



# THE "MÁRKI-ZAY" TREND

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARIES' VOTERS

[www.21kutatokozpont.hu](http://www.21kutatokozpont.hu)

## Executive Summary

Péter Márki-Zay exceeded all expectations in the first round of the opposition’s presidential primaries. His reputation and popularity have been on the rise since he first appeared on the political scene in 2018 and peaked during the campaign period of the primaries. His novelty and anti-establishment campaign, coupled with the divisive personality of his opponent Klára Dobrev, and the withdrawal of Gergely Karácsony (the mayor of Budapest) enabled him to win the second round of the primaries.

Whilst numerous citizens voted exclusively in the first round, the voter turnout nonetheless increased, which can be attributed to the high number of new voters (approx. 78 thousand), voting only in the final round of the primaries. It is presumed that a great proportion of this group are undecided, disillusioned and first-time (young) voters won over by Márki-Zay. Those who voted in the first round but stayed at home for the following round are supposedly the ones whose candidate did not make the final round. Most likely, they are supporters of Péter Jakab (leader of the right-wing Jobbik party) as he did not explicitly endorse either Klára Dobrev or Márki-Zay in the second round.

The altered rules of participation – i.e. unlike in the first round, one could vote anywhere regardless of their home address – could heavily influence the geographic distribution of voters. Hence, only weak correlations can be made based on these numbers. Nevertheless, it is notable that the voter turnout increased remarkably in the inner electoral constituencies of the capital.

The analysis of 21 Research Center observed the effect of Karácsony’s withdrawal and his endorsement of Márki-Zay, as well as the fallout of Jakab and András Fekete-Győr from the race on the distribution of second round votes between Dobrev and Márki-Zay. The proportion of votes Jakab gained in the first round stands in positive correlation with the difference between Dobrev’s in the two rounds. Put differently, in those constituencies where Jakab performed well in the first round, Dobrev could gain more votes in the second round (compared to her first-round results). The achievements of Márki-Zay negatively correlate with those of Jakab. In contrast, the share of votes for Karácsony in the first round positively correlates with the surplus of votes received by Márki-Zay in the second round. This impact is most substantial in the inner districts of Budapest (especially those in Buda); however, it cannot be ignored in other parts of the country either.

Although the victory of Márki-Zay was undoubtedly a surprise, the real question is whether he will be able to endure the next months until the 2022 general elections. Moreover, it shall be seen whether he is capable of offering a vision convincing enough for voters who stayed away from the primaries (e.g. undecided voters, opposition supporters who did not participate this time, and disillusioned Fidesz-voters). In addition, he will have to win over those voters who voted for other opposition candidates at the primaries – especially regarding voters of the Democratic Coalition (the party of Dobrev and Ferenc Gyurcsány, former Prime Minister of Hungary).

## Our Expectations Prior to the Primaries

The success of Márki-Zay was a big surprise considering the scarce financial resources he had and the lack of a serious organizational background. Still, did he really come from nowhere?

The mayor of Hódmezővásárhely has been among the [most popular](#) politicians of the opposition – with [smaller fluctuations](#) – since his [sudden break](#) into politics in the winter of 2018. His popularity – unlike many former leading opposition politicians’ – withstood the embarrassing 2018 general elections defeat of the opposition and the [targeted smear campaign](#) of Fidesz against him. Thus, he could dive into the 2018-2022 cycle from a relatively favourable position. Using his political opportunities, he could learn and prove his competency and leadership skills at two places at once: as the mayor of Hódmezővásárhely and as a founder of Movement for a Hungary of Everyone (MMM). Márki-Zay was the [first to enter the race](#) for the united opposition’s presidential candidate in the middle of the “off season” in politics in June 2020. Although not strikingly, his popularity was on a steady rise. According to a [survey](#) of Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute, a third of eligible voters named Márki-Zay as someone they could imagine next to Karácsony in a key political position in autumn 2020. Despite his rising status, publicly available opinion polls conducted between [spring](#) and [summer](#) 2021 repeatedly underestimated him. They ranked him in the 4<sup>th</sup> place among presidential candidates and no research institute predestined him proceeding to the second round.

The unexpected underperformance of Péter Jakab; Márki-Zay’s excellent execution of the television debates<sup>1</sup>; his well-targeted campaign and rhetoric criticising both the opposition and the government all contributed to him getting into the top 3 candidates, and thus the final round. As the winner of the first round, Dobrev focused on her own campaign, meanwhile Karácsony and Márki-Zay started negotiations of a co-ordinated withdrawal immediately after the first round. During this process several alternatives were discussed, but a decision was made eventually based on [survey](#) data and the [announcement](#) of Momentum<sup>2</sup> (the youngest opposition party). The talks – surprisingly to many – resulted in Karácsony withdrawing from the race to support Márki-Zay.

While nationwide primaries were unprecedented in Hungary and therefore citizens were less informed about the process, the older segment of voters returned to the voting booth in the second round as well. The long-lasting negotiations between Karácsony and Márki-Zay and the more direct and hostile campaign of the second round did not decrease voter turnout substantially. Although [several voters participated in the first round exclusively](#), we suggest that this does not link to the style of the campaign. In fact, the observed voter turnout is most likely the result of the personal character of the candidates, the intensifying dynamics of the duel

---

<sup>1</sup> Prime minister candidate debates are a rare phenomenon in Hungarian politics and the three debates attracted a great audience.

<sup>2</sup> The party chose to endorse Péter Márki-Zay despite previous promises made to Gergely Karácsony.

increasing the stakes, and the different views on the level of policies between Dobrev and Márki-Zay.

The second round brought a [higher voter turnout](#). 28, 667 more voters showed up in the second round than in the previous one, which equals to a 4.5 percent increase. In comparison with [international examples](#), such as the [American](#), [Italian](#), or French presidential primaries, we can observe that campaigns became more tense as the primaries' final round approached. Nonetheless, this change of character did not go hand in hand with voters' lowered appetite to participate, nor with the break-up of the given party formation or alliance.

## *Which voter groups decided the second round?*

It is important to note that [the rules of participation were changed](#) between the two rounds of the primaries. Whilst in the first round, one had to vote in the constituency of their officially registered home address, everyone was free to vote wherever they preferred in the second round. Hence, the increased number of Budapest-based voters is partly due to those voters living there, but officially being registered elsewhere, as well as to those opposition supporters residing in suburban areas, but commuting to Budapest for their work or studies. One may presume that this tendency is noticeable in other bigger university towns. However, there is no data available at present on a regional level so we can only provide a superficial explanation, and we have no knowledge of how this affected participation patterns. Furthermore, one must not forget the improved performance of the online voting system for the second round. We do not know of any attacks immobilising the online system, and voting itself (both on the voters' and the operators' side) ran more effectively and smoothly, thus allowing even more citizens to participate online in the second round of primaries.

Examining the voter turnout, the second round raised two cardinal questions: (1) who are those voter groups who [did not participate in the first, yet voted in the second round](#) and (2) what about those voters who [voted in the first, but stayed away for the second round](#).

With regards to the new voters, their appearance may also be attributed to the emergence of new political formations (such as movements and parties) and new persons (activists, movement leaders, politicians) that were able to revive the hopes of those less interested or disillusioned. In the first round, promulgating internal, anti-establishment reform, the character of Márki-Zay Péter symbolised a means of putting an end to corruption. This image was further reinforced in the second round. The value of novelty, however, is a double-edged sword: groups of voters, repeatedly favouring the new, are less inclined to become loyal once the recent grows into habitual. This implies that as soon as a fresh character arises on the scene, they might immediately turn their backs on the former favourite. In the last 10 to 15 years, such phenomena have often occurred: for instance, with LMP in 2009, with Együtt around 2013-2014, and in 2019, with Momentum.

The second question is perhaps even more difficult to answer. Currently, the consensus amongst pollsters is that the voters of Péter Jakab stayed at home for the second round, as [he did not explicitly encourage them to participate](#). However, there is no reliable opinion-poll data available at the moment that could support this theory.

## *How did the withdrawal of Karácsony and the abstention of Jakab impact the outcome of the primaries?*

According to the analysis of 21 Research Center, Márki-Zay was not resourceful enough to speak to those voters living in counties (mostly socio-economically deprived areas of the countryside) where Jakab performed better compared to the national average in the first round. In these counties, Dobrev seems to have had more success in convincing and attracting the supporters of Jakab - now left without a candidate. Where Jakab performed better in the first round, Dobrev gained more votes in the second. Based on this, it is probable that, whilst Jakab and his party Jobbik did not mobilize their voters in the second round or endorsed Dobrev, their voters were still more likely to have voted for Dobrev. Additionally, it should be noted that the supporters of Jakab were the ones who stayed at home in the largest proportion - which could have negatively impacted the second-round results of Dobrev. Truth be told, Jakab and Dobrev thrived in the same counties compared to their national average in the first round as well. Hence, the smaller share of votes she gained may be attributed to Jakab's absence from the second round and that he did not stir up his voters to choose Dobrev in the final.

Figure 1. Correlation between Péter Jakab's first-round share of votes and the difference of votes between the two rounds for Klára Dobrev

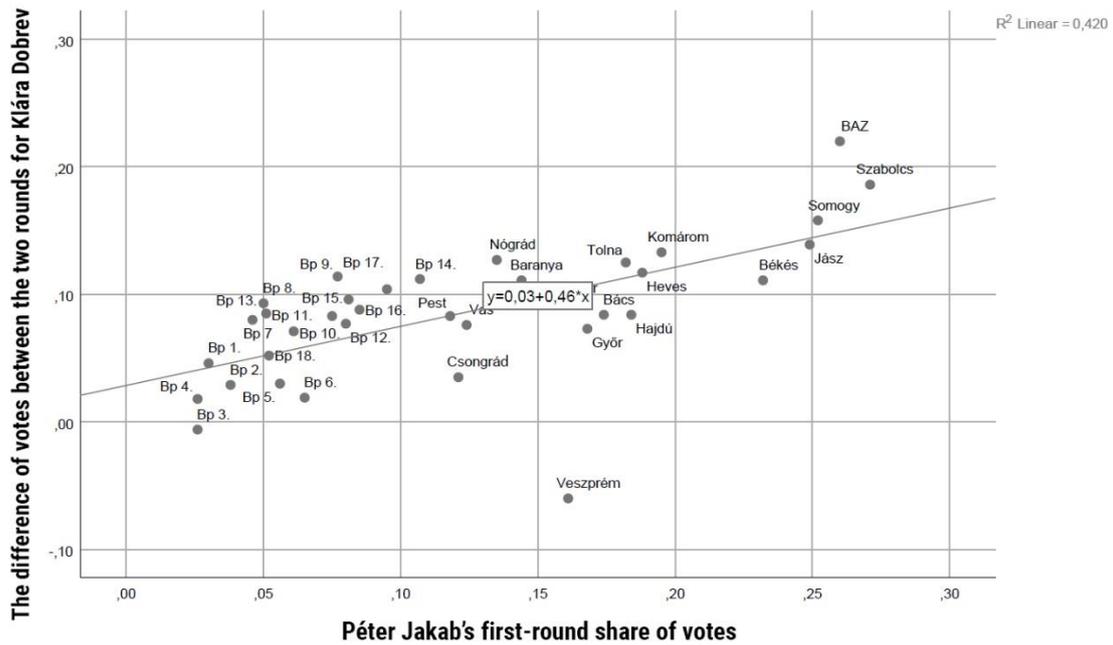
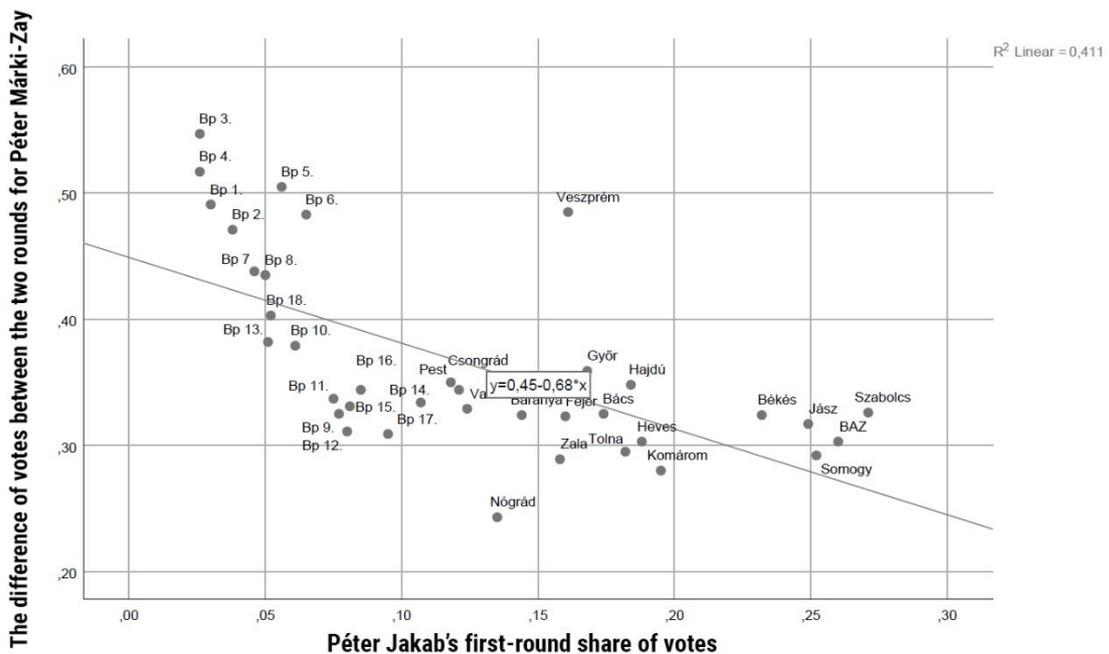


Figure 2. Correlation between Péter Jakab's first-round share of votes and the difference of votes between the two rounds for Péter Márki-Zay



The available data from the counties show that in the electoral districts where Karácsony performed better in the first round than his national average, Márki-Zay was more popular in the second round. Results of a [survey](#) conducted by Závecz Research Institute after the first round

showed that 56 percent of Karácsony’s voters would support Márki-Zay in the second round. This suggested that supporters of Karácsony were more likely to drift towards Márki-Zay – yet, based on territorial distribution, not in the same proportion. Karácsony’s endorsement of Márki-Zay primarily convinced those living in the inner districts of Pest and the green-belt of Buda to vote for Márki-Zay. At the same time, the mobilization of Karácsony in some suburban areas of Pest as well as counties could have had less effect, and the two camps of supporters did not merge fully. However, the increased number of votes for Márki-Zay can be explained with the previously mentioned new rules of the second round, which also allowed non-residents to vote in the capital.

It would be a mistake to state that the second round was won “on the streets” of Budapest. Data on counties illustrate that Márki-Zay expanded his voter base in all parts of the country, even in those counties where Karácsony underperformed his national average in the first round. Hence, in these counties the success of Márki-Zay cannot simply be accounted for by the withdrawal of Karácsony.

Figure 3. Correlation between Gergely Karácsony’s first-round share of votes and the difference of votes between the two rounds for Péter Márki-Zay

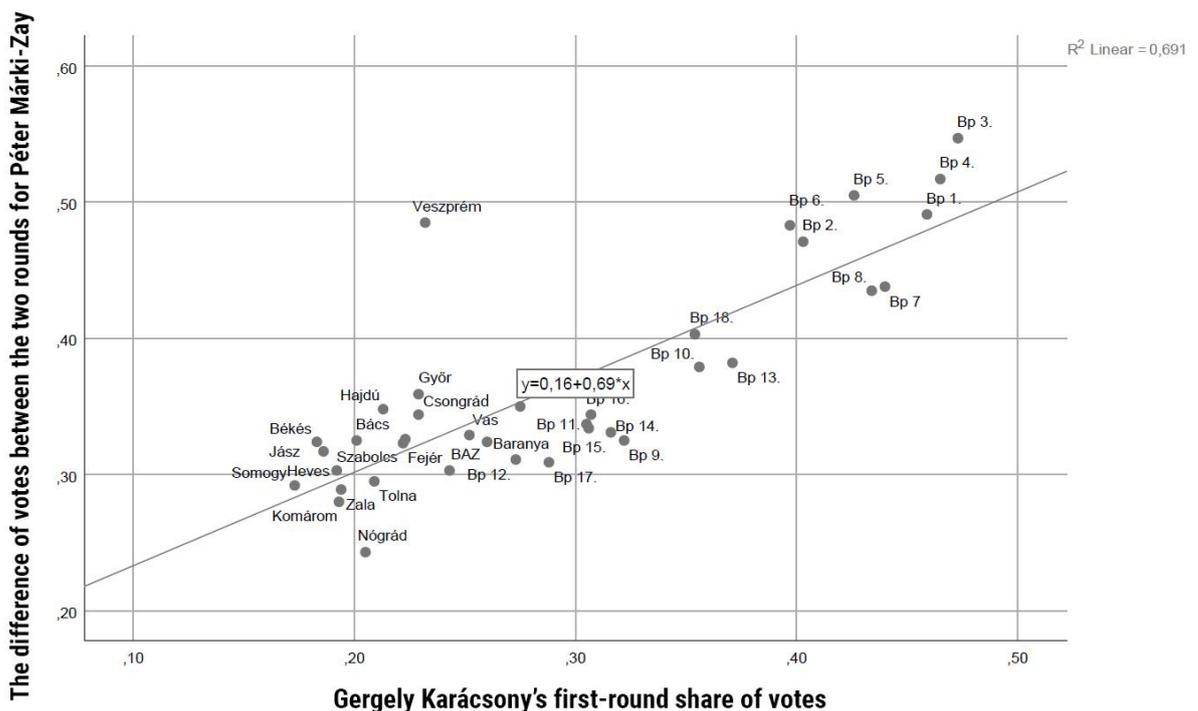
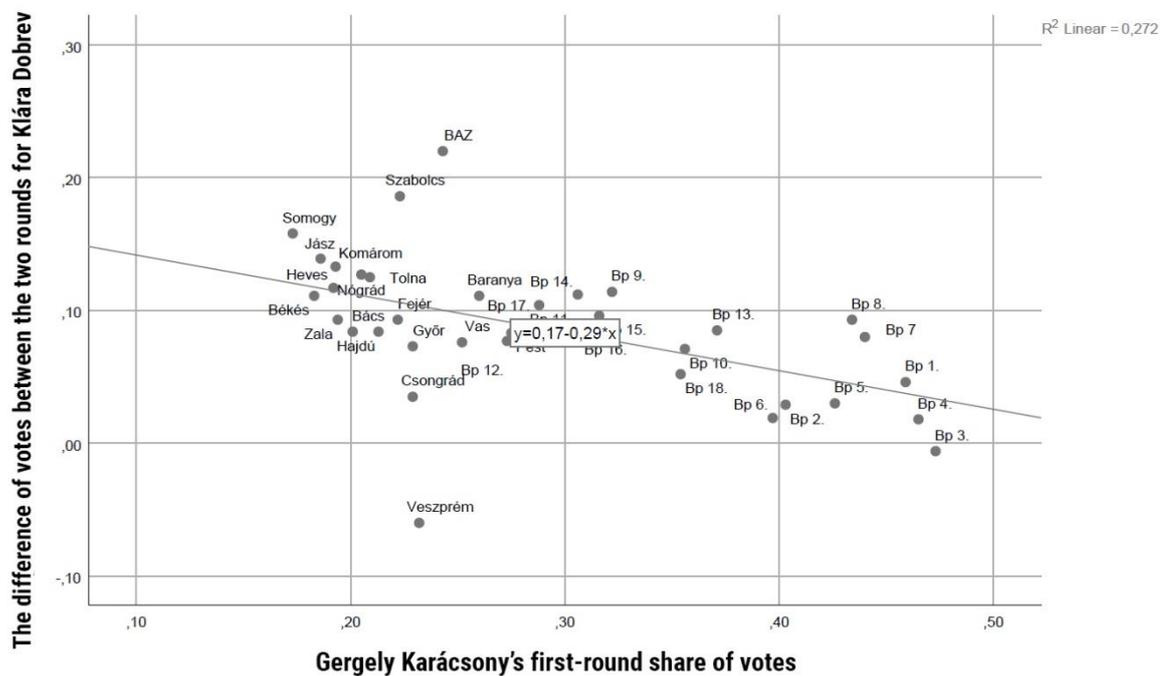


Figure 4. Correlation between Gergely Karácsony's first-round share of votes and the difference of votes between the two rounds for Klára Dobrev



## Conclusion

The present analysis of 21 Research Center aimed at establishing a hypothesis on the reasons behind the victory of Márki-Zay. The analysis has shown the mayor's undiminished popularity since 2018 as well as his nationwide reputation as of the beginning of 2020. Various reasons may be provided to explain the results of the second round. Emphasising the significance of Karácsony's withdrawal - which resulted in both the inner-city voting districts of Pest and those in the greenbelt of Buda displaying an unprecedented backing of Márki-Zay -, our study claimed this resignation to be of primal importance. Additionally, Márki-Zay could increase his voter base also in those counties, where the Budapest mayor did poorly in the first round. From the data available, we can further conclude that the majority of the András Fekete-Győr's voters went over to Márki-Zay, while those in the favour of Péter Jakab mostly chose to avoid the second round. However, deductions of individual voting fluctuations based solely on territorial data are not always precise.

The fortification of Márki-Zay could very well have opened a new chapter in Hungarian politics, but whether it is going to be a one-person show, or the collective rise of the Movement for a Hungary of Everyone (MMM) as a seventh political party (currently [measured](#) at 4%) is yet to be seen. With the roles becoming ever more clear and delineated, it is questionable whether he is going to be

able to further mobilise voting groups, as suggested by the [study](#) of Závach Research. Additionally, outside of party politics, it is yet to be seen if the cultural and economical elite, and other influencers of public opinion who advocated for individual candidates during the primaries will support him. How long will the newfound magic of Márki-Zay last? What are his personal limits, and will he be able to keep up with the pace demonstrated in the recent weeks? Lastly, are the opposition parties and their respective prime minister candidates going to accept him as the leader, as they agreed? Based on the outcome of the primaries, a substantial portion of opposition voters put their trust in Márki-Zay. The only question remaining is whether he will manage to draw those potential future voters who have now stayed at home, or participated but not in his favour (the latter of which mostly DK supporters and those disillusioned by the past 12 years of Hungarian politics), to the voting booth in April 2022.