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From Cartel Party to Traditional Membership Organization: The Organizational Evolution of Fianna Fáil

Abstract: This paper examines patterns of intra-organizational evolution and reform of Fianna Fáil as a party organization before and after the 2011 Dáil election, widely considered an 'earthquake election' that fundamentally undermined Fianna Fáil's status as the dominant party in the Irish party system. Electoral losses had triggered reform in Fianna Fáil prior to 2011, but such reforms tended to be minor, as the party expected its opposition status to be temporary. This orientation changed after 2011, as the party's very foundation seemed threatened, having suffered a historicdecline of its electoral support and membership. We argue that the post-2011 re-orientation can be usefully characterized as a movement away from organizational characteristics associated with the 'cartel model of party organization' towards characteristics echoing more 'traditional mass party structures', an organizational model less dependent on state resources, and more able to generate loyalty through organizational means. Whether the 2011 reforms will lead to lasting change is likely to depend on whether, and if so how quickly, Fianna Fáil can reclaim its position as the major party of government.

Introduction

The 2011 Dáil election was traumatic for Fianna Fáil. Compared to the previous election in 2007, the party lost more than half its popular vote, and almost three-quarters of its seats in parliament. For the first time since the 1920s it was no longer the largest party in the Dáil, and was relegated to third place, winning half the number of seats of the Labour party. That a once dominant party won half of what was historically considered the 'half' in the Irish two-and-a-half party system indicated how far the party had fallen. While previous electoral losses had triggered reform, they tended to be relatively minor, as the party expected its opposition status to be temporary. This changed after 2011, because such was the scale of the party's losses and the trauma within the organisation, it motivated a questioning of the party's *raison d'etre,* which was the spur for an unprecedented level of internal party reform.

This post-2011 re-orientation can be usefully described as a movement away from organizational characteristics that the theoretical literature associates with the cartel model of party organization[1] towards characteristics echoing more traditional mass party structures.[2] While the comparative literature on party organization prominently points to a tendency of party organizations in western democracies to move from mass to cartel party structures, Fianna Fáil's evolution moves in the opposite direction.

Part of this overall assessment is an evaluation of the intra-organizational reforms undertaken by the party after 2011. This includes the introduction of one member one vote, the selection of the party leader by an electoral college, and the granting to members the authority to decide on coalition participation. We argue that although the party grants more rights to members post-2011, this overall reform is better understood as a process of enhanced organizational integration, rather than of member empowerment. Furthermore, rather than decentralizing decision-making power to the party on the ground through enhancing intra-party democracy, it effectively shifted power from members of the parliamentary party (the arm of the party dominant in the cartel party model) to central office (the arm of the party forming the core of mass parties). As this process shifted power away from both TDs locally and nationally, it enhanced centralized decision-making.

This paper is divided into four sections. First, we describe how Fianna Fáil has historically possessed basic cartel party characteristics. Second, we describe how its status as a natural party of government, accompanied by access to state funding over the last decades, intensified these features and contributed to an increased distancing from its extra-parliamentary support base. Third, we assess how party elites prior to 2011 responded to (short-lived) periods in opposition through organizational reform; and fourth, we assess how post-2011 the nature of these reforms changed and how they altered the intra-organizational balance in the organization. We conclude with

[1] The 'cartel party' as a *party organizational model* defined by intra-organizational features – which we refer to here – needs to be distinguished from the concept of a cartel *party system* as defined by inter-party relations (see Bolleyer 2009) not dealt with in this paper.

[2] There is a debate about whether mass parties require a 'mass' (i.e. a large number of members), a question that, for instance, has been asked with regard to the French Communist Party that has relatively few members compared to left-wing parties in other countries. Treating a mass party as an organizational model, however, what we consider decisive is the structural relationships cultivated between members and the different arms of the party organization (e.g. central office, public office-holders).

the broader repercussions of our findings and how they connect to insights on party reform outside Ireland.

Fianna Fáil: Basic organizational characteristics

Formed as an extra-parliamentary group, Fianna Fáil originally placed great emphasis on its organization 'on the ground', with local branches (cumainn) providing the foundations of its powerful grass-roots appeal. Aiming to establish a cumann in every parish, by November 1926, within six months of its foundation, the party had 460 branches, a figure that had more than doubled another six months later (Dunphy, 1995: 82). Fianna Fáil's militant organizational skills owed something to the adoption of the rural networks of the old IRA, stemming from the 1919–21 revolutionary war. Indeed, the IRA veterans constituted a large section of the thousands of unpaid volunteers who helped found the nationwide network of branches, and canvassed intensely to build up the party (Dunphy, 1995: 74-5).

This organization was invaluable to Fianna Fáil in its becoming the dominant party of the Irish political system (Mair, 1987a: 135). It provided Fianna Fáil with an army and network of volunteers come election time. Initially, the party machine was therefore strongly attached to the cumann rather than local notables, and the importance of organization over personality was stressed (Carty, 1981: 105). Dunphy (1995: 75) points to the requirement of Fianna Fáil candidates to resign if requested by two-thirds of the party national executive as an example of the triumph of the organization over the party in public office or those aspiring to form part of it. The approximately 3,000 cumainn within the organization that the party sustained into the 1980s were an invaluable resource for the party in keeping abreast of local issues, and one seasoned observer described the cumainn as the 'eyes and ears of the party' (Walsh, 1986: 65). This allowed Fianna Fáil to claim that it knew what the people were thinking, while the local cumainn simultaneously served as the party's 'mouthpiece' (Walsh, 1986: 65) to transmit messages on policy and strategy to its grass-roots members.

Treating Fianna Fáil as an organization from a cross-national perspective, despite its emphasis on organization, Fianna Fáil never resembled a mass party with clearly defined organizational boundaries aimed at reinforcing members'

ideological commitment, from which loyal candidates were recruited, steered by a strong party in central office, integrating and exercising some control over local membership organizations and over the party in public office. First, Fianna Fáil, as was the case for most Irish parties (Chubb, 1992: 102), was quite a decentralized body up until recent decades, with the party in central office being quite weak and having little influence over local branches. Second, candidates were not necessarily recruited from these branches, the primary function of which seemed to be to serve as campaign organizations. Third, there was never a case of a strong commitment to ideology (Mair, 1987a).

Although the party's 'cartel party features' became particularly pronounced when government access started to be complemented by the availability of generous direct state funding, its extra-parliamentary organization was characterized by cartel party features long before such funding was introduced. While the literature commonly points to parties' dependency on direct state funding as a central (and easy to measure) indicator of party and party system cartelization, going back to central theoretical contributions, other state resources such as those provided through public office (e.g. government) are considered as functionally equivalent in that they make – as does direct state funding – the cultivation of stable societal support and the formation of a strong extra-parliamentary infrastructure underpinning it less necessary (Katz and Mair 1995; 2002).[3] Importantly, Fianna Fáil's ability to rely on government resources started only a few years after its formation, as it governed uninterrupted from 1932 to 1948. Consequently, if the formation of an organization, able to recruit loyal members and candidates for office without having to resort to selective payoffs, is incentivized by the exclusion from state institutions able to provide such payoffs (Duverger, 1964), it is unsurprising that Fianna Fáil – while building an organization – did not invest in mass party structures. It defined its membership boundaries much more broadly than traditional mass parties, which historically had strong, clearly delineated extra-parliamentary membership organizations.[4] Within Fianna Fáil, it was cumainn who were responsible for recruiting

[3] See for a critique of the concept Koole (1996).

[4] The characterization of Fianna Fáil does not mean that the party did not define itself as a community, but that it did not use organizational means to demarcate its boundaries.

and registering members, a task they were not very enamoured with, except when selection conventions came around. This meant that details on Fianna Fáil membership were historically never clear, which did not seem to matter a great deal, as formal membership was not required to avail of the patronage the party had to dispense (Chubb, 1972: 91). With low costs for organizational entry, an open organization to draw in support from all corners of society, and a flexible and strategic recruitment of non-members as candidates for public office, it traditionally most resembled the cartel model of party organization, predating the ascendency of such organizational tendencies in parties in other west European democracies (Detterbeck, 2005; Bolleyer, 2009).

For decades, membership in a formal sense often did not even exist. Deliberately defining itself as a movement rather than a party, Fianna Fáil did not pursue a strategy of mass incorporation, but tried to penetrate civil society as far as possible, which made it necessary to be as inclusive as possible. Before internal reforms that began in the 1990s, following a commission that deliberated for three years, party members did not need to pay a membership fee, and the party had no centralised membership register until the post-2011 period (Carty, 1981: 105; Mair, 1987a: 102, 114–6; Mair, 1987b). Similarly, party membership formed no precondition to run under the party's label, and candidates or TDs had no obligation to formally join the organization after election. Recruitment thus had a strong element of self-selection, with Fianna Fáil as an organization having relatively little control over who joined and left its ranks.

Naturally, the control capacities of a party and the means it employs to generate loyalty and stabilize its support base need not be located inside its organization, that is, need not be achieved by strategies such as selective recruitment of loyal members and office aspirants as associated with the mass party model (Katz and Mair, 1995: 99–100). Extra-organizational means of control, such as resources controlled by the party leadership and desired by its representatives and followers alike, most notably government patronage closely associated with the cartel party model, can be equally effective to generate and sustain support. Their disadvantage is obvious though: if resource access (e.g. through government participation) is not secure, organizational stability is easily threatened.

As is discussed in the following section, this was for a long time no real concern to Fianna Fáil as the natural party of government. During long periods of near permanent government access pre-existing cartel party features such as the permeable organizational boundaries just described were reinforced. At the same time, the party became increasingly dominated by its public representatives, and Fianna Fáil became increasingly disconnected from its organizational network outside government, elements even more central to the cartel party model (Katz and Mair, 1996: 527; Katz and Mair, 2002: 122).

Fianna Fáil as party of government: the reinforcement of cartel party structures

A central factor that facilitated the ascendency of the party in public office within Fianna Fáil as an organization was its dominant position in achieving access to national government. It was in power from 1957 to 1973, and following a period of alternation between Fine Gael-led and Fianna Fáil governments, yet again experienced near permanency in government from 1987 up to its electoral decline in the 2011 election. In the latter period, the party leader, beginning with Charles Haughey, but later continued by Bertie Ahern, used his ability to negotiate agreements with trade union social partners to maintain support among the working and lower middle classes (McGraw, 2015: 142). Fianna Fáil's dominant and ongoing access to government afforded the party considerable resources, and gave the party in public office access to patronage in the form of ministerial resource access and powers of appointment (Carty, 1981: 108). While the distribution of local spoils can be used to stabilise TDs' positions locally, ministers not only control political appointments (such as ministerial advisers), but also appointments to state boards and public bodies (for example, hospital boards, port and docks companies, or governing boards of universities). These bodies were a particularly important pool of patronage goods as ministers had complete discretion over them, as they are created by ministers, and are fully or partially financed by the government. For example, the number of appointments to these bodies between 1997 and 2006 was over 7,000 (Clancy and O'Connor 2011: 6). That the number of public bodies themselves increased from 130 in 1998 to approximately 600 in 2011 – a period in which Fianna Fáil governed continuously – indicates the growing usage of patronage as a resource to generate support through

extra-organizational means (Bolleyer, 2009: 572). Underlining this, a recent study suggests that patronage in Ireland has been primarily used to reward support (rather than as a tool to exercise policy control over the administration) (O'Malley et al., 2012). While ministerial advisers are replaced when the government changes, this is not the case regarding posts on state boards. New appointments can only be made if posts become vacant, and party supporters keep their positions when their party loses power. The relevance of these resources becomes particularly evident when government parties are concerned about losing office. Just before or immediately after elections they fill all vacancies to use their access as far and as widely as possible – again a dynamic observed before the 2007 election, for instance, when the outgoing Fianna Fáil–Progressive Democrat coalition made 400 appointments to state boards (Bolleyer, 2009: 572), and in 2011 when the Fianna Fáil–Green government made 182 appointments in its last few months (*Irish Independent,* 14 April 2011). This ensured Fianna Fáil still profited from long periods in power after an electoral defeat. Fianna Fáil's dominance could thereby outlast shorter periods in opposition, as long as its elites were confident they would regain power soon enough.[5]

This perceived self-sufficiency of the party in public office due to government resources, to which the party has had extensive access to since 1932, led, over time, to a growing distance between it and the party organization, as the interest of public office-holders started to dominate the party (Gallagher 2010: 131-2). It is indicative that the party's constitution prior to the post-2011 reforms presented the parliamentary party as separate from the organization outside public office, rather than considering it as a subsection of the party organization as an overarching structure integrating the different arms operating inside and outside public institutions (this is not purely symbolic, as it changed after 2011). This self-understanding of the party elite was also mirrored in in-depth interviews conducted by Cross and Blais, indicating that 'members see their party as one of government and are accordingly deferential to the parliamentary party in all internal party decision-making' (2012: 140).

[5] This is not meant to suggest that Fianna Fáil policies were implemented when the party was out of office, but that this continuity helped to stabilize the party's support base.

The ascendency of the party in public office was reinforced by the onset of substantial state subsidies that went into national party coffers, which made it even more self-sufficient. This began with the introduction of state-funded personal assistants in 1975, and in 1981 parties were allocated staff for administrative and research purposes (Mair, 1987a: 137). Later on, more substantial funding was provided under the 1997 Electoral Act, which Fianna Fáil challenged when being in opposition, but did little to alter once back in office. As all the parties had faced mounting private debts in the 1980s and the 1990s, the state funding came as a welcome relief, but also increased their dependency on this source. Fianna Fáil, traditionally strongly depending on private donations[6], now grew to rely much more on state funds. With the amount allocated based on electoral strength, the strategic priority of winning elections became even more important to sustain essential party finances.

It is important to note that the process that shifted power to the party in public office was accompanied by a strengthening of the national party generally. The party central office had been historically weak because the local branches did not see the necessity of a large central office and so were not willing to fund it. This relationship began to change in the 1960s when the central organization slowly acquired resources,[7] which was reinforced by the introduction of the aforementioned direct state funding. Lacking a clear delineation between the party in public office and the central organization strengthened the former, as central office was generally answerable to the party leadership (Farrell, 1995: 224).

While dominant government access and generous state funding strengthened the arm of the party operating within public institutions, echoing classical arguments in cartel party theory (Katz and Mair, 1995; 2002), more subtle changes in the relationship between individual TDs and their local organizations weakened the extra-parliamentary party. This, yet again, reinforced the dominant position of public office-

[6] Murphy and Farrell point out, based on data from 1998, that Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin were the parties which received the highest amounts of private funding (2002: 230– 31).

[7] In 1966, it employed six full-time staff on a combined salary of £5,000. In 1977, the party employed ten staff on a budget of £40,000. In 1973 it appointed a research director and a press officer. By 1985, there were 18 working in head office and 12 in the Oireachtas offices of the party (Mair, 1987a: 108).

holders – now as individual actors – in the organization, thereby weakening the party's connection to those followers not forming part of TDs' personal networks.

While the organization had kept its organizational boundaries permeable for decades, the emergence of personal power bases shifted loyalty away from the organization as a whole to a more individualistic and short-lived foundation – something identified by Carty (2004) as the 'franchise party model'. TDs and ministers developed their own local machine independent of the party organization instead of being part of it, perhaps best typified by the party leader, Bertie Ahern, and his 'Drumcondra Mafia' machine in the Dublin Central constituency. As one of Ahern's supporters recalled: 'We weren't even really Fianna Fáilers – we were Bertie people. Our people weren't traditional party people. They came in on a personal basis' (Leahy, 2009: 17). This development corresponded to incentives generated by the electoral system. Under single transferable vote (STV), voters can rank candidates running in a multi-member constituency, which introduces a strong element of intra-party competition, especially within Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael. This made the issue of candidate selection strategy especially important within parties, given the significant effect it could have on the number of seats returned. The traditionally decentralized nature of Irish parties, with Fianna Fáil being no different, meant that central office had little control over selection conventions, which were the fiefdom of local branches, and predominantly a few local elites, generally local TDs or councillors. Consequently, Fianna Fáil sometimes ran too many candidates, thus splitting the vote, or had a poor vote management strategy, which resulted in considerable tension between the party in central office and local branches increasingly built around TDs' individual networks, who jointly constituted the party in public office (Carty, 1981: 24; Gallagher, 1988: 129–30).

This constellation inevitably shaped individual TDs' organization-building strategies, leading to Fianna Fáil's development into a network of local organizations built around individual candidates rather than an integrated party organization constituted by local branches able to outlive individual candidates and office-holders. Reinforced by the party's historically fluid boundaries – defined by voters' affiliation to the republican cause rather than demarcated organizationally (e.g. through a formal membership fee or a probation phase) – party machines around individual

incumbents or candidates blossom and die. Supporters of a particular TD only faced low costs to exit a network, inviting organizational instability, if TDs' electoral fortunes decline or suitable candidates cannot be found. TDs and supporters were not linked through a shared commitment to the same organization and this worked both ways, as until the post-2011 reforms, party membership formed no precondition for running under the party's label and candidates or elected TDs had no obligation to join, echoing the separation between the 'party' (i.e. the parliamentary party) and the 'organization' in the party's constitution pre-2011 mentioned earlier.

Near-permanent government access and state funding (strengthening the position of the party in public office towards the extra-parliamentary organization) and the personalization of party networks (strengthening the position of individual TDs locally at the cost of the extra-parliamentary organization) pushed Fianna Fáil in similar directions: They further contributed to a reinforcement of office as the party's dominant goal – even though the pursuit of winning as many seats as possible aimed for by the national party and the pursuit of a TD or candidate to win a particular seat at times were in conflict with each other given the nature of the electoral system. This, in turn, shifted power to the parliamentary party/party in government as the core of Fianna Fáil's organization. For a period, the prioritization of government office as the primary aim and its exploitation contributed to the party's electoral success, confirming some party elites' belief that the cultivation of local ties might be dispensable. This is also visible in the nature of reforms prior to 2011.

Organizational reform in Fianna Fáil before and after 2011

Intra-party reform before 2011: Modifications of a cartel party organization

Naturally, elites' interest in the extra-parliamentary organization and the awareness of Fianna Fáil's detachment from its followers tended to be most pronounced when the party lost government office. While these reforms tended to strengthen ties to the local level and to enhance central organizational control, prior to the 2011 electoral shock, they remained directed towards improving the party's electoral fortunes in the short term, rather than significantly altering the position of the extra-parliamentary organization vis-à-vis the party in public office (Carty, 1981: 108; Bolleyer, 2009).

Following its losing office in 1973 after sixteen continuous years in a single-party government, for instance, a new general secretary, assisted by a new press officer and a full-time research director, set about modernizing and professionalizing the party to ensure its spell in opposition was to be short-lived. As this required a more centralized approach, or organizing and managing elections, they sought to curb the influence of local elites, and thereby implement a nationally coordinated electoral strategy. To this purpose, the party closed down paper cumainn, ghost branches created by local incumbents to maintain their control of the organization at the grass-roots level. This challenge arose from the delegate-based system that operated within Fianna Fáil. Each cumann sent a number of delegates to selection conventions and ard fheiseanna (national conferences), which encouraged an abuse of the system as local TDs created paper cumainn so that they could stack local conventions and ensure not just their re-selection, but also a weak running mate (as under Single Transferable Vote, the Irish electoral system,intra-party competition was the most common reason for the electoral defeat of an incumbent). Thus, Fianna Fáil's post-1973 reforms resulted in the closure of 100 such paper cumainn in 1976, including 80 in the county of Donegal between 1973 and 1977 (Mair, 1987a: 119). This rationalization was accompanied by the development of a nationally coordinated electoral strategy, which likewise required the central organization to exert more influence over local branches, particularly in the area of candidate selection. While this had traditionally been a decentralized affair within Fianna Fáil, the party leader managed to impose 16 candidates for the 1977 election, including six women (Mair, 1987a: 132).

In the period between 1987 and up to the earthquake election of 2011 the party was in opposition only once: 1994–97. In this period, under a new leader, Bertie Ahern, the party engaged in reforms to strengthen its extra-parliamentary structures as it had done during earlier periods in opposition. Measures included a renewed attempt to form a national membership database, after a failed effort to produce a computerised register in the 1980s. The party again engaged in local reform (e.g. the closing of paper branches) – a recurring strategy in times of opposition to increase national control – and intensified ties to local party structures. Ahern met local party cumainn to restore the number of active branches and to set up a network with local activists and interest groups. The number of party staff, which had decreased between

1990 and 1994 when Fianna Fáil was in government (following its high point during the conflict-ridden 1980s), increased again after 1994 (Murphy and Farrell, 2002: 233). Interestingly, a general pattern pre-2011 was that the resources of party headquarters were systematically strengthened when the party was in opposition. This indicated the party's efforts to increase intra-organizational control capacities, but it also reflected a strengthening of the party in central office as the parliamentary party lost power and, with it, its weakened ability to rely on government resources.

A number of internal party reports commissioned following the worst local election results in the party's history in 2004 highlighted the potential long-term costs of neglecting the party organization outside public office and thus the costs of reforming its organization solely for the purpose of enhancing short-term electoral fortunes. These reports, however, were of little consequence. The first such report, written by deputy leader Brian Cowen, painted a gloomy picture for Fianna Fáil, of it being a rural, elderly and inactive organization. Almost half of its active members were over 55 years of age, one quarter of cumainn were inactive, and 50 per cent of them met just once a year or less (Reid, 2005). In addition, almost 60 per cent of cumainn had attracted no new members in three years. The report said that active cumainn 'actively discourage new members joining the party', as local notables preferred to keep the cumainn stuffed with their supporters. This echoed a similar internal report from 1999 that had criticised paper cumainn, which it said served 'only the interests of a power bloc within a constituency organization', and can act as a deterrent to potential members wishing to join the party (Rafter, 1999).

Overall, little was done on foot of either of these reports, however, as energies were focused on securing re-election. Following an even worse local election result in 2009, which precipitated what was to come in 2011, two further internal reports were commissioned, one for Dublin, chaired by Chris Flood, a former junior minister, and another for outside the capital, chaired by former minister Gerard Collins. The picture these reports painted was no better than the Cowen report five years earlier. Although Cowen himself was now at the helm as party leader, Fianna Fáil was in crisis management for much of his leadership, as the country was in the middle of an economic recession. Consequently, reform of the party was sidelined once again. Despite the growing awareness of the vulnerability of Fianna Fáil's extra-

parliamentary structures, the party let the cumann-based system and the grass-roots organizations linked to them become ever more moribund, with it being especially weak in urban areas. Many cumainn were simply not active, particularly in Dublin, which had become a waste ground for the party (McGee, 2011).[8] .

Interestingly, dominant government access itself was one argument used by party elites to resist any participatory reforms earlier on – despite Fine Gael, the Greens, the Progressive Democrats and Labour having decided to involve their members in the selection of their party leaders years earlier. As late as 2008, Fianna Fáil officials still suggested that their 'party is unique in that when choosing a leader it is also choosing a Taoiseach and that as such the choice should be restricted to the parliamentary party' (Cross and Blais, 2012: 139). The 2011 election would change this self-perception dramatically.

The 2011 electoral shock: Away from cartel party structures towards a traditional membership organization

Electoral defeat in 2011 traumatised Fianna Fáil. It constituted an 'external shock' sufficiently severe to trigger significant organizational reforms aimed at countering the national party elites' neglect of Fianna Fáil's organization. These reforms were more profound than those earlier, as they shifted the party away from its 'cartel party structure' that it could afford, and which had intensified, so long as it had frequent and reliable access to government resources and plenty of state funding. With the party losing 57 of its 77 seats in 2011, and its first preference vote collapsing by 25 percentage points, a direct consequence of these losses was a significant cut in state funding. For example, Fianna Fáil received €5,200,780 of exchequer funding in 2010, but this fell to €3,091,818 in 2011 and €2,842,259 in 2012 (Standards in Public Office, various years). More than one third of the party's staff in central office were made redundant.

In essence, electoral decline was drastic and the loss of government could not anymore be interpreted as a temporary affair. Fine Gael, Labour, and the Greens had already given their members a say in candidate and leadership selection, with the

[8] In the Dublin South-East constituency, for example, it was estimated that just three out of 30 cumann were active.

primary motivation being to strengthen and reinvigorate their organizational base having experienced electoral set-backs of their own. This meant that Fianna Fáil met all three conditions that earlier studies identified as crucial for party elites to adopt reform that they should naturally resist, that is, those that potentially diminish their own decision-making power: availability of contagion, opposition status and electoral defeat (Cross and Blais, 2012: 136). Furthermore, decline in support also showed in party membership figures, which had been raised as a concern in internal reports for some time (see above). Those were naturally very changeable given the party's permeable boundaries; for instance, membership figures declined from 90,000 in 1979 to 65,000 in 1983, returning to 89,000 in 1989. However, in the 2000s the party experienced a historic drop from 65,000 (2008) to 18,000 in 2012 (Weeks, 2014), the year after the 2011 electoral disaster. This signaled very clearly that the party's crisis was not only one of electoral performance, but fundamentally threatened its societal underpinning.

Further evidence of the party's decline was its decision not to field a candidate for the presidential election in 2011, significant given that Fianna Fáil had won every presidential election bar the 1990 contest. The party had just one new TD elected in 2011, no female TDs, no TDs in Dublin, and was finding it difficult to attract candidates, in part due to the cumann-based system controlled by local TDs which, as discussed in a number of the aforementioned internal reports, discouraged some people from joining. The need for structural reform within Fianna Fáil was obvious.

The most visible reforms passed (at least formally) significant decision-making power on to party members. These included the introduction of the one member one vote (OMOV) system for candidate selection conventions, the selection of the leader by an electoral college, and giving the power to decide on whether to join coalition government to a national conference of members. On the one hand, these reforms re-integrated members into organizational decision-making by giving them a direct say about candidate, leader selection and government participation, and aimed at

counteracting their disconnect with the national party. On the other hand, these reforms took significant powers out of the hands of the party in public office.[9]

A second set of reforms involved strengthening the central party organization in its control capacities towards members and towards the parliamentary party, both of which were in turn subjected to more explicit obligations (for members a formal fee and probation period, and for public office holders new ethics rules). These reforms make clear that the empowerment of members such as through OMOV may not be equated with a uniform shift towards a more decentralized party structure. Instead it was coupled with an enhanced integration of and control over the different arms of the party, the party on the ground (the members) and the party in public office (the TDs), under a strengthened central organization.

In conjunction with each other, these two sets of reforms shifted Fianna Fáil away from its dominant cartel party features, a party organization predominantly existing within public institutions sustained by its close relationship with the state, towards mass party structures, a type of organization sustained by voluntary labour and fee-paying members, but embedded in a party hierarchy steered by a strong central office (Katz and Mair, 1995: 20).

The post-2011 reforms – empowering party members?

In terms of where to begin, Fianna Fáil had a number of blueprints for reform ready to implement, given the number of internal party reports it had commissioned over the previous decades. Having observed the positive changes of OMOV for the other parties in Ireland, such a reform seemed the obvious starting-point for Fianna Fáil. Such a change would also have a financial benefit, a not altogether minor consequence, given the reduction in the party's state funding following on from 2011.

To re-establish ties to local party structures, the party leader, Micheál Martin, travelled the country, addressing each of the party's 43 constituency organizations, the Comhairlí Dáil Cheantair. Renewal committees were also set up in each constituency, while a special task force was created for Dublin. Former minister Mary

[9] This is distinct from OMOV being used as a means to disempower activists in favour of more passive (and easy to manipulate) rank and file members, a feature associated with the cartel party model (Katz and Mair 1995).

Hanafin ran an intiative to attract more female members. Party headquarters also circulated proposals for reform amongst cumainn and the party membership, and invited submissions, close to 1,000 of which they received. The feedback from members was summarised in the following points presented at the 2012 ard fheis:

> • Fianna Fáil must *radically change the way it operates* and must increase its on-the-ground activities;
> • The cumann must remain the *foundation stone* of the party. Members want it to be the key connection between the organization and the community and wish it to be opened up and empowered.
> • *Individual members must be the driving force of Fianna Fáil* and there must be an end to the 'top-down' approach.
> • Members strongly support empowering members through the introduction of *one-member, one-vote (OMOV).*
> • Reforms are required in the work of the *Ard Chomhairle* [national executive]*, Headquarters* and the *Parliamentary Party.* These reforms must result in improved communications at all levels and must give members a greater say in the running of the Party.
> • Members want to have a role *in the election of the Party Leader.*
> • Members want to be *consulted in advance of the party entering government.*
> • Members want Fianna Fáil to have a strong *ethics code* which leaves no doubt that conduct which brings the party into disrepute will not be tolerated. (Fianna Fáil, 2012: 2)

Following these submissions, four core groups of amendments were put forward for inclusion in the party's constitution at the 2012 ard fheis (Fianna Fáil, 2012). These concerned measures to: implement OMOV; increase political activity; increase the activities and accountability of the parliamentary party, the national executive and central office; and ensure high ethical standards. With Fianna Fáil being the last party yet to introduce OMOV, and given the manner in which the grass-roots had been marginalised in recent decades, not to mention the failing structure of the cumann, there was overwhelming support among the membership for OMOV. Although discussed behind closed doors at the ard fheis, there was very little dissent to its introduction, albeit there was some debate about its mechanics. As it transpired, OMOV was to be used for all intra-party decisions: for internal party meetings and selection conventions, allowing members have the say on whether Fianna Fáil enters a coalition government after an election, and selecting party leaders. All paid-up

members are entitled to attend, speak and vote at meetings of the ard fheis, their cumann, their constituency organisation and to a vote in all candidate selection conventions in their constituency, which all members are entitled to contest. Anyone not paying their membership fee would have no voting rights and would be classified as associate members. This implies that this new form of empowered membership came with an element of responsibility (see the next section below).

The second major reform initiated by Fianna Fáil was to give its membership the right to decide on whether to enter coalition government. This had been mooted in 2012, and at the 2013 ard fheis a motion was passed which states that if the Fianna Fáil leader recommends the party enter into coalition, 'a draft programme for government must be presented to voting members of the organization for approval at a special ard fheis before any such government can be formed' (Kelly, 2015). Voting is to be by OMOV to accept or reject the draft programme, and it needs a majority in favour for the party to enter government. All the other Irish parties, with the exception of Fine Gael, already had a similar mechanism in place. As a part of reforms to empower the membership, this decision was an obvious and inevitable change. Just as with the discussion on OMOV a year earlier, the motion to approve it not surprisingly met with little opposition. The consequences of this power were realised within a few years, as at the 2015 ard fheis members passed motions ruling out participation in a coalition with Fine Gael, and one in which Fianna Fáil is the junior partner. Even though the motions were not binding, it let the parliamentary party know of the attitude of the members towards such coalition arrangements. This was particularly relevant a year later following the 2016 Dáil election, when even though the seat arithmetic suggested a Fine Gael-Fianna Fáil coalition was the only obvious electoral arrangement, the Fianna Fáil parliamentary party refused this option, with the opposition of its party membership being a stated key factor behind this decision. Consequently, Fianna Fáil stayed formally in opposition, facilitating the formation of a Fine Gael minority government.

The third major reform concerned how the party picked its leader. The party's national executive recommended to the 2015 ard fheis an electoral college whose members would each have one vote, deciding by the single transferable vote. Voting can be by postal ballot or by person, with a special ard fheis to be convened to pick

the party leader. Party members comprise 45 per cent of the college, TDs 40 per cent, with senators, MEPs, local councillors and members of the ard comhairle comprising the remaining 15 per cent. While this resembles the leadership selection mechanism adopted by Fine Gael in 2004 following an electoral defeat in 2002 (Cross and Blais, 2012: 139), Fianna Fáil's voting weights are more favorable to members). While in Fianna Fáil members have relatively more weight than the TDs in the final selection stage, candidate nomination still privileges TDs, and only allows members of the parliamentary party to run as leader: only a Fianna Fáil TD holding the party whip and with the support of at least five Fianna Fáil TDs is eligible to be nominated. This motion came at a time when the party leadership was under some strain, as it struggled to make an impact in the opinion polls, stagnating between 18 and 20 per cent of the national vote. While this process has not been implemented to date, the formal rules already suggest that it represents an instance of managed democratization, whereby the selectorate is expanded to (also) include members but the process prior to the final decision – determining the choices available – remains dominated by party elites (Aylott and Bolin 2016: 2–4). Unsurprisingly, the motion was passed with little dissent.

The post-2011 reforms – strengthening of the central party and party integration

The three reforms formally strengthening the rights of members might lead us to expect the balance of power to have swung back towards the grass-roots of the party. However, paradoxically, the democratization of the branch structure actually strengthened – in some areas– centralizing tendencies in the party. This is because the reform lessened the ability of local TDs to maintain a hold over the local organization via an abuse of the cumann-based system of delegation. The constituency bosses who had previously controlled selection conventions, much to the chagrin of the national party, now had far less power but this did not mean that members were necessarily more empowered. The power shifted from individual TDs with their personalized local networks to the national party. The opening up of the selection process strengthened the power of central office as it finally wrested control of the process from cumainn. So while it might have seemed as if the post-2011 reforms dispersed power within the party by empowering members, instead the

reforms integrated the party organization more and thereby shifted power from the party in public (both locally and nationally) to the party in central office.[10]

This becomes particularly clear in the area of candidate selection. In many selection conventions for the 2016 Dáil election, members had no opportunity to vote for candidates. A considerable number of candidates were selected unopposed (i.e. members were denied the option of a choice), due to a combination of central party directives and the carving up of constituencies for electoral purposes. In part this increased centralization was necessitated by the decline in support for the party, and its weakened ability to attract lower preferences, which meant the party had to adopt a much tighter selection strategy. It had lost a number of seats in 2011 because it had run too many candidates. Consequently, the party ran its fewest candidates ever for local elections in 2014, and its fewest candidates ever for Dáil elections in 2016.

This centralized strategy could also be justified more easily due to obligations under the new gender quota legislation, which required the party to have a nationally coordinated strategy to ensure it had 30 per cent female candidates, otherwise it would have had its state funding reduced by 50 per cent. The necessity of such management was highlighted by the party's failure to make the voluntary 30 per cent quota for the 2014 local elections. So, for example, central office issued directives to some local constituencies to pick just a female candidate, with in some cases there being only one, ensuring no vote took place at the convention. This was not without controversy at the local level, and resulted in one male aspirant in the Dublin Central constituency unsuccessfully taking a court case against the constitutionality of the gender quota legislation.

In this context, the reform of the branch and membership structure within the party gave central office enhanced power because it now had direct access to the members. The central organization had for decades desired this change, only to be resisted by the local party bosses who could not be bypassed. Under the old cumann-based system, there was no centralized party membership list, which meant that the

[10] We understand power here as the intra-organizational control over core arenas of intra-party decision-making considered in light of the party's opposition status. The assessment might change if the party entered government office, as then a new set of actors – ministers and possibly a Taoiseach – come in, who might start again to dominate areas such as policy-making.

national headquarters were very much dependent on information supplied to it from cumainn, which often was not very forthcoming. Members can now either join the party via a cumann or via central office, which then directs such members to their nearest cumann, or in the case of Dublin, constituency organization, as the old cumann structure has been rendered largely redundant in the capital. The means that central office now has control of party membership, the consequences of which are manifold. From a practical point of view, paid-up membership provides a new source of revenue for the national organisation, estimated at €400,000 per annum (Farrell and Little, 2013: 9).

The new system affords central office a much greater level of knowledge about the party membership and thereby allows it to exert more influence, which as mentioned is particularly evident at selection conventions. Central office maintains control of the electoral register for such conventions; it controls the timing of conventions and picks the date for nominations; it decides how many candidates are to be selected; it decides on how the constituency is to be divided in terms of candidate representation; and it ultimately decides how many candidates to run. An example of such developments occurred in the selection convention for Longford for the 2016 Dáil election. Central office issued a directive that the convention pick a sole female candidate, in effect ensuring that Connie Gerety-Quinn was selected without a vote, as the other two candidates were both male. This caused uproar, with one of the male candidates, Pat O'Rourke, stating 'HQ have reneged and turned their back on Longford. Longford Fianna Fáil will exercise their democratic right' (O'Connell, 2015). The chair of the convention, Seán Fleming TD, when defending the decision tellingly referred to the national executive committee having 'more information and access to more information than the organizations in each of the 40 constituencies' (Loughlin, 2015).

Thus, the introduction of OMOV in candidate selection has to be seen in conjunction with a more centralized control over membership, which made it more (rather than less) difficult to mobilise against the central party decisions (especially as the latter could refer to the external constraints of the new gender quota legislation). While the old cumann-based system was rotten and in need of reform, the new priority on members over delegates and branches has not unambiguously

strengthened the grass-roots of the organization. With power to control nominations and conventions no longer in the hands of local TDs, a further obstacle to central office wielding its muscle is removed. Despite the rhetoric and the apparent increased role of the grass-roots membership, power wielded by the central office has continued to grow.

In sum, the opposition of the party membership to government participation, as linked to members' new post-2011 veto rights in this area, was a significant factor in the party's decision to facilitate a Fine Gael minority government rather than taking over ministerial responsibility themselves in a formal coalition. However, in the area of candidate selection, the reality in many cases indicates the limited nature of members' role and the enhanced power of central office. The latter controlled the process in such a manner that members were denied a vote in a significant number of cases, lessening the importance of the reforms.

Another indication of the altered role of the party in central office and the shift in Fianna Fáil towards mass party features is visible in the enhanced focus on obligations in the revised constitution, obligations that both applied to individual members as well as public office holders. Compared to cartel parties, mass parties have elaborate extra-parliamentary structures that are not deferential towards parliament and its representatives (Duverger, 1964: 190). Instead, MPs are considered as delegates whose 'status as members of the party's 'inner circle' takes precedence over their status as members of parliament' (Duverger, 1964: 202), and as representatives are accountable to members (Katz and Mair, 1995: 18). It is thus indicative that the ability of the central party to discipline members – including those holding party or representative functions – was expanded considerably, which specified rule violations much more precisely, as well as giving central office a broader arsenal of sanctions. This needs to be seen in the context of another new provision, namely that candidates for public office (and thus TDs) have to become party members themselves, while formerly they could stay outside of the organization, a reform measure that stresses that members of different functional units of the party (the cumann or the parliamentary party) ought to form part of the same overall party organization coordinated by central office. Public office-holders not only have to form part of, but also are closely linked to, the extra-parliamentary organization and their

members outside institutions through new accountability mechanisms. For once, TDs were made subject to new ethics rules and are now answerable to the party's national executive when breaching standards of conduct (Article 59). Furthermore, they have to meet members at least twice a year (Article 58, Fianna Fáil, Córú & Rialacha), and need to consult with members and units on policy development (Article 57). While these provisions offer 'participatory opportunities but no real authority to the broader membership' (Cross, 2016: 16), they are relevant as they visibly and formally break with the formerly dominant view (enshrined in the pre-2011 constitution) that the parliamentary party is the embodiment of the party and the centre of internal decision-making (Cross and Blais, 2012: 140).

The increasing focus on obligations equally concerns members (including TDs), which again reflects a shift from a cartel to a mass party model. For the cartel party the boundary between members and supporters are fluid (as was historically the case in Fianna Fáil) with a main focus on state resources as a means of generating loyalty. In the mass party (less able to rely on external resources) members were actively recruited and encapsulated, with the organization putting an emphasis on both member rights *and* obligations (Katz and Mair, 1995: 18). As already mentioned, Fianna Fáil members now for the first time have to pay a formal membership fee to the central party. Furthermore, members have to go through a newly introduced twelve months probation period, before being able to exercise their rights (Article 5); thus rights are only accessible if certain standards are met. As the party also wanted a more active membership, motions were passed at the 2012 ard fheis concerning annual activity plans for its sub-level organizations, as well as requiring members to attend at least two party meetings per year. This again puts into perspective what at first glance might be considered as reforms to empower members. The expansion of membership rights is only one component of an overall reform of organizational membership that also increases the costs of membership and conditions how rights can be used, a combination of measures that seems to strengthen the infrastructure in which individual members are embedded more than the individual members themselves.

Conclusion

We have argued in this article that Fianna Fáil historically resembled the cartel model of party organization, a party model developed as a successor to the mass party, a template to which Fianna Fáil, with its fluid organizational boundaries and decentralized candidate selection, has never neatly corresponded. Up to 2011, this resemblance intensified as the party – thanks to near permanent government access and, later on, availability of direct state funding – became increasingly dominated by its parliamentary arm. Taking extensive and on-going access to extra-organizational resources to generate loyalty for granted, ties to the extra-parliamentary organization (itself increasingly dominated by TDs' personal networks) seemed dispensable. This perception was undermined by the 2011 election, which simultaneously led to an all-time low of membership figures, calling into question the organization's ability to survive altogether.

The reforms that followed, at first glance, seemed to empower party members, but are better understood in conjunction with attempts to integrate the different arms of the party, with the party in central office playing a coordinating, if not controlling, role, shifting power away from TDs locally and nationally, thereby reinforcing centralization. Simply put, while prior to 2011 the ascendency of the party in public office – a core feature of the cartel model – seemed to be the party's defining feature, post-2011 Fianna Fáil altered its organization, adopting mass party features. Undoubtedly the reform granted members more formal rights in intra-organizational decision-making. While these rights seem to be more significant in practice regarding members' ability to veto government participation than selecting candidates or leaders, the parliamentary party retains an important position, with the rights of both the latter and grass-roots members tied to new obligations, with both being more tightly integrated. Only since 2012 have TDs had to become members, while members have to pay a formal fee and go through a probation phase, with the central party having the power to employ a range of sanctions if obligations are violated. Rather than democratizing the party, the reforms suggest an aspiration to integrate the party organization as a whole, and to enhance Fianna Fáil's ability to generate loyalty and control through organizational means, reducing the need to access state and government resources.

To what extent these formal shifts will lead to lasting changes of Fianna Fáil as an organization simultaneously operating outside and inside public institutions, or whether it will oscillate back towards cartel party features will depend on whether and how quickly it can return to power, allowing it to yet again rely on external resources rather than organizational means to sustain itself.

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