

# The Faces of Joke Parties: Comparative Analysis of the Party Organization of the Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party and the Die PARTEI

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**Abstract:** *This research aims to examine the organisational structure of two so-called joke parties: the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) and the German Die PARTEI. These parties occupy a unique position within their respective party systems, as neither has secured seats in the national parliament. However, both have achieved notable successes in secondary elections, such as the European Parliament elections and at the local level. Despite being primarily recognised for their humorous, satirical and ironic communication strategies, this study seeks to move beyond the surface level of their political messaging and explore their deeper organisational structures. It is hypothesised that joke parties, as a distinct party family, share structural similarities beyond their communication style. To investigate this, two key theories of party organisation have been applied. The first is the ‘three faces’ theory proposed by Peter Mair and Peter Katz, which challenges the notion of monolithic party organisation and instead conceptualises parties as entities composed of separate yet interconnected segments, each with distinct functions, powers and responsibilities. The second theoretical framework is the movement party theory, which suggests that the boundaries between political parties and social movements are less rigid than traditionally assumed in political science. This theory posits that certain parties maintain stronger ties with civil society, exhibit grassroots organisational structures, emphasise direct democracy and prioritise street-level activism. To test this hypothesis, semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of Die PARTEI and MKKP. A diverse range of respondents was selected to ensure comprehensive data collection across national, regional (state), and local levels. In addition to analysing the vertical structure of these parties, their horizontal organisation was also examined. Consequently, data were gathered from prominent figures representing the party on the ground, the party in public office and the party in the central office. The findings indicate that both parties exhibit common*

*organisational characteristics. Notably, the segment referred to as the 'party on the ground' appears to be the most prominent, as their political activity places significant emphasis on street-level engagement. Furthermore, both parties demonstrate stronger connections with civil society than traditional cartel parties, aligning them with the characteristics of movement parties.*

**Keywords:** *joke parties, Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party, Die PARTEI, movement parties*

## Introduction

Although joke parties have been part of the Western European political arena since the 1970s, they have remained marginal for political science. This can be explained by their election results, which, according to the interpretation of Giovanni Sartori (1976[2005]), cannot be considered relevant. In other words, they cannot significantly influence either the party system or public policy decisions. However, the phenomenon of satirical parties has become widespread in Europe, exemplified by the Official Monster Raving Loony Party in the United Kingdom, the beer parties of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, or perhaps the most famous and successful example, the Besti Flokkurinn (Best Party), which, under Jón Gnarr's leadership, secured the mayoralty of Reykjavík. Nonetheless, the majority of these organizations have ceased operations or failed to move beyond a highly marginalized position and establish a functioning party structure.

The two satirical parties examined in this research, however, have somewhat transcended this marginalization. While neither is represented in their respective national parliaments, both maintain a presence in local governments, and Die PARTEI holds two mandates in the European Parliament. Based on these findings, it can be asserted that both parties are integrated components of their respective countries' party systems and rank among the strongest non-parliamentary parties. Furthermore, both parties remain active to this day and have demonstrated the necessity and ability to build a genuine party structure, as their operations are no longer solely driven by the involvement of their founders, unlike many other satirical parties. Therefore, this research examines the organizational structure of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) and the Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative (Die PARTEI) using focused comparative methods to highlight the similarities and differences between the parties.

In the structure of the study, the joke political parties, as well as Die PARTEI and the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), will first be briefly introduced. Following this, the theoretical background of party organizations will be explored, with particular reference to Peter Mair and Richard Katz's theory of the three faces of political parties, which will serve as the basis for the analysis. The empirical section will then follow, focusing on a comparison of the organizational features of the two parties and an exploration of their structures.

## Joke political parties

The phenomenon of joke parties fundamentally refers to political organizations where humour plays a central role. In the case of these parties, humour is not merely a rhetorical device but a defining element of their overall functioning. Essentially, the party interprets its socio-political and economic environment through humour, which often underlies its motivations for action (Szegeci 2021). The party family derives its name from this characteristic, which serves as the most significant common feature of joke parties. However, beyond this, several additional similarities can be identified, such as the strong anti-establishment attitudes and the emphasis on post-materialist values. Given that the primary targets of their humour are those in positions of power, joke parties can be characterized by a strong anti-elitist attitude.

When examining the emergence of joke parties and the humour they employ, two main periods can be distinguished (Glieb & Szegeci 2024). First,<sup>1</sup> the classic joke parties emerged in the 1980s, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries, influenced by new leftist movements. These parties utilized playful, non-offensive humour and were significantly shaped by the electoral systems of Anglo-Saxon countries, particularly concerning wasted votes, as well as dissatisfaction caused by the neoliberal economic shift.

The second wave of joke parties appeared during the 2010s, predominantly in continental Europe. This period marked electoral successes for joke parties, such as the election of Jón Gnarr, the candidate of the Best Party (Besti Flokkurinn), as mayor of Reykjavík (Boyer 2013; Proppé 2015). Additionally, two other notable actors central to the analysis are the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party and Die PARTEI. Furthermore, the Austrian Beer Party (Die Bierpartei), which achieved 2.02% of the vote in the 2024 elections (bundeswahlen.gv.at 2024), may become a significant joke party in the future.

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1 Excluding Jaroslav Hašek's The Party of Moderate Progress Within the Bounds of the Law (*Strana mírného pokroku v mezích zákona*), which participated in the 1911 elections in the Cisleithanian territory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it is considered more of a proto-joke party, having preceded the emergence of joke parties by a significant margin.

## ***Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party***

The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) began its activities in 2006, initially as a street art movement, becoming known for its socially critical messages in the city of Szeged (Bucs 2011). The party first participated in elections during the 2010 municipal elections in a few districts of Budapest but failed to gather the required number of nominations. Since 2014, it has operated as a political party due to a legislative amendment prohibiting non-parties from participating in elections. However, in 2014, it was unable to compete in the elections because the court did not approve its registration as a party, deeming its name ‘misleading’. Following an appeal to the Curia,<sup>2</sup> the Curia approved the party’s operation (Oross, Farkas & Papp 2018).

The party achieved its first nationwide recognition in 2015. During this year, the government launched an anti-migration billboard campaign, significantly deviating from traditional Hungarian political themes. In response, the MKKP initiated a counter-counter billboard campaign funded through public donations. In the 2018 parliamentary elections, the party garnered 1.79% of the vote, failing to cross the 5% parliamentary threshold (NVI.hu 2018). However, in the 2019 municipal elections, it won representative seats in several Budapest districts and secured a deputy-mayor position in one district (NVI.hu 2018). In the 2022 elections, the party again did not reach the 5% threshold but significantly expanded its voter base, achieving a 3.27% result (NVI.hu 2022).

The MKKP has launched several billboard campaigns countering the government’s narratives. It gained nationwide attention in 2015 during the first Hungarian anti-migration government campaign, raising 33 million HUF (~110,000 €) through public donations to formulate a counter-narrative. The billboards mimicked the visual characteristics of the government’s billboards but featured different texts, such as ‘*Sorry about our prime minister*’ or ‘*If you’re Hungary’s Prime Minister, you have to respect our laws!*’<sup>3</sup> (Nagy 2016: 121). The party continues to employ similar methods in its street campaigns. Since 2018, their main campaign slogan has been ‘Eternal life, Free beer, Tax reduction’ (see Figure 1). Its primary campaign message in the 2022 parliamentary election was ‘More animals into the Parliament’ (Szegegi 2022a: 96). Furthermore, they reflected on the political-economic situation in Hungary in their campaigns (see Figure 2).

Since becoming a member of the Budapest City Assembly, co-chair Gergely Kovács has submitted several unconventional proposals, such as the initiative titled ‘*Proposal to ban Imperial Walkers from Budapest*’, in which the following reasoning was provided:

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2 Hungarian Supreme Court

3 This was a response to the government’s billboard stating: ‘*If you come to Hungary, you have to keep our laws*’ (Thorpe, 2015).

*With the following proposal, we wish to demonstrate that the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party's representative group is equally capable of drafting proposals of such quality, seriousness, and depth of professional content as those brought forward by some of our fellow representatives in previous sessions. Let the humour factor belong to the Dog Party! Many have surely noticed that Imperial Walkers (officially known as AT-ATs, or All-Terrain Armored Transports) have overrun the capital. Unfortunately, it is increasingly observed that they ignore traffic signals, run red lights, and tear down cables. Not to mention that they occupy numerous parking spaces. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for them to transport cargo (e.g., weapons, troops, lunch, etc.). (Budapest.hu 2024)<sup>4</sup>*

**Figure 1: Slogan of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party**



Source: MKKP.party 2019a  
'Eternal life, Free beer, Tax reduction'

4 The proposal was not supported by the assembly.

Figure 2: MKKP EP election poster (2019)



Source: MKKP.party 2019b

'We will significantly reduce the insultingly high foreign wages. in England -70%, in Germany -65%, in Austria -75%, in Romania -3%. Come Home Hungarian! programme.'

## Die PARTEI

The Party for Labour, Rule of Law, Animal Protection, Promotion of Elites, and Grassroots Democratic Initiative (Die Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative), abbreviated as Die PARTEI, was founded in 2004 by the editorial staff of Titanic magazine (Neu 2018). In 2005, the party was only able to participate in elections in Berlin and Hamburg, where it achieved results well below 1%. In the 2009 elections, the party was unable to participate because the Federal Election Committee did not authorize its candidacy, deeming it not a 'serious party.' However, this decision was overturned by the Federal Constitutional Court (bundesverfassungsgericht.de 2011).

In the 2013 federal elections, Die PARTEI received 0.2% of the vote, followed by 1% in the 2017 federal elections. In the 2021 elections, it again achieved 1%, but due to significantly higher voter turnout, the nominal number of votes was nearly double compared to 2017 (bundeswahlleiterin.de 2021). Thus, Die PARTEI has yet to surpass the parliamentary threshold in Germany. However, in the Euro-

pean Parliament elections, where there is no parliamentary threshold in Germany, the party has secured mandates in every EP election since 2014—winning one seat in 2014 and two seats each in 2019 and 2024 (bundeswahlleiterin.de 2024).

The party’s relative popularity is primarily attributed to its extensive use of social media (Olterman 2017) and attention-grabbing actions that generate significant media coverage. For instance, during one election campaign, a 90-second blurred sex video was released as a political advertisement (Reuters.com, 2013). Another notable action involved displaying the slogan ‘a Nazi could be hanging here’ on billboards (Knight 2017). They make fun of other political parties (see Figure 3) or even their party leader (see Figure 4) in their campaigns.

Additionally, Martin Sonneborn’s speeches in the European Parliament deviate from conventional norms, such as:

Madam President! Dear Mrs. von der Leyen, welcome! I am genuinely pleased that, as of now, I am no longer the least serious representative of European democracy. The personnel line-up presented by the Council is something to

**Figure 3: Die PARTEI poster about other parties**



Source: Glied & Szegedi 2024: 502  
'CDU: not Christians, SPD not social, Grüne: not ecological, FDP: not liberal, AfD: not alternative, Die PARTEI: not funny'

**Figure 4: Die PARTEI EP election poster (2024)**



Source: Facebook.com/Die PARTEI  
'You know me! Leave Europe to Sonneborn.'

behold: Josep Borrell—a Spanish figure who had to resign as President of the European University Institute because he “forgot” to declare an annual gratuity of 300,000 euros—is supposed to represent European values to the world as High Representative for Foreign Affairs. Christine Lagarde—a lawyer convicted of misappropriating 400 million euros of public funds, with no experience leading a national central bank—is supposed to head the ECB. Charles Michel—a Belgian who couldn’t even form a functioning government in Belgium—is supposed to become Council President and mediate an increasingly complex web of national interests. And then there’s you, Mrs. von der Leyen—a German minister completely devoid of European policy expertise, who has only stood out for a bizarre penchant for overpriced consultants, mismanagement, and euphemisms like “financial turnaround” to describe Germany’s largest rearmament campaign since the end of the war.

To secure this parade of incompetence and moral laxity, you are making deals with the illiberal PiS party, the wannabe fascist Orbán, and Benito Salvini? We should not leave Europe to amateurs—wink emoji. (Europäisches Parlament 2018).

## Methodology

The theoretical framework of the research primarily aims to examine joke parties through two major party theories. Firstly, we intend to use the theory of movement parties to better understand the three faces of party organizations and then integrate the organizational structures of Die PARTEI and MKKP into these theories. We assume that both joke parties fall into the category of movement parties, which is reflected in the aspects of party organization. We hypothesize that the organizational unit of the party on the ground is over-represented compared to other parties and plays a crucial role in the life of the party. In other words, we assume that the autonomy and independence of local organizations are greater than those in traditional parties.

To empirically confirm or refute this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with prominent figures of Die PARTEI and MKKP. The aim was to explore the relationships between different units within each party’s organization and to uncover their unconventional participatory, political community-building, and other political strategic tools. Interviews were conducted with national and local politicians, leaders, and activists for both parties.

The study is primarily descriptive research, as it currently seeks to find answers to how the organizational structures of MKKP and Die PARTEI are built and how the individual parts behave relative to each other. It aims to identify similarities and differences between the two structures. However, it can become an important foundational study in the field of joke parties.



The interviewees provided almost identical responses to nearly all questions, therefore, not every interviewee's opinion is included in the analysis section. Instead, the opinions of those who were able to answer the questions most succinctly are presented. However, the study strives to ensure that the list of used interviews is as diverse as possible.

## Party organizations

The examination of party organizations is almost as old as the research on parties itself, with Moisey Ostrogorsky (1902) and Robert Michels (1915) approaching parties from the perspective of party organizations. Over the past century, party organizations have undergone numerous changes. If we consider only centralization, we have transitioned from loosely organized parties with cadre or honorary structures, often not even existing in a modern sense, to the development of modern hierarchized, bureaucratic, professional machinery, as described by catch-all parties (Kirchheimer 1966) or professional electoral parties (Panebianco 1988). Subsequently, we witnessed the emergence of looser forms such as cartel parties (Katz & Mair 1995) or parties resembling economic circles (Hopkin & Paolucci 1999). We can also include party organizations reminiscent of the franchise system (Carty 2004). With the spread and widespread use of the internet, cyber parties (Margetts 2006) have emerged, organizing almost entirely in the online space (Lioy, Esteve Del Valle & Gottlieb 2019).

However, it is essential to highlight Tomáš Cirhan's theory (2023), which states that anti-establishment parties have a unique, particular organizational structure where charismatic leadership and local organizations play the most significant role in party organization.

The central element of Cirhan's theory bears a strong resemblance to Herbert Kitschelt's (2006) thesis on movement parties, describing a group of parties that, in some aspects, resemble social movements. Similar to Cirhan, charismatic leadership and local organizations play a central role in party organization. However, Kitschelt presents this as mutually exclusive phenomena, suggesting that charismatic leaders primarily influence radical (populist) right-wing parties, while new left-wing and green parties are dominated by the base-democratic structure of local organizations (Caiani & Cisař 2018). Nevertheless, in some cases, a hybrid manifestation of the two phenomena can be observed, as seen in the case of the Five Star Movement (Mikola & Oross 2018) or in the early organizational development of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), for which Gergely Kovács, the co-chair of MKKP, used the term 'base-dictatorial' (Oross, Farkas & Papp 2018: 175).

Movement parties, according to the typology of Richard Gunther and Larry Diamond (2003), are relatively recent formations. However, according to Donatella della Porta and her colleagues (2017), movement parties have served as alternatives to mainstream parties since the era of mass parties, and Ma-

rina Prentoulis and Lasse Thomassen (2019) even include 19<sup>th</sup>-century labor movements in this category. Paul Almeida's research (2015) suggests that the emergence of movement parties is linked to the rise of neoliberal economic policies, at least in Latin America. Opposition parties have developed new political strategies, emphasizing street-level politics, collective action, and stronger collaboration with civil society and organizations. This has significantly shaped the functioning of these parties compared to traditional and formal political spaces.

Marco Deseriis (2020) complements this by highlighting the increasing non-conventional political participation and interest articulation shifting to virtual spaces. Movement parties with a strong online presence aim to mobilize and promote, offsetting their weak organizational structure in traditional terms. Lorenzo Mosca and Mario Quaranta (2017) found empirical evidence of participation in non-conventional politics, orientation from the internet, and voting for movement parties in Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece.

Furthermore, the characteristics of party organization are greatly influenced by the emergence of movement parties, which are closely tied to various socio-economic issues. In two-party systems where new political actors have little chance of achieving real success, social movements break into the political arena within established parties (e.g., the Tea Party, Jeremy Corbyn, Donald Trump, Bernie Sanders, etc.). However, in countries with multi-party systems where new entrants can relatively easily enter the political space, social movements emerge as new parties if they institutionalize (e.g., Podemos, SYRIZA, AfD, Five Star Movement, etc.) (Hutter, Kriesi & Lorenzini 2019).

### ***The three faces of party organizations***

In their influential work, where they departed from the previously monolithic interpretation of parties, Peter Mair and Richard Katz (1993) identified three main 'faces' or organizational components of party structures. Firstly, there is the leadership component, referred to as the central office of the party, with the primary task of organizing the party's activities, including coordinating campaigns and activists. Secondly, there is the segment of party members occupying public offices, which includes representatives of the party in parliamentary, governmental, or local government positions. Members of this group can become influential within the party based on their success and popularity, as their performance is determined by factors external to the party, namely elections. Additionally, in most modern democratic countries, some form of party funding exists, calculated based on electoral success, allowing successful politicians to contribute funds to the party treasury. Thirdly, there is the category of membership, activists, and reliable voters, collectively described as the party on the ground. Their main function is to channel local information to higher levels and, during campaigns, to participate as (unpaid) labour in party activities.

One significant advantage of Mair and Katz's theory is that it allows for a well-comparable analysis of various party formations across eras and party families. In contemporary party organizations, such as cartel parties or business enterprise parties, we observe the strengthening of actors fulfilling public offices. This trend can be explained by the increasing personalization, amplified by the effects of mediatization, as well as the financial dependence of representatives on their success. Successful characters familiar with campaigns are more frequently featured in the media, enhancing their influence within the party, potentially even against the party elite.

In contrast, with movement parties, we see relative independence of the party on the ground, which can become an autonomous actor due to its direct democratic and grassroots structure, making its own decisions and strategies at the local level. This can be explained by the fact that movement parties, being fresh protest formations, lack dominant representatives, making activists and party members involved in actual work relevant.

## **Faces of the joke parties**

### ***Party in the central office***

In the case of Die PARTEI, we can observe a multi-level structure of the party organization, fitting the peculiarities of the German federal system. Thus, there is one national organization, 19 states, and 366 local organizations. However, the national and state organizations exert less bureaucracy and influence over local organizations compared to other parties. For MKKP, we also observe similar phenomena in the sense that the organizational structure operates in a three-tier system, with one national organization connecting with local organizations through six national coordinators, which numbered around 100 outside Budapest in the spring of 2023. However, in the case of MKKP, the national organization seems to be more involved in organizing matters related to the national level. As an interviewee said: 'The Die PARTEI leadership does not have a particularly active role. It takes care of the administrative necessities. The rare pronouncements of a substantive nature carry some weight. Now and then, the federal executive board initiates nationwide campaigns. Otherwise, only the legally required administration is centralized' (Interview 9). Another politician confirmed this: 'The party develops the party strategy and what would apply to the whole country at the federal level [...] In the states, they work out their activities according to local specifics' (Interview 13).

'With the approach of the elections, the selection of candidates, who can be candidates, who can be mayor candidates, all these are decided by the party membership' (Interview 19).

In both parties, the charisma of the founders is influential. They are not charismatic leaders in the traditional sense of radical right-wing charismatic leaders (cf. Kitschelt 1995; van der Burgh & Mughan 2007), but rather serve as ethical guides for those involved in party work, determining what aligns with the founder's taste and what does not. In reality, their role in terms of identification is much more important than their influence on practical decision-making. The decisions of both parties are primarily focused on long-term national strategies rather than immediate, localized decisions.

Regarding Die PARTEI, Martin Sonneborn's public pronouncements are certainly followed semi-attentively by most members. Its role is thus on the one hand very large, on the other hand, expresses itself practically little, except in the usual celebrity horniness and exaggeration' (Interview 9). 'He [Martin Sonneborn] is a sort of an identification person' (Interview 14). Or 'We are a leader-centered party with anarchist rules. The party chairman Martin Sonneborn is our father, God and friend, he allows us to do anything and does not dictate any rules' (Interview 24).

In MKKP, 'Gergő [Gergely Kovács] has been running this whole thing for quite a long time, and everyone is on the same wavelength, and if we have any problems with each other, we usually manage to solve them' (Interview 11). Legally, 'I don't think there is [a separate jurisdiction for the co-chairs], in the sense that [...] they are the ones who determine the party's direction. But basically, Gergő and Szuzi<sup>5</sup> who usually have the last words [...] Gergő has a special role' (Interview 18).

The main difference lies in party membership. While in the case of MKKP, party membership is the primary national decision-making body, involving around 70 actual members who form an integral part of the central office, Die PARTEI presents more of a parody of traditional party membership. Joining is as simple as filling out an online questionnaire. Party membership is more of a formal institution in Die PARTEI's life, not carrying any obligations, and apart from the annual party members' meeting, it does not entail specific rights. 'We always have a membership appliance with us [at the events] and everybody can just join... Most parties don't allow you to be in another party at the same time, we allow that, we don't care' (Interview 16). They also vote on the composition of the Federal Executive Board at these meetings, which has essentially not changed since the founding. Additionally, they confirm the positions of commissioners appointed by the Federal Executive Board. However, the meeting nature predominantly dominates (and this is also not mandatory).

### ***Party in public office***

In the case of individuals holding public offices for the parties, we can see that they are marginal in both parties. The public office and the central office are not

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5 Leaders of the MKKP

distinctly separated. In the case of MKKP, their three municipal representatives are part of the presidency, with two of them also being co-chairs. Similarly, in the case of Die PARTEI, we observe a similar phenomenon where Martin Sonneborn, the party's president and European Parliament representative, is also involved in public office. Additionally, Die PARTEI has representatives in local governments who are selected from influential members or leaders at the local level. There are instances where someone transitions from the federal executive board of the party to become a representative. Thus, in both cases, we can observe processes contrary to traditional parties. Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1993) highlight that the party in the public office gradually dominates other party organizational units, partly due to the predominance of state support distributed based on the number of representatives or election results in most countries (cf. cartel party [Katz & Mair 1995, 1996; Mair 1997], electoral-professional parties [Panebianco 1988], or modern cadre parties [Koole 1994]). Moreover, regarding party workers, since the 1980s, individuals related to representative work have become more cardinal, while those connected to party work have been marginalized (Katz & Mair 2002). In contrast, for MKKP and Die PARTEI, individuals who are fundamentally dominant in the party become representatives. Thus, while traditional parties are characterized by representatives dominating the party organization, becoming prominent media actors representing a country's political elite, MKKP and Die PARTEI exhibit the reverse. Party leaders acquire representative positions, mainly due to a lack of resources and because they are parties organizing outside of parliament (Oross, Farkas & Papp 2018). Hence, the organizational structure and dominant members became significant in the party before securing representative positions.

In the party [MKKP], the people who are dominant in the party became representatives [...] Out of the five-member presidency [...] 3 are municipal members [...] there is no one who is not a member of the presidency and a representative (Interview 12).

We separate the time of the mandate by the seats and [...] anyone who wants to can. We don't take it seriously. The only people [...] who have a special role in the party, for example, Martin Sonneborn (Interview 24).

Therefore, in the case of Die PARTEI, representatives do not only come from the presidency at the local level, but at a higher level, they do not have representatives except in the European Parliament, where the party president holds a mandate.

## ***Party on the ground***

The party on the ground, in both party cases, enjoys relative autonomy, meaning that the national and federal party leadership does not heavily intervene in the affairs of local organizations. Local organizations essentially have free rein within the party's framework, and as long as their activities align with the party's image, the upper leadership does not interfere. This phenomenon is particularly evident in the case of Die PARTEI due to its federal system, where urban organizations loosely connect through regional coordinators, who primarily facilitate communication between the organizations.

The regional level is actually more of an administrative level... actions and activities either come from the federal level by the party leadership or... from active local basic organizations (Interview 13).

The federal leadership not at all, like we never had any permission or something, the state leadership neither [...] They trust in the people who are kind of in charge [at the local level] (Interview 24).

A similar phenomenon is observed in the case of MKKP.

Regarding local affairs, I think the activists have a huge impact... what kind of events we have, for example, our fall schedule, we put it together completely jointly [...] Since this is a bottom-up organized organization of ours, if someone has a good idea and we can realize it, then we do it (Interview 19).

In theory, the local organizations can make [independent decisions], only if it really doesn't fit into the direction, they might say okay, do it, but we won't associate our name with it. So, you do what you want (Interview 21).

Local organizations perform the active part of party work, which primarily does not concern the media or national issues. They enjoy relatively broad autonomy, having almost complete freedom, similar to Die PARTEI. Therefore, since they are not professional politicians at the local level but rather civilians, alternative political tools had to be found to attract attention. For MKKP, this became street art and city beautification actions, where neglected street furniture is renovated. Similarly, unconventional political activism is seen in Die PARTEI when they present various political performances or intentionally use conflict-seeking, provocative posters. In many cases, these activities are independent of the national leadership, building on local knowledge. Additionally, in both parties, the community of local participants collectively makes decisions, ensuring the appearance of every opinion or idea through a grassroots democratic function-

ing. Moreover, both organizations are strongly connected to civil society, and some interviewees engage in civil work alongside their party work, often in civil organizations or the social welfare system. For example:

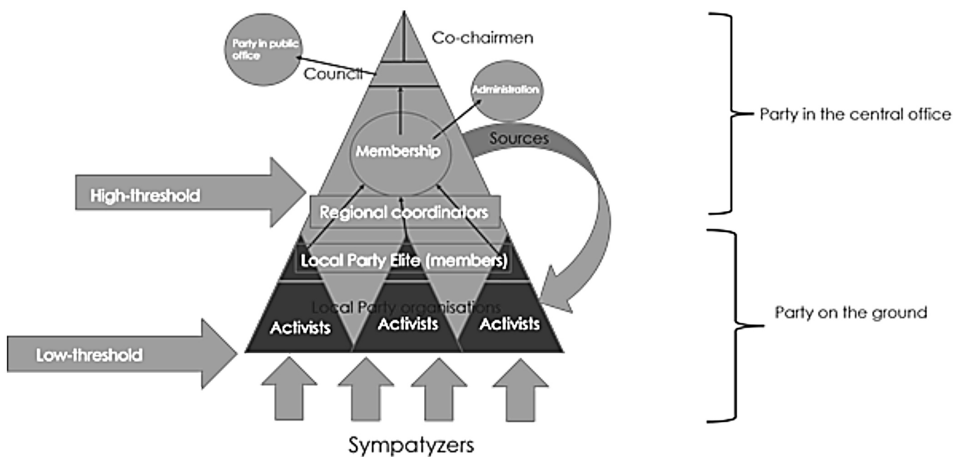
Every member of the party is an activist who can be an individual. influence the decision-making process in his or her own way, because the party's democratic idea is better than in society and in the other big parties (Interview 27).

## Organizational structure

### *Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party*

In the case of MKKP (see Figure 5), we observe a three-tier organizational structure where the middle level plays a role in administration, maintaining connections, and facilitating information flow. The upper and lower levels are involved in actual political party work. The main strength of the organizational structure lies in its low entry barrier, meaning that anyone can easily join the party's street activities (street art, city beautification, etc.), not in a formal manner as in most parties, but through collective action. Thus, one can become an active participant in party work. However, formal party membership is granted only to actively participating activists, turning it into an internal reward system. Therefore, achieving membership is a significant advancement opportunity for activists. Additionally, membership is the most important decision-making body in the party, allowing those with membership to actively influence the

**Figure 5: Organizational Structure of The Hungarian Two-tailed Dog Party**



Source: Author

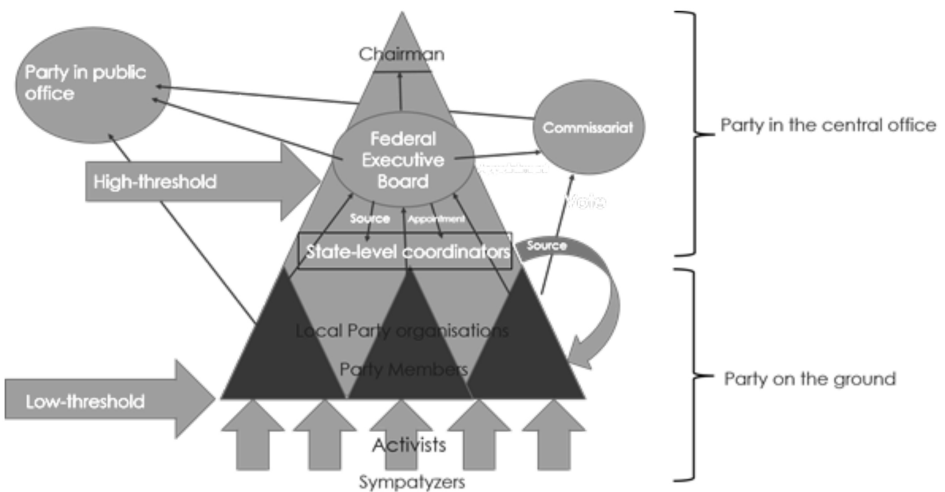
party's national decisions and the party itself. Members elect the leadership, including the president and co-presidents, and make decisions about election candidates and other administrative staff. Furthermore, the party leadership primarily handles national organizational and campaign tasks, providing resources to the local organization. Therefore, local organizations are relatively autonomous, independent entities within the party, separate from both higher levels and other organizational parts within their tier. The primary goal of MKKP with this intentional organizational structure is resource balancing and the creation of strong local communities that are active not just based on election victories but also due to internal motivations (Szegegi 2022b).

### Die PARTEI

In the case of Die PARTEI (see Figure 6), we see a structure more aligned with the organizational setup of traditional parties, albeit in a satirical party version (Szegegi 2021). Similar to MKKP, it employs a three-tier organization. The middle tier, as in MKKP, mainly functions within the party organization, focusing on resource allocation, organization, and information dissemination, akin to MKKP's regional coordinators.

The main difference between the two parties lies in the level of the formal membership entry threshold. In Die PARTEI, anyone can become a party member without significant criteria, making membership less weighty, and deci-

**Figure 6: Organizational Structure of The Die PARTEI**



Source: Author



sions are not influenced to the same extent as in the case of MKKP. The low entry threshold in this case pertains to party membership, but reaching more important positions is considerably more challenging. In Die PARTEI, a higher entry threshold has been established for these roles. This is evident in the fact that the party's leadership primarily consists of individuals from the editorial staff of the Titanic magazine, who also founded the party. Therefore, party membership is more of a symbolic commitment, carrying no real obligations.

Federal-level decisions regarding the party are made by the Federal Executive Board and Commissioners appointed by it, responsible for 'specialized' party work. The Federal Executive Board is elected by the federal party conference, where membership is the sole exercising authority (Die PARTEI.de 2022).

Most local-level members actively involved in party work do so out of personal conviction. Die PARTEI's reward system involves advancing within the party organization and obtaining local mandates with the party's support. One significant difference from MKKP is that Die PARTEI has seen not only the party's upper leadership but also local-level leaders securing mandates. However, it is typically the commissioners and members of the Federal Executive Board who become representatives.

## Conclusion

In summary, we can observe a distinct organizational structure for both MKKP and Die PARTEI. While there are marked similarities between the two organizations, differences also exist. In both parties, we see that, at the local level, the 'party on the ground' enjoys relative independence from the party's upper leadership. Joining either party is relatively easy, and in the case of Die PARTEI, this almost always comes with formal party membership. In contrast, in the case of MKKP, party membership is a privilege of a narrow elite within the party, constituting the most influential decision-making body.

Die PARTEI's party elite consists of the Federal Executive Board and Commissioners, while MKKP has a more charismatic leadership role typically fulfilled by the party's founder. Despite the opportunity for anyone to become the party president in theory, in practice, the founders play a crucial role in both parties, acting as key figures in both the party and its media presence. Consequently, a strong party elite has developed in both cases, potentially leading to the suppression of local organizations and centralized control. However, we find that local organizations maintain a significant degree of autonomy. While the party leadership deals with national affairs (campaigns, unified communication, media appearances, etc.), local organizations focus on local party work and often engage in non-partisan political actions (e.g., MKKP's painting of bus stops or Die PARTEI's free hug day). Thus, national campaigns are complemented by unconventional actions initiated by local organizations.

These actions align more with the strategies of social movements, allowing the parties to connect more easily with civil society, from which cartel parties have generally distanced themselves (Katz & Mair 1995). Consequently, both parties can be classified into the category of movement parties.

In the 2024 EP elections, both parties will compete, and while neither is likely to finish first, Die PARTEI, especially in Germany, where there is no parliamentary threshold (Sabbati & Grosek 2024), could potentially win two seats. For MKKP, most polls in the fall of 2023 indicated that they were polling above the 5% threshold.

Finally, Die PARTEI received 1.9% of the vote in the elections, resulting in 2 mandates. However, this represented a decrease of 0.5 percentage points compared to 2019, despite voter turnout in Germany being 3.4 percentage points higher (bundeswahlleiterin.de 2024). Conversely, the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) once again failed to surpass the 5% electoral threshold,<sup>6</sup> although this election marked its strongest performance to date, with a result of 3.59% (NVI.hu 2024a). Additionally, municipal elections were held in Hungary alongside the European Parliament elections, where the MKKP secured 51 mandates. Furthermore, Gergely Kovács won the mayoral seat of Budapest's 12<sup>th</sup> district<sup>7</sup>, and the MKKP achieved a majority in the district's municipal assembly (NVI 2024b).

Future research could be expanded to include the study of other satirical parties (e.g., the Austrian Beer Party). It could also serve as a foundation for examining the relationships between smaller parties and those lacking significant elite representation or robust organizational structures. Moreover, the investigation of these particular parties may contribute to a deeper understanding of the operation of movement-based parties in the long term. An intriguing area for future research is the examination of post-2024 election changes, particularly in the case of the MKKP, focusing on how the drastic increase in the number of elected representatives may alter the party's structure.

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6 This phenomenon can primarily be attributed to the emergence of Péter Magyar and the Tisza Party, which effectively overshadowed nearly all opposition parties. In March 2024, the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) was polled at over 10% by the Median polling company. However, by June, MKKP voters (along with those of most other opposition parties) had largely shifted their support to the Tisza Party.

7 Traditionally, this district of the capital, characterized by greater wealth and a more bourgeois profile, has been an area where right-wing parties have performed better since the regime change.

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