Appendix 1. Operationalizations and coding decisions

Figure 1 presents the operationalization of our theoretical framework. We arrived at these categories abductively (Awuzie and McDermott 2017; Reichertz 2010), i.e., by going back and forth between existing research and our data. The categories on the left- and right-hand edges in the figure are closer to our empirics and represent concrete actions (interactions are marked with I in the figure, and discourses are marked with D) that think tanks can engage in, contributing to either polarization or depolarization. We constructed the counterparts of these categories on the opposite side of the figure. While we sought both polarizing and depolarizing actions among think tanks, we observed more examples of how think tanks contribute to polarization and only occasionally to depolarization. This is reflected in the subheadings in the analysis, which correspond to the actions that we could identify in our data.

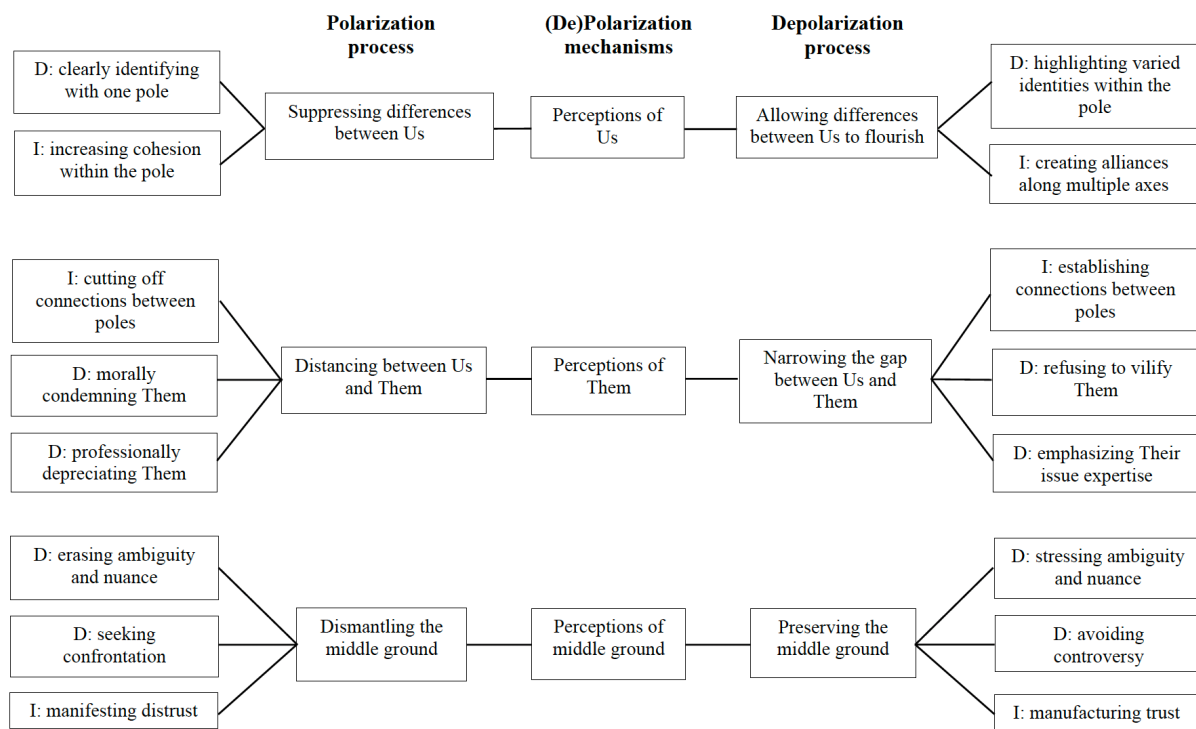Figure 1. (De)polarization operationalization

Table 1 presents examples of coding decisions, including excerpts from interviews, showing how we classified them under each code. While the analysis was based on all excerpts for each code drawn from our 53 interviews (systematically extracted with the help of NVivo), the quotes that were ultimately used in the article represent only a fraction of these excerpts, usually those that were most succinct or most clearly articulated.

Table 1. Coding decisions

	Codes	Examples of interview excerpts
POLARIZATION	Clearly identifying with one pole	"I am working for a progovernment think tank" (IP21_HU) "we identify with values that I and my colleagues believe are true of the opposition and not of the government" (IP15_HU)" "you are either treated as belonging to one side or the other" (IP23_PL) "'we' try to discredit it, because it is not 'ours,' so 'we' just push it into the other corner" (IP13_PL) "I think what's changed [since 2015] is that it [public debate] became heavily politicized and polarized, and this politicization and polarization has forced people to take sides" (IP6_PL) "For example, if we are talking about 'migrants' or 'refugees,' whichever word I use, I am serving a political interest by putting it in the public space. To say 'refugees,' 'the refugee crisis' – it is a word used by the opposition […]. However, if I say 'migrant,' I clearly prefer the government's wording. And it's hard to tell which is the right word. I just want to say that when you choose a topic, you choose words, you often choose value in this political field, completely unnoticed." (IP15_HU) "We have had a fairly strong set of values since we were founded, and we have stuck to them ever since. These were rather simple values, which seemed non-salient in 2000s, such as parliamentary democracy, Euro-Atlantic engagement or a market economy. These were very meaningless concepts at the time, but since 2010 they have also been seen in a completely different light." (IP14_HU)
	Increasing cohesion within the pole	"counterbalance for the expansion of the state, which is very dangerous if it is in the wrong hands" (IP12_PL) "in Hungary today, if you ask someone what they think about the expansion of the Paks nuclear power plant, the answer will tell you exactly what they think about migration and refugees. In Hungary, political thinking is so party-politically structured that if the government side says something on an issue, opposition voters will certainly reject it, and vice versa." (IP8_HU) "if we know that this person is in quotation marks in 'our' camp, we can safely not verify the information" (IP13_PL) "different governments and organizations only entrust organizations they themselves have mandated" (IP3_HU)
	Cutting off connections between poles	"I kind of recall meetings where the idea was raised that we are still in the same group a bit and maybe it is worth expanding it. […] the strong polarization in the political field caused that also NGOs started to reflect it a bit, such polarization" (IP17_PL) "There were some connections from our previous research that we had, but now they completely died. Even our informal connections. In the beginning, I personally had teammates in ministries or right-wing analysis institutes. I would say that we kept in touch with pro-Fidesz institutes and for a while, we met, we had a coffee, we talked, and that started to disappear completely around 2013, 2014. It was the same with all my colleagues." (IP14_HU)

		"We were attacked, even publicly called out on the internet, and told that we have blood on our hands, because we sat at the same table" (IP13_PL) "If you go to venues that are organized by, you know, that are to a large extent the place for government-affiliated think tanks, then some of the people who are outside of the government will likely consider that you may have sold your soul to the government." (IP18_HU)
	Morally condemning Them	"they should be in jail" (IP27_PL) "When I talk to them, they know and are ashamed of what they participate in" (IP8_PL) "I know that a lot of what he [another think tanker] says, he says because he has to say it, and it is something he doesn't fully agree with" (IP15_HU) "There are those who we think are morally not on the same level as us, and we are very much staying away from them" (IP1_HU)
	Professionally depreciating Them	"Unfortunately, the think tanks which are listened to are mainly those which are somehow close to those in power. Some of them have a similar political profile, some of them are personal... There are also connections, that someone is in some think tank and at the same time has some functions close to the government. And they are listened to. But the value of this, I think, is average. Well, because it is burdened with this poor relation. So out of all the think tanks that are listened to, most of them have a specific political profile and you just listen to one or the other." (IP6_PL) "They don't think" (IP5_PL) "It's government propaganda at an analytical level […] partisan opinion wrapped in expertise" (IP2_HU) "[They are] semipolitical organizations. All these Jagiellonian, Piast, Sobieski, Kościuszko, and the like, they are like that. […] It suddenly turned out, after a few years, that if they [PiS] really need something, they don't go there. If they really don't know, but they need some specific thing, like if they really need to send a document to the European Commission on how to spend structural funds or the European Social Fund – if they really need such a specific thing, then they don't want these boys all of a sudden, all these Piast institutions or whatever they are called." (IP2_PL) "They are told what to produce and then they produce it. They probably partly have some autonomy. So, they also give some input to government work. But I can't view these organizations as actors independent of the government." (IP5_HU) "When Batory Foundation [a liberal think tank] releases a report on legislation, I know very well that it will not include those things that Law and Justice did well, and I know why they will not be included, right? Well, because it's simply by definition an institution that believes that we're dealing with a government that needs to be replaced, and for that reason it's going to be very critical of them." (IP3_PL)
	Erasing ambiguity and nuance	"[The policy debate] has become more partisan. […] It has become more divided. Maybe in the 2000s there was more consensus between the two sides? I see less of that now." (IP17_HU)

		"Well, the space for such a think tank, which would not be subject to this phenomenon of political polarization, simply disappeared. I mean, this sharp polarization basically makes such a broadly defined nonpartisanship impossible. I mean, you can be unaffiliated with a particular party, but it is difficult to avoid the fundamental choice imposed on us by the present government. And, in my opinion, those organizations which try to go beyond this dispute, they do it at the cost of silence on certain issues which are quite fundamental in the context of what is happening in Poland. I mean the democratic backsliding, the violation of the Constitution, and so on." (IP1_PL) "Organizations […] which claim to be nonpartisan... we don't have these. That was my ambition at one time, but they don't really exist because life has become so polarized that there is very little room for them." (IP3_HU) "Sticking to the [PiS] authorities helps, sharp attacks help. Those who appreciate both one and the other side, and also those who condemn both sides depending on the situation, well… they are simply a dying species. I have this impression in our polarized reality." (IP14_PL) "This polarization has happened to such an extent that people who want to distance themselves from this discourse of political conflict are discredited because they want to be factual. […] For someone who nuances the message, who presents some analysis that doesn't have clear results, there is no place." (IP13_PL) "After the first defeat of the opposition in 2014, we ourselves took the position at the institutional level that political analysis […] is dead. In the sense that it can only exist in a polarized way." (IP16_HU)
	Seeking confrontation	"Neither on one side nor on the other is there a conviction that it is worth doing. Because I see the problems in think tanks and NGOs too. Sometimes they stop at something to shout loud, to say something loud, but they don't interact, they don't take part in various activities, which are sometimes difficult, tedious, sometimes forcing some kind of compromise in their thinking." (IP6_PL) "Everyone is arguing, but nobody is talking" (IP16_PL)
	Manifesting distrust	--
DEPOLARIZATION	Highlighting varied identities within the pole	"I don't pay homage and I don't declare the side directly" (IP20_PL)
	Creating alliances along multiple axes	"majority of the participants in the political dispute, I mean all of them, the vast majority, consider us to be representatives of the respective "other" side." (IP16_PL)
	Establishing connections between poles	--
	Refusing to vilify Them	"It's not an aversion to human beings, it's just a lack of common ground" (IP13_PL)
	Emphasizing Their issue expertise	--

	Stressing ambiguity and nuance	"I think that there are people in the ruling party who appreciate that someone [referring to themself] is trying to understand what they are trying to do, what it is all about, and who also sees some positive aspects of their activities." (IP7_PL)	

	Avoiding controversy	"In general, we think that this division does not serve either Poland or the sector" (IP4_PL) "We do not deal with areas that would contribute [...] to the kind of… the ongoing ideological war" (IP10_PL) "That's why we don't go into these subjects too much. For example, all ideological disputes concerning these very sensitive issues, abortion, etc. […] In other words, we are against a political dispute conducted in an atmosphere of shouting." (IP16_PL) "we don't aim for some kind of neutrality, for the lack of an opinion, but rather for diversity. […] we care about not inflaming the situation, so I rather... we don't give in to some kind of extreme views from one side or from the other side" (IP4_PL) "So, our tactic is we don't deal with daily politics, we only deal with solutions. So, we don't judge this and that political actor, also because we believe that mostly this country is about complaining and criticizing everything, so we don't do it – we only offer solutions. And with this approach, none of the actors feel that we are the enemy." (IP20_HU) "Most of our statements, if we make a critique, before we put it out there, on any of our platforms, we always, or let's say 99% of the time, we send it to the ministries [first]. So, I think it is very transparent the way we operate. We don't want to create any tension." (IP7_HU)
	Manufacturing trust	"If we don't talk in public, I can have a great conversation with him [name of a progovernment think tanker], and in some ways, we even think alike about things. Although, obviously, I don't mean that in a worldview sense, but in a logical sense." (IP15_HU) I hope that maybe we will become the place where we start talking to each other. I have even proposed that we should have such an informal meeting of experts from both sides, which we will not announce, where we will start to talk about this, about at least some projects that are worth continuing when the boys and girls change power. (IP20_PL) "[Chatham House] was good because government people were more willing to sit down with somebody who is not considered a friend if they knew that this would not be in a newspaper the next day." (IP23_HU) "The main challenge in Poland at the moment is the powerful and fabricated current, driven, of course, by this polarization [that] we are dealing with. Everything from citizens' panels through participation [that we organize] is about the fact that people have the right to differ and that they need to find some common ground." (IP8_PL) "It is difficult to be both at the same time, that is to say, to be someone who both builds bridges and is one of the shores. But it is a bit like that. We try not to go crazy, not to be in some schizophrenic situation" (IP8_PL)

Appendix 2. Composition of the sample

At the time of data collection (2020-2021), the total number of think tanks in Poland was 70 organizations, and that in Hungary was 68. See the main article for our definition of "think tank". The sample of think tanks selected for this study consisted of 41 think tanks, 17 from Hungary and 24 from Poland. Since some of our interviewees conditioned their participation in the study on the anonymity not only of their names but also of the names of the think tanks to which they belonged, we decided to anonymize the whole sample. In Table 2, we present the sample in an aggregated form, grouping the interviewed think tankers in various ways. This way we maintain the informed consent promise while showcasing the diversity of our sample. While no firm representativity can be claimed, we made maximal effort to ensure that a broad range of think tank experiences were included. Our main principles of selection considered the inclusion of think tanks of various organizational ages (established before 2010/2015 and after) and sizes (fewer than 10 or 10 and more employees), as well as think tanks with various positions with respect to the government (supportive, critical) and various ideological stances (progressive, (neo)liberal, conservative). The included think tanks cover a broad range of policy areas, with most covering at least 3-5 policy areas. When it comes to sources of funding, we also made sure to include think tanks with diverse funding arrangements. A few think tanks are entirely funded by the government, but most have multiple sources of funding. A reliable list of sources of funding for all think tanks in our sample turned out too hard to obtain, however. Public records are only fragmentary, and most think tanks reveal inconsistent or no data. Hence, we leave the task of compiling think tank funding to investigative journalists and future research which more centrally targets funding as a research question. However, it is interesting to note that even organizations funded by the government were critical of polarization as a process that disrupts think tank operations and we saw no distinct pattern of (de)polarizing discourse and interactions among these think tanks.

Table 2. Sample variation

HUNGARY N = 17		
Organizational age	Established before 2010	Established after 2010
	9	8
Organizational size	Less than 10 employees	10 or more employees
	8	9
Position toward government	Supportive	Critical
	7	10
Ideological stance	Progressive	(Neo)liberal	Conservative
	7	3	7

POLAND N = 24		
Organizational age	Established before 2015	Established after 2015
	19	5
Organizational size	Less than 10 employees	10 or more employees
	11	13
Position toward government	Supportive	Critical
	8	16
Ideological stance	Progressive	(Neo)liberal	Conservative
	4	11	9