

Party preference and subjective social mobility

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The paper focuses on how individuals perceive their own social position depending on their political party preferences. This question rests on two fundamental assumptions. Our first hypothesis is that the perception of individual social position (improving or deteriorating) cannot be explained solely based on the changes in their objective conditions. Several other factors may have a key role in whether individuals view their own lives as an advancement or deterioration. Secondly, we hypothesize that political affiliations, more specifically, party preferences may have a significant role in the perception of social position and/or the changes thereof in today's Hungary. In their analyses, Gábor (2018a, 2018b) and Andrea Szabó (2022) suggest that Fidesz–KDNP' four consecutive election victories are not independent from the population's perceived economic status. In his research, Tóka found a close correlation between the population's consumption indicators and Fidesz' approval ratings. Depending on their party preferences, opposition voters have a different view on the economic situation than pro-government voters. As far as the legitimacy of political power is concerned, it is highly important which narrative (i.e., the pessimistic or the optimistic one) becomes dominant, since (as suggested in Tóka 2018b) it can decide elections (see 2006 as well as 2018).

Similar hypotheses can be put forward in terms of mobility as well. The political power may persist and retain its legitimacy if the society is characterized by a stronger, more assertively or at least more loudly represented view that Hungary's mobility channels are not blocked, and everyone ultimately has the *opportunity* to move forward. However, it is not evident whether every segment of society shares this sentiment, and it is particularly not evident whether everyone, based on their political affiliations, has the same perception of their own status. The theory of partisan polarization (Patkós 2019, McCoy–Somer 2019, Somer–McCoy–Luke 2021) suggests that pro-government voters may have a much stronger perception of progress opportunities for progress than opposition supporters.

In what follows we first present our question and our related hypotheses, then we demonstrate the methods we used to test them. Further on, we present our findings starting with the descriptive statistical results of subjective mobility, followed by a linear regression analysis to investigate what factors affect subjective mobility and

how. This paper aims to contribute to the literature on political behaviour as well as the area of sociology focusing on social mobility and the perception thereof.

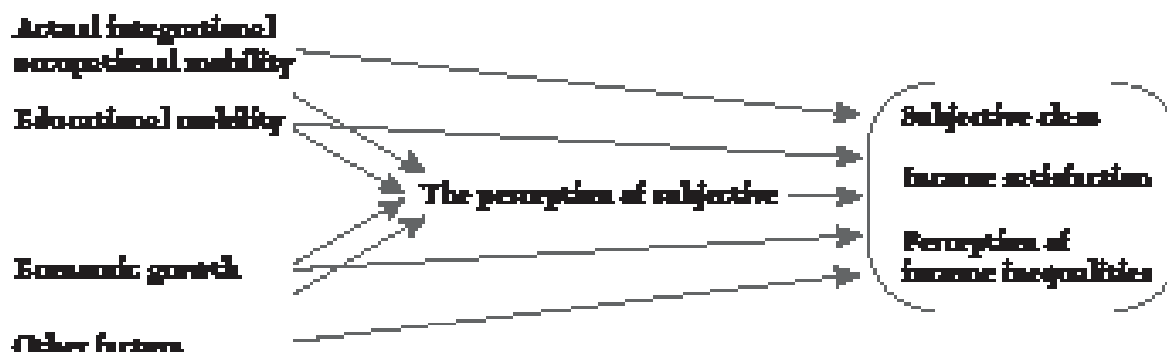
Objective and subjective mobility

In the broadest sense, social mobility is defined as the change of the social position of individuals (and/or families) (see Andorka 1982: 7). Depending on the reference base of the change, we talk about intergenerational mobility when the individual's social position is compared with their parents, and intragenerational mobility when it is compared with their own earlier social position. Changes may be examined based on several different dimensions (e.g., occupation, qualifications, income, assets). This study investigates the subjective perception of social position.

The subjective indicators of social mobility are in many ways similar to the traditional indices of mobility studies, but they are also significantly different at certain points. The most important difference lies in the fact that while the latter typically grasp the individuals' current and/or former social position based on their occupational position, the subjective indicator reflects personal opinions. The potential variance of actual changes in social position from their subjective perceptions is not in the least surprising. Although the two (may) correlate, they are two distinctly independent phenomena after all (Merllié 2008, Kraus-Tan 2015, Huszár 2018).

The question is what factors cause subjective mobility to vary from objective mobility and to what extent. The nature and/or the potential consequences of the mechanisms driving the subjective perception of mobility are highly debated (Duru-Bellat-Kieffer 2008, Kelly and Kelly 2009, Kraus-Tan 2015, Merllié 2008, Harcsa 2018). The systematic interpretation of such mechanisms was perhaps explored the furthest by Sarah Kelly and Claire Kelly (2009). According to them, subjective mobility may firstly be derived from the individual's social movement, i.e., from the change in their school qualifications and/or occupational status. On the other hand, economic growth may also affect the perception of mobility, which can invoke a perception of rising or sinking purely as a result of the collective movement of the individual's social group even in the lack of actual individual movement. Furthermore, the perception of subjective mobility may also be affected by several other socio-demographic factors whose mechanisms of action are hard to assess in advance.

Figure 1
Explanatory factors and consequences of subjective mobility



Source: Kelly and Kelly 2009.

A particularly significant element of the Kelly and Kelly model (Figure 1) is that it represents the perception of subjective mobility as a form of transmission medium which, depending on the underlying societal processes, may impact the individual's socio-political attitudes and/or political positions as well. In this case, it is difficult to take a clear stance on the direction of causality, but Péter Róbert (1999) interprets subjective mobility itself as a kind of political attitude. In this interpretation, respondents declare whether they experience the changes in their lives as an ascension or descent, which is intertwined with their judgement on the state of the country and/or the society and their satisfaction related to them.

In his paper written at the end of the first post-communist decade, Róbert investigated how members of society evaluated their own societal status compared to that of their parents and their own from ten years before, as well as how these evaluations correlate with the objective processes of social mobility. 43% of the respondents believed their social status deteriorated compared with their parents, while two-thirds of them reported a perceived negative change in relation with their status ten years prior, i.e., the period right before the change of the political system. Róbert also found that the objective indicators of intergenerational mobility did not show such a rupture after the change of the political system. Instead, they demonstrated a continuation of the earlier mobility processes. The first ten years of the new political system was typically experienced as a deterioration by even those people whose occupational position did not change or, in fact, improved relative to their parents'. The picture was somewhat nuanced by intragenerational occupational mobility studies conducted by Balogh and Róbert later (2008). They found that Hungarian society became more open in terms of mobility after the collapse of Communism, especially for men. However, "the doors closed" in the early 2000s and upward mobility became more and more infrequent afterwards.

We hypothesize that the subjective perception of changes in social status and the causality of political affiliations may be two-directional. Conceivably, citizens may vote for a particular party because they believe its policy resulted in an improved social status for them. On the other hand, it is also possible that supporters of a particular party may report an improved social status even if their occupational situation or income does not justify it. The analysis of the results may allow us to estimate which effect had a larger role in terms of causality.

As we noted above, our investigation is based on the hypothesis that highly politically driven value choices may influence subjective mobility in today's Hungary, and political affiliations may have an independent role in how individuals evaluate the changes in their own societal position. Since 2010, Hungary has been led by a political party alliance with a two-thirds constitutional majority in Parliament. This fact may have a major impact on the framework that determines and forms the channels of objective mobility (educational system, labour market, public administration). The party alliance can shape the media environment to enable the formation of the perception of daily life for certain social groups to conform to its political intent (Tóth–Szabó 2018, Szabó 2022, Gerő–Sik 2022). On the other hand, according to multiple papers by Márton Gerő and Andrea Szabó (2017, 2019, 2020, 2022), and Huszár (2022) Hungarian politics function largely independently from the other (for the sake of simplicity, let us call it objective or stratificational) integration mechanisms. Social stratification and socio-demographic factors have also been proven to be limited for understanding political dimensions, party preference and the choice of political values. According to the authors, politics are not determined solely by the structure and state of the society. On the contrary, politics integrate society as well.

Considering the above, we investigated how members of Hungarian society experience the changes in their own social position and what factors have an impact on their experience. Do political party preferences influence individual views regarding mobility? In this study, we assumed that the answer to this question is yes. More specifically, we identified the following hypotheses:

- H1. Firstly, our main hypothesis is that political preferences impact subjective mobility: the more somebody sympathizes with the ruling party, the more they believe their own position has improved over recent years.
- H2. Secondly, we believe this connection applies to intra- as well as intergenerational mobility, albeit not to the same extent. Since intergenerational mobility uses parental social position as a frame of reference while intragenerational mobility passes judgement on the individual's own recent career, we assume party preference has a larger impact on the latter case.
- H3. Thirdly, we hypothesize that politics have a significant impact on subjective mobility. Furthermore, we believe that political affiliations may actually override the perception of objective factors as well as the evaluation of shifts in the

dimensions of traditional mobility. We maintain this hypothesis for both intra- and intergenerational mobility.

Data and methods

The study is based on the large-scale sample survey conducted under the “Mobility Research Centre” project of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences’ Cooperation Excellence Programme in the autumn of 2018.¹

The subjective perception of mobility was measured with a set of questions where we asked respondents to, first, estimate their parents’ position on the social ladder on a scale from 1 to 10 (at the respondent’s age of 14) and second, locate themselves on that scale ten years prior to the survey (i.e., in 2008) and third, to determine their own current position on the scale. The questions were as follows:

Our society consists of people with different social status and lifestyle. Imagine a ladder the uppermost step of which represents the higher part of the society while the lower step means the lower part. On a scale from 1 to 10, please rate:

Which step of the ladder was your family on in your childhood (at the age of 14)?

And 10 years ago? (Only for those who were born in or before 1991)

Where would you place yourself on this ladder today?

According to their responses, individuals were considered intergenerationally immobile if they placed themselves at the same level as their parents, while they were identified as intragenerationally immobile if they gave the same score to their own social status now as ten years prior. For both inter- and intragenerational mobility we created a continuous variable ranging from -9 to +9, based on the variance between their current and previous social position. Negative values mean that the individual’s subjective social position deteriorated, while positive values indicate an advancement. The greatest advantage of this solution is that it concurrently indicates the extent and vector of mobility, and it can be applied to building linear regression models as the variable is measured at a high level.

After discussing the key features of subjective mobility, below we test our base hypotheses through a linear regression analysis. For this purpose, we transformed the multi-step modelling strategy applied by Péter Róbert (1999) to suit our own special questions.

As the first step, we only involved party preference related variables in the analysis. We used them to find out whether our first hypothesis can be supported by some

¹ The applied method was a personal survey questionnaire with 2700 successful interviews completed in the autumn of 2018. The target group was the adult (18+) population living in Hungary. Implemented by ZRI Závecz Research Institute, the sampling was carried out with a two-step, stratified probability process. The composition rate of the sampled individuals complies with the composition of the entire adult population in terms of the key socio-demographic indicators (gender, age group, school qualifications, type of settlement). The sampled population is Hungarian citizens living in Hungary, aged 18 and up. The poll was commissioned by Mobility Research Centre. Project leader: Imre Kovách. (For more details, see: Szabó–Gerő 2019: 123–124.)

type of connection between party preferences and inter- and/or intragenerational subjective mobility. If our Hypothesis 1 is correct, pro-government voters will report a rise, whereas opposition voters are expected to report a fall on the social ladder. Furthermore, if H2 is also valid, the trend will be much more markedly manifested in intragenerational mobility than in intergenerational mobility. Looking at the party preferences of voters, we considered government parties as one unit (Fidesz, KDNP), but we created three blocks of opposition parties:

- a) the traditional left-wing parties MSZP–P and DK², which ran in a kind of alliance in the 2018 national elections;
- b) the ‘new’ liberal and green parties LMP³ and Momentum⁴, as justified by their similarities in terms of ideology and age group; and
- c) right-wing and formerly radical Jobbik⁵, which made no alliance with any of the parties mentioned here when running for the 2018 national elections.

We have considered the situation where the six opposition parties cooperated in the 2022 election campaign. However, our data is from 2018, when there was no political cooperation. And on the other hand, the six co-starter parties were heavily defeated in the 2022 election. As a result of the defeat, all aspects of collaboration fell apart.

As far as the next steps of the analysis were concerned, we involved further variables that could be instrumental in explaining subjective mobility. With regard to these steps, the main question was whether H1 and H2 correlations still apply if we involve other variables in the process.

The second step introduced the key socio-demographic variables into the model (gender, age, household size, type of settlement, labour market activity), so we could filter their effect and thus examine the correlation of subjective mobility and political affiliation.

In the third phase, we inserted objective data related to the individual’s family origins and/or objective mobility, which were measured by the individual’s and their father’s occupational group. We assumed that these variables distinctly correlate with the perception of subjective mobility. Firstly, we expected individuals with a less favourable starting position to perceive a higher improvement in social status as they had more room to rise. Secondly, we hypothesized that objective occupational mobility is positively correlated with subjective mobility, i.e., individuals with improved occupational positions are more likely to feel a rise in their status. We analysed the 28+ age group because we wanted to make sure that the respondents were already adults (18+) at the time of their prior social position (ten years before the survey) used for investigating intragenerational subjective mobility. This limits the study in the

2 MSZP: Hungarian Social Party; DK: Democratic Coalition Party (Hungary); Párbeszéd: Dialogue for Hungary.

3 LMP: Politics Can Be Different Hungarian Green Party.

4 Momentum: Momentum Movement.

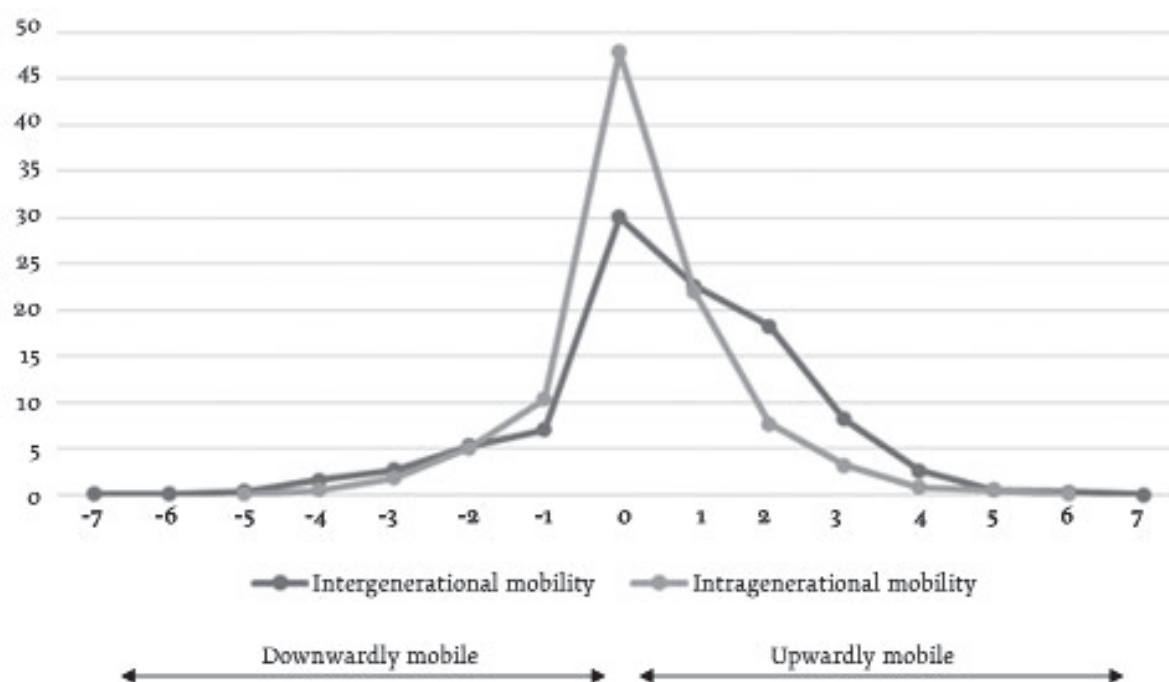
5 Jobbik: Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary.

sense that the youngest age group, which also shows particular political behaviour, was left out of the analysis.

Intergenerational and intragenerational subjective mobility

With regard to the relation of objective and subjective mobility, we first found that there were huge variances between occupational mobility and the subjective perception of changing social positions in the 2010s as well. Our findings support Péter Róbert's conclusions (1999) related to the earlier period, but the vector of the variance is the opposite this time: while the latest intergenerational mobility studies show that Hungary's society became more closed, and in fact is one of the most closed ones in comparison with Europe (Bukodi et al. 2017, Jackson–Evans 2017, Eurofound 2017, OECD 2018, Róbert 2018, Tóth–Szelényi 2018, Huszár et al. 2022), subjective mobility indicators demonstrate the highest ever rate of respondents who believe their social status has improved (Huszár–Záhonyi 2018, Balogh et al. 2019). However, the intergenerational and intragenerational subjective mobility indicators show significant variances, as we discuss below. Figure 2 displays the distribution of the two subjective mobility variables. The trend lines of the two diagrams clearly demonstrate the difference between the two indicators.

Figure 2
Distribution of subjective inter- and intragenerational mobility
in the 28+ age group (%)



Source: Mobility Research Centre, 2018.

The variance compared with their own position ten years prior shows a classic normal curve, i.e., it peaks in the middle and gradually diminishes, then flattens toward the edges. This means that the majority of respondents do not perceive significant mobility compared with their former position, neither upwards nor downwards. (Nevertheless, the perception of upward mobility is slightly higher (34%), 48% feel immobile, while 18% detect downward mobility). The mean value of intragenerational mobility is 0.24, so it is relatively close to zero, i.e., immobility.

The graph of perceived intergenerational mobility is completely different. The distribution leans to the right, i.e., to the positive, and it does not peak as much as the line diagram of the respondents' own career. This suggests that the majority (precisely 54%) of respondents feel their current status is better and their social position is more favourable than that of their parents. 28% are immobile while 18% are downwardly mobile. Consequently, the mean intergenerational mobility is 0.63 points, which is 2.5 times higher than that of intragenerational mobility.⁶

Comparing the two types of subjective mobility, it is significant that the rate of immobile respondents is considerably higher than upwardly mobile ones in terms of intragenerational mobility, while the rate of sinkers is identical in both types. The higher levels of immobility are easier to understand: there is a shorter time and less opportunity for individuals to change their social status within the time frame of their career. It is interesting, however, how the relative rate of downwardly and upwardly mobile individuals change in inter- vs. intragenerational comparison (see Table 1).

The table's "total" fields show that upwardly mobile individuals make up the majority in both types. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to define them as "winners". The second largest groups (21% each) consist of individuals who feel their status remained unchanged compared with both their own position ten years prior and that of their parents, as well as those whose own situation remained the same, but feel upwardly mobile compared with their parents.

Based on their subjective mobility, those who feel downwardly mobile in both aspects (11%) can be considered as the "losers", since their situation changed for the worse compared with both their parents and their own position ten years before.

For us, the most interesting group consists of the respondents who feel that the past ten years have changed their mobility trajectory.

One such group is formed by individuals who reported a deterioration in generational comparison, but they feel their social status improved (or remained unchanged) compared with ten years ago. The other such group comprises those who sense a regression compared with their parents' and their own position ten years ago as well. The third group (12% of the respondents) contains individuals with downward intergenerational mobility but upward intragenerational mobility; they can clearly feel like the winners of the past decade.

⁶ By the way, the correlation of the two types of subjective mobility is significant and moderately strong (Pearson $r=0.545$).

Table 1
Distribution of inter- and intragenerational mobility
in the 28+ age group (% distribution)

		%	Subjective intragenerational mobility			Total
			Downwardly mobile	Immobile	Upwardly mobile	
Subjective intergenerational mobility	Downwardly mobile	Row	59	29	12	100
		Column	59	11	6	18
		Total	11	5	2	18
	Immobile	Row	11	76	13	100
		Column	18	45	10	28
		Total	3	21	4	28
	Upwardly mobile	Row	8	39	53	100
		Column	23	44	84	54
		Total	4	21	29	54
	Total		18	48	34	
			100	100	100	

Pearson Chi2= 904.205, sig=0.000, Cramer's V=0.447 Correlation: 0.545

Source: Mobility Research Centre, 2018.

The largest share of the respondents who feel immobile compared with their parents considered themselves immobile in the past ten years as well (76%). However, 11% of the sample think their status deteriorated over the past ten years, while 13% believe it improved.

53% of the respondents with upward mobility compared with their parents reported an improved social status relative to their own situation ten years before, too. 39% reported an intergenerational improvement coupled with an unchanged social position over the past ten years, while 8% declared that their social status improved relative to their parents but deteriorated compared with their own position a decade prior.

We also asked how inter- and intragenerational mobility correlates with party preferences, if at all. We hypothesized that respondents with a dedication to the governing parties would particularly consider the past decade as a successful period. In other words, they connect their own status improvement with the political processes going on in Hungary. The ANOVA test is not suitable for analysing impacts (for which we used linear regression models in the next part of the study), but it certainly allows us to demonstrate the variance of opinions among the different preference groups (see Table 2).⁷

⁷ The applied statistical procedure examines the response variances between preference groups. More specifically, it shows the variances between the averages and the extents thereof.

Table 2
Inter- and intragenerational subjective mobility by party preference
(total population, ANOVA, averages)

Accumulated party preference	Intergenerational mobility	Intragenerational mobility	Average age
Fidesz–KDNP (Fidesz-Christian Democratic Party)	.85	.38	49
Traditional centre-left and left-wing parties	.80	.17	56
Other parties	.64	.67	44
Jobbik	.45	-.02	42
Green, Liberal, new parties	.42	.24	43
Don't answer	.63	.23	48
Don't know	.52	.20	46
Would never attend	.34	.08	49
Total:	.63	.24	48

$F=4.324$, $sig=0.000$, $eta^2=0.012$; The post hoc-LSD test is significant in terms of the voters of Fidesz–KDNP and Jobbik, green, liberal, new parties, the undecided, the “do not answer” group and those who are sure not to vote. There is also a significant difference between the traditional left-wing parties as well as Jobbik, green, liberal and new parties, the undecided and those who are sure they would not vote.

$F=3.872$, $sig=0.000$, $eta^2=0.012$. The post hoc-LSD test is significant between Fidesz–KDNP, the traditional left-wing parties, Jobbik, the undecided voters and those who are sure they would not vote. Furthermore, the opinion of traditional left-wing parties differs from the other parties, beside Fidesz–KDNP. The voters of other parties have a different opinion than Jobbik, green, Liberal and the new parties' voters.

$F=16.480$, $sig=0.000$, $eta^2=0.041$.

Source: Mobility Research Centre, 2018.

With regard to mobility compared to the parents' social position, we can identify two voter groups whose perceived subjective intergenerational mobility is significantly higher than the calculated average of the sample population: supporters of Fidesz–KDNP (0.85) and the traditional left-wing parties (MSZP, DK) (0.80). So, interestingly enough, both pro-government voters and the supporters of the two left-wing opposition parties believe their current status is higher than that of their parents. The two left-wing parties have the oldest voter base, so their age may have a distinct role in their perception of subjective mobility. Jobbik voters, non-voters and especially the supporters of small green and liberal parties demonstrated results with the opposite vector, i.e., below average and downward.

The perception of subjective mobility relative to their own earlier status shows a high value in voters for other small parties (upward mobility), but this value is negative in Jobbik voters, in other words, Jobbik supporters feel their societal movement

was explicitly unfavourable over the prior ten years. The mean values of the ANOVA analysis, along with the related post hoc results, also indicate that Fidesz voters have a consistently positive subjective mobility, i.e., they consider their current status to be higher than their parents' and their own earlier position.

The distribution of subjective mobility values (see the “total” rows in Table 1) demonstrates that the group of Fidesz–KDNP voters has the highest rate of “winners” (one third). Voters are considered winners if they view themselves as upwardly mobile both in terms of intergenerational and intragenerational mobility. Compared with the sample’s distribution, the variance is four percentage points, so it exceeds the level of coincidence. In contrast, the rate of “losers”, who perceive an unfavourable change in both dimensions of subjective mobility, is six percentage points lower in the pro-government voter group than in the entire sample. This 5% belongs to the Fidesz–KDNP voter base even though they consider their status to be worse in both dimensions of mobility. There was only one other category where we registered a change higher than the margin of error compared with the sample’s distribution: immobility. 25% of Fidesz–KDNP voters believe their status is the same as that of their parents; they do not perceive a significant change.

Table 3
Correlation of inter- and intragenerational subjective mobility
with voting for Fidesz–KDNP (%)

***p<0.01, **p<0.05	sample*	Fidesz–KDNP	Variance (Fidesz–KDNP sample)
Loser	11	5	-6***
Comp. parent downw., comp. self immobile	5	4	-1
Comp. parent downw., comp. self upw.	2	1	-1
Comp. parent immob., comp. self downw.	3	3	0
Immobile	21	25	+4**
Comp. parent: immob., comp. self upw.	4	3	-1
Comp. parent upw., comp. self downw.	4	3	-1
Comp. parent: upw., comp. self immob.	21	23	+2
Winner	29	33	+4**

*The values of the sample are identical with the “total” rows of Table 1.

Source: Mobility Research Centre, 2018.

Determining factors of the perception of mobility

In addition to descriptive statistics, we applied linear regression analysis to investigate the factors that may explain why respondents' subjective social status changed relative to their parents and/or their own position (see Tables 4 and 5). What factors are instrumental in the respondents' subjectively improved social status and what factors are connected with the experience of sinking? Secondly, are our preliminary assumptions correct and does party preference have a role in respondents experiencing an improvement or a deterioration in their social status? Finally, do the analysed factors have a consistent effect in both intergenerational and intragenerational subjective mobility?

Table 4
Linear regression models of intergenerational subjective mobility

***p<0.01, **p<0.05	(Step 1)	(Step 2)	(Step 3)
Party preference (ref. unknown preference)			
Fidesz–KDNP	.102***	.101***	.106***
MSZP, DK, Párbeszéd	.043**	.043**	.044
Jobbik	-.001	-.003	-.003
Other small parties	.007	.008	.004
Gender		-.011	-.002
Age		.063**	.056
Household size		.061***	.049**
Lives in Budapest		.018	.025
Lives in village		.006	.001
Employed		.057**	.062**
Lineage (ref. unskilled labourer father)			
Father – manager, professional			-.048***
Father – other white collar			-.021
Father – skilled worker			.007
Father – semi-skilled worker			-.003
Occupational mobility			.112***
Adjusted R2	.008	.016	.028
N	2278	2278	2134

Source: Mobility Research Centre, 2018.

Table 5
Linear regression models of intragenerational subjective mobility

***p<0.01, **p<0.05	(Step 1)	(Step 2)	(Step 3)
Party preference (ref. unknown preference)			
Fidesz–KDNP	.076***	.079***	.077***
MSZP, DK, Párbeszéd	-.001	.026	.027
Jobbik	-.035	-.048**	-.049**
Other small parties	.064***	.054**	.062***
Gender		-.005	-.004
Age		-.087***	-.074**
Household size		.043	.053**
Lives in Budapest		-.010	-.008
Lives in village		.023	.027
Employed		.086***	.092***
Lineage (ref. unskilled labourer father)			
Father – manager, professional			-.006
Father – other white collar			.019
Father – skilled worker			.010
Father – semi-skilled worker			.014
Occupational mobility			.102***
Adjusted R2	.009	.037	.045
N	2286	2286	2141

Source: Mobility Research Centre, 2018.

Analysing the effect of different factors, we can firstly note that political affiliation (at least in terms of certain parties) independently impacts the individual perception of social status changes, even after the introduction of control variables. This impact remains present regardless of whether the respondents' current social status is compared with their parents' or their own status ten years ago. The impact's strength and vector validated our preliminary expectations in several aspects, but they contradicted it in certain others.

First: government supporters have the highest rate of subjectively improved social status, which is in line with our initial hypothesis. Furthermore, the impact of pro-government sentiment is one of the strongest among all the factors we included in the analysis. The second half of our initial hypothesis suggested that citizens with

an anti-government sentiment, i.e., opposition party supporters, were less likely to experience a subjective improvement in their social status, in fact, we expected them to report a deterioration. However, we did not lay down any preliminary hypothesis as to the potential variance among the supporters of the different opposition parties. With regard to the above, let us highlight three notable phenomena:

1. Analysing the supporters of opposition parties, we found that party preference among the voters of the (previous) establishment's parties, i.e., MSZP and DK, had a positive impact on their subjective intergenerational mobility, but it did not demonstrate a significant correlation with intragenerational mobility.
2. In contrast, no significant correlation was detected between party preference and subjective intergenerational mobility among the voters of small liberal and green parties (LMP, Momentum etc.), while we did find a positive correlation between their perceived intragenerational mobility and party preference. Consequently, the supporters of these parties, despite their opposition stance, feel their social status has improved during the ten years of Fidesz–KDNP governance.
3. Jobbik supporters did not demonstrate a significant correlation between intergenerational mobility and party preference, but there was a correlation between their affiliation and subjective intragenerational mobility. The model shows a negative correlation between voting for Jobbik and subjective intragenerational mobility. In other words, Jobbik voters do not feel their status changed (improved or deteriorated) relative to their parents, but they clearly consider themselves as the losers of the past ten years.

The findings confirm our initial hypothesis in terms of Jobbik voters, but they explicitly contradict it with regard to the supporters of left-wing and liberal parties who, despite their pro-opposition stance, still perceive an improvement in their status, albeit only when it is compared with their parents' earlier position. They certainly do not feel they are the losers of the past ten years. We also hypothesized that being a supporter of the governing parties would have a stronger impact on the respondents' subjective intragenerational mobility than on their perceived intergenerational mobility. We argued that the past decade roughly overlaps with Fidesz–KDNP's now more than two terms in government, so we expected the respondents' perceived change in social status to be more closely connected to their evaluation of the government's performance. This expectation did not prove incorrect: a pro-government stance is more closely connected to the intergenerational aspect of subjective mobility than the intragenerational one. As far as opposition party supporters were concerned, the findings only partly validated our preliminary expectations: while Jobbik voters demonstrated markedly negative evaluations of the past ten years, the supporters of other small parties considered their status to be better than ten years ago.

These contradictions may partly be explained by the other variables involved in the model, which may allow us to estimate the role of party preference in subjective mobility, compared with other factors. Of these variables, we found that family origin

had a weak effect, whereas occupational mobility had quite a strong impact, which was in line with our expectations. Occupational mobility was the strongest predictor of subjective mobility in both the intergenerational and the intragenerational aspect: whoever currently has a better occupational status than that of their parents or their own ten years ago was highly likely to feel that they have advanced in society. Labour market status also has a strong impact on both forms of subjective mobility: whoever is currently employed is more likely to feel they have advanced in society than the unemployed or the members of any inactive group. This variable's effect was particularly strong in intragenerational comparison, where it showed the second highest correlation with the dependent variable after occupational mobility.

Notably, age also had quite an interesting role in intra- and intergenerational mobility. When we introduced the respondents' age into the analysis of their intergenerational mobility in the second step, it showed a positive correlation with perceived mobility, i.e., the older the respondent, the more they feel their social status improved relative to their parents. However, this impact no longer proved significant after the third step, when we introduced family origin and mobility. In contrast, when it came to intragenerational mobility, age demonstrated a significant negative correlation with the dependent variable, i.e., younger respondents are more likely to feel their social status has improved. As far as intergenerational mobility is concerned, the correlation with age may arise from the fact that younger respondents simply had a shorter time to change their social status, but the correlation may suggest lower chances for mobility as well. With regard to intragenerational mobility, the previous decade may understandably have brought the biggest changes for young respondents, since this is the period when they leave school and start a career, which typically comes with fundamental changes in their social status. Furthermore, the age correlation may be largely explained by the fact that older respondents, who form the voter base of the traditional left-wing parties, are no longer involved in the labour market, so they are less likely to experience changes in their occupation and/or status. In contrast, a large number of the economically active voters in Fidesz–KDNP's base (average age: 49) may have perceived the benefits arising from the governance of the past years. However, it is also notable that the period we investigated in this study, i.e., ten years prior, exactly overlapped with the time of the global financial crisis and the subsequent economic boom that affected all developed countries. The labour market situation became more favourable not only in Hungary but in every EU member state, leading to increased employment rates and significantly diminished unemployment.⁸ This is an external, structural impact that distinctly separates the different age groups, i.e., those who are not yet or no longer in the labour market from those who entered the labour market during this period or were always there.

⁸ See more here: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Employment_statistics/hu.

Discussion and conclusions

This study investigates the characteristics of post-2010 subjective intergenerational and intragenerational mobility. We assumed that the supporters of the current governing parties were more likely to feel their social status improved than opposition voters. The most important finding of the study is that intragenerational and intergenerational mobility function differently: there are different mechanisms of action affecting the perception of the respondents' subjective mobility compared with their own status ten years ago than relative to the status of their parents.

Analysing the effect of the different factors, we concluded that political affiliation independently impacts how individuals perceive changes in their social status, even after the introduction of control variables. In accordance with our initial hypothesis, the supporters of the governing parties have the strongest perception of an improved social status. Furthermore, this effect is one of the strongest among all the factors we involved in the analysis. Contrary to our expectations, however, pro-Fidesz–KDNP sentiment more potently impacts subjective mobility when it is compared to the parents' position than relative to the respondent's own social status ten years prior. Also contrary to our initial hypothesis, MSZP–DK voters instead reported a rise in terms of their perceived intergenerational mobility.

Contrary to our expectation, party preference seemed to have a stronger impact on intergenerational mobility than intragenerational mobility, which may significantly be mainly due to labour market status. When comparing their own social status with that of their parents, respondents' pro-government stance was the second strongest factor after occupational mobility. However, when they compared it with the changes of their social status over the past ten years, occupational mobility was followed by employment status as the second strongest factor. This leads us to the conclusion that individuals who were or became inactive or unemployed during the past decade obviously did not feel that their social status improved regardless of their party preference.

Finally, in light of the findings, we should revisit the problem raised by Kelly and Kelly (2009), i.e., what causal relation is there between party preference and the perception of subjective mobility? Do pro-government voters cast their ballots for Fidesz–KDNP because they feel their social status improved or, on the contrary, do they feel they have advanced in society because their political affiliation makes them think so? Each phenomenon likely exists on its own, too, but they can also be interconnected. However, the findings of this study do not enable us to exactly identify cause and effect. If social status changes had a direct impact on party preference, it would mean that the party structure would increasingly be associated with socio-economic inequalities. Consequently, one side of the political spectrum would be characterized by a block of pro-government winners whose social status showed a tendency for improvement over the past period, while the opposition side would consist of disenfranchised losers. Although our study did find a higher rate of

winners by subjective mobility in the pro-Fidesz–KDNP group than in the sample’s distribution, they still made up only one third of the two parties’ voter base. So, they have a positive opinion on Fidesz’ performance in government, but only one in three of them perceives a rising social status over the past decade.

We can assume that Hungary has recently seen the beginning of certain processes where winners and losers are increasingly concentrated on the government’s and the opposition’s side, respectively, but our knowledge of the party structure’s progress shows a significantly more nuanced picture. Even though the social embeddedness of party preference increased around the 2018 elections according to Zsolt Enyedi and Róbert Tardos (2018), it would be an exaggeration to call Fidesz–KDNP the party of the winners, because Fidesz–KDNP’s third consecutive two-thirds majority victory could never have happened without collecting votes from the “losers”. The findings also showed that the unemployed and the economically inactive living in the peripheral regions, who are often typically called losers, form an important voter base for the governing parties. According to Tóka (2018b), the improvement of subjective economic well-being may very rapidly influence party preferences. He claims that, in addition to the structural factors, Fidesz–KDNP’s 2018 election victory may have been indirectly affected by the Hungarian society’s “*uniquely persistently ... and unusually high*” level of consumer confidence (Tóka 2018: 371).

Structural factors may have a stronger effect in Jobbik’s case. Jobbik’s voter base has the highest rate of individuals who consider themselves as the losers of the past ten years. It is no coincidence that Jobbik made the most effort in the 2018 election campaign to reach out to the social groups that feel disenfranchised. However, opinions vary on how effectively they managed to reach out to the losers. Jobbik’s loser-focused communication strategy was quite successful in the urban population of the impoverished industrial zones in the north-east of Hungary (Enyedi and Tardos 2018).

The phenomenon that party preference, subject to the existing highly stable party structure, shows a strong correlation with the respondents’ perceived social mobility allows us to conclude that these subjective views are significantly influenced by the messages of the different political blocks, in addition to the objective changes, of course. This conclusion supports Gerő and Szabó’s (2017, 2020) claim that political integration functions as an independent mechanism of integration in Hungary.

Fidesz–KDNP is able to integrate the society by creating a universal world view that is almost completely independent from objective socio-economic factors, which allows its voter base to get a clear point of reference (message) that supports and confirms their own convictions, existing opinions or helps them to dissolve their potential uncertainties. As a key component of their integration and disintegration strategy, the governing parties strive to integrate their own base while also disintegrating opposition voters as much as possible (see Gerő–Szabó 2020).

To achieve this goal, they try to convince citizens that Hungary has a favourable environment for social progress, so even if you cannot make giant leaps ahead, you

can still advance with baby steps, thanks to the government's performance. Therefore, the governing parties' integration strategy is selective; it does not involve the entire society of Hungary, but it still functions very efficiently; it has a leader, and it has a complex ideology which results in a pillared and strong voter base where other political players have only a minimal chance to enter. This process may also have been essential in the fourth two-thirds victory in 2022.⁹

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Appendix

Table F1
Descriptive statistics of the variables used

	Mean	Distribution	Minimum	Maximum	N
Subjective mobility compared to parents	0.661	1.776	-8	7	2278
Subjective mobility compared to 10 years before	0.243	1.267	-5	6	2286
Fidesz voter	0.292	0.455	0	1	2369
MSZP, DK, Párbeszéd voter	0.103	0.304	0	1	2369
Jobbik voter	0.060	0.237	0	1	2369
Voter of other parties	0.056	0.230	0	1	2369
Unknown party preference	0.469	0.499	0	1	2369
Woman	0.536	0.499	0	1	2369
Age	51.439	14.879	28	95	2369
Household size	2.205	1.117	1	9	2369
Lives in Budapest	0.188	0.391	0	1	2369
Lives in a village	0.294	0.456	0	1	2369
Employed	0.666	0.472	0	1	2369
Father – manager, professional	0.110	0.313	0	1	2369
Father – other white collar	0.067	0.251	0	1	2369
Father – skilled worker	0.386	0.487	0	1	2369
Father – semi-skilled worker	0.125	0.331	0	1	2369
Father – unskilled worker	0.261	0.439	0	1	2369
Occupational mobility	0.630	2.011	-6	7	2210