Can partisans be pluralist?

A comparative study of party member discourse
in France and Hungary

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Pluralist values have been central to liberal democratic thought from the writings of John Stuart Mill to contemporary applications of deliberative democratic theory (for an overview, see Galston, 2002). A pluralist orientation may be defined as an account of the political world whereby a multiplicity of understandings of the common good are considered as legitimate and worthy of expression in the public sphere. It thus prescribes certain attitudes of reciprocity, openness and mutual respect, in situations of political disagreement (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996). While normative democratic theorists have long been insistent on the importance of these values, they have also expressed strong suspicion towards the capacity of political parties—central to the functioning of liberal democratic regimes—to be carriers of this pluralist ideal (for an overview see Ball, 1989; Hofstadter, 1969; Rosenblum, 2008). Instead, starting with the 18th century criticisms by Bolingbroke of the evils of "faction" up to Rawls' contemporary dismissal of the "great game of politics" (Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2006), political thinkers have shunned the divisive influence of political parties on society, rooted in the intransigent and partial nature of the partisan passion.

In the past decade, a number of democratic theorists have aimed to rehabilitate partisanship as a normative category, and thus account for what 'good partisanship' entails in democratic societies (Bonotti, 2012, 2014, 2019; Bonotti et al., 2018; Herman, 2017; Herman & Muirhead, Forthcoming; Invernizzi-Accetti & Wolkenstein, 2017; Muirhead, 2006, 2014; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2006; Rosenblum, 2008; Stojanović & Bonotti, 2019; White, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; White & Ypi, 2010, 2011; White & Ypi, 2018; Wolkenstein, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2019). Against the long-standing belief that partisanship, defined here as an array of discourses and practices in support of a certain vision of the common good attached to partisan identification (Herman, 2017), is necessarily vector of intolerance and division, one of the central contentions of this literature is that partisanship is compatible with a pluralist orientation. At their best, pluralist partisans exert restraint with regard to their own convictions and recognise that there exist other legitimate interpretations of what constitutes the common good than their own.

This paper explores the empirical implications of this normative debate, interrogating how we could recognise pluralist partisanship in political practice, and the degree to which it constitutes an attainable ideal for real-world partisans. For this purpose, I conduct a micro-level comparative study of party members discourse in two different national contexts, France and Hungary. Adapting the criteria I previously established to study pluralist commitments in political discourse (Herman, 2017), this study relies on focus-group methodology to analyse the ways in which a total of 117 party members understand political disagreement and relate to their political opposition in the main centre-left and centre-right partisan organizations in France and Hungary.

The results of this exploratory study provide key insights into the nature of partisanship, demonstrating wide variations in the extent to which partisans uphold the principles of political pluralism, but also their capacity to do so at a stringent level. The paper more generally contributes to the field of party studies by providing innovative theoretical and methodological tools to analyse a key dimension of the democratic performance of political parties: their capacity to advance norms of political tolerance. Finally, it advances democratic theory by offering evidence that pluralist partisanship is not an unattainable ideal, thus nuancing longstanding assumptions in political philosophy on the necessarily intransigent and divisive character of the partisan passion.

The remainder proceeds as follows. I first discuss the importance of pluralist commitments in normative democratic theory and highlights disagreements among theorists on the extent to which partisans can be carriers of pluralist ideals. The next section discusses the research design and methodology for this study, including criteria for operationalizing pluralist orientations among partisans. This is followed by the empirical analysis itself. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results and suggests avenues of future research.

Pluralist commitments and partisanship: An uneasy relationship

Much of normative democratic theory shares an appreciation for the importance of a pluralist orientation in liberal politics. (see among many others Cruickshank, 2014; Galston, 2002, 2005; Hallowell, 1954; Kateb, 1981; Lefort, 1988; Macedo, 1990; Mouffe, 2000; Rosenblum, 1989; Ryn, 1978). This pluralist orientation may be defined as an account of the political world according to which, in Galston's words, "there is no single, univocal summmum bonum that can be defined philosophically, let alone imposed politically" (Galston, 2002, p. 30). To this extent, it is a moral stance rather than a descriptive concept. It is prescriptive in the sense that it defines a goal to be attained, a type of ethics that needs to be infused in the spirit of democracy. Pluralism asserts itself as a specific ethos that is opposed to—and should be defended against—holistic or monistic accounts of the moral universe. These claim that the latter is ordered according to a unique, definitive and exclusive account of the common good (Galston, 2002, p. 6).

In this tradition of thought pluralist commitments are central to the liberal democratic worldview or ethos. As argued by Lefort, "the revolutionary and unprecedented feature of democracy (is that) the locus of power becomes *an empty place* (...) it is such that not individual and no group can be consubstantiated with it" (Lefort, 1988, p. 16). At the heart of this mutation of symbolic power is a moral revolution, "instituted and sustained by the dissolution of the markers of certainty" (Lefort, 1988, p. 19). Power cannot be permanently occupied in a world characterised by indeterminacy, where no claim to the good is accepted as complete and definitive. A commitment to pluralism is thus an endorsement of the most basic principle of liberal democracy: that the moral universe is characterised by a plurality of legitimate claims to the common good, and that, consequently, the political authority devolved through elections is necessarily and always of a provisional nature.

These principles have specific implications for the ways in which democratic subjects relate to political disagreement. It implies a voluntary, "reciprocal positive regard" between opponents that consider each-other as equals in an inclusive and pluralist political community (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010, pp. 1129-1130). The importance of maintaining such respectful attitudes in the face of political disagreement is for instance a central feature of both agonistic and

deliberative approaches to democracy (Knops, 2007). For the former, a "shared adhesion to the ethico-political principles of liberal democracy" means that our opponent is "no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an 'adversary' that is, somebody whose idea we combat, but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question" (Mouffe, 2000, pp. 101-102) Deliberative approaches also view 'reciprocity' as a key condition for democratic subjects to deliberate in the face of moral disagreement, a condition that involves viewing opponents as both 'competent subjects' and 'moral and political equals' (Gutmann & Thompson, 1996, p. 17).

The pluralist requirements that we demand from citizens need to be both carefully justified and limited in scope. Understanding democracy as a way of life cannot imply that perfectly virtuous behaviour is expected from all citizens at all times—this would constitute in itself an unjustifiable limitation on the civil and political freedoms that are constitutive of liberal democratic regimes (Rosenblum, 1998, pp. 13-14). What we need to establish, then, are the limits within which pluralist commitments should express themselves in a liberal democracy and, especially, the political actors from which we should expect these attitudes. In this regard, a number of political theorists have recently argued that specific responsibilities fall on *partisans*— those citizens that act with others in pursuit of translating a certain vision of the common good into governmental policy through competing in elections (Bonotti, 2011, 2018, 2019; Bonotti et al., 2018; Herman & Muirhead, Forthcoming; Invernizzi-Accetti & Wolkenstein, 2017; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2006; Stojanović & Bonotti, 2019; White, 2015a, 2015b; White & Ypi, 2010, 2011, 2016; White & Ypi, 2018; Wolkenstein, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2019). The position of partisans in the public sphere—with privileged access to financial resources, media attention, law-making and key administrative positions—lends them significantly larger amounts of political power than other citizens (Herman & Muirhead, Forthcoming). In Bonotti's formulation, this creates *positional* duties for partisans, specific legal and non-legal obligations attached to their level of responsibility within liberal democracy (Bonotti, 2012, 2018). Chief among their democratic obligations is precisely a commitment to a pluralist worldview. For citizens with such strong political beliefs, this entails a form of self-restraint or "negative capacity" (Muirhead, 2006), whereby they

recognise that what they deem right cannot be considered as absolute truth, and that different understandings of the good society are also legitimate. To this extent, partisans at their best not only "operate within an agreed-on constitutional framework" but are instead "active, avowed, intentional agents" in support of the liberal democratic regime (Rosenblum, 2008, pp. 124, 363).

While this recent body of literature follows the well-accepted view that pluralist commitments are essential to liberal democracy, its emphasis on the pluralist obligations of *partisans* more specifically is at odds with previous writings in this field. Much of the normative democratic theory that emerged in reaction to the minimalist turn of the 1960s has taken limited interest in parties and partisanship (van Biezen & Saward, 2008). The renewed interest in direct and participatory democracy during the 1970s and early 1980s focused instead on local, small-scale models of decision-making (see for example Barber, 1984; Saward, 2007, part VII). A similar statement applies to Rawlsian political theory and much of the 'deliberative turn' of the 1980s and 1990s (see for instance Dryzek, 2000; Gutmann & Thompson, 1996; Rawls, 1993). These have until recently rarely cast parties as potential vehicles of deliberation or discussed the possibility or implications of intra-party deliberation (for a critical overview, see Chambers, 2009; Rosenblum, 2008, pp. 254-317; van Biezen & Saward, 2008).[1]

Behind this ignorance of partisanship as a potential vehicle for democratic values lies a form of anti-partisan suspicion with a longer tradition. Since the 18th century, political thinkers in Europe and the United States have, with few exceptions, presented partisanship as a form of factionalism breeding unnecessary political divisions, rather than as a carrier of pluralist ideals (for a detailed overview, see Ball, 1989; Hofstadter, 1969; Rosenblum, 2008, pp. 23-163). Still today, the *a priori* commitment of partisans to a given political identity sits uncomfortably with

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[1] The "systemic" turn in deliberative democratic theory (Mansbridge, Bohman, & Chambers, 2012) has nevertheless led to study aspects of the representative process, and national level 'mass politics' more generally in light of deliberative principles—with some emphasis on the inclusive effects of parties (Chambers, 1998; Steiner, Bächtiger, Spörndli, & Steenbergen, 2004). A few important contributions have recently focused specifically on the capacity of partisanship to act as a vector for deliberative principles (see for instance Invernizzi-Accetti & Wolkenstein, 2017; Teorell, 1999; Wolkenstein, 2015, 2016a, 2016b, 2019).

the 'ideal speech' situation of deliberative democrats, involving actors with flexible positions capable of compromise for the sake of the public good (Gundersen, 2000; Muirhead, 2010). At first glance Rawlsian political theory also distances 'high' political liberalism from the 'great game of politics', partisanship being associated with forms of partiality, irrationality, and intransigence at fundamental odds with a pluralist worldview (Bonotti, 2014, 2018; Muirhead & Rosenblum, 2006, p. 99).

Studying the relationship between pluralist commitments and partisanship

Theorists of democratic partisanship pose an explicitly normative ideal, emphasising the pluralist principles that partisans *should* uphold rather than making a statement on the extent to which partisans effectively live up to these expectations in contemporary democracies. This is a profound departure from much of previous work which, while emphasising the importance of pluralist orientations for liberal democracy, do not expect such commitments from partisans. Beyond their normative positioning, these two schools make assumptions about the nature of partisanship in real-world politics: that it is either possible for partisans to uphold pluralist principles or that, *a contrario*, lack of tolerance for opposing views is in the very nature of partisan conviction. These opposing views thus raise key empirical questions: To what extent does the stringent ideal of commitment to political pluralism find resonance in the real world of party politics? Can partisans uphold in practice the pluralist orientations that much of normative theory deems essential to liberal democracy?

Operationalizing pluralist partisanship

The remaining of this paper addresses these questions with an exploratory study of the attitudes of 117 party members in France and Hungary towards their political opponents, based on a framework derived from theories of democratic partisanship. How partisans relate to their political opposition can indeed be seen a key domain of expression of pluralist partisanship (for an overview, see Herman, 2017; Herman & Muirhead, Forthcoming). The very engagement of partisans is rooted in the conviction that their own ideas and policies are superior to those of their

opponents (Rosenblum, 2008, p. 358). To engage citizens, and offer them meaningful alternatives to choose from, partisans need to argue the superiority of their own program and criticise their opponents' platform (Mouffe, 2005; White & Ypi, 2011, 2016). Partisans committed to political pluralism will engage in such necessary opposition *while* displaying respectful attitudes towards political opponents. Respect for opponents is here an active recognition of the legitimacy of opponents in formulating contradictory claims stemming from the fact that they are recognised as equals in an inclusive and pluralist political community (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010). Expressing such respect means placing our opponents' right to disagree above our conviction in the superiority of our own claims.

This study relies on three criteria to distinguish between respectful and disrespectful attitudes towards political opponents, building on my previous work (Herman, 2017). In the empirical analysis below these criteria will be discussed at greater length, along with the indicators associated with them:

• *Criterion 1: Refraining from motive-cynicism*: A first sign of respect for political opponents can be found in the types of criticisms that partisans address their opposition. Respectful opposition involves criticising the practices of opponents rather than their intentions. In other words, partisans should limit the extent to which they engage in what Gutmann and Thomson have coined 'motive cynicism': raising doubts on the integrity of the reasons opponents have to say or do something (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010, p. 1133).

• *Criterion 2: Treating opponents as principled*: The second criteria for partisans to develop a pluralist political discourse towards their opposition is that they acknowledge in discourse the principled nature of opponents' positions. Partisans should recognise that, even if they disagree with their rivals' stances, their opponents act to further their own conception of the common good and not solely their personal gain.

• *Criterion 3: Recognising that opponents are oriented towards the common good*: More generally, partisans respect political opponents when they consider these as moral agents that are

oriented towards the *common good*. This amounts to recognising that adversaries are committed to addressing widely accepted societal problems (e.g. sickness, poverty, crime), and that their actions are guided, among other things, by a concern for fundamental principles such as freedom, equality and the rule of law (Galston, 2013).

<u>Critical cases: France and Hungary</u>

This study explores these different forms of respect for political opposition in the discourse of French and Hungarian party members. It studies the two major centre-left and centre-right partisan formations in each country, the French Parti Socialiste (PS) and Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP[2] and the Hungarian *Magyar Szocialista Párt-Együtt* (MszP-Együtt) and *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége- Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt* (Fidesz-KDNP).[3] These parties have been chosen because they have intermittently exercised governmental power over the past decades. They thus act as critical cases, as the extent to which they respect pluralist standards will have a greater impact in terms of agenda-setting, policy-making and institutional reforms than that of parties at the fringe of the political spectrum. In 2013, at the time the data was collected, the PS was in government under the presidency of François Hollande (2012-2017). In Hungary, the Fidesz had a two-thirds majority in the Hungarian Parliament with Viktor Orbán at its head (2010-2014).

There are likely to be variations in the extent to which real-world partisans uphold pluralist ideals across different countries, parties or individual partisans. However, there is no accepted scale of pluralist commitments to place the discourse of a given partisan actor on and assess whether these constitute instance of "high" or "low" pluralism. To address this issue, I compare and contrast different instances of partisanship, focusing on four different parties in two

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[2] The UMP changed its name to Les Républicains on May 29, 2015.

[3] In Hungary, the fragmentation of the current opposition to Fidesz required adopting a loose definition of the current mainstream left, and include young members of Együtt 2014, but also PM and DK, MSzP's coalition partners for 2014. The KDNP is Fidesz's historical Christian conservative ally, both of which sit together in Parliament. In this subsequent analysis, these coalitions will be referred to by the name of their leading party, the MSzP and Fidesz.

different countries. At the time of the study, France and Hungary scored very differently on more widely accepted, institutional standards for democratic compliance (Freedom House, 2013a, 2013b), a discrepancy that has only widened since (Freedom House, 2019a, 2019b). While France's established democracy has experienced relative institutional stability since the beginning of the Fifth Republic in 1958, the recent institutional foundations of Hungary's post-communist democracy have been shaken by ruling party Fidesz since 2010 (European Parliament, 2013; Kelemen, 2017; Norwegian Helsinki Committee, 2013; Pech & Scheppele, 2017). Despite these contrasting democratic contexts, both electoral systems have a strong majoritarian component, resulting at the time of study in highly polarised dynamics between the two main governmental parties and a series of secondary, satellite parties on their left and right flanks. These common traits facilitate the comparison of French and Hungarian partisanship according to the same criteria. These two cases thus provide the conditions for exploring variations in the degree and kind of relationship to pluralism partisans have in European countries that fare very differently on institutional standards of democratic performance.

<u>The choice of focus-group methodology</u>

This study of French and Hungarian partisanship relies on a unique dataset of 28 focus groups which I conducted in Paris during the spring of 2013, and in Budapest during the fall of 2013. The population of this study is comprised of 117 young party members, recruited in the local youth sections of the four above-mentioned parties, or their close electoral allies.[4] Seven focus groups were thus conducted within each party family, with three to six participants per group.

Focus groups are particularly adapted to the exploratory study of shared norms among partisans. First, group discussions allow to study political attitudes not as fixed and attached to an individual, but as resulting from a process through which meaning about public affairs is

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[4] The four main youth organization were the PS's *Mouvement des Jeunes Socialistes* (MJS), the UMP's *Jeunes Populaires* (JP), the MSzP's *Societas*, and the Fidesz's *Fidelitas*.

constructed in common with others (Belzile & Oberg, 2012, p. 467; Marková, 2007; White, 2011, pp. 40, 45). Second, and relatedly, in a focus-group setting the power of the group to define the terms of the conversation is increased, thereby making subjects more likely to express the norms they share with others rather than those expected by an outsider (Herman, 2017, p. 750; Steiner et al., 2004, p. 54; White, 2011, p. 45). This proves particularly valuable for studying sensitive topics, such as in this case respect for pluralist principles.

The focus groups were designed in such a way as to encourage this sociable interaction component (see Gamson, 1992; Krueger, 1998, p. 73; White, 2011). I conducted all focus groups in the participants' native languages, French and Hungarian, with a small number of party members recruited within the same local section. Because activists knew each other and were used to talking politics with each other, this facilitated the expression of their ideas. I met with interviewees in public places, generally bars or cafés that the groups were familiar with. Finally, I designed the discussion guidelines so as to minimize as much as possible my role in the discussion.

Discussion guidelines and coding process

The conversations were structured with the use of visual prompts. At the beginning of the conversation, I gave each participant an identical series of twelve cards matching twelve different areas of public policy (see Figure 1 and 2).[5]

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[5] Two cards that were particular to both national contexts were, in France 'Sexual minorities and social change' and 'Legal and illegal immigration' (Cards 4 and 6 from left to right in Figure 1) and in Hungary 'Institutional reforms' and 'The place of the nation in politics' (Cards 4 and 7 from left to right in Figure 2). Satirical images were used in France and more illustrative pictures in Hungary because there was no equivalent to the French illustrator Plantu in Hungary, both in terms of notoriety and relative partisan neutrality. This difference is unlikely to have influenced the outcome of this study, as the images were only marginally the direct object of participants' commentary.

Figure 1: Visual prompts for the French group discussions

From left to right: Maintaining and reforming the public service; Relations to the EU; Religious and/or national minorities; Institutional reforms; Justice and security; The fight against unemployment and employment policy; The place of the Nation in Politics; Public morality; Industrial and/or agricultural politics; Fiscal policy, social policy and redistribution of wealth; Financing the public debt and deficit/improving public accounts; Environmental politics

Figure 2: Visual prompts for the Hungarian group discussions

From left to right: Maintaining and reforming the public service; Relations to the EU; Religious and/or national minorities; Sexual minorities and social change; Justice and security; Legal and illegal immigration; The fight against unemployment and employment policy; Public morality; Industrial and/or agricultural politics; Fiscal policy, social policy and redistribution of wealth; Financing the public debt and deficit; Environmental politics.

Before the discussion started, I asked each participant to take some time to rank these twelve cards according to how much disagreement they believed existed between their own party and their main opponents on these different issues. Once each participant had their individual classification, I would start the discussion with a question such as: "would someone like to tell us about one of the topics he found most consensual?" A volunteering participant would then justify why he chose to classify a given topic as garnering very little disagreement among parties. At that point I would prompt others to give their opinion on this first topic. This step would then be reproduced with another participant's second least polarizing topic. The process continued for about 90 minutes, until the most polarizing topics had been discussed.

The use of visual prompts serves a number of purposes (for an overview, see Gamson, 1992; Meinhof, 2004; White, 2011). First, it allows to generate quasi-autonomous group discussions with minimal intervention from the moderator. In this particular study, participants quickly started suggesting new cards for discussion once a topic had been discussed at sufficient length and reacting to each other's classifications without being prompted, thus allowing me to step back entirely from the conversation. Second, these types of guidelines ensure comparability between different discussions, as participants can exercise their freedom within the clearly defined boundaries of the protocol. In this case, all partisans were presented with the same questions concerning an identical series of cards, thereby leading to a similar structure within each group discussion.

Finally, this protocol generated data that allowed me to explore the pluralist commitments of partisans without having to ask participants direct questions about how much they respect their opponents. In talking about what set their own party apart from their opposition on the topics under discussion, participants also criticised and valued their opponents in different ways. This allowed me to subsequently analyse how they talked about their opponents in light of pluralist standards.

The 28 group discussions were transcribed verbatim and coded using text-analysis software NVivo to ensure a systematic approach.[6] I designed the coding scheme in such a way as to explore how the discourse of partisans relates to the three criteria outlined above. In analysing results from this coding process, I compared the occurrences and co-occurrences of different codes according to whether the groups were conducted in France or Hungary. The comparative analysis below relies on these numbers and on examples from the interviews as primary evidence.

French and Hungarian partisanship in comparative perspective

Criterion 1: Refraining from 'motive cynicism'

The first criterion for a pluralist discourse is that partisans refrain from engaging in what Gutmann and Thomson have coined 'motive-cynicism': raising doubts on the reasons opponents have to say or do something (Gutmann & Thompson, 2010, p. 1133; Herman, 2017). Such accusations may range from simple references to the vote-seeking attitude of opponents, to more serious accusations of being corrupt and moved solely by material gain. Partisans who respect political opponents refrain from such arguments as they start from the assumption that the motives of those who engage with politics, including their own, are always mixed. Questioning in discourse the full integrity of their opponents is thus both hypocritical and destructive to the political debate: this precludes the constructive criticism of opponents' discourse and practices that should form the basis of partisan debates. In this context, pluralist partisans will instead use their own normative assumptions as a basis for criticising the practice of their opponents, what they do or say, rather than the hidden motivations of their choice.

A specific code was attributed to instances where partisans criticised the intentions of their political opponents (ILL INTENTIONS) and another to instances where they focused on their practices (FLAWED PRACTICES). As Figure 3 indicates, there is a close to equal distribution

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[6] See Appendix 2 for full codebook.

between both types of criticisms in Hungarian groups, with 52.2% of these dedicated to intentions, and 47.8% to practices. French participants, on the other hand, are over two times as likely to criticise the practices of their opponents as their intentions.
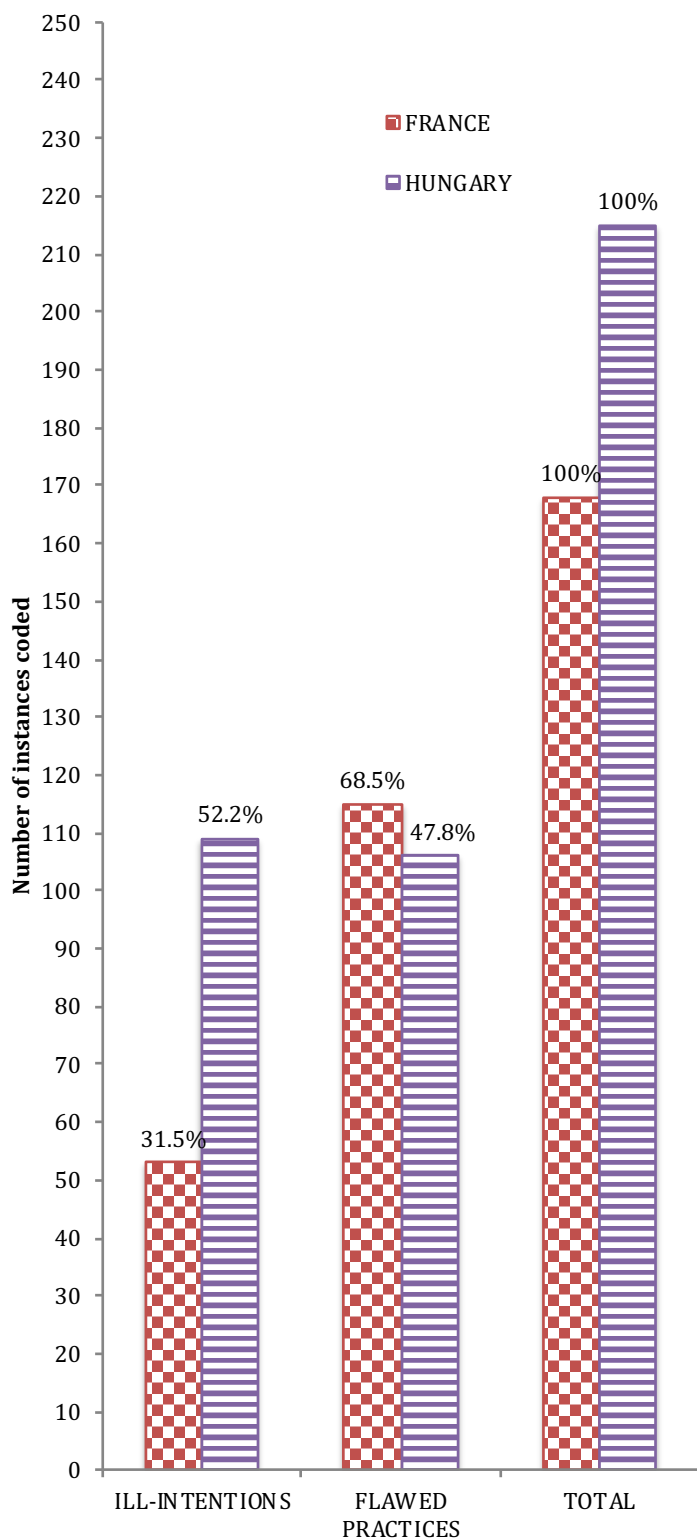
Figure 3: Criticisms by French and Hungarian participants of their opponents' intentions and practices

N.B.: In this figure and those following, the 'Total' bar represents the sum of all of the instances of discourse associated with either one of the codes under consideration in a given figure. The percentage indicated at the top of each bar represents the share of instances associated with a specific code within the Total number of instances coded considered in the same figure. In this case, each percentage indicates the share each specific type of critical statements by participants within the total number of critical statements

As an example of criticism of opponents' practices in French discussions, UMP participants would regularly target the PS for adopting counter-productive measures to tackle shared economic objectives. According to UMP participants, the PS's lack of realism results in the mismanagement of crucial issues and is ultimately harmful to France's economic health. In the following example, a young UMP activist emphasises that, while both parties aim towards more social justice, the solutions suggested by the PS to fulfil this objective are essentially flawed:

Charles: There is an objective, which is more social justice. The Right would also like more social justice! But it is not by taking from the rich and giving to the poor that we will succeed. Nothing is created in this way. The only way for the poor to have a better living standard is to create wealth, that is the only way.

Instances in which participants criticised their opponents' intentions (coded ILL-INTENTIONS) were grouped into two categories. First, cases where participants criticised their opponents for looking out for the political interest of their party, and especially their re-election, rather than the public interest more broadly (coded POLITICAL INTERESTS). Targeting opponents for demagoguery, populism, or vote-seeking behaviours falls under the first category. Second, I considered cases where participants accused their opponents of acting out of concern for more personal interests, such as material gain, securing the personal power of their members or supporters, or of being under the influence of certain sectorial interests (PERSONAL INTERESTS). Accusations of corruption, cronyism and nepotism would fall under this second category. The second type of criticisms may be considered as more problematic from a pluralist perspective than the first. Indeed, to pursue purely personal goals in politics is not only morally reprehensible, but in many instances outright illegal, making this a graver accusation than to criticize the strategic behaviour of opponents for political gains.[7]

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[7] Partisans denunciations of the strategic or corrupt behaviour of opponents may, in certain instance, be desirable to attain other normative goals that achieving a pluralist political debate—for instance to denounce abuse of power. As further discussed in the conclusion, constitutional abuse from a party in power such as Fidesz may make it particularly difficult, and perhaps even normatively undesirable, for opposition parties to uphold pluralist principles.
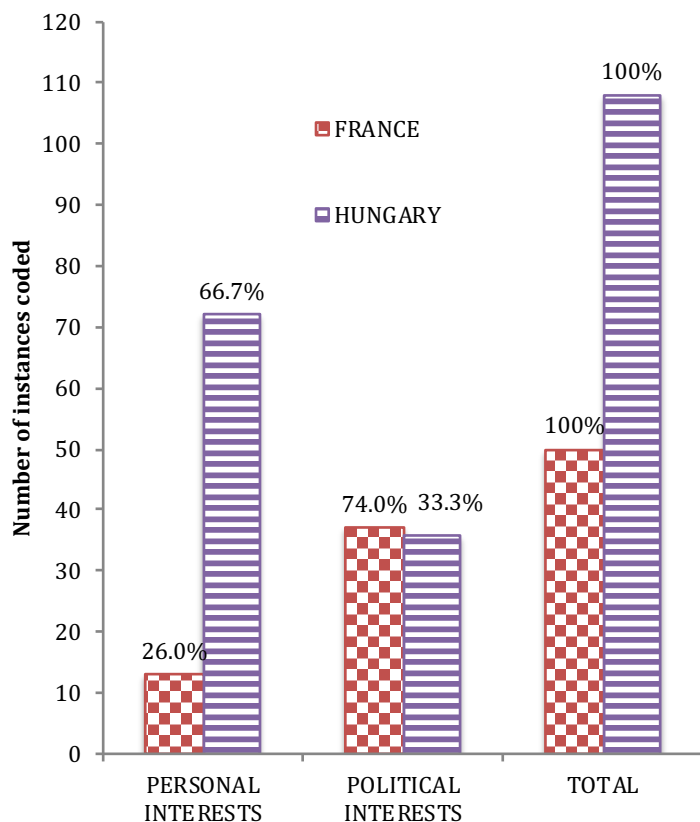
Figure 4: Types of criticisms by French and Hungarian participants of their opponents' intentions

As shown in Figure 4, 26% of French criticisms of intentions focus on the personal motivations of opponents, for instance their quest for material interest or personal influence. French participants focus more on the political motivations of their opponents, in most cases accusing them of adopting certain policies or certain discourses out of pure concern for electoral support. The proportion of criticisms targeting the political and personal motivations of opponents is reversed in the case of Hungarian groups, with two thirds of intentions-related criticisms denouncing the personal motivations of opponents, and the remaining third focusing on their political motivations (see Figure 4 above). Hungarian participants were quick to frame opponents as motivated solely by a desire for material gain, or for the personal exercise of political power. Accusations of nepotism, cronyism and corruption were especially rife. In the following

example, a Fidesz activist asserts that her opponents are solely concerned with their own, material interests:

Virág: That's how I feel about them. That for them nothing counts, except to have money. Really, their interest is to get rich, if I get rich, that's good for me. I'm not interested in what will become of all these poor people in five years. That I've sold buildings under their real value. I made a good business for myself, the rest is none of my concern. The socialists are totally egoistic, focusing only on their own interests.

Criterion 2: Treating opponents as principled

The second criterion for respectful discourse is an acknowledgement of the principled nature of opponents' positions (Herman, 2017). Partisans should assume that, even if they disagree with their rivals' stances, these act not only to further their own interests, but also to promote a certain idea of the common good. Assuming the 'mixed motives' of opponents is thus to see that, while these are partly moved by the desire to win elections and gain office, opponents are also committed to advance a set of principles they believe in. It is also an expression of belief in the morality of opposition. Indeed, why would disagreements persist in the face of joint commitment to the common good? The pluralist response to this question attributes the persistence of political disagreements to different understandings of the exact content of the 'common good', and of its practical implications.

To explore this criterion, instances where partisans talk about the values, policy objectives and ideologies of their political opponents have been coded (coded IDEAS and OPPONENT-FOCUSED) and compared with instances in which partisans talk about their own values, policy objectives and ideologies (coded IDEAS and SELF-FOCUSED). If we take this as an indicator of the extent to which participants recognise the principled nature of their opponents, French participants appear very capable of doing so (see Figure 5). Indeed, in 47% of the cases where they talk about their opponents they also evoke their ideas. This is even more than when they talk about their own platforms, in which case they only evoke the principles they defend in 31.6% of the cases.
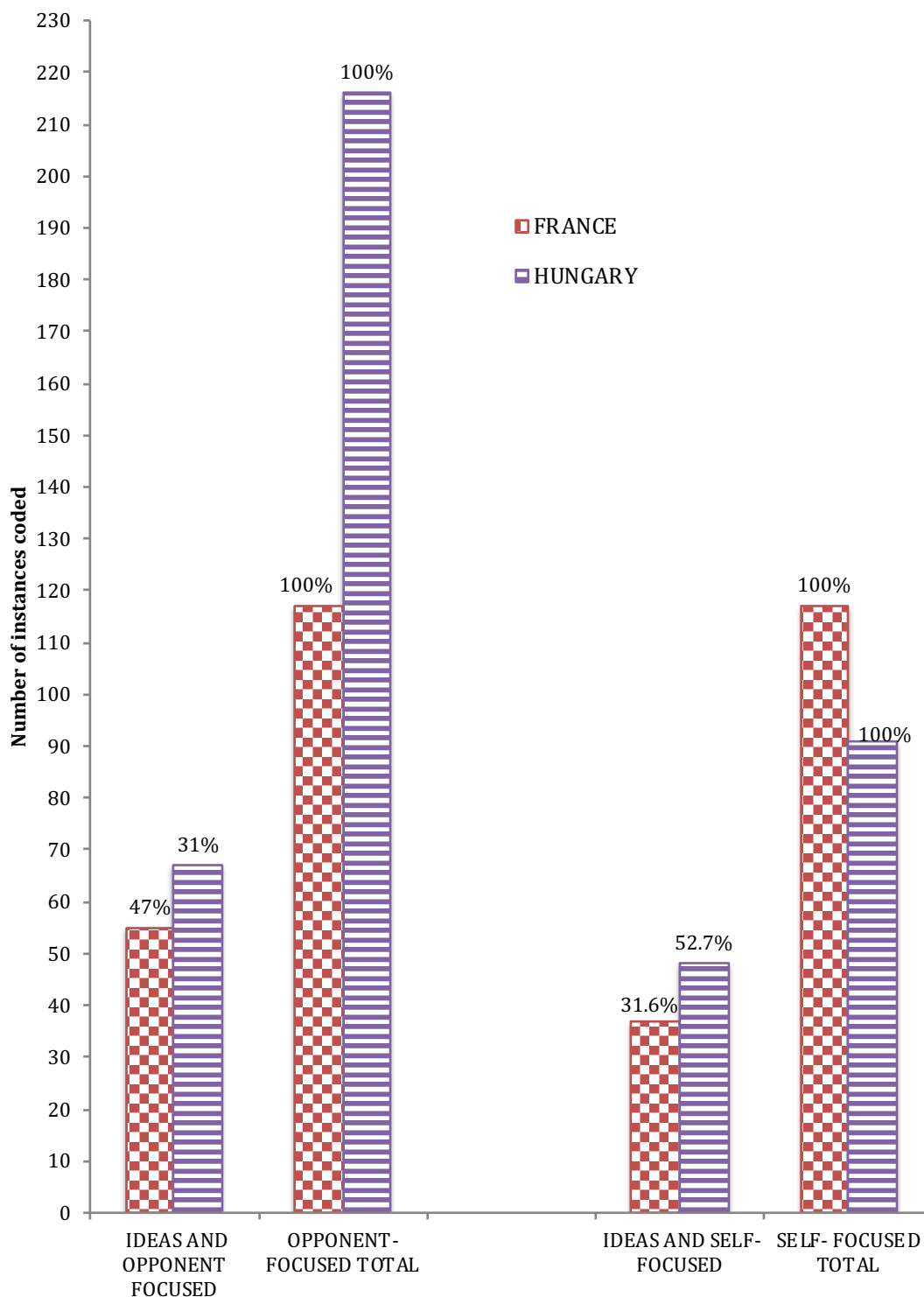
Figure 5: References by French and Hungarian participants to the ideas of their opponents and of their own party

A large share of these instances shows an explicit form of respect for political opponents. By recognising that their opponents are principled, participants also recognise that there exists a

plurality of legitimate opinions. For example, in a discussion on the ideas that structure neo-liberal economic policy, a young PS participant, Quentin, said "*we cannot say that (what they believe in) is wrong, because that would be saying that what we think is completely true*". In the following statement by another young PS member on disagreements surrounding the legalisation of same-sex marriage in France we also see the connection between acknowledging that opponents act out of principle and recognising the ineliminable character of political disagreement:

Marcel: (...) There are people who were deeply opposed (to the law), it's not my position, but I can understand where things get stuck. I'm not saying that I am supportive of this, I'm saying that I can understand, because there is a point where we are touching upon intimacy, upon people's deep convictions. And so, if you wish, there are two visions of society, and if they are opposed, it is called a healthy opposition. This means that on certain topics we can say that we don't see things politically in the same way, very plainly because we don't see life in the same way. Because for me, the objective of life is not the same as for a guy who would be a member of the UMP, rather on the right of the UMP, with a much more economical vision of society (...) And so there is an opposition, and the fact that there is no consensus on some topics, I would say this is not a problem (...)

The proportion is reversed in the case of Hungarian participants: when they evoke their opponents they talk about their ideas in only 31% of the cases, against 52.7% of the cases when they are talking about their own platforms (see Figure 5). While instances where participants explicitly *negated* the principled-nature of their opponents were not specifically coded for, it is clear from the qualitative analysis of the transcripts that this was quite a common discursive strategy among Hungarian participants. Fidesz-KDNP activists, for instance, often framed the Left as lacking any sort of ideological commitment. As comes through in the following example, the fact that the Cold War-period Hungarian communist party (MSzMP) was able to re-define itself as a social-democratic party (MSzP) in the 1990s is for Fidesz partisans the ultimate proof that their opponents have no ideals:

Nándor: (...) The people are the same, devoid of principles... who were content with Kádár, the same way as they would have been content with Rákosi...

Káldor: Power... but that is also a trait of Fidesz.

Nándor: Yes, but no... Among us no one was a censor. You understand what I mean. We didn't have party-state censors, executioners, and people like this. That's the difference. Independently of that, I can accept the politician attitude. But this is just unacceptable to the present day. That this post-communist... (that) the Hungarian Communist Party has simply changed its name, into democratic at present. Believe me, if communism came back, they would immediately be the most fervent communists. This is certain.

Much like Fidesz-KDNP participants, MSzP-Együtt participants would also picture principles claimed by their opponents as convenient electoral bait serving more base motives. This idea is made particularly explicit in the following example, where Együtt participants describe Fidesz's ideology as a carefully crafted discourse, designed since the early 2000s to gain political power and money:

Zoltán: In my opinion, that was the direction in which the political wind was blowing. They simply... they needed a toolbox (to quench) their thirst for power. And that required some demagogy. So, I think they became what they are just because that was the most comfortable path. They saw that we have a post-socialist, Kádárist, patriarchal society, that needs a strong leader figure, and for everything to be free. And that requires some ideological nonsense to stuff people's heads with. And they provide this. And let's be honest, it actually works quite well. I believe that for the Fidesz... for Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz, only one thing matters, and that's power (...) It doesn't matter what practical political measure is at stake, what principle is at stake, what alliance is at stake... if it can be traded for power, then they trade it.

<u>Criterion 3: Recognising that opponents are oriented towards the common good</u>

The third criterion for evaluating respect for political opponents is that partisans recognise adversaries as 'moral agents' and thus, despite their "mixed motives" (see above), as fundamentally oriented towards advancing the common good (Herman, 2017). This is ultimately the imperative to which both previous criteria lead. Pluralist partisans relate to opponents as if these were committed to addressing widely accepted societal problems (such as sickness, poverty, crime), and their action guided by a concern for fundamental principles such as freedom, equality and the preservation of democracy's 'procedural minimum' (Galston, 2013). On the contrary, where party activists picture their opponents as fundamentally oriented towards *harming* the

political community, they also place them outside the sphere of common morality. In such cases, opponents fail to meet the very basic condition for being included in a political discussion and become *de facto* illegitimate to govern.

At the very least, partisans that meet this criterion will refrain from picturing their opponents as immoral. Two main codes are relevant here. First, the code MORAL DEFFICIENCY was associated with cases where partisans *directly* questioned the moral integrity of their opponents. This would include, for example, emphasising that opponents are fundamentally evil at the core of their personality. Second, the code THREAT COMMON GOOD was associated when opponents were accused of knowingly threatening the broad objectives understood to form part of the general interest, the fundamental principles at the basis of the political community, or the functioning of the democratic regime itself. These indirect ways of questioning opponents' commitment to the common good would include accusing one's opponents of not being committed to defending the country's fundamental interests, but also accusations of opponents being racist, intolerant, homophobic, segregationists, totalitarian, dictatorial, etc.
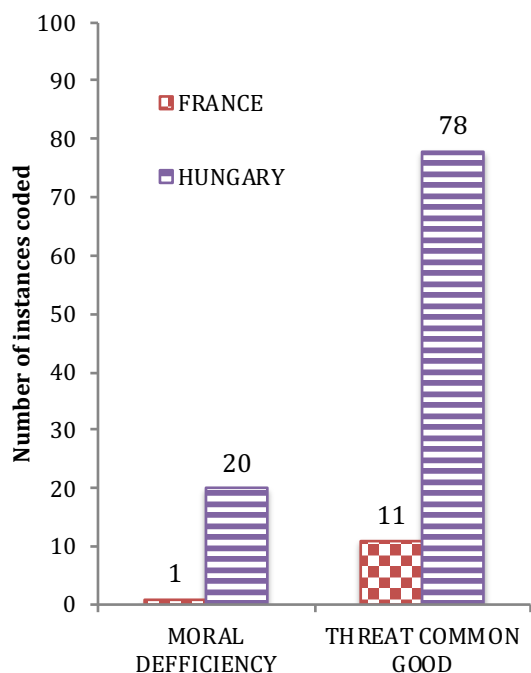
Figure 6: Criticisms by French and Hungarian participants of their opponents' ability to further the common good

As shown in Figure 6, French participants use the first type of argument and thus question directly the morality of their opponents 20 times less often than Hungarian participants, and the second type of argument close to eight times less frequently. Not only are such arguments seldom used in French group discussions, but these also contain a few instances in which French participants explicitly refuse to use a moral argument to criticize opponents. The following dialogue between PS participants is perhaps one of the clearest examples of this, in which René regrets what he sees as the tendency of his own camp to label opponents as immoral:

René: Because there is a bad tendency on the left, and I think that on this the Right... if there is one thing that I hate on the left, it is that tendency of always moralizing politics. There are a lot of people on the left, and namely when they are young, who think that, basically, left(-wingers) are in the camp of the Good, that (the Left) is the Good, (in the camp) of progress, that they hold hands and march, etc. And if you are on the right, in the end, you're not allowed, or you are very, very stupid, or you are an arsehole. So I think you can be right-wing for good reasons. I'm not at all a right-winger, I have no doubts about my convictions, but I think that political debates are very complicated, that these things are not clear-cut. And I think you can be from

the right and be at the same time an intelligent person, a good person. I think it does not affect one's personal morality.

If we consider the discourse of Hungarian participants, they were far more likely to denounce the very character of opponents as corrupt and immoral. In certain cases MSzP-Együtt participants would portray their opponents as fundamentally flawed, young Együtt participant Zoltán stating for instance: "we just don't agree with them, because they are barbarians". In the following example, a young Fidesz participant similarly develops the idea of a specifically immoral *left-wing personality*:

Zsolt: In the long run, as a general rule, a right-wing person finds interest in public life, his disposition is to think in terms of the common good. The difference with a left-wing person is that the left-wing person is more generally an individualist who has no respect for the collective, and who is capable of hating anybody. (…) He is capable, following his conscious-emotive state, to even hate his own kind. (By this I mean) how can I put this... his preferred... the political elite. As a result he has no ideological engagement that would link him to his party, or to a certain side of the political spectrum.

Another indicator of whether partisans see opponents as oriented towards the common good is the extent to which participants considered the card 'PUBLIC MORALITY' a conflictual or consensual topic. This provides an indication of the extent to which the question of morality was politicised in the groups under study and, more broadly, on the extent to which partisans view their opponents as moral agents. Indeed, when partisans saw this topic as one of disagreement, it was in most cases to oppose the virtue of their own party to the corruption of their opponents.
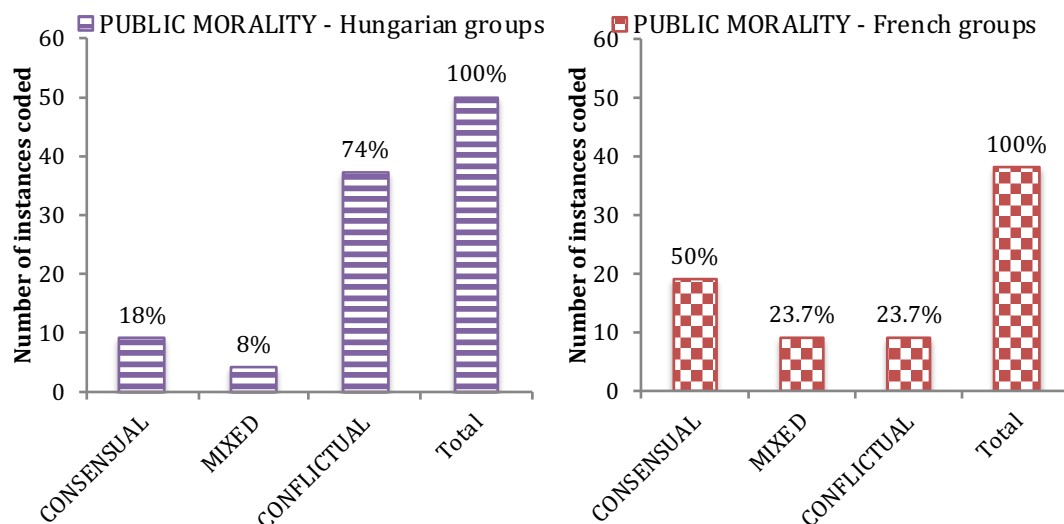
Figure 7: Assessments by French and Hungarian participants of partisan disagreement on the card PUBLIC MORALITY

As shown in Figure 7, French participants classified this card as consensual in half of the cases, against a 22.4% average of consensual card classification overall. This is also one of the topics they were least likely to classify as conflictual: they did so in only 23.7% of their classifications of this card, against a 51.8% average of conflictual card classifications. French participants in most cases downplayed the political reach of this particular question. In the following statement a PS participant discusses the card PUBLIC MORALITY:

Louis: Let's say that this is not a topic that causes debate, each will fight over... Each party has its lame ducks that are thrown back at them, everyone tries more or less to get rid of them... And we see actually that on questions like... the ban on holding concurrently several mandates, or on... transparency concerning (public officials') wages, the cleavage is not between the Right and the Left, it's rather between (...) those who want to make an effort on these questions and the others that feel like (...) taking liberties, doing more or less what they want without being held to account.

Hungarian participants on the other hand classified this card as conflictual in 74% of the cases, slightly above an average for all cards of 72.1%. They saw this topic as consensual in 18% of the cases, only slightly above the 16.1% average. In most cases, the discussion of this card

became an opportunity for participants to picture their own party as a model of virtue and their opponents as embodying immorality. In the following example, an Együtt activist contrasts the MSzP and Fidesz's attitude when faced with corruption scandals:

Tamás: And yes, if we take these corruption affairs... I mean, the question of public morality is not only, not only... according to me it has a lot to do with... (one's) relation to power. The question of what those in power (allow themselves to) do. So for example it's true that the Socialists were also stealing when they were in government. But if it was uncovered and the person was really indefensible, then they would exclude him from the party, marginalise him, and they tried... they were sorry, and tried to make-up for the whole thing... Now the situation is that when someone is implicated let's say in a moral scandal (...) (they are) not going to disappear from politics (...).

Discussion and concluding remarks

The empirical analysis reveals striking differences between French and Hungarian attitudes towards political opponents throughout all criteria considered, French partisans consistently displaying greater respect for political opponents as compared to their Hungarian counterparts. While French participants refrain from targeting their opponents' motives, Hungarian activists repeatedly engage in motive cynicism. Many French partisans recognise and declare as legitimate the principles of their opponents; conversely Hungarian participants regularly deny that opponents have any principles at all. Finally, in France interviewees very seldom imply that their opponents infringe upon the common good and display belief in the morality of their political opposition; on the other hand, Hungarian activists actively deny that their opponents are committed to the common good.

These results have implications for both normative democratic theory and party studies. The French case demonstrates that pluralist forms of partisanship are not a naive and unattainable ideal, but a political practice that has a firm grounding in empirical reality. Some of the French partisans interviewed reached extremely stringent standards of political pluralism, and the vast majority approximated the ideal. While the study lends credit to the growing number of theorists who argue that partisans can play a key role to play in sustaining pluralist norms, the

Hungarian case offers in turn a striking example of the nefarious effects of the weakness of such norms in democratic life. Anti-pluralist discourse in Hungary is associated with anti-pluralist practices: the abuses of power by ruling party Fidesz since 2010 (Freedom House, 2019b; Pech & Scheppele, 2017) can be read as a progressive translation into governmental practice of the strongly polarized political discourse dominant in the Hungarian political environment since the early 2000s (Herman, 2016; Palonen, 2009). This suggests the particular importance of studying the role that pluralist forms of partisanship play in the successful democratisation of post-authoritarian societies, but also in the continued endurance of democratic institutions in older democracies (Enyedi, 2016; Galston, 2018; Herman & Muirhead, Forthcoming).

These results also call for a reflection on the tensions that may exist between the different democratic functions of partisans, especially their responsibility to uphold norms of pluralism while providing citizens with reasons to engage with representative politics (on this second key function, see White, 2015a, 2015b; White & Ypi, 2010, 2011; Wolkenstein, 2018). The study suggests that French mainstream parties abide by norms of pluralist discourse; however, they have increasingly failed to fulfil their functions of intermediation between citizens and the state in past decades, to the point of obtaining together only a third of seats in the 2017-2022 French National Assembly. Conversely, while the practice and discourse of Fidesz have been highly anti-pluralist since 2010, they remain the only party with which a large majority of Hungarians identify and, as of today, have won three general elections in a row. There is a need for further empirical and theoretical work on the potential trade-off between advancing pluralist norms and communicating strong convictions capable of engaging citizens, the two main functions that contemporary democratic theory ascribes to partisanship (for an overview, see Herman, 2017).

The wide variations in pluralist norms revealed here also suggest that the form taken by partisanship is largely dependent on its cultural and political context. Pluralist forms of partisanship in France can be tied to a longer history of open political competition and established partisan identities; conversely, historical legacies of authoritarianism are still present in the ways Hungarian partisans characterize their opponents. The Hungarian context of widespread political

corruption (Innes, 2014; Magyar & Vásárhelyi, 2017) is also likely to hamper respect for political opponents and thus pluralist norms more broadly. While a greater number of case studies would allow empiricists to document these real-world variations and explain their roots in a more systematic manner, normative thinkers should also consider how contextual determinants impact what can be expected from partisans.

Finally, and relatedly, these results invite theorists to consider whether all partisans should be held to the same pluralist standards or whether other normative imperatives should be weighed against the pluralist ideal in certain situations. In the context of this study, it is questionable whether it is normatively desirable for MSzP partisans to treat their opponents as legitimate contenders pursuing the common good, when the actions of Fidesz since 2010 are widely acknowledged as damaging to the rule of law, fuelling systemic cronyism and state capture by partisan elites. In this particular case, should we hold MSzP partisans to the same norms of political discourse as Fidesz? Do certain normative imperatives, such as denouncing abuse of power, require from partisans that they infringe on pluralist norms of discourse? Is it desirable for partisans to be pluralist when they are faced with anti-pluralist contenders? An important theoretical literature tackles the conditions under which a democracy can legitimately restrict the rights of individuals or minority groups that represent a threat to it (Anthoula & Ludvig, 2017; Invernizzi Accetti & Zuckerman, 2016; Kirshner, 2014; Müller, 2015). Less has been said of the norms of political discourse that should guide handling disloyal political parties that are also major political forces. These questions are crucial in many young democracies facing similar issues as Hungary, but also in more established democracies where populist parties with anti-pluralist platforms are increasingly powerful contenders (Herman & Muldoon, 2018; Mudde, 2016).

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