



# The State of Social Democracy in Hungary

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

0  
1 The situation of social democracy in Europe in the early 2020s presents a  
2 mixed picture (Brandal et al., 2021). While in the Iberian Peninsula and  
3 Scandinavia, social democratic parties have had great success in recent  
4 elections, and in Germany, the SPD has won re-election and formed a  
5 government, in several major countries the left is in deep crisis. The crisis  
6 is affecting Western European and Eastern European countries alike, with  
7 the phenomenon of ‘pasokification’ (Moschonas, 2013; Sotiropoulos,  
8 2014), previously named after the dominant Greek left-wing party, taking  
9 place in France and the Netherlands, and the melting of the electorate has

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10 happened in several Eastern European social democratic parties as well  
11 (Bakke & Sitter, 2021). In the Czech Republic, the CSSD was eliminated  
12 from parliament, and in Poland, the left was able to return to parliament  
13 as part of a broader alliance after a term out of parliament.

14 Hungary's social democracy is also going through a period of crisis. For  
15 two decades after the 1990 regime change, the history of the Hungarian  
16 left was also the history of the Hungarian Socialist Party. The party started  
17 as a small party and within a few years became the largest Hungarian party,  
18 which was in government for 12 years between 1990 and 2010 (Bíró-  
19 Nagy, 2013), and after 2010 it became a medium-sized party and then a  
20 small party again, with single-digit support. In addition, since 2011, the  
21 left-liberal Democratic Coalition (DK), which split from the MSZP, has  
22 been competing for the same voters. Not to mention that in contrast  
23 to the situation before 2010, which was characterised by the concentra-  
24 tion of the party system (Enyedi, 2006), the main direction of the  
25 development of the Hungarian party system has been fragmentation in  
26 the post-2010 period, with new Green and liberal parties emerging on  
27 the opposition side and the radical right-wing Jobbik also going after  
28 anti-Orbán (Böcskei & Sebök, 2018). Abou-Chadi et al. (2021) also  
29 draw attention to the importance of fragmentation in the Western Euro-  
30 pean context. They provide empirical evidence that 'in Western Europe  
31 only a small minority of former social democratic voters have left for  
32 radical right parties. Social democratic parties have lost voters mainly to  
33 Green and mainstream right parties'. By analysing the electorates in the  
34 Hungarian context, we confirm that while there are potentially recover-  
35 able supporters among voters of Jobbik, there are also potential social  
36 democratic voters among those who currently vote for liberal parties or  
37 even Fidesz.

38 In his comprehensive paper on the causes of the crisis of social  
39 democracy in Europe, Bandau (2022) stresses that 'there is not one expla-  
40 nation that stands out but that the electoral crisis of social democracy  
41 is a complex phenomenon with multiple causes, such as socio-structural  
42 changes, fiscal austerity and neoliberal depolarization'. The present paper  
43 uses the Hungarian case to demonstrate that the crisis of social demo-  
44 cratic parties can be indeed traced back to a number of factors (including  
45 the leadership issue and the weakening organisational background), and  
46 that the neoliberal public policies of previous government cycles, which  
47 went against the preferences not only of the left-wing voter base but also  
48 of the majority of Hungarian society as a whole, are certainly among

49 the most important causes. This also confirms what Snegovaya (2022)  
50 wrote about the modernisation of left-wing parties in Eastern Europe:  
51 ‘pro-market left parties obtain reduced support; this effect is particularly  
52 pronounced among the economically vulnerable occupational groups. In  
53 countries with more pro-market left parties, these groups have a higher  
54 propensity to vote for right-wing parties.’

55 It cannot be forgotten that, in the Hungarian context, democratic  
56 backsliding and increasing authoritarian tendencies have taken place in the  
57 country alongside the decline of social democracy (Bozóki & Hegedűs,  
58 2018; Greskovits, 2015). Accordingly, an important challenge is what  
59 strategy the left can pursue in an illiberal democracy (Bíró-Nagy, 2017;  
60 Buzogány, 2017; Pirro & Stanley, 2022) and how to relate to the political  
61 positions that have brought success to the governing parties. Drawing  
62 on the Western European experience, Abou-Chadi and Wagner (2020)  
63 argue that more authoritarian/nationalist and more anti-EU positions are  
64 if anything associated with lower rather than greater electoral support  
65 for social democratic parties. Bandau (2022) also finds that ‘a liberal  
66 turn on sociocultural issues does not necessarily lead to vote losses’. The  
67 Hungarian example shows that the decline of the MSZP, which had previously  
68 dominated the left, is not due to cultural liberalism, but primarily  
69 to the fact that MSZP’s credibility of left-wing economic policy has been  
70 permanently shaken in the minds of voters as a result of previous government  
71 cycles. MSZP, and the DK, which broke away from it, became the  
72 ‘double successor parties’ (Lakner, 2011), which made the reconstruction  
73 of the Hungarian left after 2010 much more difficult. Voters not only  
74 regarded the MSZP and the DK as the successor parties of the pre-1989–  
75 1990 regime but also as the main responsible parties for the economic  
76 and social policy failures of the two decades after the fall of communism,  
77 the socially insensitive crisis management and the austerity measures. The  
78 history of the Hungarian left from 2010 to the present day is a story of  
79 dealing with these serious legacies and of the attempts to start over and  
80 rebuild in relation to them, while having to contend with and forge cooperation  
81 with a number of new competitors on the progressive side of the  
82 party system.

## 2 ELECTORAL RESULTS OF THE HUNGARIAN S&D MEMBER PARTIES

The Socialists & Democrats (S&D) have two member parties in Hungary today, the Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, abbreviated as MSZP in Hungarian) and the Democratic Coalition (Demokratikus Koalíció, abbreviated as DK in Hungarian). Both parties are represented in the Hungarian parliament, the National Assembly, as well as in the European Parliament, where their MEPs are members of the S&D Group. In the following, we will review the intertwined history of these two parties, with a special focus on recent years and their status as opposition parties in the illiberal regime led by Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party (Table 1).

As the post-communist successor party that substantially shaped the transition to democracy, the MSZP emerged as one of the major parties after the regime change from communism to democracy in 1989–1990. It was the dominant force on the left for over two decades and always one of the two largest parties between 1994 and 2010, leading the government for three terms and 12 years (Bíró-Nagy, 2013). However, its dominant position collapsed following its re-election victory in 2006, when the MSZP prime minister at the time, Ferenc Gyurcsány, introduced austerity measures and admitted in a closed session of his parliamentary faction that the re-election victory had been achieved at the cost of lying to the public and the concealment of vital budgetary and macro-economic information. The MSZP's support in the polls plummeted, and while it continued to be the leading force on the left until recently, its position was substantially

**Table 1** MSZP and DK results in European parliament and national parliamentary elections since 2014

<i>Year</i>	<i>Election</i>	<i>Left-wing parties</i>	
		<i>MSZP (%)</i>	<i>DK (%)</i>
2014	National parliament	26.21*	26.21*
2014	European parliament	10.9	9.75
2018	National parliament	11.91	5.38
2019	European parliament	6.61	16.05
2022	National parliament	34.46**	34.46**

\*MSZP and DK ran on a joint list in 2014

\*\*MSZP and DK ran on a joint list as members of 'United for Hungary' in 2022

108 diminished and has continued to erode. Meanwhile, the leading right-  
109 wing party in the Hungarian system, Fidesz, which had usually more or  
110 less tied with the MSZP in elections before 2010, took a huge lead over  
111 its main competitor on the left and emerged as the strongest party by far,  
112 dominating all elections in the last decade.

113 In 2011, a recently formed platform within the MSZP, the Democratic  
114 Coalition, led by former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, announced  
115 that it was splitting from the MSZP to establish a new party. Ten of the  
116 party's 59 MPs at the time therefore resigned from the MSZP faction in  
117 parliament and formed a new group in the Hungarian National Assembly.  
118 While the Democratic Coalition quickly established itself as a firm pres-  
119 ence in the Hungarian party system, it failed to become a major force  
120 until recently.

121 In the national parliamentary election in 2014, the MSZP and DK  
122 formed a joint list along with three smaller left-wing and liberal forma-  
123 tions. This ended up over 18 points behind Fidesz, but still well ahead  
124 of the rest of the opposition. The European Parliament election a month  
125 later marked the DK's first separate run, and it surprised everyone by  
126 winning almost 10% of the vote, finishing just one point behind the  
127 MSZP. However, European Parliament elections are notoriously low-  
128 turnout elections, when the highly disciplined voters of minor parties—in  
129 particular, the DK, whose success rests in large part on the personal  
130 charisma of former Prime Minister Gyurcsány—tend to have a larger  
131 impact. Four years later, in the national election of 2018, which featured a  
132 record turnout, the DK could not replicate its success of the 2014 Euro-  
133 pean Parliament election and it barely passed the 5% threshold, winning  
134 a mere 5.38% as compared to MSZP's 11.91% (the MSZP ran together  
135 with the green-left Párbeszéd party).

136 However, the European Parliament election of 2019 marked another  
137 breakthrough for the DK, which became the leading opposition force  
138 for the first time with a share of 16.05%, beating the MSZP (6.61%) by  
139 almost 10 percentage points. Opinion polls since then have continued to  
140 affirm the DK's position as the leading opposition party on the left, and  
141 in 2021 even as the leading party of the entire—fragmented—opposition,  
142 with a vote share that is roughly on a par with its European Parliament  
143 result of 2019. Meanwhile, in most polls, the MSZP hovers around the  
144 6–7% it won in the European Parliament election of 2019.

145 Although the MSZP has a number of young politicians with specialised  
146 public policy expertise the actual rejuvenation of its leadership has not

147 been accompanied by a perception that the party itself is young. Despite  
 148 the fact that the MSZP has staked out a more clearly left-wing position  
 149 after a centrist turn in the 2000s, the polls do not suggest that policy  
 150 positions espoused by the MSZP have had a major impact on its social  
 151 perception. The failure of the once leading force on the left to allow  
 152 politicians to rise within its ranks who are seen by the public as poten-  
 153 tial national leaders are emblematic of the ongoing crisis, and it forces the  
 154 MSZP to rely on the talents of outsiders who are assumed to improve its  
 155 electoral performance. This was most reflected in the MSZP's decision to  
 156 recruit a young green-left politician, Gergely Karácsony, to run as their  
 157 prime ministerial candidate in 2018. Although Karácsony did not end up  
 158 winning the 2018 election, he did clinch the Budapest mayoralty a year  
 159 later, once again with the backing of the MSZP. Karácsony was also the  
 160 MSZP's candidate for the primary elections of the Hungarian opposition  
 161 in 2021.

162 The primaries ended with the victory of the independent conservative  
 163 candidate, Péter Márki-Zay against the DK's Klára Dobrev, following the  
 164 tactical withdrawal of Karácsony in favour of Márki-Zay before the second  
 165 round of the primaries. The DK and MSZP fared more successfully in  
 166 the single-member constituencies of the primaries, where the opposition  
 167 parties had agreed to nominate a single candidate to run against the  
 168 ruling party candidate to maximise the opposition's chances of victory.  
 169 Part of that agreement was that the candidates for each seat would also  
 170 be selected by way of a primary and that took place in parallel with the first  
 171 round of the primaries for the prime ministerial candidate. The DK ended  
 172 up with the most winners (32 out of 106 constituencies), confirming their  
 173 leading role within the Hungarian opposition, but the biggest winners of  
 174 the process were the MSZP and their green-left allies Párbeszéd, which  
 175 jointly received a disproportional number of nominations compared to  
 176 their support in the polls (25 constituencies).

177 In certain key respects, the DK has emerged as the opposite of the  
 178 MSZP. Whereas the MSZP has been devoid of strong leadership but  
 179 has a fairly robust and transparent platform, the DK is all about lead-  
 180 ership while its platform is less emphatic and its ideological position on  
 181 the traditional left-right spectrum is hazy (see Sect. 5 for a more detailed  
 182 discussion). At the same time, the DK has established itself as one of the  
 183 harshest and loudest critics of the Orbán government and this has made  
 184 it stand out for years, while the green-left party Politics Can Be Different  
 185 (Lehet Más a Politika—LMP), and the far-right Jobbik—Movement for

186 a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom—Jobbik) which  
187 later shifted to the centre, also both sought to play the role of a construc-  
188 tive opposition, an effort that they did not fully abandon until 2018. The  
189 DK has attracted a portion of the former MSZP electorate, presumably in  
190 particular the segment that was drawn by Gyurcsány’s personal charisma  
191 (and by that of his wife, Klára Dobrev). Indeed, there was a certain  
192 amount of ill-will between the two parties because when Gyurcsány  
193 seceded in 2011 after much of the party leadership at the time felt he bore  
194 major responsibility for the MSZP’s collapsing support between 2006  
195 and 2009 (his second term as prime minister, which was cut short by his  
196 resignation), he took several of the party’s MPs and a portion of its base  
197 along with him. Many in the MSZP at the time perceived that their party,  
198 and the left on the whole, would have been better served by the former  
199 prime minister’s quietly fading into the background, as his predecessors  
200 had done.

201 In terms of governmental experience, it is crucial to point out that  
202 the MSZP and DK are the only opposition parties that have at least a  
203 few figures with relevant governmental experience. However, given the  
204 widespread consensus that the period from 2002 to 2010, when the  
205 MSZP was the leading governmental party, was not a success, govern-  
206 mental experience is not necessarily an asset (Lakner, 2011). Between  
207 2010 and 2019, left-wing politicians were removed from almost all levels  
208 of public power. The left made modest gains in the 2014 municipal elec-  
209 tions, while 2019 led to a more decisive breakthrough, with the entire  
210 opposition performing beyond expectations and the MSZP being dispro-  
211 portionately successful. Despite the fact that the MSZP won the fewest  
212 votes among the four opposition parties, its successful bargaining with  
213 the other parties concerning the electoral coordination meant that it  
214 received over half of the mayoralties won by the opposition in 2019 in  
215 municipalities with 10,000 residents or more (including Budapest district  
216 mayoralties). Furthermore, it also netted almost 40% of the council seats  
217 in the municipalities, making the MSZP the most influential party in  
218 terms of municipal leadership. Although not a Socialist politician himself,  
219 the mayor of Budapest Gergely Karácsony was also nominated by the  
220 MSZP. But in a sign that the MSZP and DK remain competitors, two  
221 Budapest district MSZP mayors switched to the DK in early 2020, which  
222 predictably agitated the MSZP leadership at the time.

### 3 THE PARTY ORGANISATIONS OF THE MSZP AND DK

This section reviews the organisational background of the two S&D member parties, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the Democratic Coalition (DK). Based on the data at our disposal, the initial growth spurt in the membership of the DK had stalled by the mid-2010s, while the MSZP has proved unable to halt the ongoing decline in its membership throughout the past decade. As regards financial resources, the MSZP has been far-better positioned between 2018 and 2022. Its state funding has been 50% higher than the DK's allotment, and the MSZP party foundation receives twice as much in funding as the DK party foundation. The two parties' reach in television and radio news shows and social media has been roughly on par, although at the same time, the pre-eminent public attention directed at DK chair Ferenc Gyurcsány is striking. The two S&D member parties are in a substantially weaker position than Fidesz in terms of their human and financial resources, as well as in terms of their media reach. Compared with the level of its national support, the MSZP won a disproportionate number of municipal assembly seats (277) and mayoralities (16) in the last municipal election, which was held in 2019. The DK, by contrast, punches below its political weight in terms of its municipal presence (it netted four mayoralities in 2019 and 164 assembly members). The MSZP is a multi-tiered organisation, with a decentralised decision-making process. The DK, by contrast, is more centralised, with many decision-making competences (e.g., the nomination of candidates) being within the remit of the party presidium.

#### *The Memberships of the MSZP and DK*

It is difficult to analyse the members of Hungarian political parties and the trends impacting them over time because there are no widely accessible public records on the subject. In 2015, the DK reported 10,867 members, while the MSZP's membership was estimated at 15,000 (the latter figure was reported by the since defunct left-wing daily *Népszabadság* [2016] which cited internal party sources). Based on these figures, the total membership of the two left-wing parties makes up the majority (55%) of all those who are members of an opposition party. There is also a connection between the two parties' membership figures in that the DK was initially launched as an internal platform within the



258 MSZP. After the DK seceded from the MSZP in 2011, a segment of the  
259 MSZP's rank-and-file left together with the DK leadership.

260 In 2020, the DK had 4,575 members who had voting rights within  
261 the party, although the number of the total membership, which also  
262 comprises supporting members who have no voting rights, is significantly  
263 larger (24. hu, 2020). A statement by the DK politician László Varju  
264 in 2020 suggested that there are some 5,000 such supporting members  
265 (Klubrádió, 2020). The MSZP's current membership can best be gauged  
266 on the basis of the party's revenues stemming from membership fees.  
267 Using this as a gauge, the MSZP had about 8,000 fee-paying members  
268 in 2019, but the real membership figure is likely to be higher, probably  
269 by several thousand.

### 270 *Financial Situation*

271 The opposition parties in Hungary receive substantial amounts of public  
272 funding, but their revenues are nevertheless dwarfed by the income of  
273 the governing parties. Three-quarters of the total state funding is allo-  
274 cated in proportion to the individual parties' electoral results, which is  
275 why the governing Fidesz party receives the highest amount of funding.  
276 Furthermore, Fidesz also has much higher revenue than the opposition  
277 parties from membership fees, donations and other sources (see Fig. 1).  
278 The MSZP's total funds in 2019 amounted to over 0.5 billion forints  
279 (1.4 million euros) (the party had a total revenue of 565 million forints  
280 while it spent 690 million). In the same year, the DK's budget was  
281 half that amount (it had revenue of 268 million forints and spent 260  
282 million—approximately 720.000 euros).

283 Figure 1 also shows that both S&D member parties raised about 20  
284 million forints (55.000 euros) in membership fees. At the same time, the  
285 MSZP received 50% more in state funding than the DK in the 2018–2022  
286 term, about five times as much in donations and has ten times as much in  
287 'other income'. Beyond each party's budgets, we also see a similar contrast  
288 in the financial figures of the party foundations operating alongside the  
289 parties. The MSZP's Táncsics Foundation had an annual budget of 359  
290 million forints (1 million euros) at its disposal in the legislative term from  
291 2018 to 2022, while the DK's For a New Republic Foundation only  
292 receives 195 million forints (540.000 euros) annually.

293 It is important to highlight that the governing parties halved the public  
294 funding for parliamentary parties in 2020, arguing that 'everyone needed

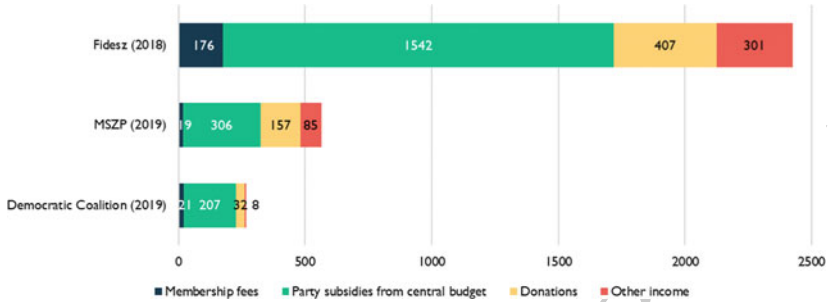


Fig. 1 Party revenues of Fidesz, MSZP and DK

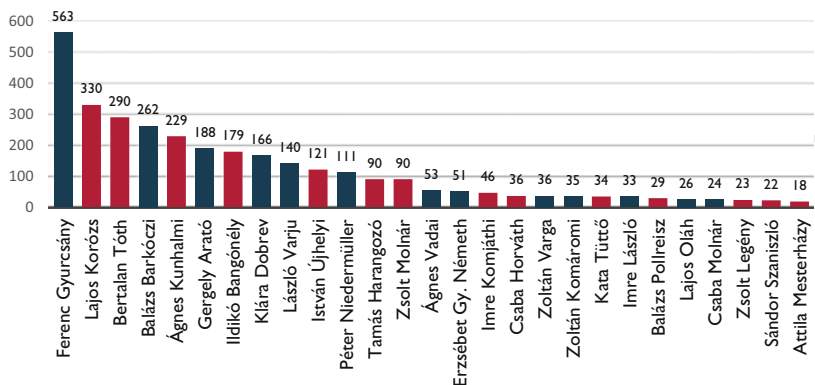
295 to contribute to the common efforts aimed at combatting the epidemic'.  
 296 The DK suffered a loss of 103.5 million forints (285.000 euros) in  
 297 revenue as a result of this decision, while the MSZP received 150 million  
 298 forints (415.000 euros) less than originally allotted.

### Media Reach

299  
 300 The difference between the governing parties and the opposition parties  
 301 in terms of their respective media reach is even more striking than the gap  
 302 in their funding. The government's popularity is amplified by state-funded  
 303 propaganda that is reflexively supportive of its policies. The government's  
 304 messages are conveyed by the public media as well as a media network  
 305 that operates under the aegis of a public foundation, the Central Euro-  
 306 pean Press and Media Foundation (abbreviated as KESMA in Hungarian).  
 307 In addition to boosting the government, these media outlets are also  
 308 engaged in a continuous negative campaign against the opposition.

309 The single most important event in the trend of the declining market  
 310 share of the social democratic parties was the loss of the major left-wing  
 311 daily newspaper *Népszabadság* in 2015. Until that time, the MSZP's party  
 312 foundation had held a 28% share in *Népszabadság* but the party founda-  
 313 tion sold its share to Vienna Capital Partners in 2015, which then went  
 314 on to close the newspaper in 2016.

315 It is not difficult to compare the media reach of the two Hungarian  
 316 S&D member parties in 2020 since the News Monitoring databases of the  
 317 National Media and Info-Communications Authority cover the relevant  
 318 statistics (Fig. 2). One piece of data that stands out is Ferenc Gyurcsány's



**Fig. 2** Number of media appearances of social democratic politicians in 2020 (Mentions and appearances in the top news shows) (*Note* red = politicians of MSZP, blue = politicians of DK. *Source* National Media and Informations Authority)

319 strikingly high presence in the news. However, one of the reasons for  
 320 the frequent mentions of this former prime minister is that he is being  
 321 demonised in the pro-government media and is presented as a nega-  
 322 tive figure who is essentially the leader of the opposition alliance. It is  
 323 also surprising that alongside this, Klára Dobrev, a vice-president of the  
 324 European Parliament and the DK's prime ministerial candidate during  
 325 the 2021 opposition primaries, is only ninth on the list of politicians  
 326 most frequently mentioned in the media. Among the MSZP politicians,  
 327 Lajos Korózs was the most prominently featured in the media, and indeed  
 328 he was the second most frequently mentioned social democratic politi-  
 329 cian after Gyurcsány (which was also mostly due to a negative campaign  
 330 against him by pro-Fidesz media). The party's co-chairpersons, Bertalan  
 331 Tóth and Ágnes Kunhalmi, also often appear in the news.

332 Former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány also stands out by a signif-  
 333 icant margin among all politicians in both social democratic parties in  
 334 terms of the number of his Facebook followers. With over 303,000  
 335 followers at the time of our data collection (June 2021), he is among the  
 336 most intensely followed politicians in the entire opposition. By compar-  
 337 ison, Budapest mayor and MSZP prime ministerial candidate Gergely  
 338 Karácsony is followed by roughly 279,000 users, while Péter Jakab, the  
 339 leader and prime ministerial candidate of the right-wing Jobbik party, has  
 340 about 377,000 followers. Among the MSZP politicians, Attila Mesterházy  
 341 has a fairly large following on Facebook (235,000). This is probably due

342 to his previous role as the chair of the MSZP from 2010 to 2014, and the  
 343 fact that in 2010 and 2014, he was also the party's candidate for prime  
 344 minister.

345 It is worth noting that there are several social democratic politicians  
 346 who appear less frequently in the news coverage of legacy media than  
 347 the top-tier opposition politicians but who have nevertheless amassed a  
 348 substantial Facebook following. This includes the MEP István Ujhelyi  
 349 and the Budapest district mayor Csaba Horváth (both MSZP), as well as  
 350 the MEPs Csaba Molnár and Klára Dobrev and the Hungarian National  
 351 Assembly MP Ágnes Vadai (all DK). Figures 2 and 3 also show that  
 352 the presence of MSZP and DK politicians is relatively balanced both  
 353 in legacy media and on social media platforms. The data provided by  
 354 the National Media and Info-Communications Authority show that the  
 355 television channels ATV and RTL Klub were the most likely to allot  
 356 speaking time to the social democratic politicians in these two parties.  
 357 In other words, these two television channels, which are independent of  
 358 the government, provide a vital platform for the dissemination of the DK  
 359 and MSZP messages.

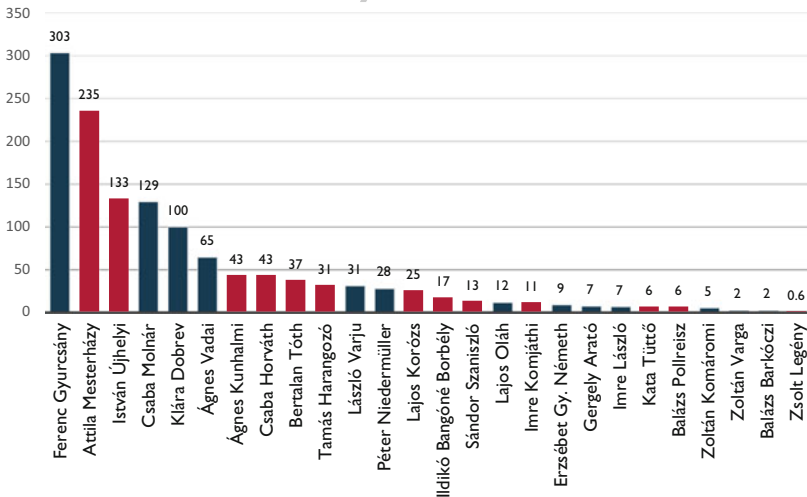


Fig. 3 Facebook followers of social democratic politicians (Thousand people)  
 (Note red = politicians of MSZP, blue = politicians of DK. Source Facebook)

### *Organisational Infrastructure, National Presence*

The organisational infrastructure of the DK is more regionally concentrated and, in terms of offices, less extensive than that of the MSZP. According to the organisational charter of the DK, one constituency organisation can operate in each of Hungary's 106 electoral constituencies. Currently, the party has seven Budapest offices and 14 offices outside the Hungarian capital. On top of that, the DK has three regional offices, one based in Pécs to cover the South Transdanubia region, one based in Győr to cover North Transdanubia and one in Miskolc for Northern Hungary. The DK's youth organisation is called Democratic Lendület (meaning 'momentum' or 'impetus' in Hungarian).

The MSZP's infrastructure spans the entire country. It has local organisations in every Hungarian county, as well as 23 local organisations in Budapest. Outside the capital, the party has the highest number of local organisations (44) in Pest County surrounding Budapest. Furthermore, the party has 91 local organisations in the eastern half of the country and 59 organisations in the Western Transdanubia region. The youth organisation of the MSZP is called Societas.

Another good indicator of national presence is the distribution of opposition representatives in municipal assemblies by the party. Based on the number of municipal assembly members and mayors, we can conclude that the MSZP pursued a successful strategy in 2019. Before the 2019 municipal election, the DK was ahead of the MSZP-Dialogue for Hungary party alliance in terms of its national support in the polls. Nevertheless, the MSZP won one and a half times as many (277) municipal assembly seats as the DK (164). With this result, the MSZP was able to slightly increase the number of its municipal assembly representatives (from 268 to 277) as compared to the 2014 municipal election. The DK, too, boosted its local presence, increasing the number of its municipal assembly representatives from 93 to 164.

As a result of the 2019 municipal election, the MSZP won 19 mayoralities in Budapest districts or other urban areas with 10,000 residents or more. In Budapest, the MSZP won six mayoralities, the highest number among the parties of the opposition (the opposition won 13 districts overall). Of the ten major urban areas with a county status in which the opposition candidates gained control of the mayor's office, MSZP politicians won four (Érd, Salgótarján, Szombathely and Szeged). Nevertheless, since the municipal election two Budapest district mayors have switched

398 parties, moving from the MSZP to the DK, while Szeged's MSZP mayor,  
 399 László Botka, left the party after his victory. Not counting Botka, László  
 400 Kiss and Sándor Szaniszló (the latter two were those who switched to  
 401 the DK), the MSZP currently holds 16 mayoralties. The DK won four  
 402 mayoralties in towns with 10,000+ residents or Budapest districts. In  
 403 addition to three districts in the capital, the DK also won the mayoralty  
 404 of Tatabánya in 2019. If we add the two former MSZP politicians to this  
 405 tally, then the DK currently holds six mayoralties.

### 406 *The Parties' Leadership Structure and Internal Organisation*

407 The MSZP's organisational structure has several levels and many units,  
 408 and the decision-making on many issues is decentralised. Political, organ-  
 409 isational and personnel decisions in the party may be rendered by a  
 410 local members' convention, a regional members' convention, a delegate  
 411 convention, a party congress, an official body in the party or a party vote.  
 412 Party members shape the party's activities and its policies either directly,  
 413 or through delegates or elected bodies, and they decide in open votes  
 414 which method will be used.

415 Local party organisations nominate the MSZP's municipal assembly  
 416 candidates, the candidates on the party's municipal list and its mayoral  
 417 candidates. The regional federations—which are made up of local organ-  
 418 isations—are responsible for adopting the political aspirations in the area  
 419 of civil and economic development for a given county (or the capital).  
 420 The most important body of a regional federation is the delegate conven-  
 421 tion. The delegates are designated by the local organisations that make  
 422 up the regional federation, with each sending delegates in proportion to  
 423 the number of party members in the respective local organisation. Based  
 424 on the proposal of the presidium of the regional federation, the regional  
 425 delegate convention uses a secret ballot to select the federation's dele-  
 426 gates at the party congress, and it also decides leadership and other issues  
 427 within its remit.

428 The party congress is the MSZP's most important decision-making  
 429 body. The congress adopts the party's manifesto for the national and the  
 430 European Parliament elections. It can also amend the party's charter and  
 431 it can decide whether the party will join the government. The congress

432 elects the party's presidium as well as the president of the MSZP board.  
 433 The members of the presidium are the party's two co-chairs (a man and a  
 434 woman, currently Bertalan Tóth and Ágnes Kunhalmi), the party's deputy  
 435 chair, two vice-chairs and a further 11 elected members. The party's  
 436 presidium and board jointly propose the party's candidate for the posi-  
 437 tion of the prime minister; the party's slate for the European Parliament  
 438 elections as well as the national parliamentary elections; and its candidate  
 439 for the position of president of the republic. These selections nevertheless  
 440 need to be approved by the congress.

441 Decision-making is considerably more concentrated within the DK,  
 442 and the party's organisational structure is more centralised than that  
 443 of the MSZP. The most important local-level organisation is the elec-  
 444 toral district-level members' assembly. The DK's main decision-making  
 445 body is the party congress. The congress adopts the party manifesto  
 446 and its charter, and it also elects the presidium. The members of the  
 447 party's presidium are the party chair (currently Ferenc Gyurcsány), its  
 448 vice-presidents and ten further elected members. The presidium has the  
 449 authority to amend the party's by-laws, as well as to nominate the party's  
 450 candidates in the single-member districts in parliamentary elections; in  
 451 municipal elections; in European Parliament elections and in mayoral elec-  
 452 tions. It further has a right of assent when it comes to the nomination of  
 453 municipal assembly candidates.

#### 454 4 POSITION IN THE PARTY SYSTEM

455 Large segments of the Hungarian media (independent and opposition  
 456 media included), commentators and the politicians of other opposition  
 457 parties tend to lump the MSZP and the DK together as the 'old left'.  
 458 The MSZP and DK are seen as parties that represent the left-wing estab-  
 459 lishment that dominated much of the post-transition era between 1990  
 460 and 2010, not only politically—where power mostly alternated between  
 461 left and right—but also in terms of social and cultural influence, especially  
 462 in the media. In recent years, however, the previous harsh rejection of the  
 463 two S&D member parties by the other opposition parties has mellowed  
 464 considerably, especially as far as the MSZP is concerned.

465 It needs to be underlined that two opposition parties, Jobbik and the  
 466 LMP, 'came of age' organisationally and ideologically during the years  
 467 of the MSZP governments. Jobbik and the LMP were in opposition to  
 468 establishment politics, especially the left-liberal elite that was politically

469 dominant at the time. This led to their intense animosity towards the  
470 MSZP and Ferenc Gyurcsány personally, who was the leading Socialist  
471 politician of the era. Gyurcsány is therefore seen by many as the exempli-  
472 fication of the problems with the ‘old left’—the suspicions surrounding  
473 the sources of his personal wealth; the strongly pro-market economic poli-  
474 cies at the time; the vocal internationalism and anti-nationalism that flew  
475 in the face of the surging nationalist/patriotic sentiments of the young  
476 generation in the 2000s; and a morally flexible pragmatism that was very  
477 vividly manifested in Gyurcsány’s infamous Őszöd speech in 2006, when  
478 in a closed meeting, Gyurcsány, as prime minister at the time, admitted  
479 that he and his party had only won re-election based on a campaign of lies.  
480 The leaking of the speech led to violent protests—the first in Hungary  
481 since 1956—and the image and polling figures of the left never recovered.  
482 While Jobbik seized on the disaffection with mainstream politics to build  
483 an electoral coalition of far-right nationalists and rural voters disappointed  
484 by the MSZP, the LMP ‘harvested’ young urban leftists, environmental-  
485 ists and the segment of the intelligentsia that had turned away from the  
486 traditional left-wing parties.

487 The fundamental animosity between the LMP and Jobbik on one side,  
488 and the MSZP and DK on the other, was the key reason behind the  
489 opposition’s inability to unite against Fidesz. For years, the prevailing  
490 perspective in Jobbik and the LMP was that the ‘old left’ was no different  
491 from Fidesz and that whatever anti-democratic measures the right-wing  
492 governing party took, they were basically an indirect result of policies of  
493 the MSZP and Gyurcsány before 2010. Any cooperation with the latter  
494 was therefore ruled out, since in the views of Jobbik and the LMP these  
495 parties were essentially the flip sides of the same coin that was the corrup-  
496 tion and arrogance in power of Fidesz. This perception was not universally  
497 shared in the LMP, which even split over the issue, leading to the seces-  
498 sion of many founding members who set up their own party, the Dialogue  
499 for Hungary (Párbeszéd), a green-left party that went on to cooperate  
500 electorally with the MSZP and DK in 2014, and is in an ongoing and  
501 recurring electoral alliance with the MSZP.

502 The fragmentation of the opposition proved to be a major liability in  
503 light of an election system that disproportionately rewards the party with  
504 the most votes, even if it is a minority party. Running against a divided and  
505 highly fragmented opposition that refused to cooperate electorally, Fidesz  
506 won sufficient single-member constituencies in three successive elections  
507 to rack up two-thirds constitutional supermajorities in parliament despite



508 winning only around half of the votes nationally in two elections (2010  
509 and 2018) and only 44.9% in 2014.

510 Momentum, a new liberal party that emerged in 2017 and has since  
511 established itself as one of the major opposition parties with roughly 8–  
512 10% of the vote, essentially shares the other opposition parties' view of  
513 the MSZP and the DK, although it has been more pragmatic towards  
514 the 'old left' from the very start. The fact that Momentum did not come  
515 into being between 2006 and 2010 (and not therefore in opposition to  
516 the MSZP) but instead a decade later, in opposition to Fidesz, may be the  
517 reason why Momentum has been more focused on ousting the incumbent  
518 party and has proven more willing to compromise and to cooperate prag-  
519 matically with any opposition party that shares this objective, the MSZP  
520 and DK included.

521 By the time of the 2018 election, Jobbik and the LMP had also  
522 gradually come around to this realisation, although their shift came too  
523 late to achieve meaningful coordination in that election, with the result  
524 that Fidesz won another two-thirds majority. It was only the impact of  
525 this election and the government's continuation of its anti-democratic  
526 practices that finally pushed the entire opposition into serious and, thus  
527 far, relatively successful cooperation. This cooperation began with the  
528 pro-democracy and anti-government protests organised in the imme-  
529 diate aftermath of the election, when for the first time the opposition  
530 parties demonstrated together (New York Times, 2018), and it continued  
531 throughout the civil disobedience-type protests when a handful of oppo-  
532 sition MPs representing all opposition parties occupied the public media  
533 building in December that year (Euractiv, 2018). The opposition's coop-  
534 eration then culminated in the unexpectedly successful municipal election  
535 in October 2019, when opposition candidates wrested control of the  
536 Budapest mayoralty and municipal assembly, along with a majority of the  
537 district mayoralties and over ten major towns in Hungary, making the  
538 opposition the dominant political force in urban Hungary. Apart from  
539 the inevitable logic of electoral mathematics, a key reason behind the  
540 shift in the attitude of the new opposition parties towards the parties  
541 of the 'old left' was the new parties' growing acceptance and worry that  
542 Fidesz is engaged in building an authoritarian regime, and their concomi-  
543 tant admission that for all their flaws, the MSZP and DK have no such  
544 designs and are committed to the democratic system.

545 The opposition's national party organisations continue to coop-  
546 erate fairly smoothly and contributed to the organisation of the intra-  
547 opposition primaries in which they allotted the position of single-member  
548 constituency candidates for the 2022 election.

549 From the perspective of the main ruling party Fidesz, the MSZP and  
550 DK occupy different positions, despite their relative proximity in other  
551 respects (common history, as well as their common membership in the  
552 European S&D Group). The MSZP used to be the most vociferously  
553 rejected party by Fidesz, but in recent years the once intense enmity has  
554 abated on the part of the governing party. This is in part due to the  
555 departure of Ferenc Gyurcsány from the MSZP, given that Orbán has  
556 regarded Gyurcsány as his archnemesis since his electoral defeat against  
557 the then-Socialist prime minister in 2006. It is therefore now the DK  
558 that is considered by Fidesz as the worst opposition party, although many  
559 analysts also assess that due to Gyurcsány's polarising ability, the two  
560 parties and their respective leaders are useful foils for one another, with  
561 each using the other to mobilise their base.

562 Looking at the relationship between the two S&D member parties  
563 themselves, it can be seen that this has been relatively cooperative and  
564 has featured less overt friction than would initially have been antici-  
565 pated, given their prehistory (outlined in Sect. 1) and given the fact  
566 that they have remained close competitors in seeking the support of the  
567 same voting bloc. Although the other opposition parties regularly attack  
568 Gyurcsány in harsh terms and describe him as a liability for the opposition,  
569 the MSZP's criticisms of him have been relatively subdued, and if there  
570 are spats between the two parties these are mostly being resolved outside  
571 the public view. Correspondingly, on matters involving opposition coop-  
572 eration, especially in forming a joint list in 2014 and coordinating the  
573 list of candidates in the single-member constituencies in 2018, the two  
574 parties concluded deals with apparent ease. Both the underlying competi-  
575 tion between the two parties and the root of the working relationship  
576 between them are reflected in the secondary preferences of their voters—  
577 in the case of both the MSZP and the DK the respective other party is  
578 the most popular choice as the secondary preference (see Sect. 6 for more  
579 details). Given that they both play a necessary role in the electoral alliance  
580 of the opposition parties, in the foreseeable future the two centre-left  
581 parties of the opposition, the MSZP and the DK, will continue to play  
582 an influential role. This is especially true in the event of an opposition  
583 victory in 2022, when they would make up a sizeable portion of the new

584 majority in parliament and would be slated to occupy key positions in  
585 government.

## 586 5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE HUNGARIAN 587 S&D MEMBER PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

588 The MSZP has traditionally nurtured close ties with left-wing civil society  
589 organisations. Among these, the partnership between the MSZP and trade  
590 unions stands out. This bond was reinforced by the MSZP's protest  
591 against the 'Slave Law' in 2018. After parliament adopted the amended  
592 Labour Code, the opposition parties jointly organised demonstrations in  
593 support of workers' rights. Subsequently, the MSZP consulted with trade  
594 unions and introduced several bills aimed at strengthening trade unions  
595 and workers.

596 Furthermore, the MSZP has also established ties to several pensioner  
597 and youth organisations, local interest groups and specialised research  
598 institutions. At the same time, it seems that in the past five or six  
599 years it has revamped its formerly far-flung network of organisational  
600 ties and has narrowed its focus on a few closer partnerships. This was  
601 reflected in the changes in the spending of the MSZP's party founda-  
602 tion. While the Táncsics Foundation supported over 30 organisations  
603 in 2015 and 2016, in 2019 only 18 organisations received funds from  
604 Táncsics. As budget documents from 2019 revealed, among the organi-  
605 sations that received small amounts of funding there were youth/student  
606 organisations; four local interest organisations; two senior/pensioner  
607 organisations; three professional associations and four unspecified types of  
608 organisation (Táncsics Alapítvány, 2020).

609 At the same time, the Villányi Street Conference Centre and Open  
610 University Foundation have received a pre-eminent amount of funding in  
611 recent years (over 20 million forints [55.000 euros] in 2019 for imple-  
612 menting the Budapest Open University programme), as has the Institute  
613 for Social Democracy (38 million forints [105.000 euros] in 2019). In  
614 other words, in the late 2010s, the party foundation did not spend most  
615 of its financial resources on the organisations that were part of a move-  
616 ment network or on organisations engaged in addressing specific social  
617 problems but on the expert organisations affiliated with the MSZP.

618 The MSZP is further also indirectly connected to civil society  
619 through its party alliance with the green-left Párbeszéd (Dialogue) party.

Párbeszéd nurtures close ties with Hungarian environmental organisations, an example being seen in a bill sponsored by Párbeszéd that was initially proposed by six green organisations in the interest of protecting the great lakes. A precursor of this—the Balaton protection action—was launched by the MSZP (2020) in cooperation with NGOs in 2020.

Based on the information available on its online platforms and its publicly available documents, the DK has a far less extensive network of ties with civic organisations. One characteristic strand in the DK's relationships with civil society is the support for minorities and marginalised groups. This is illustrated by the two working groups of the Foundation for a New Republic, the DK's party foundation. One of these is the Roma Social Integration Working Group and the other is the LGBTQ Working Group. During the coronavirus pandemic, the DK (2020) also supported the Roma local self-government in Gyöngyöspata with masks and food. Although there is no institutionalised partnership, the DK has traditionally stood with the Hungarian LGBTQ communities.

The other strand that defines the DK's engagement with civic organisations and its civic partnerships is its support of charitable organisations. In 2017, the DK called on the government to support the NGOs that helped the poor during the winter in preventing freezing deaths. In the same year, the DK (2017) entered into electoral cooperation with the Hungarian Solidarity Movement. As part of their agreement, the DK promised that the civil organisation would have parliamentary representation. In September 2020, the DK also supported the Oltalom Charitable Association—renowned for its work with homeless and underprivileged persons—with a food delivery. Additionally, during the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic, the DK donated protective gear to health and social institutions as well as NGOs.

An event that has had a vital impact on the operation of Hungarian civil society was the adoption by the government in 2017 of the 'NGO Act', which was based on the Russian model (the law was ultimately rescinded by the Orbán government in 2021 in response to a ruling by the European Court of Justice). This new law obliged the organisations that received at least 7.2 million forints (about €20,000) annually in foreign donations to report such donations to the authorities, who would keep a public record of them. The organisations were further also required to identify themselves as 'foreign-funded organisations' on their website and press material. This law, which violated the right of association, was discriminatory and intent on stigmatising the affected organisations. It

659 also constituted a danger to the entire Hungarian civil sphere, especially  
 660 the NGOs that are active in public affairs and politics. Furthermore, the  
 661 NGO Act was a threat to the civic partners affiliated with the Hungarian  
 662 S&D member parties, and the MSZP and DK both protested against the  
 663 law.

664 However, to put the civil partnerships reviewed above in perspective,  
 665 movement politics in Hungary is not chiefly the domain of the S&D's  
 666 Hungarian member parties. In the 2000s, Fidesz built an extensive civic  
 667 network, which it continued to operate when the party came to power  
 668 in 2010 (Greskovits, 2020). In fact, Fidesz then reinforced this network  
 669 using state funds (e.g., the Civil Alliance Forum), and the governing party  
 670 often used a movement-type approach to mobilise its base (for instance by  
 671 organising pro-government Peace Marches). Hungary's first green party,  
 672 Politics Can Be Different (LMP), was founded partly on the basis of  
 673 a network of Hungarian environmental NGOs. The formerly far-right  
 674 and currently centre-right Jobbik party also defined itself as a move-  
 675 ment, as did the centrist-liberal Momentum party. The former integrated  
 676 numerous organisations affiliated with the nationalist and far-right subcul-  
 677 ture in the early 2000s, while the latter made its debut in the political  
 678 arena with a signature-collection campaign to thwart the government's  
 679 plans to host the Olympic Games in Budapest, and then built its base  
 680 primarily around urban intellectuals. By contrast, in the recent past the  
 681 S&D member parties have been far less engaged in building mass move-  
 682 ments and have instead become more proactive in building ties to charities  
 683 and specialised NGOs.

## 64 6 PROGRAMMATIC POSITIONING

685 Before reviewing the overall positioning of the two S&D member parties  
 686 in Hungary, some common features need to be highlighted, which stem  
 687 from the particular Hungarian context in which these two parties are  
 688 embedded. This will be followed by an overview of the parties' positions  
 689 on key policy areas. We will conclude with a brief discussion of some  
 690 of the vital differences in the programmatic outlook of the two parties.  
 691 The most important common feature between the programmes of the  
 692 MSZP and DK is the massive emphasis on democracy and the rule of  
 693 law, which is the starting point and the most extensively covered issue  
 694 in both party platforms. This is clearly a result of the unusual situation  
 695 in which Hungary finds itself under the Orbán government, which has

696 taken massive steps to undermine the democratic ground rules and the  
 697 rule of law. Relying on their constitutional supermajorities, since 2010  
 698 successive Fidesz governments have adopted a new constitution and a  
 699 wide array of legislation to weaken democratic competition and to tilt  
 700 the political playing field in their own favour. Fidesz has used its majorities  
 701 in the legislature to undermine the system of checks and balances,  
 702 removing practically all oversight of the government's activities and vastly  
 703 diminishing the possibilities for reining in corruption and abuses of power.  
 704 Crucially, Hungarian elections have now twice consecutively been classified  
 705 as unfair by the OSCE (Guardian, 2018), and whether the remaining  
 706 weak rules protecting the considerably diminished democratic competition  
 707 will be enforced is completely dependent on the government's  
 708 'goodwill' since there is de facto no independent institution to ensure  
 709 that the will of the voters prevails.

710 It is therefore only logical that the opposition parties focus on this  
 711 issue in particular. Since the relevant concerns are fairly widely covered  
 712 in international media, and since the two parties are in agreement with  
 713 respect to reversing Fidesz's harmful decisions and to increasing democratic  
 714 accountability, their stances in this context will not be discussed in  
 715 detail here. Two specific aspects should be highlighted, however. First,  
 716 much of what the opposition parties plan to do to reassert democratic  
 717 principles and to shore up the rule of law would theoretically require a  
 718 two-thirds majority in parliament, which they are very unlikely to win.  
 719 This could well result in a situation in which even in the event of an election  
 720 victory, the opposition parties will not be able to deliver on their  
 721 most significant promise to voters because Fidesz will retain a veto on  
 722 any changes that weaken its influence over the political system. Second,  
 723 if the left-wing parties' plans in this context are comprehensively enacted,  
 724 Hungary will be a vibrant democracy, while the central government will  
 725 have less control and autonomy to operate than it has ever had before.

726 Given that the DK has not released its own platform for 2022, we  
 727 looked at its manifesto for the 2018 election, which was filed under the  
 728 heading 'programme' on the party's website (DK 2017). Although some  
 729 details on which the MSZP's (2021) programme for 2022 programme  
 730 specifically reflects (e.g., the privatisation of almost the entire higher  
 731 education system into the hands of Fidesz-controlled foundations) were  
 732 thus not covered in the DK programme because the relevance of the given  
 733 issue was not clear in 2017, on the whole the circumstances were similar  
 734 enough to make the DK's previous programme relevant.

*Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP)*

The programme of the MSZP is the strongest and most detailed when it comes to economic and social issues, while the other three core areas (cultural liberalism, green issues and foreign policy) feature less prominently. The programme sets out vital indicators concerning the party's intention to increase public spending in key areas, and we have collected the relevant promises from the most prominent areas (Table 2).

Even considering that some of the areas may overlap and that some of the amount in spending increases may thus be counted twice in the table above, what is apparent is that the MSZP plans to expand public spending massively. Some of the party's specific promises follow below.

Significantly, the MSZP proposes the introduction of a basic income, although its realisation would be slightly more complicated than the model where everyone is basically given a fixed amount. Instead, the MSZP proposes to calculate a minimum allowance that people need for subsistence, and to make sure that everyone receives this payment—direct

**Table 2** Spending increases proposed by MSZP in high-priority policy areas

<i>Policy area</i>	<i>Current spending as a % of GDP<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>MSZP's target in spending as a % of GDP</i>	<i>Percentage increase over the current level of spending (%)</i>
Public healthcare	4.7	7	39
Elementary and secondary education	5.1	6–6.5	18–27
Pensions	8.3	10	20
Social transfers	13.8	18	30
Municipal governments	6.9	11	59
Public funding for research and development	1.48 <sup>2</sup>	2.2–2.4	49–62

<sup>1</sup> According to the MSZP programme, we did not verify their data.

<sup>2</sup> On public funding for R&D, the MSZP programme did not mention a specific figure, so for this particular area we draw on EU statistics: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4187653/10321624/RD\\_intensity\\_2019data\\_Kreslic%C3%AD+pl%C3%A1tmo+1.jpg/cab014e5-dafc-1bb6-33c3-3b1ab5a5a5c9?t=1606313161665](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/4187653/10321624/RD_intensity_2019data_Kreslic%C3%AD+pl%C3%A1tmo+1.jpg/cab014e5-dafc-1bb6-33c3-3b1ab5a5a5c9?t=1606313161665).

751 transfers would only be provided to those who do not receive an amount  
752 equivalent to the minimum allowance from either income or other social  
753 transfers such as pensions, public work, unemployment benefits, etc.

754 Probably also as a reflection of its base, which tends to be elderly, the  
755 MSZP wants to support pensioners, specifically by significantly raising  
756 the minimum amount of pensions (so that no pension can be below  
757 the minimum needed for subsistence). Furthermore, the MSZP proposes  
758 that for a transition period of three years, the inflation-based indexing of  
759 pensions be supplemented by an index based on real wage increases. This  
760 is to counteract the increasing gap between pensions and wages because  
761 the latter has been rising far slower recently than the former, leading to an  
762 increasing gap in the respective incomes of retired pensioners and active  
763 workers. Moreover, the MSZP also wants to decrease inequality between  
764 pensioners, which is why the portion of the indexing based on the increase  
765 of real wages would be distributed equally among pensioners (unlike the  
766 inflation-based element of the indexing, it would not be proportional to  
767 the individual's pension), and the bonus 13th monthly pension would  
768 also be equal in amount across the board.

769 Increasing spending on healthcare, education, unemployment benefits  
770 and family assistance, the overall policies of the MSZP strongly aim to  
771 reduce socio-economic inequalities. The party therefore wants to replace  
772 the flat tax system with a progressive taxation system, for example, and  
773 it also wants to increase Hungary's low corporate tax rate, especially as  
774 concerns large corporations, which the MSZP says have been favoured  
775 by the government's economic policies. The MSZP stresses that it does  
776 not share the widely held perception that the overall tax rate in Hungary  
777 is too high. Instead, the MSZP believes it is too low, so the party  
778 wants to increase the tax burden on the whole. The MSZP does pledge,  
779 however, to reduce the highly regressive value added tax, which at 27% is  
780 extraordinarily high by international comparison.

781 In terms of family support, the MSZP wants to change Fidesz's policy  
782 of aiming most support at medium and higher income families, and it  
783 wants to boost spending on the types of benefits aimed at poorer families,  
784 while promising to retain some of the more popular middle-class benefits,  
785 such as, for example, the income tax deduction for families with children  
786 under the age of 18.

787 The programme notes the big decrease in education spending and  
788 points out that the quality of Hungarian education has declined signif-  
789 icantly under Fidesz (the document refers to the widely cited PISA



790 figures which confirm this). Furthermore, the Hungarian education  
 791 system, which has always been very unequal, is among the worst  
 792 performers of developed countries in terms of reproducing and increasing  
 793 inequality. Changing this is among the priorities designated in the  
 794 MSZP's programme, and at least some of the substantial increase in  
 795 education spending proposed (between 18 and 27% of the current level  
 796 of spending) will be used to that end. This includes a major expansion  
 797 in early intervention (starting before children reach the age of three), for  
 798 example by expanding the network of social workers to ensure that chil-  
 799 dren from underprivileged backgrounds do not start falling behind. The  
 800 MSZP programme also includes an extended version of the baby bond  
 801 programme, which would give underprivileged children a larger nest egg  
 802 from the state with which to start their adult lives.

803 In addition, the MSZP wants to reverse a decade of Fidesz's efforts at  
 804 weakening the rights of workers, including amendment of the brutally  
 805 restrictive measures of the Labour Code (which was massively over-  
 806 hauled by Fidesz to benefit employers back in 2011 and which has  
 807 been restrictively amended ever since). The MSZP promises to repeal  
 808 the controversial 'Slave Law', which allows employers to force workers  
 809 into massive overtime for which they get paid only with significant delay.  
 810 The party would furthermore strengthen the collective bargaining rights  
 811 of workers, which Fidesz has essentially hollowed out. In addition, the  
 812 MSZP pledges to raise the minimum wage and to make it the highest  
 813 among the Visegrád countries (from its current lowest level) and to make  
 814 it tax-exempt. The party also wants to put a cap on executive pay.

815 The MSZP programme does not dwell heavily on issues involving  
 816 cultural liberalism, which is probably partly a reflection of its efforts not to  
 817 alienate voters who are open to its left-wing economic and social policies  
 818 but are often sceptical of left-liberal values in the social and cultural realm.  
 819 One striking element of the MSZP programme that is likely to appeal to  
 820 such voters is the heavy emphasis on security issues, in the context both  
 821 of public safety/policing as well as the military, which appear early on  
 822 in the manifesto. Although the programme does not tabulate how much  
 823 it would spend in total on the police, it does propose increasing police  
 824 pay, hiring new officers and reorganising the entire force—with a view to  
 825 increasing public safety, particularly in underserved (especially rural) and  
 826 underprivileged areas.

827 Likely in response to the strong negative attitudes in Hungarian society  
 828 towards refugees—which are to a significant extent the result of the Fidesz

829 government's massive taxpayer-funded campaign, which focused relent-  
 830 lessly on the dangers of migration and the EU's allegedly wrong attitude  
 831 about it—the MSZP devotes scant attention to the subject. Rather than  
 832 laying out its vision or policies in detail, its terse statement on the subject  
 833 says: 'The Hungarian Socialist Party believes that the local population's  
 834 sense of physical, economic and cultural anxieties concerning the settle-  
 835 ment in Hungary of people from foreign countries needs to be respected  
 836 and [...] other methods of solidarity and supporting refugees should be  
 837 applied.' (MSZP programme, p. 35).

838 Among the issues where the party stakes out a clearly left-wing posi-  
 839 tion on a cultural issue is that of confessional schools, which have  
 840 massively gained ground under Fidesz thanks to legislative assistance and  
 841 disproportionately favourable funding from the government. The rele-  
 842 vant constitutional principle, which states that local schools may only be  
 843 turned over to religious denominations if non-confessional public alterna-  
 844 tives are available nearby, has suffered significantly as a result. The MSZP  
 845 programme promises to remedy this problem, if necessary by taking back  
 846 schools from the churches. If this were to happen, it would very likely  
 847 generate a massive conflict with both the churches and Fidesz, which  
 848 represents the Christian right.

849 The MSZP's manifesto does not focus on issues that are currently in  
 850 the focus of many left-wing programmes internationally. The situation  
 851 of women is therefore barely discussed in the platform, with a mere 8  
 852 mentions on 129 pages, usually as asides in a larger discussion. And while  
 853 some of these mentions are important—e.g., the promises of equal pay  
 854 and to address the discrimination of women in the labour market—there  
 855 is little attention paid to the situation of women overall. Hungary's vast  
 856 Roma minority, which is estimated at 5–8% of the total population, and  
 857 large segments of whom live in dire poverty and are subject to systemic  
 858 discrimination, are mentioned only twice in the document, both as side-  
 859 notes to a broader point. Sexual minorities are not mentioned at all, nor  
 860 does the MSZP explain how and whether it wants to countermand the  
 861 discriminatory legislation enacted by Fidesz against them.

862 While the MSZP programme is very strong and focused on issues  
 863 that are traditional left-wing concerns (especially inequality, labour, public  
 864 education, healthcare and social benefits), green issues are less empha-  
 865 sised, although the party's commitment to improvement in this area is  
 866 clear. Despite some of the environmental promises sounding ambitious by  
 867 current Hungarian standards (the rapid closure of all coal power plants

868 and a 55% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2030), on the whole, the  
 869 programme is not very detailed, involving promises of drafting policies in  
 870 the future and of offering some sort of incentives rather than taking reso-  
 871 lute action and setting clear indicators. At the same time, the document  
 872 does include firm commitments that under the MSZP Hungary will join  
 873 and comply with the requirements of international climate agreements,  
 874 including the European Green Deal. Arguably the party's position does  
 875 therefore provide a basis for more ambitious domestic policies, even if the  
 876 programme itself is less rich in the details.

877 The commitment to the European project suffuses the whole of the  
 878 MSZP platform. In the chapter entitled 'Our place is in Europe!', the  
 879 MSZP makes very clear that it wants to reverse what could be called  
 880 the eastern reorientation of Hungarian foreign policy under Fidesz and  
 881 to firmly entrench Hungary in the Western alliance system once again,  
 882 with a forceful re-engagement in European affairs. Among the relevant  
 883 commitments are its support of a European defence force (which in the  
 884 MSZP's vision would complement NATO rather than compete with it);  
 885 the promise to join the European Public Prosecutor's Office; the creation  
 886 of a European Health Union; enhanced cooperation with OLAF; and  
 887 support for the European Green Deal. Even more importantly, the Euro-  
 888 pean Union as the linchpin of Hungarian development and as the relevant  
 889 policy framework and point of reference, recurs throughout the docu-  
 890 ment in a wide array of public policy areas, which makes it clear that  
 891 the MSZP envisions Hungary's progress and its public policies as firmly  
 892 embedded in a joint European framework. While it does not repudiate  
 893 the ties to major powers outside the EU and the West, emphasising the  
 894 importance of bilateral ties with Russia, China and India, on the whole,  
 895 it is clear that these take a backseat to the priority of Hungary's EU and  
 896 NATO membership. Foreign policy is arguably the policy field where the  
 897 party has the best track record in government because during the MSZP's  
 898 governance Hungary was a firm European and NATO ally. This strongly  
 899 enhances the credibility of the MSZP's promise to restore Hungary's  
 900 foreign policy to its earlier Western alignment.

### 901 *Democratic Coalition (DK)*

902 A vital distinction between the DK and the MSZP is that the former  
 903 identifies itself as a centre-left force that is open to the political centre,

904 and its members and supporters equally include persons with progres-  
905 sive social democratic, liberal and conservative worldviews. This kind  
906 of catch-all approach is also reflected in the party's programme, which  
907 includes a wide variety of policies, some of which might appeal to left-  
908 wingers/social democrats and some of which liberals might find more  
909 appealing, although there is nothing in the DK's manifesto that appeals  
910 in particular to conservatives, save for a few commonplaces with fairly  
911 universal appeal (e.g., soft commitments to better public safety and  
912 nurturing Hungary's cultural heritage).

913 It is in terms of the programme's economic and social dimension that  
914 the mutual and occasionally conflicting presence of left-wing and liberal  
915 elements is most striking. The DK's commitment to left-wing values is  
916 most vividly reflected in its emphasis on decreasing inequality, fighting  
917 poverty and extending equal opportunities. Among the more left-wing  
918 socio-economic elements of its programme, the DK wants to establish  
919 a minimum family income that would top up whatever income is avail-  
920 able to poor families and unemployed individuals with a supplementary  
921 benefit that would be calculated on the basis of the other social benefits  
922 they receive and the size of the household to ensure that when all their  
923 income has been tallied up they dispose of the minimum needed for their  
924 subsistence.

925 In an innovative twist on the popular utility price freeze imposed by  
926 the Fidesz government, the DK would mandate that up to a defined  
927 minimum which a person needs for subsistence, water and electricity must  
928 be made available free of charge, while utility providers would, in turn, be  
929 more flexible when pricing their services above the mandatory minimum.  
930 The DK would also make sure that a minimum amount of heating mate-  
931 rials is made available to households, adjusted to the type of heating they  
932 use. In terms of more classical welfare policies, the DK would increase,  
933 among other things, the universal family allowance (which Fidesz has  
934 neglected in favour of benefits aimed at the middle and upper classes);  
935 the period of eligibility for unemployment benefits (which Fidesz had  
936 slashed drastically from nine months to three) and the minimum wage  
937 (although not as ambitiously as the MSZP, which wants to have the  
938 highest minimum wage in the four Visegrad countries before converging  
939 towards the figures in western Europe) by agreeing with employers to  
940 increase [the minimum wage] by a rate of 3–5% above the rate of infla-  
941 tion for a period of five years so that its amount will rise to the minimum

942 necessary for subsistence. The DK also wants to ensure that the rights of  
 943 employees can be asserted and that their right to strike is restored.

944 In addition, the DK plans to increase pensions, and in order to ensure  
 945 that the purchasing power of pensions does not decline, it plans to regu-  
 946 late the consumption basket on the basis of which pensions are calculated  
 947 by law, in order to make sure that pension increases track the actual  
 948 spending of pensioners. Furthermore, the DK would also pay an extra  
 949 pension, an unspecified amount in excess of the inflation-based indexing.  
 950 Pensions mark one of the few areas where the DK's spending plans are  
 951 specific, with the promise that if the economic growth figures are up  
 952 to expectations (—in other words, if the real growth of the economy  
 953 is at least 3–4%), the DK would use a substantial chunk of the additional  
 954 state revenue—which it estimates at 150 billion–180 billion forints (about  
 955 €400m–€500m)—to top up pensions.

956 An interesting contrast emerges between the DK's outlook on primary  
 957 and secondary education on the one hand, and its approach to health-  
 958 care on the other, with higher education falling somewhat in between.  
 959 Primary and secondary education (as well as kindergarten) are unequiv-  
 960 ocal state responsibilities, the DK says, and it promises a variety of  
 961 measures to improve education, teachers' pay and the access of underpriv-  
 962 ileged children to quality education. With regard to healthcare, however,  
 963 the DK makes clear that the state can play a partial role at best. Instead,  
 964 the DK manifesto argues that society must be made to understand that  
 965 the improvement of its health situation is primarily in its own hands.  
 966 For the DK, this responsibility involves a wide range of activities on  
 967 the part of the individual, such as exercise, keeping up with screening  
 968 tests and potentially also seeking private insurance for services that a DK-  
 969 envisioned public healthcare system would not provide. Thus, while for  
 970 pre-university education the DK identifies a clear state responsibility, for  
 971 healthcare it proposes a tripartite system, in which emergency services  
 972 are universally available; a set of standard healthcare services are avail-  
 973 able to those who are part of the social insurance system; and a variety  
 974 of optional services are available to those who have private insurance or  
 975 seek out private providers. This is clearly a move away from the universal  
 976 social healthcare model and a step towards a partial privatisation of the  
 977 healthcare system, although in some ways it would merely constitute an  
 978 official acknowledgement of what is actually happening in reality.

979 In higher education, the DK takes a compromise stance on the polar-  
 980 ising issue of tuition fees (when the government led by the current DK

981 chair Ferenc Gyurcsány in the second half of the 2000s lost a referendum  
 982 on the subject by a wide margin, it ultimately catalysed Gyurcsány's resig-  
 983 nation at the time). The DK thus proposes to offer every student the  
 984 first year of university for free, while from the second year onwards the  
 985 DK would extend some merit- and needs-based scholarships for eligible  
 986 students, with those who are ineligible being required to pay fees to  
 987 continue with their studies.

988 The party's more liberal bent is even more pronounced when it comes  
 989 to economic policy. Although, like most opposition parties, the DK  
 990 commits itself to restoring progressive taxation, it plans to lower the  
 991 income tax rate of 15% on most incomes, while the lower of the two  
 992 planned higher tax rates would only enter into effect above a threshold of  
 993 a gross salary of 1 million forints (2750 euros), which would affect very  
 994 few employees. The highest tax rate would actually be an extra tax levied  
 995 on incomes in excess of 3 million forints (8300 euros), a month, which  
 996 would barely affect anyone in Hungary. Taken together with the rest of  
 997 the programme, which emphasises that the rich rather than the middle  
 998 class need to be called to task for helping the poor, the DK's income tax  
 999 policy meshes with the party's overall approach. In general, too, the DK  
 1000 promises to simplify and slash taxes and to make the life of enterprises  
 1001 easier. However, in contrast to the MSZP, the DK says nothing about  
 1002 either increasing corporate taxes or about taxes in Hungary being too  
 1003 low overall.

1004 Much of the focus in the economic section of the DK programme is on  
 1005 increasing competitiveness and helping enterprises by reducing red tape  
 1006 and superfluous regulations, while rejecting the prevailing corrupt form  
 1007 of subsidies where political loyalty rather than competitiveness or produc-  
 1008 tivity determine eligibility. The DK eschews the vision of a muscular  
 1009 state that micromanages and dominates the economy, arguing that the  
 1010 state's role in the economy is primarily that of a regulator and super-  
 1011 visor. The DK also pleads for a responsible fiscal policy where the deficit  
 1012 does not exceed 3%, arguing that the state's investment needs and social  
 1013 outlays should be covered by the surplus revenue generated by a 3–4%  
 1014 real growth rate.

1015 Although it does not devote much space to these issues and remains  
 1016 vague on the details, the DK manifesto puts a far stronger emphasis on  
 1017 the classic social and cultural policy issues in Hungary than the MSZP  
 1018 programme. In a terse statement, the DK commits itself to the legalisa-  
 1019 tion of gay marriage, although it does not explore the situation of sexual

1020 minorities in any detail. The DK also dedicates distinct chapters to the  
 1021 situation of women and the Roma minority, in which it highlights the  
 1022 importance of these issues in Hungary and how the social reality lags  
 1023 behind what is desirable. Taking a clear stance on a divisive issue, the DK  
 1024 commits itself to a 30% quota for women in all kinds of state institutions  
 1025 and also supports mandatory quotas for corporate boards in line with the  
 1026 relevant European recommendations. Regarding immigration policy, the  
 1027 DK programme skirts the issue altogether, merely noting that the party  
 1028 wants the EU to manage this area and is willing to follow EU policy.  
 1029 The DK does, however, take a clear position on another highly polarising  
 1030 issue in Hungary, and therefore the party rejects voting rights for dual citi-  
 1031 zens who are not residents of Hungary—a proposal that is squarely aimed  
 1032 at ethnic Hungarians recently enfranchised by the Orbán government in  
 1033 large part because they overwhelmingly support the governing party. This  
 1034 makes the DK the only opposition party to call for the revocation of the  
 1035 voting rights of non-resident ethnic Hungarians.

1036 While environmental considerations repeatedly arise in various sections  
 1037 of the programme (e.g., agriculture, transport), the DK's manifesto does  
 1038 not put much of an emphasis on environmentalism. The dedicated subsec-  
 1039 tion is brief at 2 pages and does not allow for much detail nor does it  
 1040 make many far-reaching promises by today's standards. On the plus side,  
 1041 the programme does promise that the DK will adopt a climate protection  
 1042 plan that puts forth more ambitious emission reduction targets than those  
 1043 of international climate agreements. Much of the DK programme on this  
 1044 issue is focused on incentives and subsidies, especially for renewables but  
 1045 also for energy storage and other areas where environmental success neatly  
 1046 meshes with economic growth. It is apparent from the DK's proposals  
 1047 that much of its environmental focus is on the areas where the needs  
 1048 of the environment can be reconciled with economic dynamism, such  
 1049 as for instance investments in the generation of renewable energy. One  
 1050 key specific target set by the DK is that by 2025 a quarter of Hungary's  
 1051 energy needs should be covered by renewables, while by 2050 this ratio  
 1052 should rise to two-thirds. To this end, the DK wants to offer subsidies and  
 1053 loans for the development of solar and wind power plants; use EU funds  
 1054 to help establish companies in high-unemployment areas that supply the  
 1055 necessary products; and fund the energy-efficient remodelling of residen-  
 1056 tial buildings, with the goal that a quarter of residential buildings become  
 1057 net energy producers by 2025.

1058 On Europe specifically, and Hungary's place in the Western alliance  
 1059 system in general, the DK is clearly the party with the strongest pro-  
 1060 European and pro-Western message in the Hungarian party landscape.  
 1061 The DK is the only party that openly commits itself to the idea of a  
 1062 United States of Europe, and it calls for European patriotism in the place  
 1063 of traditional nationalism. In the same vein, it also argues for the intro-  
 1064 duction of the euro, accession to the European Public Prosecutor's Office  
 1065 and deeper integration in all policy areas. In addition, the DK also seeks  
 1066 to reorient Hungarian foreign policy towards a greater commitment to  
 1067 NATO.

1068 The DK's brief but dedicated chapter on foreign policy not only  
 1069 stresses where Hungary's loyalties ought to lie but is also unusually direct  
 1070 in identifying Russia as an opponent and in committing itself to joint  
 1071 European policies aimed at scaling back Russian expansion and preventing  
 1072 the spread of Russian influence. In a remarkably strong statement, the  
 1073 DK also says that it looks at the 'full sovereignty of the Baltic states  
 1074 as the guarantee of our own security'. The strong words on Russia are  
 1075 striking, especially given that relations between Russia and Hungary actu-  
 1076 ally began warming during the premiership of the current DK chair  
 1077 Ferenc Gyurcsány—at a time when the then-leader of the opposition,  
 1078 Viktor Orbán, was harshly critical of the rapprochement.

1079 In summary, while there are some key similarities between the two  
 1080 party programmes—e.g., the commitment to democracy and the rule of  
 1081 law; to Europe and NATO; and to the fight against poverty and the  
 1082 lack of opportunities for underprivileged groups—the two parties are  
 1083 also distinct in their emphases and approaches. The MSZP programme  
 1084 is to a significant extent that of a classic social democratic party, while  
 1085 the more recent issues that tend to figure prominently on the agendas  
 1086 of centre-left parties today—e.g., gender and the social integration of  
 1087 minorities—receive little attention in the MSZP manifesto. The DK, by  
 1088 contrast, takes a distinctly more classical liberal approach on economic  
 1089 issues—and that liberalism heavily influences the DK's health policies and  
 1090 also leaves an imprint on its approach towards higher education. At the  
 1091 same time, however, the DK programme is somewhat stronger on issues  
 1092 involving cultural liberalism. While it would be tempting to thus classify  
 1093 the MSZP simply as more left-wing and the DK as more centrist, the  
 1094 actual reality in the Hungarian party landscape is more complicated. The  
 1095 DK's positions on gay marriage; the vision of a united Europe; nation-  
 1096 alism and in particular the voting rights of ethnic Hungarians outside



1097 Hungary, for example, make it clearly the least moderate among the  
 1098 parliamentary parties. Whether its positions on these issues qualify as left-  
 1099 wing or liberal is a different matter, but the fact is that on these issues the  
 1100 MSZP is closer to the ideological centre of Hungarian society while the  
 1101 DK represents an ideological flank.

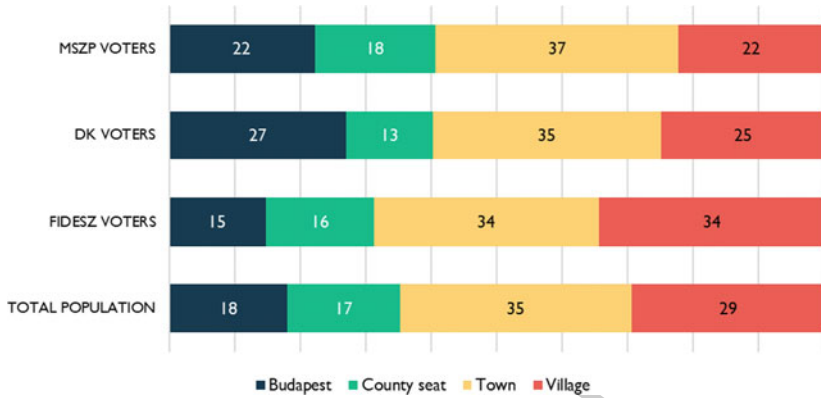
## 1102 7 SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC VOTERS, 1103 SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ISSUES

1104 In the following section, we will examine the voter profiles of the  
 1105 supporters of the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) and the Democratic  
 1106 Coalition (DK). For analytical purposes, we will compare and contrast the  
 1107 preferences and characteristics of these voters with the relevant data about  
 1108 government party voters and the average Hungarian voter. We will also  
 1109 look at the main trends with respect to the Hungarian public's support  
 1110 for social democratic values and public policies.

### 1111 *Distribution of Voters by the Level of Urbanisation*

1112 The distribution of the MSZP and DK voters based on the type of settle-  
 1113 ment in which they live differs from the distribution of the Hungarian  
 1114 public overall in two respects. Firstly, village residents are underrepre-  
 1115 sented among these two parties' supporters, and secondly, the residents  
 1116 of Hungary's largest urban area by far, the capital Budapest, are heavily  
 1117 overrepresented in turn. When comparing the voters of the DK and the  
 1118 MSZP, we found several differences that were significant beyond the  
 1119 survey's margin of error (Fig. 4). In 2021, DK voters were five percentage  
 1120 points (27%) more likely to be Budapest residents than MSZP voters  
 1121 (22%). The margin was the same in the county seats, except there the  
 1122 difference tilted in favour of the MSZP (18% vs. 13%). There were also  
 1123 modest differences in terms of the MSZP and DK voters' respective like-  
 1124 lihood of living in smaller municipalities, with the share of small-town  
 1125 residents being slightly higher among MSZP voters (37% vs. 35%). Mean-  
 1126 while, the DK had a slightly higher share of village residents (25% vs.  
 1127 22%).

1128 We found a major shift since 2018 in the distribution of the two  
 1129 parties' voters by municipality type, as both party bases have become  
 1130 stronger in the capital. The share of DK supporters living in Budapest in  
 1131 2021 had increased by 11 percentage points compared with 2018, while



**Fig. 4** Distribution of voters by residence (%) (Source Závecz Research, February 2021)

1132 MSZP voters are now five percentage points more likely to live in the  
 1133 capital. Between 2018 and 2021 the parties experienced the biggest drop  
 1134 among small-town residents, with the MSZP supporters in that demo-  
 1135 graphic falling by seven percentage points, and the DK supporters falling  
 1136 six percentage points.

1137

### *Gender Composition*

1138 There are no major differences in the gender composition of the MSZP  
 1139 and DK. Men are underrepresented in the bases of both parties (44% of  
 1140 MSZP voters were men in 2021 and 56% were women, while for the  
 1141 DK the relevant figures were 41% and 59%, respectively). It is also worth  
 1142 highlighting that the share of women in the DK's voter base has increased  
 1143 significantly (by 12 percentage points) since 2018 when men and women  
 1144 were almost equally represented (53% and 47%, respectively).

1145

### *Age Composition*

1146 As compared to the general population, the oldest age group is overrep-  
 1147 resented in both party bases (Fig. 5). At the same time, the MSZP's voter  
 1148 base is significantly more elderly not only than the average population but

1149 also as compared to the DK voters. Eight out of ten (81%) MSZP voters  
 1150 in 2021 were at least 50 years old, a share that is 34 percentage points  
 1151 higher than in the population at large and 22 points higher than among  
 1152 DK voters. A quarter of MSZP voters are between the ages of 50 and 59,  
 1153 and over half are older than 60. Among DK voters, the share of voters  
 1154 over 60 is also significantly (13 points) higher than in Hungarian society  
 1155 overall—they made up 42% of the DK’s base.

1156 Young people are somewhat underrepresented in Fidesz’s base, too,  
 1157 but the share of the two youngest age cohorts in the Fidesz base (33%)  
 1158 is still three times higher than in that of the MSZP. Fidesz’s edge among  
 1159 young voters is somewhat less pronounced when compared to the DK,  
 1160 but the governing party’s share of voters under the age of 40 was still  
 1161 seven points higher than that of the DK (33% vs. 26%).

1162 The MSZP’s voter base has shifted radically towards the older cohorts  
 1163 in recent years, and the DK has experienced a similar trend, albeit to a  
 1164 lesser extent. In the case of the MSZP, the share of voters under the age  
 1165 of 30 dropped by seven percentage points between 2018 and 2021; the  
 1166 share of those between the ages of 30 and 39 dropped by eight points;  
 1167 and the proportion of those between the ages of 40 and 49 fell by six  
 1168 points. At the same time, the share of those between the ages of 50 and  
 1169 59 surged by 12 points, and the proportion of those over 60 was nine  
 1170 points higher in 2021 than it had been three years earlier. There were only

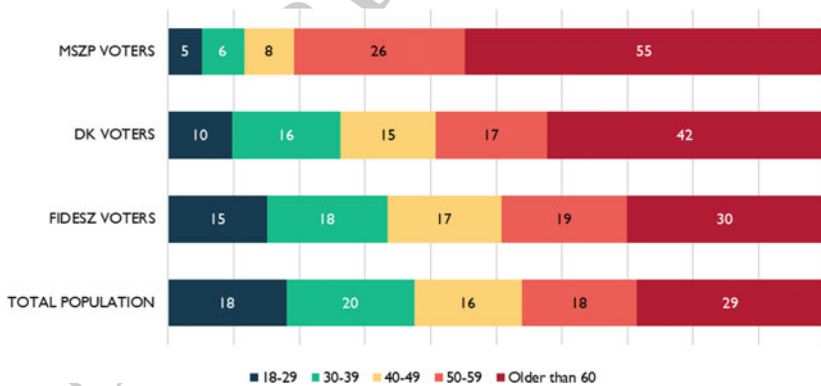


Fig. 5 Distribution of voters by age (%) (Source Závecz Research, February 2021)

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1171 two age groups whose share declined within the DK base (the proportion  
 1172 of those under 30 fell by two points, while the share of those between 30  
 1173 and 39 dropped by five percentage points), while the share of the oldest  
 1174 generations increased somewhat (by 2–3 points).

### 1175 *Composition by Educational Attainment*

1176 In terms of their educational attainment, only MSZP voters diverge  
 1177 markedly from the national average (Fig. 6). Among MSZP voters,  
 1178 the share of those with the lowest educational attainment (43%) is 14  
 1179 percentage points higher than in the population at large. At the same time,  
 1180 the share of those with university degrees (10%) is eight points lower  
 1181 than in the general public, and the proportion of those with vocational  
 1182 education (18%) is four points below the national average. The educa-  
 1183 tional attainment of DK voters did not differ significantly from either that  
 1184 of the government party supporters or that of society overall.

1185 Since 2018, the share of voters with a maximum of eight years of  
 1186 primary education has increased in the voter bases of both the MSZP and  
 1187 the DK. In the former group, it surged by ten points between 2018 and  
 1188 2021, and in the latter by four points. While the percentage of those with  
 1189 vocational training dropped among MSZP voters (down by two points),  
 1190 it increased significantly among the DK's supporters (up by seven points

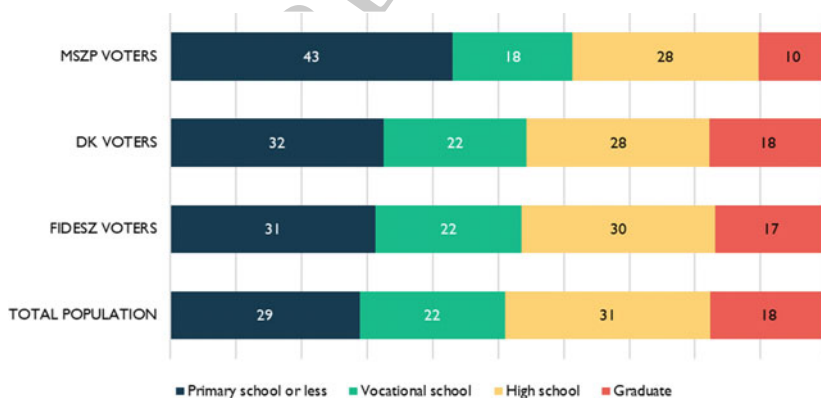


Fig. 6 Distribution of voters by education (%) (Source Závecz Research, February 2021)

1191 as compared to 2018). The share of those with completed high school  
 1192 education was nine points lower in the bases of both parties in 2021 as  
 1193 compared to three years earlier. Changes in the shares of those with higher  
 1194 education degrees were within the margin of error.

### 1195 *Distribution by Wealth and Class Identity*

1196 The distribution of the social democratic voters based on their financial  
 1197 situation reveals a very distinct pattern. Figure 7 presents the share of  
 1198 various income groups in three political communities (MSZP, DK and  
 1199 Fidesz) as well as in society overall. In the interest of better compa-  
 1200 rability, these figures only include voters who answered the question  
 1201 about their financial situation. On the whole, there are major differ-  
 1202 ences between the financial situations of the MSZP and Democratic  
 1203 Coalition voters. The share of voters from backgrounds in which the  
 1204 per capita monthly income per household member was 150,000 forints  
 1205 (about €420) or less is far higher in the MSZP base than among DK  
 1206 supporters (73% vs. 56%). While on the whole, the financial situation  
 1207 of DK voters converges towards the average of Hungarian society and  
 1208 towards that of Fidesz (although it needs to be highlighted that the  
 1209 two uppermost income segments were overrepresented in the DK base),  
 1210 among the supporters of the MSZP the below average income groups are  
 1211 substantially overrepresented.

### 1212 *The Potential Voters of the Social Democratic Parties*

1213 We analysed the potential voting pool of the social democratic parties—  
 1214 that is, their theoretically attainable base of voters—based on the  
 1215 secondary preferences of voters. Závecz Research measured this in a  
 1216 survey conducted in February 2021 by asking the respondents who they  
 1217 would vote for if their preferred party was not on the ballot. The voters  
 1218 of both social democratic parties exhibited a substantial willingness to  
 1219 support the respective other parties. At the same time, it was more typical  
 1220 of DK supporters to select the MSZP as their second choice, while the  
 1221 DK in turn was less likely to be picked by MSZP voters as their next-  
 1222 best alternative. While 65% of DK voters said that the MSZP was their  
 1223 secondary preference, only 39% of MSZP voters selected the DK as their  
 1224 second choice.

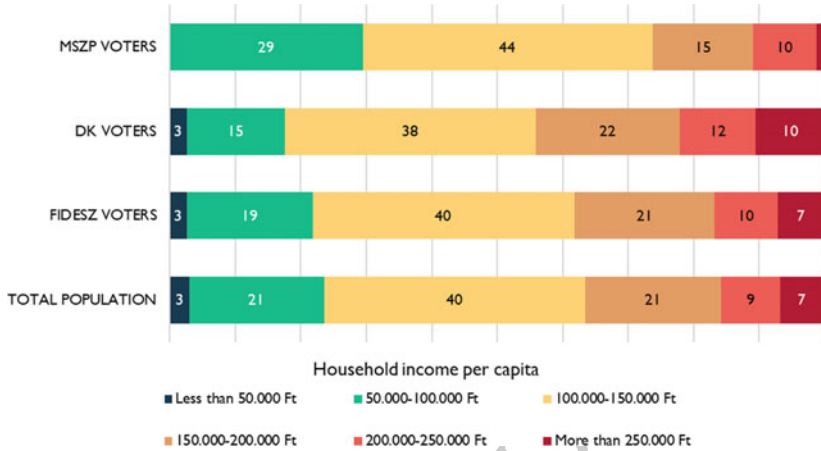
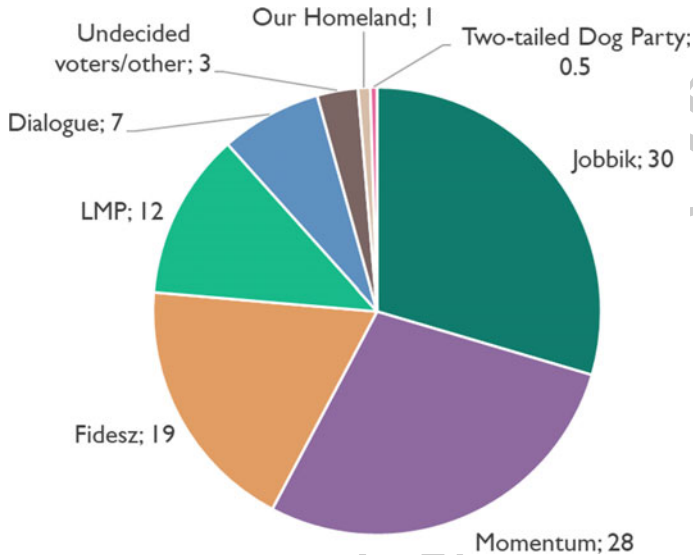


Fig. 7 Distribution of voters by income (%) (*Note* Without those who refused to answer. *Source* Závecz Research, February 2021)

1225 In our analysis, we classified those voters as potential social democratic  
 1226 voters who did not select either of the two S&D member parties as their  
 1227 first choice but indicated that one of them was their secondary prefer-  
 1228 ence. Based on the surveys, 5% of the Hungarian voting-age population  
 1229 (roughly 400,000 voters) are potential social democratic voters. We found  
 1230 the largest pool of potential social democratic voters among those whose  
 1231 first choice was Jobbik (30% of the total pool we identified), the party that  
 1232 has shifted from the far-right to the centre-right in recent years (Fig. 8).  
 1233 The voters of the centrist-liberal Momentum party provide the second-  
 1234 largest such group: 28% of potential social democratic voters would opt  
 1235 for Momentum as their first choice right now.

1236 The preference patterns of social democratic voters were not unique  
 1237 or distinct as compared to society overall. At the same time, it is worth  
 1238 pointing out that 38% of them live in villages, a figure that is nine  
 1239 percentage points higher than the share of rural voters in the total  
 1240 population. Furthermore, 56% of potential social democratic voters thus  
 1241 identified are men, while 44% are women.



**Fig. 8** Distribution of potential social democratic voters by their primary partisanship (%) (*Source* Závecz Research, February 2021)

### *The Most Pressing Problems as Perceived by the Hungarian Public and the Popularity of Social Democratic Values*

In the following, we will present the issues that Hungarians deem as the most important by reviewing what we refer to as the problem map of the Hungarian public (Fig. 9). The respondents of a survey conducted by Policy Solutions (2021) in March 2021 were asked to select the three most important issues from a list of 14 problems in Hungary which we present in the figure below. The severe impact of the economic crisis triggered by the covid-19 pandemic was also reflected in the responses, as four out of the five most often-mentioned problems concerned the economy or subsistence. Hungarians were most likely to see the high cost of living as the most pressing issue (55% of respondents referred to this). The problem of low pay did not lag far behind (52% mentioned it), and the low quality of healthcare was also mentioned by a high proportion of respondents (42%) at the time when the third wave of the covid-19 pandemic began.

1258 After the top three problems, there was a significant gap in terms of  
 1259 the frequency with which the fourth most often cited problem, namely  
 1260 inequality, was mentioned—it was selected by fewer than a third of all  
 1261 respondents (29%). The problem of low pensions was also mentioned  
 1262 relatively often, with over a fifth (23%) picking it as a top issue. Corruption  
 1263 (16%), being in a vulnerable position at work (14%), and the low  
 1264 quality of education (13%) were each mentioned by a similar share of  
 1265 respondents. Roughly every tenth respondent designated environmental  
 1266 concerns, housing problems, immigration and the democratic deficit as  
 1267 important problems. Emigration (mentioned by 7%) and the difficulties  
 1268 of life in small rural communities (8%) rounded out the list.

1269 We also looked separately at the respective responses of the government  
 1270 party, opposition and undecided voters, to see how they each perceived  
 1271 these problems. The top five problems were the same in all groups, and  
 1272 their ranking was also virtually identical. In other words, financial diffi-  
 1273 culties and the deficiencies of the healthcare system were considered as

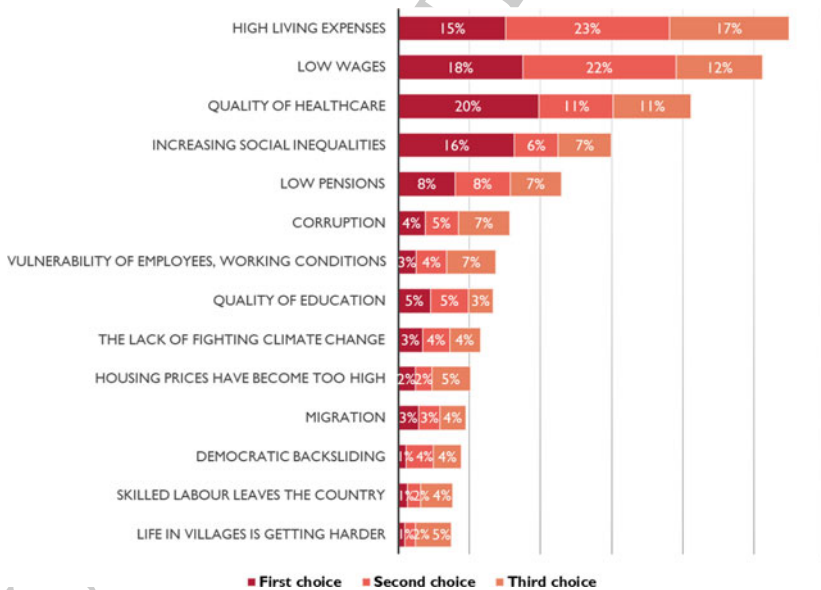


Fig. 9 Which of these do you consider to be the biggest problems in Hungary currently? (Source Policy Solutions, March 2021)



1274 the top problems in all political subsegments. There were, however, more  
 1275 substantial differences in the ranking of the less frequently mentioned  
 1276 issues. As compared to the other groups, the issue of environmentalism  
 1277 was somewhat further ahead according to government supporters (17%  
 1278 of them mentioned it), as was immigration (11%), while corruption and  
 1279 democratic decline were in the last spots in the subsample of Fidesz  
 1280 voters (each was mentioned by 6% of these respondents). Opposition  
 1281 voters, by contrast, were more likely than the average to mention corrup-  
 1282 tion (18%), the declining quality of education (18%) and the problem  
 1283 of the democratic deficit (13%). The undecided voters' ranking of prob-  
 1284 lems and the share of respondents in this segment who mentioned each  
 1285 issue was roughly on par with the average values of the public overall.  
 1286 The exceptions were two issues that were designated as relatively impor-  
 1287 tant by either government supporters—namely migration—or opposition  
 1288 voters—the decline in the quality of democracy. These were far less likely  
 1289 to be seen as important by undecided voters.

1290 A survey conducted by Policy Solutions (2020) at the end of the  
 1291 summer 2020 also showed that there is a massive demand in Hungarian  
 1292 society for left-wing economic policies. An overwhelming majority of  
 1293 Hungarian society (82%) agreed that it is the state's responsibility to  
 1294 reduce inequalities within society, while only 15% of respondents would  
 1295 leave this up to the market. Currently, those who have lost their jobs  
 1296 are eligible to receive unemployment benefits for a maximum of three  
 1297 months. Seven out of ten Hungarians thought that the eligibility period  
 1298 for unemployment benefits should be extended. This was a significant  
 1299 shift compared to the relevant data in 2018. While 54% of respondents  
 1300 indicated back in 2018 that the eligibility period for unemployment bene-  
 1301 fits was too short at three months, in 2020 this number was 16 percentage  
 1302 points higher. Even a substantial majority of Fidesz voters (60%) support  
 1303 a longer unemployment benefit eligibility period.

1304 The majority of Hungarian society also sympathise with the left-wing  
 1305 position on tax policy. Over three-quarters of Hungarian society (78%)  
 1306 support the introduction of a progressive tax scheme, whereas only every  
 1307 fifth Hungarian shares the Orbán government's view that the flat tax  
 1308 is the fairest form of distributing the tax burden. There is a near social  
 1309 consensus on the question of taxing the super-rich. A mere 8% of respon-  
 1310 dents therefore said that there was no need to levy a tax on the wealthiest  
 1311 of the wealthy, whereas 88% of Hungarians agreed with the proposition

1312 that ‘the rich should pay!’ Furthermore, based on data from Policy Solu-  
1313 tions (2021) in March 2021, nearly two-thirds of Hungarians support the  
1314 introduction of a basic income scheme, with 65% of respondents agreeing  
1315 that the state should provide everyone with a minimum amount of money  
1316 that is necessary for subsistence. Only 29% believed that this should not  
1317 be a part of the state’s responsibilities.

1318 While on economic issues the majority of Hungarian society clearly  
1319 incline towards left-wing positions, when it comes to cultural/identity  
1320 policy issues they lean towards conservative views. Based on our data from  
1321 August 2020, a majority of Hungarians (58%) are opposed to same-sex  
1322 marriages, while only slightly more than a third of respondents (35%)  
1323 would liberalise the institution of marriage. Hungarian society is divided  
1324 when it comes to the issue of fostering the socio-economic inclusion of  
1325 Roma. The share of those who agree that the state needs to focus pre-  
1326 eminently on helping our fellow Roma citizens was just as high as the  
1327 share of those who believe that this objective deserves no special effort  
1328 on the part of the state (48%–48%). Among the issues involving iden-  
1329 tity politics, the Hungarian public only proved progressive with respect to  
1330 women’s equality. An overwhelming majority of Hungarians (86%) there-  
1331 fore believe that it is unjust that women in Hungary often receive less pay  
1332 for the same work as men. Many in Hungary also reject the notion that  
1333 the issue of violence against women is overblown (68%). Furthermore,  
1334 three-quarters of Hungarians (74%) would support the adoption of a law  
1335 that would oblige employers to publicly release information concerning  
1336 the pay differentials between men and women at their companies.

## 1337 8 CONCLUSION

1338 For the Hungarian opposition, the period beginning in 2010 was the  
1339 decade of fragmentation. While before 2010 Hungarian politics was  
1340 defined by the struggle between two major parties, it took until 2022  
1341 for the political system to revert back to a situation in which two roughly  
1342 equally strong sides face off against one another. For this to come about,  
1343 six different parties have had to cooperate, none of which really stand  
1344 out in terms of strength and none of which is obviously equipped to  
1345 play the leading role in this alliance. One aspect of the overall frag-  
1346 mentation on the opposition side was that the Democratic Coalition  
1347 (DK) seceded from the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) in 2011. As a  
1348 result, the S&D Group in the European Parliament came to feature two

1349 Hungarian member parties. The emergence of a diverse and multi-party  
 1350 opposition also implies that the MSZP and DK must brace themselves  
 1351 for long-term cooperation—be it in government or opposition—with  
 1352 political forces which espouse views that are vastly different from their  
 1353 own. The ambition of both the MSZP (a party which pursues more  
 1354 traditional social democratic policies) and the DK (which has a social  
 1355 liberal outlook) will therefore be to infuse the policy platform of the  
 1356 emerging multi-party formation with as many of their own values and  
 1357 positions as possible. Furthermore, after the 2022 election, the opposition  
 1358 parties will have to grapple with the question of the type of organisa-  
 1359 tional structure in which they—including the Hungarian S&D member  
 1360 parties—can conceivably or practically operate. One often-voiced opinion  
 1361 among the current Hungarian opposition politicians is that there are too  
 1362 many parties. Given this widely shared sentiment, it is plausible that the  
 1363 cooperation between some of the opposition forces will become more  
 1364 intense during the 2022–2026 term of parliament, which would in turn  
 1365 result in a narrowing of the dispersed and broad selection of opposition  
 1366 parties.

1367 Among the Hungarian S&D member parties, the MSZP performed  
 1368 better in the polls and in elections until 2019. The first time that the  
 1369 DK performed better than the MSZP was in the European Parliament  
 1370 election of 2019, and since then the balance between the two parties  
 1371 has shifted in favour of the DK, which has established a sustained lead  
 1372 over the MSZP. Although the DK has had more voters than the MSZP  
 1373 in the past three years, the latter continues to retain a relatively strong  
 1374 party organisation and infrastructure. As compared to the DK, the MSZP  
 1375 has had more funds at its disposal. Furthermore, the MSZP also has far  
 1376 more local politicians in elected positions than the DK. Although the  
 1377 resources of the MSZP lag far behind those of the ruling party, within the  
 1378 resource-poor opposition the MSZP’s organisation and financial resources  
 1379 make it an essential player. Consequently, the MSZP finds it less chal-  
 1380 lenging to tackle the administrative/mobilisation hurdles with which the  
 1381 more recently established political organisations often massively struggle  
 1382 and which sometimes even threaten their very survival. The DK, too, is  
 1383 an essential player in the opposition bloc on account of the level of its  
 1384 support. Indeed, throughout 2021, the DK was consistently the leading  
 1385 party of the opposition, which it also proved at the intra-opposition  
 1386 primaries in September–October 2021. It also needs to be noted that part  
 1387 of the DK’s current high level of support is due to voters that the DK has

1388 successfully lured away from the MSZP. One data point that illustrates  
1389 the high level of fluidity between the voters of the two parties is that the  
1390 supporters of both, the MSZP and the DK, were most likely to select the  
1391 respective other parties as their secondary preference. The willingness to  
1392 pick the MSZP as their second choice is especially pronounced among  
1393 DK voters.

1394 A key problem that confronts both S&D member parties is the ageing  
1395 of their electorates. The MSZP is even more strongly affected by this  
1396 problem than the DK. While 80% of MSZP voters are over the age of  
1397 50, the same ratio is 60% in the case of the DK. Such a pronounced  
1398 demographic reliance on elderly voters clearly jeopardises the long-term  
1399 prospects of these parties. Furthermore, this trend of ageing voters has  
1400 continued in both parties since the 2018 election, as has the trend that  
1401 both parties are increasingly likely to be supported in major cities (in  
1402 the case of the DK, especially in Budapest) and among women. The  
1403 strategic challenge is thus obvious: young people, rural residents living  
1404 in small municipalities, and men are the demographic groups that both  
1405 parties must do more to attract. From the data presented in this chapter  
1406 is readily apparent that those younger voters who would be potentially  
1407 open to voting for one of the social democratic parties (we defined this  
1408 segment as those voters who picked either the MSZP or the DK as  
1409 their second preference but did not select the other social democratic  
1410 party as their primary preference) are most likely to be the supporters of  
1411 either Jobbik or Momentum at this time—both of which are traditionally  
1412 popular among young people.

1413 For DK supporters, former prime minister Ferenc Gyurcsány and his  
1414 wife Klára Dobrev, a Member of the European Parliament, are the central  
1415 forces of the party, and they hold the political community together.  
1416 However, at the same time, the former prime minister (and his controver-  
1417 sial public standing) is the main obstacle in the way of further expansion in  
1418 the DK's societal reach and public support. Fidesz wished to turn Ferenc  
1419 Gyurcsány into one of the centrepieces of its own campaign for the 2022  
1420 election, warning of the threat that a return of Gyurcsány and his allies to  
1421 power would imply. The frequent presence of the former prime minister  
1422 in public discourse puts a dent in the opposition's hopes that the public  
1423 will forget about the memories of the pre-2010 governments.

1424 The impacts of the major transformations in the media market and the  
1425 consequent overwhelming media dominance of the governing party are

1426 not just limited to the MSZP and DK as they affect the entire oppo-  
 1427 sition negatively. Nevertheless, these impacts make it more difficult to  
 1428 convey social democratic messages to the electorate. Fidesz has used the  
 1429 public media as a tool for governmental propaganda ever since winning  
 1430 power in 2010, and at the same time, it has also devised and is imple-  
 1431 menting a strategy in which government-friendly investors take over a  
 1432 growing number of commercial media outlets and realign them politically  
 1433 and editorially to support the government and to criticise the opposi-  
 1434 tion relentlessly. Concomitantly, the opposition parties—and especially  
 1435 the left-wing parties among them—have access to fewer and fewer media  
 1436 that cover their views. Despite the limited possibilities, these parties must  
 1437 nonetheless achieve progress in this area. For the time being, the best  
 1438 option for the MSZP and the DK is to focus on online solutions and  
 1439 to shore up their personal presence in as many parts of the country as  
 1440 possible.

1441 In the future, the S&D member parties' greatest potential for  
 1442 increasing their electoral support lies in the Hungarian public's embrace  
 1443 of social democratic values. On socio-economic issues, a clear majority  
 1444 of Hungarian society hold left-wing views, and the popularity of what  
 1445 one could call social democratic positions is far higher among the public  
 1446 than the aggregate support for the MSZP and DK. The question of who  
 1447 will most credibly represent these left-wing values in Hungarian politics  
 1448 is a vital one. Although the credibility of the MSZP and the DK took a  
 1449 serious hit during the period of the left-wing governments between 2002  
 1450 and 2010, support for these parties could conceivably be boosted among  
 1451 voters if the parties were able to reposition themselves as the most credible  
 1452 representatives of the public's preferences on issues involving the costs of  
 1453 living; the struggle against inequality; workers' rights; solidarity; fairness;  
 1454 and social mobility. This could then see their political prospects improve  
 1455 substantially. It is also important to stress that if political discourse were to  
 1456 centre on these problems, which are traditionally seen as left-wing issues,  
 1457 then it would be favourable not only for the MSZP and DK specifically  
 1458 but also for the entire opposition, which would then have a better chance  
 1459 to improve their position. If, however, the central issues on the Hungarian  
 1460 political agenda are cultural issues, it provides a more favourable terrain  
 1461 for Fidesz since the governing party's conservative stances on these issues  
 1462 (e.g., family policies, LGBT issues, migration) are closer to the prefer-  
 1463 ences of the majority and are also more likely to mobilise them. The most

1464 vital question of the coming period will thus be whether Hungarian poli-  
 1465 tics will focus on socio-economic or cultural issues. This question will also  
 1466 massively determine whether the diverse Hungarian opposition, including  
 1467 the two S&D member parties, will be in a position to mount a serious  
 1468 challenge to Viktor Orbán and his ruling Fidesz party in the 2022–2026  
 1469 term.

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