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Political integration mechanisms in Hungary (2010–2022)

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Abstract

Since 2010, Fidesz has won four electoral victories in Hungary with a constitutional majority. In this paper, we argue that the main reason behind this overwhelming electoral success is the specific pattern of political integration that has evolved in recent years. The Hungarian case, as a consequence, may also act as a basis for a theoretical step forward in understanding the role of political integration in de-democratization processes. To understand the role of political integration, we explain how the Habermas-based political integration framework relates to the types of political culture, and then, with the help of representative data collection from 2018 and 2021, we define the integration groups and, using these, examine the party preferences and participation patterns that have developed in today's Hungary. The Orbán regime successfully generates diffuse mass support: this is embedded in multiple social groups, although none of the integration groups can be considered the sole or primary supporters of the system.

Keywords: political integration; party preferences; participation; Hungary

1 Introduction

This study aims to increase understanding of the mechanism of political integration in an increasingly autocratic regime by examining political participation in Hungary. More precisely, our paper investigates how the potential for political participation in groups, defined by their level of social integration, might serve as a mechanism for providing legitimacy for the Orbán regime.

Earlier studies show (see Kovách et al., 2018; Gerő et al., 2020, Gerő & Szabó, 2020) that the political integration of Hungarian society represents a terrain of social integration, independent of other factors such as the labour market or interpersonal relationships. In this study, we take a step towards theorising political integration, understood as one of the – but not the only – system-level integration processes.[1]

[1] See also, for example, redistributive processes, Gerő & Kovách (2022).

This is particularly important in relation to the Hungarian transformation of the political regime. Since the 2010 elections, the two-block party system previously considered to be stable has been replaced by the hegemony of a large party (Körösényi, 2015; Gyulai, 2017; Tóth & Szabó, 2018). As applied to this newly emerging regime, earlier-used stratification models and different sociodemographic factors do not provide a sufficient explanation of why and how the political dimensions of integration are evolving either collectively or separately (Gerő & Szabó, 2017; Gerő & Sik, 2020) As of now, a wide 'coalition' has been formed between different social groups supporting the incumbent, mainly based on their identity and to a smaller extent, the benefits provided to them by the system (see Gerő & Sik, 2020; Huszár, 2022) This also means that political integration mechanisms operate essentially independently of other factors. Political parties and (especially the incumbent) political leaders are at the heart of the process (see also Huszár & Szabó, 2023).

It is important to note that the question is not whether politics or political institutions play a role in social integration but *how,* and what the relationship is between political integration and other social integration mechanisms. Based on previous research (Gerő & Szabó, 2017; Kovách et al., 2016; 2018), we argue that politics has become an independent integration factor in Hungary. This contradicts the traditional view of political sociology, according to which political parties translate political cleavages (conflicts embedded in the social structure) in the competition between parties and thereby mediate them into political and state institutions (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). In developing our concept, following the theory of Jürgen Habermas (2005), we see political integration as a form of colonisation of the Lifeworld by the (political) system.

The current study reviews earlier empirical work and moves towards a dynamic analysis by adding more recent empirical findings on political participation and electoral behaviour. First, we present the conceptual frameworks of political integration, then analyse the relationship between forms of political participation and the groups thus formulated based on the integration model (Kovách et al., 2016, 2018; Gerő et al., 2020) and party preferences and conditions of political participation between 2017 and 2021. By exploring these dynamics, the study also contributes to our knowledge of how the Fidesz–KDNP government[2] consolidates the Orbán regime (Körösényi, 2015) through political integration.

2 Conceptual framework for political integration and the role of political participation

Our concept of political integration is based on Jürgen Habermas' work, the *Theory of Communicative Action*. Therefore, to arrive at an understanding of political integration, we shall review the concepts of interpersonal and systemic integration and their relationship as used by Habermas.

Habermas first uses the first elements of the basic concepts of his later work in a monograph entitled *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas, 1999). He clearly distinguishes between the terminology of the public and the private and that of

[2] Fidesz – Magyar Polgári Szövetség: Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance, the Hungarian governing party.

state and society. The difference between public and private is a precursor to the distinction between the System and Lifeworld, two key concepts used later in the *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 2005). According to Habermas, modern mass societies are divided into two major spheres: the System, which includes the economy and the state (the public sphere), and the Lifeworld, which consists of the private sphere and the terrain of informal relationships surrounding and interweaving it and includes knowledge based on linguistic and value-based socialisation processes. To simplify, the System provides the goods necessary to satisfy the needs of the mass society and the administrative institutions required for its organisation and operation. In contrast, the Lifeworld provides the practices, language, and identity necessary for operating the System and everyday life.

A specific feature of modern societies is that a boundary between the private and the public sphere, or between the System and the Lifeworld, has been created. According to the coordination mechanisms of the System, aspects of efficiency (goal-rationality), while in the Lifeworld, mutual understanding (communicative rationality) dominates. In Habermas' view, the Lifeworld is constructed from three processes of structural components, culture, society, and personality, with interpersonal integration affecting most of the structural elements of life.

In late capitalism, increasingly complex systemic regulatory processes and mediums (primarily money and power) penetrate the Lifeworld, impeding understanding, and subject the latter to the constraints of material reproduction, threatening to damage the everyday action, that is, the three components of the Lifeworld. Habermas calls this process the 'technicalisation' or the colonisation of the Lifeworld'. During colonisation, the system operates mechanisms that simultaneously integrate and disintegrate the Lifeworld according to its own goals. The basis of the System's integration mechanism is ultimately that its survival, even in late capitalism, depends on the Lifeworld. According to Habermas, late capitalism has a stronger need for legitimacy than the state of liberal capitalism and earlier political arrangements. The legitimacy of the System and the common orientations and interpretive frameworks necessary for it – which determine the state of the social system as a whole – are supported by the Lifeworld. System integration thus reflects mechanisms aimed at creating the widest possible 'content-diffuse mass support,' or unconditional mass-scale system support.

Habermas attributes the possibility of control and resistance to actors in the Lifeworld. Citizens may, consciously or not, oppose the colonisation of the Lifeworld by being unwilling to cooperate with the System or withdrawing their support and loyalty. Support might mean having a supportive attitude to the operation of the state and economy (seeing their operation as necessary or as something positive) or might be enacted through political participation. The trick is that participation itself might work as a legitimising factor: it does not need to be supportive of the state. For example, a high level of participation in elections provides legitimacy for the System, while participation in protests or actively participating in civil society might also signal support for the System itself.

Thus, the purpose of the System is to ensure that citizens participate in the political process in an 'appropriate' way and quantity, generating legitimacy for the System. The explicit goal of the System is to develop and consolidate forms of mobilisation and participation in late capitalism that, while not endangering diffuse mass support, provide reassurance to the actors in the Lifeworld and present opportunities for resistance to the System.

The System thus ensures – through the institutions of formal democracy, often at the constitutional level – the operation of mechanisms in legitimate forms (that is, controlled and maintained by the System) of resistance against the System. This civic privatism, as Habermas calls it, allows the System to start and control both integrating and disintegrating processes (Szabó & Oross, 2017; Habermas, 2005).

Based on Habermas, we assume that of the various dimensions of political integration, ideological and value dimensions can strongly influence political integration as instruments of the System, strengthening political cohesion in society while not necessarily reducing conflicts in it. During the current wave of autocratization (in Central and Eastern Europe and elsewhere), populist political leaders play a crucial role, and one of the main elements of their repertoire is consistently striving to provoke conflicts and produce images of enemies (Arato, 2019; Gerő & Szabó, 2017). These conflicts, on the one hand, polarise the political community but, on the other, create large, integrated political camps with diverse social backgrounds primarily based on identity (McCoy et al., 2018).

Bartolini and Mair (1990) agree that emotions increasingly play a role in the functioning of political integration and that leaders have a major role in the functioning of integration. The naming of various social, economic, and political problems and the reasons for these can take on primary functions in political leaders' interpretations. The emotional mobilisation of political communities can be awakened not only by the presentation of social and economic problems but also by the presentation of dangers lurking in the community (Ost, 2004), especially when their causes appear as personified enemies (Berkowitz, 1994; Gerő et al., 2017).

Based on this, we consider political integration and its integration mechanisms those political actions, attitudes, norms, and ideologies that:

a) increase the political cohesion of society
b) but reduce the chance of political communication breakdowns or political conflict between the incumbent and its constituency (thus maintaining a clear flow of vertical communication),
c) but block horizontal communication (between voting camps)
d) and, at the same time, promote the broadest possible legitimacy of the political system.

Therefore, the system's legitimacy is at the heart of our concept. Thus, in a nutshell, political integration means that the system can operate complex political-economic-social processes in such a way that its support does not necessarily depend precisely or exclusively on the actual performance of the System.

According to Balázs Kiss (2015), institutions of political integration are nation-states, independent institutions for the common good, the mass media, and political parties. Without going into detail about the role of the nation-state and its institutions, it is worth examining the functions of parties. The integration functions of parties are almost incomprehensibly broad and increasingly differentiated and are perhaps the most important channel connecting the System and the Lifeworld (Kiss, 2015, p. 97). It is difficult to imagine research on political integration without any reflection on parties, party supporters, the members of subcultures associated with parties, or party leaders, who often become rigid symbols. Opinions about parties might be aggregated in party preferences (and, of course, votes in national elections).

However, political participation belongs not only to parties but to civil society organisations and social movements as well. In their seminal book, Cohen and Arato (1992) define political and civil society as two mediating spheres between the System and Lifeworld. Both are associational spheres, yet political society, consisting of mainly political parties, is more similar to the System in its coordination mechanisms, while civil society, in principle, engages in coordination mechanisms based on communicative action. In short, political parties always have to aim for voter maximisation. Thus, they need to prioritise among issues based on the responsiveness of their constituency. On the other hand, civil society organisations and social movements can stick to one issue, or certain values even when society does not respond. However, since organisational survival is also important for civil society actors, civil society actors also understand goal rationality.

Political and civil society are interconnected in different ways. First, Arato and Cohen originally emphasised that in 1989–1990, most transitional political parties emerged from civil society. Second, civil society actors, organisations, and social movements engage with the state and political parties in several ways in a democratic polity. They apply public pressure through protest, mobilisation, and public statements, and they negotiate with the executive on various (international, national, local) levels, even through consultative bodies (Della Porta, 2020; Edwards, 2009; Tarrow & Petrova, 2007). That is why Cohen and Arato (1992) assumed that civil society could counterbalance colonisation, defend the Lifeworld from the System, and even democratise the latter.

Recently, the scholarship on civil society, however, has also recognised that populist and autocratic leaders might build on movements at the emerging phase of the development of their populist party and when they are in power (Arato & Cohen, 2021; Hellmeier & Bernhard, 2023) and they may attack democratic institutions and aim to co-opt civil society using various techniques (Fejős & Néményi, 2020; Gerő, 2020; Lorch & Bunk, 2017). The building of movements and mobilisations in civil society, as well as the co-opting of civil society of populist actors, are, in the Habermasian framework, acts of colonisation.

Consequently, mobilisation and political participation play an important role not only in a democracy but are important for emerging populist leaders and remain important in populist or autocratizing regimes as well. Of course, the patterns of political participation expected in a democracy or induced by democratic actors will differ from those we might expect in a populist regime or from populist actors. Thus, political mobilisation can be seen as an active form of system integration (Kiss, 2015). The mobilisation process is integrative, as it mobilises, organises, and involves specific layers and organises different and distant communities of the Lifeworld. In this sense, mobilisation is nothing more than a medium, a channel through which integration takes place.

Teorell (2006) defines three approaches to political participation in a regime that satisfies at least the formal requirement of a democracy: 1) the elitist view, when the citizen's role is only to express preferences about the ruling elite, 2) the 'influencing' approach, when citizens aim to influence policies through various means of participation, and 3) the deliberative approach, when participation aims at discussing issues concerning the polity. Obviously, while the first approach emphasises electoral participation, the other approaches allow more room for various types of participation, such as protests, boycotts, or deliberative action.

Furthermore, forms of political participation, as referred to above, might be connected to different views of the role of the citizens, which means that the prevalence of different forms of political participation might signal these different cultures as well. Thus, the starting point of our present analysis is that social integration may also be reflected in the values associated with politics and its institutions. According to the literature, the political development and level of integration of society are correlated with different political cultures (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dalton & Welzel, 2014; Pye & Verba, 2015).

Almond and Verba (1963) identified three types of political cultures: Parochial, subject and participant. In a parochial political culture, citizens are mainly passive; their only concern is the central government. In a subject political culture, citizens see themselves as part of the political community but only as subjects of the central power. In contrast, only in participant political culture do they see themselves as agents of political processes. However, this last type of political culture does not mean that citizens challenge the political elites: they participate but without questioning the role of the elites in governing the democratic institutions, which means that they will mainly practice their right to vote and engage in formal civil society organisations and local communities Dalton and Welzel (2014) challenge this view, differentiating between the allegiant and assertive citizen. Allegiant political culture is a mixture of subject and participatory political culture, which is based on support for power and the political system and various forms of expressions of trust, while the assertive citizen is suspicious of the elite and the state. In terms of political participation, the different political cultures have different consequences: citizens acquiring a parochial political culture will restrain themselves from any type of political participation, allegiant citizens might mainly participate in electoral activities and, according to Almond and Verba (1963), associational engagement. The assertive citizen will be the only one to add protest-type activities to their political repertoire.

Of course, the differentiation of electoral, non-electoral and civic participation is analytical. In many cases, as we explained earlier, electoral mobilisation is interconnected with civil society initiatives, either in the form of bottom-up or top-down mobilisations. Populist leaders are liable to build movements around them or try to embed their political parties into civil society. In contrast, with social movements, civil society organisations, trade unions, and even political parties might serve as the backbone of the organisational work and resource mobilisation (Diani, 1992; McAdam & Scott, 2005).

However, the recent literature on populist mobilisation suggests that citizens' support for populist actors and even for autocrats yields political participation, even protest-like activities (e.g., participation in mass demonstrations). Thus, in an increasingly autocratic regime, it is important to determine the level of the different forms of political participation and how they change.

3 Political participation under the Orbán regime

In the Hungarian political system, most types of non-violent political participation are formally allowed by legislation. This has not changed much since 2010. However, Fidesz has replaced all the important regulations about political participation: they introduced new regulations on civil society and the right to association in 2011, changed the electoral

law in 2013, and changed the right to assembly in 2018. In addition, after 2013, the government campaigned against civil society organisations, which they perceived as a threat to the main governmental narratives, or fit nurtured enemy images. These campaigns included media campaigns, public harassment, new regulations against human rights organisations, organisations working with the Roma, immigrants, and women's rights, and sometimes even environmental protection (Buzogány et al., 2022; Gerő et al, 2023; Krizsán & Sebestyén, 2019; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021; Torma, 2016).

Funding and consultations became ad-hoc, favouring selected circles of organisations (Kapitány, 2019; Roggeband & Krizsán, 2021; Szikra et al., 2020). Organisations organising strikes or protests against government policies and similar protests are often framed as pawns of the opposition or international, liberal forces. Protest activities are generally delegitimised by pro-government media (Susánszky et al., 2022). Therefore, although formally nothing restricts non-violent political participation, the government has closed all the formerly established channels of social consultation, and, through discourse – i.e., some of the regulations and campaigns against civil society organisations and protests – it actively discourages political (and civil) engagement. In parallel with this process, loyal or pro-government organisations are favoured, and programs have been initiated to finance non-political (mainly sports and culture) organisations.

However, this does not mean that forms of political participation are limited to electoral participation. On the contrary, civil society organisations that were earlier engaged in negotiations, expert work and lobbying turn to community organising and protest activities (Buzogány et al., 2022; Gerő et al., 2023). Fidesz also organises large demonstrations from time to time and tries to mobilise its constituency by organising the aforementioned large demonstrations (Metz, 2015; Susánszky et al., 2016) or uses other top-down, vertical tools of mobilisation, such as the so-called 'national consultations' (Bocskor, 2018). Thus, it seems that in an increasingly autocratic system, the different forms of political participation also have a role in creating the legitimacy of or challenging the system, which implies that political integration goes together with different forms of political participation, according to the different constituencies, or, in our case, the different groups in our integration model.

The political situation underwent fundamental changes between 2018 and 2021, and substantial shifts took place in party preferences (Szabó & Gerő, 2022). The dominant governing party, Fidesz–KDNP, won the general election in 2018 by a constitutional supermajority. Preference changes can be explained by the 2020 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the most significant global pandemic since the Spanish flu (1918/1919). Hungary had one of the highest pandemic-related death rates in the world (around 45,000 deaths between 01/03/2020 and 31/03/2022). The two most substantial waves of the pandemic were in November–December 2020 and March–April 2021, when more than 20,000 Hungarians died.[3] The scale of this is clearly illustrated by noting that this figure represents more than half the annual deaths in a 'normal' or 'peaceful year'. Despite these horrible data, Hungarian society has been positive – or at least not negative – about the government's handling of the epidemic (see Körösényi et al., 2020).

[3] Source: Worldometer Coronavirus cases, Hungary https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/hungary/#graph-deaths-daily last accessed 2024.02.06.

The opposition parties reacted to the political changes. Six opposition parties[4] announced their close electoral collaboration in December 2020. Between 18/09/2021 and 16/10/2021, the opposition parties, in cooperation with NGOs, organised Hungary's first such pre-election process. In a two-round pre-election procedure, voters selected individual representative candidates for 106 electoral districts, and a non-partisan prime ministerial candidate was also established. As a result of the cooperation, a joint list was drawn up (see Szabó, 2022). The crisis and the political changes could also have affected the outcome of political integration mechanisms. The results of the election, however, did not provide any evidence to support the latter hypotheses.

4 Data and methods

The empirical part of our study is mainly descriptive. As a first step, we analyse the changes in party affiliation in the integration groups between 2018 and 2021. In the second step, we focus on the participatory dimension. We examine the level of political participation in the groups in the integration model between 2018 and 2021. Each analysis is based on the same nationally representative surveys conducted in 2018 and 2021 by the Mobility Centre of Excellence at the Centre for Social Sciences,

The integration model is what Kovách and co-authors (2016; 2018) constructed in response to the challenges of classical stratification models, especially those based on occupation (see, for example, Kovách, 2006). This model focuses on measuring three levels of social integration: interpersonal, social, and system-level. The interpersonal level of social integration is measured by the number of intimate ties, the diversity of weak ties, and subjective exclusion. Social integration is measured by labour market integration and membership in civil society organisations. In contrast, system-level integration is captured by the degree of political participation, trust in institutions and norm-compliance.[5] The model was created using latent class analysis, using data from a survey conducted in 2015 for the first time, and data collection and the model's computation were repeated in 2018 and 2021.[6] The measurements of the surveys conducted in 2018 and 2021 are the same. However, we are aware that using the latent class model limits the possibility of making comparisons between the different years.

In both years, the team decided to accept a similar seven-group version category of the model. However, because of the latent class analysis and the social changes, these

[4] The six opposition parties that cooperated:
Demokratikus Koalíció, DK: Democratic Coalition Party (Hungary);
Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, Jobbik: Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary;
Lehet Más a Politika, Magyarország Zöld Pártja, LMP: Politics Can Be Different Hungarian Green Party;
Momentum Mozgalom, Momentum: Momentum Movement;
Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP: Hungarian Social Party;
Párbeszéd: Dialogue for Hungary.

[5] For a detailed explanation of the variables that were used, see Kovách et al. (2016; 2018) or Kovách and Kristóf (this issue).

[6] The data was collected within the framework of the MTA Excellence Cooperation Programme *Mobility Research Centre* project. Two large sample face-to-face surveys were carried out in 2018 and 2021.

were somewhat different in 2021 (see Table 1). The *relationship-rich, politically active, and locally integrated* groups, distinguishable from other groups particularly by their high level of political participation and higher institutional trust, are considered elite groups or 'over-integrated'.

Of the under-integrated groups, the political activity of the *norm-conform disintegrated* is minimal; they engage in virtually no political activity other than electoral participation. Finally, the last group, the *excluded under-integrated* or in 2021, *at risk of disintegration,* accept the violation of norms, and their political activity is slightly above average due to their twice as frequent contact with politicians and local government representatives (for details, see Gerő & Szabó, 2020).

Table 1 Integration groups in 2018 and 2021

	2018	**2021**	**Comparability**
Over-integrated groups	Relationship rich, politically active	Relationship rich, politically active	High-level of similarity
	Locally integrated	Locally integrated	High level of similarity
Moderately integrated groups	Norm-conform relationship-rich	Norm-conform relationship-rich	High level of similarity
	Norm-conform integrated into the labour market	Norm conform integrated in the labour market	High level of similarity
	Norm-violating, integrated into the labour market	Politically integrated	New category in 2021
Under-integrated groups	Norm-conform disintegrated	Norm-conform, disintegrated	High level of similarity
	Excluded under-integrated	At risk of disintegration	New category in 2021

It is important to note that electoral participation (only 'willingness to participate in elections') and civic engagement ('member of civil society organisation') are part of the integration model. Thus, we only briefly refer to these features of the integration groups. Instead, we examine party affiliation and other forms of political participation in detail. To compare the 2018 and 2021 databases, the parties were merged as follows: Fidesz–KDNP (government party), traditional left-wing parties (DK, MSZP–P), Jobbik, liberal, green parties (LMP, Momentum Movement), and other parties.

Non-electoral forms of participation are examined in five categories: Traditional (party-related and more formal) forms of political participation, online, local, direct and consumer participation.[7] Among these, we see traditional and local participation in align-

[7] Exact question: *'There are different ways to act in public affairs to solve problems. For each of them, please tell me if in the last year you…'*
1. contacted a Member of Parliament or another national politician in any way (by letter, on the internet, in person);
2. contacted a local government representative or mayor in any way (by letter, on the internet, in person);

ment with the subject-participatory/allegiant political culture since these activities usually happen within the framework of party politics or at least a more stable organisational framework, while direct, online, and consumer participation characterises the assertive citizen, thus are more likely to be associated with social movements or civil society organisations because of the elite-challenging nature of these participatory forms.

Table 2 Types of political participation

Participation	**Traditional**	**Online/media**	**Local**	**Direct**	**Consumer**
Type	was active in a political organisation	'liked', commented, posted	participated in the organisation of a local event	signed a petition	boycotted certain commodities
Type	participated in the campaign of a political party	telephoned radio and TV programmes	participated in a public forum	participated in a public demonstration	donated money to a political or non-governmental organisation
Type	contacted a national politician	–	contacted local representative	–	–

As indicated above, parties are perhaps the most important channels and institutions of the political integration mechanism, so it is worth investigating the relationship between integration groups and party voting camps. We can also ask whether the different integration groups are distinguishable on the basis of party affiliation. Do over-integrated groups automatically support parties that, due to their position in relation to government, are

3. were active in a political organization (even a party) or a political movement, attended its events;
4. participated in a political party's campaign (e.g., poster hanging, emblem, badge, flyer distribution);
5. signed a letter of protest or petition or participated in the collection of signatures;
6. participated in an lawful and unlawful public demonstration, parade, or march;
7. intentionally, for reasons of principle, purchased or did not purchase or boycotted certain goods (on political, ethical, environmental grounds);
8. donated money to a political or non-governmental organization or group;
9. telephoned a radio and TV program, sent an SMS or voted in television and radio channels' 'public life' programs;
10. liked, voted on, posted or commented on the internet or Facebook on any public or political issue;
11. participated in organizing a local event or community movement (e.g., village day, saint's day, carnival, parade, local sporting event);
12. participated in a public forum.

For a detailed presentation of the results, see Szabó & Gerő (2019, pp. 103–111).

To identify the types, we followed the procedures of Theocharis and van Deth (2017) and Oross and Szabó (2019), involving undertaking factor analysis for the 12 forms of participation under examination. Rotated factor analysis yielded five distinct types of participation with different levels of individual involvement and commitment: traditional, direct, online, local, and consumer. See Appendix Table F4 for the results of the rotated factor analysis. Compared to our own division (Szabó & Gerő, 2019), we registered only one difference. We classified consumer participation (boycott and related support for organizations) as a direct form of participation.

able to make decisions favourable to them? Do under-integrated groups, as a sort of ultimate refuge, also tend to vote for the ruling parties, or, on the contrary, support the forces most opposed to the government, trusting their willingness to promote their prosperity when they get into government?

In terms of party affiliation, we see relatively large differences among the integration groups (see Appendix, Table F1). The statistical indicators in the table indicate a not-too-strong relationship between party preference and integration groups (2018: Cramer's V = 0.137 and 2021: Cramer's V= 0.145). Although the groups in two years cannot be compared entirely, some significant differences exist. First of all, the proportion of people who are able to choose a party (party-electors) changed significantly: overall, the figure rose from 57 to 64 per cent. The change is especially significant with the locally integrated group, which is among the most similar in the two years: the share of party electors grew from 72 to 84 per cent. Even if we should be cautious comparing the least integrated groups, it is important to note that in 2021, none of these groups had a party-elector share of less than 62 per cent, while the smallest proportion was 48 per cent in 2018. Thus, overall, from 2018 (which was an electoral year, although the survey was conducted after the elections), parties increased their mobilisation potential among voters.

It is also clearly visible that all parties appear more polarised in these groups. Support for Fidesz is not evenly distributed; it has either positive or negative peaks. Fidesz is dominantly supported among the locally integrated, and opposition parties cannot compensate for this advantage. Members of the politically integrated group's most distinctive feature is also a preference for Fidesz. The governing party became a dominant party within this group.

Nevertheless, its support decreased in the group of *norm-conform integrated into the labour market*. Furthermore, and interestingly, this group contains the highest number of non-voters who refuse to say or are indecisive about their party preference. At the same time, real competition between parties also seems to be apparent in this broad group, with both Jobbik and traditional left-wing parties having the highest rates of support.

It is also worth noting that within the under-integrated groups, as opposed to in 2018, support for the governing party is at or above the average level, meaning that over-, moderately, and under-integrated groups all have their highly pro-government clusters. In addition, Fidesz has the most relative support in every group.

It is also clear that the level of political integration of each integration group differs (if the measure of this is the proportion of those who choose the party and those with unknown preferences). Based on party preference, the locally integrated, the politically integrated, and the relationship-rich politically active are the most integrated.

Overall, therefore, party preference is significantly different in the integration groups. Over- and under-integrated groups appeared to be behind the ruling parties to a greater extent in 2021 than in 2018. However, it cannot be said that each integration group is organised exclusively around one party. However, partisan polarisation and political competition in the most integrated group is not dangerous for the government party if it can be communicated as a kind of elite conflict and as a strengthening of their 'own' group.

5 Participation and political integration

In the next step of the analysis, we examined the participatory dimension of political integration. We were looking to identify *which layers of society have the highest political participation and organisation reach* and *whether Hungarian society can be described along the lines of low resistance potential or high.*

To some extent, political participation is already a constituting element of the integration model. The activity of political participation (passive, electoral and other traditional or direct forms of participation), as civic engagement (participation in a civil society organisation), is already built into the groups. Civic engagement was significantly greater in the locally integrated than in other groups in 2021. In terms of civil engagement, the locally integrated are outstanding: their participation in civil associations and voluntary organisations is three to five times greater than the relationship-rich, politically active group's and basically incomparable to the other groups' almost non-existent participation in associational life (see Kovách et al., 2016; 2018).

Regarding political participation, relationship-rich, politically active, and locally integrated groups are outstanding with regard to the first type of activities. Fifty-six per cent of the relationship-rich politically active group engaged in other political activities outside electoral participation and only 1 per cent was passive in 2018, while 69 per cent of the locally integrated participated in any type of political activity outside electoral participation in the same year. The rest of the groups were relatively passive, with a majority of passive citizens.

Table 3 Level of types of political participation, 2018 and 2021, % of adult population

Participation	Traditional	Online/media	Local	Direct	Consumer
2018	6	14	19	6	5
2021	8	10	19	6	6
change	+2	-4	0	0	+1

In the autumn of 2018, 25 per cent of Hungarian society participated in some form of public and/or political action, and three-quarters abstained from activism (see Appendix Table F2). After four years, the political participation rate was extremely similar. Political activity sharply segments society into actives and passives.

In both years, political participation among over-integrated groups was outstanding, with 60 per cent and 84 per cent of the relationship-rich being politically active and 71–73 per cent of the locally integrated being active in at least one form of political participation. The latter group's very high level of multiple political activity is particularly noteworthy. The participation of the other groups either corresponds to the average or is significantly lower than the distribution in the sample (norm-conforming integrated into the labour market, norm-conform relationship-rich, norm-conform disintegrated). The gap in political participation between the under- and over-integrated groups has become even more pronounced over the four years. The latter groups have essentially appropriated and privileged political participation, so the multiplicative nature of participation is especially important in these groups.

The activity of Hungarian society is dominated by participation that is strongly distinguishable from local, regional, or classic political activism (demonstrating, petitions), such as participation in the organisation of local events, local public forums, and relations with a local politician or the mayor, followed by interactive participation on social and in other media (19 and 14 per cent, respectively). Offline types of participation that assume stronger political engagement (such as traditional party affiliation and direct participation that requires relatively greater involvement) appear at a frequency of 5–6 per cent. The political activity of groups at different levels of integration differs significantly regarding each type of participation. More strongly integrated groups were significantly overrepresented in different types of participation (see Appendix Table F3).

The forms of participation are dominated by two groups: the relationship-rich, politically active, and the locally integrated, especially in 2021. Therefore, there is no question that those in a better position in terms of social integration take the opportunity to participate. In the case of traditional, party-related participation, the locally integrated participated five times, and the relationship-rich politically active participated three times more frequently than the general population. A similar proportion of participating citizens is also recorded in the case of direct participation. Interestingly, the activity level of the locally integrated is the highest in this form. Given the strong embeddedness of Fidesz–KDNP in these groups, we assume that here that participation refers to demonstrations on national holidays, Peace Marches, or petitions supporting causes framed in right-wing terms rather than protest activities critical of the government. Whatever type of participation we examine, the middle-integrated groups' involvement is the lowest, often close to zero, which means that under-integrated groups' participation is higher than that of medium-integrated groups. However, they engage in a similar level of local participation, which is also usually higher in these groups than with other forms of political participation.

What is particularly interesting in relation to our topic is that this general tendency appears not only in the types of participation that directly underpin political integration (traditional, direct). The same pattern can be recognised in local participation: the most active in local, regional forums that are more connected to civil society are the locally integrated. Their activity even increased between 2018 and 2021. In the organisation of village days, saints' days, carnivals, local parades, and sporting events, those groups who, as mentioned above, are more ideologically engaged and tend to lean towards the governing parties are the dominant voices (see Kovách, 2020). They can become opinion leaders and influencers of the immediate environment: they may not only influence the local political culture but also play a decisive role in the functioning of civil society. The participation of other groups is weaker and focused on the world of (online) media, as well as the local space.

6 Conclusions

In this study, we analysed the process of political integration. First, we further theorised our concept of political integration. Using the Habermasian concept of System and Lifeworld, we considered political integration and integration mechanisms as those political actions, attitudes, norms, and ideologies that…

a) increase the political cohesion of society

b) but reduce the chances of political communication breakdowns or political conflict between the incumbent and its constituency (thus promote a clear flow of vertical communication),
c) but block horizontal communication (between voting camps)
d) and, at the same time, promote the broadest possible legitimacy of the political system.

We aim to contribute to understanding how an increasingly autocratic regime integrates society to maintain its power by examining the Hungarian case and the Orbán regime. More specifically, this paper focuses on the participatory mechanisms of political integration. Thus, we examined the patterns of political affiliation and non-electoral forms of political participation according to integration model groups to better understand how the Orbán regime can create diffuse mass support that consolidates the regime.

In the theoretical framework, we focused on the process – how and in what way the political system influences, controls, and 'colonises' the Lifeworld, and, in other ways, how the system integrates the Lifeworld.

In short, besides the centralisation and control of mass communication, which targets political ideologies and values (and integration by polarisation), the Orbán regime also seeks to integrate society through political participation. In this process, power does not seek to alienate society completely from politics but to create the minimum information inputs necessary for the system's functioning and to establish legitimacy, maintain mobilisation among its supporters and allow for mobilisation against its critics. The main question is, what types of political participation are 'allowed' for the different groups in society?

We introduced five types of political participation: traditional, direct, online, local and consumer. We see these types as connected to particular civic cultures as well: the regime needs both the loyal (or allegiant) citizen to show support for the incumbent and the emerging regime, and it also requires a certain amount of 'resistance' (thus, groups of assertive citizens) to increase the legitimacy of the government indirectly. However, it is important to note that the Orbán regime's legitimacy is primarily based on the sweeping electoral victories, which rely on the electoral support of large groups of otherwise politically passive groups of society.

From the analysis, the image of a three-part society emerges: over-integrated and politically active groups, medium-integrated (mostly passive), and under-integrated groups, engaging in primarily traditional and local political activities.

The over-integrated groups are characterised by a relatively high level of political participation, mainly reflected in participation in electoral, local, and non-public NGO forms of activity. Although these groups are predominantly affiliated with the ruling parties, they cannot be considered exclusively supporters of the governing parties. Overall, however, relationship-rich and locally integrated groups appear to operate predominantly according to the Almond–Verba–Pye *loyal civic culture model*, thus ensuring the creation of the diffuse mass support required for the system. Through them, the system can strongly invade countless areas of the civil sphere – the Lifeworld, because these groups are not only key players in the integration of Hungarian society due to their relationship with politics but also the most effective integrators due to their social and power positions and economic and cultural capital. Strong partisan polarisation may operate among these

groups, which does not weaken the mechanisms of political integration but strengthens the loyal groups' commitment to the System. In our view, the separation between the private and public spheres and between the System and the Lifeworld does not exist for the committed, loyal strata. Undoubtedly, these politically active, committed, and loyal strata maximally support the System through Life World practices and the language and political identities adopted by the System.

According to Teorell (2006), a deliberative approach to participation is possible in this over-integrated stratum, but in the middle and under-integrated strata, influential but mostly elitist forms of participation exist at best. Democracy that seems to work in the upper, narrow social strata masks the dysfunctions found in all other groups.

Namely, in the other integration groups, we find traces of the *loyal civic culture* of the under-integrated groups. The excluded are characterised by participation close to the average; however, although we can identify their significant frustration, they are likely to trust political institutions despite their situation.

Presumably, in both the over-integrated and the moderately integrated groups, we also find an *assertive civic culture*, as the over-integrated groups include those who do not support the government and, at the same time, strong public-civic participation outside official channels and institutions. It is important to note, however, that while groups with a markedly loyal civic culture are concentrated, block-like, primarily in the over-integrated groups (and most importantly, primarily in the locally integrated one), assertive civic culture is more fragmented and dispersed within groups. In the latter two groups, the self-limiting mechanisms of consumer society are also perceptible.

The third group contains those who stay away from political participation. Under-integrated groups are mainly this type, where mistrust is coupled with vulnerability, a lack of resources and apathy. However, regarding electoral participation, the Orbán regime (and mainly the incumbent actor) increased its mobilisation potential even in these groups between 2018 and 2021. A near-ideal situation has been created for the System: these groups do not resist the System's colonisation. They do not care about or possibly even perceive the consequences of these colonisation attempts. If there is relative security and even more limited material well-being, the functioning of the System is not the subject of communication. The mechanisms of communication and understanding between groups not only do not work, but presumably, they do not need to work.

In summary, the Orbán regime successfully provides diffuse mass support: it is embedded in multiple social groups, although none of the integration groups can be considered the sole or primary supporter of the system. On the one hand, in these groups, the political leadership achieves loyal, appropriate participatory and trust-based legitimacy; on the other hand, it can prevent an assertive civic culture from being embraced by prominent groups. Third, it keeps the most distrustful and assertive groups away from politics. The resistance of the Lifeworld and society to the aspirations of power is thus ineffective since the governing parties also exercise direct or indirect oversight of the mechanisms of organisation, unification, and resistance.

In the present study, we have described how the complex political integration of society takes place in these dimensions. Based on our analysis, the success of Fidesz–KDNP can be traced back to more than one factor. The study, based on an analysis of the above-described integration groups, shows that the stability of the ruling party's support

is to be found in the balance of mechanisms that promote 'integration through polarisation', thus dividing society into three more significant parts (over-integrated politically active, medium-integrated mostly passive, and under-integrated somewhat active locally). The integration logic we use is suitable for going beyond a simple examination of political preferences because it shows how complex mechanisms lie behind engagement with a party.

Naturally, our analysis has limits: We focused mainly on party affiliation and political participation, but mechanisms linked to political leaders and political communication are also important. We could not discuss these processes here in detail. The timeframe of our analysis is also narrow, based only on two surveys. Hopefully, we will be able to continue the research by collecting more data, which could lead to the inclusion of the broader economic context into the analysis.

Further research should go further toward developing a model based on the Hungarian experience that international comparative studies can use to measure different mechanisms that increasingly autocratic regimes use to gain legitimacy. Of course, we are aware of emerging concepts such as information autocracy (Guriev & Treisman, 2020), which also address this issue.

However, to understand the capacity of such regimes to develop and sustain support, from a sociological point of view, we need to embed communication processes and institutional changes into the understanding of the transformation processes of society itself: mechanisms of social integration, political polarisation, increasing inequalities, and other developing phenomena. Also, different countries that have started down the path to autocracy might be able to reverse this process: the 2023 elections in Poland, for example, suggest that resistance to an autocratic power with relatively broad support can be effective. Other cases lead to a more pessimistic conclusion: the Turkish model (where even an earthquake with many victims and a racing inflation rate could not shake the incumbent's power) seems to show that we still have more to understand. In our view, the key to this understanding lies in the deep processes of social transformation.

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Appendix

Table F1 Party preferences of integration groups, 2018
(data on total population, heat map, %)[8]

2018	Fidesz-KDNP	Traditional left-wing parties	Jobbik	Liberal, and Green parties	Other parties	*Party electors*	Doesn't know	Does not answer	Would not go to vote	*Those with unknown preferences*	Total
Relationship-rich politically active	**41**	10	8	4	2	*65*	22	11	2	*35*	**200**
Locally integrated	**39**	10	6	**13**	4	*72*	13	12	4	*28*	**201**
Norm conforming relationship-rich	31	8	**11**	**11**	3	*64*	19	14	5	*36*	**202**
Norm-conforming integrated into the labour market	23	7	8	4	2	*44*	**26**	14	15	*56*	**199**
Norm- violating integrated into the labour market	**36**	10	5	6	4	*61*	18	14	7	*39*	**200**
Norm- conform-disintegrated	25	13	4	4	2	*48*	**26**	11	**16**	*52*	**201**
Excluded under-integrated	29	**14**	7	6	4	*60*	22	4	14	*40*	**200**
Total	**31**	**10**	**7**	**6**	**3**	*57*	**22**	**12**	**10**	*43*	**1403**

[8] Due to the small number of cases, voters from some parties have been merged:
- Fidesz–KDNP, the government parties.
- Traditional left-wing parties: DK, MSZP–P;
- Jobbik;
- Liberal, green parties: LMP, Momentum, Liberals;
- Other parties: Mi Hazánk (Our Land), Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt (Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party), others.

2021	Fidesz-KDNP	Traditional left-wing parties	Jobbik	Liberal, green parties	Other parties	*Party electors*	Doesn't know	Does not answer	Would not go to vote	*Those with unknown preferences*	Total (N)
Relationship rich, politically active	28	23	8	5	6	*70*	15	10	6	*30*	**509**
Locally integrated	44	15	7	8	10	*84*	8	2	4	*26*	**289**
Norm-conform relationship-rich	28	13	6	6	3	*56*	19	10	15	*44*	**726**
Norm conform integrated in into the labour market	15	16	11	5	6	*53*	20	14	14	*47*	**1030**
Politically integrated	56	7	4	4	4	*75*	14	10	3	*25*	**755**
Norm conform disintegrated	34	18	3	3	4	*62*	13	7	17	*38*	**812**
Risk of disintegration	31	16	5	5	8	*65*	12	6	17	*35*	**882**
Total %	**32**	**15**	**6**	**5**	**6**	***64***	**15**	**12**	**12**	***39***	**5003**

2018: Pearson khi^2= 242.703, sig = 0.000. Cramer's V=0,137.
2021: Pearson khi^2= 633.337, sig = 0.000. Cramer's V=0,145.

Table F2 Frequency of political participation by integration groups
(total population, %)

2018 (participated: 25%)	**No participation**	**A single type of participation**	**Two types of participation**	**Three or more types of participation**	**Total**
Relationship rich, politically active	**40**	28	12	19	100
Locally integrated	**27**	8	14	51	100
Norm-conform relationship-rich	**81**	9	4	6	100
Norm conforming integrated into the labour market	**93**	3	3	1	100
Norm-violating integrated into the labour market	**76**	5	9	10	100
Norm conforming disintegrated	**89**	8	2	1	100
Excluded under-integrated	**79**	7	7	7	100
Sample	**75**	10	6	9	100
2021 (participated: 25%)	**No participation**	**A single type of participation**	**Two types of participation**	**Three or more types of participation**	**Total**
Relationship-rich politically active	**14**	29	21	35	100
Locally integrated	**29**	8	9	54	100
Norm-conform relation-ship-rich	**90**	6	2	2	100
Norm-conform integrated into the labour market	**88**	6	3	3	100
Politically integrated	**82**	9	4	6	100
Norm-conform disintegrated	**88**	7	3	2	100
Risk at disintegration	**81**	6	5	8	100
Sample	**75**	9	6	10	100

2018: Pearson Chi^2=646,638; sig=0,000; Cramer's V=0,316
2021: Pearson Chi^2=1949,183; sig=0,000; Cramer's V=0,361

Table F3 Participation of integration groups by type of participation

(ANOVA analysis, means, 0 = no participation; 1 = participation) heatmap

2018	Traditional	Online	Local	Direct	Consumer
Relationship rich, politically active	0.159	0.23	0.482	0.142	0.104
Locally integrated	0.323	0.457	0.572	0.297	0.355
Norm-conform integrated into the labour market	0.006	0.056	0.043	0.004	0.004
Norm-conform relationship-rich	0.026	0.129	0.126	0.024	0.017
Norm-violating integrated into the labour market	0.025	0.188	0.179	0.055	0.034
Norm -conform disintegrated	0.002	0.043	0.086	0.015	0.005
Excluded under-integrated	0.089	0.084	0.142	0.051	0.045
Total	**0.056**	**0.133**	**0.185**	**0.056**	**0.047**
2021	**Traditional**	**Online**	**Local**	**Direct**	**Consumer**
Relationship-rich politically active	0.302	0.271	0.686	0.226	0.184
Locally integrated	0.386	0.402	0.615	0.324	0.338
Norm-conform relation-ship-rich	0.000	0.044	0.080	0.000	0.000
Norm-conform integrated into the labour market	0.017	0.066	0.080	0.018	0.026
Politically integrated	0.040	0.070	0.140	0.017	0.026
Norm-conform disintegrated	0.018	0.043	0.089	0.013	0.010
Risk at disintegration	0.069	0.096	0.126	0.060	0.043
Total	**0.078**	**0.105**	**0.191**	**0.061**	**0.057**

For ease of interpretation, the participation types were arranged separately in a dummy-type variable. Thus, if the mean is close to zero, there is no participation, and the closer it is to one, the higher the participation. Minimum value = 0, maximum value = 1.

F-test: 50.864; sig=0,000; eta^2: 0.124.3
F-test: 34.823; sig=0,000; eta^2: 0.089.3
F-test: 79.266; sig=0,000; eta^2: 0.182.3
F-test: 37.521; sig=0,000; eta^2: 0.095.3
F-test: 57.123; sig=0,000; eta^2: 0.138.3
According to the ANOVA Post hoc Scheffe test, the participation of relationship-rich, politically active people in the traditional type differs from everyone except those excluded. Locally integrated ones are also separated from each group.
Similar findings can be made for online, local, direct, and consumer participation.
F-test: 184.798; sig=0.000; eta^2: 0.182
F-test: 94.130; sig=0.000; eta^2: 0.102
F-test: 313.177; sig=0.000; eta^2: 0.274
F-test: 141.946; sig=0.000; eta^2: .0146
F-test: 133.089; sig=0.000; eta^2: 0.138
According to the ANOVA Post hoc Scheffe test, the participation of relationship-rich and locally integrated ones are also separated from each group.

Table F4 Results of rotating factor analysis

Form of participation	Traditional	Online	Local	Direct	Consumer
was active in a political organisation (even a party) or a political movement, attended its events	**.678**	.136	.134	.157	.171
participated in a political party's campaign (e.g., poster hanging, emblem, badge, flyer distribution)	**.602**	.143	.181	.350	.030
contacted a Member of Parliament or another national politician in any way (by letter, on the Internet, in person)	**.395**	.031	.360	.154	.026
liked, voted on, posted or commented on the Internet or Facebook on any public or political issue	.071	**.635**	.151	.190	.004
called by telephone to radio and TV programmes, sent SMS, voted in television and radio channels' public life programmes	.127	**.571**	.039	.108	.130
participated in organising a local event community movement (e.g. village day, saint's day, carnival, parade, local sporting event)	.062	**.541**	**.518**	.064	.142
participated in a public forum	.125	.336	**.608**	.122	.126

Table F4 *(continued)*

Form of participation	Traditional	Online	Local	Direct	Consumer
contacted their local government representative or mayor in any way (by letter, on the Internet, in person)	.295	.013	**.506**	.110	.179
signed a letter of protest a petition, participated in the collection of signatures	.200	.277	.094	**.562**	.133
participated in an authorised or unauthorised public demonstration, parade, march	.311	.122	.166	**.515**	.170
intentionally, for reasons of principle, purchased or did not purchase, boycotted certain goods (on political, ethical, environmental grounds)	.087	.089	.171	.185	**.745**
donated money to a political or non-governmental organisation or group	.326	.278	.129	.048	**.366**

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