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THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION
OF EXTREME RIGHT-WING
CHARISMATIC PARTIES: A PARADOX?

Ami Pedahzur and Avraham Brichta

ABSTRACT

In this article, we explain the puzzling continuous success of the far right-wing parties in Europe by using micro-organizational factors such as charismatic leadership and cohesive party organization, contributing to the process of party institutionalization and demonstrating the success of the extreme right-wing parties. We attempt to solve what appears to be a paradox of the institutionalization of far right charismatic parties on the basis of theories of party leadership and party institutionalization. In this endeavour we first define the concept of charismatic parties, and then outline our argument regarding the paradox of charismatic institutionalization and present criteria for measuring institutionalization of charismatic parties. Finally, we outline a proposed theory of ‘hard charismatic parties’ institutionalization. The French FN (Front National) and the Austrian FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) serve as case studies to test our proposed model.

KEY WORDS ■ Charisma ■ extreme right ■ FN ■ FPÖ ■ institutionalization ■ leadership

On the morning of 4 October 1999, almost every citizen in the Western world was exposed to the smiling face of Austrian far-right leader Jörg Haider filling the front pages of the daily newspapers. Haider had very good reason to smile. His party had won 26.9 percent of the total vote and thus became the second largest party in the Austrian parliament. This was the greatest success experienced by an extreme right-wing party in Europe for the past fifty years. Four months later the smiling face of Haider reappeared, this time after becoming ‘king-maker’ in the newly established coalition government in Austria.

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We believe that Haider was highly and consistently successful in increasing the electoral support of his party from 9.7 percent in 1986 to 26.9 percent in the recent elections. He gave his party a pivotal position in deciding the fate of the formation of any future coalition government in Austria, demonstrating how a strong charismatic party became an institutionalized charismatic party. Thus, contrary to Panebianco (1988: 66), we argue that the FPÖ demonstrates how party institutionalization does not contradict charismatic leadership.

Instead of trying to seek an explanation for the puzzling continuous success of the far right-wing parties in Europe, because of social and political factors (especially in times of long-lasting peace and economic prosperity), we try to explain this phenomenon by using micro-organizational factors. We argue that factors such as charismatic leadership and cohesive party organization contribute to the process of party institutionalization and demonstrate the success of extreme right-wing parties.

We attempt to solve what appears to be a paradox of the institutionalization of far-right charismatic parties. In so doing we base our argument on Harmel and Svåsand’s (1993) theory of party leadership and party institutionalization and on Rose and Mackie’s (1988), as well as Veugelers’ (1995) and Harmel and Svåsand’s (1989), criteria for measuring party institutionalization.

We first define the concept of charismatic parties, and then outline our argument regarding the paradox of charismatic institutionalization and present criteria for measuring institutionalization of charismatic parties. Finally, we outline a proposed theory of ‘hard charismatic parties’ institutionalization. The French FN (Front National) and the Austrian FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs) serve as the case studies to test our proposed model.

Charismatic Parties

Charisma is a concept derived from the Greek word for ‘grace’. It has been described as a magical ability (Etzioni, 1961) and a powerful aura (Willner, 1984). It was Max Weber who saw charisma as one of the three ways of legitimizing authority. Charisma referred to the extraordinary qualities of an individual ruler, which gave him authority in times of stress (Bealey, 1999). Studies of charisma emphasize the strong emotional and affective bond between leaders and followers.

According to Panebianco, ‘charismatic parties’ are those in which there is a total symbiosis between the leader and the organizational identity (1988: 145). When applying Weber’s theory of charismatic leadership to the field of political parties, Panebianco chooses six features which characterize the ‘charismatic party’: (a) it is a cohesive dominant coalition held together by loyalty to the leader; (b) it does not present bureaucratic characteristics;
(c) it is a highly centralized organization; (d) it is often the focus of groups and organizations with undefined and uncertain boundaries and which cluster around it; (e) regardless of the charismatic party’s ideological orientation, the ‘revolutionary’ nature of charisma, which always subverts the political and/or social status quo, explains the organization’s anti-party character; (f) in externally sponsored parties, institutionalization involves at least partial emancipation from the sponsoring organization. In charismatic parties it involves an objectification of re-utilization of charisma, a transfer of loyalties from the leader to the organization, and a growing divergence between the party’s organizational identity and the leader’s personal political fortune. It also implies a movement from a solidarity system towards a system of interests, and adaptation of the original goals to the daily organizational needs (Panebianco, 1988).

The Paradox of Charismatic Institutionalization

According to Levitzky, the concept of party institutionalization, as it appears in the literature, presents a wide range of meanings (1998: 78). Maor points out several kinds of definitions, e.g. those referring to institutionalization as a process. Studies of this phenomenon apply a framework of organizational analysis (Maor, 1997: 67). Another approach treats institutionalization as a property or a state. In this case, an institutionalized party is defined as ‘one that is reified in the public mind so that “the party”’ exists as a social organization apart from its momentary leaders, and this organization demonstrates recurring patterns of behavior valued by those who identify with it’ (Janda, 1980: 19).

A third approach, and one of the most commonly used, is Panebianco’s integrated theory of institutionalization (Maor, 1997: 69). According to Panebianco, a party is institutionalized ‘when it becomes valuable in and of itself, and its goals become inseparable and indistinguishable from it’. The operational aspect of this definition focuses on two main concepts: autonomy and systemness. Hence, institutionalization is measured on two scales: (a) that of the organization’s degree of autonomy vis-à-vis its environment, and (b) that of its systemness, i.e. the degree of interdependence of its different internal sectors (Panebianco, 1988: 55).

While the concept of systemness does not present any problem for those who wish to measure the level of institutionalization of extreme right-wing charismatic parties, the concept of autonomy does. Panebianco demands that an institutionalized party will enjoy full autonomy. Hence, a party must not be too tightly connected with other political organizations inside or outside its country. However, Panebianco does not restrict his demand for autonomy to the relations between the party and its surrounding environment. He argues that the party should also enjoy autonomy from charismatic leaders. ‘In a certain sense, the charismatic leader and the external
sponsoring organization occupy analogous positions vis-à-vis the party, for they tend to discourage institutionalization’ (1988: 67). In this sense, he argues that parties that are based purely on personal charisma cannot become institutionalized until they go through a ‘routinization of charisma’ (1988: 66). Although such parties enjoy high levels of cohesion they may not be defined as institutionalized organizations due to the fact that they are totally dependent upon one person – the party leader.

Panebianco compares charismatic leadership and external sponsoring organizations and claims that they occupy analogous positions vis-à-vis the party, because they tend to discourage institutionalization (1988: 67). Elsewhere, he mentions some additional reasons for the improbability of charismatic parties becoming institutionalized. For example, the leader often deliberately tries to block the process; charisma cannot be objectified, and the organization is forced to fold at its leader’s political eclipse (1988: 147).

Maor criticizes Panebianco’s definition on several counts. One of these touches upon the core problem of defining a charismatic party as un-institutionalized. Maor argues that ‘a flaw in Panebianco’s argument is that it allows for the existence of an exception to the rule which states that the stronger the institutionalization, the more cohesive the party elite, and vice versa’ (Maor, 1997: 72). However, we would point out that there is an additional flaw in Panebianco’s attitude towards the question of institutionalization of charismatic parties. He almost ignores the fact that a charismatic party might be a very successful organization in electoral terms and thus attain some of the most important objectives of a political party. These goals are articulated in numerous definitions of a ‘political party’. For example, Sartori defines a ‘party’ as a group that presents at elections, and is capable of placing, through elections, candidates for public office (1976: 64). Downs (1957: 25) sees a party as a team of men seeking to control government apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election. Hence, according to Panebianco, a party may enjoy electoral success and place candidates for public offices or in other cases even control government apparatus, yet would still not be considered as an institutionalized organization.

This bizarre situation of a very strong and successful, yet non-institutionalized, party is an outcome of Panebianco’s decision not to include in his institutionalization definition factors such as electoral or legislative stability (Janda, 1980), nor continuous participation in national elections (Rose and Mackie, 1988: 536). Such a perspective undermines the concept of party institutionalization itself. Huntington (1965: 394) saw institutionalization as a process by which parties become established and acquire value and stability. Contrary to interest group institutionalization where value of stability may be decided upon Panebianco’s definition, i.e. autonomy and systemness, a political party by its very nature supplies quantitative measurements, such as electoral and legislative stability, that may give, at least partially, an accurate evaluation concerning the degree to which the party has met its basic targets.
Measuring the Institutionalization of Charismatic Parties

Though Panebianco placed severe conceptual obstacles in the way of attempts to evaluate the degree of institutionalization among charismatic parties, some scholars tried to cope with this challenge. Veugelers, for example, who studied the institutionalization of the French FN, bypassed Panebianco’s conceptual pit and ignored the problem of charismatic leadership. He therefore defined institutionalization as a combination of systemic, temporal, spatial criteria of party success: (a) a party has systemic importance if it has governing or blackmail potential; (b) a party has temporal importance if it persists without interruption – a stable party fields candidates in successive national elections; (c) a party has spatial importance if it pervades the polity – a national party fields candidates across the country (Veugelers, 1995: 4).

Harmel and Svåsand (1993: 74–5), too, tried to confront the issue of institutionalization of extreme right-wing parties. They emphasize the need to conceptualize institutionalization as being multi-dimensional, comprising both internal aspects of party organization and external perceptions of party as an institution. They suggest the three most important dimensions for defining a party as institutionalized: (a) the ‘routinization’ of party behaviour; (b) the perception by the other actors that the party has ‘staying power’; and (c) an objectively established survival record. Maor (1997: 75) argues that Harmel and Svåsand treat the concept of autonomy as related to, but not part of, institutionalization. This, we would argue, prevents them from falling into Panebianco’s conceptual trap.

In order to reach an acceptable operational definition for the concept of ‘charismatic institutionalization’, one can rely on Rose and Mackie’s (1998: 536) operational definition – ‘a party is judged to have become institutionalized if it fights more than three national elections’. Even though this definition does not allow us to judge whether one party is more institutionalized than the other, we may assume that the more elections the party contests the more institutionalized it becomes. However, Rose and Mackie’s definition lacks the elements of electoral and legislative stability, which is included among other factors in Veugelers’ (1995) as well as Janda’s definition (1980). Therefore, we measure institutionalization by continuous participation in national elections as well as by electoral and legislative stability.

Institutionalization of ‘Hard Charismatic Parties’

Given the fact that charismatic parties can indeed become institutionalized, as we shall demonstrate in the cases of FN and FPÖ, we present the important role of the leadership in achieving party institutionalization.
As noted by Betz,

Structural change has created a political climate conducive to right-wing populist mobilization. However, for political parties and movements to exploit this climate, they need to have more than a few slogans and a catchy party name ... one of the most important determinants of success in party organization. The most successful right-wing populist parties are led by charismatic figures capable of setting the political and programmatic direction. In addition, most parties display a highly centralized organizational structure, with decisions being made at the top by a relatively circumscribed circle of party activists and transmitted to the bottom.

(1998: 8–9)

Harmel and Svåsand are among the few scholars who developed a theoretical framework which links party leadership and party institutionalization. They used this theoretical framework for the study of one version of 'charismatic parties' – the 'soft' type (the Norwegian and Danish Progress Parties), or as they call them 'entrepreneurial issue parties' (EI parties). According to their argument, not all charismatic parties are EI parties. For example, EI parties must have external and individual origins (unlike some charismatic parties), and while they emphasize issues in the message the leader creates, for other charismatic parties the leader is the message (Harmel and Svåsand, 1993: 67–8). The fact that these parties do not fit the specific features of the charismatic party may be the reason why the authors overlook the problem of 'charismatic institutionalization' and leave the definition of institutionalization rather vague.

A comparative examination of political parties in the Western European scene leaves the impression that in terms of organizational features the EI parties may serve as an intermediate type. They fall between the non-charismatic parties and the typical 'hard charismatic parties', such as the French FN and the Austrian Freedom Party FPÖ on which this article focuses.

Harmel and Svåsand argue that the most important phases in the development of an entrepreneurial party are: (a) the period of developing a message and establishing identification; operationally, during this phase the party is represented by few of its members in the parliament; (b) a period of organization and electoral growth – in this stage the number of parliamentary representatives exceeds a 'handful' and/or a number of the party's members that have been elected to local offices; (c) a period of institutionalization, when the emphasis is on establishing the party's credibility as well as dependability – during this phase someone, inside or outside the party, first takes seriously the possibility that the party could conceivably be invited to join in a coalition government. Henceforth, they refer to these periods as identification, organization and stabilization of party development (Harmel and Svåsand, 1993: 71–3).

The basic assumption in Harmel and Svåsand's theory is that in each of the stages of the party's life there is a need for a different kind of leadership in order to achieve the destiny of institutionalization. Although this
assumption is highly relevant for non-charismatic or even EI parties, it contradicts the very basic features of the ‘hard charismatic party’, i.e. the symbiotic connection between the leader and his party. Thus, the qualifications of a leader of a charismatic party should fit into all the stages of party development.

According to their theory, in the party’s first phase the leader is the ‘creator and operator’ who enjoys qualities such as originality and creativity, communication skills, charisma and authority, which would enable him to develop the message of the party, to communicate and draw attention to it. The need for an authoritarian personality is connected to the organizational level. In a state of organizational vacuum the leader must present an authoritarian style which would enable party members and activists to operate within a loose organizational framework.

Following the theory, during the second phase the leader should be focused on party development, mainly on the routinization of the party’s operation. Harmel and Svåsand note: ‘The leader who opposes, as a matter of principle, routinization at the national level or the development of organizations at the local level, will be ill-suited for leadership during the second phase’ (1993: 74). Yet, such a situation is one of the fundamental features of the ‘hard charismatic party’. Hence, according to Harmel and Svåsand’s argument, the leader of an EI party should enjoy organizational and delegation skills along with strategic and consensus building skills. Their assumption is that at this stage the party is already characterized by factionalism and thus the leader should have the ability to operate and lead an organization, which lacks total cohesion. This assumption is less relevant for a ‘hard charismatic party’, in which, as mentioned by Panebianco, the prospects of open factionalism are very low. Alternatively, the factionalism is latent and revolves mainly around the issue of being close to the leader. Challengers in such a party are a direct threat to the very basic nature of the party, and thus if a party member does challenge the authority of the leader he is highly likely to be ousted from the organization. Hence, the leader in a ‘hard charismatic party’, which enters its second phase, should indeed enjoy organizational and strategic skills. However, the need for consensus-building abilities is limited, since the leader has to maintain his authoritarian style of leadership from the first phase of the party’s development. He has also to maintain communicative skills because, as mentioned earlier, the option of disconnecting the message from the leader in the case of ‘hard charismatic parties’ is unattainable.

As for the third phase, the stabilization, ‘hard charismatic parties’, especially of an extreme right-wing nature, rarely enter this phase. Stabilization is virtual anathema for such an organization. The vitality of these parties is based upon their extreme ideology and violent discourse. Such parties can become ‘coalitionable’ only if they attain the status of pivotal parties. Moreover, relations between far-right parties and parties of a less extreme nature are rare, due to the fact that moderate parties are apprehensive about
cooperating with extreme organizations because this may stain their image and harm their electoral stability. Another problem facing a far-right charismatic party seeking to enter the third phase is its style of leadership. Harmel and Svåsand argue that ‘needed at the helm during this period is a moderator and stabilizer, someone with good personal credentials for credibility and dependability and with skills to diffuse these characteristics throughout the organization’ (1993: 74). However, such skills are usually not the properties of the far-right charismatic leader. In many cases there is no real need for skills of this kind because, although the party may have grown, its basic structure has not changed and the leader is still the most valuable resource of the organization and therefore enjoys maximum control over it. The party’s poor chances of becoming a coalition member preclude the required complex skills that would enable the leader to deal with other parties.

The theoretical framework derived from Harmel and Svåsand’s explanation is as follows:

(a) parties that fail to provide leadership with the requisite skills and orientations at each phase will experience turmoil and eventually collapse; and (b) a party whose leader at one phase lacks the requisite skills and/or orientations for the next phase must either replace or complement that leader with others in order to avoid turmoil and eventual collapse. The fact that few leaders have all the skills and orientations required for all three phases, and may lack the skills and orientations for even two of them, means that replacing or complementing are likely to occur in most cases.

(1993: 76)

While the first assumption seems relevant not only for EI parties but for ‘hard charismatic’ parties as well, the second fails to fit such parties. Since these parties are built around one personality, they are on a slippery slope. If the leader lacks the relevant skills needed by the organization in a given phase there is a good chance that the result will be a bad fall. However, the idea of replacing the leader or complementing him with others should be carefully considered. The likelihood of a change of leadership in a party that is fully identified with one person is minimal. The prospects for the creation of a new stratum of leadership are dependent upon the leader’s will to routinize the charisma or alternatively the level of confidence in this new stratum of leadership. If any of the new leaders endangered the charismatic leader’s position, it is highly unlikely that he would remain in office for long. Therefore, the assumption that party needs would bring change to leadership seems improbable in a ‘hard charismatic party’.

Getting back to Harmel and Svåsand’s theoretical framework, their last hypothesis is relevant in the case of the ‘hard charismatic parties’ ‘if more than one phase occurs simultaneously, the tasks of leading and finding a single leader becomes exponentially more complicated’ (Harmel and Svåsand, 1993: 77). Indeed, the demands from a pure charismatic leader are much higher then those facing an EI party leader or leader of a party
non-charismatic in nature. In parties of this kind all the burden of leadership falls on the shoulders of one person, regardless of the phase in which the party finds itself.

Table 1 presents our theoretical extension of Harmel and Svåsand’s theory. This additional development of the theory should serve as the basis for the inclusion of ‘hard charismatic parties’ in the debate about the relations between charismatic leadership and party institutionalization.

Based on our case studies of the FN and FPÖ we show that even a ‘hard charismatic party’ is capable of accomplishing the three phases of identification, organization and stabilization. This is demonstrated using the analytical units of the table and their usefulness in explaining the institutionalization of ‘hard charismatic parties’.

The French National Front (FN) –
A Pure Charismatic Party

The FN exhibits an exquisite illustration of ‘pure charisma’. This party perfectly fits Panabianco’s definition of the concept ‘... parties formed by one leader who imposes himself as undisputed founder, conceivér and interpreter of a set of political symbols (the party’s original ideological goals) which become inseparable from his person’ (1988: 52).

Identification

We may discern the identification phase of the FN when Jean-Marie Le Pen founded it in 1972 as a heterogeneous federation (Marcus, 1995: 12), bringing together those who were nostalgic for Vichy, anti-Gaulist, Poujadists, Neo-Fascists, intellectuals and others. It was not Le Pen’s first political experience. He was the former president of the nationalist student association of Paris and was elected deputy in 1956 on the Poujadist list. Following the campaign he led for pro-French Algerian candidate Tixier-Vignancour in 1965, he gained the image of a man of action (Mayer, 1998: 12). Thus, Le Pen displayed all the credentials of a right-wing extremist leader: ‘He had participated in all the struggles of the extreme right including the most violent ones’ (Declair, 1999: 38).

In its formative phase, the FN was a marginal party with few sections outside Paris (Veugeler, 1995: 192). The departure of the extreme right leaders who had formed the FN during the 1970s offered an opportunity for Le Pen to disassociate himself from the ideology of Parti des Forces Nouvelles. It enabled him to get rid of the extreme right’s anti-democratic revolutionary message (Simmons, 1996: 67), to communicate his populist message to a much wider audience and thus to establish himself as the undisputed leader of the FN (Marcus, 1995: 12). Under the leadership of Le Pen the FN has managed to fight every legislative election since 1973 though not
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Primary objective</th>
<th>Specific tasks</th>
<th>Leadership needs</th>
<th>Specific tasks</th>
<th>Leadership needs</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Identification</td>
<td>Develop message</td>
<td>CREATOR and PREACHER</td>
<td>Originality and creativity, communication skills, charisma authoritativeness</td>
<td>Develop message which is tightly connected to the leaders personality</td>
<td>CREATOR and PREACHER</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Communicate message</td>
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<td>Communicate message</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Draw attention to party</td>
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<td>Draw attention to party</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adopt (non)organizational style</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adopt (non)organizational style</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Organization</td>
<td>Develop and routinize procedures</td>
<td>ORGANIZER</td>
<td>Organizational orientation and skills, consensus building skills, strategic skills</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Delegate and co-ordinate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build and maintain consensus among competing factors</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Stabilization</td>
<td>Develop reputations for credibility and dependability</td>
<td>STABILIZER</td>
<td>Personal reputation for credibility and dependability, administrative skills (for organizational maintenance and fine-tuning), complex human relation skills (to lead complex party organization while dealing with other parties)</td>
<td>A party of that kind enters the stabilization phase only upon achieving a substantial electoral achievement and high blackmail potential. Therefore, based on its strong blackmail potential, the party should develop ongoing relations with at least one party in order to form a coalition, or alternatively to make impression inroads in local government</td>
<td>PREACHER, RIGID ORGANIZER</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Fine-tune and implement message and procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop ongoing relations with other parties (perhaps eventually within coalition government)</td>
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* For comparison see Harmel and Sväsand (1993: 75).
in all constituencies, especially in the 1970s. This is an achievement specifically relevant for centralized charismatic parties. Contrary to other parties, which tend to disintegrate following electoral defeats, those that are fully controlled by one charismatic person will follow his wishes and thus may have a better chance of persevering. As Simmons points out, the originality, creativity and charisma of Le Pen had been the predominant factors in FN’s success: ‘by sheer virtue of intelligence, energy, competitiveness and charisma, Jean-Marie Le Pen fused together the desperate forces of the extreme right under his personal leadership’ (Simmons, 1996: 251).

According to Rose and Mackie (1988: 536–7), 42 percent of all parties participating in the national elections of 19 Western countries have disappeared before contesting four elections. The impressive electoral success of Le Pen is demonstrated in Figure 1, and is a clear indicator of the party’s institutionalization. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the institutionalization of Le Pen’s party is even more convincing due to his electoral success in local and European elections.

**Organization**

Veugelers argues that one of the main factors enabling the FN to survive its electoral defeats and to keep nominating candidates for national elections was the high level of cohesion under the leadership of Le Pen: ‘... the cohesion resulting from Le Pen’s control of the party was never in doubt’ (Veugelers, 1995: 232). Moreover, he emphasizes that during this phase Le Pen had unitary control of the party and thus kept it almost closed to factionalism. One faction that did exist was the Ordre Nouveau (ON), but it was rejected. Following the departure of the ON, Le Pen became even more dominant. At the time he was in charge of both organizational and communication levels, his two vice presidents had no formal decision-making power (Veugelers, 1995: 198–9).

![Figure 1. The FN at the legislative Polls*](image)

* FN’s scores are those achieved at the first ballot.
The early 1980s signalled a new era for the party. From 900 members in 1977 (Veugeler, 1995: 198), the organization expanded to between 40,000 and 50,000. In the 1984 European elections, the FN secured 11 percent of the vote (Mayer, 1992: 124) and in the 1986 legislative elections 9.7 percent, thus gaining 35 seats in the national assembly (Mitra, 1988: 49). At this point, according to Harmel and Svåsand’s theory, the party entered its second phase.

The success in the transfer to this phase was tightly connected with Le Pen’s style of leadership. Prior to the European elections of 1984, he saw indications for a potential electoral breakthrough for the party. One of the ways attention was drawn to the party was Le Pen’s numerous anti-Semitic diatribes, which became even more distinct in his pronouncements in the second half of the 1980. As Simmons points out ‘. . . anti-Semitism is part of a century-old tradition on the extreme right and is a major element holding together the various factions that compose the Front’ (1996: 132). Another method drawing attention to the party was seen in the party’s 1986 campaign manifesto, where the FN attacked the media, accusing them of either providing insufficient or negative coverage of the FN. According to Declair, a majority of the party leaders named the media as the primary barrier to the party’s creation. Moreover, the Front’s leadership contended that during the early years the party’s activities were virtually ignored by the media and that, on those rare occasions when the FN did receive coverage, it was uniformly negative (Declair, 1999: 54).

In order to avoid the problems of a big party (factionalism, tendencies, etc.) Le Pen dominated the selection of the FN candidates, ensuring that all of them were loyal to him, in order to sanitize the movement’s public image (Declair, 1999: 64). He adopted a strategy of a non-organizational style, which for the most part meant elite recruitment without relying on a formal bureaucratic party machine.

However, he did not fully succeed. Entering the second phase, the FN encountered problems of a growing party and a threat to the centralized power structure. One of these problems was the demand of local party sections to nominate their candidates by themselves. This was an unbearable situation for a ‘hard charismatic party’. The solution was that the party’s directorate, which was a tool in the hands of Le Pen, took control of local level expansion, thus bringing the centre and periphery closer together and limiting the autonomy of the local sections (Veugeler, 1995: 202–3).

Le Pen maintained his absolute control over the party organization. He was even ready to suffer some electoral failures for the sake of his unitary control; for example, the successful founders and leaders of the FN federation in Loire-et-Cher were replaced due to the fact that they displayed too much autonomy (Veugeler, 1995: 206). Mayer’s description of Le Pen’s style of leadership illustrates this phenomenon:

. . . actual power rests in the hands of the president. He is assisted by the executive bureau; a small team comprised of Le Pen’s cabinet
director, the secretary general, and the general delegate and the vice president. Triumphant reelected at every congress, Le Pen has total control over the party’s life and tolerates no opposition.

(Mayer, 1992: 15)

Another example of such a situation may be found in the fact that Le Pen prevented diffusion of power to people who had recently joined the party. His ‘divide and rule’ philosophy was clearly demonstrated on several occasions, such as the elevation of Bruno Megret to the post of general delegation in October 1988, so as to snub Stirbois and to prevent him gaining more power within the party. Other examples would include various expulsions from the party, such as Yann Piat and Yvon Briant (Marcus, 1995: 27–51).

Megret’s story illustrates once again the type of leadership that characterized the FN. Although the relationship between Le Pen and Megret was never easy, Megret was considered Le Pen’s number two for many years. However, in December 1998, Le Pen endorsed his party’s pure charismatic character. The feeling that Megret could become a real challenger caused his expulsion from the party (Valls-Russel, 1999: 8–9).

Stabilization

Over the years, Le Pen led his party and kept control over all its branches. Parliament members who showed signs of independence were expelled. He also led organizational reform that was aimed at centralizing the power in the party and enabled him to coordinate and arbitrate (Veugelers, 1995: 211). The growing blackmail potential of the FN, as demonstrated in its astounding showing at the polls, led Le Monde ‘to warn of the increasing dependence of the centrist parties on the extreme right’ (Simmons, 1996: 252). While on the national level, as Hainsworth claims, the leadership of the main right-wing parties was reluctant to make legitimizing alliances or electoral agreements with the FN on the local and regional levels:

A more laissez-faire attitude has often prevailed ... in several regions ... the FN regional counselors have provided crucial votes and alliances to elect presidents, ratify budgets and secure legislation. In return, the party has gained regional vice presidencies and other posts, in addition to acquiring further legitimacy and influence. A consequence of regional elections and agreements has been the enabling of the FN to sink roots into French society, a process enhanced by municipal electoral success.

(Hainsworth, 2000: 20)

The 1998 regional elections demonstrated Le Pen’s skills as a tough negotiator when he attempted to gain the presidency of the Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur assembly in Marseille. Even though ultimately he did not succeed in achieving his goal, he managed to split the traditional right between a faction willing to deal with the FN and a faction refusing deals. Le Pen’s machinations necessitated the intervention of President Jacques Chirac to
make a televised appeal to his supporters, and to France to refuse all appeasement of ultra-nationalism and racism (Independent, 24.3.1998; see also Guardian, 24.3.1998).

Moreover, in addition to taking over the control of four important towns, Marignane, Orange, Toulon and Vitrolles, the FN has also elected almost 2000 local counsellors. Benefiting from the proportional voting system used for Euro elections, the FN would also regularly retain 10 or more MEPs in Strasbourg (Hainsworth, 2000: 20).

Thus, the Front's success in attaining legitimacy, power and influence on the local and European levels was no accident. Over the decades since 1971, Le Pen has built the FN into a formidable party machine with all the accoutrements of an orthodox political party, including hierarchical organization, local branches throughout the country, a series of affiliated organizations, and a highly sophisticated election and propaganda apparatus (Simmons, 1996: 252).

The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) –
From Situational to Pure Charisma

The FPÖ features a very interesting example of Tucker's concept of 'situational charisma'. According to his notion,

We might use the term 'situational charisma' to refer to instances where a leader-personality of non-messianic tendency evokes a charismatic response simply because he offers, in a time of acute distress, leadership that is perceived as a source and means of salvation from distress.

(Tucker, 1970: 81–2)

Jörg Haider indeed was the right man at the right moment. When he became the leader of the FPÖ in 1986, the party, which over the years had moved toward the centre, was at a point of near extinction (Riedlsperger, 1992: 18–58). Under his leadership the FPÖ went through a new identification stage and steadily increased its electoral hold until it became the second largest party in the Austrian parliament (see Figure 2).

Identification

The evolution of the FPÖ is rather different from that of the FN. The party was founded in 1956 and was a direct descendant of the German national-liberal camp. Until 1986, the FPÖ was considered to be a relatively small protest party (Riedlsperger, 1998: 27–8). Mudde (1996) argues that the party did not originate from an (exclusively) right-wing extremist environment. As a successor to the VdU, the FPÖ was a meeting place for German nationalists, national-liberals and former Nazis. However, gradually the party developed into a national liberal party, thereby losing some right-wing
extremists to the NDP in the 1966 split. In 1983, the FPÖ was even accepted as a coalition partner of the SPÖ (Mudde 1996: 236). Its membership in the coalition led to a serious crisis in the party. The FPÖ lost its protest character as well as its former identity. Opinion polls conducted at the time showed that the potential vote for the party was less than 2 percent. This all changed when a coalition of conservatives, German-Nationalists and other dissidents engineered the election of Jörg Haider as national party chairman. Following his election, Haider began to develop a new message, which was a point of departure of the party’s electoral appeal. Under his leadership, the FPÖ modernized its liberal image, turning it into a so-called ‘fundamental liberalism’ (Betz, 1994: 112). His clear message was that, contrary to the corrupt policies of the established parties, he was to introduce integrity and honesty into politics and to mobilize more and more voters against the establishment (Betz, 1994: 113).

Thus, immediately after his election in 1986 Haider led the FPÖ to an achievement of 9.7 percent of the vote. Analysis of the FPÖ electorate in 1986 established that Haider’s charismatic personality was the greatest single factor in the party’s appeal (Morrow, 2000: 47). His authority was demonstrated by his ruthless personal leadership of the party. Following his election as party leader, internal discipline was rigidly enforced and, one by one, all rivals were driven to the margins (Morrow, 2000: 49).

As the party grew in membership and electoral power, Haider’s skills as creative leader were exhibited. He started to build party organs in order to strengthen party ties with the membership and render it more cohesive. The information centre of the party, formed to collect data and cultivate contacts with members and supporters, was established ‘to ensure smooth coordination between the parliamentary party, the provincial parties, and members and sympathizers’ (Sully, 1997: 14).

![Figure 2. The FPÖ at the legislative polls](image)
Organization

In the early 1990s, Haider disassociated himself from the establishment by conveying a strong effective anti-establishment message. He continued to preach against the second republic itself: ‘indeed, the FPÖ openly campaigned for its transformation into a new, rather ominously . . . titled “Third Republic”’ (Morrow, 2000: 54). He presented himself as the patron saint of the hard working against the corruption of the corporatist state; a master of the sound-byte he coined the slogan ‘simply honest, simply Jörg’ (Morrow, 2000: 55).

Until the 1986 Innsbruck meeting, in which Haider was brought to power, the party convention was an important body. ‘The success of the party under Haider has led to a deferral of authority to the chairman to such an extent that it is now unflatteringly referred to as Führerpartei’ (Riedlsperger, 1998: 30). Moreover, ‘during the 1994 referendum campaign [on EU membership], the 1995 election campaign and the 1996 EU elections, the FPÖ was de facto synonymous with Haider’ (Morrow, 2000: 60). ‘Those who have tried to exercise their independence were expelled or have defected, as did the party’s 1992 presidential candidate Heide Schmidt and former defense minister Friedhelm Frioschenshlager’ (Riedlsperger, 1998: 30). Indeed, as Morrow points out, ‘Opposing Haider remained a difficult matter’ (2000: 54). Even his threatened resignation at the end of April 1998 may serve as an example of his astute political skills as an authoritarian party leader and organizer. It was meant to instill an added degree of cohesion into the party and reinforce loyalty to the leader.

Stabilization

In the 1995 elections ‘The freedom party campaign centered exclusively around Jörg Haider’ (Sully, 1997: 112). Furthermore, in the 1995 elections the blackmail potential of the FPÖ has been distinctly revealed: ‘Haider was no longer the innocent onlooker but was in a position to make a real challenge for power and shake up the post-war Austrian system’ (Sully, 1997: 114). A year later, in 1996, Haider made it absolutely clear that his aim was to enter the government, stressing, ‘The political game is in the future unthinkable without us’ (Sully, 1997: 160). This was even the impression of Haider’s critics, who observed that if no reforms in the Austrian political system were implemented, then the ground-swell of discontent would surge and Haider’s party could find itself in power (Sully, 1997: 204). As Sully observed ‘much like the Social Democrats in the First Republic, Haider’s FPÖ has been shut out of the main power of the republic. Like the Social Democrats in the 1920s, Haider has engaged in verbal radicalism but, if given the chance, could opt for moderate policies in practice’ (Sully, 1997: 204). Morrow’s prediction that Vranitzky’s successor Victor Klima would be less hostile to cooperation with the FPÖ has been proven wrong.
However, Morrow’s prediction of pragmatism was vindicated when Wolfgang Schüssel, anxious to become the Chancellor, invited Haider and the FPÖ to join his coalition (Morrow, 2000: 61). Realizing his blackmail potential, Haider has shown himself to be a skilful negotiator by bringing his party into the coalition despite the domestic and international outcry against Schüssel’s ÖVP, at the price of symbolically stepping down as the party leader (The Economist, 27.1.2000).

Conclusion

Contrary to Panebianco’s contention that charismatic parties rarely institutionalize, the examples of the FN and the FPÖ prove convincingly that strong charismatic leaders, when attaining substantial electoral support, and continuous representation in the bodies of the national and local government, are capable of reaching stabilization. So far, despite electoral volatility, the impressive and continuous electoral and legislative success seems to be enabling these parties to attain pivotal position and blackmail potential. At least one of the established parties is thereby forced to enter into a coalition with the far right charismatic party, as in the case of the FPÖ. Another way is to attain power and representation in important municipalities in local elections, or impressive representation in supra-national institutions such as the European Parliament, in the case of the FN.

Although Harmel and Svasand acknowledge the possibility that soft charismatic parties are capable of accomplishing all three phases of institutionalization, namely identification, organization and stabilization, they discounted the ability of hard charismatic parties to accomplish all three phases of institutionalization. The prevalent opinion among scholars of right-wing extremism is that the success of such parties is usually a result of environmental factors (social, economic, etc.). However, our case studies support Betz’s contention that micro-factors such as charismatic leadership are critical in achieving full-fledged institutionalization of extreme right-wing charismatic parties by exploiting the climate conducive to right-wing populist mobilization (Betz, 1998: 8–9). What seems to be a paradox of the institutionalization of extreme right-wing charismatic parties is becoming a reality.

However, as mentioned by Panebianco, ‘the fact that a party is highly institutionalized is no guarantee that de-institutionalization . . . will not take place when its environment undergoes radical changes’ (1988: 62–3). Our definition of institutionalization is rather different from Panebianco’s. Yet, we tend to agree that even after completing the institutionalization process and reaching stabilization, hard charismatic parties are still vulnerable, like other parties, to external and internal influences. If they are unsuccessful in realizing the ‘routinization of charisma’, these parties are even more likely to be susceptible when the charismatic leader leaves the scene.
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Note

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