

HUNGARY'S ANXIETY MAP 2021



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The goal of the joint research by Policy Solutions and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung was to examine what types of anxieties and fears characterise Hungarian society in 2021. Our research provides us with an overview of the issues that Hungarians tend to worry about in their personal lives; the national problems that concern them the most; as well as the global risks that they think are paramount today. In compiling this analysis of the problems that weigh heavily on the minds of Hungarians today, we also sought to get a better understanding of how they envision the future of their country, society and immediate environment 10 years hence.

We used a survey conducted with the help of our partner, Závecz Research, between 2-11 March 2021 as the basis for our analysis. The survey was based on personal interviews with 1,000 Hungarians who made up a representative sample of Hungarian society based on age, gender, educational attainment and the type of municipality they live in.

In a 10-year perspective, Hungarians tend to be optimistic

We began our survey by asking Hungarians what their long-term expectations are concerning their personal lives, the future of Hungary and the European Union, respectively. Optimists made up a relative majority of respondents on all three questions (between 38%-44%), while a pessimistic outlook was characteristic of roughly a third of Hungarians (32%-36%). At the same time, however, 22%-26% of respondents had no immediate answer to this question. When it came to their assessment of the ten-year trajectory of Hungary's future, 44% of respondents said that the situation would improve; the share of those who were optimistic about their personal prospects was very similar (42%), while with respect to the EU almost every four in ten respondents (38%) said that the coming decade would bring positive changes.

The young, more educated and pro-government segments of the public tend to be more optimistic than the average

Moving from the younger cohorts to the older ones, we found lower numbers of respondents who are optimistic about their own future. While over half of those under 30 (53%) are optimistic about their future prospects, in the cohort aged 40-50 this share was only 43% and among those over 60 it dropped to a fewer than a third (31%).

A breakdown of the responses by educational attainment also reflected a striking pattern. An absolute majority of respondents who have completed secondary school (50%) or a university degree (55%) professed optimism about the future. By contrast, the share of optimists among those who have only elementary education or vocational school training was ca. 20 points lower (34% and 30%, respectively), while the share of pessimistic responses was higher in both cohorts (38% and 37%, respectively). Furthermore, among those with lower educational attainment, the share of respondents who expect Hungary's situation to deteriorate was also much higher. Those with no more than elementary education were roughly evenly divided between pessimists (36%) and optimists (38%), while among those with vocational training pessimists (42%) were more common than optimists (32%). Among those with completed secondary education, by contrast, the share of optimists far outweighs that of pessimists (31% vs. 50%) and this is even more true of those with university degrees (26% vs. 56%).

Political affiliation clearly had an impact on how positively people saw their personal prospects. The share of respondents who expected their future to improve was far higher among government party supporters (59%) than among opposition voters (35%), while undecided voters proved most pessimistic in terms of their expectations of their personal future (30%).

Those who were negatively affected by the Covid-19 crisis also took a dimmer view of their long-term future

Based on a multivariate analysis, we also found a significant relationship between the respondents' economic experience and their expectations concerning the future. We compared those who reported that their financial situation had either deteriorated or improved during the past year to those who did not experience any changes in their financial situation. Those who said that their financial situation had gotten worse recently were also 11 percentage points more likely to be pessimistic about their future prospects over the next decade. At the same time, the few

respondents who reported that their financial situation had improved during the last year were 21 percentage points less likely to be pessimistic.

Pessimism about their personal future was most typical of elderly respondents (they were 25 percentage points more likely to take a dim view of their future). The elderly were also more likely to have a gloomy outlook when it came to the prospects facing Hungary and the European Union, although in this case the gap between pessimists and optimists was not as significant (14 points in the context of Hungary and 18 points in the context of the EU).

The most important personal anxieties: Fear for our loved ones, illnesses, vulnerability and financial insecurity

In the next stage of our research we sought to ascertain what kind of personal fears Hungarians tend to harbour. We read 12 different statements to the respondents and asked them to tell us how much each elicited fear in them. They were asked to rate each statement on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant that the given statement does not at all elicit fear in them, while a 5 meant that it gives rise to intense anxiety.

The most widespread personal fear in Hungarian society is that something bad might befall our loved ones: close to two-thirds (63%) of our respondents harboured massive fears about that. The second-most prevalent fear was that of getting sick and being hospitalised (50%). The third in the ranking of personal fears was that of vulnerability, which is something that 48% are concerned about. The most widespread economic fear – namely the worry about a potential inability to pay the bills for financial reasons – lagged barely behind (47%).

After the four most commonly shared fears, there is a big gap in terms of pervasiveness of the remaining fears: only 39% of respondents are afraid of a runaway world, while 31% fear immigration and 30% fear indebtedness. A quarter of respondents are anxious about a family member emigrating or becoming the victim of a violent attack (24%-24%). At the end of the list is the fear of becoming homeless, a relationship falling apart, the search for a partner proving futile and workplace discrimination (18%-19% are afraid of these).

Those with lower education attainment and older respondents are more afraid of falling ill

The age-based distribution of the fear of significant health problems revealed a striking pattern. Only 37% of those under 30 are concerned about being hospitalised, while in the middle-aged generations the respective figures were 40%, 47% and 50%, and amongst the oldest cohort it was even higher at 69%. Of the various age-groups, it was those over 60 who were especially likely (68%) to say that they were afraid of a loved one falling ill. In the younger cohorts, the corresponding ratio was somewhat lower, but it was still high in every group of this segment (58%-61%).

Looking at the distribution of numbers based on education, we find that as we move towards the segments with lower educational attainment, the respondents in the respective cohorts were more likely to be anxious about the possibility of falling ill. Fewer than half of the respondents who had at least a secondary school degree shared this fear (44% of those with university degrees and 49% of those with high school degrees), while among those with no more than elementary education six out of ten professed either slight or massive fears of being afflicted with a serious illness.

Financial fears tend to be more prevalent among opposition, undecided and younger voters

The differences between various political groups were especially massive when it came to their respective assessments of the issue of financial insecurity. While only 37% of pro-government respondents harboured fears of being unable to pay their bills, more than half of all opposition and undecided voters had such fears (53% and 50%, respectively). Even if we control for the impact of the respondents' demographic characteristics and their assessment of their financial situation, these differences were significant.

A breakdown of the responses by age shows that the fear of financial insecurity was especially prevalent in the age groups under 40 (50%-51%). At the same time, middle-aged respondents lagged barely behind, with 45% and 48% of respondents in these age groups professing slight or strong fears about potential financial distress. Those over 60 were the least likely to share this particular fear, although it was still fairly widespread among them (43%). Looking at the responses based on educational attainment, those with university degrees were least likely to be plagued by the idea of financial insecurity (33% shared such concerns). Among the groups with lower educational attainment, the proportion of those who were afraid of major financial difficulties was 14-19 percentage points higher (47%-52%).

The respondents' retrospective assessment of their financial situation also significantly correlated with their fear about future financial difficulties. Controlling for the impact of demographic and political variables, those who saw their financial situation deteriorate in the past year were 13 percentage points more likely to harbour such fears than those who did not experience any changes in their financial circumstances.

It is striking that relatively few urban respondents (25% in small towns and 29% in major urban areas) in 2021 said that they were afraid of people from different cultural backgrounds/immigrants moving in nearby. It was only in villages, by contrast, that an exceedingly high proportion of respondents (41%) said that they were scared of this happening.

How the personal fears are interconnected

We also examined how the intensity of individual fears might be connected. By looking at the standout correlation values we can identify a few clearly distinct fear groups. The high correlation between the two most widespread types of fears, to wit the anxieties concerning our loved ones and the fears about falling ill and being hospitalised, are worth noting. Presumably, both types of fears are rooted in the **health-related concerns stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic**. It is hardly surprising that these two types of fears were at the top of the list we discussed above.

The correlation between the various **types of economic fears** was also striking. Financial security, indebtedness, the loss of one's home, and the somewhat more general fear of vulnerability significantly correlated with one another. The fear of discrimination, in turn, significantly correlates with the fear of losing one's home.

Even more pronounced is the relationship between the fear of **loneliness and social isolation**. The fears of staying single, emigrating family members, losing one's home and discrimination in school or at work are strongly correlated.

A fourth group of fears could be identified as fears involving a **sense of physical threat**. The fear about becoming the victim of a violent crime significantly correlates with a variety of other fears. Among the latter, the fear of losing one's home, discrimination and immigrants stand out.

Mapping Hungary's problems in 2021: Cost of living, low salaries, healthcare

In the next block of our research we surveyed what issues Hungarians consider as the most important problems. We asked respondents to select the three most significant issues among the 14 problems in Hungary we listed. The depth of the crisis that has emerged over the past year was reflected in the fact that four of the five most frequently-mentioned problems were associated with financial/subsistence issues. The high cost of living was mentioned most often, with 55% citing this as a problem. The issue of low pay did not lag far behind, with 52% mentioning it. The state of healthcare rounded out the top three (42%).

In fourth place – lagging well behind the first three problems – was the issue of inequality: it was selected by fewer than a third of all respondents (29%). Over a fifth all respondents (23%) cited low pensions, which was followed by the issues of corruption (16%), being at the mercy of one's employers (14%) and education (13%). Ten percent of respondents mentioned the weak environmental and climate protection efforts, high housing prices, immigration, and the quality of democracy. The least frequently mentioned problems were the difficulties of living in small municipalities (8%) and emigration (7%).

When it comes to issues involving financial subsistence, the breakdown of the answers based on educational attainment highlights a pattern of inequality. Six out of ten respondents in the cohort with the lowest educational attainment mentioned this problem. In the more educated groups, the frequency of mentions was 6-7 percentage points lower, although it was still high at over 50%. With respect to the state of healthcare, we found significant differences between the various age groups. While a quarter (26%) of those under 30 stressed this problem, in the middle-aged groups the share of those concerned about healthcare rose to 39-30%, and it went up to 53% in the oldest cohort.

Fidesz voters, opposition voters and undecideds mentioned the same five issues as the most important problems

We also juxtaposed the rankings of various problems in the subsamples of government party, opposition and undecided voters, respectively. The various political segments saw the same five problems as the top issues of concern, and their respective rankings of the individual issues within the Top 5 were virtually identical, too. The only difference was that the opposition voters' ranking of the first two problems (cost of living and pay) was reversed as compared to the two other groups (government party supporters and undecideds).

As we move down the list to the less frequently mentioned problems, we find more significant differences. Unlike in the case of the average responses of the total representative sample of the Hungarian public, among pro-government respondents corruption was not the sixth most-frequently mentioned problem; instead, they cited weak environmental measures as the most important concern outside the top five (17% mentioned the environment, a rate that was six points higher than in the total sample). They were also more likely to mention immigration than the average respondents (16%, +6 points), while emigration, too, was more important to Fidesz voters (11%, +4

points). Education, in turn, was slightly less likely to concern government party supporters (10%, -3 points), while in terms of their assessment of the impact of problems stemming from housing prices and rural life, they did not diverge significantly from the average. At the same time, it is hardly surprising that concerns regarding corruption (6%, -10 points) and the quality of democracy (6%, -3 points) was relegated to the end of the list among government party supporters.

Unlike government party supporters, opposition voters ranked corruption as the sixth most prominent concern, with a high ratio of mentions (at 23%, they were 7 points more likely to mention it than all respondents). Opposition voters were also more likely than the average to cite the low quality of education (18%, +5 points) and the declining quality of democracy in Hungary (13%, +4 points) as problems.

Among the undecided voters, the least frequently mentioned problems were two issues, one of which is important for the government while the other is stressed by the opposition: migration and the quality of democracy, respectively. Immigration was mentioned by only 4% of undecided respondents, six points below the average value of the public at large and 11 points below the rate of Fidesz respondents. Problems with the quality of democracy concerned only 5% of undecided voters, five points less than the average and nine percent below the rate of mentions among opposition supporters.

The main concerns about Hungary's future: The deterioration of the healthcare system, rising inequality and growing poverty

We also surveyed how various negative developments concerning the country's future evoke fears in Hungarians. Just as in the context of Hungarians' perceptions about their current problems, their fears about the future also tend to centre on economic issues. However, in this section of the survey people were most likely to express concerns about the state of healthcare. Over two-thirds share the three most common types of fears: worries about the decline of the healthcare system (70%); increasing inequality (67%) and people falling into poverty (66%). The fear that there will not be sufficient money to cover the pensions of the next generation lag only slightly behind (63%).

Over half of the respondents said they were afraid that the state of the environment will deteriorate further (55%), and they are also anxious about the possibility that people will not be able to buy homes (52%). Almost half of the respondents (46%) said they are concerned about the decline in the quality of education. Several years after the government's intense anti-immigration campaign, four out of ten respondents said they were afraid that a growing number of immigrants would come to Hungary in the future. The share of those who expressed the concern that Hungary would become depopulated was only slightly below that figure (38%), and the share of those who are anxious about a potential "Huxit" – in other words Hungary's departure from the EU – was also just a few points lower (36%).

Those who had experienced a financial setback in the past year were more likely to share a significant portion of these fears than those whose financial situation was unchanged. In the meanwhile, those who had seen their financial circumstances improve, by contrast, were significantly less likely to express fears concerning most of the issues listed here than those whose financial circumstances were unchanged.

Only half of the government supporters (52%) shared the otherwise widespread concern that Hungarians are growing increasingly poor. By contrast, seven out of ten (71%) undecided voters and three-quarters of opposition supporters (75%) found that this is a cause for concern. The impact of political preferences was also massive in the context of the respondents' view of growing socio-economic inequality. Over half (53%) of government party supporters were worried about

inequality, while far higher proportions of opposition voters (77%) and undecideds (72%) felt that way. Those with university degrees were less likely to be concerned about inequality and more likely to be anxious about environmental destruction, while the respondents who had no more than elementary education were less concerned about the environment.

Global dangers according to Hungarians: New pandemics, economic crisis, climate catastrophe, migration

One year after the Covid-19 epidemic exploded into public consciousness, the fear of similar pandemics sweeping the world clearly tops the ranking of Hungarians' concerns when it comes to global challenges. A significant majority (59%) of respondents ranked the appearance of new infectious diseases among the three top global challenges (with 28% mentioning it as their first concern), with the potential prospect of a global economic crisis lagging significantly behind as the second most often-mentioned concern (with 38% of mentions overall and 12% designating it as their foremost concern). A third of Hungarians (33%) mentioned the climate crisis as one of the most potent global threats (with 10% ranking it first) and 30% indicated that migration was one of the most important challenges (and 11% saying chose it as their top concern).

Party preference and educational attainment had no significant impact on how likely respondents were to be anxious about new pandemics, but age clearly had a substantial influence on the respondents' perception of this issue. Elderly respondents were far more likely to be afraid of new infectious diseases cropping up; those between 18-29 (55%) and 30-39 (51%) years were least likely to mention this as a major concern, while among those over 60 two-thirds of respondents designated it as such.

Government party supporters (36%) and opposition voters (34%) are equally likely to be afraid of a climate catastrophe. If we also take educational attainment into account, however, we find that these correlate significantly with the likelihood of being concerned about the climate; the more educated social cohorts are more likely to worry about the climate crisis. While only 28% of those with no more than elementary education worry about climate change, among those with university degrees 45% said they harboured such fears.

As expected, we found substantial differences between the respective views of government party supporters and opposition voters about global migration. While 40% of Fidesz-KDNP supporters mentioned mass migration as one of the top three global challenges, only a quarter of opposition voters agreed (25%). Among undecideds, the ratio of those who are fearful about this was lower still at 23%, which indicates that the governing parties were not as successful in 2021 as previously in using the migration issue to mobilise voters who have no partisan affiliation.

On the whole, we found that although Hungarians still have strong memories of the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 migration crisis, and they are also well aware of the green revolution that has been ongoing in the western world since the second half of the past decade, the Covid-19 pandemic that began in 2020 has substantially transformed the global outlook of Hungarian society. The fear of infectious diseases and of the spread of new viruses is exceedingly high in Hungarian society. Although once the epidemic is actually scaled back, this particular anxiety is likely to ease, due to the economic losses wrought by Covid-19 as well as the seclusion and grief accompanying the protracted lockdown, the fear of new pandemics is likely to play a major role in Hungarian society for a long time to come.

The majority of Hungarians are not afraid of the dangers of digitalisation

The majority of Hungarian society is not afraid that automation will lead to mass unemployment in the future: 41% of respondents said that robots will take away the work of humans, while 56% said that this is not a realistic danger. While close to two-thirds (64%) also disagreed with the proposition that artificial intelligence-controlled systems will turn on humanity in the future, 29% said that this apocalyptic scenario could become reality. On this topic, education clearly correlated with the distribution of responses – the more educated strata were less likely to fear that robots will harm humanity in the future. However, Hungarian society is very divided on the question of how dangerous it would be if our digital data end up in the hands of parties who are not authorised to handle it. Exactly half of Hungarians are afraid that their personal data will be abused online, while 48% are not concerned about this threat.

Party affiliation did not correlate with the respondents' opinions about digitalisation, but when looking at the respondents' age, we found that those in their thirties were most likely to be anxious about the dangers of digitalisation on all three questions we queried the respondents about. At the same time, it is disconcerting that those in the oldest segments – who are on average least likely to be familiar with the internet – were most likely to say that they felt safe online. A look at the responses by educational attainment also does not seem reassuring, for the Hungarians with lowest educational attainment – those with no more than eight years of elementary education – were least likely (42%) to be concerned that their personal information might be abused, even though they are arguably more likely to become the victims of internet fraud than their more educated peers.

With regard to the potential ramifications of digital progress, we found that Hungarians' sense of danger does not seem particularly pronounced. The majority of Hungarians underestimate the consequences of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and of increasing automation in the economy, while roughly half of the public also professed to be unperturbed about the issue of data protection/security.