and never threatened. This entails that the sanction mechanisms described above have been used to deter backbencher from defecting from the party line, resulting in further cohesion.

10 The executive committee is controlled by the party leadership in that the parliamentary executive group dominates the executive committee (Danish People’s Party Rules §5).
11 Danish People’s Party Rules §2. It might be argued that this clause was made to make it impossible for former members of the Progress Party to become members of Danish People’s Party.
12 In 2000 four members of parliament left the party, arguing that the party was undemocratic (Bille, 2001: 107).
According to Bille (2001: 107-8), the party leadership made use of its right to exclude party members that had to extreme views on immigrants. This sent signals that party leadership was capable - and willing - to use the sanction mechanisms given to it by the party rules.

The lack of influence of the PP and the comparably high degree of influence of the DF, indicate that the internal dynamics of parties plays a role in how much influence radical right wing parties have when in a position of power. DF’s leadership had sufficient legitimacy amongst backbenchers either because the latter agreed with, or feared repercussions from, the former. The lack of leadership legitimacy observed in the first period, where the PP was in a structurally similar position, indicates that when leadership is contested and hence unable to secure cohesion, radical right wing parties pay the price of ‘non-influence’.

In conclusion, we can state that the differences between the two parties are captured by the differences between the second and third stage of party institutionalisation described above. In terms of institutionalisation the PP arrived at the second stage, proving that it had an electoral base that would secure representation. The party never succeeded in converging on a leader after the return of Glistrup in 1987, making it impossible for the party to move to the third stage of institutionalisation. Unlike the DF, it never moved to the third stage of stabilisation, due to the internal fight over leadership. DF, nevertheless, has successfully come to the point where it is perceived to be a reliable coalition partner that is capable of providing support for the government on major policy initiatives such as the Budget. Further, the party has proven that its electoral base is sufficiently large for it to become a lasting part of Danish party politics. Finally, the leadership in DF learned from its experience (when it was still part of the PP) that in order to gain influence the party had to commit to the deals made by having strict procedures on candidate and membership selection. The party, however, still has to prove that it will not suffer at the polls from its status as a ‘quasi – governmental’ party.

Section 3 - Conclusion

Two main questions have guided this paper. The first, in contrast to the Austrian FPÖ, is why were Italian radical right wing parties (AN and LN) able to gain power and then stabilise themselves amongst other parties? Secondly, why was the Danish radical right-wing party DF not yet able to secure governmental positions per se in contrast to its Italian and Austrian counterparts, but how could it nevertheless gain more policy influence than its predecessor PP? The theoretical section of the paper considered characteristics of right-wing parties, focussed on different variables that affect leadership and cohesion in
the run-up of government participation, and finally evaluated the potential effects of
ing incumbency on both leadership and cohesion. Linking ideas raised in the theoretical
section, the second section offered empirical analysis of radical right parties in Italy, Austria and Denmark, first considering the institutional rules made government participation or government support possible and then evaluating the effects of
incumbency on leadership and cohesion of each of the parties.

The evidence suggests the importance of two main dimensions of inter-party
organisation before and after office was gained, namely, party leadership and party
discipline. As such, two main arguments have been developed. First, in order for radical
right-wing parties to gain office (or attain governmental influence as in the case of
Denmark), strong and charismatic leadership, along with tight party cohesion, are
necessary. This was seen in Italy where both Fini of the AN and Bossi of the LN were able
to centralise party structure and make the party cohesive not only because of their
charismatic personalities, but also because different institutional variables, such as
changes to electoral laws in the early 1990s, forced parties into collaborative agreements
which resulted in extensive power for leaders. A similar dynamic was at play in Denmark
where electoral laws since 1973 have favoured election of far-right parties, who have
subsequently centralised structures around the leader as especially seen in DF.

Second, the paper argues that incumbency success, or lack thereof, of radical right-
wing parties in these countries can be explained based on the ability, or failure, of
leadership to build cohesion to help move the party organisation from a populist
opposition party to a trustworthy governmental one. The cases demonstrate that if a leader
cannot enforce party cohesion and satisfy the claims made by party supporters and
delegates, ‘destructive factions’ emerge that inevitably lead to failure, or a lack of
institutionalisation. For example, while the AN, LN and DF were able to institutionalise
their parties within the political system during their participation in government, the FPÖ
and PP was largely unsuccessful to pass through the last stage of stabilisation given the
existence of ‘destructive factions’ that emerged in the wake of a type of leadership ‘void’.
This was particularly seen in the case of Austria where the change of leadership in FPÖ
after joining the governmental coalition, the subsequent decreased party cohesion through
incumbency, and the incapability of the party to satisfy large parts of its delegates,
resulted in the party’s inevitable demise. Of course, even though Riess-Passer failed to
play the “internal game” (Harmel and Svåsand, 1993: 76) the question remains whether
the FPÖ would have been more successful with the stable leadership of Haider. One might
hypothesise that Haider would probably have won the internal game holding together the
different parts of the party, but he may not have been able to work as a successful party

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13 We refer to institutionalisation as referred to by Harmel and Svåsand (1993), meaning that a party passes
successfully through all three stages of party development.
negotiator in the coalition with ÖVP. However, taking the 1\textsuperscript{st} AN-LN-FI coalition in Italy in 1994 and especially the LN as an example, a Haider-leadership and its effects might have helped the FPÖ to survive in electoral terms as policy positions, as well as cohesion within the party, could have been maintained.\textsuperscript{14}

The FPÖ experience also offers a valuable experience for radical-right parties in government: their policy positions and their implementation seem to be observed much more closely by their supporters and, in contrast to other parties, any failure of the radical-right to keep and implement the promised positions is punished faster and more immediately – in electoral terms. As Kitschelt puts it, if right-wing parties are forced to “[...] reveal their positions on difficult matters of economic and social policy [...] intra-party conflicts [will be unleashed] within populist parties” (1995: 199-200). Thus, a lesson for right-wing parties who aspire to obtain government position is that they announce their policy platforms very cautiously because supporters assess these parties on their ability to represent and implement these particular positions.

Thus, we can conclude those radical-right parties that are led by pragmatic – but also charismatic – leaders, who can build cohesion while relying on the trust and support of their supporters and delegates, can establish themselves as successful incumbent parties and will enjoy further electoral success. Lacking leadership, incumbency can backfire, in terms of electoral defeat, as voters learn that the populist promises of a charismatic party in government cannot be realised. With this in mind, perhaps the main lesson for right-wing parties in power is that as leadership, cohesion and stability wane, so too do credibility and the chances of a successful future.

\textsuperscript{14} As an example that supports this hypothesis, one can take the electoral victory of Jörg Haider in the regional elections of Carinthia in March 2004. Contrary to opinion polls Haider was able to win the election and gather even more votes than in 1999.
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