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Deliberative Discourse in the Digital Realm: Analyzing the Czech Pirate Party Web Forum.

Bachelor Thesis

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Zásady pro vypracování:

This work is focused on understanding the deliberative digital Czech Pirate Party's discussions on their online forum. The main questions of this work are: to what degree do participants in the Czech Pirate Party forum engage in deliberative discourse, and how does this alignment vary across different topics under discussion? First, this work assesses the top 5% of a number of answers of all archived (finished) discussions in member's initiatives at the National Forum of the Czech Pirate Party based on Kies's deliberative criteria from his book "Promises and Limits of Web-deliberation". Kies's criteria are Inclusion, Discursive equality, Reciprocity Justification, Reflexivity, Empathy, Sincerity, Plurality, and External impact. However, this work focuses only on three criteria: Justification, Reflexivity, and Empathy, since they are the most relevant and countable for this study. All the messages in the selected debates are analyzed for violating the criteria, in other words, they lack logical or moral basis, rely solely on emotions or personal beliefs, are dismissing for other participants, mocking or belittling opposing views. Then all scores are analyzed to understand the absence or presence of a trend in the score depending on the topic of the discussion.

The purpose of this work is to fill in the existing gap of the research on digital deliberate parties. The understanding of that can help the party leadership to decide if the way of communication to their supporters should or should not change.

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Declaration

I declare that I have written this Bachelor thesis independently under the supervision of Mgr. PhDr. Petra Vodová and stated all employed sources and literature.

In Hradec Králové, 22.04.2024.

Signature: _____

Abstract

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This bachelor thesis investigates the degree of deliberation among participants in the Czech Pirate Party National Forum. Coding the messages based on the selected deliberative criteria, the study combines quantitative data analysis with qualitative case studies to explore the level of deliberation in the forums and the relationship between its results and topics of the selected forums. Findings reveal a good to high level of the deliberation in the forums, variable between different criteria. The work provides an example of the way to measure deliberation in the digital parties forums.

Keywords: Digital party, Czech Pirate Party, Pirate Party, Deliberative democracy, Deliberative criteria.

Anotace

DOYKO, S. (2024) *Deliberativní diskurz v digitální říši: Analýza webového fóra České pirátské strany*. (Bakalářská práce). Hradec Králové: Filozofická fakulta, Univerzita Hradec Králové.

Tato bakalářská práce zkoumá míru deliberace mezi účastníky Národního fóra České pirátské strany. Studie kóduje zprávy na základě vybraných deliberativních kritérií a kombinuje kvantitativní analýzu dat s kvalitativními případovými studii, aby prozkoumala úroveň uvažování na fórech a vztah mezi jejími výsledky a tématy vybraných fór. Zjištění odhalují dobrou až vysokou úroveň uvažování na fórech, proměnlivé mezi různými kritérii. Práce poskytuje příklad způsobu měření deliberace na fórech digitálních stran.

Klíčová slova: Digitální strana, Česká pirátská strana, Pirátská strana, Deliberativní demokracie, Deliberativní kritéria.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

As Ebeling and Wolkenstein write, “traditionally, theorists have conceived legitimacy as requiring the public justification of the exercise of political power” (Ebeling, Wolkenstein 2018). Thus, they believe that “the original ideal of deliberative democracy is a participatory ideal that emphasizes the active participation of citizens in public deliberation with the aim of influencing the exercise of political power in accordance with their conception of the common good” (Ebeling, Wolkenstein 2018). Likewise, they believe that political parties “are not only preference aggregators” but can be deliberative agents themselves and provide citizens with deliberative forums where citizens can engage in deliberation with other citizens. By articulating the essential role of parties in this process, Ebeling and Wolkenstein can address a notable shortcoming in current deliberative system frameworks. Unlike existing approaches that struggle to recognize the intricate social and political dynamics in modern societies, their approach maintains a principled connection between genuinely deliberative political systems and the aspiration for politically autonomous citizens (Ebeling, Wolkenstein 2018, p. 7). Thus, the deliberative form of democracy can be considered the one we should strive for. Based on this, this work approaches the view of digital parties through the lens of deliberative democracy.

1.2 Research Objectives

Czech Pirate Party is a part of a bigger group of Pirate Parties which are considered to be digital parties that strive for a deliberative intra party democracy. However, the literature is not conclusive in whether digital parties can be in fact deliberative. Gerbaudo (2021a; 2019; 2020; 2021b) provides points that digital parties are not deliberative, while Deresiis (2020a; 2019; 2020b; 2020c) claims digital parties can be non-deliberative and deliberative, and that the examples of later can be Pirate Parties. Therefore, this work sets the goal of answering these research questions: "To what degree do participants in the Czech Pirate Party forum engage in deliberative discourse?" and "How does this alignment vary across different topics under discussion?".

To answer the questions, I first limited the theoretical scope, focusing mainly on Gerbaudo's (2019) definition of digital parties and Jürgen Habermas' (Fultner 2011) understanding of deliberative democracy. Then, I identified 3 criteria for deliberative democracy based on Kies work (Kies 2010) that are applicable for my particular study type: justification, reflexivity, and empathy. Then, I split those criteria into six variables to ensure that I could track different sides of the criteria more accurately. Each variable represented a yes-or-no question, for which each message got a 1 for yes or 0 for no. I applied the identified criteria to the five selected forums. The forums were selected from the most discussed forums on the Czech Pirate Party National Forum. The additional criteria for selection were that the forums are locked (meaning no more answers can be added), were posted in recent years (from 2017), and forums are representing different kinds of themes like recall, voting, or election. After applying selected deliberative criteria, I calculated and analyzed the answers, going through the criteria and then through the topic, to identify how deliberative the messages of the participants were and if there were any variations in the results based on the topic of discussion.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The purpose of this work is to fill in the existing gap in research on digital deliberative parties. Understanding this gap can help party leadership decide if the way of communicating with their supporters should or should not change, and if they do, on what deliberative criteria they should focus more of their attention.

1.4 Structure of the work

This work is divided into several parts: Introduction, Literature Review, Understanding Deliberative Discourse in the Czech Pirate Party, Methodology, Findings, and Conclusions.

The first subpart of the literature review part provides a nuanced understanding of the concept of digital parties. This part goes through the historical context and the concept's evolution, definition, and key characteristics, as well as its typology. The second subpart is devoted to laying out the definition of deliberative democracy primarily based on Jürgen Habermas' formulation as an alternative to the liberal and republican understanding of 'democracy'. In

order to understand, apply, and study deliberative democracy, this work describes Kies' deliberative criteria.

The Understanding Deliberative Discourse in the Czech Pirate Party part is devoted to an overview of the context of the Czech Pirate Party and the party's online forum. The first subpart covers the background of the party, such as history, membership, and structure, while the second subpart is focused on the variable rules of the party and what we can say about the presence of the deliberation criteria in these rules.

The methodology part covers a deep description and explanation of the selection of the data, its collection and archiving, as well as the coding and analysis procedures. It also mentions limitations and ethical considerations.

The Findings part is divided into two parts, with the first one presenting the results from the individual criteria and variable perspective, and the second one showing the results from the forums and topics, answering the research questions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Parties

2.1.1 History

Since the advent of the new Internet era, almost every aspect of our daily lives have undergone significant transformation. We now utilize digital technologies such as email, social media, and internal platforms daily. Not even political parties are immune to these changes, with virtually all of them now maintaining websites and engaging in email communication with their members (Hartleb 2013, 357).

It is not by virtue of their mere existence that political parties were so keen on inviting these new technologies into their lives. Political parties can see the opportunities to use web technologies for 'internal' and 'external purposes' (Gibson and Ward 2009; Oross and Tap 2023, 346–47). Gaining popularity, mobilizing supporters, and communicating with the electorate were the main external purposes. The internal purposes focused on creating more opportunities for their members, who were genuinely involved with politics. The

predominant drivers for internal use of these new technologies were: the decline in political party support and membership, as well as the general decline in interest in politics and participation in voting (Hartleb 2013, 358). They believed that the Internet could solve participation problems by providing user-driven platforms; in this they saw a potential to stimulate grassroots participation (Spyridou and Veglis 2011, 137), increase party transparency, and stimulate internal deliberation (Oross and Tap 2023, 346–47).

However, simply employing the use of digital technologies does not in and of itself make a party 'digital'. As the American scholar David Karpf (Karpf 2012) pointed out, it is important to distinguish between "legacy organizations" and "netroots organizations". Legacy organizations are those that were established before the digital revolution and have since adapted to the new environment, while netroots organizations are those that were founded more recently. Netroots organizations have embraced digital technologies and a different organizational structure from the outset. These netroots organizations also require "a new design of power" which "is represented not by a traditional ownership but rather by a potential access" (Hartleb 2013, 357).

Digital parties started their existence in the mid-2000s-2010s. They do indeed use digital technologies, but it is not their main feature. These parties are taking an anti-party position over traditional parties. Digital parties are beginning their way as movements, as an answer to globalization, as the ones you can trust, the ones that are not like the other parties, and the ones that are open, transparent, authentic, and free from corruption and bureaucracy (Gerbaudo 2019, 4, 2021a, 3; Hartleb 2013). From the technical viewpoint, members of digital parties "are afforded more flexible channels for participation and opportunities to form and join looser issue-based and policy-based networks. Levels and timing of individuals' involvement could vary, ranging from simply receiving regular news updates to donating funds and contributing feedback on an individual policy or issue basis" (Hartleb 2013, 357). The initial boom in attention, however, did not live up to expectations of voting success; nevertheless, there are still digital parties that continue their existence. Moreover, there are digital parties that have been elected to different levels of power. For example, the Czech and Icelandic Pirate parties, Podemos, and the Five Star Movement have seats in the lower and upper chambers of parliaments, the EU parliament, and regional and municipal levels.

Helen Margetts (Margetts 2006) was one of the first ones to define digital parties and dubbed them ‘Cyber-parties’. She writes “The key defining feature is that cyber parties use web-based technologies to strengthen the relationship between voters and party, rather than traditional notions of membership: such technologies are fuelling the trend towards lower levels of membership, rather than being used to ameliorate it”. Later in 2013, Florian Hartleb (Hartleb 2013) called the Pirate Party in Germany and the Five Star Movement in Italy ‘anti-establishment cyber-parties’. In 2018, Katarzyna Klimowicz (Klimowicz 2018) wrote about the phenomena of Podemos, en Comú, Partia Razem, and Píratar as ‘network parties.’ Finally, in 2019, Paulo Gerbaudo (Gerbaudo 2019) published his book and secured the name ‘digital’ parties. Even though there are variations in the names of this type of political party, Gerbaudo’s name is becoming increasingly common, so I will continue to use it.

Gerbaudo looks at the history of digital party development a little bit differently. Namely, he identifies two waves of digital democracy (Gerbaudo 2021a). The first wave began as the initial experimentation in the field, starting from the 1980s and continuing through to the 1990s and 2000s. The first wave had “the aim of lowering barriers to information, discussion, and deliberation; extending and deepening the channels through which citizens participate in policy making and allowing citizens to monitor more closely how public policies are decided and implemented” (Gerbaudo 2021a, 2). However, said wave did not fulfill all its expectations. The second wave of digital democracy, according to Gerbaudo, has much more potential. This was thought to be primarily due to the popularization of social media, and secondly, as a consequence of sophisticated, user-friendly, online decision-making platforms. The main difference between these two waves is that the central role of the second wave is focused primarily on the internal democracy of organizations.

The very first party of the second wave of digital democracy was the ‘Pirate Party’, or more precisely the ‘Pirate Parties’ – as many simultaneously appeared in a short period of time. Even though the Pirate Parties were thought to be successful, many of them lost their initial momentum rapidly. However, other similar parties were able to achieve much bigger success, at least in the electoral sense. The Italian Five Star Movement, founded in 2009, and Spanish Podemos, founded in 2014, have both made digital democracy a defining feature of their identities (Gerbaudo 2019, 26).

2.1.2 Definition

Paolo Gerbaudo (2019) in his book ‘The digital party: political organization and online democracy’ (Gerbaudo 2019) defines digital parties not just as existing parties that started using emails, websites, etc., but as a completely new group of parties. These new parties, such as the Pirate Parties in Europe, Podemos in Spain, and La France Insoumise in France, although having different manifestos, promise to change the way they do politics with the use of new digital technologies. They believe that these digital technologies would help them to be more democratic, more open to supporters, faster acting, and overall more authentic and transparent. In essence, these new digital parties are not parties that just want to use new technologies because they are simply there, but because they want to change the way political parties communicate within and with their members – an act they believe takes an ‘anti-party’ stance to traditional parties (Gerbaudo 2021a). It could be said that they are being more ‘deliberative’.

Marco Guglielmo (Guglielmo 2021, 129) proposes a different name, which is the ‘anti-party digital party’. Although I agree that an anti-party digital party is a more precise definition of this kind of party, I believe that its length poses an inconvenience that prevents its wide-spread adoption. Moreover, the definition of a digital party already implies that it is an anti-party, hence its redundancy. The parties that are not per se, ‘digital parties’, but use digital technologies, are described as being in a different era, digital age, or using specific tools. However, these tools do not define them as they would otherwise define true digital parties. Consequently, I will continue to use Gerbaudo’s definition of ‘digital parties’ in this work.

2.1.3 Platform and networked parties

In the book “Political parties and deliberation: from challenges to opportunities” Gerbaudo argues (Gerbaudo 2019) that the formations like the Five Star Movement, Podemos, and Pirate Parties are a new type of political party, which he calls ‘digital party’. He states that they integrate the Internet and digital media more fully than traditional parties do. These parties present “their adoption of the logic of interactivity and participation, popularized by social media platforms, as a way to deliver a more direct democracy” (Gerbaudo 2020, 41). He believes that they are moving by a utopian vision of online democracy: they use digital technologies “to extend and deepen political participation, reintegrate in the polity many

citizens who have a long time been distant from the political arena, and allow them to have a more direct and meaningful intervention in the political process” (Gerbaudo 2020, 42).

Gerbaudo names digital parties instead as ‘platform parties’ (Gerbaudo 2019, 2021a, 2021b). He identifies the main characteristic of digital parties as using a platform on the Internet as a main space for party life (Gerbaudo 2019, 5). On such platforms, members can join discussions, propose discussions and ideas, donate money, choose a task for volunteer work, vote on inter-party agendas and consultations, etc. Even though we are looking at digital parties as parties who are trying to be (or at least seem) more deliberate, Gerbaudo looks at digital parties generally negatively (Gerbaudo 2019, 2021a). He sees platform parties as entities that are data driven, have a free registration model, and rely on free political labor. Regarding data, platform parties are not just organized around social media, but also collect and aggregate user data during the decision-making processes (Gerbaudo 2019, 73). A free registration model disconnects the membership and financial contributions, and even though some party leaders use it as an argument for inclusivity, Gerbaudo sees it as something which devalues the entire concept of membership. He instead sees them rather as “simple users who agreed to be on their mailing list” (Gerbaudo 2019, 74). He also believes that the free political labor can be divided to ‘super-volunteers’, who are highly active, and smaller sympathizers, who play a significant role in parties’ campaigning spreading political content to their own network of contacts (Gerbaudo 2019, 75). Considering everything being said, Gerbaudo sees platform parties as “plebiscitarian, centralized, with a low degree of institutionalization of rules and procedures and inclusiveness” (Gerbaudo 2021a). Gerbaudo uses the cases of Podemos and the Five Star Movement to support his argument (Gerbaudo 2019, 2021a). However, before we delve deeper into his arguments, I would like to cover the two basic ways of direct democracy that Gerbaudo and others use.

We can see the two forms of digital parties as a reflection of two options of inter-party democracy (IPD): assembly-based IPD and plebiscitary IPD (Poguntke, et al. 2016). The main feature of assembly-based IPD is providing decision-making opportunities to the debate participants. Participants would come to meetings, debate propositions, and then make a decision. Conversely, plebiscitary IPD would instead separate debates and decision-making processes. Participants’ role would be to support or block the proposal in an already agreed upon form. In other words, we can say that it represents either top-down (plebiscitary) or bottom-up (assembly-based) forms of democracy. Bottom-up, assembly-based, or

member-controlled democratic practices are considered more open and grassroots-oriented. This form promotes the moment of participation and deliberation by striving to achieve a maximum degree of openness, inclusiveness, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness in the voting procedure. In contrast, top-down, plebiscitary, or leader-controlled democratic practices are strongly influenced by the party elite. The form is strongly based on the party elite line, letting the members express their opinions and preferences in strict limited settings (Gerbaudo 2021a).

Platform parties, according to Gerbaudo, are plebiscitary or top-down parties. Studying the Five Star Movement and Podemos, he comes to the conclusion that both “have significant limitations” in discussions and deliberation (Gerbaudo 2021a, 13): participation with a small number of members, issues of usability and transparency, and the leadership that “has retained a large degree of control over the editing and selection of members’ input, limiting the possibility for effective grassroots intervention on decision-making”. They also have problems with the inclusivity due to a high degree of centralisation, institutionalization of election procedure “due to the lack of clear statutory regulations for the election of officers and candidates”, and online referendums due to their top-down structure (Gerbaudo 2021a, 14–15)

I acknowledge that platform parties such as Podemos and the Five Star Movement do not indeed follow deliberative criteria, however, I agree with Marco Deseriis. He believes that digital parties are not just platform parties, as Gerbaudo writes about them, but that they can be divided into two different groups: platform parties and networked parties (Deseriis 2020c).

Gerbaudo gives seven key themes regarding the organization of a party: membership growth, delocalization, hyper-leadership, superbase, plebiscitarianism, disintermediation, and distributed centralization (Deseriis 2020c; Gerbaudo 2019). Deseriis writes that different digital parties do not meet the criteria for platform parties and proposes the other type: networked parties. Networked parties have seven key roles but oppose them: non-exclusive membership instead of membership growth, decentralization instead of delocalization, leadership function instead of hyper-leadership, bottom-up division of labor instead of superbase, collective agenda-setting instead of plebiscitarianism, hybrid participation instead of disintermediation, and scalable deliberation instead of distributed centralization (Deseriis 2020c). So, even though both platforms and networked parties present themselves as

anti-establishment movements, both believe that the internet increases the capacity of citizens for self-representation, and have online platforms where members can participate in discussions, propose ideas, and vote, they are very different in political participation and internal party democracy (Deseriis 2019).

In terms of the Czech Pirate Party Deseriis defines it as a networked party (Deseriis 2020c, 907), therefore, there is a reason to believe that the party has a greater chance to be more deliberative and fulfill deliberate criteria.

2.2 Deliberative Democracy

2.2.1 Definition

Since the goal of this work is to understand to what degree participants in the Czech Pirate Party forum engage in deliberative discourse, we need to understand what deliberative democracy is. However, prior to that we need to understand the context from which this model is coming from. Before Jürgen Habermas defined deliberative democracy, there were two understandings of democracy: liberal and republican (Kies 2010, 21–23).

The liberal model of democracy is characterized by (Kies 2010, 24–25):

- Minimal individualistic citizen participation: citizens' private interests are aggregated into political will.
- Minimal intervention of the state into the private lives of citizens.
- Minimal role of civil society.
- The nature of the political process is a competition for positions that give access to administrative power.
- People's authority is represented by elections and by voting legislative, executive, and judicial organs.

Whereas the republican model is characterized by:

- Maximal communitarian participation by participating in all public decisions.
- The bureaucracy of the state should disappear, so the citizens could form decentralized self-governance.
- The role of civil society is pivotal.

- The nature of the political process should be a mode of ethical dialogue focused on self-comprehension, suggesting the presence of a culturally accepted framework of agreement.
- The principle is that sovereignty cannot be delegated.

Jürgen Habermas, to define his deliberative model, compares it to the republican one (Kies 2010, 23). He sees the advantage of the republican model in a radical position that “society organizes itself through the communicatively united citizens.” However, he sees a disadvantage in it as being too idealistic by making “the democratic process depend on the virtues of the citizens devoted to the public wealth” and that this model is not adapted to the complex society we are living in. To fight these disadvantages, he proposes a different model that aspires to be more realistic. Jürgen Habermas says that to have deliberative political communication, the people involved should hold some presuppositions. "Political interaction can count as deliberative only when participants approach with these presuppositions in the background of their acts. These presuppositions are that anyone can take part in discourse, anyone can introduce and challenge claims that are made, everyone must see each other as equals, and everyone must assume that others are under no compulsion while they are participating” (Fultner 2011, 140). Upon introducing these presuppositions, he claims that the deliberative approach is measurable and does not suffer from the unstable ethical attitude of the subjects (Kies 2010, 23).

So, the deliberate model of democracy is characterized by (Kies 2010, 24–25):

- The participation of citizens is critically important; they should especially actively participate in the public political space.
- The state and society should be separated.
- The role of civil society is crucial.
- The essence of politics resides within the public sphere, where critical, inclusive, and influential public opinion takes shape.
- The concept of sovereignty emanates from the dispersed exchange of communicative interactions between legally institutionalized processes of will formation and culturally activated public engagement.

In essence, the deliberative model of democracy sees the political-legal system only as one action system among others, not as a peak or as a center. The focus of the model is on the

opinion-formation processes that lead to a political decision (Kies 2010, 28). Or, as Young sees it (Young 2000, 22), deliberation is “a form of practical reason” where it is more important to determine the proposals on which the collective agrees and which are supported by the best reasons, as opposed to determining the preferences of the majority.

2.2.2 Kies’s Deliberative Criteria

Kies (Kies 2010, 40–41) mentions there is a lack of agreement on the selection of criteria for the empirical study of the deliberateness of ongoing debates. He purports this is likely due to the varying perspectives of deliberative theorists, who confer different importance to different criteria. Kies does however note that these differences do not lie in most part on the fundamentals. He believes that ideally, “researchers should attempt to measure all normative criteria”. Conversely, he agrees that sometimes it is impossible to measure them all. Kies argues that when measuring all normative criteria is impractical, researchers should provide clear explanations to avoid misinterpreting seemingly deliberative processes that might lack substance.

Kies has gone about listing all the discursive deliberative criteria (Kies 2010, 42). He groups them into four categories: criteria that concern contextual factors (inclusion; discursive equality), criteria that concern the deliberative attitude of the participants (reciprocity; justification; reflexivity; empathy; sincerity), a criterion that concerns plurality, and a criterion that concerns external impact.

Inclusion and Discursive equality

Inclusion means to believe that “a democratic decision is fair and accountable only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making” (Kies 2010, 42). The discursive equality criterion comes from the inclusion criteria, with an added condition that people should not only be included, but simultaneously equal in opportunities to introduce, question, and express their attitudes, desires, and needs (Kies 2010, 42–43). To meet this criteria, another condition such as freedom from domination should be met (Kies 2010, 43). This means that participants are in equal positions with each other, and nobody can threaten others or force them to accept their opinion over another’s.

Concerning the online environment, these contextual criteria imply there should be access to a computer and information and communication technologies (ICT), the necessary skills to participate in online forums and contribute to them (Kies 2010, 43). Moreover, the problem of freedom from domination is very complex and somehow should be solved. The discursive equality criterion cannot be met if there is one small group of participants dominating the debates (a small percentage of senders who are responsible for a large percentage of posts) (Kies 2010, 43; Vodová and Voda 2021).

Reciprocity

This criterion is considered a basic condition or a foundation for deliberation. It can be defined as actually taking in the comment of another person, in other words, having a debate or a conversation, rather than multiple monologues (Kies 2010, 44). However, there is a problem with analyzing this criterion. The presence or absence of reciprocity does not automatically define the message as deliberate or non-deliberate. What makes it even more difficult is that the absence of the criterion could mean that the messages are indeed deliberate (Kies 2010, 45–46). For example, in cases such as general agreement about a discussed topic, we would not find reciprocity. Of note is that it would not automatically mean a lack of deliberation. In addition, it would be the same in cases when forum participants are interested only in sharing specific information with fellow members.

As we see, studying the reciprocity criterion can be very complicated, since we have to consider many variables, and the results would be highly difficult to interpret. Luckily, other criteria such as reflexivity, justification, and empathy could help to ease this complicated job (Kies 2010, 46). By studying the message for reciprocity indirectly we can ensure that the message actually has deliberative content and intention.

Justification

Justification implies that citizens should give each other a reason for “the mutually binding laws and public policies that they collectively enact” (Kies 2010, 46). In plain English, justification is a reason why one should agree with the other’s argument or proposal. Likewise, the reason must be understandable for any member, regardless of their position in society or educational level, along with ignoring the authority of revelation (Kies 2010, 46).

Reflexivity

The criterion of reflexivity means that participants are willing to change or adapt their opinions and preferences if they are convinced that this alternative way is more appropriate for solving the problem (Kies 2010, 48).

Empathy

Empathy can be understood as “the extent participants take into account and are sensitive to other participants and positions, not only those immediately present in the forum, but all affected by the problem considered ” (Dahlberg 2004, 33).

Sincerity

Sincerity as a criterion implies that one should make a sincere effort to understand and rationally assess the positions of others. This sincere effort can be shown, for example, as an effort to know all relevant information and understand other’s true intentions, interests, needs, and desires (Dahlberg 2004, 30; Kies 2010, 52).

Plurality

The criterion of plurality is a fundamental criterion for evaluating the success of a debate. Plurality aims to measure the presence of different and divergent opinions in the online discussion space (Kies 2010, 53).

External impact

The external impact implies that there is an impact that is taking place outside an online forum if this forum is actually having a successful deliberative process (Kies 2010, 54).

3. Understanding Deliberative Discourse in the Czech Pirate Party Forum

3.1 Context of the Czech Pirate Party

3.1.1. Background of the Czech Pirate Party

The Czech Pirate Party was not the first branch in the Pirate Party family. The first one was founded in Sweden in 2006. Soon after, other Pirate Parties began establishing themselves in many European countries (Jääsaari and Šárovec 2021, 203). In regards to the Czech Pirate Party, it was founded in 2009 when programmer Jiří Kadeřávek announced a petition for the creation of the party, and in less than 3 months the party was registered by the Czech Ministry of the Interior (Šárovec 2019, 4).

For a long time, the party had been relatively small and not electorally successful (Jääsaari and Šárovec 2021, 209). Only in 2017 was the Czech Pirate Party able to achieve a significant breakthrough: they were able to win 22 mandates out of 200 (10.79%) at the election of the Chamber of Deputies in the Parliament of the Czech Republic (Šárovec 2019, 8). Before the voting that took place in 2017, they were able to secure 0.80% back in 2010 and 2.66% in 2013, with only one joint candidate to the Senate in 2012, as well as 21 seats in local elections in autumn 2014 and just 5 seats in the regional elections of 2016 (Šárovec 2019, 7). After 2017, the Czech Pirate Party was able to get 1 senator in the 2018 Senate elections, 13 seats in the Prague City Assembly, and additionally, a mayor. Overall, the party was able to get 353 seats in the 2018 local elections. In the 2019 European Parliament elections, they were able to secure 3 seats (ČSÚ 2019). In the 2020 Senate voting, the party was able to vote another senator in; in the same year's rounds of regional voting, they got 92 seats (ČZÚ 2023). In the 2021 elections of the Chamber of Deputies, the party formed a coalition with several mayors (Starostové/STAN) and was able to achieve 37 seats together; however, the Pirate Party only actually got 4 representatives (ČZÚ 2023). Even though the results in numbers were worse than during the previous elections, the party was finally able to be a member of the ruling coalition and achieve 3 ministry positions. In the 2022 local elections, the party was also less successful than before, getting 274 seats; however, most of the parties had worse results this cycle since people were voting more for the independent candidates (ČZÚ 2023). Overall, we see that after 2017, the party was able to gain a lot more

support at all levels of politics; however, this trend was punctuated by the aforementioned losses in recent years. Nevertheless, it's still very hard to predict future trends in the party's electoral success due to the instability of voter's support for all existing parties.

3.1.2 Party membership

At the time of writing this work, the party has 1,163 members and 91 suspended members (mostly due to late membership payments), 1,275 registered supporters, and a total of 12,642 registered users (possibly around 10,113 registered users without party membership) (Piráti 2024c).

The Czech Pirate Party identifies three types of users:

- party members,
- registered supporters, and
- registered users without party membership.

To become a member of Czech Pirate Party, a person should be a citizen (of the Czech Republic or a citizen of the European Union who has a confirmed temporary residence permit or a permanent residence permit in the Czech Republic) who

- is fully competent to act legally,
- is not a member of another political party,
- agree with the Pirates' program goals and commit to supporting them.

Party members can vote in party-wide and regional ballots and can be elected to all positions in the party (Piráti 2024f, 2024d). The member must pay the membership fee annually in a self-decided amount in the range of CZK 200 to CZK 49,999.

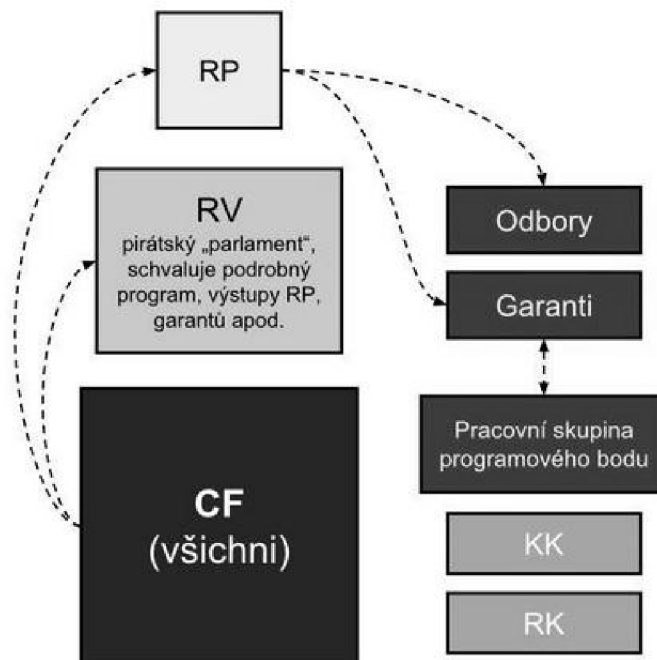
To become registered supporter, a person should

- submit an application for registration, in which they fill in at least the functional contact and name of the regional association or local association to which they wish to belong and the information required for identity verification.
- be verified as having knowledge of the ideological goals of the party by a member of the relevant regional presidency.

Registered supporters do not have to pay membership fee or any other contribution.

3.1.3. Party's structure

Figure 1: Czech Pirate Party organizational structure scheme



Source: https://wiki.pirati.cz/po/navody/vitej_u_piratu

The party is divided into several main bodies (Figure 1)(Piráti 2024g):

- Party Presidency (RP): executive body of the Czech Pirate Party.
- Party Committee (RV): prepares materials for the National forum and specifies the regulations adopted by it.
- The National Forum is the highest body of the Pirate Party, which includes all members of the party.
- Control Commission (KK) and Arbitration Commission (RK): oversee the adherence of the rules within the Pirate Party.
- Committees (Odbor) and Party Office: semi-volunteer teams that manage the internal affairs of the party.

Since the focus of this work is the Czech Pirate Forum, I am providing merely a brief overview on the party's main bodies. A detailed expansion and analysis is reserved for the focus of this work.

3.2 Overview of the Czech Pirate Party's Online Forum

The Forum of Czech Pirate Party is divided into several sub forums that discuss the program of the party ('Pirátský program'), regional and local forums ('Oblastní sdružení'), forums under different party bodies and teams ('Orgány strany a týmy'), and other intraparty discussions that don't go under any other forums ('Vnitrostranická diskuse').

The National Forum ('Celostátní fórum'), which lies under 'Orgány strany a týmy', is considered to be the highest party body. It is in charge of elections and withdrawals of party leadership and is part of the republic committee, establishing and removing commissions and departments, the election of commission members, and the chairs of departments (Vodová and Voda 2021).

3.2.1 Rules of procedure of the national forum

The Rules of Procedure of the National Forum (Piráti 2024a) are one of the main sets of rules for the National Forum. It defines the actual procedures, and also states that members have a right to submit proposals to a group of members, participate in the debate, and vote, whereas registered supporters have only a right to participate in the debate with an advisory vote. It also states that every meeting is directed by a moderator. A moderator is a chairman or the authorized deputy chairman of the party (another member present or a registered supporter may chair the meeting of the national forum only if the rules of procedure stipulate as such or a proposed procedure of this sort is approved). The moderator is taking into account the general agreement of those present, and if orderly proceedings require it, they can use orderly measures to remove the speaker from the floor or expel a person from the meeting.

The ways of proceeding can be on the Internet, via a physical meeting, or via a meeting using the Internet.

For voting on the Internet, the minimum duration of the vote is determined as follows: (Unless otherwise specified by the proposed procedure, if the end date or the start of voting falls on a non-working day, the voting will be extended by this day, even repeatedly, so that it starts and ends on a working day; the time for reflection must be respected) (Table 1) (Piráti 2024a).

Table 1: Czech Pirate Party votings duration periods

Type of vote time	Period
General agreement on the proposed procedure	24 hours
Voting on the proposed procedure (excluding decisive vote)	24 hours
Decisive vote	from Friday 10 a.m. to Monday 8 p.m.

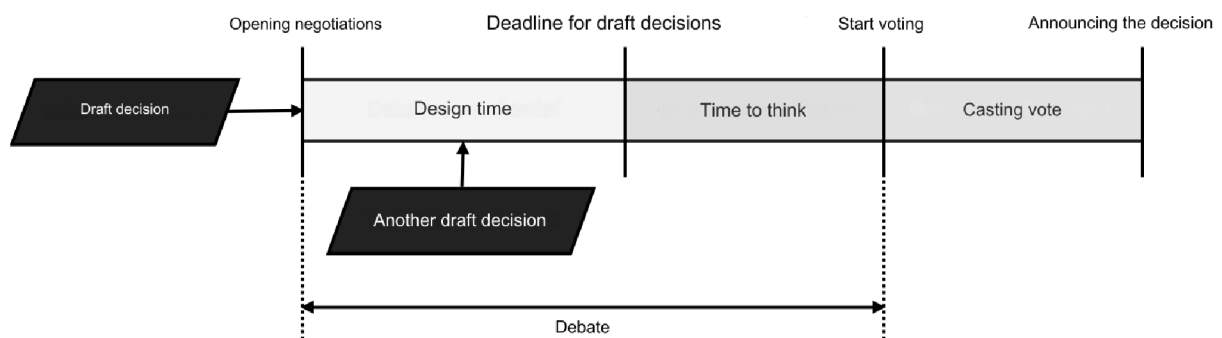
Source: <https://wiki.pirati.cz/rules/jdr>

The National Forum can make decisions on resolutions and on elections. For this, it has a few procedures:

- Basic or regular procedure
 - Resolution procedure
 - Selection procedure (voting)
- Procedure for accelerated negotiations (referendum)
- Other procedures

The basic proceedings (Figure 2)(Piráti 2024a) of the national forum begin with a draft decision. Then it continues with a debate, where there is time for amendments and rewriting the draft and time to think about the final draft. The last part of the procedure is voting and the announcement of the adopted decision.

Figure 2: Basic proceedings of the Czech Pirate Party National Forum

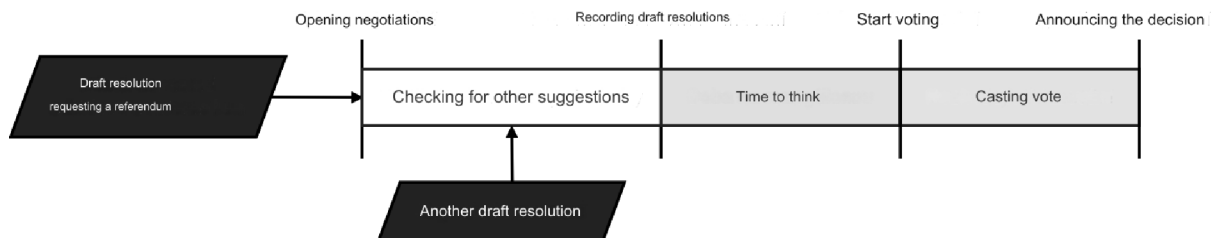


Source: <https://wiki.pirati.cz/rules/jdr>

An accelerated meeting (referendum) (Figure 3)(Piráti 2024a) is an accelerated procedure in which certain resolutions are discussed. It also begins with a draft decision; however, it should already be asking for an accelerated way from the beginning. Then it continues with a

time to understand if there are any other drafts of resolution. After that, the members have time to debate and think about the resolution. The last part of the procedure is voting and the announcement of the adopted decision.

Figure 3: Proceedings of the Czech Pirate Party National Forum in the referendum



Source: <https://wiki.pirati.cz/rules/jdr>

3.2.2 Codex of behavior

The codex of behavior (Piráti 2024b) determines the rules for online and offline communication for all party members and supporters. The main rules found there are:

1. “Principles of joint functioning Cooperation in the party is based on the following principles:
 - a. be open and fair,
 - b. communicate freely and matter-of-factly,
 - c. assume goodwill
 - d. approach others with consideration and respect, including respect for different opinions,
 - e. accept initiative and co-create an environment where it is safe to ask questions,
 - f. give others constructive feedback and refrain from hasty criticism.
 - g. try to provide help and support to those who are harmed by violations of the Code.”
2. “In order to create a safer environment in the party, we must all refrain from any form of harassment, personal attacks, intimidation, insults, humiliation, ridicule, bullying, or other comparably hurtful and destructive interactions.”
3. “Each person has a different nature and different boundaries, so we approach everyone with sensitivity. In particular, the creation of sexualized psychological or

physical pressure, attack or manipulation, unsolicited attention of a sexual nature or sexual and sexist remarks is inadmissible.”

4. “Any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, skin color, age, creed, religion, national or social origin, membership of a national or ethnic minority, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical appearance, health, or similar reasons is fundamentally inadmissible.”
5. "In the event that you come across an action that is in conflict with the Code, you should inform the person in question, or the moderator, of the inappropriateness of the action and try to end it."
6. In the event of violation of the Code:
 - a. “The person may issue a formal reprimand to the person concerned.”
 - b. “It is possible to grant sanctions according to other regulations.”
 - c. “It is possible to file a complaint.”
 - d. “If the person in question does not stop violating the principles of communication in the internal online environment, even following a formal reprimand, and/or repeatedly violates these principles, the administrative department may temporarily exclude him from the discussion in the given communication space, or the administrator of the entire information system may temporarily suspend his access to the space. This sanction can also be granted without prior notice in cases of gross violation of communication principles.”

3.2.3 Deliberation criteria in Czech Pirate Party Forum rules

Considering a steady improvement in the percentage of households with access to the Internet from 49.2% in 2009, when the party was founded, to 87.5% in 2023 (Czech Statistical Office 2024), we can definitely say that it is getting easier for the party to meet its inclusion criteria by technological means. Membership in the party is relatively liberal as well, since they accept everyone who can actually vote and be elected under Czech election laws. However, being supporters of liberal values, it can be regarded as a strange hypocrisy that the party is not giving third country nationals the right to join. This embargo even extends to third country nationals who have acquired a permanent residency and are eligible to vote in the local elections. For those who can be members, it is convenient that there are two membership tiers: being a full member with a voting voice or a registered member. The

starting annual participation fee for full members is very low, being only 1% of the monthly minimum wage (in 2024). That way, even low-income citizens are able to join. For the registered members tier, there is no registration fee, so they can contribute to the party life as much as is feasible for them. Overall, based on the party documents, even though there are points for improvement, it is possible to say the inclusion criterion is met.

Since the basis of this work is the criterion of reciprocity, which I analyze through justification, reflexivity, and empathy criteria (which are described in more detail in the methodology part of this work), let us see how they are reflected in the Czech Pirate Party rules.

The code of behavior is mainly focused on empathy. In point #1 that I cited earlier at the Codex of Behavior part, the party is asking and, in some instances, demanding (since there is a description of punishments provided at point #6) to assume goodwill, respect each other, create a safe environment for the users (the definition of which is described in points #2 and #3), and avoid hasty criticism. In point #4, the party also demands to avoid any kind of discrimination. All of that, as well as promoting giving feedback and putting the responsibility of the primary guard of the rules on members, makes me expect positive results in the criteria of empathy.

In terms of ‘justification’, the party has tried to put some rules in place to regulate its dissemination; however, in my opinion, they are not as straightforward as the empathy criteria. In the already-mentioned point #1, they advise being open and fair and communicating freely and matter-of-factly, as they repeat it in the supplementary Rules of Internet Communications (Piráti 2024e). They put it in the Decree on the meeting of the National Forum (Piráti 2024h) as well:

“In addition to the general rules of the forum, the following rules apply to the meeting of the national forum according to the rules of procedure:

- politeness,
- matter-of-factness,
- brevity,
- [and] for formatting, use only bold, italics, and paragraphs.”

However, I could not find any further explanation of how exactly the party views such a message. As such, I expect a mixed picture of the results, since perhaps the users could form contradictory ideas based on their interpretations.

I am the least optimistic about the results of reflexivity. One can say that it is vaguely implied in the comments in the Codex of Behavior about respect for others and giving others constructive feedback. However, I believe that there is no clear focus from the party on such criteria, or a potentially complete lack of it. Therefore, I am expecting to see the worst results on this criteria. I stipulate the reason being that no member is educated on the subject, and it would be difficult to assume that somehow the majority of the users would just practice it naturally.

4. Methodology

4.1 Selection of Data

To answer the research question, "To what degree do participants in the Czech Pirate Party forum engage in deliberative discourse?" and "How does this alignment vary across different topics under discussion?" I selected certain forum topics from the Czech Pirate Party's online forums.

For this work, I initially thought to use the data from the Archive of the National Forum (Piráti, 2024b). The reason behind this was that posts in the archive are already closed and no longer open to discussion. However, I didn't understand correctly that not all finished discussions are automatically archived. The majority of finished forums actually stay on the National Forum page and get 'locked' or 'muted', meaning nobody else can add any new messages to that forum. Considering that the archive had only 156 topics compared to the 421 topics of the National Forum, I decided to change focus from the archive of the National Forum to closed forums on the National Forum, in order to obtain more data (Piráti, 2024a). Another change was made in size selection: the top 5% of the most discussed forums. These are the forums with the most posts in them. Even though it seems like 5% is a small proportion, it in fact represents 24.77% of all answers given in the National Forum which translates to exactly 6,683 messages. Considering the nature of this work, it was not realistic to go through all of these messages, since the analysis is intended to be not just quantitative but qualitative as well. Therefore, I decided to limit the number of forums to 5. However, the

selected forums represent the highest amount of discussion, since their message and view count far exceeds the median across all forums. The total number of forums at the National Forum at the moment of data collection was 421. The mean for messages was 36, and the mean number of views on these forums was 8,192. The chosen forums had the lowest number of messages was 54 and the lowest number of views was 13,674. You can see the chosen forums in Table 2.

Table 2: Selected Forums

Number	Name of the Forum	Link to the forum	Topics of discussion	Number of messages	Number of views
1	'CF 35/2017 Odvolání Jakuba Michálka z RP'	https://forum.pirati.cz/viewtopic.php?t=38476	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to recall Jakub Michalek from his position in the Party Presidency.	93	44768
2	'CF 9/2017 Odvolání kontrolní komise'	https://forum.pirati.cz/viewtopic.php?t=36386	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to withdraw the control commission.	79	21794
3	'CF 10/2020 Doplnující volba do Kontrolní komise'	https://forum.pirati.cz/viewtopic.php?t=53062	The supplementary voting for the Control Commission.	63	19404
4	'CF 8/2022 Odsouzení fyzických trestů'	https://forum.pirati.cz/viewtopic.php?t=60347	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on physical punishment when raising children.	101	17698
5	'CF 13/2023 Pozice Pirátské strany k Pavlu Blažkovi'	https://forum.pirati.cz/viewtopic.php?t=64620	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the continuation of Pavel Blažek in the position of Minister of Justice of the Czech Republic as a response to a corruption scandal involving the minister.	54	13674

Source: author's own elaboration.

The most discussed forums are selected due to the assumption that if the topic is intensely discussed, there could be disagreements, which means they must be the most representative of whether participants are following the deliberative criteria or not.

I decided to choose the topics from a more recent time (specifically 2017) because only one work that was done on intra-party democracy in the Czech Pirate Party is from the year 2018 (Michalčák, 2018). This is to better explore the insight into the current situation and the level of deliberation in the party forum.

4.2 Data Collection and Archiving

To start analyzing the data, I gathered the list of topics utilizing the python function of web-scraping, number of answers, number of views, author of the last message, and date. I was able to organize the scraped list from the most to the least number of answers, and which helped prioritize the topics to select first. I also made sure that all the selected forums were already closed such that further discussions and answers wouldn't be taking place. The forum data was scraped on March 11, 2024.

I used Python code to scrape the initial list of forums from the website (Piráti, 2024a) and then transformed all the data into an Excel sheet to order it from the most answers to the least.

Considering that all forums are public and users choose their usernames by themselves, I do not see any potential privacy violations.

Henceforth, I was able to download all the forums that fit the search criteria.

4.3 Coding and Analysis Procedure

4.3.1 Coding

One of the most important and basic criteria for deliberation is reciprocity. However, it is very difficult to search for the absence or presence of reciprocity right away, since both results would not 100% answer the question of the deliberativeness of the communication (Kies, 2010, p. 45). Nevertheless, it is possible to study reciprocity with better results with the help of other criteria: justification, reflexivity, and empathy. That is why they were chosen as the main criteria for coding the forums.

These criteria are analyzed through content analysis. The sample data was coded into 6 binary variables, which were selected and constructed to reflect theoretical concepts.

The first 3 variables reflect justification:

- Presence of arguments: Does the message provide a reason or an argument to justify the position?
- Understanding: Are arguments understandable for the majority of the public?
- Reasoning: Do arguments have moral or logical reasoning?

The second variable has one component and accounts for reflexivity:

- Self-awareness: Does the author recognize opposing viewpoints or potential weaknesses in their arguments?

The last 2 variables reflect empathy:

- Dialogue: Does the user engage with others, even if they disagree?
- Tone: Is the tone of the posting respectful/neutral?

All the messages from the selected forums were analyzed based on the variables above. In other words, all the messages went through 6 questions and got assigned a number: if the answer to the question is 'yes', then the assigned number is '1' if the answer to the question is 'no', then the number is '0'; if the question is inapplicable to certain messages, then it is marked as 'N/A'. Since understanding and reasoning are strongly related to the presence of the argument, in case of a lack of argument, these variables are marked as 'N/A'. Furthermore, the moderators' announcements were not analyzed, as they were serving informational purposes and the moderator is not directly involved in the debates about the issue. The moderators' messages were marked as '-' and did not influence the result. I also did not include in the analysis the messages that were sent after the final voting results announcements due to their lack of influence on the result of the voting.

4.3.2 Analysis Procedure

Presence of arguments

The process of identifying the presence of arguments was quite straightforward. If a person were to write a position in a formula similar to "I think X because Y", or other wording

equivalent, where X is a position and Y is an argument, then it is considered that there is the presence of an argument. For example, this message (Marek.Krejpsky 2023) is arguing even though it omits the "I think" part. Nevertheless, from the context, it is clear that this is the user's opinion and not just an unrelated statement (all the quotes are translated from Czech to English by the author):

“The Minister of Justice should not be someone who is reported to be trying to look into files or to be at war with prosecutors (see the recent resignation of Chief Prosecutor Radim Daňhel).

He is becoming more and more controversial and is damaging the image of the government and the Pirates, who have tolerated him until now, with his reputation and suspicious actions.”

The user thinks that "The Minister of Justice should not be someone who is reported to be trying to look into files or to be at war with prosecutors" because "He is becoming a more and more controversial figure and is damaging the image of the government and the Pirates".

The messages without arguments are usually messages where users were answering some messages with only links, a comment that would portray an agreement to another user without elaboration on it, etc.

Understandable

The process of identifying the understandability of the arguments was not so difficult as well. The argument must have been written simply without using difficult words, niche slang, etc. to be considered understandable.

For example, this message (Ondra.kl 2017) used a metaphor that is not that easily understandable for everyone to identify what exactly the author means; it is hard to determine if the author means it as sarcasm or not. Therefore, this message is considered to lack understanding of the argument.

“Somehow I didn't notice that the media was concerned with the secrecy of the resolution. The media only became interested in the CF negotiations on the dismissal of Michálek.

It's like saying that the paint manufacturer is responsible for the painted wall and not the person who painted it. ;)"

An example of arguments being understandable is (Martin.Elias 2020):

"I don't think running for CC with the fact that CC has ever hurt me is a suitable starting position. If Pavel feels that the case is not resolved fairly, he should have used other solutions, which, of course, do not include candidacy for the CC. I expressed my doubt in his nomination thread, and Pavel's other comments only convince me that I cannot support his candidacy."

The author is expressing his arguments clearly without using too many advanced or niche words (CC is a common party abbreviation for Control Committee).

Reasoning

The process of identifying the presence of reasoning was oppositely one of the most challenging criteria to identify. First of all, some messages would just omit the need to support their argument when it is not immediately evident why this is valid. Secondly, some people would not use a proper reason, like a logical or moral basis. However, people would use other reasons, like personal experience or a custom.

As a bad example, I use this message (Robert.Magni 2022) (Picture 1). It does argue the structure "I think X because Y," however, it lacks the logical or moral explanation; in other words, it is not supported.

Picture 1: Example of lack of reasoning

I suggest changing point A to:

“

From a wide selection of professional literature, it follows that the use of physical punishment does not have a positive effect on the child in education

As point B is unnecessary and too confusing, I propose to omit it completely.

I propose to combine point C with the new point A so that the entire resolution is simplified to:

“

From a wide selection of professional literature, it follows that the use of punishments does not have a significant positive effect on the child in education, therefore the CF imposes the MRT Human Rights to be active in educating the public about educational procedures that are in line with current knowledge of the developmental psychology of children.

I left out the word "physical" because the effect of psychological abuse is even worse.

And since punishments also have a limited positive effect, I added the word "significant"

And thank you to the author for not judging anymore - that's what I had the biggest problem with

Source: Robert.Magni. (2022, February 11). *Re: CF 8/2022 Odsouzení fyzických trestů*. <https://forum.pirati.cz/viewtopic.php?p=798689#p798689>. The original language is Czech, this is a translated version.

The opponent, however, in his initial speech does provide reasoning (Jan.Hrubes 2022).

“Raising a child is very difficult. It is clear that the methods of education that each parent chooses will depend on their socio-cultural background. It is not the role of the state to force this or that method on parents using such a brutal instrument as legislation. This initiative and this resolution are therefore not and have never been about a law that should prohibit some form of education.

However, the state has the task of protecting the child and providing him with the best possible environment so that he can become a successful member of society. It follows from a wide selection of professional literature that the use of physical shocks does not have a positive effect on the child during education. For those interested, here are some meta-analyses summarizing the last 30 years of research: Gershoff, 2002, 2018; Durrant, 2012.”

The author of the message makes some claims, then supports them with arguments, and backs these arguments with the literature.

Of course, the majority of the messages were not backed by the literature; however, they were still considered to be reasonable, for example, this message (Ondrej.Kalis 2022a).

“I perceive Pirates as a very free-spirited, liberal party that recognizes the personality of each individual regardless of nationality, gender, orientation, who knows what, and also regardless of age. Although a child at an early age is not always able to make independent decisions, it is still not the property of its parents in any sense. Therefore, it is very appropriate to ask whether it is right for a person to hit another person and call it the right thing or part of education. If we answer, it's not right! Then it is logical to say that we do not agree with the systematic use of physical punishment.

This has nothing to do with the question of whether a person sometimes loses his temper in a heated situation. From my point of view, it is mainly a declaration that physical punishment is not correct, educational, or for the good of the beaten person. It's a thing that might happen sometimes, but it's not good.”

The argument and reasoning are that if members have certain values and agree that hitting another person is bad and a child is not the property of parents, then it is reasonable to disagree with physical punishments for kids. The author is writing down the logical chain, and in that way, the message is considered to fulfill the reasoning criteria.

Self-awareness

The process of identifying the presence of self-awareness was similarly as challenging as the identification of present reasoning.

The words that led to a present of self-awareness were "I understand that (but)...", "I understand it can seem like X, however,...", "I agree with you on X but I don't think Y is... [right]", etc. Another characteristic that I consider self-awareness is when a user asks a question regarding their opinion, for example, "I think X. Isn't that like that?" and when it was clearly not a rhetorical question. Another good example of self-awareness was admitting that a member did something wrong (Jakub.Michalek 2017):

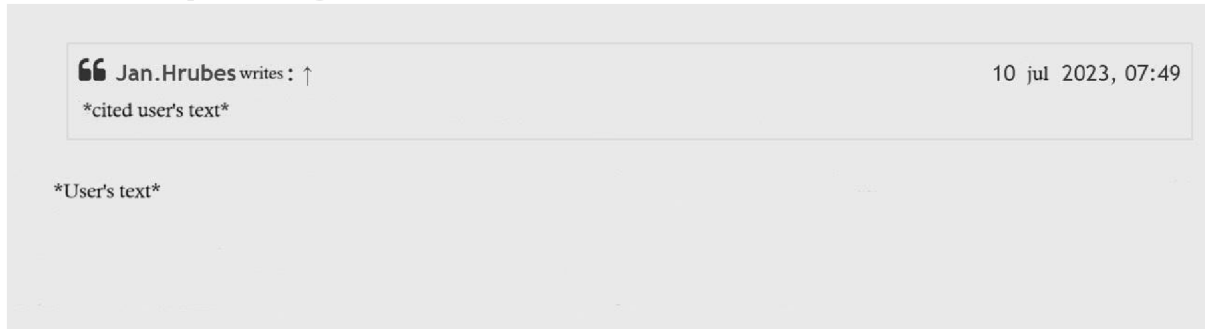
“Looking back now, I admit I made a mistake. When I explained the whole situation publicly, I was unnecessarily arrogant.”

It is hard to give any examples of a lack of self-awareness, because it is commonly characterized as not mentioning or recognizing the opposing argument, as well as a lack of recognition of the flaws of their own arguments.

Dialogue

The process of identification of the presence of dialogue was relatively easy as well because the identification criteria were straightforward: the user's message must answer directly to a certain message, or it is clear from the message that they refer to already mentioned positions and people. Directly answered questions are visible; they use a quote from the other message (picture 2, big box with quote sign, name of the quoted user, and date of the message), or they refer to the username or name of the person. Examples of undetected ones are: using a broad way of mentioning the person/opinion.

Picture 2: Example of dialogue, translated



Source: Author's scheme of the message

Tone

The process of identifying the tone was also relatively easy. Calling names (idiot, stupid, crazy, etc.), personal attacks, and overly emotional statements (a lot of unnecessary exclamation points, ellipses, etc.) were all considered clues of lacking the appropriate tone.

Under the Codex of Behavior that we talked about in the previous chapter, direct assaults and similar acts are not allowed. In the analyzed forums, I saw evidence that such inappropriate messages are indeed addressed by the members and moderators. A registered non-member and non-supporter user wrote such a message in response to other member messages:

“You are insidious and arrogant. I have seen your "personal dispute resolution" in several arbitrations, where you have only shown your distorted desire to destroy opponents by abusing all available loopholes in the regulations you wrote yourself. You have no legal sense, and violating and abusing the general law and party regulations is just your way to power.

There is nothing human about you anymore, and this display of your hypocrisy really sickens me.

You are a freak.”

This message clearly violated rules, so a member pointed it out in the message (Jiri.Kaderavek 2017), and a moderator (Michaela.Vodova 2017) moved this message from the forum to a separate place and warned the offender that upon repetition of such behavior he will be expelled from the meeting.

However, not all the members always keep a respectful, or at least neutral, tone. Generally, violations do not fall directly under the violation of the rules, but I did count them as more

disrespectful than they could have been and what the general standard for these forums is. I do not know for sure why such disrespect was not addressed by the moderators and members. A potential explanation is that there is a will to put minor mistakes down for the sake of the productiveness of the discussion. However, I counted some aggressive words like "lie," "you are lying," "demagogy," and "you are/act paranoiac," and moving too personal to the opponents as something not matching the respectful and neutral. Also, in the Czech language, there are two forms of referring to a person: you-formal and you-informal. Since the tradition of party communications in the forum is the use of you-informal, this use was considered as respectful or neutral. Conversely, the use of you-formal names such as Mr, Mrs, or equivalents were considered more hostile communication and were flagged as disrespectful.

As positive examples of a neutral tone, even though the person strongly disagrees with an opponent, I would cite this message (Ondrej.Kalis 2022b):

“For me, the essence of Pirates is mainly personal freedom, and if someone beats a person or otherwise abuses their power or superiority against them, then it should be damn important to Pirates, and I want Pirates to stand up for him. Instead, you come here with a topic that has nothing to do with the ongoing discussion, to belittle why we are dealing with this in the first place. The neighboring debate deals with the Turów mine, one of the most fundamental environmental issues. It does not occur to me that we should not be able to solve both.

Tell a child who is bullied by several boys who beat and oppress their parents at home and they get away with it by trampling a weaker classmate that their problem is insignificant compared to the fact that the families of the aggressors do not know where to pay for the energy... This is where you get argumentative to a completely absurd level. Probably because you ran out of arguments.”

A member clearly states his strong position and tries to explain it. He does make assumptions about the other person's reasons for writing her position; however, he does not assume that he knows her reasons (he uses the word "probably") and does not go to a personal level, like "you are absurd", "you are stupid", "if you say so, you don't care about children", etc.

The classic respectful and positive tone words were "Dear members", "Thank you, everyone, who...", "I hope you decide as you think best", "I would like to ask a question", etc.

4.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Of course, there are certain limitations to such a study. First of all, the representativeness of just 5 forums is not that broad; however, it can capture some trends. Another limitation is the relative subjectivity of the marking. However clear instructions are, there is still a possibility of subjective judgment. The selection of the data could have been biased as well, even though I tried to choose it randomly, choose different topics of forums, and choose forums that were led by different procedures to have as many representable and at the same time random sets of data.

5. Findings

The guiding research questions of this work were: "To what degree do participants in the Czech Pirate Party forum engage in deliberative discourse?" and "How does this alignment vary across different topics under discussion?". First, I identified the forums that will be studied. I chose 5 different topic-finished forums dating from 2017 to current time, which were also among the most discussed ones at the National Forum of Czech Pirate Party. Second, I applied 3 deliberative criteria with a total of 6 variables to all the messages in the selected forums, excluding moderators' messages because of their limited influence on the discussions. Each variable was a yes-or-no question. Every 'yes' equaled 1, and every 'no' equaled 0. Some questions that could not be answered were marked as 'N/A'. Lastly, I calculated the results with regard to every variable and forum.

From Table 4, we can see that the fulfillment of the criteria broadly is very high. Overall, the best results had the empathy criterion, then it was justification, and reflexivity showed the worst result among all three. In terms of individual variables, understanding and tone showed the best results, and self-awareness showed the worst results. The expectations for the results were generally fulfilled as well, as it was expected that the empathy criterion would show the best result, justification was expected to show relatively good results but with problems in the reasoning variable, and reflexivity was not expected to have a high result due to the lack of focus on it in the rules of the party.

In the proceeding part of this work, I will go through individual criteria and variables, forums, and topics and state all the findings and trends.

Table 3: Analyzed forums' information

Number	Name of the Forum	Topics of discussion	Total number of messages	Number of analyzed messages
1	'CF 35/2017 Odvolání Jakuba Michálka z RP'	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to recall Jakub Michalek from his position in the Party Presidency.	93	83
2	'CF 9/2017 Odvolání kontrolní komise'	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to withdraw the control commission.	79	68
3	'CF 10/2020 Doplňující volba do Kontrolní komise'	The supplementary voting for the Control Commission.	63	42
4	'CF 8/2022 Odsouzení fyzických trestů'	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on physical punishment when raising children.	101	82
5	'CF 13/2023 Pozice Pirátské strany k Pavlu Blažkovi'	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the continuation of Pavel Blažek in the position of Minister of Justice of the Czech Republic as a response to a corruption scandal involving the minister.	54	47

Source: author's own elaboration.

Table 4: Results of individual criteria

Criteria/Forum name		1	2	3	4	5	Average per criteria
		CF 352017	CF 92017	CF 102020	CF 82022	CF 132023	
Justification	Presence of arguments	71,08%	89,71%	80,95%	89,02%	85,11%	83,17%
	Understanding	98,31%	92,06%	97,06%	94,74%	97,50%	95,93%
	Reasoning	79,66%	58,73%	85,29%	48,68%	82,50%	70,97%
Reflexivity	Self-awareness	51,81%	48,53%	59,52%	43,90%	70,21%	54,80%
Empathy	Dialogue	80,72%	73,53%	76,19%	86,59%	70,21%	77,45%
	Tone	85,54%	94,12%	100,00%	97,56%	95,74%	94,59%

Source: author's own elaboration.

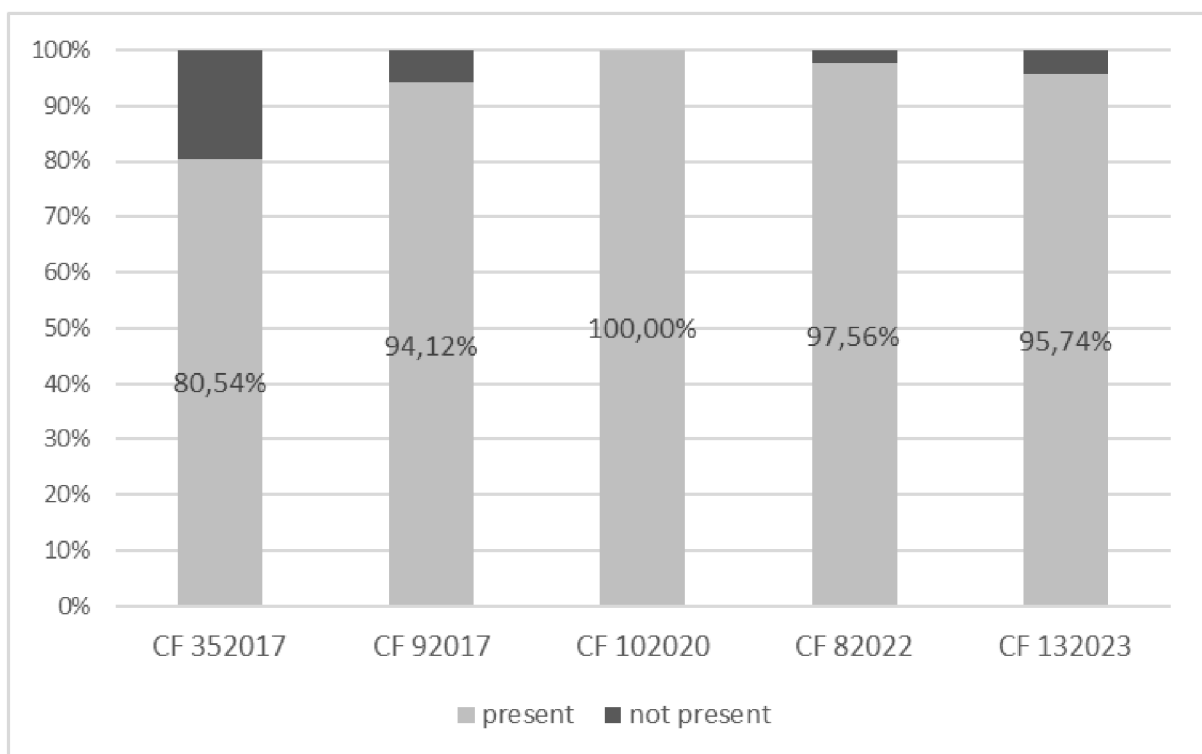
5.1 Going through criteria

5.1.1 Empathy

As predicted, based mainly on the Codex of Behavior, empathy had an obvious presence in the forums' messages. Users actively engage with other users, react to their messages, answer them, and refer to them in their speeches. The tone of the majority of the messages is almost always respectful or neutral.

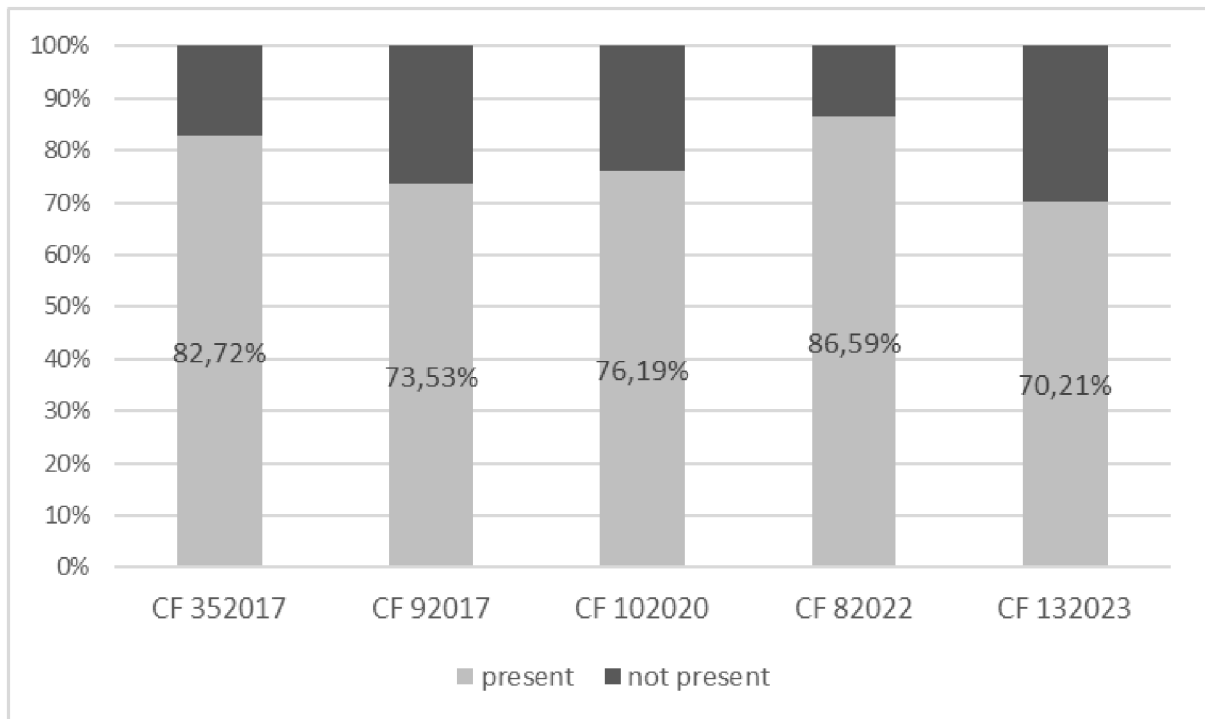
The studied forums showed astonishing results, specifically in regards to the tone of the messages, with about 95% of the messages being written in a respectful or neutral tone (Table 4). The highest and lowest results were 100% and 80.54% (Figure 4). Regarding the dialogue criterion, I also believe it is an impressive result. More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of messages directly or indirectly refer to the other users' messages, ideas, or questions (Table 4). It is a high result due to the fact that it is impossible to expect all messages to refer to someone else's message. The highest percentage was 86.59, and the lowest was 70.21 (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Tone results



Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 5: Dialogue results



Source: author's own elaboration.

The tone variable was often represented by a lack of negative tone rather than the presence of a positive tone. Nevertheless, considering that the forum is supposed to be a safe space for friendly equals, I believe that the lack of a negative tone is much more important for deliberation than the presence of a positive tone. After all, the discussions should, in a way, mimic real-life discussions.

The majority of the time, the dialogue was represented by a direct answer to a quote from another user (look at the example in Picture 2 in the methodology part). Much more rarely, users would use a direct user name to answer someone with a form of '@user' or would answer indirectly on some positions or questions.

5.1.2 Justification

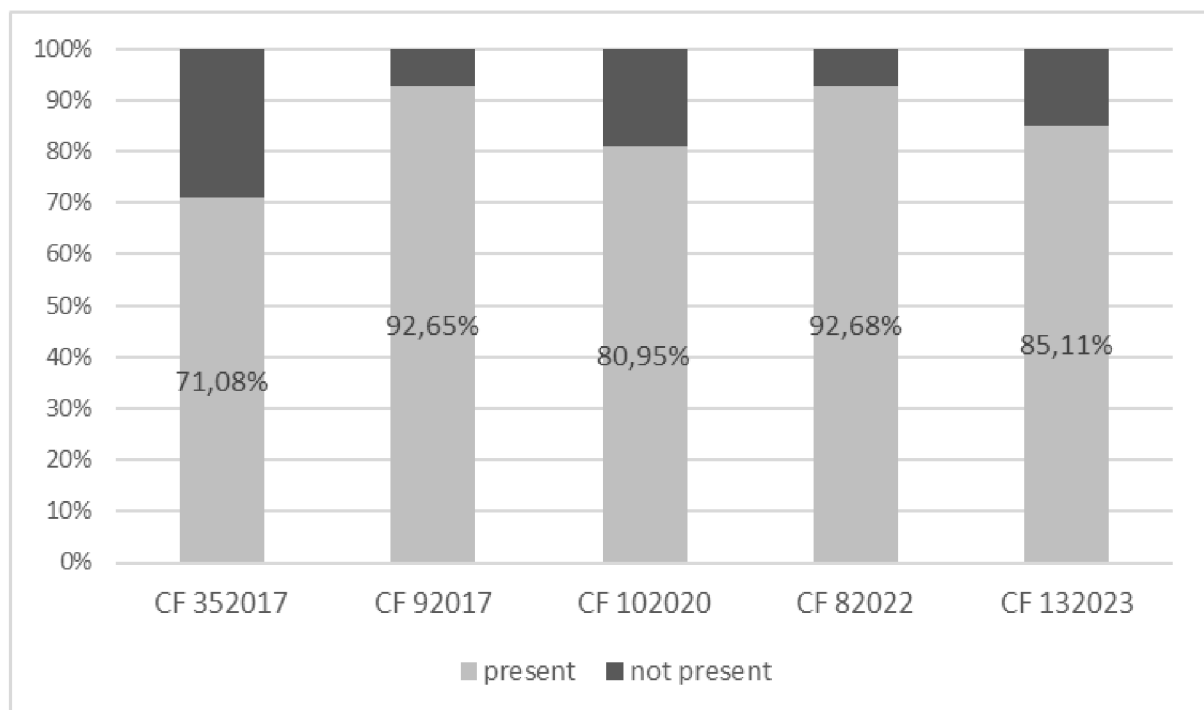
In terms of the justification criterion, the results are also quite expected. On average, more than 70% of forum messages have arguments (Table 4), meaning that users are actually trying to follow the rule of writing the messages matter-of-factly. The lowest percentage had Forum #1 (about the recall of Jakub Michalek) with 71.08%, and the highest percentage had forum #4 (about the position on physical punishment on children) with 92.68% (Figure 4). However, as it was predicted, even though users tried to stick to the rule, they lack understanding of what

it actually means. Therefore, the difference between the results of reasoning and understanding is 25 points, showing that the party should have paid more attention to this rule and made it more clear for everyone (Table 6). The highest result for understanding was 98.31%, and for reasoning was 85.29%, and the lowest ones were 92.06% and 48.68% respectively (Figure 7 & 8).

In terms of understanding, users were actually hardly ever using difficult words or concepts for other users. The main problem for those that did actually fail to make their argument understandable was the lack of coherence and connectivity between the two, meaning that I could not understand the relationship between the statement and the argument.

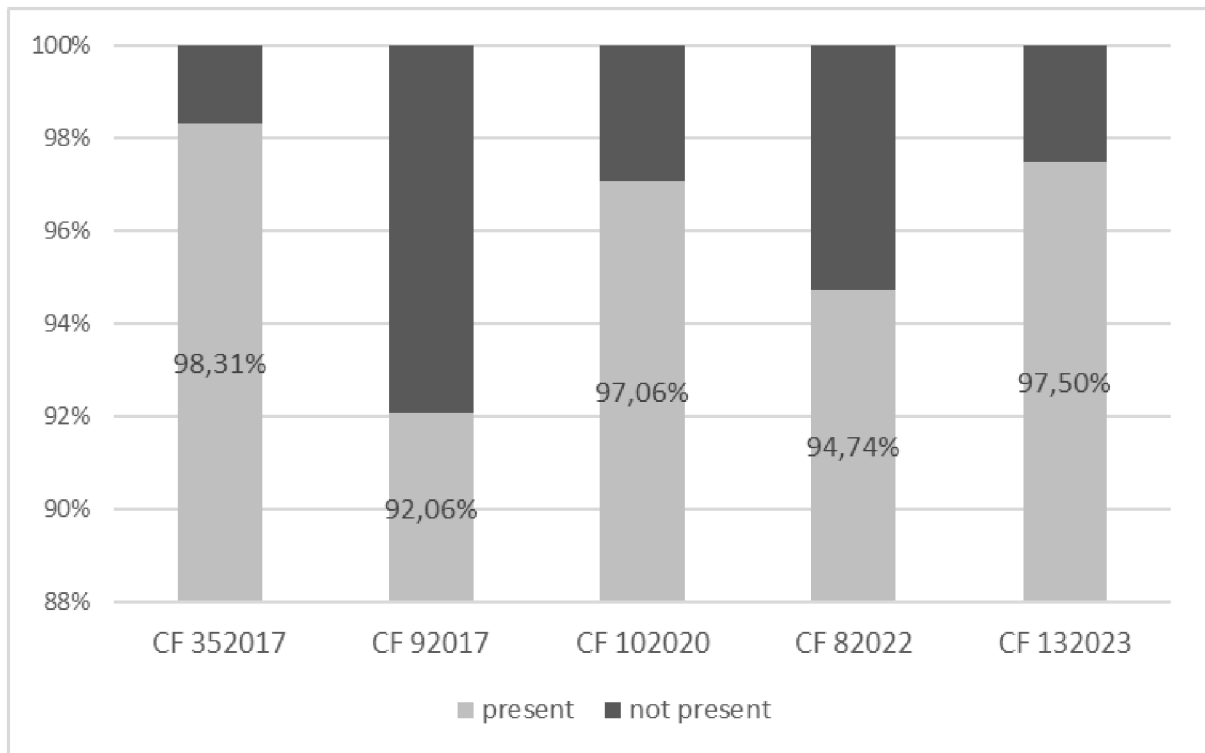
Reasoning was even more challenging than understanding, because it had more sub-criteria to choose from: 1) there is a reason, and it is moral or logical; 2) there is a reason, and it is neither moral nor logical; 3) there is no reason. Positive reasoning was only option 1. Considering that the party was lacking any focus on this variable, or, in other words, this representing the justification criterion, it was evident that users had a harder time understanding what the ideal argument looks like, what is important in it, and what is not.

Figure 6: Presence of arguments results



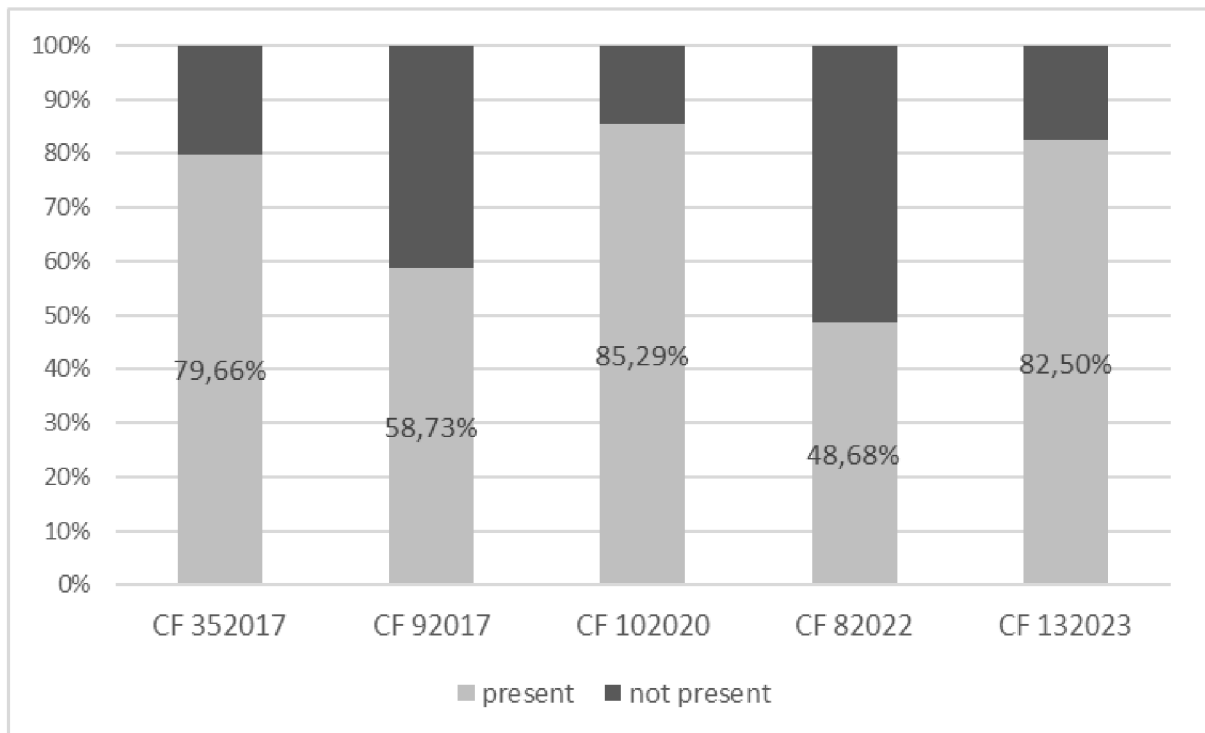
Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 7: Understanding results



Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 8: Reasoning results



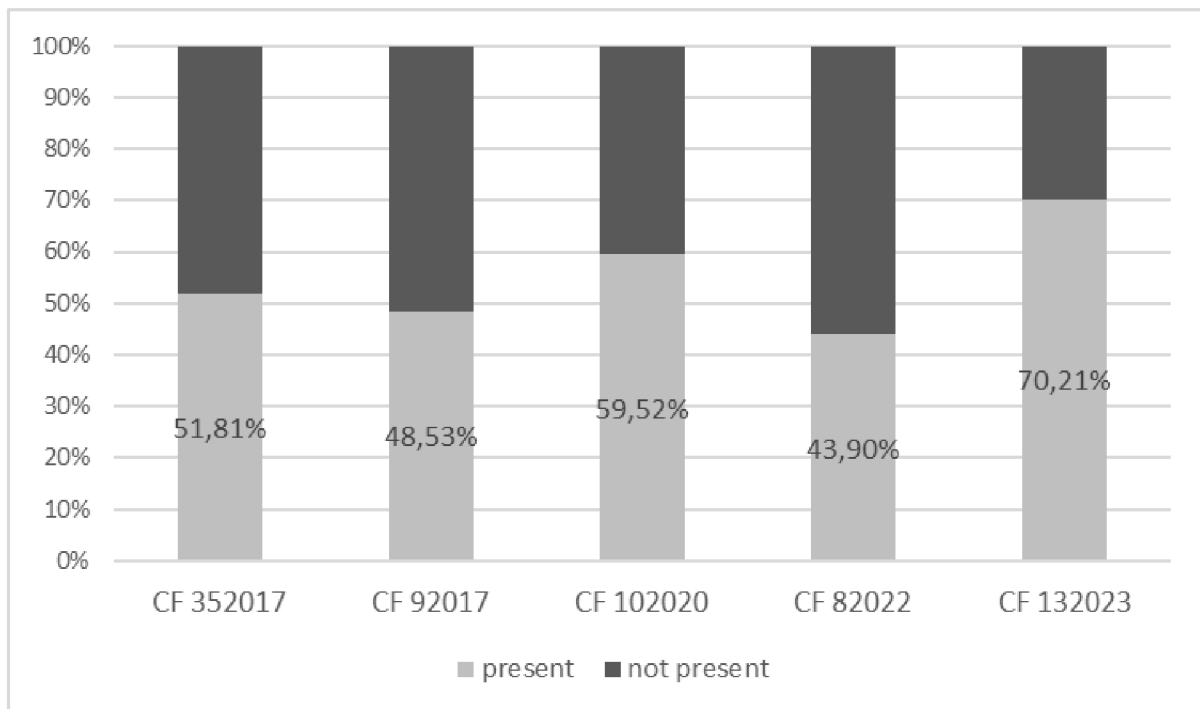
Source: author's own elaboration.

5.1.3 Reflexivity

Finally, the results of the reflexivity criterion also meet expectations. Only one forum was able to show relatively good results; in 70% of the messages in that forum, there was a presence of self-awareness. However, in Forum #4 (about the position on physical punishment on children), the result was a disappointing 43.9% (Figure 9). The mean result was just 54.8%. This can be explained for two reasons. First, this criterion lacks a clear explanation of its need and the ways to practice it. Second, it is almost impossible to expect that users would naturally use it since reflecting is an advanced way of thinking.

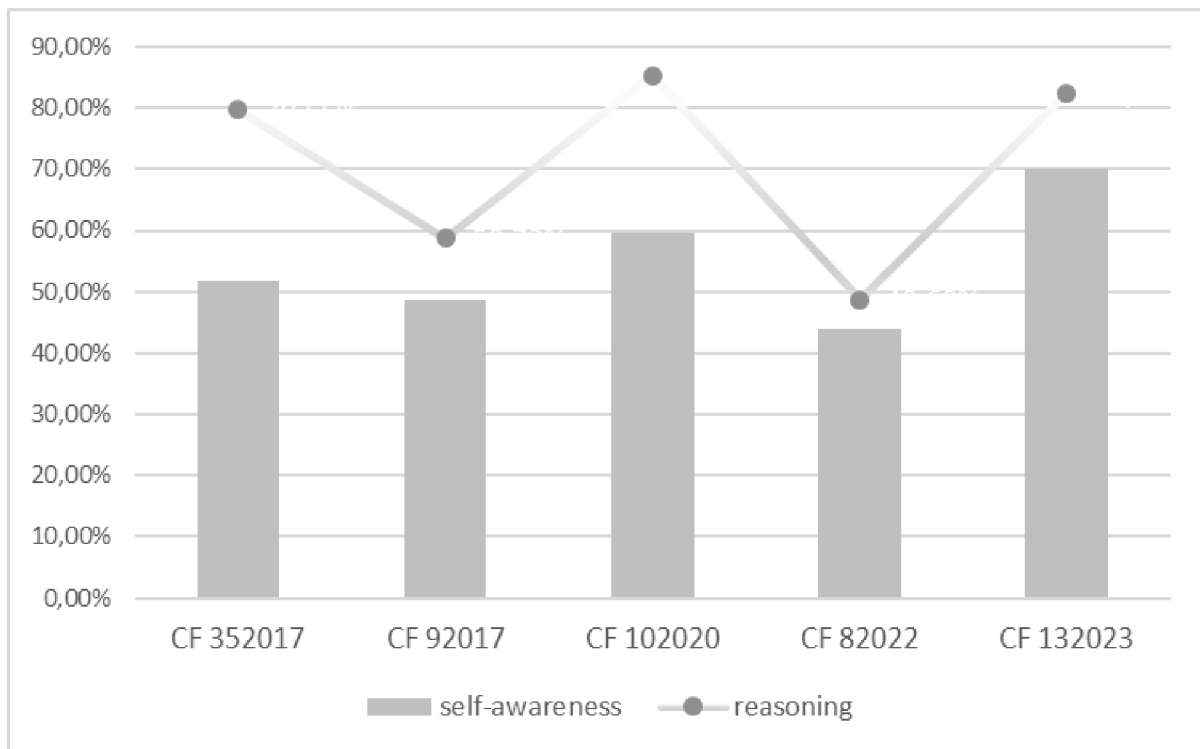
A rather unexpected result was a correlation between self-awareness and the presence of reason. If the percentage of reasonability was high, then self-awareness was higher as well, and vice versa. It is a compelling correlation. My hypothesis is that people who write more reasonable arguments are more likely to have higher self-awareness, since both of them require certain skills and an advanced way of thinking. However, it is only speculation, and more targeted research is needed to uncover whether there is a correlation and, if so, how it works.

Figure 9: Self-awareness results



Source: author's own elaboration.

Figure 10: Correlation between self-awareness and reasoning



Source: author's own elaboration.

No other correlations between variables were identified.

5.2 Going through forums and topics

Forum #1 and Forum #5 are interesting to compare to each other because they both discuss inappropriate behavior. Forum #1 is about the wrongful (from some members' point of view) action of a highly positioned party member, while Forum #5 is about much worse allegations of the coalition Minister of Justice (he is not a member of the party). More precisely, Forum #1 is discussing the position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to recall Jakub Michalek from his position in the Party Presidency due to his manner of handling the withdrawal of the lawsuit to the Supreme Administrative Court regarding the election results. Forum #5, on the other hand, is discussing the position of the Czech Pirate Party on the continuation of Pavel Blažek in the position of Minister of Justice of the Czech Republic as a response to a corruption scandal involving the minister.

Table 5: Forums topics of discussions

Number	Topics of discussion	Essence of the discussion
1	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to recall Jakub Michalek from his position in the Party Presidency.	Recall of the high-position party member
2	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to withdraw the control commission.	Recall of the group organ of the party
3	Supplementary voting for the Control Commission.	Election of multiple people
4	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on physical punishment when raising children.	Decision of the Party on non-urgent problem
5	The position of the Czech Pirate Party on the continuation of Pavel Blažek in the position of Minister of Justice of the Czech Republic as a response to a corruption scandal involving the minister.	Decision of the Party on urgent problem

Source: author's own elaboration.

First of all, there are many more registered users participating in forum #1 and almost none in the second forum. It shows that the topic is interesting for a wider group, or at least they are willing to express their opinion about it since they do not have a voice in the voting. Secondly, even though the allegations of the Minister are criminal and scandalous, the emotionality of the first forum is the highest compared to all forums. So, users communicate about this internal problem much more intensely than the other external problem, even if logically it is more critical. The Pirate Party agreed on this minister's candidature, even though this person did not have a perfect reputation already. Therefore, it is potentially a more critical political problem for the party than the discussed actions of the members of the party. Additionally, comparing these forums with the rest, I noticed that it was hard for me to predict from just a topic what problem would be more or less emotional. Another interesting outcome was that tone and dialogue did not correlate whatsoever; while the first forum was emotional and more often broke a neutral tone, it did, nevertheless, have one of the highest percentages of dialogue. It is important from the perspective that the percentage of dialogue was higher in the forums that had the most disagreements and options of opinion, and was lower when there were fewer numbers and differences between the positions. For example,

forum #4 discussing the position of the Czech Pirate Party on physical punishment when raising children had the highest percentage on the dialogue variable and the biggest diversion in the opinions on the discussion. First of all, usually the position that is voted for contains only one point, for example: recall this person or not, agree with this statement or not. This forum, however, had a combined statement of three different points, creating variations of opinions, when people would agree only on one or two points and disagree with the other ones in different combinations, or would want to amend some or all of the points, or questioned the need for this statement, or were questioning the trustworthiness of the initial arguments, etc. That created a big spike in dialogue variables for this forum. The opposite to this one is, already mentioned, forum #5. This forum had only two choices of position, such as agree or disagree. Since the biggest majority of the users agreed on the very basics of the position, the dialogue variable showed the lowest results among all the studied forums.

Another pair for comparison is forum #1 and forum #2. The first one is discussing the position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to recall Jakub Michalek from his position in the Party Presidency, and the second one is discussing the position of the Czech Pirate Party on the need to withdraw the control commission. They represent the opposite perspective on how users look at the recall of individuals and the recall of the group. First and second forums were taking last and first place on the percentages of the presence of the arguments, but surprisingly, the results of understanding and reasoning are the opposite. In forum #2, the average user would be more argumentative, but those arguments would be less understandable and reasonable. Additionally, in this specific comparison, there was a correlation with tone. One would think that if the message is more emotional, then it probably is less reasonable and understandable; however, this pair and other forums prove that there is no such direct correlation in this way. Moreover, this pair showed the opposite result. Yet, I can not say that I found any trend within it. To sum up, in terms of differences between different topics, there can be a few trends discovered; however, they should be looked at with skepticism. To have more reliable results, more forums should be studied. The forum discussing the recall of one member had worse results in terms of arguments and tone compared to all the other forums. It happened to be the most emotionally charged discussion. Forums about the recall of the group organ of the party and non-urgent problems showed the deviation in reasoning and understanding. The uniting point of these forums was the presence of too many opposing points while at the same time not being too emotionally charged. For self-awareness, most of the topics did not do well, except the one about the decision of the

party on urgent problems. I would explain that the absolute majority of the users in that forum were in the very same position, if not counting nuances, while all other forums did not have a clear majority on any of the discussions. For the dialogue, it was a relatively stable result, regardless of the topic. Specifically, the only more or less clear trends are:

- Dialogue is not affected by the topic.
- Self-awareness is higher the larger the majority of the opinion.
- Tone is affected by the emotionality of the discussion.
- Reasoning and self-awareness have opposite correlations.

Based on the results, we can say that the Czech Pirate Party forum engages in a good level of deliberation in the justification and empathy criteria; however, it has some room for improvement in the reflexivity criterion. Considering the lack of focus on this criterion in the party rules, the Czech Pirate Party could potentially amend them with the introduction of the importance of being more critical of their own arguments and being more open to changing their minds. However, it is important to note that potentially, users meet this criterion on a higher level and just do not express it in written messages. To determine if this hypothesis is the case, a more thorough study is needed.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this work provides a complex and deep analysis of the deliberative discourse within the Czech Pirate Party National Forum, focusing on the criteria of justification, reflexivity, and empathy based on Kies' outline and answering the research questions "To what degree do participants in the Czech Pirate Party forum engage in deliberative discourse?" and "How does this alignment vary across different topics under discussion?". The findings revealed varying degrees of engagement with deliberative practices across different criteria, variables, and topics in the forums.

The theoretic basis of the work is mainly Gerbaudo's (2021b; 2020; 2021a; 2019) theory on digital parties, Deresiis' (2020b; 2019; 2020c; 2020a) opposition to Gerbaudo's belief that digital parties cannot be deliberative, Jürgen Habermas' (Fultner 2011) understanding of deliberative democracy, and Kies' work (2010) on deliberative democracy criteria. These theories helped to outline the definition of digital party and deliberative democracy and to

understand what deliberative criteria were applicable to use in the work to identify the degree of deliberation of Czech Pirate Party forum engagement.

Based on the findings, we can say that overall, the Czech Pirate Party forums engage in a good level of deliberation in the justification and empathy criteria. The reflexivity criterion showed less impressive results, which need to be studied more since the explanation for such results is not exactly clear. The results can be an actual representation of the level of this criterion in the forums, or they can be potentially higher due to the internal thinking of the users, which is not shown in the written messages. Either way, I believe that both components were somehow involved in the low results, at least because while we saw that the results of the variables that the party put their focus on in the rules were higher, the ones that the party did not elaborate much or even at all. This work identified these more or less clear trends:

- Dialogue is not affected by the topic.
- Self-awareness is higher the larger the majority of the opinion.
- Tone is affected by the emotionality of the discussion.
- Reasoning and self-awareness have opposite correlations.
- More descriptive and precise rules in communications result in higher deliberative criteria percentages.

Putting the answers to the research questions directly, I can say that

1. Generally, participants in the Czech Pirate Party forum engage with a good degree of deliberation. However, some of the criteria of justification and empathy are fulfilled way better than the criterion of reflexivity.
2. There is no direct, evident correlation between the topics and the differences in the deliberation results. Meaning that there is no prediction that elections are necessarily more deliberative than recalls or anything like this. There are correlations within the characteristics of the forums, like the tone being affected by the emotionality of the discussion; however, based on the studied data, it is hard to say that one particular theme or topic of the forum will necessarily be more emotional than another.

Of course, it is important to understand that this work had a few limitations that could have affected the results. The most important of them is a relatively small number of the studied

forums. Future research could expand the number of forums and verify if the trends stay the same even in a large-scale study.

I believe that this work can open up a different approach to identifying the reality of intraparty deliberation, especially on the forums. A previous study on defining the intraparty democracy in the Czech Pirate Party (Michalčák 2018) was conducted as an interview with some members and concluded that there are tendencies within the party to centralize, and generally, the intraparty democracy levels are going down. However, this work's findings showed that at least the deliberation levels in the party's National forum are staying quite high. Considering the National Forum is the central and most important body of the party, and at the same time it has good to high levels of deliberation, I believe that opinion interviews are not the ideal instrument to measure intra-party democracy and levels of deliberation in the party. Changing the size of the party and obtaining more and more seats at the different levels are complicating the management of the party and creating more tension between some of the members that can be perceived by party members and leadership differently, potentially even creating the appearance that the party is not something as it was before. In other words, I do not think interviewees' opinions can be trusted in evaluating the levels of democracy and deliberation in a party. Concluding, I believe that the basis for the evaluation of intraparty democracy and deliberation levels should be on the basis of countable variables, which can be applied throughout different digital parties. Therefore, this work brings a set of variables that can be used to study not only the deliberation levels of the Czech Pirate Party forum and its dynamics in time, but can be used in any other digital party that has forum discussions.

In conclusion, this work contributes to bridging the existing gap in the studies of digital deliberative parties and offers valuable insights for the Czech Pirate Party regarding the quality of their deliberative engagement.

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