

# Elite Change and division

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## Pathways to the Hungarian cultural elite before and after 2010

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There is broad agreement in Hungarian social science that the Orbán governments that came to power in 2010 and have been in power since then have sought to replace not only the political but also the economic and the cultural elite on a large scale. The change of the perceived leftist majority in the elite was a declared intention of a political regime that was set up for stability and an unprecedented length of government. A good part of the economic elite had already sided with Fidesz in the 2000s (Kovách, 2011a), and those who had not were later forced to accept at least the primacy of the political elite (Scheiring, 2020). In the case of the cultural elite, a permanent culture war could be observed in the last decades and the situation in the last few years only worsened.

Viktor Orbán had already foreseen the intention of cultural elite change in his famous 2009 speech in Kötcse, and his governments and the various cultural policy officials he appointed later implemented a number of cultural policy measures to promote elite change. In the light of all this, it is perhaps surprising that, although there have been numerous analyses and case studies on the subject (Kristóf, 2021, 2017), no one has yet attempted to demonstrate, using quantitative, statistical methods, how successful the elite replacement has been. If we look not at individual leadership positions but at the cultural elite as a whole, has the cultural elite changed in terms of its composition, socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes? This paper explores this question as a modest contribution to the great work done by Imre Kovách and his research team over the last decade to better understand why our semi-authoritarian political system is so stable and integrative, in the context of research on the integration of Hungarian society.

## Data and methods

This study is based on a survey among the members of the Hungarian cultural elite (N=411) conducted in 2018. The survey was the fifth wave of elite surveys conducted in the Centre for Social Sciences since 1993, led by Imre Kovách (Kovách, 2011b; Szelenyi et al., 1995).

In the survey, the elite was operationalised broadly as actors who are influential in the process of cultural production; either because of their strategic position, cultural reputation, or market success. Hence, a person could be included in the elite sample in different ways.

47 per cent of the sample was part of the *positional elite*. This is the most accepted way to operationalise the elite of a social sector (Hoffmann-Lange, 2017). The *leaders* of universities, scientific and cultural institutions (museums, theatres, libraries, research institutes etc.), and the media were included in the positional sample. *Members* of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and the two (left-liberal and right-wing) Academies of Arts were also included in the positional sample, because these are the most prestigious institutions in the cultural field. Membership of these academies is a demonstration of a long scientific or artistic career and provides a considerable life-annuity, and new members are elected by the existing ones.

Positional sampling is well supplemented with *reputational* sampling in elite studies (Hoffmann-Lange, 2017), especially in the cultural field, where elite membership is often based on formal and informal reputation. Thus, 44 per cent of our sample was included according to two different forms of reputational criteria. First, individuals' reputation was measured by their *awards*: the living recipients of the highest cultural state awards were included on our list. Second, members of the cultural elite participating in the survey were asked to nominate a maximum of five persons they considered as '*the greatest figures of contemporary Hungarian culture*'. The most often nominated individuals, if they had not been in the sample already, were also included in the sample of the Hungarian cultural elites (snowball sampling, five per cent) and could nominate the five greatest actors of the cultural elite as well. Finally, a small proportion of bestselling authors and music performers were also included in the cultural elite sample, based on the criteria of market success (9 per cent) (Table 1).

Table 1  
Composition of the cultural elite sample

Elite group	N
Leaders of cultural institutions and the media	148
Members of academies	84
Recipients of cultural awards	149
Invited by votes of elite members (reputational elite)	50
Market elite	42
Total	458

The composition of the cultural elite in terms of socio-demographic variables is the following: the majority are very highly educated, middle-aged males, Budapesters overrepresented. They mostly come from white collar families and are alumni of elite Budapest universities (Table 2).

Table 2  
Basic socio-demographic characteristics of the Hungarian cultural elite

Women	19%
Average age	64 years
Place of birth: Budapest	54%
Share of graduates	93%
Fathers with a white collar occupation	66%
Alumni of Budapest elite universities	50%

## Results

### Time of entry and sense of belonging to the elite

Elite members were asked whether they felt part of the elite. 70% of them answered yes to this question, which is high compared with other (political, economic) elite groups. The least likely to feel part of the elite were media executives (less than half), and the most likely were members of academies of science and arts and the reputational elite (more than 80 per cent).

A relevant question for my research question on elite exchange is when elite members became elite and how long they have been considered members of the elite. My own research classification was based on the criteria for inclusion in the sample (when the award was given, when the first institutional leader position was reached, etc.). On this basis, I distinguished between incumbent elite members, who were already considered members of the elite before 2010, and 'newcomers', who joined the elite in 2010 or after (Table 3).

There were significant differences in the proportion of 'newcomers' between the different groups of elites, both in terms of researcher classification and elite members' own perceptions. As well as by age, the leaders and the market elite are differed from the members of the academies, award winners and the reputational elite. The former two groups have a much higher proportion of those who joined the elite after 2010. The elite members' own perception of how long they have felt part of the elite differed slightly from the researcher classification for each group. Among those who felt part of the elite, only 15 per cent thought they had joined the elite in 2010 or after. It seems that the 'fulfilment' of the research criteria for elite status precedes the career stage at which cultural actors are subjectively judged to be already part of the elite.

Table 3  
Proportion of 'newcomers' by researcher classification  
and by elite members' own perceptions

Elite group	Percentage of newcomers to the elite in 2010 or later (%)	
	Researcher classification	Members' own opinion
Leaders	47	27
Members of academies	15	10
Recipients of cultural awards	15	7
Invited by votes of elite members (reputational elite)	8	5
Market elite	48	42
Total	27	15

Is there a difference between the elite before 2010 and the elite in 2010 or after? This question is interesting from the point of view of whether the recruitment criteria for the appointment of institutional leaders or even for the distribution of cultural prizes have changed under the Orbán governments. In other words, can the impact of cultural policy be detected? I used multivariate analysis to investigate the differences between those who were appointed to the elite before 2010 and those who were appointed after 2010.<sup>1</sup> The results show that those who joined the elite after 2010 are – not surprisingly – younger. It is also not surprising that fewer of them were included in the sample with the votes of other elite members, since elite members with decades of performance and recognition tend to get the votes. However, two further differences between incumbents and newcomers suggest a slight change in the criteria for elite recruitment: among the latter, there are significantly fewer Budapest-born elites and fewer elites who identify themselves as left-wing. While 57 per cent of the pre-2010 incomers were born in Budapest, only 41 per cent of the post-2010 incomers were born in Budapest. 45 per cent of the incumbents declared themselves left-wing, while only 28 per cent of the newcomers declared themselves left-wing.

<sup>1</sup> In the model explaining the dependent variable (whether they were a member of the elite before 2010), I included the following variables: gender, age, place of birth, father's education, respondent's elite university degree, art degree, former communist party membership, political position (right-left scale), which sub-sample they belong to, whether they have received professional awards in their career, whether they had been in the national media in the previous year. These factors explained relatively much of the variance of the dependent variable (Nagelkerke R = .389). See Appendix for the binary logistic regression model.

## Political attitudes

The political attitudes of elite members are of great importance for the research questions of this paper, and it is therefore worth discussing how this can be investigated. In quantitative studies, political attitudes are typically measured by self-reporting on a right-to-left scale, a commonly used instrument to measure political preferences (Coughlin and Lockhart, 1998; Lesschaeve, 2017). In Hungary, it is also a well-established measurement instrument that clearly indicates political divisions (Kmetty, 2014), despite the fact that the two sides of the scale do not show coherent differences on public policy issues, being much closer to party identity (Tóka, 2005).

Traditionally, the cultural elite is a social group in which left-wing and liberal attitudes are more dominant than in society as a whole (Brym, 2010; Lipset, 1959; Shils, 1958). This is also true for the Hungarian cultural elite (Kristóf, 2014). At the same time, the Hungarian cultural elite operates in a social context that is highly polarized compared with other European countries (Patkós, 2022). The trend for polarization spread from top to bottom in society in the decades after the regime change: a polarizing elite increasingly polarized the electorate, and in this process the ideology-producing intelligentsia played a major role (Körösenyi, 2013; Kristóf, 2014). In the 2000s, the distribution of Hungarian citizens on the right-left scale became increasingly U-shaped as the centre became more and more empty. However, the shift away from the centre was not symmetrical; political attitudes shifted to the right of the scale (Enyedi and Benoit, 2011).

Table 4 shows a leftward predominance in the cultural elite at all the points in time studied. However, it also shows that a significant change took place between 2001 and 2009: the emptying out of the centre, i.e. polarization. In comparison, the change between 2009 and 2018 no longer constituted a significant difference.

Table 4  
Position of the cultural elite on a right-left scale  
(1- very right-wing - 9- very left-wing), percentage distribution

	Left (6–9)	Centrum (5)	Right (1–4)
2001	39	37	24
2009	47	24	29
2018	40	26	34

Looking at the different groups of cultural elites, compared with the distribution of the whole sample, leaders of institutions and media leaders placed themselves 46% to the right (28% left, 26% centre), a very significant difference compared with the other groups. At the time of the elite recruitment in 2009, this group of leaders did not yet show a different attitude from the others, suggesting that by 2018, the patronage nature of public institutional leadership appointments had shifted this elite group to the right (Table 5).

Table 5  
Position of cultural elite groups on the right-left scale, percentage distribution (2018)

Elite group	Left (6–9)	Centre (5)	Right (1–4)
Leaders	28	26	46
Members of academies	49	20	31
Recipients of cultural awards	42	31	27
Invited by votes of elite members (reputational elite)	48	19	33
Market elite	46	27	27
Total	40	26	34

There was a significant difference in political attitudes between the elite before and after 2010. While 45 per cent of those who entered the elite before 2010 were left-wing and only 30 per cent were right-wing, this proportion was almost exactly reversed among those who entered after 2010 (Table 6).

Table 6  
Position of incumbents and newcomers on the right-left scale, percentage distribution

Time of entry	Left (6–9)	Centre (5)	Right (1–4)
Before 2010	45	25	30
2010 or later	28	27	45
Total	40	26	34

The conservative-liberal axis showed a similar distribution to the right-left scale. Across the cultural elite as a whole, 31 per cent were conservative, 21 per cent placed themselves in the middle, and 48 per cent were liberal. We don't have data going back 20 years on this question, as we do on the right-left scale, because it was first asked in the 2009 wave of elite surveys, so we can only assume that a polarization process has taken place here too. In any case, compared with the 2009 data, the 2018 liberal-conservative self-ratings show no significant change. The differences between the different cultural elite groups in this dimension are also similar to the right-left axis: the reputational elite are more liberal than the average, while media and academic leaders are more conservative. Likewise, the proportion of those who joined the elite before and after 2010 reversed on a right-left scale: 53% of those who joined the elite before 2010 said they were liberal, compared with only 35% of newcomers.

Party preference is more volatile than ideological position, but it is also an interesting indicator of political attitudes. In 2018, many of the cultural elite did not know or did not say which party they would support or would not have voted in any case if 'national elections took place this Sunday.' 24 per cent would have voted for the governing Fidesz-KDNP, with similar proportions of 6–7 per cent respectively voting for oppositional parties such as LMP, DK, Momentum and the Two-Tailed Dog Party. The Hungarian Socialist Party would have won only 3% of the votes (even back then

in 2018, that foreshadowed the most recent weakening of that historical party), and the right-wing oppositional party Jobbik would have won a total of 1 piece of votes among the cultural elite.

Political attitudes were therefore an important segmenting factor among the cultural elite. I used regression models to investigate what explained the difference in political attitudes, i.e., which variables were related to the position of elite members on the right-left and the conservative-liberal axis.<sup>2</sup>

Among right-wing elite members, there were more people born in the countryside, fewer former communist party members, and they were more likely to have been featured in the national media in the year before the survey took place.<sup>3</sup> Left-wing elite members were younger, more likely to be born in Budapest and to have been members of the elite before 2010, were not part of the 'members of academia' sub-sample, and were more likely not to have been featured in the national media. Those who placed themselves in the middle of the right-left scale were also younger, more likely to have received some kind of award or distinction in their careers, and less likely to be members of academies and the reputational elite.

The conservative-liberal axis also reflected the 2010 breakpoint: self-described liberals were more likely to have been in the elite before 2010, in contrast to conservatives, who were more likely to be newcomers. Moreover, liberals were more likely to have been born in Budapest and to have attended an elite university in Budapest. Paternal education had an effect only for conservatives of all the political attitude dependent variables: they were more likely to be the children of a graduate father. Those who placed themselves in the centre of the conservative-liberal scale were less likely to be part of the reputational elite, more likely to have been born in the countryside, less likely to have attended an elite university and more likely to be artists.

Finally, I examined factors associated with party preference in a similar way. Because of the small number of items, it would not have made sense to treat all party supporters individually, so I combined them into a bivalent pro-government/opposition variable. On this basis, Fidesz voters are older, less likely to have been communist party members, more likely to have been born in rural areas, less likely to have belonged to the market elite and more likely to have joined the elite after 2010.

<sup>2</sup> In the models explaining different political attitudes (left, right, centrum, liberal, conservative, centrum, voter of the Fidesz) as dependent variables, I included the following variables: gender, age, place of birth, father's education, respondent's elite university degree, art degree, former communist party membership, whether respondents were a member of the elite before 2010, which sub-sample they belong to, whether they received a professional award or been featured in the national media in the previous year. See Appendix for the seven binary logistic regression models. The models could explain only a small part of the variance of the attitude variables.

<sup>3</sup> In the 2009 sample of elites, this was the other way around: left-wing elites were more prominent in the media, which illustrates the change in media 'market' over time.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have used statistical methods to explore correlations about cultural elites in relation to elite replacement and political divisions. I sought to find out whether the cultural elite database reveals a change in elite recruitment before and after 2010, the beginning of the Orbán-regime. Has the recruitment criteria changed, and if so, how has this affected the composition and political orientation of the elite?

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, the Hungarian cultural elite is elderly, heavily male, and significantly over-represented by those born in Budapest. The majority of its members are the children of educated parents whose career paths have usually led them to the elite through elite universities in Budapest.

Around a quarter of the cultural elite members entered the elite in 2010 or afterwards, i.e., in the Orbán era, but in the institutional and media leader group and the market elite this is almost half of the elite members. On the one hand, it signifies a natural circulation of the elite and is also caused by sampling peculiarities (for example, those who are in the elite on the basis of their cultural awards or elected members of academies are considered members of the elite until their death, while the leadership position lasts only for a certain period of time). However, the analysis suggests that the recruitment base of the elite may have changed after 2010, with fewer 'newcomers' being born in Budapest and having leftist ideological attitudes.

Nevertheless, this change in recruitment criteria does not mean that the left-wing and liberal predominance in the Hungarian cultural elite has disappeared. Overall, political attitudes in the 2018 cultural elite were similar to the proportions in the 2009 elite sample; the cultural elite had already become ideologically polarized during the 2000s. However, there were significant differences among different groups of the 2018 elite in terms of their political self-identification: institutional and media leaders were much more right-wing than the rest of the elite. This difference suggests the presence of political patronage: institutional leaders in the cultural sphere are easily replaced by the government with more loyal cultural actors. In this sense, elite replacement was partly successful in the positional cultural elite.

Political attitudes are difficult to explain by socio-demographic variables. The multivariate analyses presented in this paper, although of low explanatory power, showed how elite members with different political attitudes differed in their other characteristics. These included their age, place of birth, but also, importantly for the research question of elite replacement, left-wing and liberal elites were more likely to have entered the elite before 2010, again supporting the thesis of the political influence on cultural elite recruitment.

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## Appendix

### Regression models (binary logistic)

Dependent variable: Incumbent (Entering the elite: before 2010) Nagelkerke R = .389

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
gender	-.450	.365	1.525	1	.217	1.569
age	-.088	.015	35.292	1	.000	.915
art degree	.142	.466	.092	1	.761	1.152
former communist party membership	-.645	.467	1.910	1	.167	.524
father with tertiary education	-.477	.326	2.138	1	.144	.621
alumni of an elite university	-.396	.347	1.303	1	.254	.673
place of birth: Budapest	.659	.316	4.346	1	.037	1.932
award winner	-.108	.440	.061	1	.805	.897
subsamples (reference category: leaders of cultural institutions)			8.189	4	.085	
members of academies	-.517	.503	1.055	1	.304	.597
recipients of cultural awards	-.611	.421	2.108	1	.146	.543
reputational elite	-1.513	.692	4.782	1	.029	.220
market elite	.500	.559	.799	1	.371	1.648
performance in the national media	-.401	.344	1.359	1	.244	.670
right-wing	-.144	.366	.155	1	.694	.866
left-wing	-.825	.375	4.842	1	.028	.438
Constant	6.789	1.919	12.523	1	.000	888.264

Dependent variable: Centrist on the left-right scale Nagelkerke R = .088

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
gender	.063	.328	.036	1	.849	1.065
age	.036	.013	8.072	1	.004	1.036
art degree	.267	.365	.536	1	.464	1.306
former communist party membership	.441	.372	1.409	1	.235	1.555
father with tertiary education	-.006	.267	.000	1	.983	.994
alumni of an elite university	.155	.304	.260	1	.610	1.167
place of birth: Budapest	-.136	.265	.264	1	.608	.873
entry to the elite: before 2010	1.281	.532	5.791	1	.016	3.600
award winner	.191	.287	.441	1	.507	1.210
subsamples (reference category: leaders of cultural institutions)			7.987	4	.092	
members of academies	-.514	.323	2.533	1	.111	1.673
recipients of cultural awards	-1.153	.448	6.637	1	.010	.316
reputational elite	-.410	.362	1.286	1	.257	.664
market elite	-.920	.495	3.455	1	.063	.399
performance in the national media	-.258	.529	.238	1	.626	.773
Constant	-7.261	1.915	14.382	1	.000	.001

Dependent variable: Conservative Nagelkerke R = .107

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
gender	-.136	.319	.181	1	.670	.873
age	.002	.012	.017	1	.896	1.002
art degree	-.526	.375	1.963	1	.161	.591
former communist party membership	.445	.389	1.307	1	.253	1.560
father with tertiary education	-.526	.269	3.823	1	.051	.591
alumni of an elite university	-.084	.286	.086	1	.769	.919
place of birth: Budapest	.364	.254	2.047	1	.153	1.439
entry to the elite: before 2010	.939	.299	9.893	1	.002	2.558
award winner	.400	.421	.901	1	.343	1.491
subsamples (reference category: leaders of cultural institutions)			1.726	4	.786	
members of academies	-.498	.530	.885	1	.347	1.646
recipients of cultural awards	.616	.587	1.101	1	.294	1.852
reputational elite	.537	.553	.944	1	.331	1.712
market elite	.205	.643	.101	1	.750	1.227
performance in the national media	.360	.285	1.605	1	.205	1.434
Constant	-4.320	1.815	5.668	1	.017	.013

Dependent variable: Liberal Nagelkerke R = .101

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
gender	-.005	.287	.000	1	.986	.995
age	-.010	.010	.888	1	.346	.990
art degree	-.390	.330	1.394	1	.238	.677
former communist party membership	-.143	.328	.190	1	.663	.867
father with tertiary education	.201	.237	.719	1	.397	1.222
alumni of an elite university	.555	.273	4.135	1	.042	1.742
place of birth: Budapest	-.673	.237	8.087	1	.004	.510
entry to the elite: before 2010	-.788	.292	7.292	1	.007	.455
award winner	-.726	.392	3.436	1	.064	.484
subsamples (reference category: leaders of cultural institutions)			5.794	4	.215	
members of academies	-.548	.486	1.273	1	.259	.578
recipients of cultural awards	-.142	.528	.072	1	.788	.868
reputational elite	-.103	.499	.043	1	.836	.902
market elite	.479	.569	.710	1	.399	1.615
performance in the national media	-.337	.251	1.794	1	.180	.714
Constant	3.896	1.664	5.486	1	.019	49.223

Dependent variable: Centrist on the conservative-liberal scale Nagelkerke R = .069

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
gender	.222	.332	.449	1	.503	1.249
age	.012	.013	.977	1	.323	1.012
art degree	1.131	.399	8.017	1	.005	3.097
former communist party membership	-.244	.369	.435	1	.509	.784
father with tertiary education	.302	.269	1.261	1	.261	1.353
alumni of an elite university	-.742	.338	4.831	1	.028	.476
place of birth: Budapest	.538	.280	3.683	1	.055	1.712
entry to the elite: before 2010	-.161	.342	.220	1	.639	.852
award winner	.514	.489	1.105	1	.293	1.672
subsamples (reference category: leaders of cultural institutions)			5.174	4	.270	
members of academies	-.638	.434	2.154	1	.142	.529
recipients of cultural awards	-.627	.389	2.596	1	.107	.534
reputational elite	-1.182	.559	4.461	1	.035	.307
market elite	-.129	.561	.053	1	.818	.879
performance in the national media	.075	.294	.065	1	.799	1.078
Constant	-2.674	1.859	2.069	1	.150	.069



Dependent variable: Party preference Fidesz-KDNP Nagelkerke R = .140

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
gender	.280	.372	.564	1	.453	1.323
age	-.028	.014	3.994	1	.046	.973
art degree	.065	.455	.020	1	.887	1.067
former communist party membership	-1.167	.484	5.801	1	.016	.311
father with tertiary education	.230	.307	.561	1	.454	1.259
alumni of an elite university	.150	.341	.194	1	.660	1.162
place of birth: Budapest	-.697	.298	5.463	1	.019	.498
entry to the elite: before 2010	-.705	.347	4.132	1	.042	.494
award winner	.193	.498	.150	1	.698	1.213
subsamples (reference category: leaders of cultural institutions)			6.258	4	.181	
members of academies	-.292	.469	.388	1	.533	.747
recipients of cultural awards	.140	.426	.108	1	.742	1.151
reputational elite	.618	.615	1.012	1	.314	1.856
market elite	1.266	.711	3.173	1	.075	3.547
performance in the national media	-.445	.321	1.926	1	.165	.641
Constant	5.987	2.024	8.748	1	.003	398.407