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THE ANALYSIS OF THE 2018 HUNGARIAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN THE ASPECT OF THE FIDESZ-KDNP

KEYWORDS: Fidesz, KDNP, Election, 2018, parliament, Hungary, 1990, Jobbik, LMP, DK, Viktor Orbán, Gábor Vona, Bernadett Szel, Ferenc Gyurcsány, polarization, sub-polarization

1. Introduction

In 2018, the 8th parliamentary election will be held in Hungary since the fall of the communist regime in 1989 and the first election in 1990. The election will answer a question that has never been asked in the history of Hungarian politics: will the Fidesz-KDNP coalition win the elections and gain the majority of the votes, and by that, the governing right for the third time in a row. This would be the first occasion that political parties elected and govern the country for such a long period of time in Hungary. Both Fidesz (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance), and KDNP (Christian Democratic People's Party) part of the Hungarian political scene since 1990. With the help of articles and books written in the subject, this paper overviews both parties. In order to understand the current scene, I will revisit the political scene in Hungary from 1990 until 2018, in the aspect of the number of parties whom qualified their selves to the Parliament. With each election, new challenges, and sometimes, new parties arise to compete. I will overview the 2010 election as a milestone in the change of the political scene, what led to the change, and how the changes affected it. As for the 2018 election, I will cover the main ideas and mottos of the party and

its campaign and how the party reacted to the opposition and other events throughout the 2017–2018 period. I will also compare opinion polls in the 2017–2018 period, the messages and the prime minister appointees.

2. About the Hungarian Parliament

Since the new constitution, which also adopted a new system both in voting regions and their delegates, the Hungarian parliament consist of 199 mandates that are divided into 106 seats, reserved for representatives of the voting districts, and the remaining 93 are from lists. Gaining two third of the mandates is crucial, since the constitution and changing the constitution requires the support of the 2/3rd of the representatives. The Hungarian parliament has only one house (Harding, 2018). Before the new system, there were two rounds of voting and 386 mandates were divided between the parties (Bihari, 2009).

3. The pluralist party system in Hungary after 2010

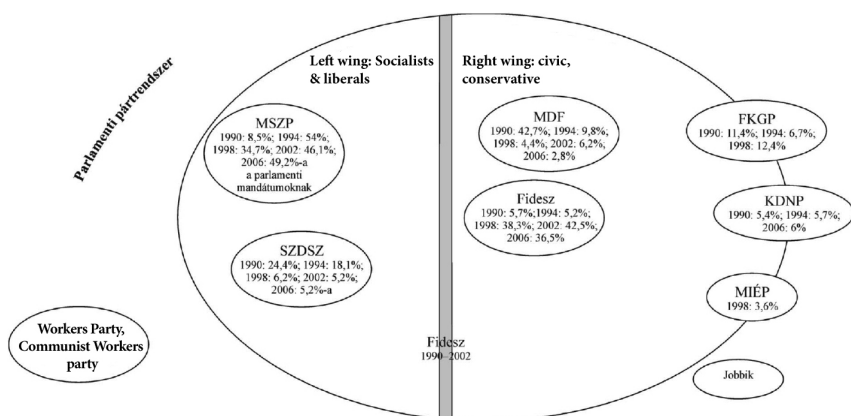


Fig. 1. The pluralist party system after the free election in 1990 (1990–2006) (Bihari, 2009)

This picture was drawn in 2006, but it represents the main situation in the Hungarian political system. Shifts have already happened compared to this map, for instance, Jobbik at bottom right since 2006, started to move towards

the centre. This shift was most visible between, 2013–2018 when the party started their people party program. The shift caused uproar in the voter base, since the party started to disassociate its radical past (Barkóczi, 2018).

The MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) after the 2010 election started to fragment into several smaller parties, one fragment which became the DK (Democratic Coalition) with Ferenc Gyurcsány ex-prime minister as their president (Origo, 2011). SZDSZ, the liberal party being part for 20 years of the Hungarian parliament after a long downfall, starting with the 1994 coalition with MSZP, which at the time, was considered as the post-communist party, did not qualify their selves into the parliament, and soon after, cease to exist (Oltay, 2012; MNO, 2014).

Left by the space of SZDSZ, a new party emerged, LMP (Politics Can be Different), established in 2009 – hence, they are not visible on the map – as a green party (Tóth, 2010). Throughout the 2010–18 time many left/liberal party arose from the absence of the SZDSZ and the MSZP losing control over their voters and decaying itself (Mihályffy et al., 2011).

Also, worth mentioning, that the Hungarian society is highly polarized when it comes to left or right (Oltay, 2012). There are many sub-polarization amongst the population which I will point out in further details. These sub-polarization points are not as enduring nor strong as the polarization between right and left, however, mainly tied to persons, can be a subdivision point.

4. The Hungarian parliament from 1990–2010

The Hungarian parliamentary system, in the aspect of the political parties, is stable, the fluctuation of the parties – as I will discuss in this chapter – is very low: Many parties are part of the parliament since 1990, and only a few managed to get in the parliament throughout the 28 years, making it a stable system (Bihari, 2009).

The first free elections after the fall of the communist system was held in 1990, where the MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum), the FKgP (Independent Farmers Party) and the KDNP (Christian Democratic Party) governed. This election was a statement against the communist regime and the successor party, the MSZP. No political actors wanted to be in a coalition nor associated with them, until 1994. One of the main parties, that actively participated changing the system, the SZDSZ, let them out from their so called political quarantine, by governing in coalition from 1994 until 1998.

As it presented on figure number 1, the popularity of the SZDSZ started to decline sharply afterwards this (Bihari, 2009).

Between 1998 and 2002, FKgP, MDF and Fidesz governed, which was the first Orbán government. At that time, MIÉP, was also part of the parliament, as a radical right wing party, but flanked out after this period (Bihari, 2009).

Between 2002 and 2010, MSZP SZDSZ coalition governed, and throughout that time there was a reordering in the system, many rooted in 2006. There was a change in the political thinking in Hungary because of the infamous „Öszöd speech” by Ferenc Gyurcsány. The speech amongst others, mentioned how they managed to win the election in 2006, “not doing anything for 4 years”. Combined with the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian revolution led to a huge protest against the government on the 23th of October, where the police used force to disperse the protestors (O’Sullivan J., Kálmán P., 2015). Gábor Vona, president of Jobbik said: „We needed 2006 autumn, many woke up from this” (Róna, 2016).

In 2010, the so called “earthquake election” resulted the emerge and qualification into the parliament of two new parties: Jobbik and the LMP (Enyedi et al., 2011). After the elections, DK (Democratic Coalition) split out from the MSZP and the PM (Dialogue for Hungary) from the LMP (HVG, 2013; Origo, 2011).

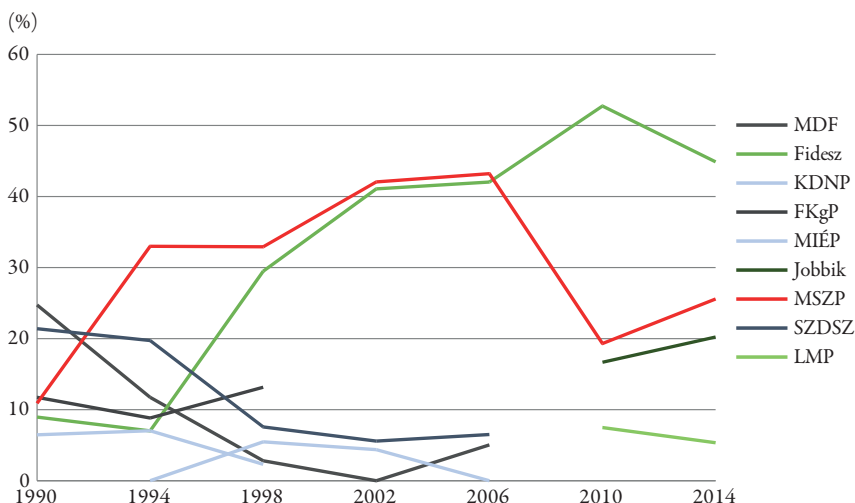


Fig. 2. Political parties and their support (in percent) among the overall population in the years 1990–2014 (Parliament, 2010)

In the 2018 elections the questions were the following: Can the Fidesz-KDNP gain governing right for the fourth time? As previously demonstrated, two terms was the most that a party could gain continuously.

Also, many expected a record high participation for the elections, which could even shake Fidesz, that had a very stable voting base. Jobbik was expected as the main competitor, has the party changed and/or gained enough to erase its radical past? Last, but not least: What the left side of the political map did in order to govern again?

5. History of Fidesz

This chapter briefly overlooks the history of the Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Aliences. It was formed in 1988.03.30., throughout the communist era (Fidesz, 2006). They were part of the first few parties that were established in opposite of the ruling communist party (Oltay, 2012). In 1989.06.16., at the reburial of Imre Nagy former prime minister of Hungary throughout the Revolution of 1956, Viktor Orbán held his speech, demanding the soviet troops to leave Hungary. Amongst others, this lead to the fall of the communist regime in Hungary (O’Sullivan J., Kálmán P., 2015).

After the fall of the regime, the very first free elections were held in 1990.03.25., and Fidesz got into the parliament. At this point Fidesz defined itself as a liberal party. Worth mentioning, that liberal thinking positioned itself at the time against the totalitarian communist thinking, based on the value of freedom of speech, not in the sense of the modern liberalism. That’s why the party, and the ideology underwent a shift around 1994 to be a centre right people party (Wéber, 1996; Modor Á., Laczik E. and Fricz T., 2013).

In the 1998 elections, the middle right conservative group (MDF and FKgP) with the lead of Fidesz won the elections, and in coalition the First Orbán Government was born (Bihari, 2009).

Both in 2002 and 2006, the party lost narrowly at the elections. In 2006, the party was a head figure of the rallies and protests against the governing MSZP-SZDSZ coalition (Bihari, 2009).

In 2010, they won the elections with a landslide, the Second Orbán government was born, and in 2014, they won the elections narrowly, now with the previously mentioned new election system applied, which lead to the third Orbán government (O’Sullivan J., Kálmán P., 2015).

6. History of the KDNP

The Christian Democratic People's Party was originally established in 1944, after the second world war's war movements were finished in Hungary. However, throughout the communist era and its totalitarian ruling methods, the party had to suspend itself, until its reformation in 1989.09.30. The party was in a coalitional government with MDF, and were governing from 1990–1994. However, after the election of the new party president, György Giczy, the party started to decline both morally and in its popularity. Throughout the time, many party members wanted to reclaim the party and its name and guide it back to its original roots, but in the mean time, László Varga, Zoltán K. Kovács, Sándor Keresztes, Péter Harrach and László Surján established the MKDSZ Hungarian Christian Democratic Association, which was part of the first Orbán government. In 2002.11.02 the party assembly could take place after verdict, therefore it could reform itself (Semjén, 2017). Since 2002 the party is in a coalition with Fidesz on every election (O'Sullivan J., Kálmán P., 2015).

7. Party preferences amongst the population

This chapter overlooks the party preferences among the population one year time span prior the 2018.04.08. election. I will overlook 3 main institutes, each and every institute having an ideological background.

First, there is Nézőpont Institute. In their survey, as can be seen in Figure 3, amongst the population, the governing coalition never really dropped below 30%, in fact, one month before the elections, it peaked around 40% amongst the population. Jobbik, the main opposition party was around 10%, while the left/liberal parties barely made it to the 5% (which requires to qualify in to the Parliament), or didn't make it all. Also worth mentioning, that before the elections, the number of people whom previously claimed, that they cannot, will not, do not know if they would participate the elections dropped.

The second measurement I overview is the surveys of Iránytű Institute. This institute self identify themselves as national conservatives (Iránytű Intézet, 2018). In their surveys, as can be seen in Figure 4, Jobbik was mainly between 15–20%, the governing party was between 30–35%, and they measured a sharp decline in the voter base of the governing party prior the elections. Also worth mentioning, that the MSZP had a solid supporter

base, which allowed them to qualify their selves into the parliament, while the liberal and green party, DK and LMP had a solid 5 or more percent voter base from September, 2017.

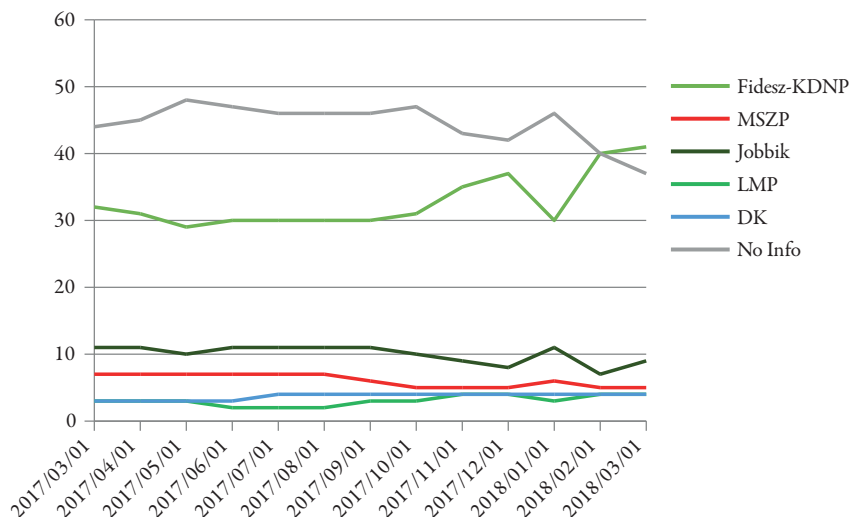


Fig. 3. Party preferences amongst the population according to Nézőpont Institute (Közüvéleménykutatók, 2018)

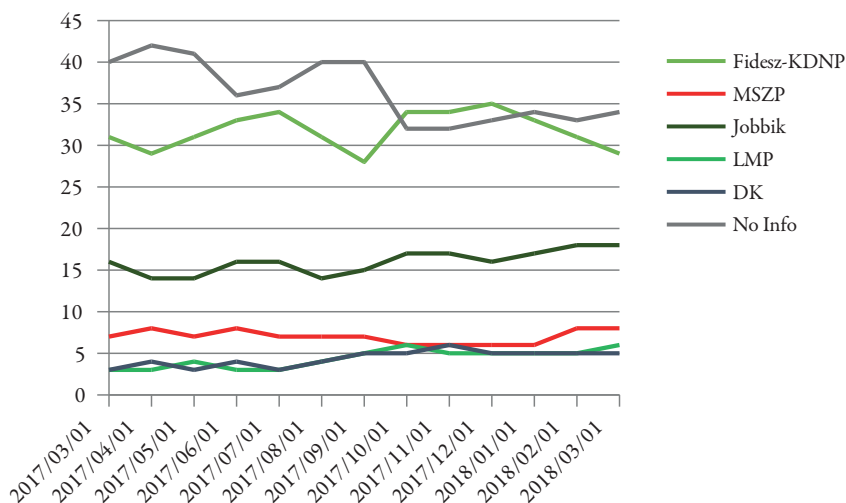


Fig. 4. Party preferences amongst the population according to Iránytű Institute (Közüvéleménykutatók, 2018)

Last, but not least Republikon institute. They identify themselves as liberals (Republikon, 2018). When the graph was made, the institute did not have a survey for March. In their surveys, as can be seen in Figure 5, the governing parties were between 28 and 35%, and the MSZP and Jobbik were around 10%, having a solid base for the parliament election. The most interesting aspect of the surveys was the fact, that nor the green nor the liberal party had enough supporters to gain 5%, in order to qualify themselves into the parliament.

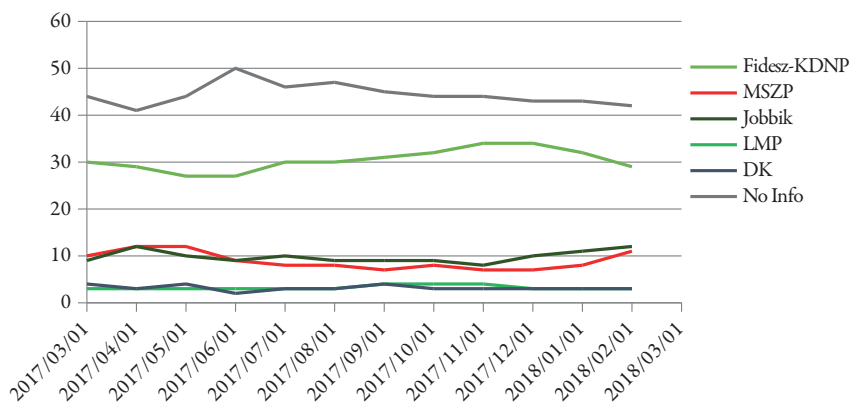


Fig. 5. Party preferences amongst the population according to Republikon Institute (Közzvéleménykutatók, 2018)

8. Main events in the campaign

This chapter overlooks some of the main events of the campaigns prior the election. One of the main competitor, MSZP, had uncertainties in their figure head, who would spearhead the campaign. The mayor of Szeged, László Botka became their candidate for a while. He was re-elected several time as the mayor Szeged, therefore, he was well known. However, he didn't want to cooperate with other party in order to govern (which was a defining theme amongst the opposition, in order to win the elections) (Dull, 2017). This, and his bad communication and motto led him to step down as Prime Minister Candidate. His motto was: „Let there be justice! The rich should pay!“. He wanted to have tax reforms in his reign; however the motto itself was faulty, because it was often interpreted as a communist motto

(Hecker, 2017). That led to the end of the Botka-era in MSZP, giving away to the Karácsony-era. Their initially thinking was that with a fresh face, they could rejuvenate MSZP, as he was the mayor of the XIVth district. The party ran with the idea for the elections (MSZP, 2017).

On the governing parties behalf, throughout the campaign the key moment was the mayor election in Hódmezővásárhely: A previously “bastion” of the governing party lost the election, and an independent mayor won the election. The appointee was strongly supported by Jobbik unofficially, and by the opposing parties (24.hu, 2018). This event came as a shock for the governing party (Paranoid Android, 2018), which quickly answered with a mass event, called the Peace march. The peace march was a bolster for the governing party voters (Bordács, 2018).

Prior the elections, the so called “Öszöd speech” of Jobbik happened, when Ádám Mirkóczki, spokesman of Jobbik said: „...The Jobbik before 2010 wasn’t the real Jobbik...”. Being a national radical party, as shown before, infuriated the national radical voter base, both for those, who at this point already sobered out from the shift of the party towards the centre right/left wing, and for those, who still stuck to the party because of its founding ideas (Gabay, 2018).

The key concept of the election on the behalf the opposition was the so called: coordination. In voting districts, they would have stepped down in favour for the other opposition party candidate, which had more chance winning against the government candidate according the surveys (Kálmán, 2018). This coordination happened mainly in the last few weeks prior the election, even though the concept was negotiated throughout the whole campaign (Rovó, 2018).

9. Prime minister candidates, party programs

This chapter overviews the prime minister candidates, in the first case, the prime minister in office: Viktor Orbán. As previously mentioned, founder of the Fidesz, he was the candidate of the Fidesz-KDNP coalition. Both parties are middle right, conservative parties (Bihari, 2009). The main motto of the Fidesz-KDNP campaign was: For us, Hungary’s first.

The slogan was simple, and the message was clear. The main ideas and messages were anti-migration campaign. In the minister speeches, the message that the government have to defend Hungary from the migration was

always implanted (O'Sullivan J., Kálmán P., 2015). These speeches were available on social media, which was an effective tool throughout the campaign. The communication and setting was based upon the sole belief, that the opposing parties are pro-migration parties. With the setting, previously discussed, this type of communication seemed effective, effective enough to stick with it throughout the whole campaign. Therefore, the campaign was mainly operating on the cultural plain of communication, overwhelming the economy plain. The governing parties didn't have a program, only the promise of the continuity of the previous, 2010 government program (O'Sullivan J., Kálmán P., 2015).

The next candidate was Gergely Karácsony, nominated by the MSZP-PM parties (MSZP, 2017). MSZP, the Hungarian Socialist Party is a middle-left party (Bihari, 2009). Gergely Karácsony however was the nominee of the party PM, Dialogue for Hungary. The party was a green party, part of the LMP (HVG, 2013). The initial thinking on the behalf of the MSZP was-as mentioned before – that they wanted a fresh face, a rejuvenated image for the party. Their motto was Change! Now!. Their main ideas and communication were based upon the idea that Orbán must go, which is a sub-polarization point in the Hungarian society. The coordination amongst the other opposing parties, such as Jobbik and LMP failed in general (Lengyel, 2018). Their program point were: Wage increase, 13th month pension, decrease in the bills (electricity, heating etc.) anticorruption public prosecution, higher health care sources, educational reforms, tax free minimal wages (MSZP, 2018). It is fair to say, that even though they had the tools to operate on the economic plain, they gave little but non to this, and were operating on the cultural plain.

As main competitor, Jobbik showed up in the polls as the second most supported party. With a far right past, the party started to shift to be a people party (Barkóczy, 2018). However, since the political space at the centre right at the time was occupied-and still is – by Fidesz, the party started to shift beyond the centre, somewhat to the left. Their motto was: Jobbik, on the side of the people! However, there were other mottos as well, such as: Be part of the victory (appealing to the voters need to belong to the winners), New government, now!; We win, You win!, creating a somewhat confusing state in the voters mind with too many mottos. Their prime minister candidate, Gábor Vona wasn't represented on many of the billboards. The party didn't take part in the coordinated election (Lengyel, 2018). Their program was the 15+1 program, with promises like: anti-corruption, border defence,

fixing the health care system, youth housing program, quality jobs with good wages, modern educational system, helping the small and middle size enterprises, helping the countryside (which economically is behind the big cities and Budapest), increasing the minimal pension, free parking, protecting the hard currency lawn victims, respect women, road building program, reinforce rule of law (stopping the “dictatorship”), helping the 3 million poor people and +1: punish cruelty against animals (Jobbik, 2018). Their campaign was mainly operating on the cultural plain.

On the left side of the political space, there was DK, the Democratic Coalition, with Ferenc Gyurcsány, former prime minister, as their prime minister candidate (Demokratikus Koalíció, 2018). His person – explained previously – is also a so called sub polarization point in the Hungarian society: either vote for or against him. The party’ motto was: We can do it with Gyurcsány! They were part of the coordination. The party was mainly operating on the cultural plain. The party program was the following: European wages, European pension, European health care system, European educational system, smart-Hungary (renewable energy, R+D etc.), anti corruption, United States of Europe etc. These program points are focusing on a European orientation and trying to win the votes of the elderly people (Demokratikus Koalíció, 2018).

And last, but not least, the green party: LMP (Politics Can Be Different). Their prime minister candidate was Bernadett Szel. The party’ motto was: It’s our turn now (Lehetmás, 2018). The party officially wasn’t part of the coordinated voting system, however, in some places the party candidate stepped back from candidacy. (Lengyel, 2018). The party program was the Szel-plan: anti corruption, higher wages, educational system reform, health care system reform, helping Hungarian small and micro firms and promote the usage of renewable energy (Lehetmás, 2018).

It requires a new section in order to overlook a new factor in the Hungarian politics/elections, namely the non political organizations/actors and civil groups. In the 2018 elections these groups played a huge role not only in campaigning, but also helping the so called coordination with tools like applications and websites (FI: Viszlát Kétharmad FB page, v18.eu, orbannakmenniekell.hu, taktikaizsavazas.hu etc.) to inform voters about the opposition party having the most chance to win against the governing appointee in the voting district. With tools like these, the usually apolitical groups, like younger voters, the younger generations got connected and involved in the parliamentary elections and politics.

10. Assumptions & Conclusions

Throughout the campaign up until the elections, the following assumptions can be concluded: The coordination between the opposition failed, because the main opposing party Jobbik didn't coordinate in general and only LMP was willing, but only in certain places. Even with the help of civil groups, there were only partial success. The main impression from the opposition was that it was fractured, and their only common ground was the motto like phrase: Orbán must go. On the other hand, the Fidesz-KDNP communication was plain and simple, which resonated with many people and according to the surveys seemed very effective. The communication of this coalition, which was keeping the country's culture and achievements or let it be taken by immigrants and let the culture and the achievements be destroyed was also started to reflect on European matters, which gave the whole election the idea of having a high-stake, and also, attracting international interest. This pragmatic point of view attracted many voters, and the analysts predicted high numbers. The main opposition party, Jobbik, got outmanoeuvred by Fidesz-KDNP. Also, prior the election day, the party discredited itself in many former voters eyes, making their former national radicals and former Jobbik members to spoke against Jobbik. The far right past, and voters didn't tolerate the people party tendencies, and the shifting toward the centre/left. However, throughout the campaign they remained the second most strongest party.

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