



**HOW DO HUNGARIANS EVALUATE THE LAST 10
YEARS OF HUNGARY?**

Research summary

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The aim of this joint research of Policy Solutions and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung was to explore how the Hungarian society evaluates the ten years since Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party got back to power in 2010. Building on our empirical results, lessons can be drawn not only about the society's general assessment of the major trends in Hungary, but also about what has improved or deteriorated in the last decade, what are the Orbán government's most popular measures and its greatest public policy failures, and how they see the state of democracy in Hungary. Moreover, this analysis helps better understand which social groups are the most important pillars of Fidesz's public support and how citizens feel about their chances of individual prosperity under Orbán's government.

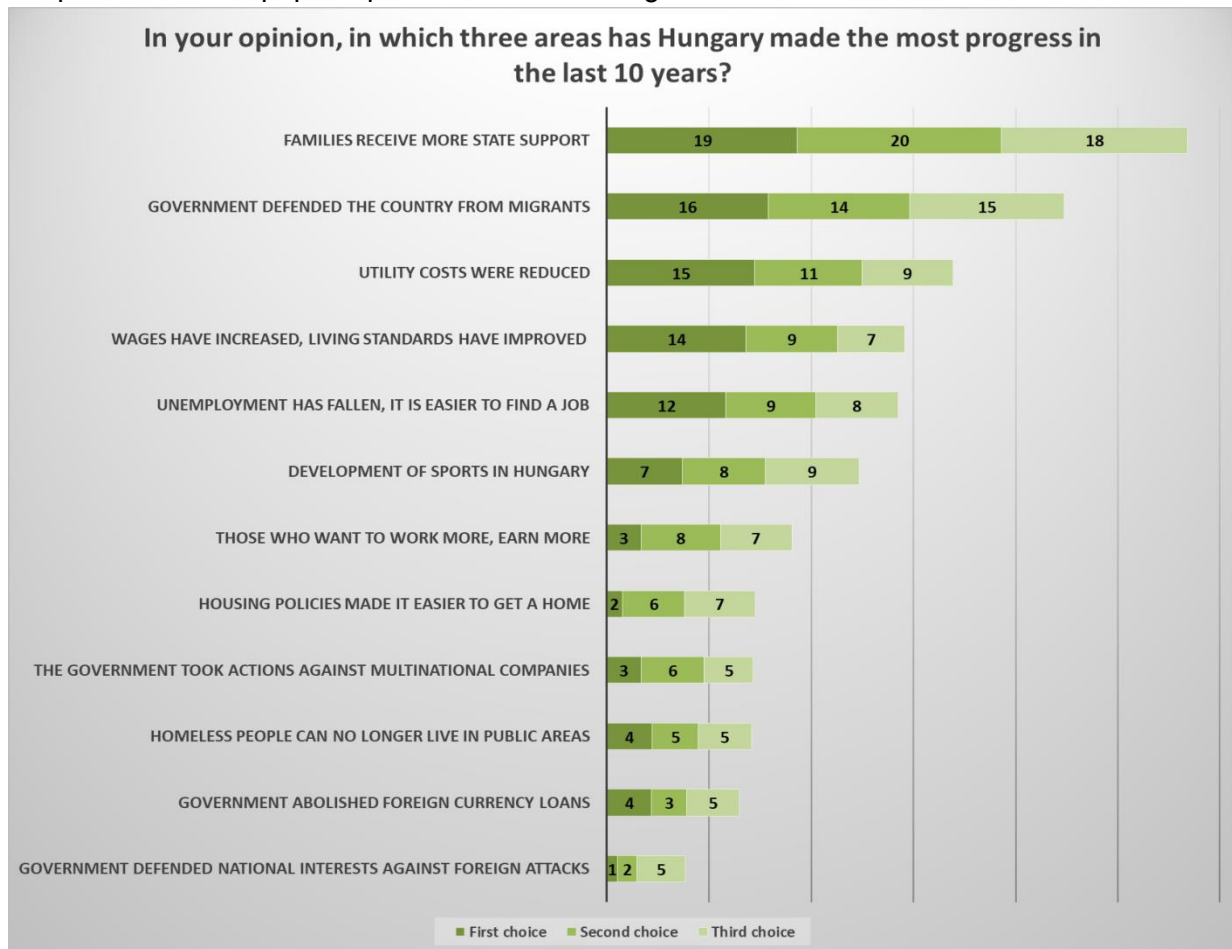
The research is based on an opinion poll conducted by Závecz Research. Just before the coronavirus pandemic, 1000 people – representing the whole adult population of Hungary by age, gender, residency and education – were interviewed personally between 3 and 13 March 2020.

The most popular measures of the Orbán government since 2010: family policies, migration, utility cost reduction

The family policies (increased state subsidies for families) are considered the most important achievement of the Orbán government in the last ten years, according to the Hungarians (Graph 1). 57% chose this option when asked to select the three areas in which the most progress has been made over the last decade. The Orbán government's anti-immigration measures were ranked second (45 percent). At third place, we found the main topic of the 2014 election campaign, the government's efforts to reduce utility costs (35%).

Two economic aspects of Orbán's governance were ranked at the fourth and fifth places. 30% of the respondents believed that wage growth (and consequently, improved living standards) was one of the key successes of Orbán's 'System of National Cooperation' (NER, for short), while 29 percent highlighted the decreased unemployment. The much promoted housing subsidy scheme only takes place in the second half of the list, alongside the government's "fight" against multinational companies, the de facto abolishing of foreign currency loans, and the permanent defense against "foreign attacks".

Graph 1. The most popular policies of the Orbán government, 2010-2020



The Hungarian government's most popular policy, the family allowance system has widespread support, but it can play a particularly important role in convincing undecided voters – two-thirds of the undecideds think that it is one of the government's greatest achievements of the past decade. The support for the government's family policies correlates the most with the type of settlement: **the smaller the settlement, the higher family support measures were ranked** - their share was 63% among those who live in villages.

Pro-government voters see the Orbán's fight against immigration as the most important achievement of the last decade. More than half of Fidesz supporters (56%) chose this option. The cross-cutting effect of the topic is indicated by the fact that while stopping immigration was the least important for left-liberal Democratic Coalition (DK) voters, but even one-third (31%) of them consider the anti-immigration policies of the last few years a key achievement of Fidesz.

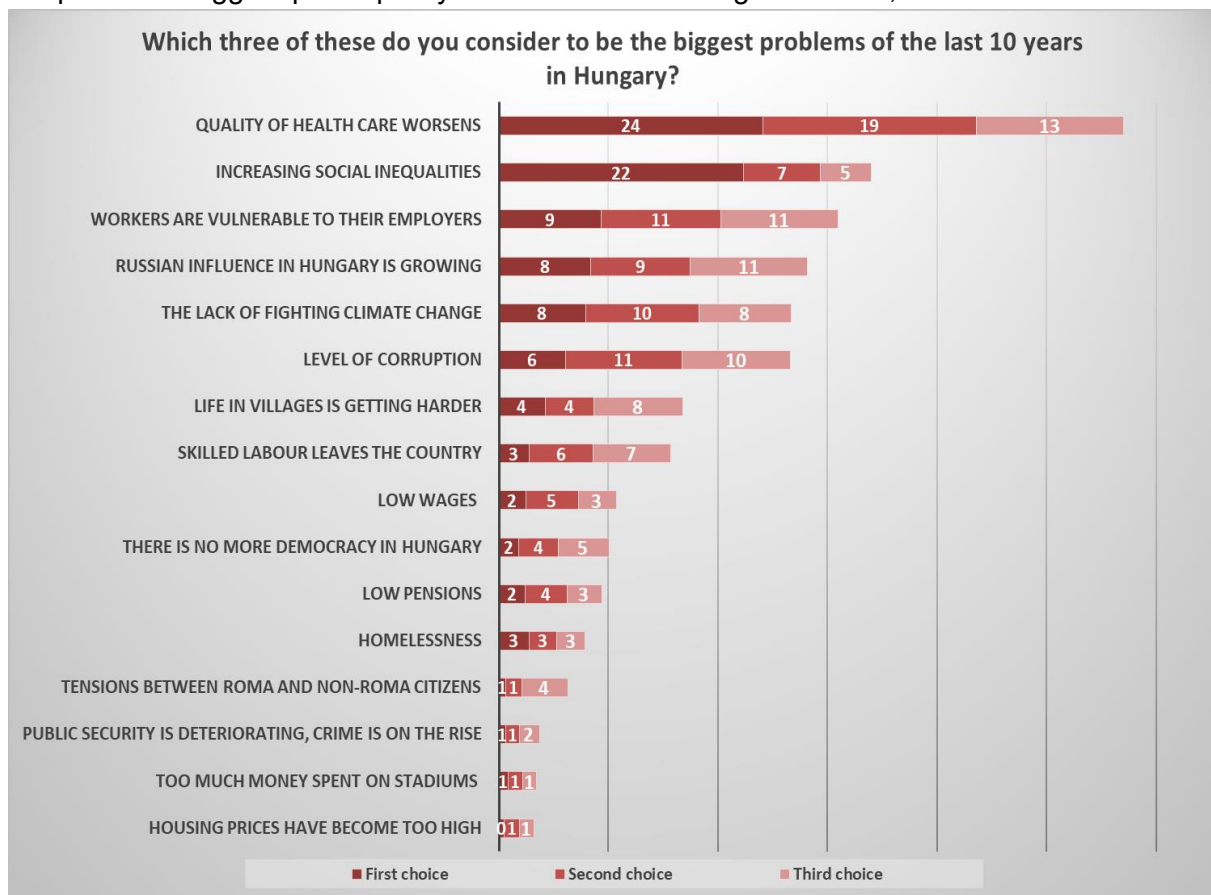
Data about the most important government policies over the past ten years also show that **utility cost reduction has been at least as important for opposition voters as for pro-government voters.** It is also worth mentioning that the breakdown by level of education shows that citizens with the lowest education chose this option the most frequently (40%),

while graduates the least frequently (28%), which clearly indicates that reduced utility bills were especially appreciated by the most disadvantaged citizens.

The greatest public policy failures of the last 10 years: health care, social inequalities, vulnerability of employees

The state of health care clearly worried Hungarians the most when we asked them to name the three biggest problems of the successive Orbán governments since 2010 (Graph 2). 57% of the respondents chose this option, moreover, 24% ranked the deteriorating health care system at the first place. **Social inequalities came second: 34% said that one of the biggest failures of the Orbán governments was allowing social inequalities to grow further.** Slightly behind this – but still among the top 3 issues – we found the vulnerability of employees (31%), followed by the growing Russian influence (28%), poor climate policy and the high level of corruption (27-27%).

Graph 2. The biggest public policy failures of the Orbán government, 2010-2020



Voters of the Socialist Party (MSZP) are the most concerned about the state of health care. 75% of Socialist voters believe that the Hungarian government has given its poorest performance in the field of health care in the last 10 years, but liberal Momentum supporters and the undecideds (63-63%) were also above the average. Moreover, even 46 percent of

pro-government voters ranked the state of health service among the top three problems. It is important to add that this research was conducted before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic in Hungary. Therefore it may be a matter of serious concern for the government that its track record of health policies was judged already very negatively before this major crisis.

In a rare agreement with opposition voters, supporters of Fidesz also believe that letting inequalities between rich and poor grow has been one of the government's biggest failures. Furthermore, the less educated citizens increasingly see growing social inequalities as a serious problem (41% of citizens with primary education and only 28% of graduates chose this option), indicating that disadvantaged groups would expect the government to do more to help them.

Opposition voters are particularly concerned with the Hungarian government's economic policy which is clearly favouring companies. Pro-government voters chose this option below the average, but even a quarter of them are particularly troubled by the vulnerability of employees, indicating that the protests against the "slave law" in December 2018 did not exclusively reflect opposition views.

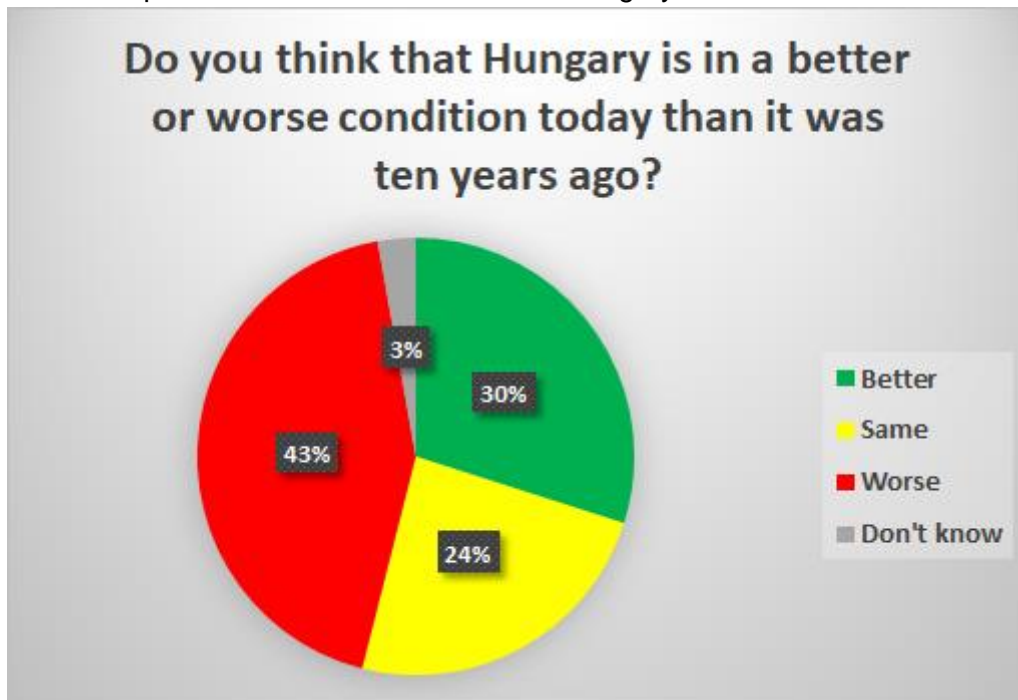
There is a very significant difference between the opinions of pro-government and opposition voters about the perception of Russian influence in Hungary. **Sympathizers of the opposition parties consider the country's growing dependence on Russia as problematic roughly twice as much (40%) as Fidesz voters (20%).**

The characteristically young and urban Momentum voters were the most dissatisfied with the Hungarian government's insufficiently ambitious climate policy. Almost every second Momentum voter (45%) chose this option; DK voters are at the second place (29%). The MSZP voting group (15%) is the least anxious about insufficient government climate policy, but the results measured among Fidesz (21%) and Jobbik voters (24%) are also below the average compared to the whole population.

More people say that Hungary's overall situation has deteriorated since 2010 than those who believe it has improved

According to 43% of Hungarians, the country is in a worse situation overall, and only 30% see an improvement compared to the state in which Viktor Orbán took over power from Gordon Bajnai in 2010. According to every fourth respondent, Hungary is in exactly the same situation as it was ten years ago (Graph 3). **Two-thirds of Fidesz voters see an improvement, but the opposition block have a much more negative opinion.** Among the supporters of parties with a vote share higher than 5%, the proportion of those who saw an improvement did not reach 10%. At the same time, a significant part of Momentum voters (four out of ten) see no difference between the times of the Socialist governments (pre-2010 era) and the Orbán regime. They think that the state of Hungary is essentially the same as it was ten years ago.

Graph 3. Public opinion on the overall situation of Hungary over the last decade



DK voters have the worst opinion about the last ten years: 85% say the situation is worse than a decade earlier, but the opinion of Jobbik (72%) and MSZP (65%) voters is also overwhelmingly negative. Educational background shows a clear correlation with the satisfaction with the overall performance of Fidesz: more educated citizens assessed the situation more negatively. It is important to add that those who see the country's situation as worse are in a relative majority in every type of age group, educational background and type of settlement.

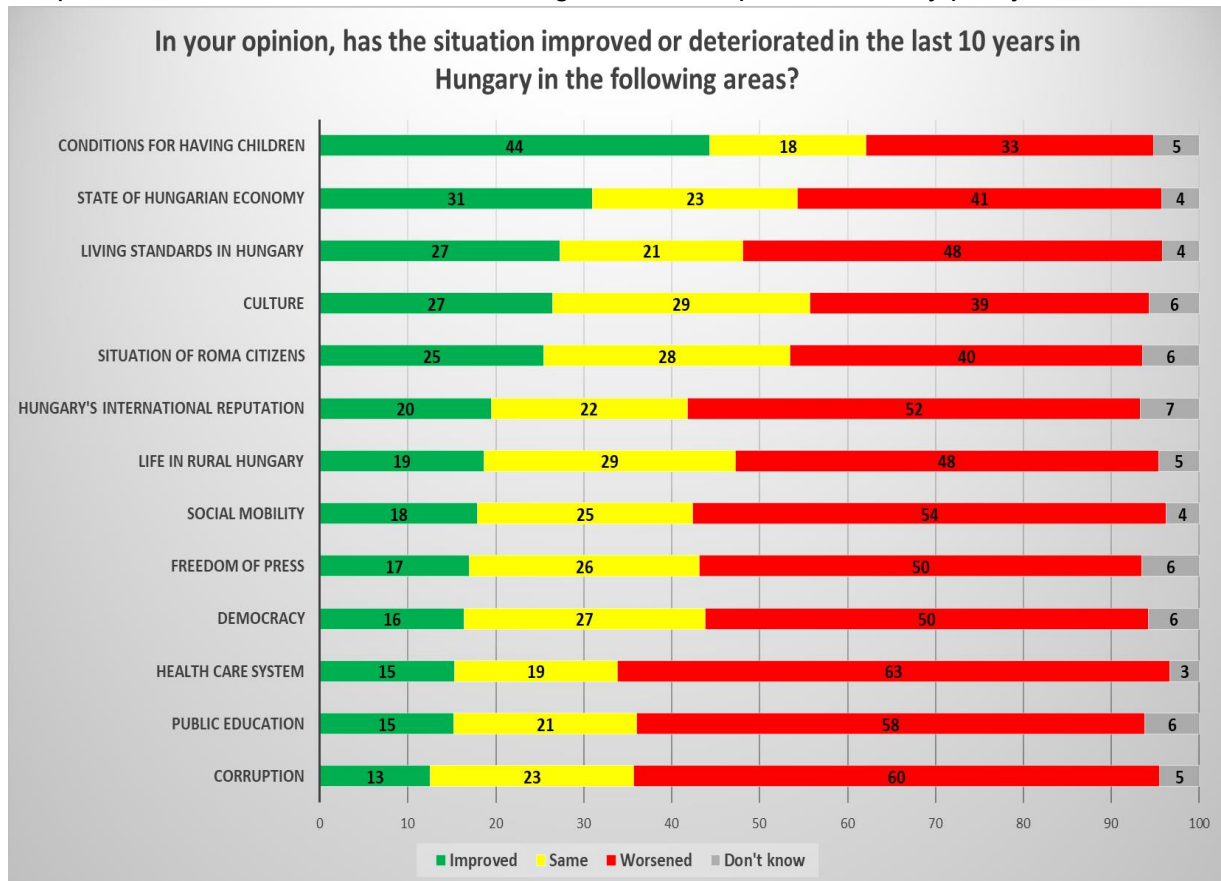
Progress and decline: assessment of Fidesz's performance by public policy areas

In our research, we also examined whether Hungarians see progress or decline in separate policy fields. Out of the thirteen areas examined, **Hungarians see the most improvement mainly in areas related to the economy: family subsidies (44%), state of the Hungarian economy (31%) and living standards (27%) received the highest amount of positive answers (Graph 4).** In contrast, the worst certificates were issued by respondents to the human fields (health, education, social mobility).

All in all, the fact that the relative majority of voters report backsliding in most policy fields, casts a different light on the government's PR campaign of policy success about the last decade. Apart from the family support system, there is a relative majority in all areas for those who say that the situation in Hungary has deteriorated in the last decade, and in seven areas respondents with negative opinions are even in an absolute majority. The share of citizens who think that the situation in democracy and press freedom has worsened is 50%. The share of negative opinion is 52% regarding

Hungary's international reputation, 54% regarding social mobility, 58% regarding the state of public education, 60% regarding the level of corruption and 63% regarding health care. Depending on the question, the share of those who think that the situation in Hungary can be considered roughly the same as ten years earlier varies between 18 and 29 percent.

Graph 4. Public assessment of the Orbán government's performance by policy areas



Three main findings can be drawn concerning the characteristics of different social groups:

1, The youngest (under-30) generation is the most critical about the performance of the Orbán government, while the oldest age group (over 60) rates the results of Viktor Orbán's last ten years the most positively.

2, Higher educated citizens typically view domestic political and social trends more negatively.

3, People living in rural Hungary are somewhat more satisfied with the ten years of the Orbán government than people living in cities.

Party preferences prevail

Party preferences dominate when assessing the policy issues: the majority of pro-government voters are rather satisfied, while a significant proportion of opposition voters tend to discover deteriorating trends in various policy areas. It is also important to note that there is a relatively significant minority among Fidesz voters (an average of 20-25%) who are dissatisfied with the policy achievements of the last decade. **Regarding the opposition voters, DK supporters are the most severe critics of the government. The vast majority of them consider everything that has happened in Hungary in the last 10 years to be bad.** The opinions of Momentum voters are only slightly less harsh, and although there are several among Jobbik and MSZP voters who are at least neutral towards the results of the Fidesz government, overall the clear majority of them see the last ten years very negatively.

The social reality behind macroeconomic successes

Despite the favorable macroeconomic indicators often emphasized by the Orbán government in recent years, more people feel that their own family's financial situation has worsened in the last ten years (38%) than those who report an improvement (26%). The perception of Hungarians' own prosperity also seems to be determined primarily by party preference: exactly half of Fidesz voters feel that they can afford more than a decade earlier, while the same proportion among voters of opposition parties is only 11-14 percent. The clear majority of DK supporters (64%) reported a decline in their financial opportunities, while Momentum voters were the least likely to experience such a decline (but this only meant that half of them still saw a negative development in their own family's well-being). In stark contrast, only 14 percent of pro-government voters thought their lives were harder than a decade earlier. The overriding effect of political affiliation may explain why residents of Budapest, the richest city in the country, has the lowest proportion (22%) of those who say that their family's financial situation is better than it was ten years ago. This hypothesis is also supported by the fact that in the villages – that are increasingly becoming the hinterland of Fidesz - we can observe the highest proportion of people who think that they have made financial progress. However, it is important to emphasize that there are more answers of financial decline in all types of settlements, including villages.

The Orbán government favors the rich, the majority is worse off than 10 years ago

There is a clear majority of those who say that the government of Fidesz primarily favors the rich: two-thirds of the respondents agreed with the statement, while only 28 percent disagreed. Even the majority of pro-government voters (55%) share the view that the government primarily represents the interests of the rich. However, an overwhelming majority of opposition supporters agreed with the statement, ranging from 64% among DK voters to an almost completely unanimous opinion among Socialist Party voters (90%). It is

important to add that two-thirds of the undecideds also believe that Fidesz primarily benefits the rich.

At the same time, the majority not only says that the government favors the rich, but that the majority is also worse off than a decade ago. 42% agreed with the statement that the majority of Hungarians were living better than ten years ago, while 53% said that the financial situation of the majority has deteriorated compared to 2010. **Interestingly, there are far more people who say that the majority is doing better than those who reported a financial improvement in their own lives.**

According to half of the society, there is no democracy in Hungary today

Due to the trends experienced over the last decade, there was already a serious lack of trust in the rule of law in Hungary even before the “Enabling Act” was introduced in relation to the coronavirus pandemic. According to half of the Hungarian society, the state of democracy in Hungary has deteriorated in the last 10 years. In contrast, only 17 percent see progress in terms of democracy in Hungary, while roughly a quarter (27%) said that the consecutive Orbán governments after 2010 have had no effect on the quality of democracy. **In the assessment of the statement that “there is democracy in Hungary”, two fully balanced camps can be observed. There are as many who think that there is still democracy in Hungary (48%) as those who think that what is in Hungary today can no longer be considered a proper democracy (47%).**

Based on the above results, **it is not surprising that ten years after Fidesz came to power the Hungarian society is completely divided on the question about the chances of a democratic change of government in Hungary. In Spring 2020, those who believe that the Orbán government can no longer be replaced in democratic elections are in a slight majority compared those who say that the Hungarian people will overthrow the National Cooperation System one day in a democratic way (40%).**

A few months after the 2018 parliamentary elections, we asked the same question from Hungarian voters. Back then there was a bigger difference between the two camps. In the autumn of 2018, the degree of apathy of the opposition voters at the time was well indicated by the fact that half of the Hungarians (49%) believed that Viktor Orbán could not be democratically removed from office, and only 36% thought oppositely. **The current results show that after the successes of the opposition at the 2019 local elections, hopes for changing government have strengthened a bit within the Hungarian society, but overall, there is still a very serious lack of confidence in the institution of elections in Hungary.** However, it should be added that the biggest change has taken place among the undecideds, who did not believe in the chances of a democratic change of government (31% vs. 51%) a year and a half ago, but in Spring 2020 the majority of them are optimistic (42% vs. 36%). This change of mood is especially important for opposition parties concerning the mobilization of the undecideds in a further parliamentary election.



About the authors

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