



# Counter-movements: radicalization of the mainstream and moderation of the far-right in Hungary

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# Right-wing nationalist PM Viktor Orbán re-elected

- Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was reelected to a third consecutive term after his right-wing Fidesz party won 49 percent of the vote, enough for a two-thirds supermajority in parliament.
- It was a decisive win for Orbán, who in recent years has clashed publicly with the European Union, becoming for many a symbol of the illiberal nationalism now rising throughout Europe.
- Right-wing populists are now both in government and opposition: Fidesz and Jobbik got 70% of the votes at the 2018 elections
- Orbán's victory is a product of several factors, but three stand out: the systematic weakening of Hungary's democratic system, the success of Orbán's antimigration platform, and the fragmentation of the opposition.

# Hungarian elections – 8 April 2018 - Results

Jelölőszervezet, párt vagy pártszövetség		Listás szavazatok						
		Magyarországon		Levélben		Összesen		Csak a pártok esetében vett aránya (%)
Neve	Típusa	Száma	Aránya (%)	Száma	Aránya (%)	Száma	Aránya (%)	
Fidesz–KDNP		2 608 086	47,36	216 120	96,24	2 824 206	49,27	49,60
Jobbik		1 090 616	19,8	2053	0,91	1 092 669	19,06	19,19
MSZP–Párbeszéd		681 358	12,37	1244	0,55	682 602	11,91	11,99
LMP		402 346	7,31	2079	0,93	404 425	7.06	7,10
DK		307 401	5,58	667	0,3	308 068	5.37	5,41
Momentum		174 225	3,16	1000	0,45	175 225	3.06	3,08
MKKP		98 757	1,79	653	0,29	99 410	1.73	1,75
Együtt		37 251	0,68	310	0,14	37 561	0.66	0,66

# Populism in government?

- It's difficult to remain an anti-establishment party if you are in power.
- In case a political force aims to remain populist on government as well, and has very few domestic competition, it needs to find „enemies” outside of the party political arena, possibly outside of the country.
- In the „fight” against „enemies” outside of the country, the voice of the majority of the people can be portrayed as the „oppressed” by bigger, „evil” forces

# „Enemies” of the Hungarian government

- The overall theme of right-wing populist Fidesz is **protection** at every level. Protection from „Hungary’s enemies”:
  
- „Brussels” and other attempts at „foreign domination”
- Multinational corporations
- IMF
- US-Hungarian billionaire George Soros and the „Soros Plan”
- Migrants – „Muslim invasion of Christian Hungary”
- „Western liberals”
- Critical NGOs – „foreign agents” who seek to „undermine Hungary”

# Democratic backsliding in practice

- **Viktor Orbán's infamous speech in Tusnádfürdő (2014): “We are building an illiberal state”**
- In practice, illiberalism in Hungary has meant the elimination of control over the government, mostly in domestic politics, but also internationally („freedom fight” against the EU, IMF, banks, multinationals).
- **Systematic weakening of the system of checks and balances** - Democratic institutions still exist, but their functions have been emptied, and all independent oversight functions are in the hands of Fidesz loyalists.

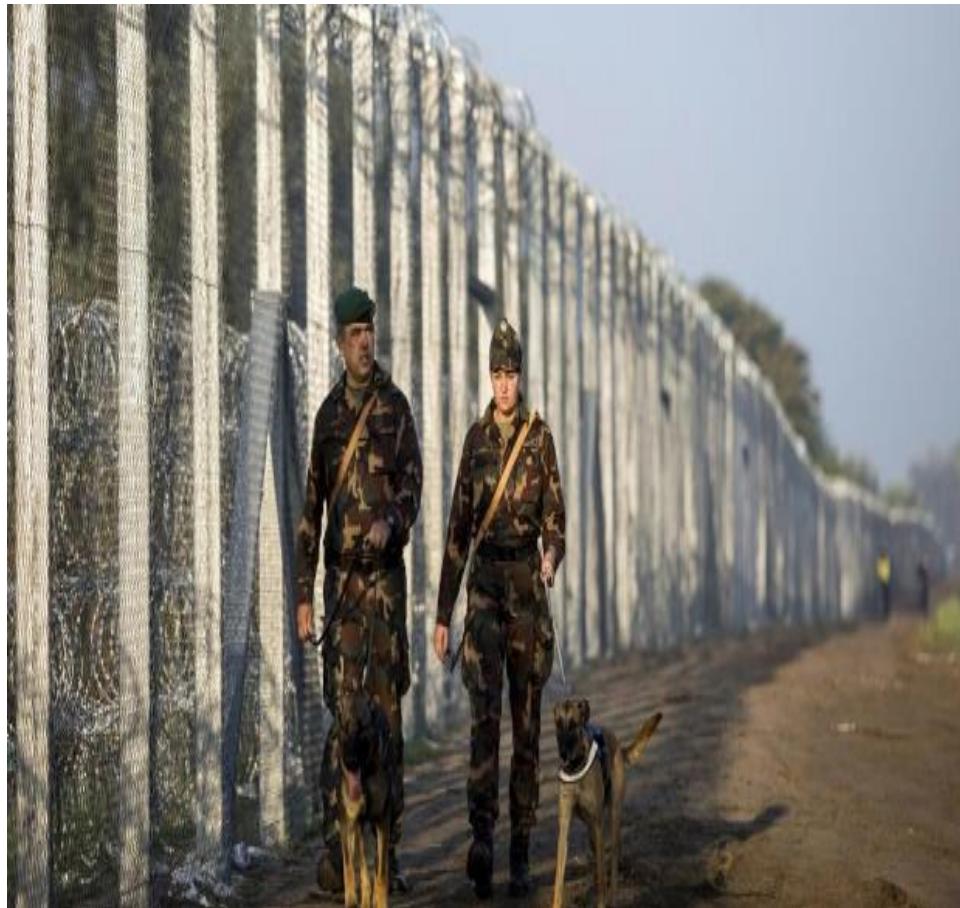
# Democratic backsliding in practice

- Cutting back the powers of the Constitutional Court
- Fidesz loyalists oversee the functioning of the Hungarian state (general attorney, media council, state audit office, fiscal council)
- Portraying NGOs as „foreign agents” – Shrinking space for critical voices
- Limiting media freedom – Public media as a propaganda tool, oligarchs close to the government buy up media (TV, radio, online, print media)
- Electoral system was reformed in a way that favoured the governing party in 2014 and 2018 – Free, but unfair elections, OSCE („gerrymandering”, „compensation of the winner”, unequal voting opportunities for Hungarians working abroad and ethnic Hungarian voters in neighbouring countries, campaign advertisements)

## The refugee crisis in Hungary: the radicalisation of the mainstream

- The right-wing populist government built a fence at the Serbian-Hungarian and the Croatian-Hungarian borders to keep out refugees – originally the idea of a Jobbik politician
- PM Orbán has been fighting a rhetoric war with other European leaders (Merkel, Macron, Juncker, Verhofstadt, etc.)
- Double purpose of PM Orbán: maintain his party's support at home and reframe himself at the international arena (from “authoritarian populist” to “defender of Europe’s borders, defender of Christianity”)
- The government organised a referendum on the EU-level refugee quota system – October 2016 - originally the idea of Jobbik

## Radicalisation of the mainstream – PM Orbán and the migration crisis



# Migration as the winning issue

- A clear lesson of Hungary's election is that **migration was a winning issue for Orban in 2018**. Indeed, Orban was so convinced that his tough stance would be enough to win that Fidesz campaigned exclusively on its opposition to immigration—the party did not draw up an election platform, made no economic or social promises, and did not participate in any debates.
- Since the European migrant crisis began in late 2015, migration has trumped all other issues in Hungary—in this respect, **Orban's 2015 decision to close his country's border and his continued defiance of EU requests to accept refugees have both been politically popular**.
- **Migration has proven to be an especially effective tool in mobilizing less educated voters**, primarily in rural areas. Orban has successfully persuaded his base that only he and his government can **protect the country against the “Muslim invasion”** and the influence of outsiders, including Brussels, George Soros, and most recently, the United Nations.

## Government billboard campaign – „Don’t let Soros have the last laugh”



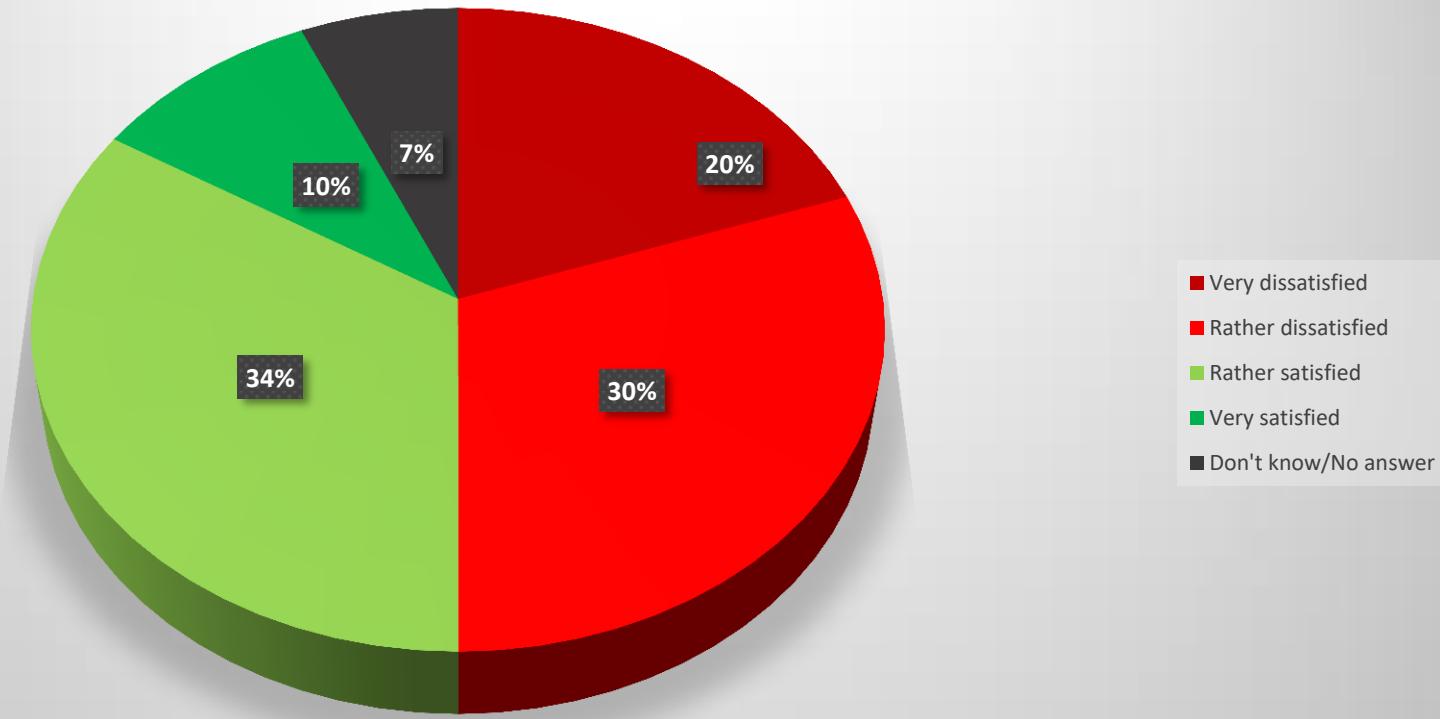
## **After elections: Listing the „enemies” – The „Soros-mercenaries” in pro-government weekly**

# What's next? Who's next?

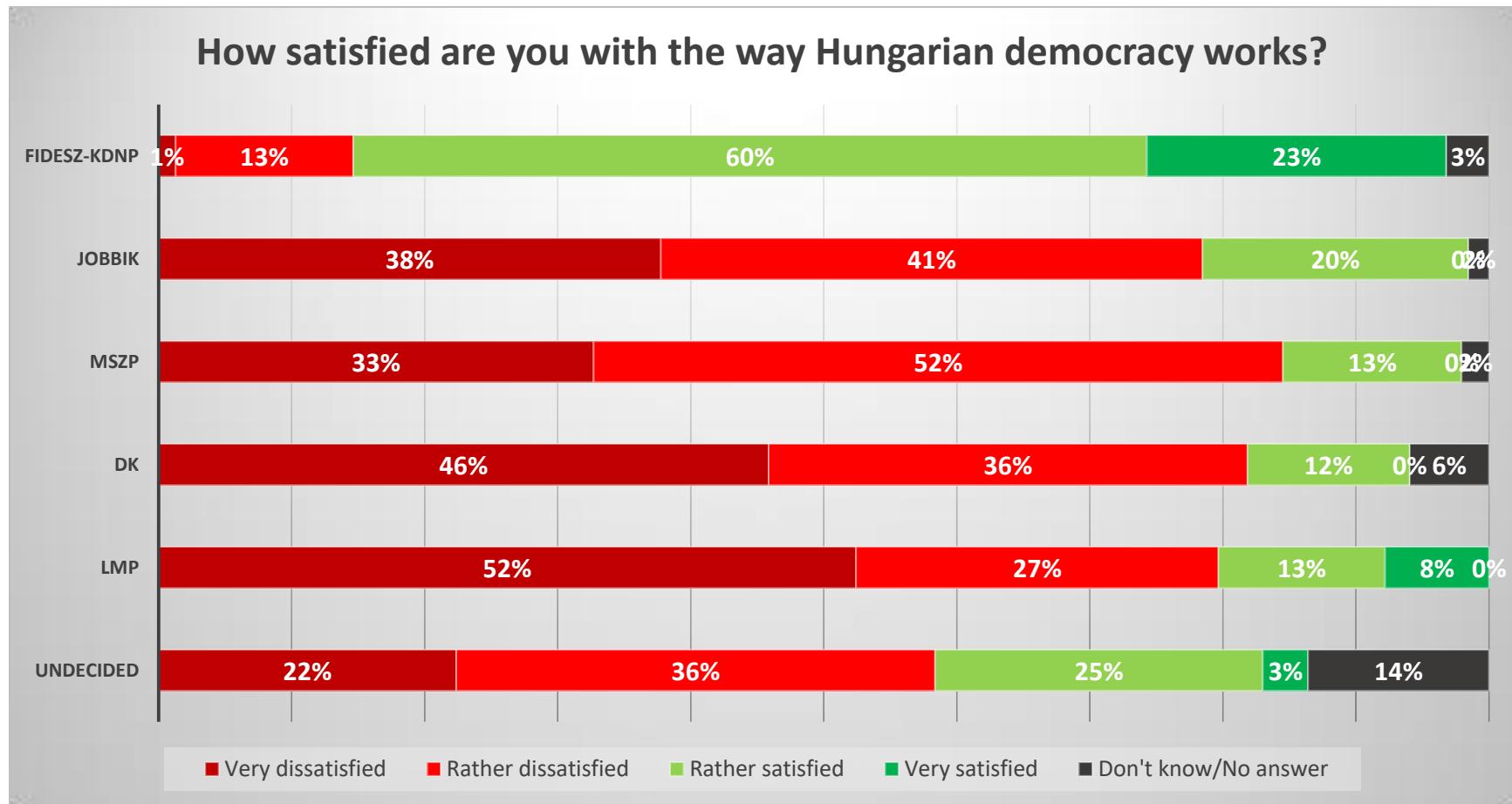
- Nothing in the past eight years suggests that reconciliation will be on the agenda.
- The weakness of the opposition keeps Fidesz focused on its other enemies: **Brussels, Soros, NGOs, academia, liberal professors and artists, remaining independent media.** The **judiciary**, which has so far largely managed to preserve its autonomy, is also likely to be a target.
- From an international perspective, however, the most important strategic issues are **how far Orban will go in his criticism of the EU** and obstruction of common European policies and how much interference he will be willing to brook from Brussels.
- On the European side, **the question is to what extent the continent's leaders will tolerate the Hungarian government's increasingly authoritarian policies.**

## The majority is dissatisfied with the way Hungarian democracy works

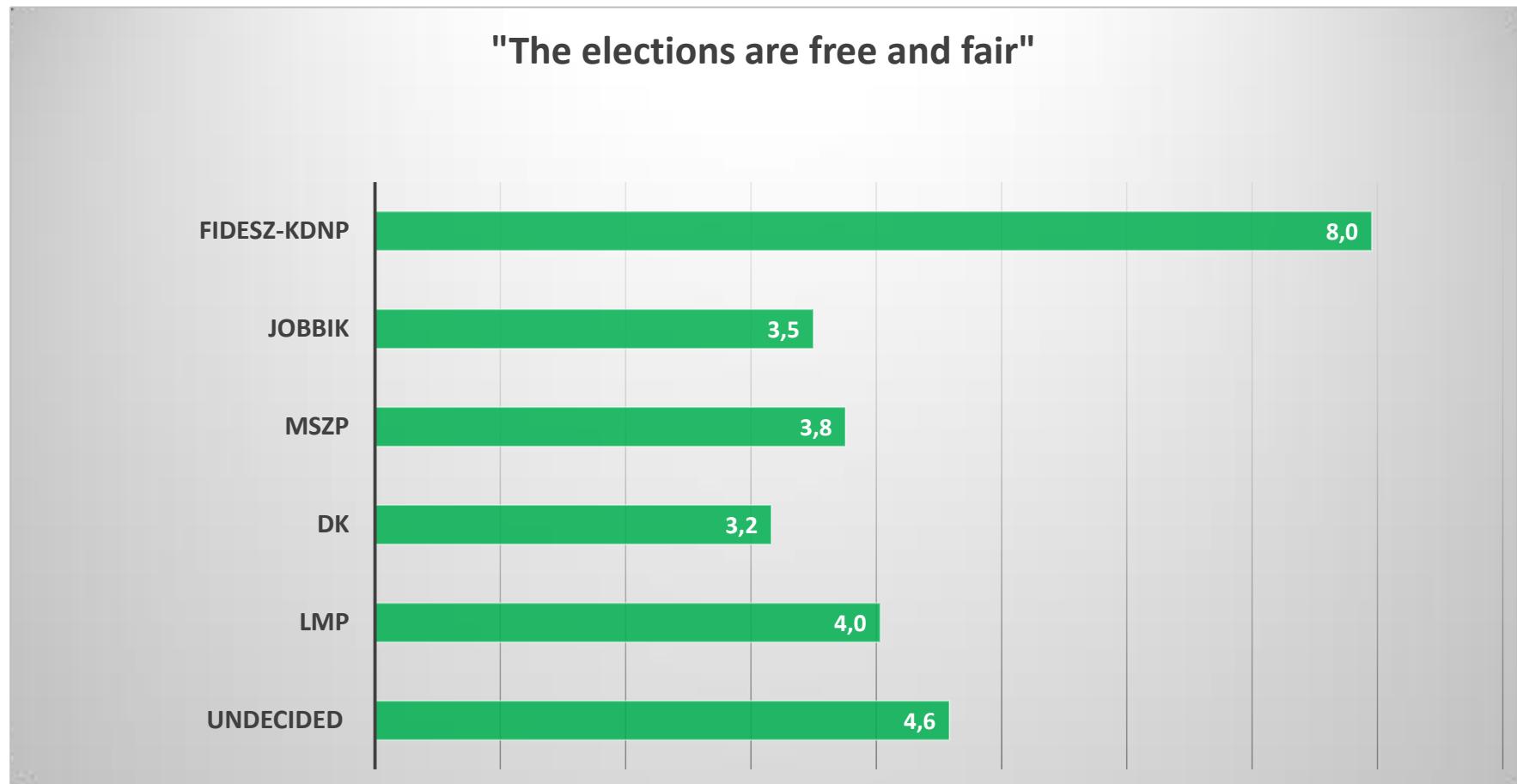
How satisfied are you with the way Hungarian democracy works?



## Parallel reality perceptions about the quality of democracy in Hungary

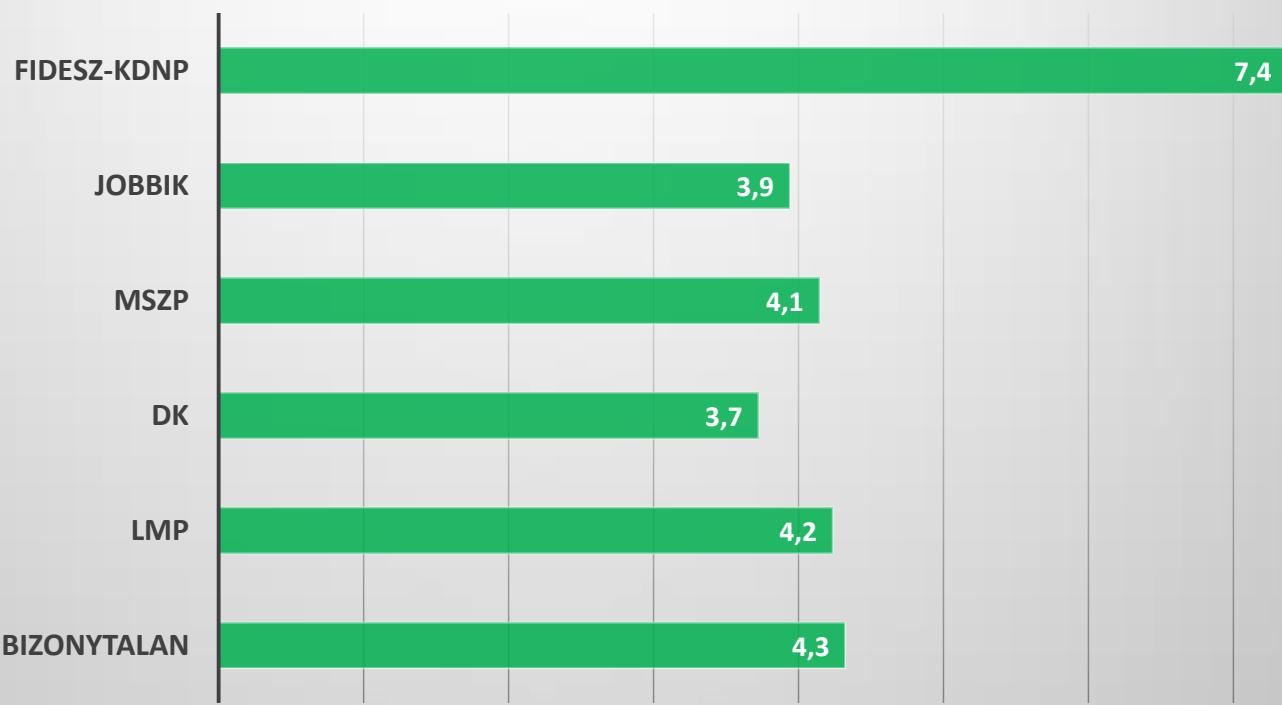


## No agreement even on the state of the basic framework of democracy



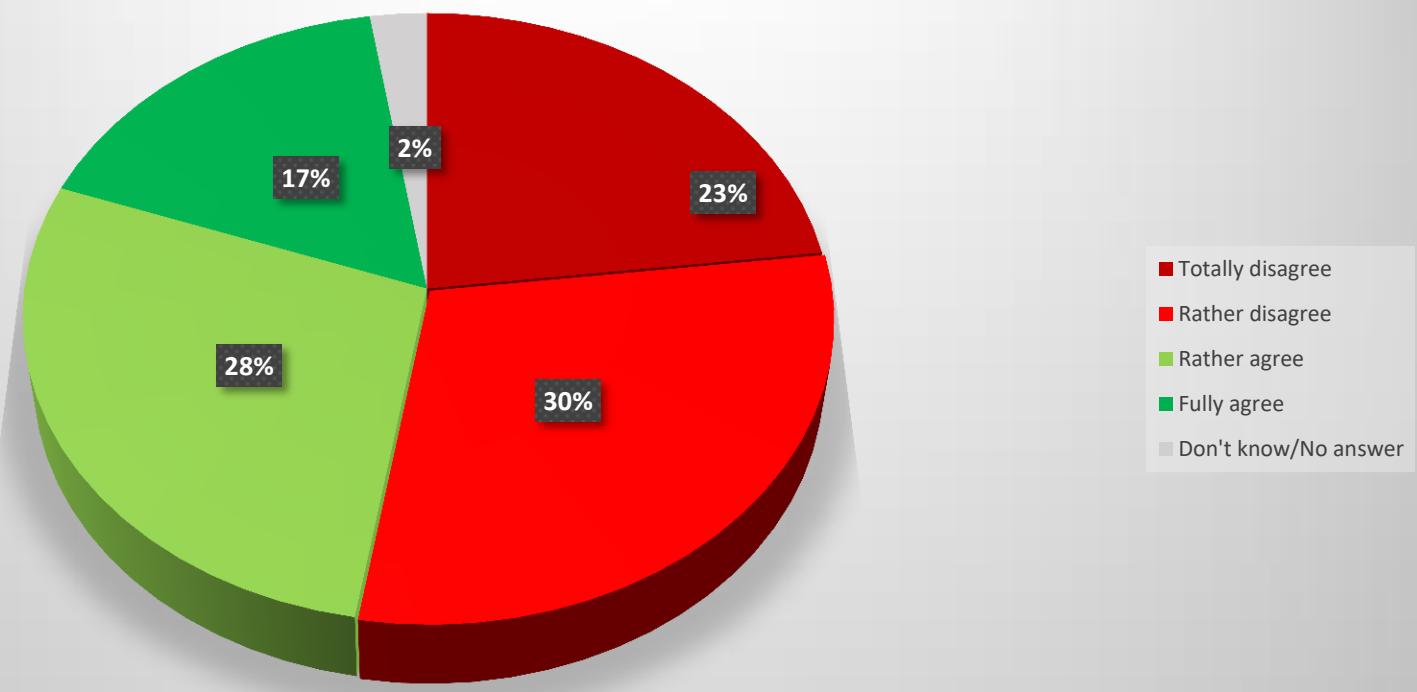
## Only Fidesz voters believe in the independence of the judicial system

"The courts work independently from party politics"



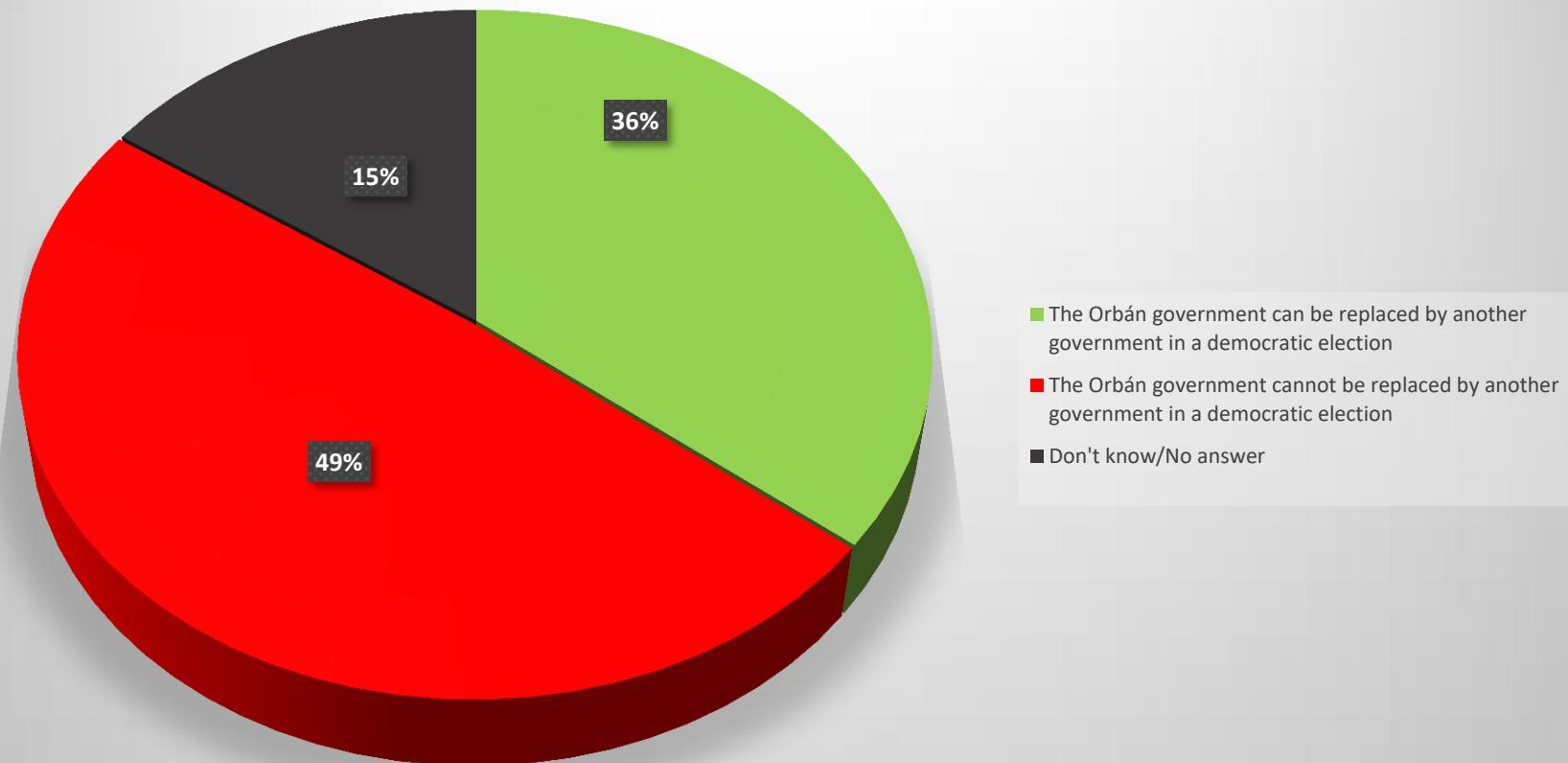
## Majority thinks that there is no press freedom anymore in Hungary

"In Hungary, there is press freedom since the media can freely criticize the government"



## Widespread impression that Fidesz cannot be defeated at the ballot box

Is it possible to oust the Orbán government by democratic means?



# Apathy – Self-fulfilling prophecy?

- The underlying lack of faith in the power of parliamentary elections among the supporters of the opposition confronts the affected parties with a major challenge:
- **Opposition politicians need to convince the frustrated potential voters that voting is making sense at all.** The first and biggest challenge facing the opposition parties in the next elections is the pervasive and deep sense of apathy among their potential voters.
- **This is fuelled in part by the crisis in the credibility of the opposition parties**, but the problems run deeper still: **the loss of confidence now also extends to the institution of democratic elections as such.**
- The big question for the coming years is whether the continuous decline in the state of democracy will trigger greater activity among voters who are critical of the government or whether it will result in a combination of resignation and passivity.

# Jobbik strategy 2014-2018: going mainstream

- Mainstreaming strategy was triggered by the insight that the party had exhausted the growth potential that extremist slogans yield.
- A new strategy was needed that would help Jobbik rid itself of the stigma of broad social unacceptability.
- The de-demonization campaign was not a one-off communication stunt, but has turned into the core of Jobbik's politics over the last four years.
- To reach out to wider segments of the Hungarian society and to become electable for the growing number of undecided voters, especially disillusioned Fidesz voters – these objectives motivated Jobbik when they left their aggressive and racist image behind.
- Positioning of Jobbik: Party of the 21st century vs. Parties of the 20th century (Fidesz, MSZP)

# The „original” Jobbik, 2006-2013



mno

# The image of Jobbik, 2013-2018



## Jobbik's defeat at the 2018 elections – the limits of going mainstream

- After 5 years of more moderate politics, Jobbik still faces the same strategic problems in their voting base (age, gender, geography)
- By wasting most of the last parliamentary term on internal struggles, the left offered far-right Jobbik a unique opportunity to become the main challenger to the governing party. However, the far-right has had its own difficulties, as **Fidesz has been outflanking Jobbik from the right for some time.**
- **Was the mainstreaming process too fast?** While it remains the most-supported opposition party, Jobbik is apparently still not acceptable to most voters in the centre, in spite of a Marine Le Pen-inspired detoxification strategy. **Fidesz, meanwhile, is now a real threat to its far-right base.**
- After the elections, Jobbik is in crisis – President Gábor Vona's fate was linked to the success of the „popular party strategy” and he resigned after the elections.

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## The consequence of Jobbik's disappointing electoral result: President Gábor Vona resigned

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## €2 million fine against Jobbik in 2017 – The reason: „You work, they steal” anti-government billboard campaign



## Jobbik's new president: Tamás Sneider („Roy”)



[hatvanonline.hu](http://hatvanonline.hu)



## Sneider – continuation of the mainstreaming strategy

- Following the resignation of Vona, Tamás Sneider, the former skinhead leader was considered as the more moderate candidate for the position of Jobbik's president. He was elected as Jobbik's president by 56% of the votes in May 2018
- He was convicted in 1992 for beating a man of the Roma ethnic minority (suspended prison sentence)
- Sneider has been Vice-President of Jobbik since 2009, MP since 2010, deputy leader of Jobbik's parliamentary group
- Sneider has been Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament since 2014
- He has been considered as an ally of former Jobbik President Gábor Vona

## „Our Home” - A new far-right party established by former Jobbik presidential candidate László Toroczkai



[nyugat.hu](http://nyugat.hu)

# Toroczkai – back to Jobbik's far-right roots?

- Toroczkai has been mayor of Ásotthalom since 2013, he became known nationally in 2006 for leading an attack against the HQ of Hungarian State TV
- The Serbia-Hungary border fence was originally Toroczkai's idea – PM Orbán built it and tried to make the EU pay for it, but Brussels refused
- Toroczkai believes Donald Trump should be encouraged by the success of the Hungarian fence – „**I hope it inspires the Americans**” – he said in an interview to NBC
- His reputation was boosted in far-right circles when he produced and starred in an **action movie-style video message to migrants**: „Hungary is a bad choice. Ásotthalom is the worst”.
- **Toroczkai banned LGBT rights messages and Islamic religious practices in his village last year**, but that local law was overturned by a Hungarian court

# Parallel movements into opposing directions

- For Fidesz, **any pretension to being a centrist party is completely gone** – Fidesz has shifted public discourse successfully to the right
- After the refugee crisis became less acute for the time being, **Fidesz remained solidly in the far-right terrain** in choosing the next issues on the agenda. The intense **anti-Brussels campaign** conducted by the government stands in stark contrast with Jobbik's cautious rapprochement towards the European Union. **Far-right turn in combined with increasingly authoritarian tendencies.**
- Similarly, the relentless **attacks on George Soros and the small NGO sphere** in Hungary also play into the widespread paranoia about foreign powers trying to dominate Hungary.
- The result of the parallel movements of the two parties into opposing directions is that **it is no longer easy for voters to identify which of the two is the radical party** – in fact, Fidesz now seems to be more far-right than the original far-right Jobbik.

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# **Thank you for your attention!**

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