

The Fidesz Party's Secret to Success: Investigating Economic Voting in Hungary

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Executive Summary

In this study, we have assessed the role of economic motivations as the driver of electoral support for the governing party of Hungary: what relationships exist between the socio-economic status of voters, their subjective perception of the health of the economy and their expectations towards it, their reception of economically-relevant topics of the public agenda, and voters' party choice.

Based on a database containing over ten thousand responses to opinion polls – compiled before the COVID-19 crisis - we have devised an index which grades Hungarian society from the most privileged elite down to the materially-deprived „underclass” according to educational background, occupational position, place of residence, ethnic identity, income and access to the internet. Based on the index, it can be asserted that the upper-most decile of Hungarian society is predominantly pro-opposition (as in supporting any other party than those forming the government) and that support for the government is increasing in each decile with a lower index. Support for the governing Fidesz party is the most prominent amongst the most vulnerable and materially-deprived strata of society.

To some extent, the correlation, paradoxically, is a result of economic voting: About 70% of respondents from the „underclass” have expressed that they are not unsatisfied with the dynamics of their own financial situation. Their responses to questions in associated themes, such as their subjective perception of their standards of living, also did not reveal any deviation from the national average of responses. Importantly, our time series analysis, spanning several decades, has provided evidence that the public's perception of the economy – the Consumer Confidence Index – acts as a strong determinant of support for the government: when economic expectations are more favorable, voters are more likely to select the current governing party as their party of choice. While the causation is also valid when it is inverted, it is considerably weaker. The importance of economic voting is also underlined by the agenda perception of voters: respondents usually selected economically-relevant topics as the most important matters for each month, and when asked to name the best policy of the governing Fidesz party, respondents selected fiscal policies (primarily the government's family policy, secondarily the government's policy of reducing utility bills) significantly more often than they did non-financially relevant policies (e.g. ones regarding migration).

Defying the logic of economic voting, it was found that the parties of the opposition are not able to garner the support of even that 30% of poor voters who experience economic deterioration, as almost half of these people would vote for the government despite that they have a negative perception of the financial state of their household. This correlation is surprising because it is only valid in the case of voters who reside in the countryside, and because amongst all other groups of pro-government voters, those who have a negative perception of the economy are absent. According to one of our suppositions, this is a result of external constraints: that of the norms and expectations laid out by the local and national authorities and of direct pressuring and political patronage on their behalf. Supporting this explanation is our analysis which revealed that the governing Fidesz party was able to improve its electoral support most in the settlements where the number of public workers is high, and amongst settlements of a similar size and with a population of a similar educational background, in places where the number of public workers per capita is the highest, revealing that the government party tends to be more popular in areas which are economically deprived. The correlation is more pronounced in towns led by a Fidesz-mayor.

While it cannot be ruled out that the underclass (and amongst them, the public workers) decide to support the Orbán government on ideological grounds, from the data assessed it is clear that class background only very rarely influences political opinion. It is rather that voters tend to frame their answers for political-ideological questions based on party allegiance. Economically-deprived citizens

were not more egalitarian or left-leaning in their answers to statements regarding the stigmatization of the significantly well-off or income inequality. The opinions of these citizens only differed significantly from the average on the question of immigration, however, them being more rejective in this topic can also be explained as a consequence, rather than as a cause of their party allegiance. The campaign strategists of the government have realized that groups on the lower echelons of society are much more invested in competing against each other than against the elite: for these people, migrants pose a larger threat than does government corruption or the the oligarchs often criticized by the opposition. Nevertheless, the importance of ideological and intellectual motivations in fuelling the enduring support of the Orbán government cannot be denied, it is rather that these cannot explain the compelling success of the government party amongst the lower strata of society.

The underclass prominently selecting the government party as its party of choice is less surprising when assessed from the perspective of social psychology. The theory of system justification, framed by Jost (2017), originates from the supposition that protest (in whatever form; ranging from open rebellion to a simple protest vote) is a psychologically draining and frustrating process: it is not self-evident that dissent will lead to active protest action. Socially deprived people will rather seek self-justification along with internal and external security. Consequently, these people will view the incumbent – for them disadvantageous – system as not only inescapable, but also necessary. Through this way of thinking, they exonerate themselves: an explanation is gained for their own miserable situation, while the constrain of the responsibility of having to initiate change is also absolved. This way, responsibility is removed from the underclass for its own deprived position. The importance of self-exoneration is also underlined by members of the lower echelons of society believing that valuable connections and a good family background are the keys to success, instead of other factors such as hard work or luck. From this perspective, blaming the government for the rampant corruption or for the underclass' own hardships is as if one was blaming the sun for setting each evening.

Finally, an obvious explanation for the government's success is its media supremacy: according to the calculations of media researchers, the ratio of media reach between the government and the opposition media is 70%-30%, respectively. The government's dominance is more prominent in the case of the underclass, and our analysis has also revealed that citizens of the same social status have a higher propensity for becoming government supporters as a consequence of their media consumption patterns. However, government supremacy does not equal exclusivity, as even most poorly-educated and economically-deprived people from the countryside are not completely isolated from opposition messages: in Hungary, the cross-consumption of media, the consumption of media which expresses opinions contrary to one's own preferences, is prevalent amongst all layers of society – including the deprived as well. A major flaw of the media hypothesis is that the public agenda perception of the poor is largely comparable to that of the rich in Hungary.

We have expanded the data gathered before the COVID-19 crisis with a poll performed in May and with a prediction made based on our time series analysis. The Consumer Confidence Index has not been as low as in 2020 May - June since 2013 – and back then, the government party's popularity, compared with data from 2020 May, was over 10 percent less amongst those who expressed a party preference. That level of popularity, in the current party system and with the opposition parties contesting an election as a single bloc, would not be sufficient for the re-election of the Orbán government. However, the correlations modelled by us might lose their relevance as a result of an external shock. The key question, at the moment, might be to what extent voters will blame Viktor Orbán for the impending economic recession.

Introduction¹

The quote which James Carville, the campaign manager of Bill Clinton, wrote on a board in their 1992 campaign headquarters, „The economy, stupid!”, has become one of the most often recited quotations of public political discussion and political science. The popularity of the quote is not accidental. When it comes to the collapse of empires, the election and failure of governments, the study of economic motives is possibly the first cause worth investigating. Governing parties with good economic performance tend to lose only very rarely, while those with a bad economic performance win only in exceptional cases (Lewis-Beck, Stegmeier, 2019).

Contrary to the above, it is not self-explanatory that economic motives should be singled out as the explanation for the 3 consecutive electoral victories of the Fidesz (*Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége*; Alliance of Young Democrats) party of Hungary – which have undoubtedly made Viktor Orbán one of the most successful political entrepreneurs of Europe - that saw the coalition of the Fidesz and KDNP (*Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt*; Christian Democratic People’s Party) parties gaining 2/3rds of seats in the country’s parliament. When in 2018, the Závecz Research Institute (a Hungarian think tank) polled voters on the reasons behind the electoral victory of Fidesz, none of the four most popular responses chosen by opposition voters focused on economic voting. Instead, the following were named: the anti-migration campaign, the fragmentation of the opposition, the electoral system and the media supremacy of the government side. On the other hand, government voters primarily chose the response „*For me, the policies of the Fidesz governments have been more favorable than those of the previous governments.*” (highlighted by the authors; however, it is clear than this answer may stem from other considerations than purely economic motives). Analysts and opinion leaders are divided in their interpretations of the reasons for the government’s high popularity, and the ones arguing for economic motives are clearly not forming the majority (Tóka, 2018). Others point towards the migration campaign (Bíró-Nagy, 2018), to partisanship (Patkós, 2018), or to the supremacy in resources of the government side (Tóth-Szabó, 2018). From an initial perspective, it can be readily stated that everyone is right: clearly, we are investigating a very complex phenomenon and each explanation has its own merits. Furthermore, there are significant overlaps between some of the approaches, which shows that these are not exclusive hypotheses.

In this study, we focus on economic voting: we are investigating the role of economic motivations in support for the governing Fidesz party. Naturally, we will also engage with the other noted explanations, however, we will be primarily trying to explain the relationship that exists between voters’ existential-social situation, their subjective perception of their own financial situation and their expectations towards it, their reception of economically-relevant topics of the public agenda and their party choice. In parallel to identifying correlations, we will also entertain causal explanations: by testing largely conflicting hypotheses, we will be seeking the answer to the question as to why it is exactly the most deprived strata of society that supports the Fidesz party the most. After the data analysis of our large polling sample, we have also performed time series analysis (on data between 1998 and 2020), where we investigated the relationship between consumer and business trust and support for the incumbent party. Later, we will also present a regional analysis where we will consider the effect of the proportion of public workers, the most vulnerable social group, in a given settlement

¹ We would like to express our appreciation to Réka Marinkás and Kornél Kőműves for their support in the performance of this study. We would also like to thank the Median Institute for providing the large quantity of data which they have shared with us. The chapter on the hypotheses was written by Judit Pétervári and Dániel Róna, the one on the time series by Márton Túry, the one on the territorial analysis by Bianka Szeitl, while Dániel Róna authored all other chapters.

on the electoral performance of the governing party (while also considering other settlement-level variables).

In addition to the combining of the three quantitative methodologies, we also wish to contribute to national academic achievements by not only considering the level of education, wealth-income status and occupational position in our analysis, but also the place of residence, internet access and ethnic identity (Romani or non-Romani). These new variables are equally descriptive of the voter's social status, resources, standards of living and prospects. For information of this level of depth, it is not sufficient to only use one monthly poll and hence we merged Median databases from 9 monthly polls (N = 10800). At the same time, while seeking answers for the questions and hypotheses described above, we will also rely on other, pre-existing studies.

Our study – similarly to the literature on economic voting – is focused on the assessment of past economic tendencies, while the documentation of future expectations was possible only occasionally. The scope of our work is not inclusive of an investigation of how party programs and promises regarding the future can influence the voting public. We could also not assess whether the current state of Hungarian politics is desirable or not, and if not, how it could be improved. Instead of furnishing advice for the future, this paper's purpose is to analyze the past.

We wish to provide answers to the above questions using data collected between the end of 2018 and the beginning of 2020, hence we will be assessing Hungarian politics preceding the COVID-19 crisis. In our last chapter, however, using the Median Institute's data from the end of May 2020, we will shed some light on how perceptions of the state of the economy and expectations towards it changed due to the pandemic. We will also investigate whether those citizens who were pushed into a desperate situation are blaming the government, and if yes, to what extent. The essay will not engage in predictions about the future popularity of the Fidesz party of Hungary, however, it will aim to explain the driving forces of support for the current Orbán government and will describe the nature of its stability and weaknesses.

Hypotheses

Besides investigating the political and economic fragmentation of the whole of society, and the relationship of the two, the main goal of this study is to answer the question as to why it is exactly the poorest and most vulnerable strata of Hungarian society that supports the Fidesz party the most. The below explanations, of course, may not only provide insights into the pro-government preferences of the poorest, however, when formulating a hypothesis we were primarily considering their perspective. As we will discuss in detail in the chapter on opinion polls, we will consider the members of Hungarian society with the following characteristics to be disadvantaged: being deprived of income and wealth, having an inferior profession (physical laborers), living on a small settlement, being Romani, or not completing secondary school. We will consider those, the most deprived, who have at least 4 of the above attributes to be forming the „underclass” (our methodology will be presented in detail on **page 13-14**). For the sake of practicality, we will use the terms „poor citizens”, „deprived citizens”, „lower classes/strata” and „those with a lower status” as synonyms for the „underclass” – while refraining from any value judgement.

In general, support for any political power is based on ideological identification, (assumed or real) economic interests, external or internal constraints, or compulsive situations. The final may manifest in local coercion, obligatory alignment with norms, or through internal psychological process, as well

as in the voter (primarily) examining the arguments and positions of the favored political side. These approaches do not necessarily contradict each other, overlaps may exist between them, however, if they are of real explanatory value, they produce a distinctive set of symptoms. If one explains more, the other unavoidably reveals less (not nothing, however): in this sense, they are contenders. In this chapter, we will focus exactly on the causalities behind each of the approaches and on what sorts of practical consequences do the validity of the assumptions indicate.

1. Hypothesis: Electoral manipulation (through constraints)

It can be discerned from Hungarian electoral results that the Fidesz party performs significantly better in smaller settlements which are inhabited by citizens of a lower social status. The „voter clientelism hypothesis” (Mares and Young, 2019) envisions that the politicians of Fidesz consciously obstruct the free ballot for the purpose of gaining votes. They underscore that this equates to physical violence and coercion in only rare cases: in general, the basis of repression is the abuse of power and its main tool is the making of threats, the spreading of fake news and lies, and the conscious bewildering of the under-informed voter. For the underprivileged, the possibility of revenge in the future or one’s own dependency on those holding public office may serve as strong motivation to follow the „local norm”, instead of acting according to their conscience. Mares and Young, in their extensive study, highlight the examples of the provision of social support on the basis of one’s voting, the threat of the withdrawal of one’s benefits, along with retaliation from employers and loan sharks. In certain circumstances, the sacking of one public employee may send a strong message to all inhabitants of a settlement. The government’s policies and activities provide the background for the unrestrained exercise of power on the local level: by setting strict – but subjective – conditions for one’s participation in social programs such as receiving free meals, or any other form of governmental or municipal aid. The post-2010 Fidesz government has cut funding for benefits distributed on an individual basis, while they have established a monopoly of employment in a number of settlements with the public works program. Electoral manipulation – to varying degrees – may affect a very large number of citizens (those who owe money to loan sharks, those employed by local governments, or even those employed by the state, such as secondary school teachers). We, however, in the following, will focus on public workers, all of whom are in a very vulnerable position. Public workers are rarely treated as a separate category in opinion polls due to their low numbers, however, there are statistics with geographic breakdowns of their distribution².

It would support our supposition if we would find that only those members of the poorest strata would have a higher propensity to support the Fidesz party who reside in the countryside (and not in Budapest; the above described are largely specific to the countryside). It would also align with our hypothesis, if – controlling for all other variables (such as settlement size and prosperity) – we would find that support for the Fidesz party increases with the number of public workers in a given settlement; and if the settlement-level popularity gain of Fidesz between 2010 and 2018 would positively collerate with the number of public workers. If this hypothesis is correct, then the „political increment” of public workers would benefit pro-government mayors to a larger extent than it would benefit other mayors.

2. Hypothesis: Economic Voting

The next scenario is when one chooses to vote for the Fidesz party not because of either manipulation or sympathy, but because of (real or assumed) economic interest. According to pro-government logic,

² This would also be true for the unemployed, which is a flaw of our approach, as this study is only using geographical data for those registered as job-seekers.

a number of benefits, incentives and government programs would be abolished in case the opposition would (re-)take power: the reduction in utility fees, family support programs, the increased minimum wage, the government's cafeteria program and the benefits distributed to pensioners. From the perspective of this explanation, it is only of secondary importance whether the economic interest is real or if it is only assumed. *This hypothesis would be strengthened by that if the most deprived layers of society, especially those who are Fidesz supporters, would have a higher or equal propensity compared with the national average for assessing their economic situation as improving. The underclass having only an average propensity for economic self-assessment is not in contradiction with the hypothesis: it can be expected that the poor would be significantly less satisfied than the average to begin with. Their public agenda perception is also dominantly controlled by economic themes according to this hypothesis. The hypothesis would also be strengthened by our time series analysis revealing a significant and overarching connection between the assessment of the economy and support for the incumbent party, in such a way that the former is causing the latter.*

3. Hypothesis: The professed pro-government voter

Support for the Fidesz party amongst those who can choose a party has stayed over 30-35% for 20 consequent years, and over 40% since 2006. There must be an ideological reason for this high level of popularity, which stayed consistent through economic and political cycles (Enyedi-Benoit 2010, Enyedi 2015, Enyedi-Tardos 2018). Especially prominent is the landslide 50-65% average support for Fidesz (László & Molnár, 2019) in settlements with 5000 or less inhabitants (where about one third of the total population resides; KSH, 2019). It would be difficult to argue that at least a significant part of this voter base is not formed by those who vote for Fidesz according to their own convictions, ideological and policy preferences. *This hypothesis would be verified by pro-government voters – especially those representing the underclass – being affiliated in their affirmation of the values (conservatism, right-leaning, anti-migration) close to the Fidesz party and by pro-government voters' social status largely predicting their political opinions. It would also align with this hypothesis if in the public agenda perception, pro-government voters would predominantly mention value-based themes (eg. the situation of Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin, family policies).*

4. Hypothesis: System justification (acquiescence, low status inter-group competition)

Based on the logic of economic voting, it would be valid to assume that those who are in a bad situation want to see change happen. To the contrary, the history of men, spanning several millennia, reveals that men, even when living in extreme physical and mental poverty revolt only very rarely, in extraordinary cases. This is due to their situation being defined by several – often contradictory – desires and constraints. The theory of „system justification”, coined by Jost (2017) bases itself in the supposition that dissent (which may take whatever form; from open revolt to a simple vote) is a psychologically draining and frustrating process: it is not self-explanatory at all that discontent will necessary lead to active protest action.

- One of the alternatives is *acquiescence*. Hungarians are not mobilized solely by dissatisfaction, „[...] dissatisfaction is not only *ordinary*, but also *commonplace, mundane and lacking perspective* (at least for the Hungarian situation), is often juxtaposed with the past (which is celebrated, coveted) while the dissatisfaction does not rally anyone and calls for no sacrifice; it indicates the need for change, but barely displays any opportunities for it, while it dreads the future, it is cautious and distrustful” (Hunyady, 2013, p. 626). This situation can also be aggravated by that the opposition (since 2010; the election of the current Orbán government) is only able to channel discontent into support for their own policies in rare cases and can hardly forge individual frustration into collective action.

- The other sub-hypothesis is the *low status inter-group competition*. Discussing inter-group relationships, the „Stereotype Content Model” (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007) asserts that the assumed group status and rivalry define the answers and reactions to other groups of people belonging to the same lot. Rivalry reveals the motives of the other group: it shows whether the other group is cordial and reliable or whether it is threatening and untrustworthy. In shorter terms, rivalry indicates whether the other group will aim to cooperate or whether it will attempt to seize public goods. A group’s status is explanatory of its members’ competency: high-status groups tend to be considered as high performance, as well as being in possession of a large degree of power (Caprariello, Cuddy, & Fiske, 2009). Social groups with low status tend to be assessed as enemies by other low status groups: the Romani minority or „migrants” are rarely considered to be either high-performance or powerful, their presence is nevertheless considered to be threatening (even when these groups are not actually physically present). On the contrary, while the lavish lifestyle of the governing elite might cause discontent amongst the lower strata of society, it would be risky behavior to revolt in the face of potential government sanctions through the power of the same elite. In addition to this, the elite is always assumed to be remote, abstract and intangible (Hunyadi, 2017). In case this assumption is true, the opposition is beating the dead horse when it is trying to make an enemy out of government-friendly oligarchs as they will be unable to mobilize the lowest segments of society with this theme.
- Closely connected to the above is another sub-hypothesis: *the fear of one ending up on the lowest step of the ladder (last-place aversion)*, Kuziemko et al., 2014). The study of Kuziemko’s team’s has presented that those who earn just a little more than the minimum wage oppose raising the minimum wage, as this would mean that those below them on the income ladder would catch up with them. Their experimental and opinion polling results have shown that people fight not to end up on the lowest step of the ladder - so it is not *them* that does - often prioritizing this over other motivations and goals. There are notable examples to anti-migration parties utilizing this fear for rallying the support of voters stranded on the peripheries of society.
- *System justification*. According to Jost’s theory, a psychologically costly revolution is not able to materialize as the individual is continuously affected by non-conscious mental processes: people with low social status will rather choose mental safety, self-justification, along with internal and external peace. As a consequence, they will consider the incumbent – for them disadvantageous – system as necessary and inevitable. Through this, they also exonerate themselves: they are granted an explanation for their own desperate situation and they are also relieved of the obligation for initiating change: this way, they are relieved of any responsibility for their own hardship.

The term „collective narcissism” was coined by Adorno (1963/1998): he argued that low status experienced on the individual level can be compensated by an idealized, assumed identification with a powerful group. The ignored individual often hopes to better his own self-evaluation by aligning with some sort of group – and this hope has been exploited by the phraseology and party communications of Fidesz, as they often present themselves by (possibly consciously) overplaying a confident, morally superior and defiant stance. The narcissist narrative of the party operates in more than one way: it offers relief to the individual, while in parallel the individual becomes motivated to defend the group. This may provide an enormous resource to the party. Given that the individual extends its self-identity to the group, an attack on the group becomes an attack on the individual’s own identity. This can explain why any threats to the group’s authority trigger a disproportionate reaction, which aims to liquidate that threat without delay, with the response at times greatly exceeding the boundaries of rationality (Lantos, 2017). The content of this last assumption is difficult to measure with explicit tests due to nonconscious processes.

From the perspective of the *acquiescence* and the *system justification* theories, it would follow that those assessing their economic situation as declining and those who are in a vulnerable situation would end up supporting the government or would not choose a party at all. According to the *rivalry of those with low status* theory, the poor, the homeless, the migrants, the Romani minority and potentially other groups would be primarily discriminated against by those who are themselves of low social status and who are pro-government voters. Proposing a somewhat altered view, the *last-place aversion* theory suggests that this is not valid for the lower middle class and for the most vulnerable. The „self-exonerating“ attitude is a common symptom highlighted by these perspectives: according to the assumption, citizens – especially the poor-, portray social inequalities to be inevitable. If they are unescapable, then fighting against them is also unreasonable.

5. Hypothesis: Media consumption

It could be an obvious explanation that deprived social groups are isolated from voices and messages critical of the government. *This hypothesis would be verified if there would be a strong relationship between media consumption and party choice and if a larger segment of the poorest strata of society would consume government media than the average, and if the poorest would consume less media products critical of the government. On the other side, the hypothesis would be weakened if we would find significant cross-consumption (meaning that people consume media products contrary to their own political views) amongst the whole of society along with the lower classes.*

Later on in the study, we will return to these assumptions and investigate whether our results increase or decrease their feasibility. At the end of the study, we will dedicate an individual chapter to summarizing and evaluating the empirical evidence.

Analysis of opinion polling data

Methodology

The latest municipal elections have again proven that the government is significantly more popular outside major cities and, based on earlier studies, we can also assert that support for Fidesz amongst young voters is weaker than amongst the rest of society (Median, 2020³). Recent research proposed by Zsolt Enyedi and Róbert Tardos (2018), Zoltán Kmetty (2018), and Policy Solutions (2020) indicates that citizens with a higher level of education tend to be more critical of the government, while those with a poorer educational background have an over the average propensity for supporting the government. Nevertheless, in the recent years there were no extensive studies from the point of view of how the income, the wealth and the social class status, as well as the assessment of one's economic situation can affect party preferences (for earlier examples see Policy Solutions, 2015 and Gerő-Szabó, 2017). Our knowledge of the current state of political fragmentation, class status, political preferences, economic voting, economic expectations and media consumption in Hungary, and of their relationships, is limited and is lacking empirical evidence.

However, in 2019 the political party system has changed: with Jobbik committing itself to cooperation with the other opposition parties, the previously definitive central force field has come to an end. As a result, two blocks – of largely similar size in terms of population – face off against each other now. The support for "third way" parties does not reach the parliamentary threshold yet. It is also unclear how much traction they can gain amongst the voters of both camps, and in what proportion they will

³ 40% for the full population, 34% in the case of the 12-29 age group.

be able to attract new voters. The voter bases of the six opposition parties who cooperated during the 2018 election became fluid and open to tactical voting. The 2019 municipal election, which saw the opposition make a number of valuable gains from the government, has also encouraged the supporters of the opposition taking a pro-cooperation strategy. This is partially the reason as to why we will consider the voter bases of these six opposition parties together and not as separate groups during our analysis, while the other reason is that this way we can decrease statistical uncertainty: individually considered, many of the samples would be too small. The merging of the voting bases is also justifiable by that we are testing economic voting, which can be interpreted best in a government-opposition dichotomy. Furthermore, also for statistical reasons, we have merged the voters of the „third way” parties into the undecided group. This way, our study can work with three categories: pro-government voters, pro-opposition voters and those with no party choice.

We resolve the previously mentioned sample size problem by merging 9 Median databases, hence creating a total maximal **sample size of 10 800** (where the margin of error is around $\pm 1\%$ ⁴). In most cases, we will also report results for subpopulations of a couple thousand and hundred samples: For a sample of 1000, the margin of error is around $\pm 3\%$, for 500 $\pm 4,3\%$, for 200 it is a little under $\pm 7\%$ (nota bene in traditional studies with a sample of one thousand, even the results for significantly smaller sub-populations are often scrutinized). The database contains the following months: **2018 September, October and December, along with 2019 January, March, the turn of June-July, September, October and November**. It is important to consider that all data was collected through **in-person (face-to-face)** investigations, which, according to our previous work, yield the largest response rate and have contributed to the most accurate electoral predictions.⁵ Even in the face of this, we believe, based on the results of the 2019 municipal elections and on past experiences that support for the Fidesz party is somewhat (by a margin of a couple percent) over-estimated by the database – the difference in support between the government and the opposition is probably smaller than the ratio of 39% to 31%, respectively. If not indicated otherwise, this database will be the source of data for our calculations.

It could be a point of contention whether our data is obsolete as of June 2020. Our opinion is that it is not obsolete at all, as we are investigating the political fragmentation of various social groups, which sees only minimal changes in a matter of years and months at most. As an example, the MSZP party (*Magyar Szocialista Párt*; Hungarian Socialist Party) already gained the greatest level of support from the generation socialized in the golden age of the Kádár-era in the 1990s (Stumpf, 1996, Karácsony, 2005), while a high level of support amongst the youth has characterized the Jobbik party from since its inception (Róna-Sórács, 2012) until today (Median, 2020). In this chapter, we will work with a database for 2018-2019, while in the final chapter dealing with public agenda perception, we will expand our analysis by utilizing Median data for 2020 February and May. Based on the latter, we will be able to draw a limited number of conclusions on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis and the impending economic crisis.

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the correlations between social status and party preference. The chapter's focus will be on wealth-income status, economic expectations and media consumption: it will be evaluated how and why the voting patterns of the lower strata of society

⁴ For a 95 percent confidence interval with a 50% heterogeneity level (in the case of a 50% party).

⁵ This is of a large significance as, according to research experience, the top and bottom 5-10% of society is the hardest to survey (Angelusz-Tardos 2009), hence the poorest are only worth investigating via personal surveys.

diverge from that of more privileged groups⁶. We will commence by inspecting bivariate correlations, while at the end of the chapter we will assess multivariable correlations.

During our analysis, we have one-by-one tested the effects of each individual variable (eg. education), however, we have now created a complex indicator by merging several variables which we believe is superior in measuring the respondent's actual social status. Similar to traditional class variables⁷, our complex variable also considers educational background and occupational position. However, we have also included the place of residence, ethnic status (Romani or not Romani), income and access to the internet⁸ (the last two were utilized by Gábos and associates, 2016, while Tamás Rudas has studied the voters of Jobbik with a similar methodology 2011, p. 520), which allows our variable to reveal more about the respondent's standards of living and social status. Clearly, none of the variables determine poor social status alone, however, their conjunction increases its probability. As an example, there is a large number of well-off citizens living in villages, however, those living in villages generally have access to worse educational and health facilities, along with lower quality infrastructure while their real estate also tends to be less valuable compared with that of citizens living in large cities who match them concerning the other variables.

In the lowest category – in the most disadvantaged group – we have gathered those who only have primary education, who have little wealth in assets, who correspond to the lowest income quartile, who have no internet, who reside in small settlements, who work as untrained or trained physical workers, and who are of Romani ethnicity⁹ (1. table). As another example, those with high school education but with all other characteristics matching would be categorized one group higher. In the highest group, we have assembled those who use the internet every day, who belong to the highest income quartile, who own a number of wealth assets, who work in a senior position, who have a university degree, who are not Romani and who live in the capital city. This way, we have created 18 categories, however, we have merged the top and bottom 3 (to increase the sample size) and hence we have used 14 categories for the purpose of our analysis. Under the table, in small print - where we provide an explanation of the detailed coding - we have also explained why we have initially created 18 categories.

⁶ We have displayed our indicator measuring the strength of a relationship (CramerV) after each table. It takes on a value of 1 if the relationship is deterministic and 0 if there is no relationship between the studied variables.

⁷As an example: ESOMAR, European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research

https://www.mediainfo.hu/media_iranytu/esomar.php

⁸ We have considered those to not use the internet who, in response to Medián's survey question regarding the frequency of internet use, have stated that they never use the internet.

⁹In line with the practice used in sociological studies (eg. Ladányi-Szelényi 2001) the interviewers categorized respondents as either Romani or non-Romani. Self-classification tends to underestimate a given ethnicity's or nationality's share, eg. See Hungarian census data.

Table 1. The class distribution of the whole of society

According to educational background, income, wealth, occupational position, internet use, place of residence and ethnicity.

1= lowest class, 14= highest class.

Class by grades	Pro-government(%)	Pro-opposition(%)	No party choice(%)	Total (%)	Sample size
14 – Most privileged citizens	33	47	21	100	456
13	35	42	23	100	439
12	37	40	23	100	608
11	39	36	25	100	749
10	42	31	27	100	955
9	36	33	31	100	987
8	37	34	29	100	897
7	39	31	30	100	831
6	40	31	29	100	746
5	45	25	30	100	584
4	46	22	33	100	578
3	41	25	34	100	433
2– underclass	44	19	37	100	252
1– underclass, economically most deprived citizens	48	13	39	100	247
Full sample	40	32	29	100	8762

Explanation. Educational Background: 4= University degree, 3= High school matura (érettség), 2= Skilled qualification, 1= Primary education

Occupational position: 4= Senior and middle manager, 3= Junior intellectual and office worker; 2= Shift manager, technician, skilled worker 1= Trained and untrained physical worker

Internet use: 4= Every day, 3= Often, 2= Rarely, 1 = Never .

Income: 4= Upper income quartile, 3= Upper-middle income quartile, 2= Lower middle income quartile, 1= Lower income quartile

Ethnicity: Romani= 1, Not Romani=2

Wealth: Based on a list of 15 assets (which indicate wealth), we have assigned those into category 1 who have a maximum of 3 assets, into category 2 those who have 4 to 7 assets, and into category 3 those who have at least 8 assets. The assets considered were mostly household appliances, here is the full list: Washing machine, air conditioner, laptop, tablet, car, video camera, LCD television, dishwasher, e-book, home computer, holiday home, other real estate, smart phone and digital camera.

Settlement type: Village=1, City=2, Budapest=3.

The final indicator is the sum of the above. The most disadvantaged respondents will get 1 for every variable, which means their final score will be 7. The most privileged respondents will receive four 4-s, two 3-s, and one 2, which means their final score will be 24. Those with a score of 7-8-9 or 22-23-24 were merged into one category, hence values of 7 and 8 were categorized as 9, while values of 23 and 24 were categorized as 22. After this, we have subtracted 8 from the values, hence this way category 1 actually represents the values 7, 8, and 9, while category 14 stands for the values 22, 23, and 24

Cramer V=0,102, p<0,05

Based on the indicator which we have established, it can be observed that there is a significant and linear relationship between wealth-social status and party choice. Support for the government party is prominent amongst the poorest, while support for the opposition is very limited. As we move upwards on the social ladder, there are no significant differences between support for the government amongst the whole group, up until we reach the top two categories: amongst the uppermost groups, support for the Fidesz party is significantly less prevalent. For the opposition, the correlation is almost

completely linear: the more privileged a group is, the more opposition voters it will contain. It can also be observed that the ratio of those who did not express a party preference increases with lower status. In case we would only look at those selecting a party, the difference would be even more marked: In the bottom two categories, the Fidesz party would achieve electoral results of over 75%, while the opposition would only receive 25%, while in the top category, the opposition would win 60% to 40%. A difference of this size can be considered peculiar in political sociology. In the following, we will consistently use this categorization as representing the underclass (under the names underclass 1-2). Under this, we will consider the bottom two categories ($n=247 + 252=499$, representing about 6% of the total population), however, given that the lowest category is already the combination of 3 categories, this is actually 4 categories in total. In summary, those who are assigned the lowest value in at least 4 of the considered variables will be categorized as belonging to the underclass. As an example, one would still belong here if their income, wealth and educational background would place them in the second best category while their internet use, ethnicity, occupational position and place of residence is corresponding to the lowest category. In case the respondent makes an improvement in any of the variables, they advance from the underclass.

All variables are significant on an individual level, therefore the Romani people, those with a worse educational background, those living in smaller settlements, those with no access to the internet, those with lower income and a lower number of assets of value are significantly more likely to be pro-government voters than the other members of the group (appendix tables 1-7). However, the most significant differences are notable in the case of the combined variable. Between some components, there is a significant overlap: those with low income tend to have a worse educational background, while they usually also have an occupational position indicating lower status, etc. Occupational positions probably best illustrate the difference, which we have displayed separately.

Table 2. The party preferences of the whole of society based on occupational position („What is your professional title?“ percentage rates)

	Pro-government (%)	Pro-opposition (%)	No party choice (%)	Total (%)	Sample size
Senior management	34	48	17	100	258
Middle management	33	44	23	100	415
Junior intellectual	37	36	28	100	1144
Other intellectual, office worker	39	33	28	100	1836
Shift manager, technician (physical work downwards from here)	36	33	30	100	198
Skilled worker	40	30	30	100	3798
Trained worker	40	24	36	100	1758
Untrained laborer	45	22	33	100	708
Total population	39	31	30	100	10545

Cramer $V=0,076$, $p<0,05$ amongst those performing intellectual work, $0,61$ amongst those performing physical labor. Respondents could choose from the above 8 categories in the survey of Median. Here, „skilled worker“ is not an educational background but an occupational position. Pensioners were assigned their former occupational position.

The second table strengthens the above described tendency: in the case of the opposition, we have found a very significant and almost linear correlation, while in the case of the government we have

found that the above one and bottom two categories stand out of the line the most (in line with the last-place aversion theory). In case only those with a low occupational position (physical workers) would vote, then the Fidesz party would win by two-thirds of all votes, while if only middle and senior managers would vote then the opposition would do (by a close margin). The quantitatively most significant middle layers are similarly divided as the total population.

A number of studies have described that the Fidesz party – with in increasing tendency since 2010 – receives significantly above average support from the disadvantaged groups of society (eg. Enyedi-Fábián-Tardos, 2014, Enyedi-Tardos, 2018). It has also been documented, that as a result of a lengthy process, the political left has lost most of the working class vote (Tóth, 2011, Scheiring, 2019). However, until now, we have not seen empirical evidence of such a significant correlation. Furthermore, Andrea Szabó and Márton Gergő (2019, p. 24) using a database from 2018 with a sample of 2700 – using a self-assessment of social class - have explained that support for the government amongst better-off citizens exceeds the average, while based on the same data, Zoltan Kmetty (2018:158) and using another database based on a subjective well-being indicator, Zolt Enyedi and Robert Tardos (2018) have reached the same conclusions. On the contrary, the co-authors Gerő-Szabó have demonstrated based on 2015 data that the Fidesz party was able to mobilize a large number of discontent left-wingers (Gerő-Szabó, 2017, p. 136), most of whom were of low status. The leader of the research team, Imre Kovách has asserted that the system is pacifying the poorest.

The difference becomes robust if not only income-, wealth and education-related circumstances are considered, but also other variables which are of an equal importance from the perspective of social hierarchy and relative welfare within society (such as access to the internet, place of residence, occupational position or ethnicity). *We believe that the primary reason as to why our findings are novel in Hungarian empirical research is that a more complex class categorization was performed, while the second most important reason is the new party system that came about in 2019.*

In any case, the high level overview of data presented so far is in absolute contradiction with the core hypothesis of economic voting. According to our data, exactly those members of society have the largest propensity to support the government who would have the most reason for displeasure and dissent.

It is worth noting that the Fidesz party has never been measured to be weaker amongst the elite than its average amongst the whole population, and that having outstanding level of support amongst those with low status has not been an early characteristic of the party.

Table 3. Changes in support for the Fidesz party according to education and ethnicity (percentage rates)

	2018-2020	2010	2009	2008	2003
N (Sample)	10800	1500	3000	3000	1000
Class 0-7 (6 years primary)	45				
8 years in primary school	43	45	49	47	23
Vocational training	40	44	48	48	36
High school with matura	37	41	41	43	28
University, college with a degree	35	46	42	43	33
CramerV	0,075	n.a. = non applicable?	0,09	0,09	0,143
Romani	48	56	67	70	29
Not Romani	38	42	44	44	25
CramerV	0,072	0,078	0,090	0,092	n.a.
TOTAL	39	45	45	45	29

Source: For 2018-2020, we used the merged Median database, while for the earlier data points we used the databases of the Hungarian Electoral Research Program (*Magyar Választáskutatási Program*; for which the data collection was performed through the joint effort of the Median, Zavecz, and Tarki Institutes)

Before its current supremacy, the Fidesz party has only garnered above average support amongst those with a lower level of education once, in the period 2008-2009, while until 2003 this strata was one of the weaknesses of Fidesz. To the contrary, the party has achieved prominent levels of popularity amongst the Romani minority consequently since at least 2008.

An analysis of the underclass: the correlations between economic expectations, media consumption and political preferences

In this sub-chapter, we will further examine the effect of social affiliation on party preferences while also introducing new variables to the analysis: the assessment of economic situation and media consumption. The relationship between class status and party choice is fundamentally different between the capital city and the rest of the country (table 4). Budapest has long been a pro-opposition stronghold and the opposition has consistently performed better in the city than outside of it. Even the support of the opposition amongst the poor does not differ significantly from this higher level. *Class status, and other previously considered variables are much less relevant for government-opposition power relations in the capital city than they are in the rest of the country.*

Table 4. The party preferences of citizens belonging to the most vulnerable groups in Budapest (the capital city)

BUDAPEST	Pro-government (%)	Pro-opposition (%)	No party choice (%)	In Total (%)	Sample Size
8 years in primary school	26	36	38	100	174
Trained laborer	27	36	37	100	183
Lowest income quartile	39	29	32	100	221
Possessing least no. of assets	33	28	38	100	305
No personal computer	35	30	35	100	382
Never using internet	35	30	34	100	299
Romani	23	29	48	100	83
Budapest total population	34	37	29	100	1891

Note. CramerV: 0.066 for education; It is not significant for occupational position and for income; 0.093 for being Romani; 0.092 for the wealth variable and for the underclass. $P < 0,05$

In the capital city, the share of undecided voters is larger amongst the disadvantaged groups of society than amongst the total population. The government-opposition standoff in Budapest, however, is balanced amongst the most deprived groups. The government's spectacular supremacy only prevails amongst the poor of the countryside, but not at all amongst those of Budapest. It is descriptive, that no relevant difference can be noted in the case of the capital city for a number of nationally significant variables. This, without doubt, is supporting the first hypothesis – based on electoral manipulation: In Budapest, the national and local authority – which is to a significant extent not even held by pro-government personnel – lacks the wide range of constraints which they can apply in smaller settlements. This finding is not decisive by itself, however, it fits into the theoretical framework.

In the fifth table, we have inspected the different social groups' assessment of their economic situation. According to international good practice, the Median Institute asked four questions from respondents: how the economic situation of their own household, and that of the country, changed in the last 12 months; and what they expect, how will the situation of these two change in the following 12 months. The 4 indicators correlate very closely. In the following, we will display responses for people's assessment of the situation of their household in the past 12 months – that, which should depend most on personal experiences instead of party preferences.

Table 5. The correlation between assessments of the economy and social status. The proportion of those amongst each class-category, the economic situation of whom in the last 12 months has

	Declined (%)	Not changed (%)	Improved (%)	In Total (%)	Sample size
14 – The most privileged citizens	25	51	25	100	456
13	20	54	26	100	439
12	18	61	21	100	608
11	22	57	22	100	749
10	18	60	22	100	955
9	19	62	20	100	987
8	23	57	20	100	897
7	26	55	19	100	831
6	24	57	19	100	746
5	23	57	20	100	584
4	25	57	18	100	578
3	29	56	16	100	433
2– underclass	25	57	18	100	252
1– underclass, most disadvantaged citizens	39	53	9	100	247
Full sample	23	57	20	100	8762

CramerV=0,082, p<0,05

First, it must be pointed out that the findings for the total population in 2018-2019 are unusually „optimistic”, as it can be discerned from our time series analysis that members of the total population have not been found to make such a favorable assessment of their economic situation since 2002. When considering the breakdown by social groups, the largest deviation from the average can be observed in the case of the (small) lowest social group: it is not surprising that only very few of them described their financial situation as improving. On the other hand, the majority has described their economic situation as unchanged rather than as declining. Moving upwards, the proportion of „optimists” increases, however, differences in various social groups’ assessment of their economic situation is largely similar for all groups better-off than those on the lowest step of the ladder. The improving tendency is also not linear. The majority experienced an absence of change in the cases of all indicators. A very similar tendency is revealed when each component (wealth, education, income) of the class variable is individually considered, with sometimes weak but always significant correlations. *The correlation underlines the 2nd hypothesis (relating to economic voting by the poor): two thirds to three quarters of the deprived members of society do not think that their financial situation worsened, hence, from this perspective, they have no reason to protest against the government.* The tendency is surprising given that there is a larger difference when it comes to satisfaction with life, work and social integration (Balogh et al, 2019; Also refer to our subchapter regarding value systems).

Now that we have one-by-one examined the relationship between class status and party choice, along with that between class status and one’s assessment of their own economic situation, it is now time to proceed by inspecting the three variables together. How do the party preferences of the poor who believe their economic situation is unchanged differ from that of those who see their status as declining?

Table 6. The relationship between assessments of one's economic situation, class status and party preferences. In the past 12 months, the economic situation of the household has...

Assessment of the financial situation of the household	The educational background and class status of the respondent	Pro-government (%)	Pro-Opposition (%)	No party choice (%)	Total (%)	Sample size
Declined	underclass1-2	28	25	45	100	157
	8 years in primary school or less	25	36	39	100	575
	Vocational training	11	53	36	100	817
	High school with matura	9	60	31	100	667
	University, college, with degree	6	67	27	100	355
	In total	13	53	34	100	2418
Not changed	underclass1-2	52	12	36	100	271
	8 years in primary school, or less	46	20	34	100	1165
	Vocational training	41	26	33	100	1955
	High school with matura	36	33	31	100	1993
	University, college, with degree	32	36	32	100	1011
	In total	39	29	33	100	6124
Improved	underclass1-2	71	8	21	100	65
	8 years in primary school or less	69	9	21	100	303
	Vocational training	73	11	16	100	676
	High school with matura	70	13	17	100	687
	University, college, with degree	67	16	17	100	422
	In total	70	13	17	100	2089

CramerV In case of education = declined and 0,173; For unchanged 0,094; for improved 0,056. For the underclass: declined 0,161; Unchanged 0,073; $p < 0,05$ everywhere, Not significant for „improved“

It is not a surprise that there are more people expressing a preference for the opposition amongst those who experienced a decline in their financial situation and that it is the opposite for those who experienced improvement. At this stage, it could not be asserted which is the cause and which is the effect: it is possible that one decides to support the governing party because they see their own household's financial situation as improving, while it could also be that those who support the Fidesz party in the first place make more favorable assessments of their economic situation due to their bias for the government, which transforms them into optimists (we will return to this in the time series chapter). However, it is a key finding that a significant majority of those who experience an „improving“ financial situation are pro-government, and that amongst those with a worsening financial situation, only the highly-educated are prominently pro-opposition (data in bold). The lower is a group's social status amongst those with a declining financial situation, the less likely they are to turn against the government. Citizens belonging to the underclass, and with a poor educational background, share a more favorable view of the government – and a less favorable view of the opposition – than it could be expected based on patterns in the total population. If the opposition can only gain the support of every third disadvantaged and deprived citizen, they have lost the political race for economically-motivated votes. According to the foundational hypothesis of economic voting, it should exactly be the most deprived layers of society supporting the opposition most. It is also suggestive, that the CramerV indicator (showing the correlation) is strongest in the case of those experiencing a declining financial situation. The correlation is hence disproving the 2nd hypothesis concerning economic voting and is in support of the 4th hypothesis presupposing system justification.

Table 7 highlights that the above correlation is equally valid for the complex class variable, as it is for its individual components. In contrast to the former table, we only display data for those with a declining financial situation.

Table 7. The relationship between assessments of economic situation, class status and party choice amongst the poorest strata of society. The division of party preference amongst those who believe that the financial situation of their household has DECLINED

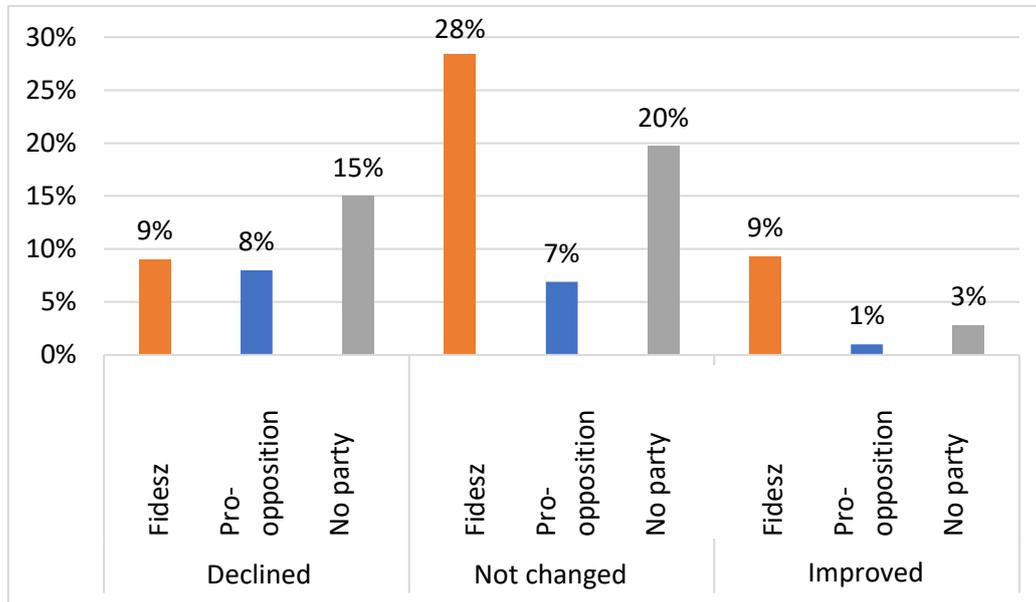
Social Group	Pro-government(%)	Pro-opposition(%)	No party choice (%)	In total(%)	Sample size
8 years in primary school or less	25	36	39	100	575
Trained laborer	19	41	40	100	477
Untrained laborer	27	37	36	100	191
Romani	32	29	39	100	220
Lowest income decile	26	35	40	100	271
Lowest income quartile	20	41	39	100	616
Residing in a village	22	44	34	100	696
underclass1-2	28	25	45	100	157
All respondents with a worsening financial situation	13	53	34	100	2418

CramerV= for occupational position 0,146; for Romani 0,204; for income quartile 0,135; for decile 0,165; for the village 0,140. $p < 0,05$ (educational background and underclass were stated in the previous table)

We have only included respondents from vulnerable groups who assessed their situation to be worsening in table 7. Amongst them, those who probably had the worst standards of living had the largest propensity to support the government. The Romani and underclass1-2 groups had a larger propensity to support the government party than to support the opposition. Once again, we have only displayed the results for those who assessed their own household's financial situation to be declining. Amongst trained laborers and respondents belonging to the underclass1-2 group, the opposition was slightly more popular, even though the margin was much smaller than in the case of other respondents with a declining situation.

Finally, chart 1 illustrates how the opposition lost that social segment, among which it should have performed best according to the logic of economic voting.

Chart 1. The division of the poorest (underclass1-2) according to party preference and their assessment of their own financial situation. How has the income of your household changed in the last 12 months? *The orange column (on the left) represents the responses of Fidesz supporters.* (N=493, TOTAL %)



CramerV=0,209, p<0,05

One hundred percent on the chart corresponds to 493 respondents belonging to the underclass. These respondents are the ones to whom at least four out of the seven attributes suggesting low status apply. 9 percent of these respondents experienced a decline in their financial situation and is supporting the government. When considering the whole group (without regards to party preference), it can be seen that more than half (55%) did not feel that their financial situation changed, while 13% believed that it actually improved (columns on the right). This, in itself, creates an obstacle for the opposition in mobilizing them: in contrast to their poverty, most of them believe that their financial situation is stable.

It is not surprising that amongst those experiencing financial improvement, only a very small proportion are pro-opposition (the middle column to the right with 1%), while a clear majority is pro-government. Based on the earlier, it could also have been anticipated that only a small proportion of those assessing their situation as unchanged decided to vote against the government (7% in the middle), and that most of this group is either without a party preference (20%) or is pro-government (28%). On the other hand, that the opposition was only able to rally a minority of those with a declining financial situation is certainly worthy of further study (8%, to the left). Even if a ballot was held with only those with a declining situation amongst the poorest voting, the opposition would still not be able to gain the upper hand against the government. After presenting the correlations in detail, we will proceed by introducing possible explanations. The role of media consumption is worth investigating separately in advance of the multivariable analyses.

Table 8. The percentage proportion of those who consume at least weekly the most popular media channels (who also report about politics)

	RTL (Independent; Commercial)	TV2 (pro- government; Commercial)	M1 (pro- government; state- owned)	ATV híradó (independent; commercial)	Blikk (independent; commercial)	Index (independent; commercial)	Origo (pro- government; commercial)	Sample Size
underclass1-2 (%)	74	73	56	19	4	2	4	497
Primary education (%)	75	73	57	24	7	7	9	2057
Residents of small settlements (%)	72	67	50	23	7	11	14	1793
Total population (%)	71	65	48	24	8	14	15	8762

CramerV values in case of the underclass: RTL 0,067; TV2 0,108; M1 0,098; HírTv 0,039; ATV 0,033; Blikk 0,034; index 0,181; origo 0,143; 24.hu 0,095; 444.hu 0,102; hvg.hu 0,146, $p < 0,05$

The key takeaway of table 8 is that the media consumption of the underclass does not differ from that of the total population in the selection of media products for consumption on the basis of political preferences, but rather on the basis of media channels (television vs. internet). It can generally be stated that the members of the underclass tend to follow the news slightly less: they consume the most popular television news programmes (RTL, TV2) slightly more often than the total population, however, their consumption of less popular tv channels (ATV) and online news portals (Index, Origo, 24.hu) is significantly below the rate of the total population. No data was included for the major Kossuth and Petofi radio channels and for regional papers due to a lack of data. However, it would be hard to argue against the fact that there are few platforms for opposition voices amongst radio channels and regional newspapers, which are consumed by 42% (for the Kossuth and Petofi radio's combined) and 20% of the population at least once a week, respectively (Median 2018). According to Median-Mertek data, the proportion of those who only inform themselves based on pro-government media channels is 7%, while the same number for the underclass is 11%. *Overall, patterns of media consumption provide evidence to support hypothesis 5, while also revealing that „pro-government bubble”-s of thinking are rare, even amongst the underclass.*

Multivariable Analysis

In the next section, we will investigate the hierarchical relationship that exists between the correlations presented so far (and between ones we are yet to introduce): we will uncover which correlation is the strongest and whether there are ones which are less significant with regards to their relationship to party choice. In statistical analyses, this is generally evidenced with logistical regression models: this is an analysis which considers a number of variables (questions, statements) at one time. The analysis has one dependent variable (the question which is to be answered, which in our case is whether the respondent indicated that they plan to support the Fidesz party or not. The model seeks

to investigate the certainty at which the propensity of one to vote for the Fidesz party can be predicted based on the independent variables (basically all questions and statements of our study). In a hypothetical case when the indicator measuring the strength of the correlation would equal one, it would mean that the model at hand fully explains the dependent variable, while if it equals zero it means that the variables of the model have no value in predicting affiliation with the government party. It can be seen in table 9 that the variables in our complex model can predict with a probability of 40,3% whether one is pro-government or not (Nagelkerke R square 0,403 – which is relatively high in political sociology). Support for the Orbán government is dependent on factors which were outside the scope of our work. Significant variables can be seen in the table below. We avoided the use of left-right scales in our analysis to avoid tautological explanations.

Table 9. Multivariable Analysis. Explaining sympathy for Fidesz.

Only those variables are displayed which had a significant effect on party choice. The variables are ordered according to their respective odds ratio. Dependent variable: voting for Fidesz. The model's explanatory power: Nagelkerke R square: 0,403.

Name of variable	Significance level	Odds ratio – Exp (B)	Name of variable	Significance level	Odds ratio - Exp(B)
The financial situation of the country will decline	0,00	0,492	Is radical (at least 5 on a scale of 7)	0,00	2,06
The financial situation of the country has declined	0,00	0,582	Watches news on HírTv (at least once a week)	0,00	2,015
The financial situation of his/her household has declined	0,00	0,623	Is Romani	0,00	1,98
Reads the news portal 444 (at least once a week)	0,00	0,637	The financial situation of the country has improved	0,00	1,851
Watches the news on ATV (at least once a week)	0,00	0,665	The financial situation of the country will improve	0,00	1,85
Watches the news on RTL (At least once a week)	0,00	0,726	Is Conservative (at least 5 on a scale of 7)	0,00	1,79
The financial situation of his/her household will decline	0,00	0,732	Watches the news on M1 (at least once a week)	0,00	1,725
Resides in Budapest	0,00	0,769	Watches the news on TV2 (at least once a week)	0,00	1,669
Is younger than 30	0,00	0,772	The financial situation of his/her household will improve	0,00	1,631
Is older than 60	0,00	0,787	Reads the news portal Origo (at least once a week)	0,00	1,599
Reads the news portal Index (at least once a week)	0,02	0,836	Goes to church often	0,00	1,441
Never goes to church	0,00	0,847	Reads the news portal 24.hu (at least once a week)	0,01	1,264
Reads the news portal HVG (at least once a week)	0,09	0,851	Primary education	0,04	1,197
Has a college/university degree	0,04	0,861	The financial situation of his/her household improved	0,03	1,192
Is male	0,02	0,89			

Explanation. An odds ratio which is higher than 1 increases the propensity for voting for the government, while if it is lower than 1 it decreases the same propensity. As an example, if a respondent states that the financial situation of the country will decline - *ceteris paribus* - there will be a 0,492 smaller, about half, chance that this respondent will vote for the Fidesz party compared with someone who would not agree with this statement. If one claims that they are a radical (they chose at least 5 on a scale of 7), however, they will be more than twice as likely to support the Fidesz party, compared with other respondents who are identical to the respondent in all other attributes.

Most significant variables are connected to assessments of one's economic situation and to media consumption: those who take a pessimistic tone in assessing their own or the country's financial

situation along with those who follow the correspondence of independent media platforms – all other things being equal – are more likely to choose to support the opposition; on the other hand, the economic „optimists”, those who follow state-owned or pro-government media are more likely to choose to vote for Fidesz. It is important to note that „cross-consumption” is quite significant when it comes to „pro-government vs. independent” media (Median-Mertek, 2018). The emphasis is on „all other things being equal”: a difference in media consumption or economic assessment causes a significant difference in political preferences according to our model; a difference which is more significant than for variations in social group affiliation.

As for the demographical variables, the only significant ones were ethnicity and the place of residence: all other things being equal, if the respondent was Romani, their propensity to vote for Fidesz doubled – while this was significantly decreased by him/her living in Budapest. Going to church often and having a poor educational background increased, while being under 30 or above 60, and having a degree decreased one’s propensity for voting for Fidesz. It is also worth noting that a number of variables such as the frequency of internet use, income and wealth status were found not to be significant (as a result of our multivariable analysis, while there often was a significant relationship in bivariate analysis). By itself, respondents’ view of Hungary’s EU membership was also not significant: most Fidesz voters also consider Hungary’s membership as a benign influence.

Moving forward from the complex model, some sub-models, where we have grouped variables of a similar nature, are also worth considering. Through this, the influence of a number of attributes, such as assessments of the situation of the economy, media consumption and demographic circumstances, on the propensity to support the government can be investigated. R square marks this explanatory power in case of each sub-model.

Table 10. A comparison of the explanatory power of the different models

Name of model	Explanatory power – Fidesz party (Nagelkerke R square)	Explanatory power – Opposition (Nagelkerke R square)
Assessment of economic situation	0,303	0,205
Media consumption	0,126	0,121
Ideology	0,072	0,050
Demographic model	0,033	0,039
Wealth	0,004	0,012
Full (complex) model	0,403	0,316

Assessment of economic situation: how has the country's and their own household's situation changed + the same with regards to expectations for the future

Media consumption: Consumes certain media channels at least once a week

Ideology: Respondents allocate themselves on a Conservative-Liberal and a Moderate-Radical scale, also indicate their view on Hungary's EU membership.

Wealth: Ownership of 15 different wealth assets

Demographics: Age, gender, place of residence, educational background, ethnicity (Romani or not), income, frequency of church visits, occupational position

In summary, all models turned out to be significant: media consumption and, especially, assessments of economic situation were found to have the strongest relationship with political party affiliation, however, the relationship was also noted for social status and wealth. If we want to assess, whether a respondent is likely to support the governing party or not, the first area worth investigating would be how they would assess their economic situation and what media products they consume, instead of how they would allocate themselves on an ideological scale. It could be argued that the causation might as well be two-way: economic optimism and consumption of pro-government media can be both a cause and effect of affiliation with Fidesz (we will engage with this further in the time series chapter). Furthermore, this could be true for our variable concerning opinions of EU membership and for basically all attitude variables, especially considering that our data has demonstrated that media consumption and assessments of economic situation only partially explain party preferences: A significant part of those dissatisfied with their financial situation do not support the government, while governments voters are interested in most independent media channels. As an example, Polyák and his associates – based on Median data – have presented that amongst frequent media-consumers, only 19% have a less than 20% in the mix of media products they consume for media channels critical of the government. (Polyák, Szávai, Urbán, 2019, p. 74). The table also reveals that the opposition voter base can be defined more clearly in terms of demographic characteristics, especially in terms of wealth-income and social status: the explanatory power of these was somewhat more significant. It is not a coincidence that for the bivariate relationship, the relationship was notably stronger and more linear in case of the opposition: the supporters of all opposition *parties combined are a less diverse coalition than the voter base of Fidesz*. At the same time, the assessment of economic situation still predicts support for the opposition with a high probability – albeit with a somewhat lower probability than for the government: this can be assessed as a result of the earlier conclusion that the opposition was unable to rally the support of a fair segment of even those who assessed their financial situation as declining. Finally, due to the ideological diversity of the parties of the opposition, it is not surprising that ideology was less significant for pro-opposition orientation than for pro-government support.

Apart from the differences noted above, however, support for the Fidesz party and the opposition are explained by largely overlapping attributes.

In this chapter, we have found empirical evidence for the following hypotheses: economic voting (no. 2), media consumption (no. 5) and system justification (no. 4). Furthermore, the data has made the electoral manipulation hypothesis (no. 1) more viable. At the same time, we have also revealed contradictory tendencies concerning the economic voting and media consumption hypotheses.

Public Agenda Perception

This chapter is sought to describe the differences in the public agenda perception of people of different party affiliations (pro-government, pro-opposition, or no party choice), and that of the most deprived layers of society and the rest of Hungary's population. One of the key steps in the framing of political opinions is the consumption of media: if we are to explain how definitive economic motivations are in the electoral decisions made by citizens, then the study of the importance of economically-relevant themes in public agenda perception is necessary. One of the oldest, and most often re-visited goals of studies in the political sciences is gaining an understanding of how different these (may) reach citizens, which of these themes do citizens consider as important, and how much these influence them in their everyday life, in their way of thinking and, finally, in their electoral choices (Cohen 1963, McCombs & Shaw 1972, Chomsky 1988).

Public agenda perception is often measured by researchers with the use of fixed list of options, with the respondent being asked to choose the news and themes they have been following from the list (eg. Micsinai 2018). This so-called „closed-question” method has its own merits, however, its significant flaw is that the respondent cannot answer in a spontaneous way, due to being invited to choose from pre-selected options. Respondents often state that they have heard about a topic, however, it cannot be established how much they actually know about it and neither how they would have referenced it by themselves. It is hard to imagine that many would say they never heard about „educational reform”. This flaw is rectified by the use of open questions: in open question surveys, the respondents are not provided with pre-selected options, but are instead asked to phrase their answers with their own words, based on the information that they have obtained previously. Zaller (1992) argues that these types of answers reveal significantly more about the respondent's perception: the respondent will only be able to recall a theme from their memory („from the top of their head”) if it is actually important for them. In accordance with this, we will also be investigating public agenda perception with the use of open questions. Based on Median Institute data for 2019 January, March, June, and November, we could collect empirical evidence of the most important events which voters could recall by themselves from the preceding weeks. Based on the survey for 2020 February, we also investigated which government decisions the respondents have assessed as the best and the worst.

When it comes to open question surveys, all answers can be unique. Due to this, we allocated answers with corresponding themes into common categories (eg. the government's different family support programs were all sorted into the „Family support” category). Consequently, we sorted these categories into the following groups: (1) *Pro-government economically-relevant themes* (family support, wage raises, etc.); (2) *Anti-government economically-relevant themes* (eg. low wages); (3) *Non-economically-relevant themes* (eg. municipal elections; we have also sorted responses regarding government corruption here, as the average voter is not directly affected by corruption); (4) *Themes regarding healthcare and education* (these constitute a separate category as they can be considered both economically-relevant and not relevant based on value judgement); (5) We have also created a

separate category for *other news without political content* (eg. the weather). When it comes to categorization, simplification is clearly unavoidable, however, we would like to assert that the most important economically-relevant affairs (family support, the reduction in utility fees) are primarily economic themes, even though they are the parts of a narrative which is not necessarily economic (Böcskei 2015).

Table 11. A broad overview of public agenda perception: the frequency of the 5 theme categories, in all months combined (2019 January, March, June, and November – percentage proportions, N=4800)

	All respondents (%)	Pro-government (%)	Pro-opposition (%)	No party choice (%)
<i>Pro-government economically-relevant themes</i>	15	21	10	14
<i>Anti-government economically-relevant themes</i>	19	13	22	22
<i>Non-economically-relevant themes</i>	48	49	49	46
<i>Themes regarding healthcare and education</i>	3	2	4	3
<i>Other news without political content</i>	15	15	15	15
<i>In total</i>	100	100	100	100

CramerV= 0,119, p<0,05

Amongst the total population, mentions of negative (anti-government) over positive (pro-government) economically-relevant themes are somewhat more prevalent, however, this can be considered to be a result of widespread disapproval that the government's redrafting of Hungary's overtime laws drew in January, as we have detailed in table 11. In other months, responses detailing pro-government positive news are much more prevalent.

It is not a surprise that voters supporting the government party were more likely to respond by selecting positive economically-relevant themes, while opposition voters tended to choose negative economically-relevant themes. Amongst those who did not choose a party, negative economically-relevant themes tend to be dominant (party due to the overtime law). It is worth noting, that those without a party choice are the only group amongst whom there is no clear, consistent tendency: in one month, negative themes were selected more often while in another positive ones prevailed. The key takeaway is that the central patterns are largely similar between the different electoral factions, as there are no significant differences between the latter 3 categories – even though mentions of education and healthcare-related themes are considered to be negative in pro-government narrative, such responses were not much more common amongst anti-government voters than amongst the total population.

Table 12 „What was the most important affair in the past weeks or months, which you can recall, and which you consider as important from your own point of view? Economically-relevant answers (Percentage proportion).

Total economically-relevant responses +	Key economically-relevant themes for the month		Key non-material themes for the given month		Tendency in support for the government -	Total economically-relevant responses +
	-	+	-	+		
8%	39%	Wage raises (6%) Family support (2%)	Overtime law (33%) Delay in payment of pensions (5%)	8%	39%	Wage raises (6%) Family support (2%)
24%	12%	Family support (21%) Wage raises (3%)	Bad standard of living (8%) Overtime law (2%)	24%	12%	Family support (21%) Wage raises (3%) Family support (16%) Wage raises (3%)
21%	6%	Family support (16%) Wage raises (3%)	High prices, low wages, inflation (4%) Low pensions, (2%)	21%	6%	Family support (16%) Wage raises (3%)
12%	8%	Decrease in utility fees (3%) Family support (3%)	Increase in living costs (5%) Decrease in HUF's value (1%)	12%	8%	Decrease in utility fees (3%) Family support (3%)

Note: We have only recorded responses with concrete answers. For the fluctuations in support for the governing party, please see our time series analysis and the summary of Gabor Toka¹⁰. „+” indicates that the theme is positive from a government perspective, while, „-”, indicates the opposite.

¹⁰<https://kozvelemeney.wordpress.com/>

Table 13. The public agenda perception of the most vulnerable citizens (merged databases, N=4800)

	Positive economic ally-relevant	Negative economic ally-relevant	Non-economic ally-relevant	Healthcare/education	Non-political	Total	Sample size
Lives in a village	20	14	47	3	16	100	804
Romani	20	20	45	1	14	100	152
8 years in primary school	18	20	44	4	14	100	471
Trained laborer	16	18	48	3	14	100	593
Lowest income quartile	16	18	48	3	15	100	519
Possesses the fewest wealth assets	13	21	48	2	16	100	715
Never uses the internet	12	21	48	3	16	100	685
Total population	16	18	48	3	15	100	4783

CramerV= 0,103 for those living in a village, where, $p < 0,5$, for other groups it is not significant.

For each group – save for that of those living in villages and for the Romani – negative economically-relevant themes appear at a higher proportion than do positive economically-relevant themes. This is in no small part due to the amendments to provisions of the Hungarian Labour Code dealing with overtime hours. If we would have haphazardly selected any other three months, then mentions of positive themes would have had a slight majority. Compared with the total population, however, no significant difference could be noted. This is surprising in light of the basic hypothesis of economic voting: when the financially worse-off were asked about the most important affair of the month, there was not a larger share of responses indicating dissatisfaction, even though they would have probably had „more reason for it”. Hence not only the assessments of economic situation but neither the public agenda perception of the disadvantaged groups of society reveals above average dissatisfaction. It could be that those strata of society which are economically most dependent on the governing party tend to be only informed about (from their perspective) positive economic themes (eg. family benefits and incentives, raising the minimum wage), and not about economically-relevant developments which affect them negatively. It seems that the government is (also) more successful in circulating positive messages amongst these groups, while negative news can only take a foothold amongst these strata of society less often. Our supposition is also strengthened by that the media consumption of the deprived groups of society is characterized by an above average rate of consumption of pro-government media products (see the previous chapter). *In summary, the high mention rate of economically-relevant themes and the low proportion of respondents from the poorest groups expressing discontent validates the economic voting hypothesis.*

In 2020 February, the Median Institute also asked respondents what they consider to be the Fidesz government’s best and worst policies since they took office in 2010. The coding of this open survey was performed according to a similar methodology as we have discussed in the former subchapter. We have first categorized answers according to themes, after which we have classified them as either (1) economically-relevant or (2) non-economically-relevant. In this case, we decided that the creation of other groups for the two primary communication platforms of the government is also useful. Due to this, we have gathered in separate categories responses concerning (3) family support policies

(which are generally economically-relevant, however, the number of mentions of these were noteworthy) and regarding (4) the government’s conflicts with “Brussels” (the EU), the migrants and against George Soros (Hungary’s global adversary according to the government’s narrative). We have indicated those mentions as “economically-relevant” which were referring to wages, standards of living and everyday livelihood.

Table 14. Government policies considered to be the best, broken-down according to party preferences (Open questionnaire, N=1200, percentage ratios)

	Pro-government	Pro-opposition	No party choice	Top 3 economically-relevant	Top 3 Non-economically-relevant
Family support	30	14	20	Family Support (30%)	Anti-migrant policies, building the border fence (18%)
Other economically-relevant themes	33	18	20		
Brussels, anti-immigration, anti-George Soros	25	15	18	Reduction of utility expenses (10%)	
Non-economically-relevant themes	6	4	3	Minimum wage raises(7%)	Anti-EU, anti-Soros conflict, the government protected Hungarians
Other	6	48	40		
In total	100	100	100		

CramerV=0,301, p<0,05

As it can be seen in table 14, about two-thirds of Fidesz voters mention positive economically-relevant themes, while a quarter of them applauds the government’s anti-migration policy. Economically-relevant policies were also the most popular amongst opposition supporters and amongst those who have not expressed a party choice. It is important to consider, however, that the response rate was significantly lower amongst the latter two groups than amongst government supporters. Almost half of pro-opposition respondents and about a quarter of respondents with no party choice could not answer or decided not to answer. In case we would remove them from our sample then, proportionally, there would be almost no difference between party preference groups. The responses of the most deprived would not deviate from that of all respondents in this scenario either. Once again: *The two most successful pro-government economically-relevant themes became popular exactly because they were embedded into value-based narratives*¹¹.

We have analyzed additional breakdowns of the responses regarding the worst policies of Fidesz: in this case, of course, the economically-relevant themes that appeared were not about increases to salaries or satisfactory standards of living but rather the opposite (“low pensions”, “low wages”, etc.).

¹¹ Please see the study of Balázs Böcskei (2015) for the value-based narrative of the reduction in utility fees.

Table 15. Government policies considered to be the worst, broken-down by party preferences (Open questionnaire, N=1200, percentage proportions)

	Pro-government	Pro-opposition	No party choice	Top 3 Economically-relevant	Top 3 Non-economically-relevant
Proportion of economically-relevant mentions (%)	21	21	20	Corruption (17%)	Deterioration of healthcare (6%)
Football, stadiums	11	7	10	Stadium building (14%)	Constant incitement of hatred (6%)
Corruption, deception, fraud	7	15	13		
Mention rate of non-economically-relevant themes (%)	7	14	11	Alacsony nyugdíjak (5%)	Deterioration of education(5%)
(the deterioration of) Healthcare	5	5	2		
(the deterioration of) education	3	6	2		
Fear for democracy, hate campaign, propaganda	2	12	4		
No answer	44	20	38		
In total	100	100	100		

Cramer V=0,221 p<0,05

In this dimension, party affiliation is of little relevance: about a fifth of all respondents, without any notable difference for pro-government, pro-opposition voters and those without a party preference, chose to mention negative economically-relevant themes, while about a tenth of respondents stated that they are displeased with the funds spent by the government on football and new stadiums. However, some differences are more marked in the case of this question than in that of the previous one: pro-government voters tended to mention government corruption and non-economically relevant themes less, while answers describing a fear for democracy and the government's propaganda campaign were mostly coming from pro-opposition respondents. The answers of the most deprived social groups did not notably deviate from those of the rest of society, the only difference worth mentioning was that those with a poor quality educational background had the lowest propensity to mention their fear for democracy.

The responses given to the above two open questions are very similar to the findings of the Zavec Institute study commissioned by the Policy Solutions Institute in 2020 March: the same questions were asked, only as a closed questionnaire. Economically-relevant themes, especially family support, were also found to be amongst the most significant. Another relevant comparison is the study of Istvan Micsinai (2018, p. 57), which has demonstrated that the economically-relevant policies were perceived by the voting public as the most important in not only 2019, but almost consistently between 2004 and 2014. In the same publication, Micsinai (2018) has also presented that on the agenda of the media, (macro)economical themes were considered most frequently. "Agenda-setting" hence worked: the agenda of the media could transmit what was important to the agenda of the general public. The public agenda perception analyses of Daniel Rona in 2017 concluded with the similar findings.

A key take-away is that the opposition parties are not able to rally voters, apart from their core supporters, with their oft-repeated narrative about seeking to defend democracy and the rule of law against the government. *The prominence of economically-relevant themes has also been revealed in*

this chapter: For questions regarding the most important theme of a month, and for the best and worst policies, economically-relevant themes were leading the mention list. It was also identifiable that the primacy of economic motivations often overrode party affiliation: that so many pro-government voters mentioned the amendments to provisions of the Hungarian Labour Code dealing with overtime hours was a clear indication of this. This chapter has provided empirical evidence for the economic voting (no. 2) hypothesis.

Value preferences

The empirical evidence presented in the previous chapters had implications for four of our hypotheses so far, with only the “professed voter” hypothesis not being evaluated in light of the available empirical evidence. According to this hypothesis, groups belonging to the most deprived strata of society have a high propensity for voting for the governing party because they are aligned with the values and the ideology of the Fidesz-KDNP coalition.

Under this “conviction” hypothesis, hence, we only mean that voters choose to support Fidesz not because of any constraints, disinformation bubble, or economic incentive, but rather because of their approval of the party’s policies and values. We would not expect pro-government voters to agree with every Fidesz policy and value: a voter can vote according to their conviction even if they choose Fidesz as “the lesser evil” out of all parties.

The ideal way to test this hypothesis would be to analyze a database with a sufficiently large population which contains responses for questions regarding the main problems structuring Hungarian politics and for questions concerning respondents’ ideological preferences. Unfortunately, the database for 9 months which we have used contains only a few questions which are relevant for understanding respondents’ value systems. We will commence our analysis by considering these findings, while we will also extend them with data from the 2020 survey of the Policy Solution Institute and from an earlier Median survey (for one month). The hypothesis would be validated if pro-government voters – especially those belonging to the underclass – would be unified in their affirmation of values close to Fidesz and if class status in itself would have a significant impact on political opinion-forming. In this case, the differences between classes would reveal a similar pattern to the pro-government—pro-opposition divide. With these databases, however, it will not be possible to use indicators of the same precision and detail as we did so far in our analysis. Due to this, we have simply selected those with only primary education to be representing the underclass.

Median surveys use a left-right and a conservative-liberal scale, along with a question concerning the respondents’ view on Hungary’s membership of the EU for measuring ideological preferences.

The government’s right-wing and conservative values appear amongst its voters as well. The supporters of the governing party differ from the average in their value preferences, however, within the pro-government party class status is not a differentiating factor. This only validates our hypothesis in part: poor pro-government voters do not align with the governing party more than the rest of the Fidesz voter camp. The somewhat surprising relationship between class status and ideological self-assessment is illustrated by the table below.

Table 16: the self-allocation of classes on the conservative-liberal scale (percentage ratios)

Class	Does not know (%)	Conservative(%)	Center(%)	Liberal (%)	Total(%)	Sample size
14- Class with the most resources	1	34	27	39	100	456
13	2	41	21	36	100	439
12	2	37	28	33	100	608
11	2	39	28	31	100	749
10	2	41	28	30	100	955
9	3	40	29	28	100	987
8	3	43	27	28	100	897
7	4	42	28	26	100	831
6	3	40	31	26	100	746
5	4	47	27	22	100	584
4	7	41	29	23	100	578
3	7	43	28	22	100	433
2-underclass	7	53	31	9	100	252
1-underclass, Class most deprived of resources	11	50	27	12	100	247
Total population	3	41	28	27	100	8762

Explanation. Scale of 7, Respondents were categorized as either conservative (between 1 and 3), liberal (between 5 and 7), or as being on the centre (4). CramerV=0,082. For classes, 15 is the most privileged, while 1 is the most vulnerable group (see table 1)

We have identified patterns very similar to those concerning the pro-government/pro-opposition/undecided divide (see table 1): moving downwards from the top on the social ladder, the proportion of liberals decreases (while that of those undecided increases). The proportion of conservatives only deviates from the average in the top and bottom two groups: amongst the elite, their proportion is significantly lower, while amongst the underclass, it is significantly higher than the average. If we interpret the meaning of the word conservative strictly, it would follow based on our findings that it is the poorest who wish to preserve the status quo most, while it is the richest who wish to dismantle it. Given the inherent logical problem with this, it is more likely that there is a preference for identifying as a conservative over as a liberal amongst the lower echelons of society due to the government's construction of liberals as the villains of society in public discussion.

The effectiveness of this conscious framing of antagonists in the public eye is shown by that opinions of George Soros (who is presented as Hungary's global enemy by Fidesz) and of "international and liberal organizations" are primarily defined by opinions of Viktor Orbán and party preferences, while social status has little impact on them (Gerő, Szabó, 2017). According to the 2018 December study of the Median institute, 62% of all respondents and 85% of government supporters believe that "George Soros is first and foremost a selfish businessman seeking to seize power, while also attempting to promote his own interests on a global scale". Educational background, occupational position and the place of residence (by settlement type) had no influence on opinions of George Soros. This tendency, however, was not identical in the cases of other "scapegoat" groups.

Table 17. Opinions of scapegoat groups according to party preferences and educational background (As the questions were phrased in different ways, they cannot be compared against each other, but a comparison of the differences in the responses for one answer is still valuable)

Sources: Median surveys, along with the 2008 database of the Electoral Research Program (*Választáskutatási*

Group	Statement	Pro-government voters (%)	Total Population (%)	Primary education (%)
Soros	Agrees: „George Soros is first and foremost a selfish businessman seeking to seize power, attempting to promote his own interests on a global scale” (2018 December)	85	62	63
Migrants	Migrants are very antipathetic to me (On a scale of 9, no more than a value of 3, 2018 December)	75	62	72
Romani	The Romani are very antipathetic to me (On a scale of 9, no more than a value of 3, 2018 December)	55	51	44
Jews	Jews are very antipathetic to me (On a scale of 9, no more than a value of 3, 2018 December)	16	17	17
Homeless	Agrees: „The homeless are responsible for their own desperate situation” (2013 March)	39	31	35
Poor 2020	2020 , Agrees: „Most poor are responsible for their own poverty”	36	24	36
Poor 2008	2008 , Agrees: „Most poor are responsible for their own poverty”	13	13	14

Program). The differences are not significant according to party preferences and educational background in the 2008 data for the poor and neither they are for the Jews in the 2018 data. Differences according to educational background are also not significant for opinions on Soros.

Based on the data in table 17, it can be discerned that those groups which have been targeted by the communication of the government side and have been framed as “villains” are more antipathetic to society, and especially to those who are supporters of the government and those who have a low level of education. Furthermore, the proportion of those who blame the poor for their own situation has increased significantly since 2008, especially amongst Fidesz supporters and amongst those with primary education at most, clearly shows the ruthless efficiency of the communication of the government party.

That those with a low level of education have an above average propensity for the blaming of migrants, the homeless and the poor points towards the system justification theory, and especially towards low status inter-group competition. Also, that Fidesz voters were the least empathetic towards the homeless further underlines these theories.

For all questions with a political element, answers tended to be defined by political party affiliation with this gaining precedence over even the independent assessment of one’s own interests and needs. This already appears in responses for the question “is the country headed in the right direction?”.

Table 18. Responses to the question „Is the country headed in the right direction?” according to class status

Class status	Does not know (%)	Agrees(%)	Disagrees (%)	Total(%)	Sample Size
14- Class with the most resources	6	36	58	100	456
13	6	45	50	100	439
12	4	45	51	100	608
11	7	46	47	100	749
10	5	48	47	100	955
9	7	43	51	100	987
8	6	46	48	100	897
7	7	45	48	100	831
6	8	45	48	100	746
5	7	54	39	100	584
4	9	51	40	100	578
3	7	48	45	100	433
2-underclass	8	57	35	100	252
1-underclass, class most deprived of resources	11	50	39	100	247
Full sample	7	46	47	100	8762

CramerV=0,076. Amongst classes, 14 is the most privileged while 1 is the most vulnerable group

The takeaway from the merged Median database is that the more privileged respondents are, the more likely they will be to believe that things are going in the wrong direction – and the more vulnerable and deprived they are, the more likely they will be to believe that they are heading in the right direction. Once again, the above pattern is only surprising if we expect people’s class status to be taking precedence in their way of thinking. People’s own social status is more relevant when they are asked to assess their own household’s financial situation (table 5) or when they are asked to share their opinions about life, work and society – in these cases, those belonging to the lower classes are indeed more dissatisfied (however, the difference is still not immense). The question for table 18 was, however, assessed according to political and not personal preferences: 92% of pro-government voters stated that they believe the country is headed in the right direction, while 89% of opposition supporters saw it as the opposite. A very similar pattern can be identified when respondents are asked about the performance of the Orbán government. The Policy Solutions Institute was right in calling Hungarian society “deaf” based on this phenomena (2020, p. 88)¹².

The data demonstrates that a significant part of the pro-government audience *can* be critical, even though differences according to party preferences are very significant. From the perspective of the hypothesis, it is much more important that the opinions of those with primary education (and the underclass) in most cases do not diverge from those of the whole population. Hence even in those cases when party preferences at least partially lose their primacy, class status still does not become

¹²“All together, our findings portray a society where allegiances to the government/opposition side have hardened, which has been deafened by the noise of party political clashes, where party preferences take precedence over basic socio-demographical realities and where the main organizing principle of society has become one’s position with regards to the reigning political class.”

definitive – furthermore, we may even find an inverted correlation from what we could expect based on “class logic” (that the governing of Fidesz is primarily benefitting the rich).

Based on the chapter, the following narrative is emerging: whenever respondents are asked to perform broad value judgement in their responses to questions in public opinion polls, – where pro-government/pro-opposition stances are easily identifiable – their answers were framed as “oaths of allegiance”, and the respondents were indeed “deaf” to all other arguments (including ones with regards to their own class status). It became possible this way that the poor – compared with the rich – considered themselves to be more conservative and to be more satisfied with the way things are generally going in Hungary. The other category is formed by questions which are less broad, which refer to a specific situation, event, or character. Party preferences are not irrelevant here either, of course, but in these instances Fidesz voters had a much higher propensity for expressing critical opinions, given that they did not have to cast judgement upon the whole of government policy (or at least on a significant part of it). On the other hand, the responses for this group of questions were identical with the previous one in that class status by itself was of basically no importance in the framing of opinions. The final category of questions is made up of themes which respondents cannot interpret “politically “ – in the cases of these, differences according to party preferences were not significant, however, neither were the respondents’ social status. It is surprising, that there was only a minimal deviation between the proportions of the answers of the rich and the poor for questions which were probing topics such as assistance to the poor, the scale of redistribution by the state and the condemnation of the rich.

All in all, the data contradicts the hypothesis regarding convinced voters (no. 3) and provides no evidence which could validate it. The poorest certainly do not have the largest propensity for voting for Fidesz because they are aligned with the governing party’s ideology and worldview the most. At the same time, this is not to imply that their vote does not have a value-based component. The chapter, however, has provided empirical evidence for the system justification, low status inter-group competition, and acquiescence theories.

Economic expectations in Hungary – a time series analysis of the effect of the business and consumer confidence indices

The goal of the chapter and the data used for the analysis

In this chapter, we have evaluated the relationship between the economic expectations of the respondents and support for the incumbent party – seeking to understand whether any systematic correlation can be identified between the two variables in Hungary. During our analysis, we have measured economic expectations via the consumer confidence index and the business confidence index of the GKI Economic Research PLC (*GKI Gazdaságkutató Zrt.*) – while support for the incumbent party was established based on the contemporary largest governing party’s popularity according to opinion polls. The consumer confidence index is an indicator established based on a nationally representative survey, which has been gauged monthly since 1996. The survey probes respondents regarding their own financial situation, their perspectives for saving money, their expectations regarding inflation and unemployment, along with general questions of the economic situation of the country. The index, compiled according to the above explained methodology, illustrates the economic

expectations of Hungarian consumers on a scale ranging from -100 to +100. During the compiling of the business confidence index, the GKI Economic Research PLC reaches out to business executives representing different industry segments of the Hungarian economy, who then explain their expectations with regards to the prospects of their own industry. These expectations are also graded monthly by GKI on a scale of -100 to +100 since 1996¹³. We have defined the popularity of the strongest incumbent party as the average of all opinion polling data for each month.¹⁴

The analysis investigates the correlations between the three indices between the 1998 General Election and the March of 2020 – providing a uniquely long-term overview of the correlation between Hungarian economic expectations and the popularity of the incumbent party. Our findings indicate that there is a systematic correlation between the 3 variables – however, it has also become clear that the exact effect of the variables on each other can be broken into periods and that therefore conclusions regarding the relationship between economic expectations and support for the incumbent party can only be drawn in a way that they are each only relevant for a certain period. The triumph of Fidesz in 2010 is a clear line demarcating a new period, and in the period since then support for the government has been demonstrably influenced by the consumer confidence index – at the moment, however, it is not possible to predict whether the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), and its economic and political consequences, will lead to new correlations taking the place of past tendencies.

The chapter, after introducing the data used, will investigate via statistical methods the covariance of the three variables and will uncover the deeper correlations between business confidence, consumer confidence and support for the incumbent party. The analysis will also present the demarcation lines that can be defined with regards to variations in the popularity of the incumbent party in the period under investigation; and, according to our current understanding, whether the effects of the pandemic may affect the popularity of Fidesz.

Support for the incumbent party, along with trends in the consumer confidence and business confidence indices in Hungary since 1998

On the second chart, we have compared the business confidence and consumer confidence indices of GKI (the yellow and green trend lines, respectively) with the popularity of the strongest incumbent party (orange trend line).

¹³ The consumer confidence index and business confidence index time series data of the GKI Economic Research PLC is free to access on their website:

- For between 1995 and 2010: https://www.gki.hu/wp-content/uploads/gki/konj_1101.pdf

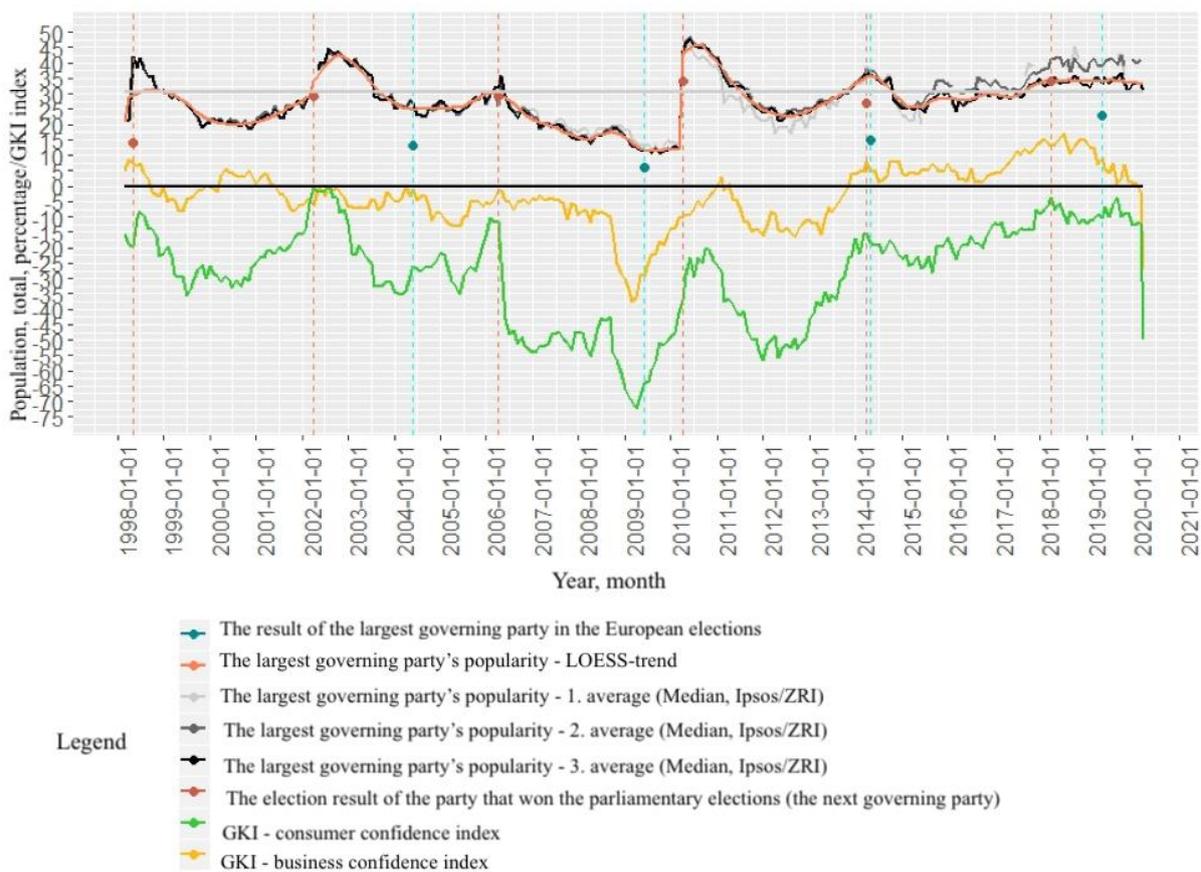
- For between 2011 and 2015: https://www.gki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/GKI_konj_1601.pdf

- For between 2016 and 2020: https://www.gki.hu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GKI_konj_2004.pdf

¹⁴ Daniel Rona's own collection was used for the data between 1998 and 2010, while for the period 2010 to 2018 Gabor Torok's materials were utilized, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Z5wHlguzz-4ucEsNQCVx4w18geYc1v-DKKXK-aOx_IU/edit#gid=0; For the period after 2018, we relied on Gabor Toka's data. https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IVTL_cXGcOfDf8vt03MrwDsNa41Xb8a0

2. figure

The largest political party in government's popularity, business and consumer index.



The three main trend lines have experienced visibly coincidental paths. Furthermore, a tendency can be identified that the three trend lines reach their peak during and after general elections while they tend to hit the baseline at half-time towards the next election.

There are clear similarities in the patterns of the three trend lines, which raises the question whether there is a systematic correlation between the variables. If these similarities are not only coincidental but they are actually the results of the systematic effect of voters' economic expectations on Hungarian party politics, then a new tool has been identified in the interpretation of Hungarian political life. At the same time, it is also possible that the relationship is random, especially considering that changes in the business confidence index are much more cyclical than changes in support for the governing party are.

A systematic investigation is necessary for exploring whether there is a correlation between support for the strongest incumbent party and contemporary economic expectations. In the following, the chapter will attempt this systematic investigation.

Our approach for this consisted of three main steps: we have first explored structural fractures in the period between 1998 and 2000¹⁵, as a part of which we have studied the support for the strongest

¹⁵ It is possible that there are certain "structural fractures" in the data series, which do not stem from the natural processes of the economy but which are instead the results of the actions of the government party. These can equally have a potential for fundamentally rewiring the relationship between economic expectations and support for the incumbent party. If the data series contains structural fractures of this nature, then even if there is a systematic correlation between the

governing party with statistical methods. Later on, we have validated for each relevant period whether our data meets the mathematical requirements for correlation testing. Finally, we have established models for each of the periods identified for explaining the relationship between the three variables.

For investigating the correlations, we have relied on data collected before the COVID-19 crisis – it would not have been possible in the short timeframe since the outbreak of the pandemic to decide whether we should consider a new period to have commenced. We will engage with this question later on in a separate section of the study.

Structural fractures in support for the strongest incumbent party

While studying the popularity of the incumbent party with computational analysis, we have identified three points in time demarcating different periods¹⁶. These are the following: the 2002 General Election (April 2002); the months following the violent protests in the Autumn of 2006 (2006 November); and the landslide victory of the Fidesz party in 2010 (2010 April). The 2002 and 2010 fractures are not surprising: in these months, the contemporary governments of Hungary were replaced. The ascent to power of the MSZP government of 2002 led to a significant shift in the economic policies of Hungary compared with those of the first government of Viktor Orbán (1998-2002). Similarly, the 2010 Orbán government also pursued an economic policy which diverged greatly from that of the government preceding it.

The fracture that came about in 2006 can be explained by the disappearance of voter trust in the second Gyurcsány government (2006-2009): in contrast to the optimistic tone of the electoral campaign, the hastily introduced austerity measures, the confidence crisis surrounding the prime minister, and the successful opposition campaign (led by the Fidesz party) taking an advantage of the situation resulted in the governing party not being able to get back on its feet by half-time for the next election. Given that the contemporary economic crisis was not primarily a result, and has not become as severe as it did because, of the economic performance of Hungary, it could have been possible that the previously noted relationship between economic expectations and support for the strongest incumbent party was disrupted.

In line with our findings, this chapter will differentiate between four separate periods: the period of the first Orbán government between 1998 and the spring of 2002; the period between the spring of 2002 and the autumn of 2006, which marked four years of success and popularity for the MSZP party; the period between the autumn of 2006 and the spring of 2010, which saw widespread dissent in Hungary amidst the global economic crisis; and the period after 2010, marking the enduring dominance of the Fidesz party in politics.

Covariance, correlation

studied variables, the intensity of this in different periods may vary. It is also possible that the nature of the correlation is altered between different periods – the business confidence index, the consumer confidence index and support for the strongest incumbent party may have a different effect on each other in one year than in another.

¹⁶ Our computational analysis was performed on the time series with the “strucchange” package of the statistical analysis software R, which was created by Jushan Bai és Pierre Perron based on their 1998 and 2002 studies.

The two relevant studies:

- Bai, Jushan; Perron, Pierre (1998). “Estimating and Testing Linear Models with Multiple Structural Changes”. *Econometrica*, Vol. 66. No. 1. 47-48.

- Bai, Jushan; Perron, Pierre (2002). “Computation and Analysis of multiple structural change models”. *Journal of Applied Econometrics*, Vol. 18. No. 1. 1-22.

We have analyzed the relationship between the business confidence index, the consumer confidence index and the popularity of the incumbent party with cross-correlation analysis performed separately for the four periods¹⁷.

Between 1998 and 2002, both the consumer confidence index and the business confidence index was in a statistically significant covariation with the popularity of the incumbent party: support for the governing party followed shifts in the business confidence index with a delay of 9 months (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0,43), while those in the consumer confidence index with a delay of one month (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0,49). These indicate a moderately strong positive relationship¹⁸. The covariation between the three variables is also significant for the period between 2002 and 2006, however, the correlation is of a different nature than before 2002. Support for the incumbent party in this period followed shifts in the business confidence index with a delay of three months, while the type of the covariation changed to negative: while in the previous period support for the incumbent party decreased whenever there was a decline in business confidence, between 2002 and 2006, this relationship was inverted (Pearson correlation coefficient: -0,31). In this period, the consumer confidence index revealed instant covariation with support for the incumbent party (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0,35).

Between 2007 and 2010, support for the governing party followed shifts in the business confidence index with a delay of 7 months (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0,35), while those in the consumer confidence index with a delay of one month (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0,38). After 2010, shifts in support for the strongest governing party followed those in the business confidence index with a delay of 10 months (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0,25), while those in the consumer confidence index with a delay of one month (Pearson correlation coefficient: 0,21), similarly to the period between 1998 and 2002.

In summary, it can be asserted that in the past 22 years, support for the incumbent party followed shifts in the consumer confidence index very closely, with a delay of one month at most – at the same time, the relationship between the governing party's popularity and the business confidence index was less tight, with a delay of 3 to 10 months. In light of our findings, we can state that the covariation of the three variables is systematic and that it implies the existence of a systematic correlation.

Modelling and interpreting the correlation

Given that support for the incumbent party is in systematic covariation with the business confidence and consumer confidence indices, further statistical analysis can be performed over the correlation between the three variables – we have performed this for all four studied periods via a Vector Autoregression (VAR) model suitable for the analysis of multi-dimension, time series correlations¹⁹.

Further to the identification of the statistically-relevant covariation between the variables, the establishment of models regarding the identified correlations is also of use given that this way explicit

¹⁷ In the case of a cross-correlation analysis, we investigate covariance in the case of data for two time series in a way that we slide one of the time series compared to the other – after every modification, we inspect whether there is statistically significant covariance. This way, we can also identify effects which appear with a delay in time.

¹⁸ The maximal value of the correlation coefficient is 1, while its minimal value is -1. These indicate a deterministic relationship, while values falling closer to 0 indicate a weaker relationship. The negative domain indicates an inverted relationship: when an increase in one variable leads to a decrease in another.

¹⁹ Vector autoregression models presuppose based on several, mutually-interactive models that the elements of each time series may not only be affected by the earlier elements of the other time series, but also by their own earlier values. For the establishment of the VAR models, we have mathematically defined our variables as series which can be described by the process of „haphazard rambling and drifting“.

predictions can be made of the effects of a shift in a variable on another – independently from the effects of the other variables included in the model. Using a statistical model which is based on an appropriately-chosen and valid correlation, we should be able to predict the change in the support of the incumbent party based on a unit of change in the consumer confidence or business confidence indices.

We have summarized the most important findings of the modelling in the below table. Values marked with a star were significant with a confidence interval of 90%, while those without a star were significant with a confidence interval of 95%.

Table 19. The effect of the business confidence and consumer confidence indices on the popularity of the incumbent party

	1998-2002	2002-2006	2006-2010	2010-
The effect of the business confidence index on support for the incumbent (with a two month delay)	-	-	-	-
The effect of the business confidence index on support for the incumbent (with a one month delay)	0,41*	-	-	-
The effect of the consumer confidence index on support for the incumbent (with a two month delay)	0,28*	-	-	-0,12
The effect of the consumer confidence index on support for the incumbent (with a one month delay)	-	0,24	-	0,15
The effect of an increase in popularity for the governing party in the second month following the survey identifying the increase.	-	0,32	-	-
The effect of an increase in popularity for the governing party in the month following the survey identifying the increase.	0,53	0,46	0,64	0,96
The result of the Granger test (whether it is economic variables affecting the incumbent, or vice versa)	Economic assessment is influencing politics	Economic assessment is influencing politics	Politics is influencing economic assessment	Economic assessment is influencing politics

For the period between 1998 and 2002, based on the findings of the model, it can be said that for a given month support for the incumbent party has been influenced by the consumer confidence index from two months earlier, the business confidence index of the previous month and support for the same party in the previous month. At the same time, the statistical modelling of the correlation has revealed that the relationship between the three variables is not one-way: it is not only economic expectation affecting support for the incumbent party but also vice versa. Shifts in the popularity of the incumbent party also had an impact on the movements of the consumer confidence index (besides the earlier values of the consumer and business confidence indices). Movements in the business confidence index were only affected by its own previous values, however.

This complex correlation can explain the divergence from the findings detailed in the correlation analysis: during the investigation of the covariation of two variables, the interaction of the observations can lead to some correlations appearing stronger than in reality, while to others appearing as weaker. The complexity of the correlation between the variables also raises the question of what we can consider to be the cause and what we can consider to be the effect. For providing an

answer to this, we have utilized the so-called Granger tests²⁰. Based on the Granger test performed we could assert that the consumer confidence and business confidence indices had a larger impact on the popularity of the incumbent party than vice versa.

For the period after 2010, the model has identified that there is a correlation between support for the incumbent party, the value of the consumer confidence index for the preceding month, and the same for the month before that (furthermore, there is also a correlation between the incumbent party's popularity in a given month and in the preceding month). A unit of increase in the consumer confidence index, on average, led to a 0,15% increase in support for the incumbent party in the subsequent month and to a 0,12% decrease in support two months later – all in all, the effect was a 0,03% increase over the course of two months. On the other hand, a one percentage increase in support for the incumbent, on average, led to a 0,96% increase in the next month. The consumer confidence index was affected by the business confidence index, by the level of support for the incumbent and party, and also by its own earlier values. At the same time, the values of the business confidence index were only affected by its own previous values.

All things considered, it can be said that the statistical model revealed that there is a more complex correlation in effect between support for the incumbent party and economic expectations than it could have been predicted based on the correlation analysis. It seems that there is no direct relationship between support for the incumbent party and the business confidence index – the covariation taking effect after a several month delay is a result of other associated effects.

At the same time, the influence of the consumer confidence index has been confirmed by the modelling. While the exact correlation seems more complex than what we would have predicted based on the correlations because of indirect effects, support for the incumbent party, on average, follows shifts in the consumer confidence index with a one or two month delay. It is a key finding that between 2006 and 2010, it was not the consumer confidence index exerting an influence on support for the strongest governing party, but vice versa. This, however, was only the case for the period between 2006 and 2010.

Summary: the consumer confidence index and support for the incumbent party

We have devoted this chapter to exploring the systematic correlations that exist between economic expectations and the popularity of the contemporary incumbent party.

The correlation analysis identified statistically significant covariance between economic expectations and support for the incumbent party in all of the periods defined by us: support for the strongest governing party followed the consumer confidence index closely, with a delay of 1-2 months, while the business confidence index only more loosely, with a 7-10 month delay. Based on this, we can assert that there is a systematic correlation between support for the incumbent party and economic expectations – it is important to note, however, that our analysis has revealed that the correlation is much more complex than the simple correlation analysis could suggest. On the one hand, not only the significance of the correlation can vary by the period, but also its orientation: between 2006 and 2010, during the economic crisis, the free fall of the economic expectations of consumers was a result, and not a cause of the political crisis affecting the governing party. On the other hand, as a consequence

²⁰ The Granger test reveals in case of multiple variables, which are changing in parallel and are mutually affecting each other, whether the values of each variable are better explained by the former values of that same variable or if the values of another variable are more definitive.

of the interaction of the variables, the correlation analysis could have overestimated the effect of business expectations – which have proven insignificant during our later statistical analysis.

It is important to highlight, that the popularity measured for the incumbent party in a given month strongly influences its popularity for the subsequent month: party political processes reinforce themselves without regard to developments in economic expectations. In summary, it can be stated that the consumer confidence index not only exhibits close covariation with support for the strongest governing party but is also influencing it: a drop in the consumer confidence index (save for temporary periods around extraordinary political crises) will lead to a fall in the popularity of the governing party; and in case the economic expectations of consumers improve, the popularity of the incumbent party is also set to be enhanced.

How can the COVID-19 crisis impact the popularity of Fidesz?

The statistical modelling of the correlation between the consumer confidence index and support for the incumbent governing party provides an opportunity for making predictions about the future popularity of the strongest governing party. If it can be assumed that past correlations will remain valid for the future, then, given that both the consumer confidence index and support for the incumbent party strongly depend on their own and on each other's values from the preceding months, it is possible to make predictions for the values of these for the succeeding months from current and recent data on their values.

Since the beginning of 2018, support for the governing Fidesz party has stabilized at a very high level, exceeding 30%, with this level of support only having been surpassed previously during election years. In the same period, the consumer confidence index has been very optimistic every month, reaching heights which were last matched in 2002. Based on the previously identified correlation, the governing party did not have any reason for concern: the soaring of the consumer confidence index indicated that the popularity of Fidesz should not be expected to stumble in the short- to medium-terms.

In March 2020, however, the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) began spreading in Hungary – and it brought with itself a historic, 38 point drop in the consumer confidence index. Observing the relationship between the consumer confidence index and support for the incumbent governing party, the question arises: what impact could the COVID-19 crisis, along with the economic uncertainty and consumer pessimism accompanying it, have on the popularity of Fidesz? While the little time that has passed since the outbreak of the pandemic does not allow us to formulate a definitive answer for this question, the model established in the previous chapter can still be of use.

Based on the model established in the previous chapter, we can calculate our present-day (as of May 2020) prediction of the future popularity of Fidesz.

In May 2020, consumer expectations bounced back from their baseline in April: the 38 point drop in the consumer confidence index was followed by a 11 point surge the next month. Similarly, support for the Fidesz party has also increased amongst the total population (it must be noted that a number of pollsters changed their methodology in these months) hence it can be concluded that the popularity of the governing party benefited from the first month of the crisis.

According to our model, this extraordinarily high level of support for the Fidesz party will not last until the end of summer: according to our expectations, support for the party will return to a level similar to that before the pandemic.

At the same time, it is important to highlight that this prediction is based on a number of suppositions. Firstly, we assume that the consumer confidence index will continue to rise²¹ - a drastic and enduring decline in the economic expectations of consumers could pose serious difficulties for the governing party. A global economic crisis could easily supersede present expectations.

Second, the model at hand is based on previously identified correlations – and as before, it is possible that the correlation between consumer confidence and support for the incumbent party will change in nature. It cannot be ruled out that Fidesz will be able to maintain its high level of popularity despite the consumer confidence index persistently maintaining low values – this scenario would, however, indicate that a new fracture has occurred in Hungarian political life.

It is very likely that we are witnessing the birth of such a new situation: the tendencies of the consumer confidence index and of the incumbent party's popularity have diverged greatly, and we have not seen previous examples for a situation like this to be maintained on the long term. The last time when the consumer confidence index was at a similarly low level, during the summer of 2013, support for the governing party amongst those selecting a party preference was around 45-47%, which is about 10% lower than its current value. Assuming that the opposition would contest a general election as a united front, this level of support might not be enough for the re-election of the Orbán government. At the same time, it is exactly because of the uniqueness of the situation that we cannot engage in predictions purely based on the consumer confidence index.

Territorial analysis: The effect of the public works program on the popularity of Fidesz

After the time series analysis, in this chapter we move on to examine settlement-level data. Measures concerning public employment, and especially the public works program have been under heavy scrutiny from many different professional fields for years and this analytical interest has remained persistent until today. Critical academic studying the public workers program have primarily approached the topic from three perspectives. Firstly, they have framed the public works program as a sociopolitical policy²². Secondly, they have assessed the program as a strategic step for increasing the governing party's popularity amongst voters, and thirdly, as a tool for controlling voting behavior. Studies aligning with any of the three approaches share a common feature in that they all focus on the general status of economically vulnerable citizens, and closely examine how the public works program influences (either positively, negatively, or not at all) the living conditions of these citizens who possess lower levels of education and a lesser value on the labor market to begin with. We will primarily engage with the questions surrounding the second and third approach in this chapter.

The reason why party preference, voting behavior and most evidently Fidesz's political support is closely connected to the question of public employment (and why the program could manifest as a tool for gaining political influence) is because Fidesz's popularity -as we explained before- is well above

²¹ According to the latest GKI data, the consumer confidence index continued to rise in June: its current value of -32 is comparable to the index's level in the period 2003-2005. <https://www.gki.hu/language/hu/2020/06/10/juniusban-csokkent-de-meg-eros-maradt-a-fogyasztok-pesszimizmusa/>

²² Budapest Intézet – Hétfa Elemző Központ (2011): A közcélú foglalkoztatás kibővülésének célzottsága, igénybevétele és hatása a tartós munkanélküliségre. [The effect and consequences of the expansion of public employment on long-term unemployment.] Kutatási jelentés (javított változat) [Research report (amended version)]. 30th of August, 2011.

Scharle Á: A közfoglalkoztatás mérete és költsége. [The size and expenses of public employment] In: Fazekas K, Neumann L. (eds.): Munkaerőpiaci Tükör [Labour Market Mirror] 2013 61-62.

the average amongst citizens whom are economically vulnerable, poorly educated and who have less opportunities in the labor market: the groups which can be considered the targets of the public works program. Given that all the data necessary for our analysis has a traceable territorial localization, it can be clearly identified based on electoral results that Fidesz performs especially well in smaller settlements which are mostly inhabited by citizens of a lower socio-economic status. The previously mentioned “voter clientele hypothesis”²³ is sought to explain this phenomenon: according to the theory, Fidesz politicians, in an attempt to gain more votes, consciously obstruct the free ballot. The prospect of being included in, or excluded from the public works program creates a dependency that can influence the living conditions and economic vulnerability of these citizens to such a degree, that they rather choose to comply with “local norms” than to vote according to their conscience. As previously stated during the introduction of our hypotheses, the public worker is not the only vulnerable group in Hungarian society, but they are the ones with the least alternatives. Earlier research (Mares and Young, and the research team led by Political Capital) also suspects they are the primary potential victims of electoral manipulation in Hungary.

In the following, we will evaluate two pairs of questions based on the theoretical framework of the first hypothesis (electoral manipulation), which presupposes that the popularity of Fidesz is affected by the public works program. Both question pairs are focused on classic electoral behavior and on the local vulnerability of the public works program with the following questions:

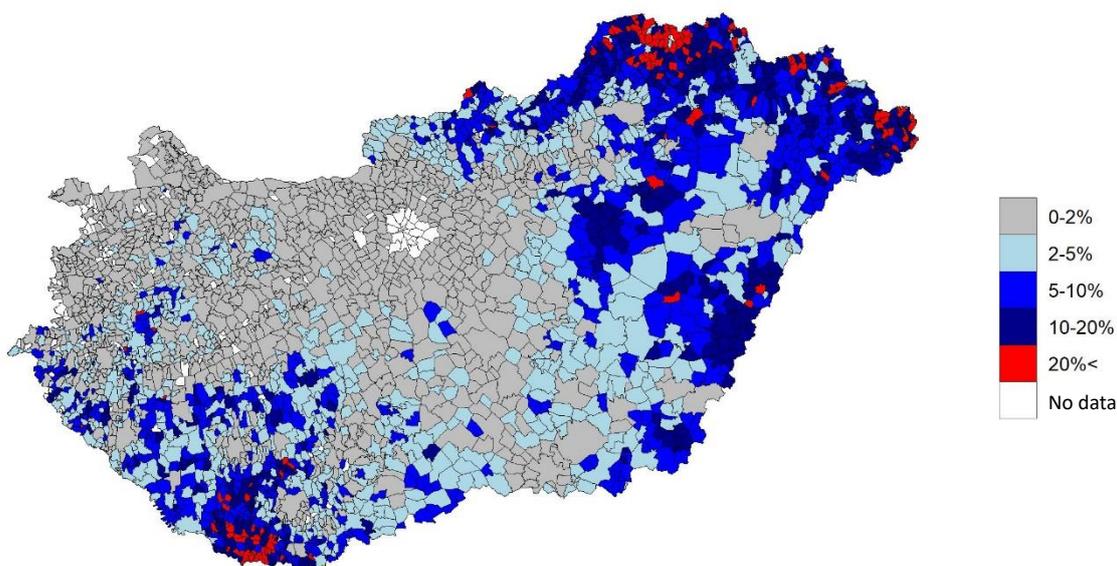
1. What independent role does public employment have for the support for the Fidesz party, based on the results of the 2018 General Election on a territorial level? What differences can be noted in this dimension when settlements are grouped according to whether they are led by a Fidesz-mayor or a mayor not affiliated with Fidesz?
2. What independent role does public employment have in the increase in support which Fidesz saw during the period between 2014 and 2018? What differences can be noted in this dimension when settlements are grouped according to whether they are led by a Fidesz-mayor or a mayor not affiliated with Fidesz?

The “independent role” condition is of importance because we already know that settlements which employ more public workers tend to be more pro-government than the average, however, this can also be caused by their particular level of development or size. What we do not know is whether it can be expected that out of two settlements with similar economic and social characteristics, one will be more pro-government simply because it employs more public workers. Pre-existing studies have not taken into consideration either these characteristics or settlement size, and neither did they attempt to establish an understanding of what sort of differences could exist between settlements that are led by mayors affiliated with Fidesz and mayors independent of the government party. The inclusion of this final breakdown is key in case of both questions, as the intensification of the local exercise of power is primarily possible to implement through the public works program, which, through the establishment of a monopoly of employment within respective settlement directly or indirectly influences electoral results. For seeking answers to the above questions, we have established separate multivariable regression models, which we will introduce in the same order as the above questions. For each model, we will evaluate electoral results in the light of data on public employment and of the settlement-level variables. We will solely be working with territory-level data and the unit of our

²³ Mares-Young (2019): Varieties of Clientelism in Hungarian Elections, *Comparative Politics*, Volume 51, Number 3, April 2019, pp. 449-480(32), City University of New York
<https://g7.hu/kozelet/20190502/be-lehet-bizonyitani-ha-csalnak-az-onkormanyzati-valasztasokon/>

analysis will be settlements in Hungary. ²⁴ We have also included other attributes of every settlement in our analysis as an explanatory and control variable for the multivariable analyses. As the key explanatory variable, we have calculated the proportion of those publicly employed, which shows ratio of those publicly employed as a percentage of those who are economically active, which reveals what proportion of the active population participated in the public works program in the relevant settlement in 2018. The territorial distribution of this is visualized by chart 3: high levels of participation in the public works program is primarily a characteristic of settlements in Hungary's peripheries.

Chart 3: The proportion of those publicly employed in Hungary in 2018 (by settlement, as a percentage of the economically active population)



The first model (table 20) considers the proportion of votes which the Fidesz party received during the 2018 election. In this case, we have investigated whether settlement-level variables, which are connected to standards of living or the proportion of those publicly employed were affecting the proportion of votes cast for Fidesz during the 2018 General Election in a settlement. For the first model, the dependent (explainable) variable is the proportion of votes, while the independent (explanatory) variables are territorial parameters: the size of the settlement (based on the number of inhabitants), the level of education of the population, their income status (according to yearly incomes and earnings per capita), the proportion of children, and the proportion of the unemployed (measured as a proportion of the population of a working age) ²⁵.

After the base model, we have drilled further with our analysis while also considering the party affiliation of the mayors, which led to the formulation of two separate sub-models. ²⁶ We have used linear regression as the tool of our analysis. In the table, we have only displayed variables which are

²⁴ We had to remove those settlements from the sample for which there were no official statistics on the number of participants in the public workers program (this is relevant for 130 settlements).

²⁵ The source of the settlement-level data is the publicly available data warehouse of the Central Statistics Office. The date of the last downloading of the data: 25th of May, 2020.

²⁶ The results of the 2014 election were analyzed for the sub-models.

significant in at least of one of the models. Based on an interpretation of the coefficients, the independent effects of the explanatory variables can be interpreted: if in the row of a given variable the value of the coefficient is larger than one it that means that all other things being equal, an increase in that given variable will raise the proportion of votes for Fidesz in that territory. On the other hand, a coefficient smaller than one means that an increase in the variable will usually lead to a decrease in the proportion of votes cast for Fidesz.

Table 20. Multivariable analysis, explaining the proportion of votes for the Fidesz party

Only variables which are significant in at least one of the models are displayed.²⁷ Dependent variable: the proportion of votes for Fidesz in 2018, on the settlement-level.
The explanatory value of the model – measured according to R^2

Name of variable	Models					
	Base model $R^2: 0,22$		Sub-model I.: Settlements with a mayor independent of Fidesz $R^2: 0,21$		Sub-model II.: Settlements with a Fidesz mayor $R^2: 0,40$	
	Sig.	Odds ratio- Exp(B)	Sig.	Odds ratio- Exp(B)	Sig.	Odds ratio - Exp(B)
Proportion of males within the permanent population	0,00	1,526	0,00	1,453	0,00	1,920
The proportion of people of a working age (18-59) within the population of the settlement	0,00	0,747	0,00	0,735	n.s.	-
The proportion of the elderly (60+) within the total population of the settlement	0,00	0,788	0,01	0,850	0,00	0,595
The proportion of those with at most primary school education amongst the total population	0,00	0,507	0,00	0,399	n.s.	-
The proportion of those with education from a vocational school within the total population	0,00	2,060	0,01	1,849	0,05	2,104
The level of income in the settlement	0,00	1,001	0,05	1,001	0,00	1,002
The size of the settlement (number of the population)	0,00	0,999	0,00	0,999	0,00	0,999
The proportion of those unemployed within the population of the settlement	0,00	1,231	0,00	1,275	n.s.	-
The proportion of public workers within the population of the settlement	0,00	1,368	0,00	1,297	0,00	1,544

Based on the findings of table 20²⁸, it can be seen that the proportion of public workers within a settlement by itself bears explanatory power, meaning that if there is a higher proportion of public

²⁷ The other, non-significant, variables considered during our analysis were the proportion of little children and the proportion of those with higher education.

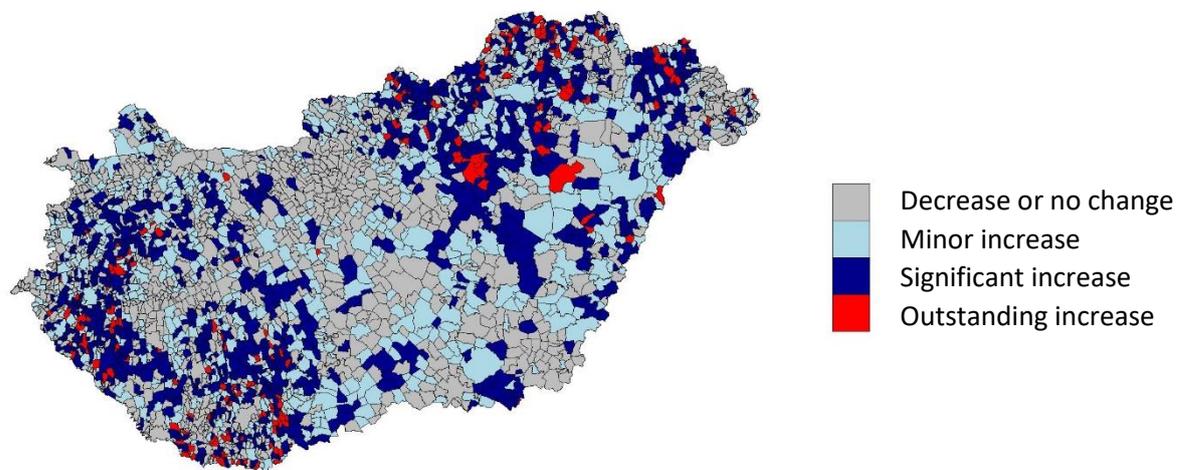
²⁸ We measured the explanatory power of the models according to R square, which shows the effect on the dependent variable of all the variables taken together. In other terms, this shows to what extent all variables with explanatory power were included in the analysis. This is usually affirmed above a value of 0,2.

workers in a settlement, there will necessarily be a higher proportion of votes for Fidesz, even in cases when the settlement is similar concerning its job market, along with its educational and demographic variables compared to another Hungarian sample settlement. This independent effect is not only possible to observe in the case of the base model, but it also remains significant in the model for settlements with a Fidesz mayor and with a mayor independent from Fidesz. While in the two sub-models the coefficients identified for the proportion of public workers in the settlement are lower, it can also be discerned that the proportion of public workers has a stronger effect in the case of settlements with a Fidesz mayor than in the case of settlements with a mayor independent from Fidesz (the value of the coefficients is 1,54 and 1,29, respectively). *This means that in settlements led by a pro-government mayor, the electoral gain for the Fidesz party from public workers being employed in that settlement is significantly higher than in the case of settlements controlled by an independent or opposition mayor*²⁹. Other significant variables also support our previously stated hypotheses: the proportion of votes cast for Fidesz are increased the most by the proportion of those with vocational training, the proportion of those unemployed and the proportion of males amongst the total population of a given settlement.

The second model investigates the Fidesz party's gain in popularity between the general elections of 2014 and 2018. We have defined this gain as the relative change compared to the proportion of votes the party received in 2014 (meaning the percentage increase in votes cast for Fidesz compared to the 2014 election), while territorial distribution is illustrated by chart 4. It can be discerned that the proportion of votes for the Fidesz party increased in those settlements which had a high proportion of publicly employed people according to chart 3. This does not seem as a coincidence based on the previously described findings, as it is exactly these (generally economically-deprived) settlements where the Fidesz party performed better in the 2018 General Election than its average and where the demographic background of the population implies that they have an above average propensity for being affiliated with Fidesz. The key to the last (2018) landslide victory of the Orbán government, taking 2/3rds of seats in the country's parliament, was in no small part that they were extraordinarily successful in mobilizing voters in these settlements which were already their electoral strongholds to begin with.

²⁹ Up until 2018, the proportion of settlements led by the opposition was very low both in terms of the number of settlements and the proportion of the total population inhabiting them.

Chart 4 . The relative increase in votes cast for the Fidesz party between 2014 and 2018 on a settlement-level



The chart was produced by the authors of this study.

We have also performed regression analysis while seeking answers for the second question, while besides the base model we have also analyzed the results of the sub-models based on the party affiliation of the mayor. In addition to the previously-used settlement-level explanatory variables, we have once again displayed separately the proportion of public workers and, as a control variable, the proportion of votes received by the Fidesz party in 2014³⁰. It can be seen that the proportion of public workers once again had an independent effect on the gain in pro-government votes in the base model (the first third of table 21) and that the correlation is also significant for the sub-models. In the cases of settlements led by Fidesz mayors, the effect of the proportion of public workers is also higher, as it increases the probability of a gain in the votes cast for Fidesz by fifty percent (table 21, 3rd/3rd – sub-model II.). As further significant explanatory variables, the proportional increase in votes for Fidesz was also increased by the proportion of children, by the proportion of those with vocational school education, and the proportion of those unemployed (especially in settlements not led by a Fidesz mayor). We emphasize that in the second model we focused on specifically the gain in the proportion of votes and it is not self-explanatory at all that the increase is larger in a settlement where the party was stronger to begin with.

Table 21. Multivariable analysis, explaining the gain in the proportion of votes cast for Fidesz between 2014 and 2018

Only variables which are significant in at least one of the models are displayed.³¹ Dependent variable: The relative increase in votes cast for the Fidesz party between 2014 and 2018, on the settlement level.

³⁰ This sort of controlling was necessary because, without this, model would deviate according to the starting point (which in this case is the proportion of votes Fidesz received in 2014).

³¹ Other, non-significant, variables included in our model were the proportion of those of a working age, the proportion of the elderly in the settlement and the proportion of those with higher education.

The explanatory power of the model – measured according to R^2

Name of the variable	Models					
	Base model		Sub-model I.: Settlements with a mayor independent of Fidesz		Sub-model II.: Settlements with a Fidesz mayor	
	$R^2: 0,28$		$R^2: 0,32$		$R^2: 0,30$	
	Sig.	Odds ratio - Exp(B)	Sig.	Odds ratio - Exp(B)	Sig.	Odds ratio - Exp(B)
The proportion of males within the permanent population	n.s.	-	0,01	1,836	n.s.	-
The proportion of children (Age 3-5) within the permanent population	0,01	1,205	0,05	2,718	0,05	2,115
The proportion of those with at most primary education within the population of the settlement	0,01	0,829	0,01	0,508	n.s.	-
The proportion of those with vocational school education within the population of the settlement	0,00	1,778	0,00	4,746	n.s.	-
The level of income in the settlement	0,01	1,000	0,00	1,001	0,05	1,002
The size of the settlement (the numbers of the population)	0,00	0,999	0,00	0,999	0,00	0,999
The proportion of the unemployed within the population of the settlement	0,00	1,238	0,00	2,429	0,05	1,427
The proportion of public workers within the population of the settlement	0,00	1,276	0,00	1,505	0,00	1,590
The proportion of votes cast for the Fidesz party in the 2014 General Election	0,00	0,758	0,00	0,252	0,00	0,456

In summary, it can be concluded that the proportion of public workers on the settlement-level had an independent effect on both the electoral performance of the Fidesz party in 2018 and on the gain in the proportion of votes of Fidesz between 2014 and 2018. This effect remains an explanatory power independent of constant attributes, such as the proportion of the unemployed, the level of education

and other demographic parameters. It could be argued that an increase in the proportion of public workers leads to an increase in support for Fidesz because public workers (and their social circle) are grateful for the opportunity to work. For this to be true, the effect of public workers on elections would have to be equally strong in settlements led by mayors independent of Fidesz as it is in settlements led by Fidesz-mayors which was not the case, as the effect of the ratio of public workers in a settlement was much more significant in settlements led by pro-government mayors for both the 2018 General Election and for the gain in votes of Fidesz between the general elections of 2014 and 2018. One could also presuppose that public workers are grateful to both the mayor and the government, and that due to this, they are still more likely to vote for Fidesz in settlements which are not led by a mayor affiliated with Fidesz. We find this duly unrealistic, as this would not only presuppose that the inhabitants of the settlements have a clear understanding of the party affiliation of their settlement's mayor, but also that they connect it with national politics. Furthermore, if a Fidesz mayor is able to gather extra votes for their party, the question is raised that why this is exactly in connection with specifically the proportion of public workers? Naturally, no indisputable evidence can be provided using the above territorial data, however, based on the settlement-level and statistical patterns, it is a much more plausible explanation that the driving force is electoral manipulation (hypothesis no. 1), rather than "political gratitude".

Testing of hypotheses, summary

Following an overview of the immense quantity of data, in this chapter we are going to summarize our findings and evaluate the explanatory power of the hypotheses. We would like to highlight once again that the five hypotheses, according to which we have interpreted the predominantly sympathetic stance of the underclass towards the governing party, are in competition with each other, but are not certainly not exclusive of one another. The purpose of this chapter will be to demarcate the explanations and reflect on what would follow if one or the other theory could exhaustively explain the prominent level of support of Fidesz. The more the theoretical expectation differs from reality, the weaker the respective hypothesis is.

1. Hypothesis: Electoral manipulation (via constraints)

Gaining full assurance over the validity of this hypothesis is not possible solely through data analysis, however, the suspicion and the supposition have been backed up by a number of tendencies. It is mysterious from even an academic perspective that a significant part of those members of the underclass who feel like their financial situation is declining would vote for the government. This anomaly is further obscured by that a large proportion of these vulnerable citizens are more dissatisfied with their lives, jobs and social integration than the average, however, at the same time they believe that the things in the country are headed in the right direction far more than the average voter does. Our suspicion is also strengthened by that this correlation is only valid in the countryside, as in the capital city deprived citizens do not show a level of sympathy towards the government which exceeds the average of the capital city. Earlier scholarship concurs in that electoral manipulation is primarily a feature of Hungarian politics outside the capital.

Our territorial analysis has further made the electoral manipulation hypothesis more viable. Between two settlements that are similar in terms of size and of the educational background of inhabitants, Fidesz is more popular in the one which employs more public workers. Furthermore, we experienced that the electoral gain of Fidesz between 2010 and 2018 was significantly higher in towns which employ more public workers. If this correlation would be true for every town, regardless of the political

affiliation of the mayor, it could be concluded that the public workers are grateful for their opportunity for employment and therefore vote for the Orbán cabinet. However, this is not the case, as in those settlements where the mayor was a Fidesz politician, Fidesz saw a significantly larger electoral gain from public workers than did other settlements whose mayor was not affiliated with Fidesz. It would also not be a viable supposition to make that public workers and their environment would have a higher propensity for voting for Fidesz out of political gratitude, having identified the pro-Fidesz affiliation of their mayor and connecting it with national politics during the general election. Based on the above public opinion polling and territorial data, it is much more likely that constraints are much more common than gratitude is, even though this cannot be proven without the shadow of doubt.

2. Hypothesis: Economic voting

It is a key finding that economic voting does exist and that a key reason as to why the poor are not turning against the system *en masse* is their relatively favorable assessment of their economic situation. Even though they are somewhat more dissatisfied than the average, the difference was not remarkable - in fact, seven out of ten members of the underclass do not even perceive that their situation is declining. Signs of above average dissent are absent from both the underclass' assessment of their economic situation and from their public agenda perception. Dissatisfaction with their lives, jobs and social status was not widespread either. Therefore, any expectation that "the poor will rise up" and will overthrow the government seems preposterous. Our time-series analysis further strengthened the supposition, as it proved that the support of the governing parties in the period under review (between 1998 and 2000) was constantly in a significant correlation with the consumer confidence index. It was also brought to light that it is mainly shifts in assessments of economic situation that spark changes in the support of the incumbent party and that it was rather an exception when it happened inversely (which was also before 2010.) It also strengthens the hypothesis that our multivariable analysis, based on the survey data used, has also found the economic assessment model to be the most significant. If we want to know which respondent is supporting the government and which one is not, then the respondent's economic expectations and experiences are of much more explanatory value than, for example, the respondent's ideological affiliation is. Finally, the most popular policy of the government was the family support "package", while the reduction in utility fees was also favored, similarly to other economically-relevant themes. However, the Fidesz government's family politics and utility fee reduction policies were able to become successful because they were integrated into a value-based narrative.

There are a plethora of arguments for this hypothesis to be only accepted partially. This approach cannot answer the question as to why do the poor who experience their own financial situation to be declining have the same propensity for voting for the governing party as they do for voting for one of the opposition parties – while amongst the middle and upper classes, barely anyone is experiencing a decline in their economic situation would vote for Fidesz. This hypothesis also cannot explain why the voting patterns of those poor with a declining financial situation in and outside of the capital city diverge much more significantly compared with the non-poor or with those with a non-declining situation. From this perspective, it is also not clear why Fidesz saw the largest electoral gain in settlements which are the most vulnerable and deprived. We have found no empirical evidence that the groups preferring Fidesz are more concerned about economically-relevant themes. There was no significant difference between opinions of even the most unpleasant topics for Fidesz based on the level of education. Finally, this approach provides no explanation for why people who assess their

financial situation as unchanged have a high propensity for voting for Fidesz. This suggests that other hypotheses are of relevance as well.

3. Hypothesis: The professed pro-government voter

Out of all the hypotheses - based on our data - we found this one to be the least significant. Of course, the focus of our study is the question why support for the government party is outstanding among deprived groups - and not why it is generally high across all social groups. Previous studies have shown that this is mainly due to ideological reasons: we have also found that roughly half of Orbán-supporters expressed their support for the government even in the cases of the themes which were the most embarrassing for Fidesz.

At the same time, our analysis has demonstrated that class affiliation has almost no role in political judgement: the opinions of the poor do not differ significantly from those of the rich, even in topics which are highly relevant for them (e.g. amongst the poor, there were not proportionally more respondents agreeing with statements such as "the government should lower income differences" or that "in this country, it is only possible to get rich unfairly"). This is the exact opposite of what would logically follow from the 3rd hypothesis. It is true that because of the underclass' outstanding level of support for Fidesz, the poorest of society declare themselves to be conservatives in the greatest proportion and they are also the ones to have the highest propensity for thinking that things are going in the right direction in the country, however, this is simply the projection of party preferences on political questions, which does not equal value-based voting. The data in the relevant chapter showed that respondents are extremely disciplined when they are polled on questions relevant for party politics, with almost everyone responding according to their own party affiliation. It was also impossible, however, to find a topic for which the answers of the respondents were defined by social status, even in the cases of topics which were of little relevance for party politics.

4. Hypothesis: System justification (acquiescence, low status inter-group competition)

The fourth hypothesis actually consists of a number of closely-related hypotheses. The starting point of our previous hypotheses were the assumptions that (1) financially-deprived citizens are aware of their desperate situation and (2) they try to change it by (3) penalizing and overthrowing the governing elite. However, many theories of social psychology point to how the above-mentioned logic is not always straightforward. Earlier, we have presented a plethora of empirical evidence suggesting that the poorest are not necessarily dissatisfied. Less than a third of them considered their economic situation to be declining, while a strong majority reported that their financial situation remained unchanged (the opinion polling chapter). This is a key argument in the cases of both the acquiescence and the system justification: what seems unbearable for the elite is not necessarily unbearable for the lower classes. The relativization of the differences can partially be due to the different benchmark: the neighbours of the poor are also likely to be poor; hence their expectations will also be lower (e.g. Hátszegi, 2017.)

What is even more important, however, is that it is not straightforward at all that they want change (2) and, especially that they could achieve it by replacing the political elite. We saw that even those lower-class citizens who assessed their situation as declining were divided politically, with just a small portion of them indicating that they would vote for the opposition (with about the same proportion naming a preference for the government). This is a textbook example of system justification: if they perceive the system to be an unchangeable feature of society, then they cannot blame themselves, not even for their own declining situation. This self-exoneration can also indicate how the majority of lower-class people think that financial success is only a matter of good relationships and family background and not that of hard work or luck (society as a whole found hard work more important,

Balogh and associates 2019, p. 95.) From this perspective, blaming the government for the thriving corruption or for the personal misfortune of the members of the underclass would be alike blaming the sun for setting each evening. Blame is instead placed on rival groups, primarily on migrants. And indeed, those with a lower level of education and those who reside in smaller settlements are more antipathetic towards this group. The effectiveness of the construction of antagonists in the public eye has been detailed by a number of studies (e.g. Bíró-Nagy, 2018 or the Medián research of Autumn 2015.) Migrants are "easier" to be afraid of than government oligarchs.

We have also gathered strong empirical evidence for the low status inter-group competition hypothesis. Members of the underclass had a higher propensity to blame the homeless and the poor than did the complete population. It was also striking that those who consider themselves Fidesz supporters are less empathetic towards these two groups than the average. We can see that the assumption (3) from two paragraphs earlier does not automatically stand: the underclass competes with other lower class groups instead of the elite. Finally, the last-place aversion ("the fear of finishing last ") hypothesis was supported by how in our class classification of 14 categories, support for the government was significantly exceeding the average only in groups 13 and 14, with groups 9-12 (the lower middle-class) only diverging from the average in terms of their support to a small extent. They are more similar to the underclass in the sense that the opposition has a harder time reaching out to them. A more detailed examination of this group – similar to how we have focused on the underclass in this study – would be a worthwhile topic for future research.

5. Hypothesis: Media consumption

According to our final hypothesis, citizens at the bottom of the social hierarchy are in an informational bubble that is dominated by government media – with this being the primary reason for their orientation towards the Fidesz party. It is undeniable that members of the underclass primarily inform themselves from government media and that opposition messages have a much harder time in reaching them. However, even amongst those who have only completed primary school, the ratio of those who never follow news in any independent media channel is only 11% - hence most of them are not exclusively following government media. In Hungary, amongst all social groups – hence also amongst the deprived - cross-consumption (the consumption of media channels which contradict one's political preferences) is significant. That the public agenda perception of the poor also does not differ much from that of the average also raises doubt over the complete validity of the media hypothesis. Generally, the poor had an equal propensity for selecting economically-relevant themes as the most important themes of the month as the average respondent.

Nevertheless, the data from the multivariable analysis has proven that people who belong to the same social group would probably vote for different parties solely based on their media consumption. After assessments of the economy, it was media consumption that held the strongest explanatory power in our multivariable analysis. In summary, the overall relevance of this hypothesis cannot to be called into questioned.

It falls outside the boundaries of our analysis, but is still worth mentioning that the lack of media channels (and electoral manipulation) is only one reason for the absence of a prominent opposition presence in the countryside. The people of the countryside have long been targeted by the communications of Fidesz, while for the opposition they are hardly a priority. It is an illustrative example that, not counting the far-right Jobbik party, only one-third of the opposition's MPs are from the countryside, while the same ratio for Jobbik and the Fidesz-KDNP coalition is 70% and 80%,

respectively.³² We have also shown that the “fear for democracy” and for the rule of law does not resonate amongst the underclass, who are not keen supporters of democracy anyway.

The effect of the coronavirus

Consequent to the summary of observations from before the COVID-19 pandemic, we are going to consider one final topic: how much did the situation change due to the virus? Naturally, we are not able to investigate it comprehensively due to a lack of data. However, it is still possible to entertain a number of questions with this limited data. In the following, we will rely on data collected by the Median institute in late May 2020 through a telephone survey as a part of which 1000 respondents were interviewed. The survey was specifically ordered by the 21 Research Centre. The data collection took place between May 28 and June 5.

Firstly, it is worth examining how the "usual" indicator of the assessment of the economic situation has changed throughout the pandemic.

Table 22. The financial situation of your household in the past/upcoming 12 months...

Past assessment	Declined (%)	Unchanged (%)	Improved (%)	Total (%)
Fidesz	28	50	21	100
Opposition	56	33	11	100
No party choice	46	40	13	100
Total population	42	43	16	100
Future expectation	will decline (%)	will remain unchanged(%)	will improve(%)	Total (%)
Fidesz	26	11	59	100
Opposition	62	13	21	100
No party choice	48	16	27	100
Total population	43	13	38	100

Past: Cramer V=0.183, future Cramer V=0.198. Medián, May 2020, N=1000

On the tendency shown in the time-series chapter it could already be seen that assessments of economic situation have declined dramatically throughout April 2020, however, by the end of May an enormous difference has emerged with regards to the assessment of the past and the foreseeable future. Usually the expectations regarding the future are shaped solely by the (recent) past, hence they usually follow a similar pattern. A divergence of this magnitude is very rare: the last time it happened in Hungary was in 2010, prior to the election of the Orbán government, which was more than certain by then. It is important to note from the data for the total population, it is unusual that the proportion of those who expect their situation to remain unchanged has eroded from the usual 50% to only 13%. This is understandable as the majority of those who expect a change for the better probably understand this question as improving compared to their situation during the pandemic and not compared to their situation compared to before the pandemic. The fact that the sum average has barely declined compared to that from 6 months earlier, when the positive and negative expectations were balanced, could probably be deduced to this.

³² Own calculation, we have considered a politician to be „from the countryside” if they contested a seat in the countryside and if they exercised real political activity outside of Budapest.

The pattern regarding party preferences is not surprising, momentarily it is maybe not even irrational that someone would vote in favour of the governing parties even despite their declining situation. However, it is worth noting that 26% of Fidesz supporters think that their situation will continue to decline. All this considered, due to the overrepresentation of Fidesz supporters in the survey, the future expectations are not yet significantly more negative, but the significant increase of pessimism among those without a party preference can be a warning sign for Fidesz.

The next important question is that of what percentage of the population was affected by the pandemic and to what extent?

Table 23. Which statement applies to you? Since the beginning of the pandemic...

	your income ceased because you have lost your job (%)	your income has decreased significantly (%)	your income has not decreased yet, but it probably will in the near future (%)	it will probably not decrease (%)	it will certainly not decrease (%)	pensioner, stay-at-home, student etc. (%)	Total (%)
Fidesz supporter	6	12	6	15	30	31	100
opposition	7	16	10	19	20	26	100
without party preference	6	10	9	23	22	28	100
Maximum 8 classes of elementary school	8	5	11	10	19	47	100
Vocational school	8	17	9	18	23	24	100
High school graduation	5	13	7	22	27	26	100
University level graduation	4	11	7	22	30	24	100
Total	6	12	8	19	25	29	100

CramerV=0.143 at the educational factor and 0.115 at the party preference. Medián, May 2020, N=1000

Altogether, the fact that 6% of the population lost their job is in accordance with earlier surveys and estimates. Combined with those whose income has decreased and those who believe their income might decrease in the future, we have at hand more than one fourth of the population, almost 40% of the economically active population, which is an aggregate of more than 2 million citizens. It is possible that a portion of these people's incomes only decreased temporarily and that with the restarting of the economy their financial plight will be relieved (e.g. they can work in a reopened restaurant), but in many sectors (e.g. in tourism) the prospect of a quick restart is vague. In summary, the dire situation of these 2 million people is an unfortunate development for the government and it is also a warning sign for them that there are a further 1.5 million people (19%) who do not expect a

decrease in their income but who also do not think that such would be impossible to happen. It is of course not possible to foresee how long the patience of the current and future victims of the economic crisis will last, but momentarily it is still enduring, as we can find them among the supporters of the government in a similar percentage as among the whole population. The differences regarding education and party preference are modest at most.

In this situation the most important question might be to what extent the victims of the crisis blame the government.

Table 24.: „What do you think, what is the cause of this (potential or real) loss of income?” Only respondents who indicated that they were harmed by the crisis were asked this question (N=257)

	Does not know (%)	Only the virus is responsible, the government is not to blame (%)	The virus shares most of the responsibility, but the government is not free of blame (%)	The government bears most of the responsibility, but the virus is also partially to blame (%)	Only the government is to blame (%)	In Total (%)
Pro-government	5	65	23	6	2	100
Pro-opposition	6	28	36	20	9	100
No party choice	5	27	39	12	15	100
8 years in primary school, at most	3	35	30	13	20	100
Vocational school	6	45	27	13	7	100
High school diploma	5	36	41	13	5	100
Higher education with a degree	5	48	29	14	5	100
Total	5	41	33	13	8	100

Cramer V is solely significant in case of the party affiliation: 0,287. Source: Medián, May 2020, N=257

In the table, we have only displayed the distribution of the responses of those respondents who have experienced a decline in their income or who expect such to impact them. At first, it could be suggested that the data is reassuring for Viktor Orbán: only 21% believe that the government is primarily to blame and those who share this opinion form a minority amongst even the opposition. At the same time, here people had to choose between the government and the virus, not between the government and the opposition. Few would argue that the virus did not have at least a significant part to play in this crisis. The 8 percent of respondents who indicated that they are solely victims of the government and not those of the crisis must be zealously anti-Fidesz. The about one-third of respondents who stated that they believe the primary culprit is the virus, while also placing some blame in the government could foreshadow trouble for the government. The number of those who place no blame in the government is high, however, they nevertheless do not form a majority. Hence, out of the 2 million people represented by these respondents, about 1,2 million are at least partially dissatisfied with the conduct of the government during the crisis. A fairly large proportion of them would vote for Fidesz, however, if their situation is not stabilized (or their existential fear is not alleviated), then they will be unlikely to maintain affiliation with Orbán's faction: this is not a consideration of a secondary nature which one can be discontent towards while remaining a voter of Fidesz. This is a question of life and

death and if voters will not be satisfied with the government with regards to this aspect, they will most likely punish it. If we add that the government will be unlikely to be able to blame the opposition for the impending economic crisis and that the chances for a quick economic rebound are very slim, then it can be concluded that the prospects of the government are much more unclear than they would seem at first sight.

Our data on future expectations also does not reveal any clear tendencies.

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