

The Hungarian Fear

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- In their most recent research study, Policy Solutions and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung have sought to find out how pervasive and dominant a sense of fear is in Hungarian society. From the answers concerning personal fears it emerged that the three most important fears in society are the “unpredictability and instability of life” (30%), “serious illnesses, ending up in hospital” (24%) and “material insecurity, the inability to pay the bills at the end of the month” (23%). These fears were closely followed by the fear of dependency, of being exposed to circumstances beyond their control (21%), and migration (20%).
- On the whole, we found that a significant portion of fears in society stem from insecurity and the concomitant unpredictability of life. The sense of “*we don't know what tomorrow will bring*” instils fears into people's minds. The fear of losing control also tends to be pronounced. Among Fidesz supporters, the most important fear – which is also typical of other groups, however – is that of migrants and the potential war caused by them, the “*Third World War*”.
- When we asked respondents to select those three among the listed events that most concern them in connection with the *fate of their country*, the issue of healthcare was mentioned most often with a significant lead over other issues. Every second Hungarian is concerned about the state of healthcare deteriorating further. The second most prevalent fear, mentioned by roughly a third of all respondents, is the impoverishment of Hungarian society. In addition to these, every fourth respondent is seriously concerned that the social disparities will continue to rise further in Hungary, that the gap between the rich and poor will widen.
- These topics also show that the primary concerns within society tend to pertain to leftwing issues. In other words, once again it has been affirmed that not only in terms of its dreams and vision of the future, but also with respect to its fears, Hungarian society typically leans left.

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1. The research

In their most recent research study, Policy Solutions and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung have sought to find out how pervasive and dominant a sense of fear is in Hungarian society; What type of personal fears characterise Hungarian society and what fears do Hungarians harbour about the future of their country? On the occasion of the Hungarian parliamentary elections of 2018, we found it important to examine **how afraid citizens are of certain political parties attaining power in Hungary**. After the positive visions we had looked at in our research entitled “Hungarian Dream”, which was published in 2017, we now moved on to look at the negative visions of the future, the ingredients that make up the “Nightmares of Hungarians”. We base our conclusions on the results of **a national representative survey of 1,000 respondents interviewed in person, as well as several interviews conducted in focus groups** on seven different locations throughout Hungary. Our partner in conducting this research was the polling company Závecz Research.

2. The social mood

In the first part of our “Hungarian Fears” research we wanted to find out more about the general mood in Hungarian society. We investigated to what extent the four basic sentiments – **happiness, anxiety stemming from expectations, fear and hate** – are present in our everyday lives. The answers unequivocally reveal that when we ask Hungarians about their everyday life, then **positive, happy sentiments are far more prevalent** than negative ones. A general sense of happiness is most typical of **young and highly educated persons**, those who live in the **Transdanubia** region of Hungary (especially in the larger urban areas that serve as county seats) and **rightwing (Fidesz) voters**. The least happy people tend to be those with only eight years of elementary education, middle-aged respondents and the elderly, as well as those who live in the Southern Plains and in North Hungary – especially in small towns. Women are also more likely than the average to fall into this category.

Men tend to be burdened least by expectations, while those in their forties and with an education of no more than eight years of elementary school tend to feel most challenged by the pressures in their lives. The highest levels of fears are also most typical of those who have completed only elementary education, but they are also exceedingly high among those over the age of 60, leftwing voters and women. **Fear as a sentiment is more typical of highly developed regions** than of those that are falling behind in terms of development. Fears are least prevalent among young respondents, those with higher levels of education, Budapest residents and rightwing voters (Jobbik and Fidesz) in general.

Finally, the **feeling of hate is especially typical of those in their middle ages**, those whose education qualifies them for skilled manual labour or unskilled work, as well as of those who live in the poorest regions. It is also **present at higher than average levels among rightwing (Fidesz and Jobbik) voters**. It is least typical of those with higher education (college/university), the youngest and oldest Hungarians, Budapest residents, women and leftwing voters.

As far as the general public mood in Hungary is concerned, we can conclude that when it comes to their assessment of their everyday lives, **positive sentiments predominate among a majority of Hungarians**. Seventy percent of the public said that they recently experienced a feeling of happiness – other research has also shown that the majority of society experienced an improvement in their mood over the last few years. Nevertheless, another aspect of our research that was also observed in other surveys is that **roughly a third of the total population is characterised by total disenchantment**, loss of hope and unhappiness. Among the negative sentiments, the **burdens of “expectations” (39% experienced this during the last week) are most likely to be perceived** as oppressive by Hungarians. **Fear was recently felt by a quarter of the population, while hate was experienced by every fifth respondent**.

Another major dividing line we observed in society separates those from under the age of 40

from those who are older – **40 is the age when negative sentiments begin to accumulate and reach ever new heights**. Happiness-related sentiments are less typical of women, while negative feelings and anxiety are more common among them. There is a significant difference between rightwing and leftwing voters in terms of the hate/fear issue. Proportionally, **the feeling of hate is more prevalent among rightwing voters than among leftwing voters** (rightwingers: 17-19% vs. leftwingers: 12-13%), while **fear is more typical on the left than on the right** (21-26% of rightwing respondents vs. 28-38% of leftwing respondents).

3. Personal fears

From the answers concerning personal fears it emerged that **the three most important fears in society are the “unpredictability and instability of life” (30%), “serious illnesses, ending up in hospital” (24%) and “material insecurity, the inability to pay the bills at the end of the month” (23%)**. These fears were closely followed by the fear of **fear of dependency**, of being exposed to circumstances beyond their control (21%), and **migration** (20%).

In almost every major demographic, the **public’s fear map is dominated by the uncertainty/unpredictability of life**. Only with respect to Budapest residents and those over the age of 60 does this issue not rank at the top. Among the elderly, the fear of health problems ranks ahead of uncertainty-related anxiety. In Budapest, migration ranked as the top fear in April 2018.

Men are fundamentally less likely to be afraid (or less likely to admit it) than women – among men 19% professed that they had not been subject to any fears recently, while among women this ratio was only 12%. At the same time, another difference between the genders is that **men are more likely to mention migration as a source of fear, while women tended to refer to health problems more often**.

Until the age of 50 the concerns of Hungarians tend to be dominated by their material situation,

over the age of 50 other fears, such as that of health problems and of dependency tend to rise. Among **those between the ages of 18-29, a major (third most common) fear is that of losing one’s housing** – that concern is far less prevalent among other demographics.

In contrast to prior expectations, we found that migration is just as much a pre-eminent source of fear in Budapest as it is in other types of – i.e. smaller – municipalities. Indeed, while in Budapest the potential influx of “foreigners” is the number one source of fear, in villages it ranks only second and in rural towns it is in fifth place among the top fears. In the county seats (the major urban areas outside Budapest) other problems – thus a bad economic situation and the fear of a runaway world – have squeezed migration out of the list of top-ranked concerns.

Finally, in terms of the fears that respondents mentioned spontaneously, without pre-given choices, party preferences had a major impact on what Hungarians tend to be most afraid of. **Fear of uncertainty was the most typical fear across the board**, but after that **Fidesz voters were more likely to be afraid of migrants, Jobbik voters fear financial insecurity**, while **MSZP voters are most afraid of falling ill**. The second most important source of **fear among undecided voters is fear of dependency**, of being exposed to circumstances beyond their control. Migration did not make it into the list of the top five fears of MSZP voters, whereas concerns about **the runaway world did**. For undecided voters the latter is also among the pre-eminent fears – so much so that for them financial issues did not even make it onto the virtual podium of top fears.

On the whole, we found that a significant portion of fears in society stem from insecurity and the concomitant unpredictability of life. The sense of **“we don’t know what tomorrow will bring”** instils fears into people’s minds. The fear of **losing control** also tends to be pronounced. The **desire for predictability and stability** also manifests itself in the fact that although a significant portion of the respondents in our focus group surveys were middle-aged persons, many of them nevertheless

expressed a longing for their retirement when they would no longer have to be concerned about their everyday financial situation and losing their jobs. When respondents were asked to spontaneously name their most pressing fears, the anxiety about uncertainty and unpredictability was far more prevalent than when respondents were asked to select fears from a pre-given list. **Financial problems and fears of poverty also came up in the context of various different types of questions.** Among Fidesz supporters, the most important fear – which is also typical of other groups, however – is that of **migrants and the potential war caused by them, the “Third World War”.** In trying to understand the nature of personal fears in the Hungarian public, it is also important to stress the **fear of climate change and environmental disasters.** With 12% of the public mentioning these spontaneously, these issues also made it onto the list of top-ranked fears. Moreover, when prompted by the interviewer, **31% of Hungarians indicated that they do fear of climate change** – in spite of the fact that national politics hardly ever address this issue.

4. Fears about Hungary’s future

In addition to examining personal fears, we also found it important to ascertain **what type of fears prevail in society concerning the fate of the country.** Our first question in this context was what type of feelings thinking about Hungary’s future evoked in the respondents. Their answers clearly revealed that **Hungarians tend to be unequivocally optimistic when it comes to their country’s future:** those who were confident in this context were nearly twice as many in number as those who felt apprehensive about it. The difference in terms of quality is also striking: **a quarter of the 61% who professed optimism (that is 15% of all respondents) are very optimistic about Hungary’s future,** while only one in every six pessimistic respondents (i.e. fewer than 5% of the entire public) have strong fears and concerns about Hungary’s future.

Nevertheless, **this does not imply that there are no major fears among Hungarians about the fate**

of their country. When we asked respondents to **select those three among the listed events that most concern them in connection with the fate of their country,** the **issue of healthcare was mentioned most often** with a significant lead over other issues. Every second Hungarian is concerned about the state of healthcare deteriorating further.

The second most prevalent fear, mentioned by roughly a third of all respondents, is the impoverishment of Hungarian society. Thirty-seven percent of Hungarians are concerned that people might fall upon harder times financially in the near future.

In addition to these, **every fourth respondent is seriously concerned that the social disparities will continue to rise further in Hungary,** that the **gap between the rich and poor will widen.**

Among the fears concerning Hungary, the **fourth position was taken by the problem of “there won’t be any pensions for the next generation”.**

Finally, the **fifth most frequently mentioned answer was the fear of the growing number of migrants.**

Disaggregating this to the level of distinct major social demographics, we find that with a single exception **all relevant groups in Hungary are most concerned about the state of healthcare.** The sole exception with respect to the latter are the persons in the age group 30-39: Hungarians in this group ranked the fear of rising poverty as the top concern. A vital difference between various demographics is that **the quality of education tends to concern people up to the age of 40, while from that point on the potential collapse of the pension system tends to crowd out education from the top list of fears.**

On the whole, the **fears concerning Hungary’s future tend to be highly politicized,** that is the respondents’ party preferences exert a major impact on how likely they are to be afraid of a given problem and what problems they are likely to regard as the most severe. Party preference and

age also have a substantial impact on the degree of fear experienced by the respondents and their respective rankings of top fears. **Nevertheless, irrespective of partisan preferences, it is clear that the most important concerns in Hungary today attach to healthcare, poverty, social disparities, pensions and migration.**

These topics also show that the primary concerns within society tend to pertain to leftwing issues. In other words, once again it has been affirmed that not only in terms of its dreams and vision of the future, but also with respect to its fears, Hungarian society typically leans left.

Migration ranks among the most important fears with respect to both, personal fears as well as fears concerning the fate of Hungary. Concerning the attitudes towards migration, party preferences tend to have the most pronounced impact, as among Fidesz voters the fear that a substantial number of migrants will move to Hungary ranks as the third most important, while among the supporters of other parties – though they, too, share this concern – it does not make it into the list of the top five fears.

It is also worth noting how widespread the concern is in all demographics that the next generation will not receive a pension. Twenty-two percent of the public mentioned this problem spontaneously, while 50% selected it when it was listed as an option. What makes this issue especially interesting is that this topic made it onto the top list of concerns even though it is hardly discussed in national politics and was never a flagship issue in political campaigns.

5. Fears concerning individual political parties

Finally, in the last segment of our research we examined which political party Hungarians are most concerned about winning power. Specifically, we asked respondents the following: “Please indicate whether you would be more likely to harbour apprehensions or less so if the

following party won the election and were to form a government!”

The answers confirmed what was apparent already from the result of the national parliamentary election, namely that **Fidesz clearly enjoys the best reputation in Hungarian society when we asked respondents whether they would fear for the country’s future if the given party were to win the elections.** The share of those who evinced confidence in Fidesz stood at 46% in the public overall, as opposed to 38% who said they would fear for Hungary if that party won the election. Sixteen percent had no opinion or did not share it.

The answers also showed that voters were most concerned about the former socialist PM Ferenc Gyurcsány’s party, the Democratic Coalition (DK), but the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) lags only slightly behind – this allows us to conclude that even though eight years have gone by since these parties and their politicians have been out of power, the image of what is colloquially known in Hungary as “the past eight years” in reference to the leftwing government between 2002-2010, which Fidesz had relentlessly castigated in the run-up to the 2010 campaign and beyond, has heavily branded itself into the popular imagination, with the result that large segments of the electorate are still viscerally opposed to the old leftwing political elite. Overall, half of all voters would reject both DK (59%) and MSZP (57%), while 21% and 24%, respectively, would have no qualms about entrusting them with leading Hungary.

Among the parties that never held government positions, Jobbik and LMP are only slightly more palatable to the Hungarian public than the “old left”, although voters hold Jobbik in slightly higher esteem than the green party. A little over a quarter of respondents (28%) would trust Jobbik in power, while 53% are fearful of such a scenario. As for LMP, 25% of the public would not harbour apprehensions about LMP becoming the main force in government.

Five important conclusions can be drawn about the fears of individual demographic groups concerning specific political parties:

Fidesz voters are more afraid of one of the opposition parties rising to power than opposition voters are about Viktor Orbán's governance.

The majority of opposition voters is also apprehensive of the notion that another opposition party than the one they prefer take control of the government. Especially Jobbik voters are concerned, but the leftwing voters, the supporters of MSZP, DK and LMP, too, are distrustful of the other parties. MSZP voters are the most open towards other opposition forces.

If we look at the issues on the basis of age rather than party preferences, then **those aged 40-49 are most afraid of a Fidesz governance, while the ruling party is most popular among those over the age of 50.** The age of 50 is also a key line of demarcation with respect to Jobbik, only inversely to the relationship observed in the case of Fidesz: those under 50 are least likely to harbour fears about Jobbik, and those over 60 are most likely to do so.

The majority of skilled workers is afraid of every party other than Fidesz. They tend to be the most committed supporters of the governing party. The leftwing parties, by contrast, are most accepted among those with higher education attainment.

Finally, we found that **despite our expectations it was not in Budapest but in rural towns that the notion of the fourth Orbán government was most likely to give rise to fears (43%).** At the same time, however, based on the respondents' place of residence, the inhabitants of rural towns were least likely to be fearful of the leftwing parties. Despite the fact that **Fidesz's popularity is at its lowest in the capital, the share of those who are concerned about the next Fidesz government (31%) is relatively low.** In other words, Budapest residents are far less likely to support Fidesz than respondents in other regions of Hungary, but fears concerning the governing party were nevertheless higher in rural areas.

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