

# **THE POLITICAL VALUES OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REGION**

POLICY SOLUTIONS 

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
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# **THE POLITICAL VALUES OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION IN THE CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN REGION**

The results of the Millennial Dialogue international  
youth research in regional comparison



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# 1 | Introduction: What is the Millennial Dialogue?

In the last decade, a growing number of democratic countries around the world faced two major challenges: decreasing voter turnout in elections and the shrinking membership of mainstream political parties. **The Millennial Generation, also known as Generation Y or Gen Y – that is youths born between 1980 and 2000, who are between the ages of 15-35 today –, which has turned its back on politics, is massively implicated in both processes.**

This generation is comfortable with the digital world and with social networks, and is at ease when it comes to social media; it grew up surrounded by the various technologies associated with these. Print newspapers and serious news analysis on television played a minor role in the political socialisation of this generation, and the tabloidisation of politics and the dumbing down of information rendered politics more accessible, but at the same time also more repulsive, to them.

**This is also the generation that is mired in an ever tougher struggle for work, and which has first-hand experience with the social impact of economic austerity.** And while it enjoys the fruits of continuous technological progress, it also experiences massive uncertainty as a result of the fact that we live in the age of unpredictability.

All this probably played a major role in Millennial Generation's disenchantment with mainstream politics, and the Occupy movement or the Spanish Indignados movement are striking manifestations of this sentiment. But it was the same sentiment that led to a surge in the support of anti-capitalist leftwing parties in southern Europe and to the rise in the support of eastern European far-right parties.

**The goal of the Millennial Dialogue project is to better understand Millennial Generation with the help of new opinion survey methods applied in numerous countries of the world.** The programme was launched by the **Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS)** and by the US-based **Global Progress**, and it also featured the help of **AudienceNet**, a public opinion polling company. The research relied on quantitative and qualitative methods alike. A 1,000 young respondents between the ages of 15 and 34 filled out an online survey in each country. The samples of respondents were representative for the general population in their generation in terms of their age distribution, household income and education. In the next stage, the online qualitative survey, performed by AudienceNet, asked 40 persons in each country, selected from among those who had participated in the first survey, to participate in a moderated discussion about their political attitudes, which spanned several days. This was thus an online focus group of sorts.

**The Hungarian and central and eastern European (to wit Austrian, Polish and Bulgarian) surveys were analysed by Policy Solutions, and we are pleased to present the results to our esteemed readers.**



## 2 | **Millennial Generation in Central and Eastern Europe**

**I**n many respects, the Millennial Generation faces very similar processes in the various countries of central and eastern Europe: growing economies burdened by increasing socio-economic inequality; easier communication and simpler mobility as a result of technology, but also a rapidly accelerating runaway world; greater flexibility in the labour market as a result of vast transformations in the traditional workplace, but also greater vulnerability and uncertainty.

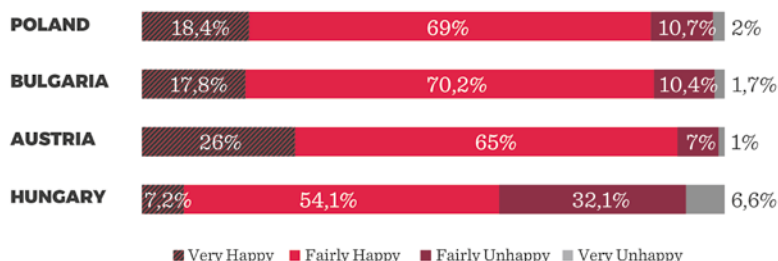
**What we sought to find out was how the generation aged 15-34 in four central and eastern European countries - which are similar in many respects but nevertheless differ with respect to their histories and levels of development - feel about and view public life, politics and the world in general.** Austria, the most developed country in the region, was interesting as the sole non-post-communist country in the sample. Bulgaria was relevant as the European Union's poorest member state whose fate is now closely intertwined with the western countries and western European culture for the first time in its history. Hungary has gone from being one of the most promising and most quickly developing countries in the region to falling behind - into one of the last spots - first in terms of its economic trajectory, and then also in terms of democratic values. Last but not least, there is Poland,

the most populous country in central and eastern Europe, which has experienced a singular economic boom in recent years that even the world financial crisis could not disrupt. **In the following we will thus compare the results of the Austrian, Bulgarian, Hungarian and Polish segments of the Millennial Dialogue research, and use this to sketch the similarities and differences between the Millennial Generation of these four countries.**

## **2.1. Young people's vision of the future**

**While in Austria, Bulgaria and Poland nine out of ten respondents submitted that they were pleased with their lives, among their Hungarian counterparts this applied only to six out of ten.** Moreover, in Hungary the ratio of those who were very satisfied was a mere 7%, while in Austria a quarter of respondents selected this response, and even in Poland and Bulgaria nearly a fifth are very pleased with their current situation. The ratio of those who are unhappy with their lives is three times as high in Hungary as in Poland and Bulgaria, and nearly five times higher than in Austria. Thus youth in Hungary tend to be considerably less satisfied with their current situation in life than their regional counterparts.

## TAKING ALL THINGS INTO CONSIDERATION, HOW HAPPY ARE YOU WITH YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW?

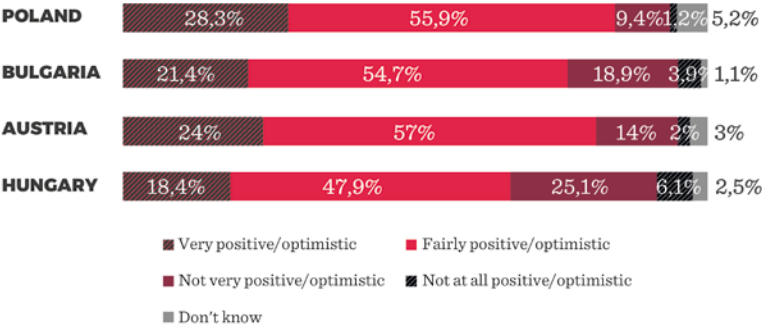


**Another observation that characterises Hungary in particular is that as age increases, respondents reported significantly lower levels of life satisfaction.** In the other three countries there was no substantial difference between respondents under 25 and those who were older, **but in Hungary a greater sense of disenchantment prevailed among those over 25: their level of happiness was 15 points below those in the age group 15-24.**

Depending on the country, the financial situation of youths tends to have a very different impact on their life satisfaction. **In the richer countries the gap between the happiness levels of youths with higher and lower incomes was relatively smaller, while in the poor countries this gap was more substantial.** In Austria there was no major difference: Those in the lowest third in terms of income reported just as high levels of satisfaction as the richest third, and in Poland, too, the difference was only five points in favour of the rich. In Bulgaria, however, the proportion of dissatisfied youths among those

with lower incomes was 14 percentage points higher than among their more affluent counterparts, though even in that country a mere fourth ultimately indicated being dissatisfied with their situation. In Hungary the respective financial situation of individual respondents had the greatest impact on satisfaction, even though this was also the country with the lowest level of satisfaction overall. The gap between those in the highest and lowest income brackets was 34 percentage points, which makes the low-income Hungarians the most dissatisfied among all the groups interviewed.

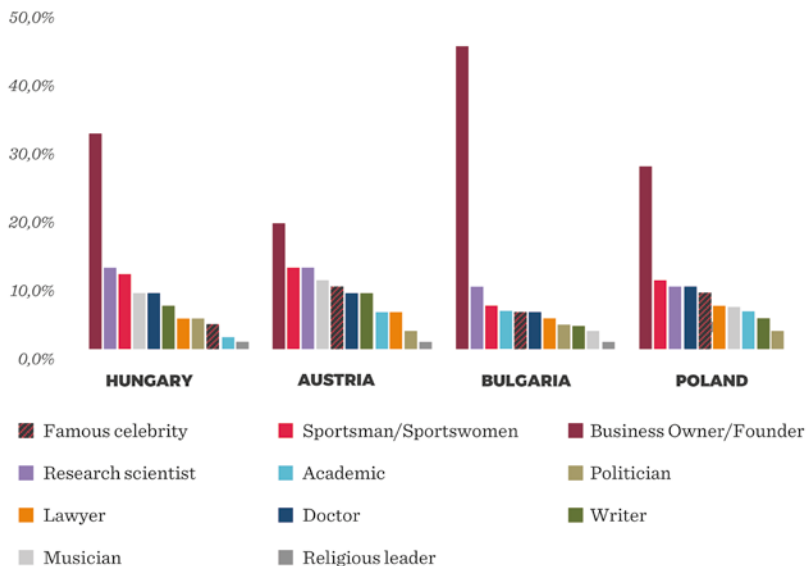
**LOOKING TO THE FUTURE AND THE THINGS YOU MIGHT LIKE TO DO AND ACHIEVE IN LIFE, HOW POSITIVE/OPTIMISTIC ARE YOU THAT YOU WILL GET WHAT YOU HOPE FOR?**



A similar tendency prevailed with respect to how these youths view their future prospects. **On the whole, all youths in the region tend to take a favourable view of their opportunities and plans for the future,** but in Hungary the optimism of those aged 15-34 is considerably more subdued than in the case of youths in the other three EU member states.

**Polish youths have the most optimistic assessment of their future prospects (84% share a positive outlook), followed by Austria,** where four out of five young people tend to look ahead optimistically. In Bulgaria, this ratio stands at 75%, and Hungary comes in last with two-thirds of all respondents indicating confidence in the future. Only in Hungary and Bulgaria did respondents' financial situation have a substantial impact on their confidence in the future. Among those with high incomes, 80% and 85%, respectively, took a favourable view of their future prospects, while among those with low incomes this share dropped to 57% and 60%, respectively. There was thus a 23-25% gap between the confidence levels of high and low income youths in these countries. In Poland the difference between the respective "future confidence" of high and low income youth was more modest, with a 6% gap in favour of the better off respondents. In Austria the situation was reversed: those with lower incomes held very slightly – a 5% gap – more optimistic views concerning their future prospects than those with higher incomes.

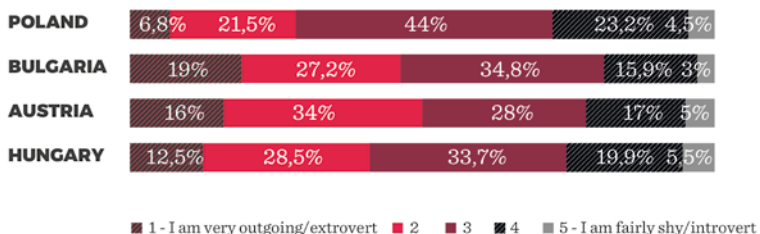
## YOU MAY NOT WANT TO BE ANY OF THEM BUT GIVEN THE FOLLOWING CHOICES, WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING WOULD YOU PERSONALLY RATHER BE?



The preferred career paths of youths are very similar in the countries of the region we reviewed. A career as a businessperson ranks as the most popular professions in all of these countries, while the goal of becoming a researcher or an athlete (sportsman/sportswoman) rank second and third, respectively. Among the four countries, Bulgaria is the one where launching or managing a business is by far the most popular career objective; every second youth considers this the most attractive choice of profession. In Hungary every third respondent would like to start or manage a business, in Poland 30% said the same, while in Austria the popularity of an entrepreneurial

path is significantly lower than in the other countries, with only every fifth of those aged between 15-34 finding this career attractive. Thirteen percent of Hungarian and Austrian youth want to become researcher, and the same is true for 10% in Bulgaria and Poland. Another popular option is a career as a sportsman/sportswoman, which 11-13% would choose in these countries, except for Bulgaria, where only 7% would prefer this possibility, though this still makes it the third most popular option. Medicine is also among the most popular options in all countries save Bulgaria: roughly every tenth respondent would like to become a doctor, unlike in Bulgaria, where only 6% would choose this. **A career as a musician is most attractive in Austria and Hungary** (11% and 9%, respectively), while becoming a “celebrity” is popular among Austrian and Polish youths under 35 (10% and 9%, respectively). **Becoming a religious leader is not a popular path for youths in any of these countries, but a career as a politician is also among the least preferred professions everywhere, as only 3-5% of respondents indicated that they would like to engage in politics professionally.**

## WHERE WOULD YOU TEND TO POSITION YOURSELF ON THE FOLLOWING SCALES?



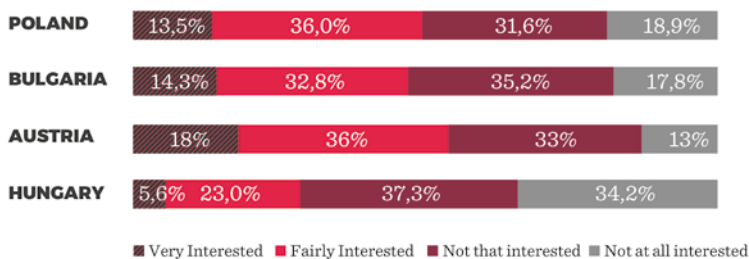
Among the four countries analysed here, we find the highest share of extroverted youths in Austria, while this trait is least typical of Polish youths. Half of all Austrians under 35 consider themselves extroverts, while less than a quarter of them are introverts. Among Poles, by contrast, the ratio of outgoing persons (28%) who enjoy company is roughly half the Austrian figure, though the ratio of introverts is not substantially higher than in the other countries and is on par with the ratio of extroverts. Correspondingly, the largest group of Polish respondents positioned themselves in the middle of this scale. In Bulgaria, extroverts outnumber introverts by a ratio of two to one. Roughly half of all respondents qualify themselves as outgoing, while fewer than a fifth consider themselves shy. **Four-tenths of Hungarian youths describe themselves as enjoying company/extroverted, while a quarter of respondents characterised themselves as introverts.**



## 2.2. Interest in politics

Hungarian youths evinced an extremely low level of interest in politics, not only in terms of absolute figures but also compared to the other countries we looked at, though the youths in the other countries did not appear wildly interested in politics, either. In Austria, Bulgaria and Poland roughly half – 54%, 47%, and 50% – stated that they are interested in this field. In Hungary, however, this ratio was considerably lower, as only 29% of youth – some 20-25 points below the values that prevailed in the other three regional EU member states we looked at – professed an interest in politics. While in the other three countries there was a small but nevertheless significant group that evinced a significant interest in public life, an active, politically interested segment of youth is near completely missing in Hungary; 18% of young Austrians, and 14% of youths in Bulgaria and Poland indicated an interest in politics, but in Hungary this ratio was merely 6%. In other words, in Hungary the share of youths who are interested in politics is only a third of the same ratio in Austria, and half of the percentage we observed in Bulgaria and Poland.

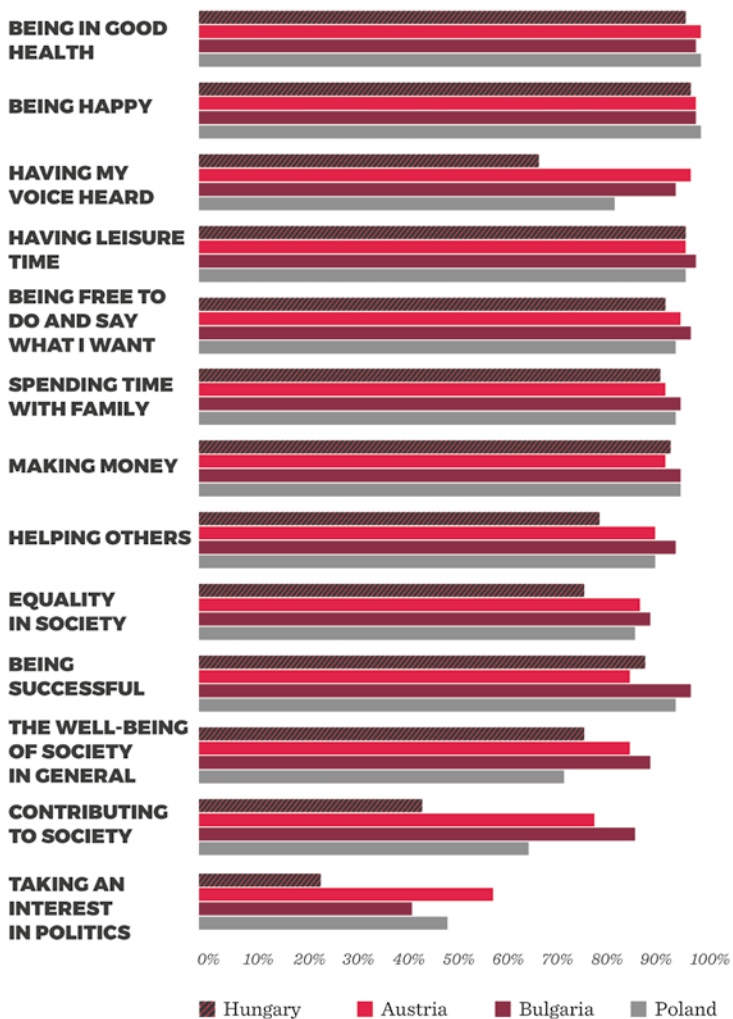
### HOW INTERESTED ARE YOU IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING? - POLITICS



There are several significant differences between Hungary and the other three countries in terms of the share of youths who professed a total indifference to politics. The proportion of 15-34 year-olds who are completely uninterested in politics is below 20% in Austria, Bulgaria and Poland. **In Hungary, by contrast, a third of all youths disclaimed an interest in politics.** The ratio of youths without an interest in politics is lowest in Austria, while in Bulgaria and Poland this ratio is considerably higher with 18-19%. In Hungary, however, the same ratio is nearly twice as high as in the aforementioned two countries. **In other words, the divide between the different political cultures of East and West, between old and new member states, is nowhere near enough to explain the strikingly high share of Hungarian youths who profess that they have no interest in politics.**

**Youths in all four countries near unanimously designate happiness and good health as the most important goal, but leisure and the freedom to do and say as they want is also among the top five values in all four countries.**

## HOW IMPORTANT TO YOU PERSONALLY ARE EACH OF THE FOLLOWING?



Another thing that all youths in these countries have in common is that their level of interest in politics is fairly low. Among Austrian youths, over half (59%) believe that politics is important, while among Polish youths this ratio drops to half of all respondents, and in Bulgaria only 40% of those in Millennial Generation subscribe to this view. And once again there is a significant gap between Hungary and the other countries: only 25% of youths in Hungary agree that an interest in politics is important.

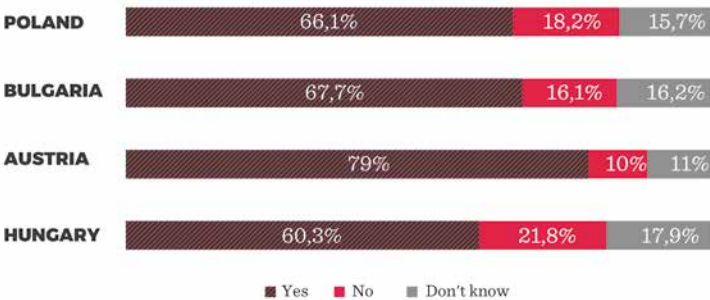
An involvement in the life of the local community and a contribution to society were ranked among the less important values by the 15-34-year-olds interviewed in these surveys. **What the aforementioned show is that issues involving one's individual financial situation and issues surrounding self-realization matter considerably more for youths in the region than community-related values.**

## **2.3. Voter turnout**

One of the most important indicators of political activity is the willingness to vote in elections. A majority of the young people surveyed in the four EU member states are active voters – at least in their own self-perception (even as actual voter turnout data often paint a different picture) –, though there are differences between the four countries in terms of respondents' willingness to vote. **Austrian youths in the 15-34 generation tend to be most active, with 80% claiming that they would vote in an upcoming election**, while only every tenth would stay at home and another tenth are unsure what they would do if elections were held today. Bulgarian and Polish youth

are less enthusiastic about voting. Two-thirds of young people would turn out if elections were held this Sunday, while fewer than 20% would certainly stay away from the polls, roughly the same share as those who are still undecided about this. **The willingness to vote was lowest among Hungarian youths, only 60% of whom said they would turn out, while over 20% said they would not vote in an upcoming election.**

### WOULD YOU (LIKE TO) VOTE?



The retrospective indicator asking respondents about whether they actually voted in the previous election reveals a similar distribution across the countries in question.<sup>1</sup> Three-quarters of Austrian youths said they voted in the most recent election, compared to only 17% who said they had stayed home, while 5% indicated that they would have voted but were too young at that point. In Bulgaria a little over 60% of respondents said they had voted in the most recent election, while a quarter had stayed home. Every tenth Bulgarian respondent

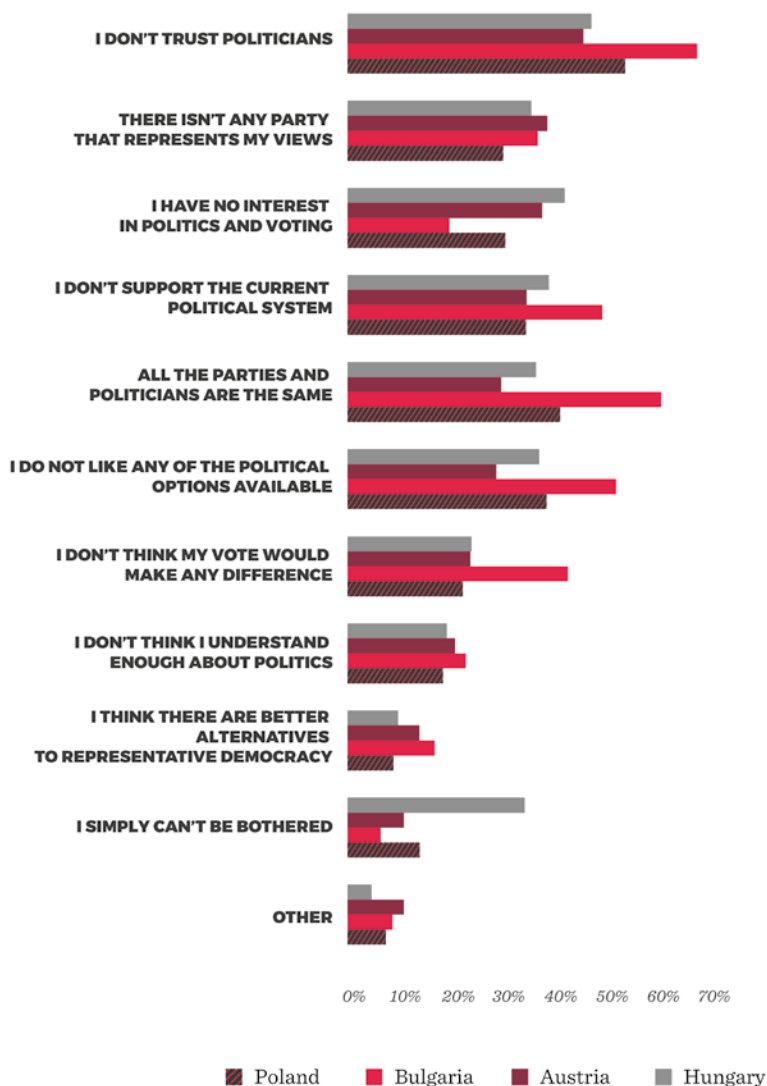
<sup>1</sup> There were no Polish data for this question.

had not been of voting age at the time of the last election. Hungary's situation was peculiar in that two-thirds of all respondents claimed to have voted, while 6% said they had not yet reached 18 at the time. In other words if the Hungarian respondents' memory served them right, then the willingness to vote has declined somewhat in this group, since only 60% of them would still vote in an election held this Sunday. Based on actual voter turnout data, however, we can assume that the answer about the previous election was in many cases more likely to be an expression of respondents' desire to conform to social expectations than an actual memory of voting.

The gap between women's and men's respective willingness to vote was most substantial in Hungary, where the ratio of active men was 10 points higher than the ratio of active women. In the other countries this gap is considerably smaller, ranging from 3-5%. **The situation in Bulgaria is unique in that it is the only country where women evince a higher propensity to vote than men. In Hungary and Bulgaria respondents' financial situation also correlates with their level of political activity: the willingness to vote is 10 points higher among those with high incomes than among those with low incomes.** In Poland this difference is only 4 points, while in Austria there is no significant gap between wealthy and poor respondents' willingness to vote.

**Among those who would not vote in an impending election, the lack of trust in politicians was mentioned as the most important reasons for voter passivity; this held for all four countries.** In Austria and Hungary nearly half, in Poland 54% and in Bulgaria an even higher ratio, two-thirds, of young respondents indicated a lack of trust as the reason for non-voting.

## WHAT MAKES YOU NOT WANT TO VOTE?

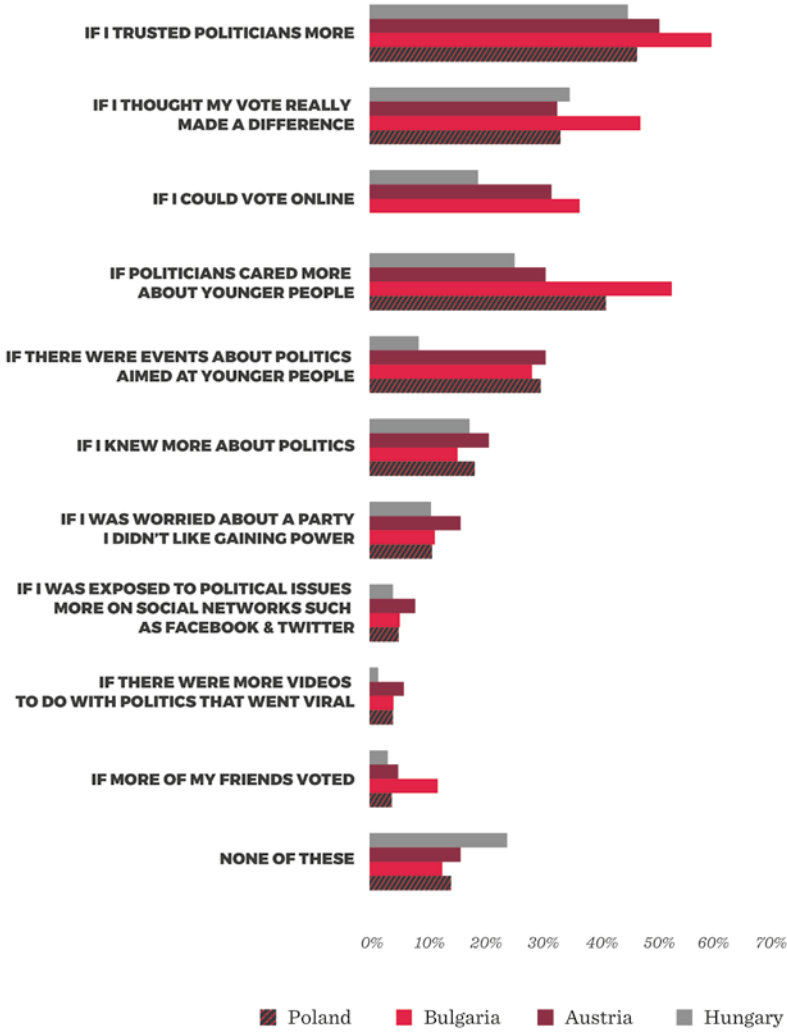


**In Bulgaria and Poland the lack of trust in politicians was the most frequently designated reason underlying this passivity; the second and third most frequent answers in both countries were that parties and politicians are all the same, or that they do not like any of the political options.** In Poland both answers were selected by four out of ten respondents, while in Bulgaria the ratio was even higher with over half of all respondents choosing this answer. In the two eastern member states a rejection of the prevailing political system was also a leading factor underlying “electoral abstinence”. In Bulgaria, where there were more non-voters who abstain due to their critical feelings towards elections than in the other three countries, many youths also refrain from voting because they feel their votes do not count and there is no party that represents their views.

**In all four countries examined, youths who do not vote could become more interested in voting – in their own assessment – if they could trust politicians. Roughly 60% of respondents in Bulgaria and approximately half in the other three countries designated this particular factor among the choices offered. The second and third most frequently mentioned incentive according to the young respondents – nearly everywhere – would be if they felt that politicians paid more attention to youths and that their votes really count.** Especially in Bulgaria (53%) and in Poland (42%) young people aged 15-34 feel that they would be motivated if politicians paid greater attention to the problems of youths; this was the second most popular answer in both countries.



# WHICH, IF ANY OF THE FOLLOWING, MIGHT MAKE YOU MORE INTERESTED IN VOTING?



Similarly to Poland, a third of politically passive youths in Austria and Hungary would turn out to vote if they felt that their votes really mattered. The notion that politicians should pay greater heed to the needs of youths was also popular among Hungarian and Austrian non-voters: in Austria roughly a third of non-voters took this view, while in Hungary a quarter shared it; this made this the fourth most popular answer in Austria and the third in Hungary.

In Bulgaria, Austria and Poland events directed at young people might also serve to motivate a significant segment of youths to vote; roughly a third of all respondents in those countries felt that that would help. In Hungary, however, there seems to be less receptiveness towards this, as only 9% of political passive youths evinced an interest. In addition to the aforementioned, the possibility to vote online would substantially increase the voting propensity of Bulgarian and Austrian youths. Thirty-seven percent of Bulgarian youths and 32% of their Austrian counterparts, that is a roughly a third of respondents, would be more inclined to exercise their right to vote if a new voting method was adopted. In Hungary online voting would have a more limited impact, as roughly a fifth of non-voters would be spurred to greater electoral activity if it were introduced.

In all four countries many youths also indicated that their lacking political knowledge was one of the reasons for their electoral abstention, in other words there was a segment who felt that if they had more information, they would be more likely to vote. The share of these respondents was highest in Austria, where every fifth non-voter selected this option, while in Poland and Hungary almost every fifth voter, and in Bulgaria 16% shared this view.

## **2.4. Women in politics**

**Youths mostly tend to agree with the status quo between women and men in politics – though of course the status quo in Austria differs from the prevailing situation in, say, Bulgaria.** Bulgarian respondents were most likely to share the assessment – two-thirds of youths between 15-34 agreed – that the current gender balance in politics is appropriate, while only a fifth of them assessed that more women are needed in politics. In fact, 15% would like to see more male politicians in public life. **In Austria, too, the ratio of those who are satisfied with the current gender balance is substantial: half of all respondents are pleased with the current situation.** Nevertheless, at roughly a third of all respondents, the share of those who wish to see more women in politics is considerably higher than in Bulgaria, and a mere 6% indicated that they want to see more men in politics. **Hungarian respondents were most dissatisfied with the gender balance in politics, but four out of ten still consider the current distribution of men and women in public life satisfactory.** Nevertheless, the share of those who want more women in politics was almost as high.

## **2.5. Factors that influence the voting preferences of youth**

**Impressions formed about the leaders of individual parties and information about local candidates had a decisive impact on voting preferences in all four countries. The above is a good indication of the personalisation of politics and thus of the major role that party leaders play in the decisions of youths as compared to the**

**values espoused by parties or party platforms.** In all of the countries analysed, youths' image of party leaders was the most frequently mentioned consideration in explaining electoral choices; it influenced the choices of 80% of respondents. Information about local candidates are of similar importance. Roughly 80% of Hungarian and Bulgarian youths consider this (too) in their decision, and in the case of Polish youths it weighs even heavier than information about party leaders. In Austria it is not as pre-eminent as in the other three countries, but it is nevertheless among the more important factors as roughly three-quarters of all respondents consider this in their choices.

**Apart from the above, interviews with candidates and TV news also have a higher than average impact on the choices of youths in all four countries.** Interviews with candidates play the biggest role in Austria and Poland, where roughly four-fifths of youth take them into consideration, and in Bulgaria, too, this campaign instrument influences three-quarters of respondents. Among the four countries in question, the impact of candidate interviews was the least pronounced in Hungary. Nevertheless, even there two-thirds of 15-34-year-olds claimed that their electoral decisions were influenced by this factor. TV news generally serve as a point of orientation for youths, and among all the media these have the most significant impact on political preferences everywhere, from Austria all the way to Bulgaria. The ratio of those who consider television news in their electoral decisions is highest in Austria, where 80% are influenced by this medium, while in Bulgaria and Hungary this ratio exceeded two-thirds (72-71%), and in Poland it was around two-thirds.

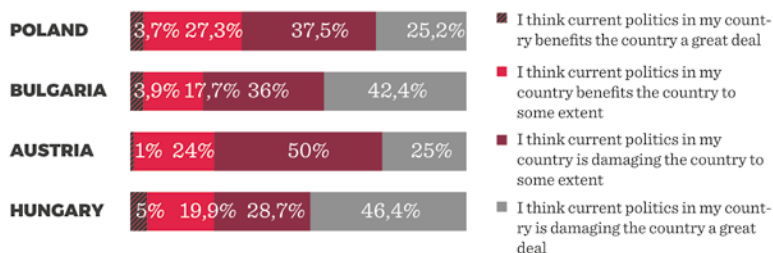
In Poland personal encounters with the candidates (78%) play a more pronounced role, while in Austria party platforms are considered

pre-eminently important by youths. **In Poland youths considered the opinions of parents, siblings and friends more heavily than 15-34-year-olds in the other three countries.** While in the other countries this ratio typically stood at around 50%, in Poland the political views held by family members and friends were considered a crucial factor by 60-65% of respondents. **Interestingly, youths in all four countries of the region are similar in that – by their own admission – they consider social media and YouTube videos less important in influencing their political decisions than traditional media.** Party posters and leaflets also have little impact on the political decisions of youths in these countries.

## **2.6. Trust in politicians and parties**

**Youths in the four countries analysed are fundamentally sceptical towards politicians. In Bulgaria and Hungary nearly every second youth completely lacks trust in politicians, but in Austria this proportion is fairly high as well, as four out of ten lack all confidence in any of their politicians.** Moderately sceptical respondents also made up a fairly wide segment of youth. In Austria half of all youths said they believe some politicians but not others. In Hungary every third youth said the same, and in Bulgaria 30% of all 15-34-year-olds gave this answer. In Austria the share of those who did not take a stance - in other words those who do not pay attention to what politicians have to say - was significantly smaller. Fewer than 10% of Austrian respondents shared this attitude towards politicians, while in Hungary and Bulgaria roughly every fifth youth shared this opinion. Overall, however, the ratio of those who fully trust their politicians was negligible in all countries: in Austria, Bulgaria and Hungary alike a mere 4% trust their politicians unconditionally.

## WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU THINK CURRENT PARTY POLITICS BENEFITS THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE?



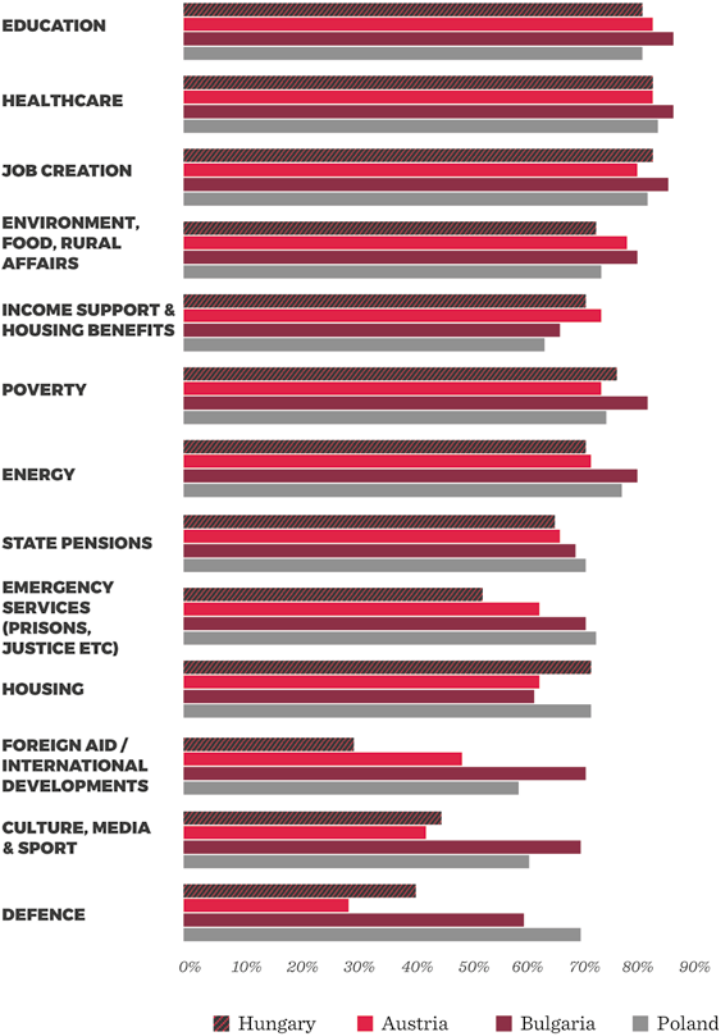
Youths in these four countries uniformly take a dim view of the impact of domestic politics on their countries. The overwhelming majority of 15-34-year-olds in all countries assessed that current politics hurts their countries. This particular opinion was most pervasive in Bulgaria, where 80% of respondents think that the impact of politics is negative, while in Hungary this ratio was three-fourths of all respondents and in Austria it was 70%. In Poland respondents were not as pessimistic, but the share of those Polish youths thought that politics charts a bad direction for their country was still over 60%. Among Bulgarian and Hungarian youths, the assessment of the impact of politics was even worse; the ratio of those who believe that politics has a damaging impact on their countries was especially high in these countries. In Hungary roughly half of all youths, and in Bulgaria around four-tenths of all respondents take such a dim view of the effect of politics, while in Poland the same holds for only every

fourth and in Austria only for every fifth of all respondents under 35. This already unfavourable overall picture is further marred by the fact that those who believe that party politics has a beneficial impact constitute a small minority in all four countries, and the ratio of those who believe that its impact is very positive is downright negligible. The ratio of these decidedly optimistic respondents was a mere 5% in Hungary and 4% in Bulgaria and Poland, while in Austria it was practically nil.

## **2.7. The most important issues for youths**

**In their ranking of policy priorities, youths in the selected countries picked healthcare, education and job creation as the top issues.** In all four countries at least nine out of ten respondents felt that these areas deserve more attention than they currently receive, and in Bulgaria this ratio was even higher, as almost all respondents would treat these three areas as pre-eminent policy issues. **The vast majority of youths in all four countries would also treat the elimination of poverty and the environment as key priorities.** Respondents in Hungary also ranked income support and housing benefits as especially important, while in Austria respondents referred to welfare (income support and housing benefits) and energy as top priority issues.

# IF YOU WERE IN THE GOVERNMENT, HOW MUCH PRIORITY WOULD YOU PLACE ON EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?





**Though fundamentally those who are tolerant of sexual minorities are in the majority in all four countries, Austrians tend to be most accepting of different sexual orientations and gender identities, while Hungarians are least likely to share this outlook.** In Austria an overwhelming majority (89%) argue that society must accept the equality of people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. In Bulgaria and Poland three-quarters of youths between 15-34 share this view, while in Hungary only two-thirds agree (still a decidedly high figure).

## 3 | Focus: Generation Y in Hungary

Though we looked at the values of Hungarian Gen Y respondents from a variety of perspectives in the previous chapter, we now wish to take a more detailed look at how these youths think about politics. **All the more so since Hungary is almost unique in the region and in the entire European Union in the sense that a majority of Hungarian youths – while they are very reserved vis-à-vis politics – would primarily vote for radical and populist rightwing parties and overwhelmingly keep their distance from leftwing and liberal parties.** Though Fidesz and Jobbik are the most popular parties among Hungarian youths, the ratio of non-voters and undecideds suggests that one cannot necessarily conclude that the Hungarian Gen Y is predominantly rightwing. What these results suggest instead is that these two parties have a keener understanding of the values and problems of this generation than the other parties. Which is why it is worthwhile to review in more detail what values and problems Hungarian Gen Y youths tend to share.

### 3.1. Youths' vision of the future

**Of the professional career prospects they were asked about, the plurality of Hungarian youths, every third respondent, selected founding a business or becoming a business executive. The second most attractive career path was that of a researcher, which was selected by 13%. Almost the same proportion picked professional**

**athlete.** Musician (9%), doctor (9%) and writer (7%) are also among the more popular professions. The least attractive future career choice is that of religious leader (1%), and a similarly low proportion would pursue a path as a celebrity or politician (4% each). There are substantial differences between the desired career choices of men and women: the answers suggest that women have a lower level of entrepreneurial spirit than men, and only a third as many women as men would like to become athletes. At the same time, they are considerably more likely to prefer a career as a doctor (13%), as writers (11%) or as lawyers (7%). A professional future as an academic, musician or politician was equally popular among both genders.

### **3.2. Interest in politics**

**Hungarian youths displayed a decidedly low level of interest in politics. A little over a quarter of respondents claimed that they had any interest in politics, and only 6% professed a strong interest in public life.** A significantly higher ratio of respondents indicated that they want to completely stay away from politics: every third respondent stated this. On the whole, 70% can be characterised as finding politics unappealing or uninteresting. **Yet with increasing age comes a growing interest in politics: while among 15-17-year-olds only 17% said they had an interest in politics, among 30-34-year-olds this ratio increased to 32%, that is among the oldest cohort in our survey interest in politics was nearly twice as high as in the youngest.** The financial situation of respondents also had a significant impact: those with higher incomes were twice as likely to be interested in politics. Those with medium or low incomes did not diverge significantly from the average.

**Hungarian youths regard happiness, good health and leisure as the most important values. Almost every young person who answered the survey questions selected these from the concepts proposed.** Earning money, the freedom to do and say as they want, time with the family and success were also considered very important by nine out of ten respondents between the ages of 15 and 34. **Hungarian youths tend to regard community values as secondary compared to individual values.** Though high percentages of youths consider helping others and general social welfare/social equality important (the former was selected by four-fifths and the latter by two-thirds of respondents), fewer than half considered involvement in the public life of the local community and contributing to society as important. **It is telling that of all the options suggested, an interest in politics was least vital to respondents: only every fourth regarded it as important.**

**Hungarian youths have a high level of awareness of the major parties in Hungarian politics. Nine out of ten were familiar with the three largest Hungarian parties, the rightwing populist Fidesz, the far-right Jobbik and the leftwing Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP).** Respondents tended to be less aware of the smaller parties. **While 70% knew about the green party LMP, the name recognition of the Democratic Coalition (DK), the Together (Együtt) party and of the Christian Democrats (KDNP) was under 60%. The Hungarian Liberal Party (MLP) and the Dialogue for Hungary (PM) were little known: only 38% of respondents knew about the former, and a mere 29% indicated having heard about the latter.**

### 3.3. Voter participation

**By their own admission, roughly 60% of respondents would turn out to vote, which does not lag behind actual voter turnout in the parliamentary elections.** One-fifth of all respondents would not vote, however, and the same percentage indicated being uncertain about participation. Naturally, a general interest in politics has a major impact on respondents' willingness to vote. Those with an interest in politics are one and half a times more likely to vote - nearly nine-tenths - than the average, while only one third of those who feel alienated from politics plan to cast a ballot at election time. There is a smaller but nevertheless significant difference between men and women, as well as between those with low and high incomes, which tilts in favour of men and more affluent respondents: **Men and affluent respondents are ten percentage points more likely to say they will turn out to vote than women and those in less advantageous financial situations.** The willingness to vote increases with age: **Among those between 15-24, 53% say they would vote, while in the 25-34 cohort 65% would turn out.**

As far as they recalled, young respondents had cast a ballot in the most recent election in even higher numbers. Nearly a quarter said they had not voted, 6% indicated that they had been too young to vote at the time, while 3% said they could not remember. Over four-fifths of those who are interested in politics said they had voted, however, while only half of those who kept their distance from politics said that they had cast a ballot. Men reported higher voting activity than women, and (relatively) older respondents within the generation aged 15-34 said they had voted in higher numbers than the average. In terms of their self-reported turnout, there were no significant

differences between more affluent and less wealthy voters, however. **At the same time, it is important to note that both prospective and retrospective turnout in such surveys tends to be higher than actual turnout figures.**

**On the whole, however, it is readily apparent that the lack of trust in politicians is the most important reason behind the electoral abstention of young people.** Roughly half of Hungarian non-voters gave this as the reason for their abstention. The negative assessment of both politicians and parties is crucial in this regard. Over a third of them dislike all possible electoral options, arguing that “all parties and politicians are the same”, or because there is no party that represents their views. It is an important warning sign that reduced willingness to vote is not only the result of lacking sympathy for parties and politicians but also of general political apathy and of a critical attitude towards the existing democratic regime. **Thus, the second most often-mentioned reason behind non-voting is indifference towards politics and the institution of elections (42%), while the third is respondents’ lack of support for the prevailing political system (39%).** A quarter of respondents also refrain because of their perception that their vote does not count, while a fifth of all non-voters believes that their lacking knowledge of politics is also an important factor.

**Based on their self-assessment, passive youths would be best motivated if they could trust politicians; almost half (46%) of non-voters selected this option.** Another important factor that would encourage turnout would be if they perceived that their vote really counts; over a third of non-voting respondents selected this option (35%). Every fourth non-voting Hungarian youth would be more likely

to vote if they felt that politicians are more interested in youths. They would also feel motivated to vote if online voting were introduced, though with 19% selecting this answer the impact of this particular factor would be somewhat smaller, as would an expansion in the level of their existing political knowledge (18%). **Protest voting, however, does not constitute a strong motivating factor for them; only one out ten respondents would feel motivated to vote in order to prevent the rise to power of a party that they do not sympathise with.**

**Hungarian youths between 15-34 emphatically reject the idea of lowering the voting age to 16 years.** An overwhelming majority of respondents, around 80%, disagree with this idea, and only one in ten youths would support such a proposal. The target group, that is those aged 15-17, are far more open to this idea, as every third respondent in this cohort agreed that those aged 16 and 17 should be able to vote, but still: in this cohort, too, the opponents enjoy a plurality, as 43% reject the idea of reducing the voting age.

### **3.4. Women in politics**

**Youths are divided when it comes to women taking an active role in political life. Roughly four out of ten (42%) assess that the ratio of women in politics is at the right level now, but men are much more likely to support the status quo than women.** About half of the former, while only a third of the latter are pleased with the current situation. **The proportion of those who believe that more women are needed in politics is almost identical at 41%.** Women identify disproportionately with the latter position, while only a third of men shared this assessment. There were only few respondents who want

more men in politics: only one out of ten respondent supported this view. Those who agree that more men are needed in politics were also predominantly men: there were four times as many male supporters of this idea as female supporters (4%).

### **3.5. Factors that impact the voting preferences of youths**

**The voting preferences of Hungarian youths are most strongly influenced by their knowledge and opinions of party leaders and local candidates. Together, these factors were selected by over four-fifths of all respondents, with the former being chosen by over half, while the latter was considered a key factor by 44%. For two-thirds of youths, interviews with candidates are also important factors in weighing political options. The news and information reported in the media also have an influence on voting decisions, but it is somewhat surprising that this generation, which is actively using the internet, is nevertheless more influenced in this respect by traditional media, such as television (71%) and radio (70%) than by online news and blogs (65%), social media (51%) or YouTube videos (47%). The last category is even less relevant than print news (62%) when it comes to influencing voting preferences. Roughly six-tenths of respondents assessed that candidates' platforms influence their voting choice. Slightly fewer respondents considered that their immediate social environment played a role in their voting preferences: 55% indicated that their parents provided a point of orientation in their voting decision, while 49% said the same about friends and 46% about siblings. Among the options listed, youths between the ages 15-34 were least likely to be influenced by party leaflets and posters. Only four out of ten youth**

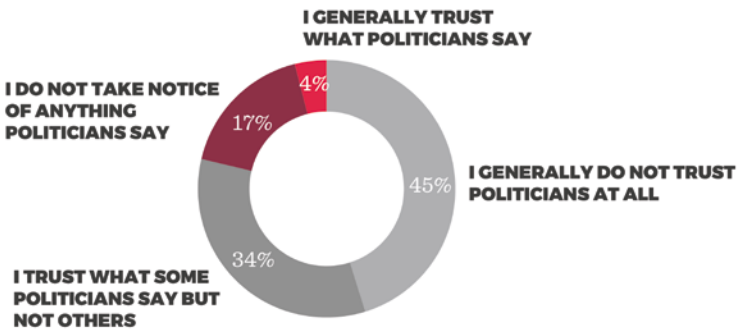


claimed that these help them in choosing the right party or candidate.

### 3.6. Trust in politicians and parties

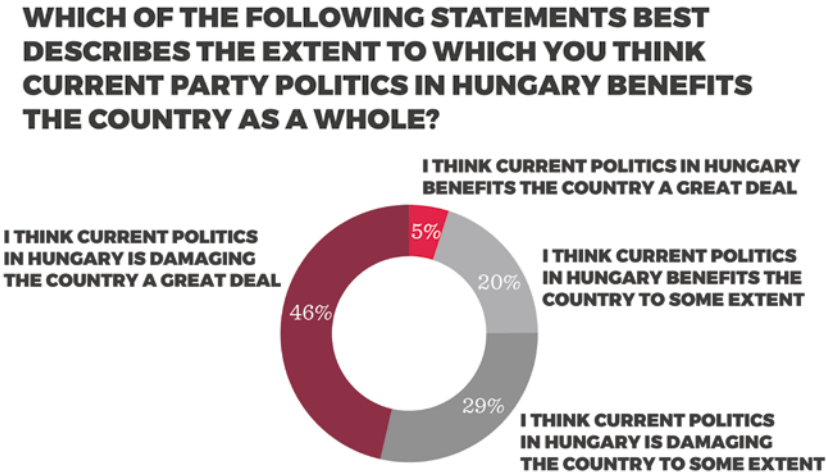
The distrustful attitudes of young people towards politicians are also illustrated by the fact that almost half (45%) of 15-34-year-olds do not trust politicians at all. One-third of them believe some politicians but not politicians in general, and every sixth respondent does not even listen to what politicians have to say. The share of those who generally trust what politicians have to say is negligible at only 4%.

**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES YOUR VIEWS WITH REGARDS TO HOW MUCH YOU TRUST WHAT POLITICIANS SAY?**



The level of trust in politicians significantly correlates with interest in politics. Those who evince a pronounced interest in politics tend to be less sceptical towards politicians, while those who have turned

away from politics tend to be more sceptical. In the former group only every fourth respondent does not trust politicians at all, while the ratio of those who generally trust what politicians say (15%) is almost four times the level measured among all respondents. Among those who are not interested in politics at all, however, almost sixty percent indicated that they never believe politicians, while practically no one always believes politicians. As one might expect, the same cleavage prevails among voters and non-voters. Those who have no political preferences tend to be more likely to reject politicians than active voters, even though four out of ten respondents in the latter group, too, do not trust politicians at all. **Respondents on the lower end of the income scale also have greater reservations towards politicians than those in better financial circumstances: Roughly half in the former group do not trust politicians at all, while in the latter group fewer than a third share this attitude.**



Hungarian youths are not only dissatisfied with politicians in particular but also with domestic politics in general. **Three-quarters of respondents believe that on the whole party politics in Hungary brings more harm than good, and only one in four 15-34-year-olds believe that in total the country benefits from the prevailing conditions in domestic politics.** Moreover, half of domestic youths identify with the position that party politics in Hungary are very harmful, while only 5% share the view that domestic politics as it is practiced now mostly benefits the country. Those who are not interested in politics (83%) tend to be more pessimistic than those who are interested in public life (72%), and a greater proportion of those who belong to the younger cohorts take a negative view (81%) of the impact of party politics than those who are comparatively older (71%).

**Among the political parties, youths were most likely to mention Jobbik as the formation that best understands youths (35%); is the most credible (27%); is most open and honest (25%); and has the best ideas for improving Hungary's situation (27%). Apart from the far-right Jobbik, the rightwing populist Fidesz and the green party LMP had significant levels of support when it came to youths' opinions about these issues.** Twelve percent believe that LMP best understands youth and 10% hold the same about Fidesz. The green party and the main governing party's communications were considered credible by 9% each, while the former was considered open and honest by 9% and the latter by 6%. As far as good ideas for improving Hungary are concerned, 7% attributed this characteristic to LMP while 13% think Fidesz is best in this regard. As for the remaining parties, only a fraction of respondents thought that they provided the best fit in response to these questions. **At the same time the fact that**

**every third respondent believes that neither party's communication is credible or open and honest is reflective of the significant levels of ill-feelings towards political parties. Moreover, every fourth youth considered that none of the parties have any good ideas for improving Hungary.**

**When asked which party is most likely to have bad ideas for helping Hungary, the greatest group, nearly every fourth respondent, mentioned the main governing party, Fidesz. But the previous governing party, the leftwing MSZP, was also listed by 13%, and 8% mentioned Jobbik.**

### **3.7. The most important issues for Hungarian youths**

**If youths were allowed to set the policy priorities for the government, then job creation, healthcare and education would rank as the top three issues.** This view was shared near universally by those aged 15-34. The first two issues were mentioned by 91%, while the third was named by 89% as one of the top issues. **Eradicating poverty and income support/housing benefits were ranked among the top issues by 80% of respondents.** Culture, media and sports received far fewer mentions (50%), while national defence was mentioned by 45%. The fewest respondents listed international aid and international development as priorities: only every third believes these should be among the top issues.

**The majority of Hungarian youths are accepting of different sexual orientations and gender identities.** Almost two-thirds of respondents agree that society should accept persons of different sexual orientations

and gender identities as equals, and only 14% reject this proposition, while every fifth respondent was neutral on this issue. The distribution of opinions between supporters and opponents is very similar when it comes to the question of whether politicians should take a public stance endorsing the social acceptance of all sexual orientations and gender identities. In other words, 15-34-year-old Hungarians essentially consider the social acceptance of these issues as important, but have a slightly more nuanced assessment when it comes to their social impact. Slightly over half of all respondents (54%) agree that it is useful for society to accept all sexual orientations and gender identities, while only every fifth disagrees with this proposition, and the share of those who take a neutral position is also slightly higher, with a quarter of youths falling into this category.

## 4 | Summary

Numerous hypothesis concerning youths have been confirmed by the data, while others appear to have been rebutted. Based on the results of the Millennial Dialogue research on the Millennial Generation in Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary and Austria, it emerges clearly that 15-34-year-olds are considerably more optimistic both about the present and the future than one would often expect. Ninety percent of youths in Bulgaria, Poland and Austria are happy with their lives, and 75-85% are also optimistic about their future. Hungarian youths are also more optimistic than what we have customarily observed in surveys of the general population – at the same time it is also obvious that the age of roughly 25 is a watershed in Hungary: youths older than that tend to be significantly less happy than those between the ages of 15 and 24.

Youths in all four countries unanimously said that they consider happiness and good health as the most important goals, and they also included the freedom to do and say as they want as one of the top five values. The low level of interest in politics was to be expected, though there were key differences: While roughly half of Bulgarian, Austrian and Polish youths professed some level of interest in political issues, in Hungary only a third of the millennials are interested in public life, and a negligible 6% evinced an in-depth curiosity about politics. Overall, issues involving individual welfare and self-realisation weigh much heavier for youths in the region than community values.

The career opportunities most preferred by youths are very similar in the countries we analysed. An entrepreneurial path was the most frequently desired career in all countries, while work as a researcher or as a professional athlete clinched the second and third spots, respectively – lagging significantly behind the first, however. In none of the countries did a significant number of youths aspire to positions as religious leaders, but they generally tended to eschew politics as well: 3-5% of respondents said they were most interested in the latter area.

With respect to voting propensity, it is worth pointing out that there were only two countries among the four, Bulgaria and Hungary, in which the financial situation of respondents influenced how they viewed electoral participation. In these two countries youths in an underprivileged financial situation were 10 percentage points less likely to vote than their more affluent counterparts. In Hungary a gap of this size also characterised the respective voting propensities of men and women, with the former professing greater voting activity.

Non-voting youths in all four countries mentioned lack of trust in politicians as one of the main reasons underlying their political passivity. Nearly half of all youths in Austria and Hungary, 54% in Poland and an even higher proportion in Bulgaria, two-thirds, indicated that their electoral abstention was caused by a lack of trust. Correspondingly, the majority view of non-voting youths in all four countries was that they would be more interested in elections if they could trust politicians more. Sixty percent of respondents in Bulgaria, and roughly half in Austria, Poland and Hungary selected this factor among the potential answers. Based on the answers provided by respondents, the second and third most frequently

mentioned incentive to vote would be, respectively, if politicians paid more attention to youths and if youths felt that their vote really matters.

Electoral preferences are heavily influenced in all four countries by impressions about party leaders and information about local candidates. The above is a good illustration of the personalisation of politics, the pre-eminent role that party leaders play in the voting decisions of youth when compared to party values or platforms.

Theoretically, the fact that youths tend to consider leftwing issues as the top priorities could provide an opening for social democratic parties. Healthcare, education and job creation are considered the most important policy issues by youths in the countries investigated. Eradicating poverty and environmentalism are also pre-eminent priorities for a decisive majority of youths in all four countries. Surprisingly, youths tend to generally support the prevailing gender balance in politics – though one must add, of course, that this status quo is very different in Austria than in, say, Bulgaria. Moreover, in Bulgaria two-thirds of youths between the ages of 15-34 assess that the gender balance in politics is all right, and only a fifth believe that more women should be involved in politics. Youths in Hungary are most dissatisfied with the prevailing gender balance in politics, but still: Four of ten Hungarian youths are basically happy with the current conditions. Nevertheless, almost the same proportion believe that more women should be included in political life.





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The goal of the Millennial Dialogue project is to better understand Millennial Generation with the help of new opinion survey methods applied in numerous countries of the world. The programme was launched by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) and by the US-based Global Progress, and it also featured the help of AudienceNet, a public opinion polling company.

The Hungarian and other central and eastern European (Austrian, Bulgarian and Polish) surveys were analysed by Policy Solutions, and we are pleased to present the results to our esteemed readers.