

DIVIDED HUNGARY

**Political polarization of
the Hungarian society**



DIVIDED HUNGARY: POLITICAL POLARIZATION OF THE HUNGARIAN SOCIETY

AUTHORS: ANDRÁS BÍRÓ-NAGY – ÁRON SZÁSZI – ATTILA VARGA

JUNE 2022

In our research, we used three methods to assess the degree of affective polarization in Hungarian society. These are 1) the emotional thermometer (how respondents feel about politicians and voters of their own and the opposite camp), 2) the social distance between political groups (how would they feel if someone from the other political camp moved into their neighborhood) and, 3) the prevalence of political stereotypes.

Both Fidesz voters and opposition voters dislike each other's politicians more than voters of the opposite camp

First, we asked respondents to indicate on an "emotional thermometer" the feelings they associate with voters and politicians of Fidesz and the united opposition. Respondents associate similarly positive feelings with voters and politicians on their own side (averaging around 70 points on a scale of 100). This indicator did not change significantly between August 2021 and April-May 2022. Both surveys, however, show that respondents associate more negative feelings with out-group politicians than with the voters of the opposite camp. This is true for both Fidesz and opposition voters.

After the 2022 elections, the level of mutual disapproval of the two major political camps has decreased, but opposition voters still have a lower opinion of the Fidesz side than vice versa.

Respondents associate fundamentally negative feelings with the opposing political side. It is noteworthy, however, that the emotional thermometer has shifted in a positive direction in

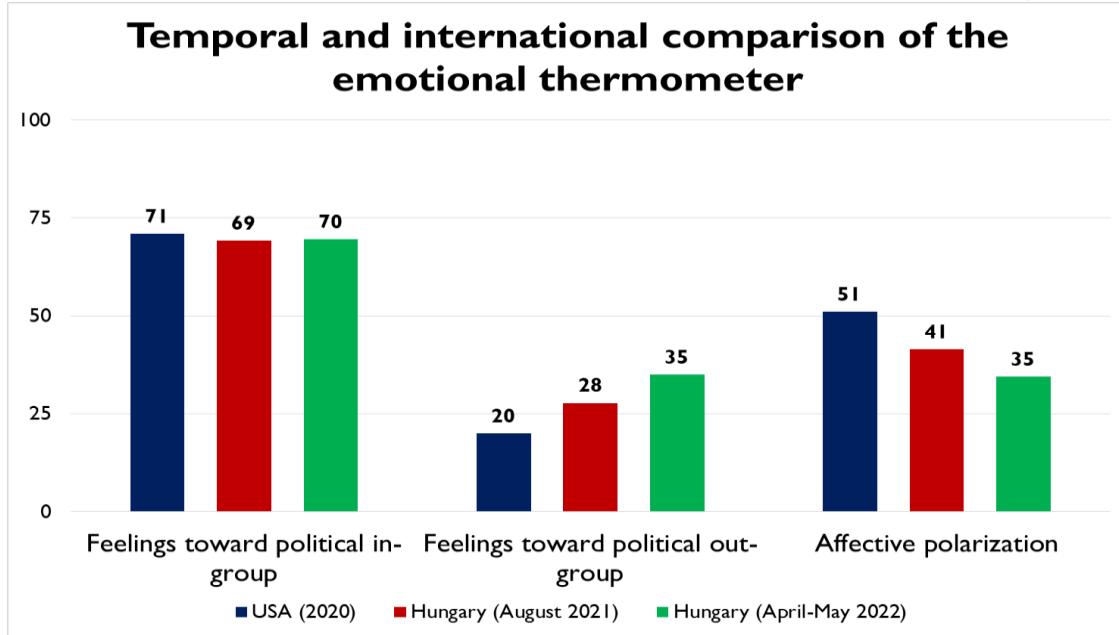
the eight months between the two surveys, both for voters on the other side (up from 31 to 38 points) and for politicians (up from 25 to 32 points). In other words, between the two surveys, the level of antagonism between the two camps decreased – presumably due to the end of the emotionally overheated election campaign and the fact that our second survey took place only a few weeks after the elections.

The antipathy between the two big camps is mutual, but opposition supporters are even colder toward the government side than Fidesz voters toward the opposition. However, a common pattern among government supporters and opponents is that they are on average as negative towards non-voters as they are towards voters of the opposing side.

Those opposition voters who remained after the election did not entirely alienated from their own side after the opposition's defeat, as the group's emotional thermometer after the 2022 election and last August both read around 70 points. Thus, confidence within the shrinking opposition camp is still holding, but those who have become seriously disillusioned have already left.

The level of affective polarization is lower in Hungary than in the USA

Because we used the American scientific methodology in our study, we were able to make a spatial comparison in addition to a temporal comparison. The US emotional polarization data is from 2020. Hungarians and Americans are similarly positive about their own camp (scores around 70 points). However, the US has a somewhat higher level of alienation towards the opposing camp (20 points) than Hungary (28 points in August 2021, 35 points in spring 2022). Hence, it can be concluded that the degree of polarization is higher in the USA (51 points difference). Hungary was 10 points behind this in 2021 (41 points). However, by April-May 2022, the decline in rejection towards the opposite camp has led to a substantial improvement in our emotional polarization index (35 points difference).



Three out of ten opposition supporter and two out of ten pro-government voter would feel bad if a voter from the opposite camp moved next door

29% of opposition voters would feel bad if a Fidesz voter moved into their neighborhood. Furthermore, one in five Fidesz voter would feel bad if a new opposition neighbour moved in. In other words, the proportion of Fidesz voters who would not be happy to have an opposition neighbour is 10 percentage points lower than the proportion of opposition voters who would be disinclined to have a Fidesz neighbour (19% vs. 29%). Among supporters of Our Homeland, far more would be happy to have opposition voters than Fidesz voters.

Despite political divisions, there is a common point: the rejection of Roma and Muslim people

Despite the significant political divisions presented in our publication, we find issues that unite the political camps. This "common ground" is the strong opposition to Roma and Muslim people.

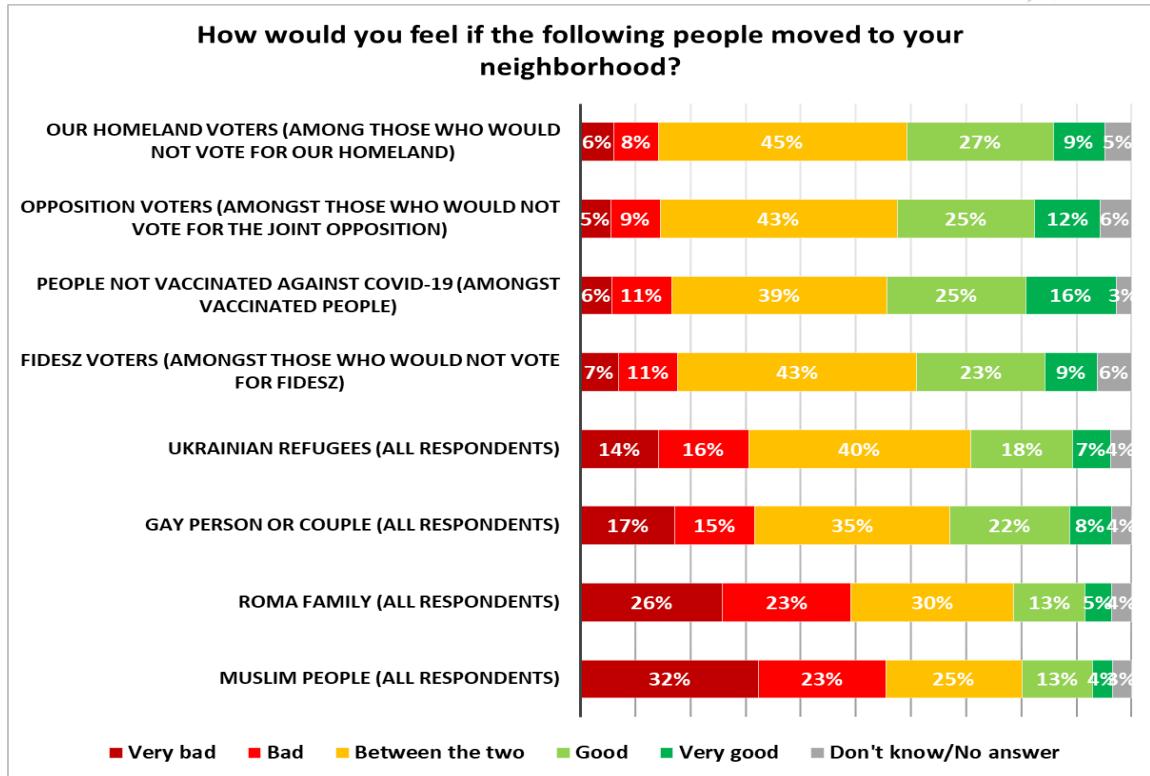
In all political groups except the non-partisan ones, there is an absolute majority of those who would feel bad if they had a Muslim neighbour. 63 percent of Fidesz voters, 60 percent of the far-right Our Homeland party's voters and 51 percent of opposition voters feel this way, but the proportion is also high among the unaffiliated (43%).

Attitudes towards Roma are similar to the above pattern. Absolute majorities of government supporters (52%), opposition supporters (53%) and Our Homeland voters (62%) are also among those who would be bothered by a Roma family in their neighborhood.

There is also a similar degree of distancing from Ukrainian refugees among Fidesz voters (31%) and opposition voters (36%). Strikingly, even Ukrainian refugees would bother more people than voters from the other major political bloc - both among government party voters (31% vs. 19%) and opposition voters (36% vs. 29%).

A notable difference between the two major political camps is that Fidesz voters are much more distanced from gay people than opposition voters (42% vs. 19%). In contrast, fewer people in the opposition would be bothered by gay person or couple than government supporters next door (24% vs. 29%).

Fidesz supporters are the least tolerant toward unvaccinated people: 21% would feel badly if they had an unvaccinated neighbor. This ratio is 13% among opposition voters, 7% Our Homeland voters 7%, and 5% among non-partisans.



The majority of government and opposition voters consider each other brainwashed

Negative stereotypes about Fidesz voters are prevalent. Nearly two thirds (63%) of opposition supporters thought Fidesz voters were brainwashed. Almost half of Our Homeland voters (47%) and only a quarter of politically unaffiliated Hungarians (26%) thought the same. A similar pattern emerged for the other questions concerning perceived traits of the political groups.

Opposition voters were the most negative towards Fidesz voters, Our Homeland supporters were somewhat less negative, while those without a party were the least judgmental of government party members.

According to those who did not support the opposition alliance, opposition voters are also best described by negative adjectives. However, in their case, one trait did not stand out: more than a third of respondents (36%-36%-36%) thought that opposition voters were brainwashed, aggressive and hypocritical. Fewer thought the opposite: 21% said they were not brainwashed, 19% said they were not aggressive and 16% said they were not hypocritical. Slightly more than a quarter of non-opposition respondents see the supporters of the six-party alliance as intelligent (27%), well-meaning (26%) and open-minded (25%).

Affective polarization is more common among older people, Budapest residents and the more politically committed

Our multivariate analyses show that the polarization score (+6 points) is significantly higher among opposition voters than among Fidesz voters, as measured by the acceptance of negative political stereotypes about the opposing camp. Left-right self-identification had a significant effect on the polarization measured by the emotional thermometer: left-wingers (+35 points), moderate left-wingers (+18 points) and right-wingers (+22 points) were all much more polarized, compared to centrist respondents. Political stereotypes were also more prevalent among politically committed left and right (+6 and +5.5 points). Political interest was also associated with higher levels of polarization. Women had a lower social distance from the other political side (-6 points). Age had a significant effect on several indicators. Compared to young adults, respondents aged 50-59 are more polarised (social distance +12 points) as well as respondents over 60 (social distance +9 points, stereotypes +5 points). Affective polarization is more specific to Budapest. People in the capital city are significantly more negative towards members of the political opposition than people in the villages, measured by both the emotional thermometer (+10 points) and social distance (+8 points).

Majority of Hungarians self-identify as right-wing and conservative

Hungarian society is dominated by those who consider themselves right-wing (44%), while a quarter of respondents classifying themselves as left-wing (22%) and centrist (27%). One in ten Hungarians (10%) consider themselves to be on the far-left, while one in four (24%) consider themselves to be on far-right poles of the political spectrum. In other words, a third of Hungarians (34%) are politically extreme, indicating a high level of ideological polarization. However, comparing our data to previous researches, it became clear that ideological polarization was stronger in 2010 than in 2022.

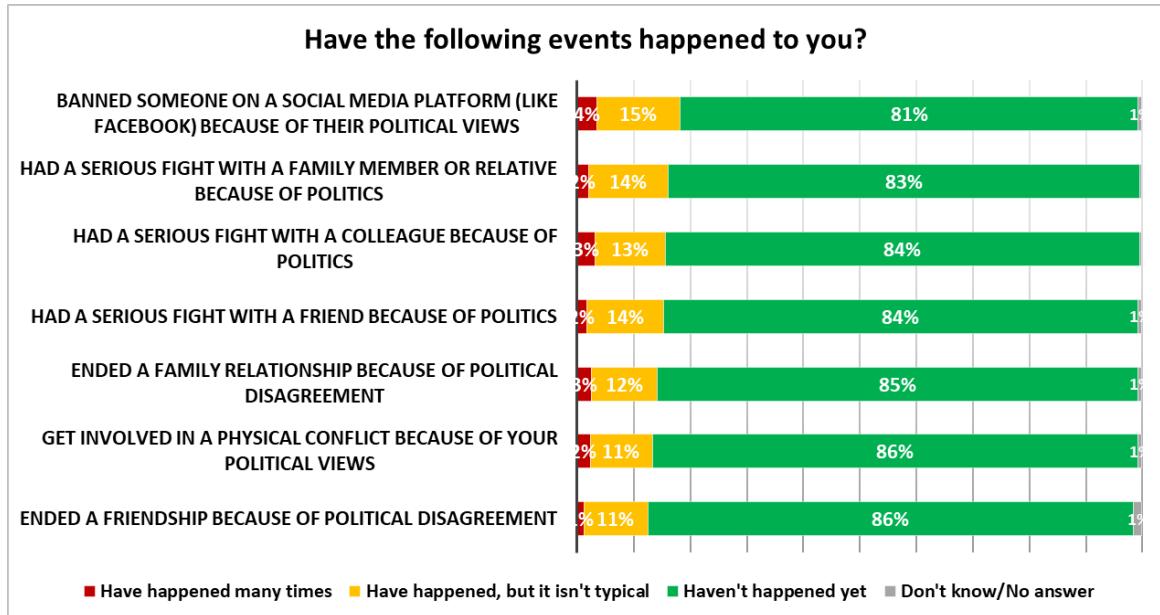
Unsurprisingly, three quarters of governing party voters (77%) consider themselves right-wing and 16% centrist (4% think they are left-wing). In contrast, 59% of the voters of the joint opposition think of themselves as left-wing, while a quarter hold a centrist position (24%). 15% of opposition voters consider themselves right-wing – a significant proportion of them are Jobbik voters. Supporters of the far-right Our Homeland can be considered the most complex group: while the majority of them have a right-wing (42%) or centrist (28%) views, there is also a significant proportion of those who refer to themselves as left-wing (25%). An interesting detail is that it is not the supporters of Our Homeland, but the Fidesz voters who have the highest proportion of far-right voters.

A quarter of Hungarians (25%) consider themselves liberal, while 41% consider themselves conservative. 29% of respondents rate themselves as being in the middle. Around a quarter of Hungarians put themselves at either end of the liberal-conservative scale (27%).

One in six Hungarians have had a relationship ruined by politics

We also looked at how political polarization manifests itself in the everyday lives of Hungarians. The most frequent political conflicts are related to social media: one in five Hungarians (19%) have banned someone on Facebook or some other platform because of their political opinions. 16-16-16% of Hungarians have had a serious argument with a family member,

co-worker or friend about politics. A similar number have broken off a relationship with a family member because of politics (15%), while slightly fewer ended friendships over politics (12%). Worryingly, more than a tenth of Hungarians (13%) have been in physical conflict over political disagreements.



Seven in ten vote for the same as their partner

Seven in ten (68%) of those living in a relationship have cast the ballot the same way as their partner in the 2022 general election. 16 percentage said they voted for a different party than their partner, and a further 16 percentage reported that they or their partner did not vote. More Fidesz supporters had the same political preference as their partner (82%) than opposition voters (75%).

Half of opposition voters and a third of Fidesz voters cannot imagine being in a romantic relationship with a voter from the other political camp

Half of the opposition voters can imagine getting romantically involved with a Fidesz voter, while the other half rejects the idea (45% vs. 44%). Among supporters of Our Homeland, an absolute majority would not have a problem with dating a Fidesz voter (55% vs. 31%). Relative majority of non-affiliated voters would be open to a Fidesz supporter (45%), while far fewer of them would reject government supporters outright (27%).

A majority of Fidesz voters (58%) could imagine a romantic relationship with an opposition supporter. Only 29% of government party voters could not imagine it. There is also a large majority of respondents open to opposition voters among supporters of Our Homeland (62% vs. 25%) and among those without a party affiliation (56% vs. 20%).

62% of Fidesz supporters can imagine dating with Our Homeland voters, while 25% consider this out of the question. 57% of opposition supporters would be open to Our Homeland voters, while 34% would reject the voters of the far-right party.

In principle, therefore, the majority of Hungarians are open to romantic relationships with members of the opposite camp, but in practice it is mostly like-minded people who come together, or perhaps aligning their political preferences with each other later.

Parallel realities in the perception of the economy

Another important dimension of political polarization is that members of different political camps begin to perceive the processes around them in very different ways. Hungarians perceive the country's economic situation differently depending on which political camp they support. While more than two thirds (76%) of Fidesz voters believe that the economic situation has not changed or has improved, opposition voters are the mostly negative (70% say the economic indicators have worsened). Nearly two thirds (64%) of Our Homeland

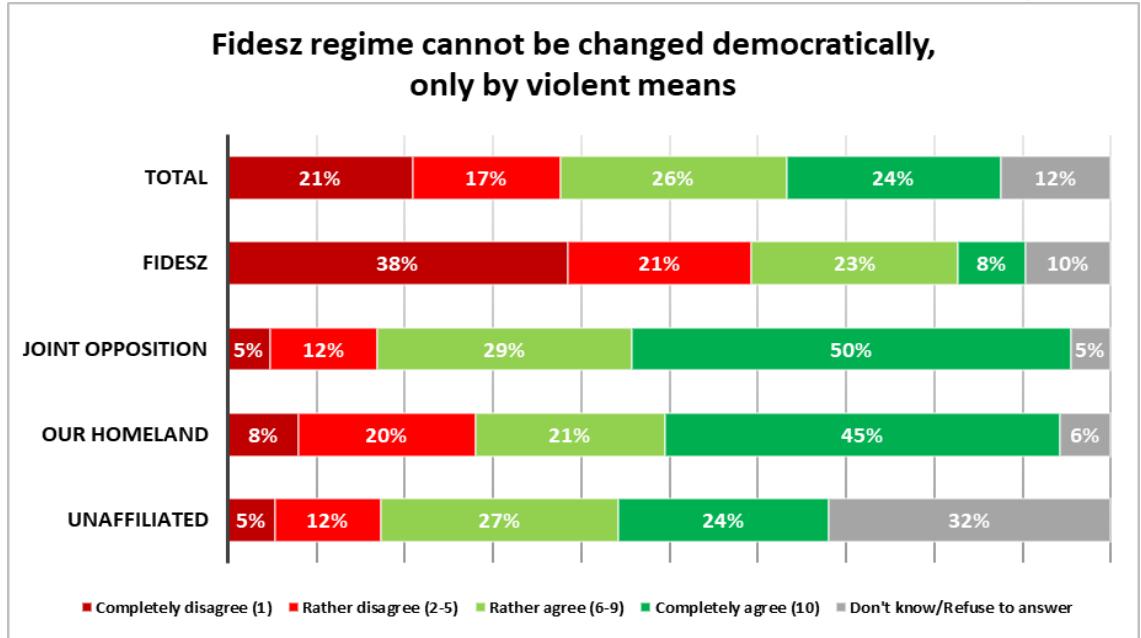
supporters and 57% of non-party voters share the negative view. Among the opposition camp (7%), supporters of the Our Homeland Movement (9%) and those with no party affiliation (9%), the proportion of those who see an improvement is less than 10%.

In addition to assessing the general economic situation, we also asked respondents to rate their own household's financial situation in the light of the past six months. While three quarters (73%) of those who supported the governing parties experienced stagnation and only 18% a deterioration, 57% of those who voted for the opposition joint list said that their household's financial situation had deteriorated over the past six months and only 41% said that there had been no change. The opposing political camps also have a different view of their own financial situation over the next year. Government party voters mainly expect an improvement (26%) or stagnation (54%) in the coming year, while pessimists are in the majority among opposition voters (57%) and supporters of Our Homeland (57%).

Eight out of ten opposition voters believe that Fidesz can no longer be democratically replaced

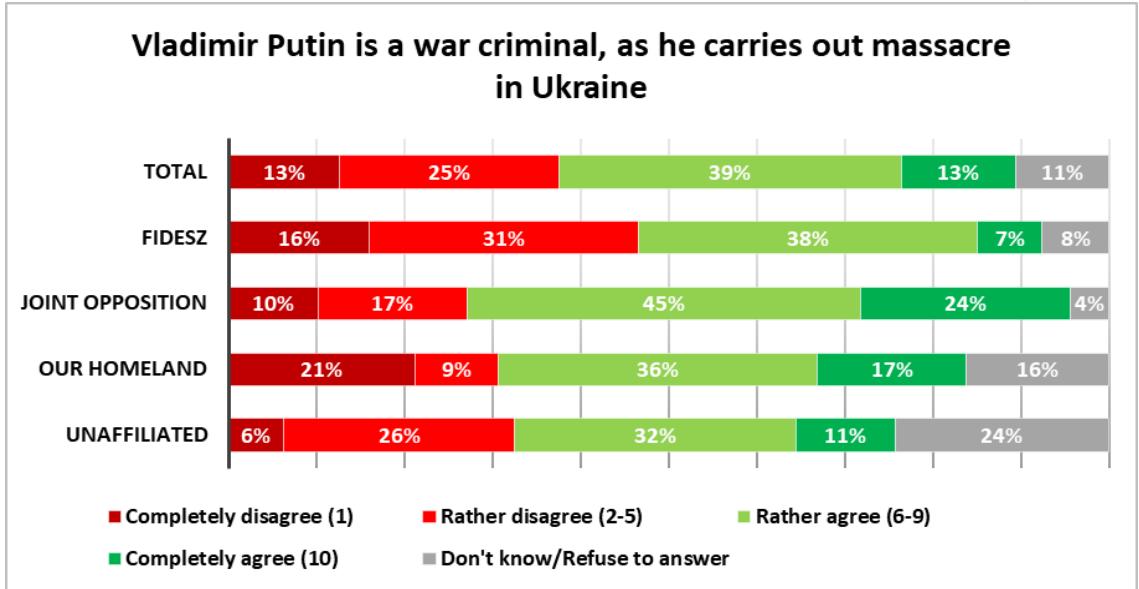
Following the 2022 parliamentary elections, a majority of Hungarians (58%) said that elections in Hungary were free and fair. A third of Hungarians (35%) thought the opposite. 79% of voters who voted for the governing Fidesz party - compared to 36% of those who voted for the opposition list - considered the Hungarian elections as free and fair.

Our survey, conducted one month after the 2022 elections, shows that 50% of Hungarians agree that Fidesz can no longer be democratically replaced, while only 38% think it is still possible. The deep apathy among opposition voters is reflected in the fact that 79% of those who support the opposition's joint list see no chance of replacing Fidesz democratically after the 2022 elections. Two-thirds of Our Homeland voters (66%) and half of non-affiliated Hungarians (51%), and even a third of Fidesz voters share this view.



Hungarians are also strongly divided by the Russian-Ukrainian war

The final two questions of the survey asked how Hungarians feel about the Russian-Ukrainian war. Half of Hungarians (52%) agree with the statement that Vladimir Putin is a war criminal because he is carrying out a massacre in Ukraine, but it is important to point out that 38% of respondents do not think this is the case. Among pro-government voters, there is a relative majority of those who believe that Vladimir Putin should not be considered a war criminal (48%), but still many Fidesz voters condemn the Russian president (45%). In contrast, two thirds of opposition voters (69%) condemn Putin for the Russo-Ukrainian war, but one in four opposition voters (27%) disagree that the Russians would carry out genocide in Ukraine. In the camp of the Our Homeland supporters, the condemnatory attitude is dominant: 53% of voters of the far-right party believe Putin is a war criminal (while 30% disagree with this statement).



We also looked at how Hungarians feel about the Russian narrative of the war. We asked respondents whether they agree with that “Russian attacked Ukraine as a response to the genocide of ethnic Russians by Ukrainians”. Hungarians are strongly divided on the issue: while 45% of respondents rejected this narrative, 42% of respondents said genocide against the Russians was the cause of the war. Although the opposing political camps evaluate the claim differently, it is clear that there is a significant proportion of both pro- and non-government voters who tend to agree with the Russian narrative. A relative majority of Fidesz voters (49%) believe that the Ukrainians committed genocide against the Russians and that this was the reason for the Russian-Ukrainian war, while among opposition voters the majority opinion is more likely to reject this narrative (52%).