Closer to Citizens or Ticking Boxes?
Political Parties and Participatory Practices in Hungary

Abstract:
Political parties use participatory practices to connect with their members and with the broader electorate. While substantial research indicates how people get involved, very little is known about why political parties use participatory practices. The present article addresses this gap in the literature and seeks to identify the reasons parties do so. We elaborate an analytical framework that includes three main categories of explanations: party characteristics, internal dynamics, and external dynamics. Our analysis focuses on Hungary, explores party statutes and manifestos, and relies on 26 semi-structured interviews with party elites from ten political parties. The findings indicate that parties have several purposes in mind, which vary across parties, that are often linked to broader concerns about citizen engagement and to attempts to give members a voice in internal and external decision-making processes.

Introduction

Political parties use a variety of means to gain electoral support. Extensive research documents the adaptation of parties to contemporary developments in society, such as the intensive use of technology and the high demands of citizens for an increased role in decision-making processes. Earlier studies illustrate that political parties give their members a voice in their internal life either through direct or deliberative practices. Parties go digital to reach specific segments of society, increase transparency, and/or cut costs, and they provide specific types of engagement meant to build loyalty among their membership (Scarrow 2015; Bennett, Segerberg, and Knüpfer 2018; Barberà et al. 2021). While we know that political parties use participatory practices, there is very little information about the reasons why they use them. Understanding why political parties resort to participatory practices is important for at least two reasons. First, the involvement of citizens in intra-party decision-making procedures is an indication of the openness parties have towards their members or voters more widely. To date, the roots of their openness have been extensively studied relative to candidate or leadership selection, but very little work has been done on the forms of participation. Second, the reasons for adopting participatory practices shed light on the roles that parties take in the broader democratic process in society. Some of these causes could contribute to narrowing the gap between citizens and political parties.

This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by identifying the reasons why political parties use participatory practices. To this end, we elaborate an analytical framework that includes three main categories of explanations: party characteristics, internal dynamics, and external dynamics. We carry out a preliminary and exploratory testing of this framework on the Hungarian case. This country has several characteristics that make it an appropriate case for our analysis: one party has been in a dominant position in Hungarian politics for more than a decade; it is an illiberal setting in which the electoral system favors such a dominant position; and the party system includes both old and new actors. The analysis covers the use of practices instead of their adoption because our intention is to observe what is actually done in reality rather than simply provision. We rely on 26 semi-structured interviews with party elites from nine parliamentary parties, along with one extra-parliamentary party that was close to gaining parliamentary seats in the 2022 Hungarian parliamentary elections. The parties differ in ideology, size, incumbency status, and age. While these elite interviews risk providing responses that express general norms, they provide valuable information because many of these respondents were involved in the decision to establish and use participatory practices.

The next section reviews the literature about the use of participatory practices by political parties, and outlines several reasons for it. The third section describes the research design used in this analysis. Next, we provide an overview of the Hungarian political system. The fourth section sets out the analysis that explains the variation in participatory practices. The conclusion summarizes the key findings and discusses the main implications for party politics.

Political Parties and Participatory Practices

Participatory practices, conceptualized here as institutional activities that are components of political parties' organizations or strategies, are an integrated part of party politics. Political parties have engaged citizens – both their own members and the broader electorate – in various activities for many decades. Mass parties have extensively engaged their members in election campaigns and developed activities aimed at persuading members of the electorate to join their ranks (Duverger 1954; Katz and Mair 1994). Their most common activities were events organized by local branches for party members or general campaign rallies involving both members and ordinary voters who were potential future members. The professionalization of campaigns and the gradual increase of reliance on state resources (Panebianco 1988; Katz and Mair 1995; Marian 2018) changed the forms of participatory

practices that parties proposed to their members and voters. In the present day, members remain important for political parties in spite of a general decrease in membership rolls (Scarrow 2015). As such, political parties seek ways to engage them in activities.

One common participatory practice for members in recent decades has been the organization of primaries for both candidate and party leadership selection (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Sandri, Seddone, and Venturino 2015). This is a form of intra-party democracy intended to provide members with a greater voice in internal decision-making processes. The idea of primaries rests on the premise that the selection of representatives of the party in public office and leaders of the party must be inclusive and provide members with the opportunity to express their preferences. In theory, primaries seek to ensure that the most representative party members reach public office - and the highest position in the party. This does not always work in practice, because incumbents often win or have a strong say about renomination and re-election, which diminishes the value of party primaries; also, in some instances the party leadership may overrule the results of the primaries if they do not correspond to their initial preferences (Alford and Brady 1993; Gastil 2000; Gherghina 2013).

Giving members a direct say in actual decisions is a similar participatory practice. This possibility takes two main forms. On the one hand, for example, the German Greens proposed a rotation scheme for its parliamentarians in which their term in office is limited to half of the legislative term in order to allow other members a chance to occupy that position (Poguntke 1992). On the other hand, intra-party referendums or membership ballots allow members express direct opinions on specific policies (Sussman 2007; Scarrow 2015). Intra-party referendums can be binding or consultative, and a variety of topics can be put to a members' vote, e.g. a party's coalition behavior (Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel 2020a). This channel of engagement is more effective for members when they are also allowed to ask questions, and this option is not reserved to party elites. When elites pre-select party policies, these membership ballots reinforce the elite's preferences rather than allowing ordinary members a direct say in decisions (Wolkenstein 2016).

Deliberative procedures are presented as potential avenues to reinvigorate the nature of intra-party democracy because they facilitate the exchange of arguments between party leaders and members (Teorell 1999). Several political parties have developed their deliberative appetite over the past three decades (Heidar and Jupskås 2022), while other parties have more recently started to provide members with a variety of deliberative practices that cover a relatively broad range of issues such as candidate selection, coalition behavior, policy

formation, and general decision-making (Gherghina, Soare, and Jacquet 2020; Gherghina and Jacquet 2022). Intra-party deliberation provides members with the chance to formulate opinions by means of argumentation, to achieve concrete collective decisions, to increase the efficacy of decisions, and to get them socialized via a model of decision-making based on dialogue and consensus (Teorell 1999; Wolkenstein 2016; Gherghina, Soare, and Jacquet 2020; Heidar and Jupskås 2022).

The use of technology by political parties is the most recent form of member engagement. New digital tools have increased the transparency of decisions, stimulated deliberation and communication, reduced costs for both the party and its members, and allowed loosely organized parties with limited financial means to conduct their activities (Bennett, Segerberg and Knüpfer, 2018; Oross and Tap, 2021). These digital tools allow parties to organize online activities that had previously taken place in person before the new technology was adopted. For example, internal referendums can be organized online, and the internal party debate can benefit from an online platform where members can express opinions, exchange ideas, and engage in communication.

Political parties also use these practices to engage with external audiences (i.e., non-members). The forms remain the same, but the engagement has somewhat different purposes. For example, political parties which show high levels of intra-party democracy, or provide citizens with interaction opportunities, may narrow the gap between people and institutions and be perceived as more legitimate by the broader electorate (Gherghina, Soare, and Jacquet 2020; Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2015). The inclusiveness and transparency that parties promote through these means of engagement can make them more appealing to citizens and encourage them both to vote for the party and even to join them (McSwiney 2021). Related to the idea of voter mobilization, the provision of participatory practices to the broader citizenry, especially online, can play an important role in achieving greater visibility, and in facilitating political propaganda and voter manipulation via social media (Woolley and Howard 2019). To pursue these purposes, parties engage the broader citizenry in action.

Why Participatory Practices?
The participatory practices outlined in the previous section are diverse, and oriented both inwards and outwards. While several studies explain why particular participatory practices were used by political parties, to date no general theoretical framework has been established which integrates these explanations. In the attempt to build a useful analytical model, we were

inspired by a study seeking to explain the process of intra-party democratization by looking at three levels: the political system, the party system, and the intra-party dynamics (Barnea and Rahat 2007). The political system undergoes important changes over time along the lines of gaps between citizens and political institutions, general disengagement, and the general criticism oriented towards the functioning of representative democracy (Norris 2011; Dalton 2019). As a reaction to these changes, parties may propose forms of engagement to get closer to citizens. The competition inherent in the party system may favor intra-party democratization practices as these can serve as useful avenues for recovery from electoral defeat, vantage points in comparison to other competitors, and ways to show innovation especially when in opposition, or simply to avoid lagging behind through isomorphism (Cross and Pilet 2016; Vittori 2019). The intra-party dynamic can facilitate democratization due to the interaction between party units, the power-sharing arrangements within parties between the elites and rank-and-file members, and the efforts made to maintain cohesion (Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro, and Hirano 2009; Astudillo and Detterbeck 2020; Close and Gherghina 2019).

Our theoretical approach builds on the model developed by Barnea and Rahat (2007). We introduce nuances into the original model, and make several changes that could help to explain why parties may promote participatory practices. On the one hand, we drop the political system level because our analysis compares parties within the same political system, which all face similar challenges. On the other hand, we develop three analytical dimensions which are, to some extent, equivalent to the party system and intra-party levels. Figure 1 depicts these dimensions and their components.

First, we focus on four party characteristics that are likely to determine variations in parties' approaches towards participatory practices: ideology, party size, government status, and party age. There are theoretical arguments on which of these are most important in shaping variations in participatory practices. For example, left-wing political parties often promote inclusiveness and equality (Kastning 2013; Johnson 2019), in line with the ideas behind participatory practices. The size of parties can also influence their use of participatory practices in both directions, as large parties may promote such practices more than smaller parties because they have the resources to support them and strive to gain legitimacy; meanwhile, smaller parties may promote participatory practices in attempts to develop their organization and boost their electoral appeal. A similar reasoning applies to incumbent and opposition parties: the former may be inclined to use participatory practices to consolidate their position in government, while the latter may wish to gain more visibility and to present

and debate alternatives to the government's policies (de Giorgi and Ilonszki 2018). Established parties may favor the use of classic forms of participation such as rallies or primaries, while newer parties may be more inclined to promote online tools oriented towards deliberation (Vittori 2019; Gherghina, Soare, and Jacquet 2020).

Figure 1: An Analytical Framework of Participatory Practices

Party characteristics	Internal dynamic	External dynamic
• Ideology • Size • Incumbency vs. opposition • Party age (established vs. new)	• People: legitimacy, motivation, education • Decisions: candidates and policies • Functionality: in specific circumstances	• People: legitimacy, input, closing the gap • Decisions: inter-party competition • Functionality: visibility, electoral appeal

The other two analytical dimensions presented in Figure 1 distinguish between the internal dynamic – which resembles the intra-party level identified by Barnea and Rahat (2007) – and the external dynamic that focuses on the relationships of parties with the broader electorate. The literature reviewed above illustrates that political parties promote participatory practices with three broad aims in mind: establishing a connection with the people, providing input possibilities for decision-making, and for functionality reasons. The internal dynamic refers to the involvement of party members with the aim of legitimizing the party's procedures and decisions, to motivate members to continue their activity and to educate them on the values of the party (Barberà and Rodríguez-Teruel 2020b; Stoiciu and Gherghina 2020) These decisions include candidate selection and voting on policies through intra-party referendums. The functionality refers to party development under specific circumstances such as internal divisions, technological developments, or pandemics. The people in the external dynamic include the wider electorate, and their engagement is meant to provide legitimacy to parties in the public sphere and to close the gap between citizens and institutions. The decisions here are mainly about inter-party competition, in relation to which parties can effectively engage either members (Vodová and Voda 2020) or voters. Parties may also be driven by a desire to increase their visibility, boost their electoral appeal, and improve the general perceptions the electorate has of them (Gherghina, Soare, and Jacquet 2020).

Research Design

For exploratory testing of this analytical framework, we selected the case-study of Hungary, which is appropriate for three reasons. First, since 2010 Hungary has been governed by the same party (Fidesz-MPSZ) that enjoys great support for its political and economic reforms (Batory 2016; Scoggins 2020). Over time, the party has pushed the country onto a path to de-democratization (Bogaards 2018) and into the emergence of an illiberal setting (Pállinger 2019). The electoral system reform, designed by the government party in 2011, favors its dominance and ensures that its chances of continuing in office are high (Batory 2016). This domination of the political scene by one political party pushes the other parties to identify ways to counter-balance its electoral popularity. One of these ways is the creation of broad electoral alliances as was the case in the 2022 legislative elections. Such an alliance was formed in the context of the important dilemma faced by opposition parties: by competing in the elections and gaining several parliamentary seats, they also provide legitimacy to a regime that they harshly criticize (Susánszky, Unger, and Kopper 2020). Other ways may require the higher involvement of citizens in their internal and external activities.

Second, several Hungarian political parties have recently provided some new practices to coordinate candidate selection, to consult citizens about policy issues at national or local levels, and to make their presence visible in the digital environment (Batory and Svensson 2019; Oross and Tap 2021). Third, the Hungarian party system is a mixture of established and new parties, which allows the observation of how different types of party organizations deal with participatory practices. These participatory practices range from traditional forms of involvement such as rallies and local clubs, to newer possibilities in the form of online forums and online referendums (Oross and Tap 2021).

Our analysis includes ten political parties (see Appendix 1): the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), Democratic Coalition (DK), Dialogue (Párbeszéd), Politics Can Be Different (LMP), Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP), and Momentum Movement (M) are all left-wing parties; while the Alliance of Young Democrats – Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz-MPSZ), Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), and Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk) are all right-wing parties.[1] Párbeszéd, LMP, MKKP, Mi Hazánk and Momentum are small parties based on membership size, while the other five parties are large parties. Fidesz-MPSZ has been in government, with KDNP as its coalition

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[1] The left-right axis is more appropriate in the Hungarian case than the populism-pluralism axis because the latter overlaps greatly with incumbency and age. The left-right axis brings added value to the analysis by outlining the differences between parties that are not gauged through other criteria.

partner, for the last three electoral terms (since 2010). We consider new parties those that first ran in the 2018 legislative election: Mi Hazánk, MKKP, and Momentum.

This study combines secondary and primary data. We use secondary data to assess the party characteristics (Figure 1) and to identify the relationships between party characteristics and participatory practices. The secondary data comes from party statutes and manifestos indicating their ideology, as well as electoral databases, and previous research on party size, incumbency status, and age. We use primary data to identify the use of participatory practices and to assess the internal and external dynamics.[2] The primary data consists of semi-structured interviews with 26 party elites (Appendix 2) that were conducted between March and August 2020. In order to cover the three faces of party organization, our interviewees included elected representatives of the parties in public office (e.g., the presidents of each party, heads of the Parliamentary Groups, and selected Members of the European Parliament), the parties' central offices (e.g., its operating director), and on the ground (e.g., local party leaders, mayors, and local councillors in Budapest). The interviewees were selected to ensure a wide range of involvement in the decision-making processes and daily activities of their political parties. The interviews were conducted with a minimum number of two people per party; those people had to occupy high positions in the party structure. One exception to this rule was Fidesz because a) the party uses several gatekeepers to reject interview invitations from neutral researchers; and b) even if researchers avoid the gatekeepers, most party elites are reluctant to give interviews. Consequently, we could secure only one respondent for this party.

The interview guide included 12 questions about party membership, representatives' activities, various decisions reached within the party, their understanding of participatory democracy, and participatory practices. The questions were general in nature, and did not push the respondents to focus on particular forms of participatory practices or events. We also asked some follow-up questions that elicited details when the initial answers were too short. While the interviews were conducted during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, the respondents were asked about their party's participatory practices in general, both before and during the pandemic, to avoid an overestimation of online participatory tools. The latter type (i.e., online tools) were the only ones available during the pandemic.

We analyzed the content of the interview responses with the help of inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) to identify internal and external dynamics. The coding did

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[2] We sought to triangulate the data on intra-party democracy with those from the Political Party Database project (Poguntke et al. 2016), but the data available for Hungary were not recent and did not include several of the parties analyzed here.

not use pre-established themes; instead, we read all the interview transcripts and identified potential themes. The analysis procedure had three phases. The authors independently read all the interview transcripts, identified the major themes, and grouped the interviews according to them in phase one. In phase two, an inter-coder reliability test was applied in which the themes provided earlier were compared, including the interviews associated with these themes. A very high degree of convergence between the themes was independently identified. In phase three, the authors made a final list of participatory practices and the interviews associated with them.

An Overview of the Hungarian Party System

This section provides a brief description of the political parties running in Hungary's 2018 elections, in chronological order of their formation. MSZP was founded in October 1989 as the post-communist successor of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party. It was an important party in the first two post-communist decades, winning several elections and forming government coalitions three times up until 2010 (Lakner 2011). Following the 2008 global financial crisis, the party lost much of its popular support (Bíró, Beck, and Róna 2011), receiving slightly above 17% of votes and gaining four seats compared to the previous nine seats. The party's electoral support gradually decreased from then on, and it received approximately 12% of the votes in the 2018 legislative elections, in which it had an electoral alliance with Párbeszéd (Várnagy 2019). In 2022, the party ran in a large electoral alliance of opposition parties, and it is difficult to estimate its support.

Founded as bottom-up and horizontal youth movement in 1988, Fidesz-MPSZ was converted into a highly centralized and top-down parliamentary party during the 1990s. The party was first in government between 1998 and 2002, and was then in opposition for the next eight years. Learning from its electoral defeats, the institutionalization of the party went further through building a network of collateral organizations (Greskovits 2017; Metz 2015), uniting right-wing parties, increasing the membership, and establishing party-related media forums. Currently, it is the most centralized, dominant party in the Hungarian party system with 50% electoral support. Next, KDNP is a historical, Christian rightist political party founded on 13 October 1944 by Hungarian Catholic statesmen, which the communist-dominated post-war authorities excluded from participation in 1949. The party was re-founded in 1989 with its present name, won 21 seats in the 1990 parliamentary election, and entered government. In the 1994 election, KDNP won 22 seats and moved into opposition;

then it lost all its seats in the 1998 election. As part of the Fidesz-led process of uniting right-wing parties, KDNP signed an agreement with Fidesz for election cooperation, as a result of which the party obtained seats in the National Assembly in 2006 and became a satellite party of Fidesz.

In 2003, Jobbik was founded as a radical and nationalist party. It has since started to re-define itself as a conservative people's party, and it changed the controversial elements of its communication in 2016 (Bíró-Nagy and Boros 2016). During the 2018 parliamentary elections Jobbik became the biggest opposition party, with 19% of votes. Moving on, inspired by the Western green and New Leftist movements, the Hungarian green party LMP was founded in 2009. It gained its first parliamentary seats in 2010 and persisted in the political arena. In the 2018 legislative elections, the most recent of which it contested alone, the party won 7% of votes, giving it eight members in the legislature (Daniel Kovarek and Littvay 2019).

In 2011, the former Prime Minister and chairman Ferenc Gyurcsány mobilized several party members to split from the MSZP and form a new party, DK (Körösényi, Ondre, and Hajdu 2017). During the 2018 parliamentary elections DK gained only 5.4% of votes, but according to recent opinion polls it has doubled its electoral support. Next, Párbeszéd is a Hungarian green political party formed in February 2013 by eight MPs who had left LMP. Párbeszéd signed an electoral coalition with MSZP shortly before the 2018 elections and the joint list led by the party's chairman received 12% of votes. Mi Hazánk was founded by Jobbik dissidents who left the organization after the party's leadership moved away from its radical roots in 2016.

Finally, the newest generation of movement parties, including the Momentum Movement, a centrist political startup that seeks to transcend the old divisions between left and right (Lentsch 2019) which entered Parliament in 2022, and the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party, an extra-parliamentary opposition movement founded by a group of street artists in 2014, are opposition movements with small amounts of their own resources and nationwide networks of activists. More details about these parties are available in Appendix 1.

Explaining the Variation in Participatory Practices

This section starts with an overview of the participatory practices used by Hungarian political parties. Table 1 reflects the diversity of these practices, which are clustered into four main categories according to what lies at their core: debate, education, direct decisions, and civic engagement. Debate-oriented practices foster communication between the party and people

(members and non-members) or between people. This category does not include the everyday discussions that take place in local branches of political parties, which may have some potential to shape deliberations in specific instances. Education-oriented practices seek to provide information to people (usually members) about the party's ideology, and to socialize them with its political values. Direct decision practices refer to both personnel selection (primaries) and policy issues (referendums). These civic engagement practices allow citizens to express opinions and communicate with parties through general (online petitions) or specific tools (national consultations).

We considered participatory practices that were advertised on the party's website and mentioned by the interviewees as a participatory practice of the party. It is important to note that in Hungary, the Law on Party Foundations (introduced in 2004 and based on the German model) enables parliamentary parties to rely exclusively on their party foundations to take care of educational functions; therefore, party-based events which have 'education purposes' in the case of parliamentary parties such as Fidesz (Tranzit Festival) or LMP (Eco-political Summer University) were not considered here to represent party participatory practices but activities of the party's foundations. With these events, parliamentary parties do not advertise their active participation because doing so would count as 'covert party funding', something that is prohibited by the Law on Party Foundations.

Table 1: The participatory practices of Hungarian parties

Party	Debate	Education	Direct decision	Civic engagement
MSZP			Primaries	
			Internal referendums	
			(online)	
Fidesz-MPSZ	Rallies			National Consultation
KDNP				
Jobbik	Street forums		Primaries	
LMP	Local clubs		Primaries	
			Internal referendums	
DK			Internal referendums	
			(online)	
Párbeszéd			Primaries	
Mi Hazánk	Rallies	Folk colleges		
MKKP	Local clubs	Folk colleges		

Momentum	Local clubs		Primaries	Online petitions
	Online forums			

Participatory practices

Debate-oriented practices include rallies, a series of events where the elite of the party travels from organization to organization. Rallies outside campaign periods differ from campaign rallies in terms of their deliberative character, as they have pre-announced topics (Böcskei, 2016), and participants have the chance to ask questions and make suggestions to politicians. Compared to rallies, street forums require less intensive mobilization, and one of the Jobbik interviewees defined them as 'street forums at a pre-announced time, where anyone can come to me and share their experiences, their opinions' (Interview 13). Debate-oriented practices also include local club events, and the meetings organized by local party branches which focus on local problems. At the latter, members can formulate opinions by means of argumentation or make concrete collective decisions by reaching consensus on small-scale project proposals that the local branch of the party can then implement. Local forums are also used to detect local problems, and some parties initiate local referendums based on them. The parties all reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the effect of social restrictions was tangible because online forums became popular. Online forums can be substitutes for deliberative events such as rallies or local events, and digitalization has affected all levels of party functioning: an interviewee noted that recently, "every institution is set up to be able to operate online when needed" (Interview 4).

In using professionalized campaign techniques to maximize votes most parties have given up their social functions, but some parties maintain educational functions. Inspired by the model of the Danish thinker N.S. Grundtvig, whose goal in the 1800s was to create a completely informal educational structure, folk college events enable party members and activists to travel, to spend a few days together, and to listen to experts on various topics. On the one hand, inviting experts on different topics as speakers enables the party "to build an intellectual circle around the party" (Interview 8); on the other hand, these events provide opportunities to party members to get together for a couple of days so "the essence of it is community building practically" (Interview 25).

Direct decision-making has gradually become part of Hungarian political practice. Since the fall of Communism, seven national referendums have been held. In general, direct democracy within most parties was limited because parties used to be "hinterland[s] of the

party elite than actual mass movements" (Körösényi, Tóth, and Török 2009, 200). MSZP has the longest tradition of offering decision making to members; indeed, the party's statute defines internal referendums (called party votes) as "the community right of active party members to make decisions". In the past decade several parties have introduced online intra-party referendums that enable party members "to get information and to vote on certain internal issues of the party" (Interview 5) in order to express direct opinions on specific policies.

Left wing parties (MSZP, Párbeszéd) started to promote open primaries as a candidate-centred approach to unite the fractured opposition during the municipal elections in 2019. Open primaries provide an opportunity to all voters to participate in the selection of representatives of opposition parties in public office, and the process is carried out jointly by several parties. Following two rounds of primaries, the winner forged unity among the fractured opposition parties (Dorosz 2020, 43) and enhanced opposition candidates' chances of winning against government candidates in the majoritarian electoral system. Opposition parties gained majorities in Budapest and in Hungary's other large cities. Following this result, six opposition parties (MSZP, Jobbik, LMP, DK, Párbeszéd and M) decided to coordinate their candidate selection via primaries for the 2022 parliamentary elections.

Parties also enable some forms of civic engagement and volunteering that do not require a strong affiliation to the organization. As an opposition party, Fidesz created the National Consultation in 2005. After the party joined the government in 2010, the consultations were transformed into a questionnaire sent by the government to Hungarian citizens by mail. It has since become a strategic instrument for mobilizing supporters in political struggles against 'the opponents', focusing on specific political or social crises in a way that has enhanced citizens' dissatisfaction towards Hungarian politics (e.g., poor economic development, immigration, lack of political alternatives, social welfare) (Batory and Svensson 2019). On several occasions post-2010, National Consultations in Hungary have been a preliminary phase either of a legislative act or a referendum. Meanwhile, the Momentum movement gives citizens a say in different matters via online petitions, and if a certain number of signatures are gathered on a particular proposal, it must be negotiated by different bodies of the party.

Party characteristics

The ideology makes little difference between parties in Hungary with respect to their participatory practices.[3] The evidence indicates that both left- and right-wing parties encourage debate-oriented participation, education, and civic engagement, but the practices are different in each case. The Hungarian left-wing political parties promote inclusiveness and equality, and motivate their members and activists to initiate activities. For example, local organizations are motivated to come up with their own initiatives, such as via local clubs and online forums, when organizing debates. The right-wing parties (Fidesz, Jobbik, Mi Hazánk) initiate debates in a top-down manner, from the central office of the party, in the form of rallies where the party elites travel from one local organization to the other. These serve as tools to keep the party organization in motion between electoral campaigns. The same difference is observable with respect to civic engagement practices, as the liberal Momentum promotes grassroot activities through petition signing, while the right-wing Fidesz uses centrally coordinated action in the form of the National Consultations. The major difference is in the use of direct democracy, as primaries and internal referendums are only used by left-wing parties, likely reflecting their inclusive approach in which members are encouraged to engage in decision-making.

The size of the parties is associated with different participatory practices in three out of the four categories covered in Table 1. The large parties Fidesz and Jobbik organize rallies, while small parties opt for local clubs or online forums to promote debates among their members or with the broader public. One possible explanation for the different approach is that large parties have sufficient resources to coordinate rallies, which are likely to create a larger impact within the membership, as they are often organized at the national level. With one exception (Mi Hazánk uses rallies), the small parties focus exclusively on small-scale action taken at a local level. The civic engagement practices also differ, with Fidesz using large-scale events requiring extensive resources (National Consultations) and the small party Momentum using online petitions that require minimal resources. Only the small parties use educational participatory practices in the form of folk colleges, which can increase members' knowledge and loyalty, and encourage citizens to join the ranks of the party. There is no difference between the large and small parties in the direct democracy category: MSZP is a large party and uses both primaries and referendums, while three small parties (LMP, DK and Párbeszéd) use one of these two practices.

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[3] A functional equivalent of ideology is the party family. We use the former in the analysis because it captures more variation in terms of parties' positioning in the political space. The results presented in the paper also hold true for an analysis of party families (including those belonging to European parties) instead of ideology.

Opposition parties use more participatory practices. The education and direct decision categories are exclusively used by these parties, while in terms of civic engagement the specific practices differ between the incumbent Fidesz-MPSZ and the other parties. The governing party uses rallies, in common with Jobbik and Mi Hazánk, both in opposition.

We turn now to the participatory practices used by old and new parties. The old parties are the only ones which use direct decision practices. This may be somewhat counterintuitive given that many newly-emerged parties often have a strong component of connectivity and member involvement (Bennett, Segerberg, and Knüpfer 2018). One possible explanation for the use of direct decision practices by old parties is that their internal procedures are more developed, and they can ask for members' input into candidates or policies. In contrast, newly-emerged parties may struggle to form their organization, and inclusive decision-making may not be a priority issue in their first years of existence. Education practices are used exclusively by new parties, likely to stabilize their membership and increase its loyalty. Both old and new parties use rallies and local clubs as forms of debate-oriented practices, but they differ in terms of civic engagement.

Table 2: Party Characteristics and Participatory Practices in Hungary

	Debate	**Education**	**Direct decision**	**Civic engagement**
Ideology	Different forms	Same forms	Left-wing only	Different forms
Size	Different forms	Small parties only	Same forms	Different forms
Incumbency	Same forms	Opposition only	Opposition only	Different forms
Party age	Same forms	New parties only	Old parties only	Different forms

The summary in Table 2 reflects several important relationships between party characteristics and participatory practices. The debate-oriented practices differ across parties according to their ideology and size, but incumbency and age do not make a difference. The education practices are particular to the small and new parties that are in opposition. Direct decision procedures are a feature of left-wing, old and opposition Hungarian parties. Civic engagement differs across all four dimensions, but that variation is mainly due to the fact that the two parties using them are completely different (Fidesz-MPSZ and Momentum).

Internal and external dynamics
The analysis of internal and external dynamics presented here is derived exclusively from interviews and focuses on the reasons why Hungarian parties use participatory practices. Table

3 summarizes these reasons, which to a significant extent match the categories used in Tables 1 and 2. The interviews reveal that parties use participatory practices to enhance debate, educate citizens, provide a voice in the decision-making process (direct decision), improve political engagement, and ensure the functionality of the party. The internal dimension targets the party members, while the external dimension applies to voters more broadly.

Let us start with the idea behind debates. Some small parties (LMP, MKKP, Momentum) use specific participatory practices such as local clubs to promote debates, reach out to the electorate, and receive input from citizens. Mi Hazánk and MKKP educate their members in order to shape their ideological views and policy preferences. An elected representative on the ground from MKKP explained how participation enables the implementation of the party's decisions in a non-hierarchical system (Interview 12):

> Accuracy and predictability in a hierarchical system is much clearer (…) in a participatory system (...) a managerial or coordinating role is gained on the basis of capacities and competencies (…) If, say, you organize a team and put work behind it, you've actually done something. We also have a party system that is similar to other parties in terms of logistics, legal operations, and financial order, but the rest is a great experiment.

Fidesz-MPSZ uses the National Consultations to consolidate their position in government by shaping the political agenda via 'push polling' citizens. This way, the government can regularly report on the number of respondents that have filled in the questionnaire, and can emphasize how much it appreciates the feedback it receives from citizens. In this sense, the practice used by Fidesz-MPSZ has a dual external function: receiving input from citizens, and cultivating a democratic image (see Table 3). New parties also make use of external participatory practices to establish a connection with the electorate and to gain inputs from citizens. According to a member of the party in the central office from Momentum, "If we provide this opportunity to citizens, things will be in a different light and we can get extra inputs, opinions, ideas that would have escaped our attention" (Interview 4). Participatory practices like rallies are also suitable to recruit new members, as another interviewee explained: "during forums we can meet our supporters and recruit members" (Interview 8). A further reason that emerged during an interview (Interview 6) was that due to opposition parties' fragmentation, and partly due to their internal problems, those parties decided to provide external participation opportunities to citizens to close the gap between the party itself and voters.

An elected member in public office from DK explained that receiving inputs from citizens is important. Talking about the period when the former prime minister and several members of the party elite were in government, interviewee 5 commented that:

In retrospect, many of us felt that we had not paid enough attention to the views of citizens. We governed based on abstract theories and thought we knew what was good because we had a lot of information. We didn't care about the impulses coming towards us. Learning from this (…) it is specifically our goal to gain support for the issues we represent. (…) So, we think it is from this attitude that DK actually succeeds in growing from a 1% party to a 16% party."

Participatory practices can also educate members, because as was explicitly explained by a party leader from Párbeszéd, by taking part in them "one learns how to think through the different alternatives before making decisions, one can see that not everything is black and white" (Interview 3). Participatory practices are also used externally for community building; for example, MKKP organizes creative, small-scale projects implemented locally in order to organize local communities.

The direct decisions emerging from participatory practices bring several benefits to the party. Párbeszéd promotes primaries "because, on the one hand, participation is a key message of the party, on the other hand, in organizational terms, it is in our interest" (Interview 3). An elected representative of the Párbeszéd party in central office explained that "for primaries an infrastructure must be created, which in practice means volunteers, existing communities. Where the opposition is in a vacuum, primaries help creating an opposition organization" (Interview 22).

Table 3: Internal and External Dynamic and Participatory Practices in Hungary

	Debate	**Education**	**Direct decision**	**Political engagement**	**Functionality**
Internal	Legitimacy (M) Party modernization (Párbeszéd)	Educate members (Párbeszéd)	Party leadership selection (Párbeszéd, Jobbik) Prevents conflicts (MSZP) Avoid monopoly of party units (MSZP)	Re-election (Fidesz-MPSZ) Motivate members (Momentum)	Functioning during pandemics (M) Gains time (Párbeszéd)
External	Input from citizens (M) Close the gap (Párbeszéd)	Community building (MKKP)	Cooperation of opposition parties (Párbeszéd)	Recruit members (Mi Hazánk)	Democratic image (DK, Fidesz-MPSZ, MSZP) Media coverage (Mi Hazánk)

An elected representative of the MSZP party in public office cited operability as a reason for the use of party referendums, because they enable direct decision making without delegates:

"it is still a party with a large membership, it is still difficult to find a venue for a congress of nearly five hundred people where delegates can get together" (Interview 15). An expert from the party explained that "in any organization where there are resources, there is a visible or less visible way for the organization to influence decisions. For example, delegates are counted, county leaders are consulted, and so on", and therefore, direct decision making can "break up a party's decision-making structure" (Interview 1).

Through arranging open primaries, opposition parties can reduce the negative effects of inter-party competition in the public sphere and improve their democratic image. One interviewee claimed that it "gives a candidate direct legitimacy against the organizational interests of parties" (Interview 22). Participatory practices can also be used to modernize a party "in an information-rich world where politics needs to adapt to the 21st century" (Interview 7). Such practices are also useful to avoid a monopoly of party units because they can "break a party's decision-making structures as participatory tools put decisions directly into members' hands" (Interview 1), and "a lot of conflicts can be prevented with it." (Interview 17). Inclusive practices can be also useful in efforts to increase *the quality of selection of party leadership* as they theoretically open the door for any member to become a leader within the party (Interview 13).

In terms of political engagement, Fidesz-MPSZ and Jobbik have large party organizations and use rallies to enable their party elites to keep in touch with local organizations. These rallies keep members and activists motivated between elections and prevent the leadership from breaking away from the party membership (Interview 11); moreover, they seek to persuade and motivate their members. As explicitly outlined by a Fidesz party elite, they aim to mobilize supporters within the party: "everyone who strives for any position in Fidesz depends on the party members, so whoever is not able to win their sympathy has no chance" (Interview 11). Parties with fewer resources such as Momentum also use participation as a means by which to motivate members:

> We can only do this without money in such a playing field if those who work with us in the community do it honestly, out of enthusiasm. For them to feel motivated, their opinion must be an integral part of the decision-making process. This is where the importance of participation at Momentum started and has been confirmed by the last three years (Interview 9).

Momentum promotes online deliberative practices because online petitions give their membership a direct say in the decisions of different bodies of the party (Interview 4). In relation to enhancing the cooperation of opposition parties, one respondent from Párbeszéd

considers participatory democracy as a weapon against Fidesz. For Párbeszéd, primaries are a good option because on the one hand, participation is a key message of the party's politics; and on the other hand, opposition parties can legitimize their selection process of candidates for the 2022 parliamentary elections. For primaries to happen an infrastructure must be created, which in practice requires volunteers and existing political communities. In districts where the opposition is weak, primaries can also enhance the development of organizational structures for each opposition party. The latter can also gain visibility (which taps into the functionality reason outlined in Table 3): referendums and online referendums can be used to attract the attention of the media to those issues which the party deems important, or to orient their membership to take direct decisions in political affairs. Recently, open primaries were introduced not only in order to unite the fragmented party elites of the opposition parties and to select their candidates for the 2022 parliamentary elections, but also to increase the social embeddedness of those parties: "Opposition parties, partly due to fragmentation, are not really embedded in society, and there is a gap between voters and parties" (Interview 6). The optional use of resources was also mentioned as a reason for the introduction of primaries (Interview 22):

> The opposition starts from a terrible resource disadvantage, it cannot afford not to choose the best candidates. Fidesz can afford not to launch the best candidate, because behind Fidesz there is the embeddedness, money, media, resources. The opposition, however, doesn't have the same resources and can't waste what little it has.

Parties also use participatory practices for functionality reasons. The optimal allocation of resources is important for parties; therefore, gaining time is a key to success, and participatory tools, especially digital ones, are very useful in achieving that aim. According to one interviewee, "with the technological advances of the future, more and more citizens will have time to participate in politics. But, if we do not want citizens to spend this liberated time in virtual reality, with games, watching series, then incorporating them into political decision-making is a very important activity" (Interview 7). The COVID-19 pandemic has also drawn the attention of politicians to the question of how parties can function during pandemics: "most parties cannot function because it is not codified in their rules and they don't have any practice on how to conduct a local assembly online. In the other parties, it absolutely doesn't work, and they're not even prepared for these 21st century challenges, while we've practically already started with it all" (Interview 4). An elected representative of MSZP in public office explained that party leaders know the party structures well, but have less contact with citizens. The use of participatory practices can boost MSZP's democratic image (Interview 15).

A respondent belonging to Mi Hazánk mentioned that the main goal of organizing rallies was to offer citizens "a lot of direct encounters because we are a small party and we can't even appear in the media with a weight appropriate to our size" (Interview 8). The lack of resources often means that new parties get little media coverage, and the use of participatory practices can balance that out: "since we did not have a great opportunity in the media, we are active on social media and offline" (Interview 9).

Conclusions

This paper aimed to explain why political parties use participatory practices. It focused on Hungary to provide initial exploratory testing of its proposed analytical framework, which has three dimensions: party characteristics, internal dynamics, and external dynamics. The three main findings can be summarized as follows. First, Hungarian political parties use a variety of participatory practices ranging from traditional forms (rallies and local clubs) to more contemporary options (online discussion forums, folk colleges, and online internal referendums). None of these forms is dominant, and many political parties use more than one. This result adds nuance to previous findings about the provision of such practices in Hungary. For example, the country scores very low on the "plebiscitary intra-party democracy" index built by the Political Parties Database (Poguntke et al. 2016), but we show that several Hungarian parties use direct decision-making. Although there are many possible reasons for this divergence in findings, such as the number of parties considered or the time frame of the analysis, this observation reflects a dynamic use of participatory practices in recent periods. Second, the participatory practices can be clustered into four main categories according to their purpose: debate-oriented, education, direct decision, and civic engagement. These four categories refine the initial analytical model derived from the literature (shown in Figure 1), and some of them can be explained with reference to party characteristics such as ideology, size, incumbency, and age. Third, we identify five reasons why political parties use participatory practices: to initiate debates, to educate citizens, to promote direct decisions, to enhance political participation, and to ensure functionality, especially in difficult times. These reasons cut across the parties (Table 3), so the general picture is complex. Old parties use participatory practices to maintain the democratic image of the party (functionality), while several new parties use them to substitute for party organization in the party's relation with voters (debates), or as a tool to organize themselves more effectively (direct decisions).

These results have broader implications for party politics beyond the single case study covered in this paper. For the reasons covered in the research design, Hungary was a most likely case to study in order to understand the use of participatory practices by political parties. Nevertheless, the results can still be generalized to other countries where the special context is absent because none of the motivations to use participatory practices found here are linked to the illiberal setting, the dominance of one political party, or the coordinated mobilization of opposition parties. At a theoretical level, we therefore propose an analytical framework that can be applied to other political settings to explain why parties adopt participatory practices. Our analysis identifies several useful categories of participatory practices and the reasons for using them, which could form the basis for further research. These categories are not country sensitive, although some of the analysis was conducted inductively, and they may be valuable in comparative studies.

Empirically, we illustrate that political parties use participatory practices with several purposes in mind, thus enhancing the existing knowledge in two ways. First, political parties have several motives for adopting participatory practices, which vary across parties. Despite this, the range of motives is relatively small and contrasts partially with the comprehensive list outlined in previous studies (Scarrow 2015; Bennett, Segerberg, and Knüpfer 2018; Barberà et al. 2021) or presented to the public by parties. Second, the motives do not include practical considerations such as cutting costs that are usually associated with the use of digital tools. Parties appear instead to be driven by broader concerns related to citizen engagement and by giving members a voice in internal and external decision-making processes. Moreover, in those settings in which opposition parties lack access to government office for long periods, participatory intra-party democratization practices could help them to recover from electoral defeat.

This study has two limitations that can be addressed by further research. On the one hand, the analytical framework was tested here in an exploratory manner on a relatively small number of observations. Future studies could test the framework in a larger N either by expanding the number of countries (cases) or by conducting surveys among party elites in the same country. Either of these two avenues would provide the opportunity to control for other variables that may influence parties' reasons for using participatory practices. Second, although they are the decision-makers when using participatory practices, elites could be biased towards norm expression in interviews. Future studies could complement this approach and include the opinions of party members and/or voters about the motives for participatory

practices. Such an analysis would allow a comparison of citizens' beliefs about these motives and would help to build understanding of whether they see them as genuine efforts to engage and communicate, or as attempts to influence and mislead the electorate.

Appendix 1: The Profile of the Hungarian Parties Included in the Analysis

Party (year of formation)	Ideology	MPs (#)	MEPs (#)	Mayors (#)	Local councilors (#)	County councilors (#)	Members (#)
MSZP (1989)	Social Democracy	15	1	47	329	33	20000
Fidesz-MPSZ (1988)	National Conservatism	116	12	599	2177	245	36800
KDNP (1989)	Christian Democracy	17	1				10000
Jobbik (2003)	Hungarian nationalism	20	1	19	350	52	13100
LMP (2008)	Green Politics	6	0	0	61	0	600
DK (2011)	Social Liberalism	9	4	27	174	45	9200
Párbeszéd (2013)	Green Left	5	0	2	28	6	200
Mi Hazánk (2016)	Hungarian nationalism	3**	0	2	21	8	1000*
MKKP (2006)	Anti-establishment (joke) party	0	0	0	4	0	200*
Momentum (2017)	Conservative Liberalism	0	2	3	144	24	3000*

Source: Kovarek and Soós (2017), and own data collection.

MPs = Members of Parliament, MEPs = Members of the European Parliament.

Data for members comes from 2015 with two exceptions where data comes from 2020 (*).

** Officially they are independent MPs who are members of Mi Hazánk.

Appendix 2: The list of interviews used in the analysis (in chronological order)

Interview code	Position	Age	Party	Length (min)	Date of the interview
Interview 1	expert	37	MSZP	79	16.03.2020
Interview2	elected representative, party in central office	34	LMP	46	21.03.2020.
Interview 3	expert	50	Párbeszéd	80	24.03.2020
Interview 4	elected representative, party in central office	27	M	45	26.03.2020.
Interview 5	elected representative, party in central office	42	DK	67	31.03.2020.
Interview 6	elected representative, party in central office	44	Párbeszéd	40	01.04.2020.
Interview 7	elected representative, party in central office	32	Párbeszéd	26	02.04.2020.
Interview 8	elected representative of party in public office	33	Mi Hazánk	22	17.04.2020.
Interview 9	elected representative of party in public office	33	M	56	21.04.2020.
Interview 10	elected representative party on the ground	50	Párbeszéd	65	22.04.2020.
Interview 11	elected representative party on the ground	67	Fidesz-KDNP	55	23.04.2020.
Interview 12	elected representative party on the ground	33	MKKP	65	24.04.2020.
Interview 13	elected representative of party in public office	36	Jobbik	45	13.05.2020.
Interview 14	expert	49	LMP	87	14.05.2020.
Interview 15	elected representative of party in public office	37	MSZP	71	26.05.2020.
Interview 16	elected representative, party in central office	40	MKKP	60	31.05.2020.
Interview 17	elected representative party on the ground	48	MSZP	45	03.06.2020.
Interview 18	elected representative party on the ground	65	DK	38	03.06.2020.
Interview 19	elected representative party on the ground	40	MKKP	96	11.06.2020.
Interview 20	expert	30	M	40	11.06.2020.
Interview 21	elected representative party on the ground	53	M	38	15.06.2020.
Interview 22	elected representative, party in central office	45	Párbeszéd	24	30.06.2020.
Interview 23	expert	65	MSZP	104	01.07.2020
Interview 24	elected representative party on the ground	44	Jobbik	35	06.07.2020.
Interview 25	elected representative party on the ground	26	Mi Hazánk	57	09.07.2020.
Interview 26	elected representative of party in public office	45	MSZP	35	16.07.2020.

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