

What Unites Us More than Divides Us

*Research on political divisions and similarities
among Hungarian voters*

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Abstract

This report presents findings from a study by the 21 Research Center, in cooperation with Heinrich Böll Stiftung, examining political polarization in Hungary and identifying potential areas of consensus for depolarization. Using focus groups and a national survey, the research found that values such as family and freedom are widely shared, though divisions remain regarding national identity, human rights, and political discourse. Economic insecurity further deepens these divides. The report offers recommendations for NGOs to use shared values to promote unity, policymakers to address inequality, and future research to explore the links between economic insecurity and polarization, as well as generational differences in national identity

Introduction

Political and social polarization in Hungary has intensified in recent decades, creating significant divisions not only between political factions but also across broader social, cultural, and economic domains. This polarization, rooted in historical transitions such as the 1989-1990 shift from communism to democracy, has been exacerbated by pivotal political events, notably Viktor Orbán's speech in 2002, the 2006 Ószöd speech and the consolidation of power by the Fidesz government from 2010 onward. Contemporary political discourse in Hungary is often characterized by divisive rhetoric, where narratives of exclusion and identity construction serve to demarcate certain groups as "authentic" members of the national community, while others are marginalized. This rhetorical strategy has contributed to an increasingly fragmented society. The implications of this polarization are far-reaching and detrimental to both the social fabric and the political health of the nation. Deep divisions block effective communication between different social and political groups, reducing the capacity for mutual understanding and eroding social trust. As political opposition becomes viewed as existential threats rather than legitimate opponents, the possibility for productive dialogue and compromise diminishes. This lack of dialogue threatens the functioning of democratic processes, as it leads to the cementing of political positions and undermines the capacity for collective problem-solving. In the long term, persistent polarization risks destabilizing the foundations of democratic governance by weakening institutions that rely on broad public engagement and cooperation across political lines.

In response to these critical challenges, the 21 Research Center with the support of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung has initiated the project "What Unites Us More than Divides Us", aimed at identifying the common values and narratives that transcend these deep-rooted divisions within Hungarian society. Most studies on this topic during the last few years primarily measure the depth and scope of polarization, while the present research is distinct in its focus on uncovering shared ground—areas of consensus that can serve as the basis for depolarization efforts. By exploring the factors that have the potential to unify rather than divide, the project seeks to contribute to a more cohesive social landscape in Hungary. The research therefore documents societal divides and, at the same time, offers practical insights into the shared national identity to mitigate the damaging effects of polarization in the long term.

Methodologically, the project employs a mixed approach, integrating desk research, qualitative focus group discussions, and quantitative surveys. The desk research phase provides a comprehensive review of existing scholarship on political polarization and depolarization, identifying key themes and areas where societal cohesion might be fostered. The qualitative component, through focus groups representing diverse political and demographic backgrounds, offers a deeper exploration of personal narratives and perceptions, facilitating the identification of themes that may foster cross-partisan understanding. The national survey delivers quantitative data on public attitudes, allowing for the identification of less polarized societal segments and pinpointing areas with potential for depolarization. This approach was selected to provide depth in understanding the dynamics of polarization. By combining these methods, the research captures both the macro-level trends and the micro-level insights necessary to inform effective depolarization strategies.

The findings from this research are intended to serve as a resource for key societal actors, including civil society organizations, policymakers, and media professionals. These stakeholders play a critical role in shaping public discourse and fostering social cohesion. By identifying shared values and common narratives, this project aims to equip these actors with the knowledge necessary to promote strategies that can mitigate polarization and encourage societal unity. In doing so, the research contributes to a broader effort to safeguard democratic governance in Hungary by fostering a public sphere that is more inclusive, dialogical, and cohesive.

Methodology

Research Design

This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection to comprehensively explore political polarization and potential areas of societal consensus in Hungary. The mixed-methods design allows for the identification of narrative patterns and areas of agreement across political camps by investigating attitudes toward historical events, contemporary figures, global phenomena, and core social values.

The research began with a qualitative phase—focus group discussions—which helped uncover common and divisive themes. These themes were then used in the design of a national online survey, enabling us to test the findings across a broader and more representative sample of Hungarian voters. The combination of qualitative insights and quantitative data provides a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of polarization while also exploring potential avenues for depolarization. This approach was chosen because it captures both broad societal trends through the survey and deeper, nuanced personal narratives through the focus groups, allowing for a comprehensive examination of political divisions and consensus.

Data Collection

Qualitative Research (Focus Groups)

Three focus group discussions were conducted from May 16 to 23, 2024, each lasting 90 minutes. Each group consisted of 8 participants (with 10 originally organized to account for possible no-shows). The participants were selected to reflect a diverse mix of demographics, including variations in age, gender, geographic location, education level, and political interest. This diverse composition ensured that the focus groups captured a broad spectrum of views and experiences. The discussions focused on key themes such as personal identity, perception of national identity, values and symbols, hopes and fears.

The focus group discussions were recorded and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis. This method allowed for the systematic identification, organization, and interpretation of patterns within the data. Coding was applied to the transcripts to categorize key themes, particularly those related to political

identity, shared values, and cross-partisan narratives. The findings from this phase were instrumental in designing the subsequent survey questionnaire, ensuring that key themes from the discussions were quantitatively tested on a larger scale.

Quantitative Research (Public Opinion Poll)

The quantitative phase consisted of an online survey conducted from June 5 to June 11, 2024, with a sample of 1,022 respondents. The sample was representative of the Hungarian voting-age population, with quotas applied for gender, age group, highest level of education, and town type. In addition to these demographic quotas, post-survey weighting was applied based on respondents' voting preferences in the 2024 European Parliament elections, ensuring that the sample accurately reflected the political landscape of Hungary. The survey had a margin of error of $\pm 3.2\%$, which is acceptable for a national study of this kind.

The survey consisted of 25 questions, including both Likert scale and multiple-choice questions. Participants were asked to rate the importance of 14 value items on a scale of 1 to 5, with topics such as family, nation, equality, tradition, and sustainability. Respondents were also asked about their agreement with statements related to Hungarian identity, political division, and traditional values. Respondents were also asked to select from a list of the three most important aspects of Hungarian identity, which included items like Nobel laureates, Hungarian cuisine, and significant historical figures. Additionally, the survey explored opinions on various historical events, including the 1956 revolution, the 1989 transition, and Hungary's accession to the European Union.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the public opinion poll were analyzed using statistical methods, including Chi-square tests. Chi-square tests were applied to examine associations between categorical variables such as political preference, age, gender, and responses to key survey questions. Ordinal logistic regression was used to further explore relationships between the respondents' demographic characteristics and their views on identity, political division, and national values. For instance, the statement "Hungary is an outstanding nation" was tested against explanatory variables like gender, age, education, income, and political party preference. Statistically significant results were highlighted, providing insight into which segments of society were more or less polarized on certain issues.

Ethical Considerations

All participants in the focus groups and the online survey were informed of the research objectives and provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants were assured of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Ethical protocols adhered to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines, ensuring the responsible handling of personal data throughout the research process.

Focus Group Insights

The focus group discussions provided insights into how Hungarian citizens perceive their personal identities, their sense of national belonging, and the values that unite or divide them. These insights, drawn from a diverse mix of participants, helped to inform the subsequent quantitative phase of the research by identifying key themes that are central to the experience of Hungarian identity in a polarized society. Below is a detailed account of the main themes and narratives that emerged from the focus groups, structured around the major discussion topics.

Personal Identity and Community Belonging

In the initial discussions on personal identity, participants were asked to reflect on the communities they belonged to and the factors that defined their sense of self. Responses indicated that personal identity was often closely tied to **immediate social circles**, such as family, friends, and professional groups. Many participants expressed a strong sense of belonging to these smaller communities, which they described as being held together by shared values, traditions, and social practices.

Key aspects that emerged included:

- **Community Bonds:** Participants frequently mentioned a sense of shared destiny and mutual support within their communities, which were seen as crucial for personal development. Concepts such as empathy, common goals, and collective experiences were emphasized, highlighting the importance of solidarity and cooperation in their everyday lives.
- **Cultural Rituals:** Some participants referred to ritualistic practices—whether religious, cultural, or social—that reinforced their sense of

belonging. These rituals were seen as markers of identity that set their communities apart from others, both within and beyond Hungary.

Negative aspects within communities were also discussed, such as conflicts over political ideologies and generational differences in outlook. However, most participants acknowledged that despite such differences, there was a strong underlying desire for cohesion, even if ideological alignment was not always possible.

National Identity and Hungarian Identity

The topic of national identity sparked lively discussions, with participants reflecting on what it means to be Hungarian. Responses were often polarized, indicating that national identity is a complex and sometimes contested concept among Hungarians.

1. Sense of Belonging to the Nation:

- Several participants expressed a strong connection to Hungary's history and culture, particularly its long-standing traditions and resilience through historical challenges. The idea of a shared historical destiny—marked by events such as Trianon and the 1956 revolution—was cited as a key element of Hungarian identity. However, some participants noted that this shared sense of history often came with a victim mentality, which they found problematic, as it perpetuated a sense of defeat and passivity in the national consciousness.
- Others, particularly younger participants, expressed ambivalence toward national identity. Some felt that national pride had been co-opted by political forces, making it difficult to express their Hungarian identity without being associated with specific political ideologies. For them, the concept of nationhood felt increasingly divisive rather than unifying.

2. International Comparisons:

- Many participants who had traveled or lived abroad offered reflections on how Hungarian identity differed from that of other nations. For instance, comparisons were made to France and the United States, where participants observed more overt national pride. Several participants felt that while Hungary had much to be proud of—such as its rich cultural heritage and thousand-year history—these

accomplishments were often overshadowed by internal divisions and a lack of collective self-confidence.

- Participants also noted that linguistic uniqueness contributed to a sense of distinctiveness, with the Hungarian language often seen as a unifying factor. However, the sense of linguistic and cultural isolation was sometimes mentioned as contributing to feelings of insularity.

Common Values and Divisive Elements

When asked to define specific values, symbols, and cultural elements that unite Hungarians, the focus group participants highlighted both **positive and negative attributes**.

1. Common Values:

- Family, tradition, and history were consistently mentioned as core values that many Hungarians hold dear. Participants spoke of the importance of preserving Hungarian customs, whether through language, cultural products, or national holidays. This sense of cultural continuity was seen as a source of pride and a means of connecting the past with the present.
- Sports achievements, particularly in the Olympics and football, were also cited as key points of national pride. Participants noted that during major sporting events, political differences often faded, and a rare sense of unity emerged across the nation.

2. Divisive Elements:

- Political polarization was repeatedly mentioned as a major divisive force. Participants across the political spectrum expressed frustration with how politics infiltrated everyday life, making it difficult to discuss national issues without resorting to entrenched partisan positions.

The idea of a shared national destiny was also debated. Some participants felt that Hungarian society was deeply fractured by historical and social differences, which prevented the formation of a cohesive national identity. The legacy of Trianon and Hungary's position as a "loser" in multiple historical conflicts was seen as central to this narrative of division.

Perceptions of Hungary's Present and Future

Discussions about contemporary Hungary and its future revealed significant concerns about the country's trajectory. Participants expressed both hopes and anxieties about Hungary's ability to overcome its current challenges, and these discussions reflected broader social and political concerns.

1. Challenges Facing Hungary:

- Participants identified several critical challenges facing Hungary, including economic difficulties, political corruption, and the erosion of democratic norms. These issues were seen as escalating social divisions and undermining trust in public institutions.
- The polarization of public discourse was another key concern, with many participants lamenting the inability of different political factions to engage in constructive dialogue. This division was seen as preventing Hungary from addressing its most pressing challenges in a unified manner.

2. Hopes for the Future:

- Despite these concerns, participants expressed a desire for greater national unity and social stability. Many hoped for a future in which political differences could be set aside in favor of focusing on common goals, such as improving living standards and ensuring a better future for younger generations.
- There was also a strong desire for Hungary to become more self-confident on the international stage, with participants suggesting that Hungary should celebrate its unique contributions to global culture, science, and history rather than dwell on past defeats.

Concluding Reflections

The focus group discussions underscored the deep complexity of Hungarian identity in a polarized society. While there are clear areas of commonality—such as pride in the country's historical and cultural heritage—these are often overshadowed by political and social divisions. At the same time, the discussions revealed a strong desire for unity and shared purpose, suggesting that depolarization efforts could be successful if they focus on fostering a shared national narrative that transcends political divides.

Results of the Public Opinion Research

The insights gained from the focus group discussions formed the foundation of the national public opinion survey, which sought to quantitatively test the narratives and themes that emerged during the qualitative phase. The survey was designed to explore key themes related to values, national identity, historical events, and perceptions of current and future threats. Therefore it provides an opportunity to evaluate the extent of polarization across different demographic and political groups, while also highlighting areas of potential consensus. By examining these aspects, the research contributes valuable insights into how political, social, and economic divides manifest in public attitudes, and whether common ground can be found on key issues.

Values: Family as a Common Priority

In our research, respondents were asked to rank 14 "value items" on a scale of 1 to 5, based on how important these values were to them. The results show that the most important values were freedom, family, and the guarantee of fundamental human rights, with 93%, 92%, and 89% of respondents respectively rating these values as somewhat or very important. There was also relative agreement among voters from different parties on these values. However, fundamental human rights were considered less important by pro-government voters (77%).

The value of the nation was regarded as important by 71% of respondents. This figure was higher among pro-government and Mi Hazánk voters (83% and 98%, respectively) and lower among supporters of other parties (61%). There was much less consensus on the importance of religion. It was not considered important by 64% of Tisza voters, while only 16% of pro-government voters shared this view. Acceptance of others also emerged as a divisive value. It was important to 95% of opposition voters and 91% of Tisza voters, but only to 61% of Fidesz voters.

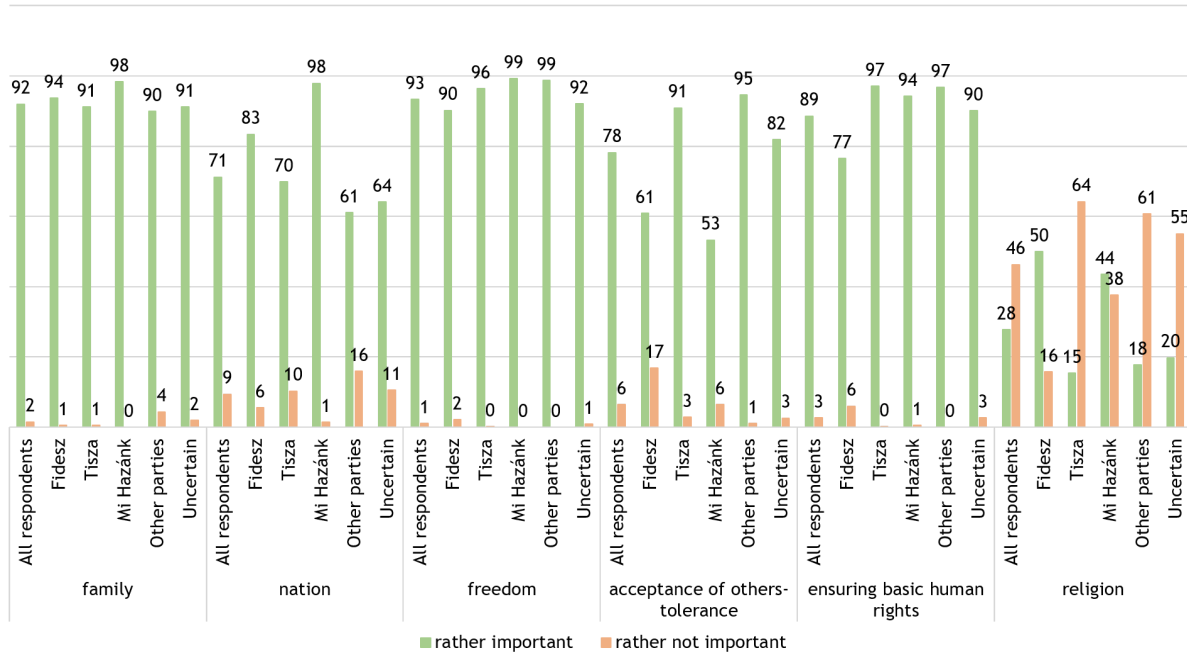


Figure 1. "How important are the following values?" (1 - Not at all; 5 - Very important). Rather not important = 1, 2; Rather important = 4, 5

Belonging to Communities: Family as the Most Important

Family is not only important as a value but also as a defining community. Across all political camps, 90% of respondents rated it as rather important. However, there are greater differences among political groups in how they perceive their Hungarian identity. For Fidesz voters, the nation as a community is much more important (79%) than belonging to Europe (38%). On the other hand, for Tisza voters, European identity (88%) is more important than national identity (70%).

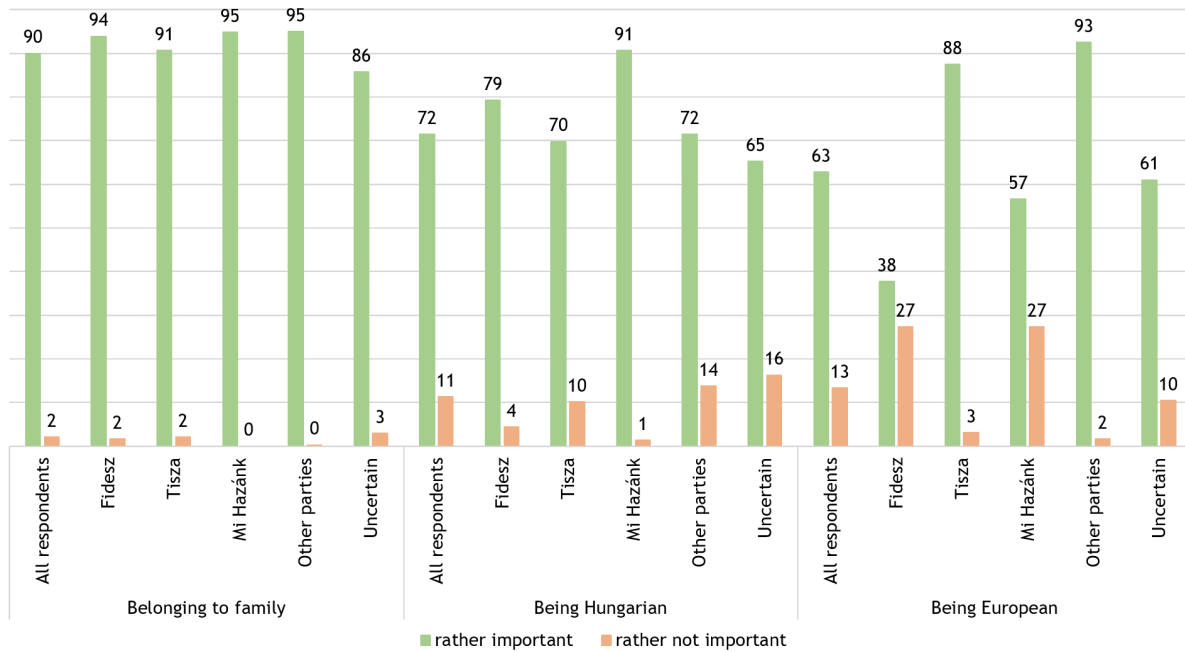


Figure 2. "How important is belonging to the following communities to you? Rate 1 if it is not important at all and 5 if it is very important." (Rather important = 4, 5; Rather not important = 1, 2, %)

Overall, family, both as a community and as a value, holds key importance for Hungarians, regardless of party preference. This is expected, particularly among conservative parties, where the traditional concept of family is central. Interestingly, the importance of family also appears in progressive initiatives, such as the "Family is Family" social media campaign, launched by NGOs and supported by opposition parties. While most Hungarians agree on the importance of family, the question remains: what do we understand by the concept of family?

Elements of Hungarian National Identity

Based on the ranking of values, the perception of the nation shares similarities with the concept of family: it is important to most respondents. Two-thirds indicated that the nation is "rather important" to them in terms of their Hungarian national identity. To measure the importance of specific elements of Hungarian national identity, we asked respondents to choose the three elements they found most important. This allowed us to identify which elements were most frequently selected as one of the top three most important aspects of national identity. The results are somewhat varied: Hungarian inventions were the most frequently selected item (50%), followed by the distinctiveness of the Hungarian language (48%), with Hungarian food being the third most commonly chosen (38%). Among government party voters, one in five expressed particular pride in Hungary's sporting achievements, while voters of other parties favored different elements.

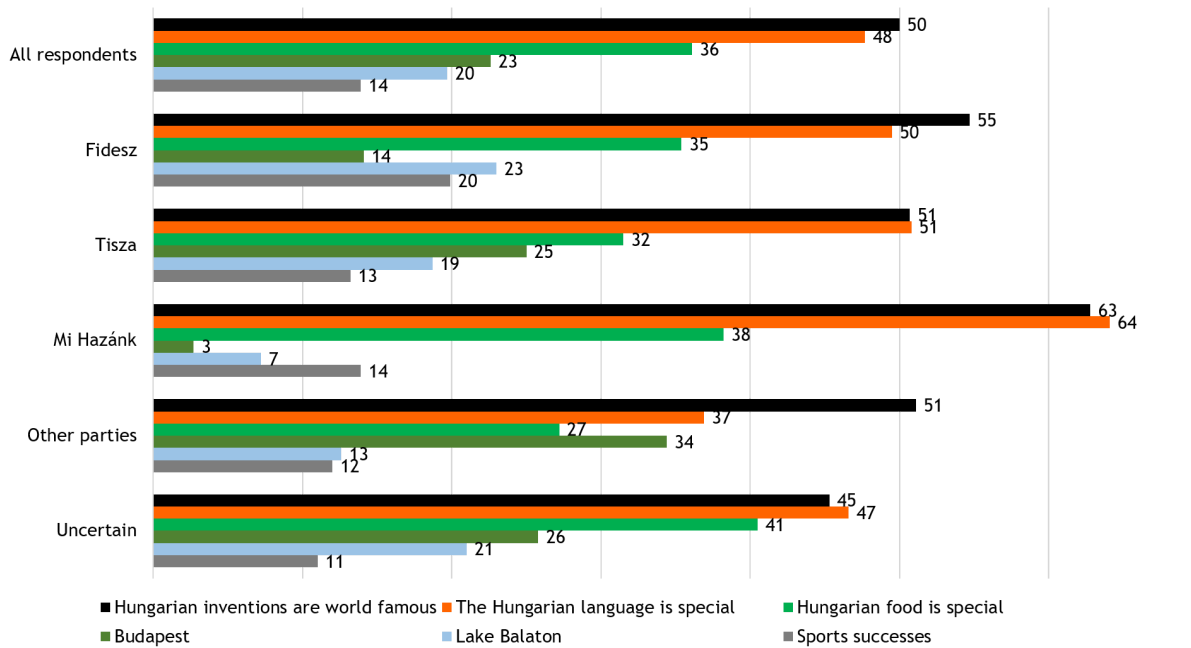


Figure 3. "From the list below, choose the three elements you think are the most important in terms of being Hungarian." (Proportion of respondents who selected each element)

There are notable differences in how people from different settlement types view national identity. For instance, Budapest was selected much more frequently by its residents, with 40% choosing it, compared to 16% of residents from county seats, 19% from other cities, and 21% from villages. Conversely, Lake Balaton becomes increasingly important as the size of the settlement decreases.

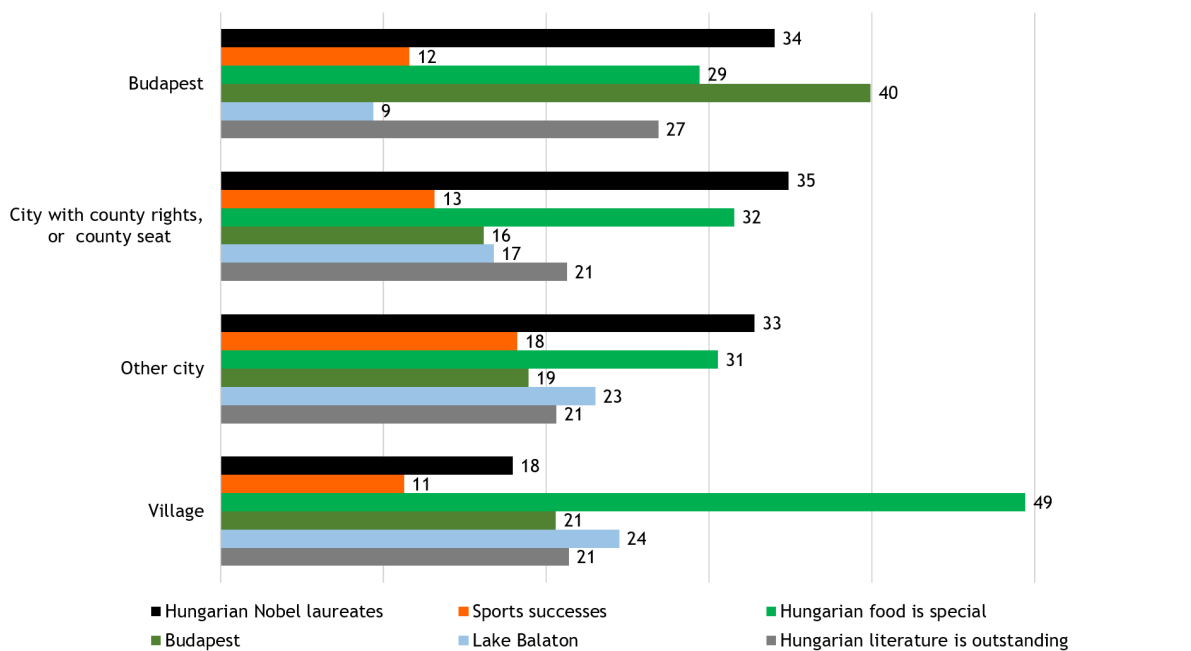


Figure 4. "From the list below, choose the three elements you think are the most

important in terms of being Hungarian." (Proportion of respondents who selected each element)

Differences also emerge across age groups when considering elements of national identity. "Hungarian Nobel laureates" were most frequently chosen by people aged 65 and older (45%), while Lake Balaton was selected less often by this group (12%). In contrast, the youngest age group (18 to 29 years) selected "Hungarian inventions are world famous" less frequently than other age groups, and only 23% chose "Hungarian Nobel laureates." On the other hand, Lake Balaton was selected most frequently by this age group (33%). These findings highlight the generational differences in how national identity is constructed. Younger people may be less familiar with Hungarian Nobel laureates and inventions, making them less central to their national identity. In contrast, leisure destinations like Lake Balaton hold greater importance for them.

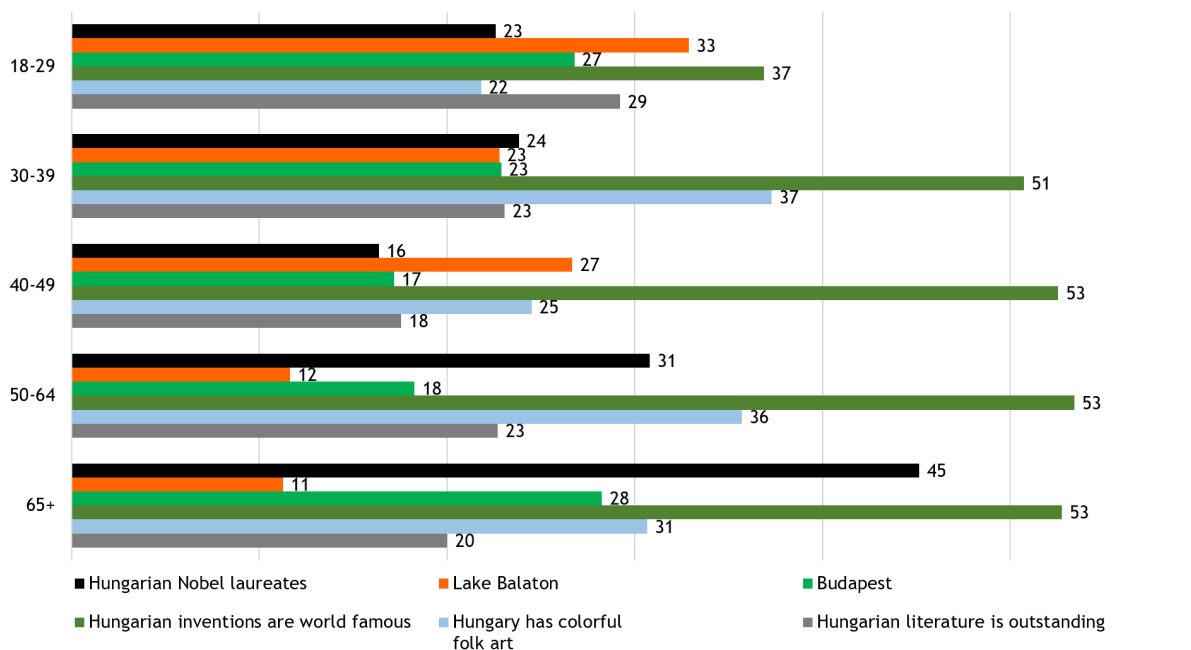


Figure 5. "From the list below, choose the three elements you think are the most important in terms of being Hungarian." (Proportion of respondents who selected each element)

Perception of Historical Events

The perception of various historical events plays a significant role in the construction of national identity. We listed seven key events from Hungarian history and asked respondents to rank their importance on a scale of 1 to 5. The 1848-49 War of Independence emerged as the most important event for respondents, with 75% indicating it was rather or very important to them, followed by the 1956

Revolution at 69%. Some events, however, evoke more controversy. For example, 27% of Fidesz voters indicated that Hungary's accession to the European Union was either "rather unimportant" or "not important at all" for them, compared to only 2-3% of Tisza and other opposition party voters who felt the same. Similarly, the Holocaust is perceived as less important by Fidesz voters, with 22% indicating it is "rather unimportant" or "not important at all." This sentiment is even more pronounced among Mi Hazánk voters, with 48% expressing the same view, while only 11% of opposition party voters share this perception. Conversely, the Treaty of Trianon holds less significance for opposition party voters, with 29% saying it is "rather unimportant" or "not important at all." In contrast, only 10% of Fidesz voters view Trianon as unimportant.

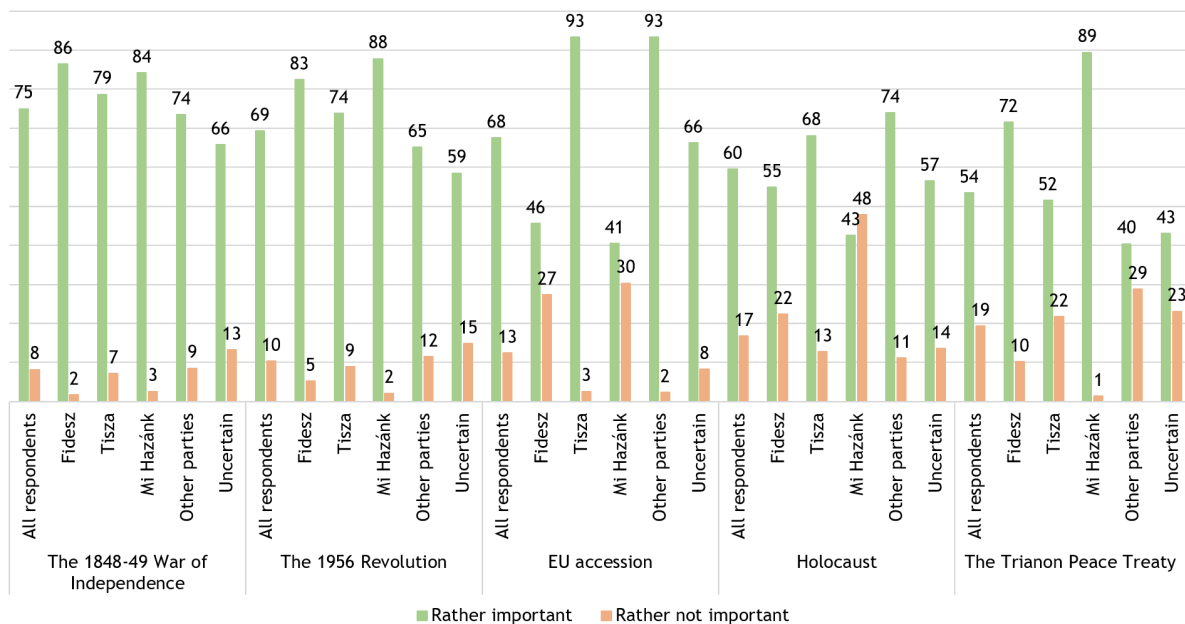


Figure 6. "How important are the following historical events to you? Give 1 if it is not important at all and 5 if it is very important." (Important = 4, 5; Not important = 1, 2)

Common Past, Common Future?

As with historical events, perceptions of future threats vary significantly based on party preference. Among Fidesz voters, the Russian-Ukrainian war is seen as the biggest threat, with 52% identifying it as the most pressing issue. Migration is also considered a major concern among Fidesz supporters, with 19% ranking it as the biggest threat and 31% placing it second. By contrast, the economic crisis is seen as the third most significant threat among Fidesz voters. For Mi Hazánk supporters, population decline is clearly the top concern, with 26% ranking it first and 36% placing it second. Among voters of other parties, the economic crisis is

considered the greatest threat; for example, 56% of Tisza Party supporters ranked it first. Climate change is a key concern for opposition party voters, with 71% ranking it as the biggest threat, while only 28% of government party voters shared this view.

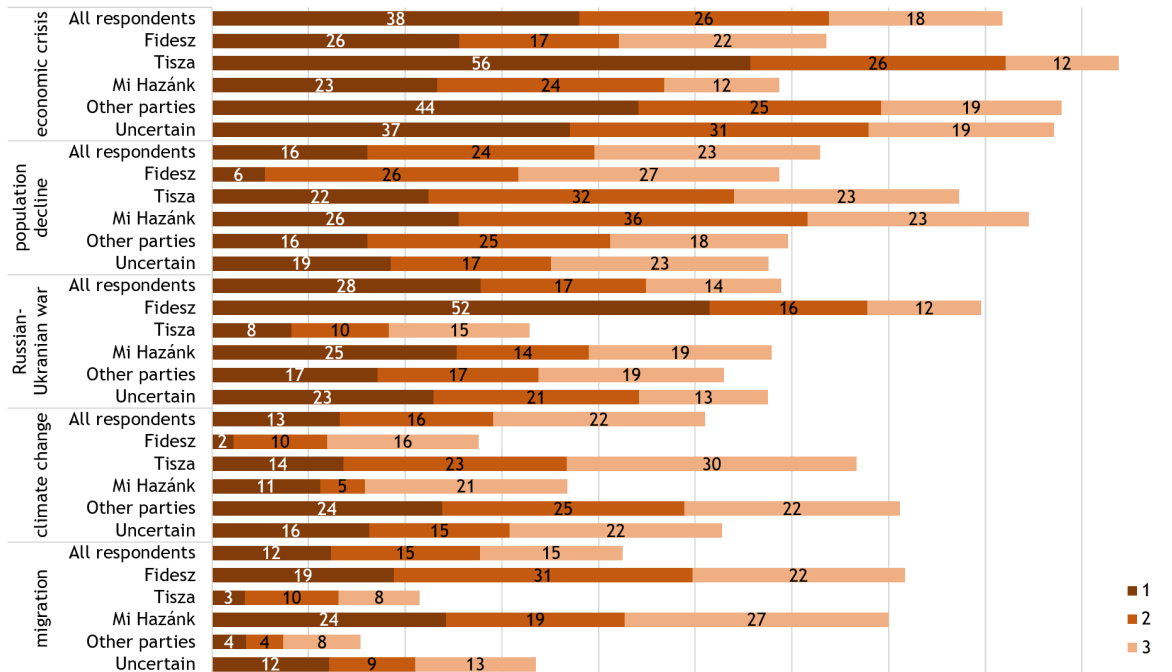


Figure 7. "Which is the most dangerous event for Hungary?" (Ranking based on the proportion of respondents who ranked each factor first, second, or third)

The fear of economic crisis is worth discussing in more detail. The economic crisis is among the first three biggest threats among voters of all parties, even government party voters. At the same time, looking at the most important threats among different groups regarding economic security, we also observe interesting results. The more difficult it is for people to live on their income, the higher the proportion who ranked an economic crisis as the most dangerous event for Hungary. These results indicate that there is a not negligible part of Hungarian society who live in economic uncertainty and this is what most defines their fears as well, in contrast to people who live in greater comfort.

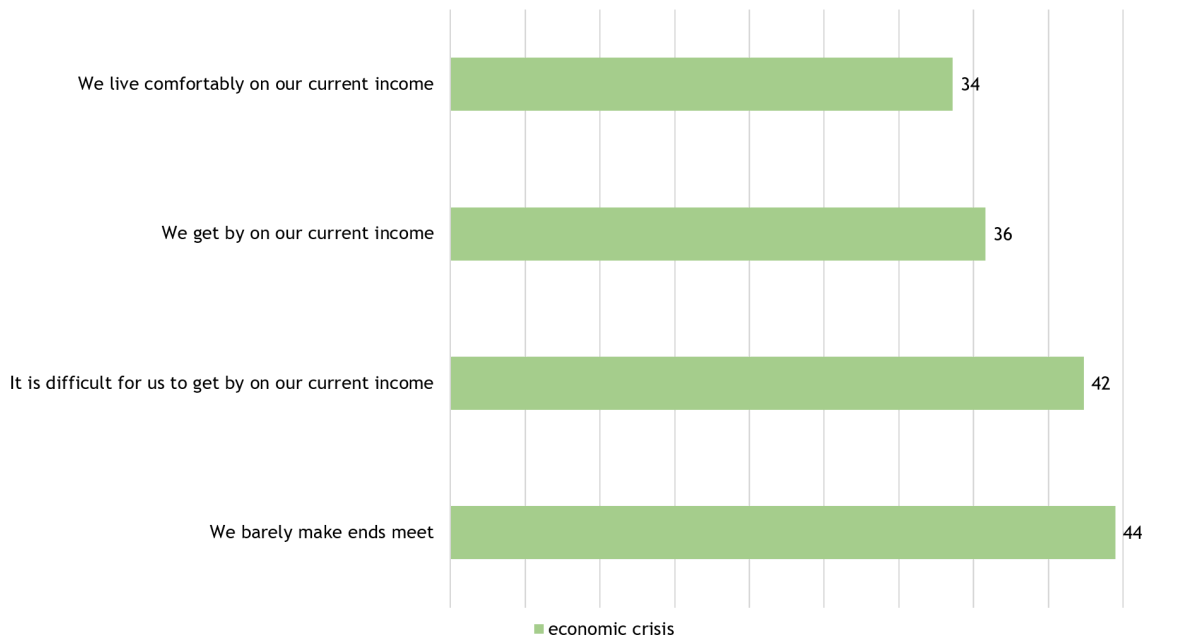


Figure 8. "Which is the most dangerous event for Hungary?" (ranking, the proportion of those who ranked economic crisis first)

The Conclusion from Attitude Questions: Division

The majority of respondents (81%) believe that society would be better off if it were less polarized by politics. More than 80% of voters from all political camps agree with this statement, except for the governing party, though 64% of Fidesz voters also share this view. At the same time, only 26% of respondents feel that people around them think similarly, while 28% believe that others think differently. However, the picture becomes more complex when viewed through the lens of party preference. Among government party voters, 44% believe that others think similarly to them, compared to just 16% of Tisza party voters and 11% of voters from other opposition parties. This suggests that the governing party feels less pressure to bridge these divisions. Half of the respondents (55%) think that if we put ourselves in others' shoes, we would more easily accept their views. This sentiment is particularly strong among minority groups, with 65% of Tisza party voters and 74% of voters from other opposition parties agreeing.

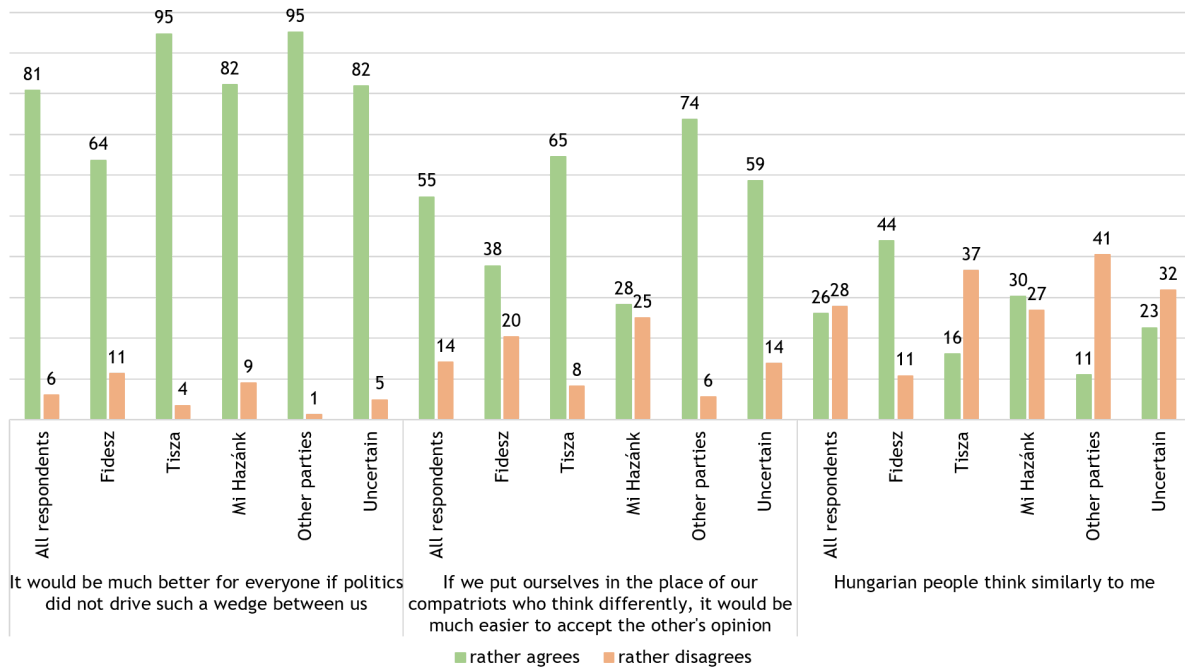


Figure 9. "To what extent do you agree with the following statements?" (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree; Rather agree = 4, 5; Rather disagree = 1, 2, %)

When examining attitudes through the lens of economic security, another significant finding emerges. Only 15% of those who reported struggling to make ends meet feel that others think similarly to them, while 41% believe those around them think differently. In contrast, 32% of people who live comfortably feel that others think similarly to them, with only 29% thinking otherwise. This suggests a correlation between economic insecurity and the feeling of social exclusion, reinforcing earlier conclusions about how economic instability affects fears and attitudes within less economically stable groups. The least wealthy segment of Hungarian society feels disconnected from the majority, reflecting a broader sense of insecurity and exclusion.

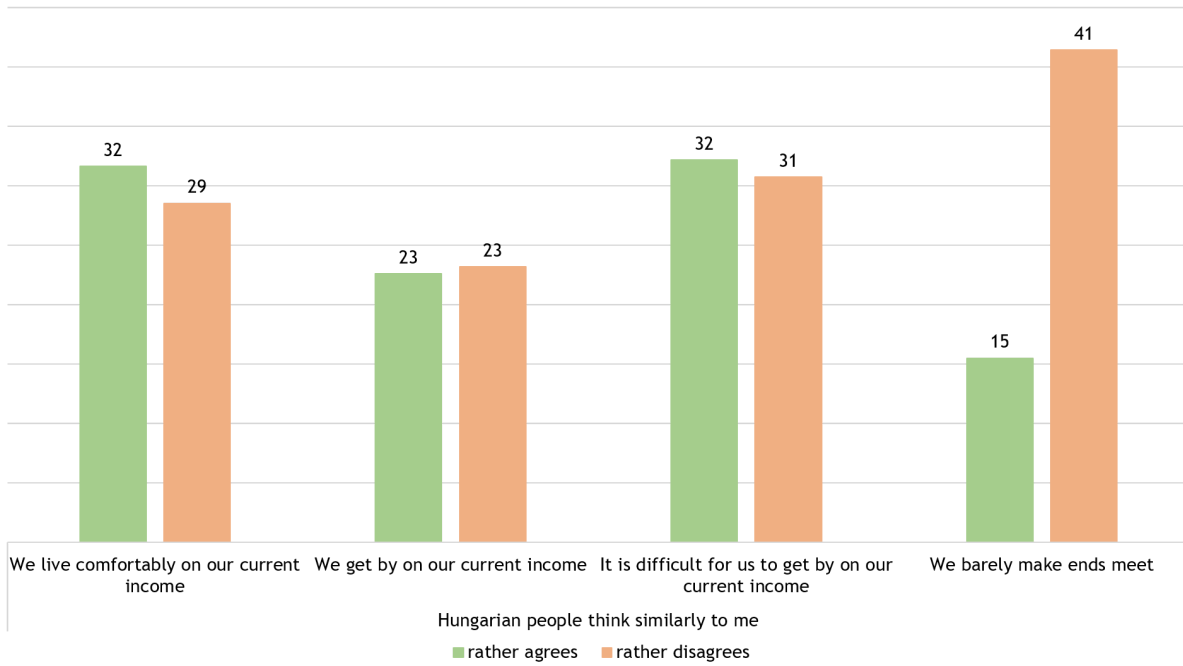


Figure 10. "To what extent do you agree with the following statements?" (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree; Rather agree = 4, 5; Rather disagree = 1, 2, %)

Discussion

The findings from both the focus groups and the quantitative survey reveal a deeply polarized society, where political, social, and economic divides shape not only individual perceptions but also collective narratives about national identity, values, and the country’s future.

Polarization Overview

The data confirms that Hungary is significantly polarized along political lines, with deep divisions in how citizens view core elements of identity and national values. For instance, while family emerges as a shared value across political groups, the interpretation of what "family" represents may differ. Similarly, while freedom and fundamental human rights are valued by a large majority, the lower emphasis on human rights among pro-government voters (77%) compared to opposition voters (89%) points to a potential divergence in how these rights are understood. The perception of national identity is another area where polarization is evident. While two-thirds of respondents agree that the nation is an important part of their identity, the data highlights stark differences in how this is expressed. Pro-government voters are more likely to emphasize the importance of national identity (83%), while opposition voters lean towards a broader European

identity. These findings suggest that national identity itself has become a contested space, where different political groups associate it with competing values—national sovereignty for one, European integration for another.

Common Ground

Despite the high level of polarization, certain themes emerge as potential areas for consensus. Family, as both a value and a community, is universally important, with 90% of respondents across all political groups rating it highly. This shared emphasis on family provides a possible foundation for depolarization efforts, particularly when framed in a way that acknowledges the different interpretations while emphasizing the common desire for social stability, continuity, and care for future generations. Sports achievements, particularly in areas like football and the Olympics, are another area where political differences temporarily fade, as they offer moments of national pride that transcend partisan boundaries. While such events do not erase underlying political divisions, they offer an opportunity to build unity around non-political symbols of national success and collective celebration.

Challenges to Unity

However, the research also points to significant challenges in bridging the existing divides. Political polarization is one of the most frequently cited divisive forces, with respondents across the political spectrum expressing frustration at how politics has infiltrated everyday conversations and interactions. The inability to discuss national issues without resorting to fixed positions reflects a deep-seated polarization in public discourse, where political identity has become a defining feature of social interaction. This division is further evident in how different political groups perceive historical events. While the 1848-49 War of Independence and the 1956 Revolution are broadly considered important by the majority of Hungarians, the perception of other events, like the EU accession and the Holocaust, diverges sharply between pro-government and opposition voters. This divergence suggests that historical memory is not only a point of pride but also a battleground for competing national narratives, making it difficult to construct a cohesive understanding of Hungary's past and its implications for the present. Another challenge lies in the deepening economic insecurities that exacerbate social divisions. Respondents facing financial hardship are less likely to feel that others think similarly to them, suggesting that economic hardship compounds feelings of exclusion and alienation. This economic divide, in turn, affects how different segments of society perceive current threats, such as the economic crisis

and migration. While climate change is seen as the most pressing issue among opposition voters, government party supporters place more importance on the Russian-Ukrainian war and migration, reflecting divergent priorities that further fragment the public's perception of common challenges.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and discussions, this research provides recommendations for civil society organizations, policymakers, and researchers. These proposals aim to address the ongoing polarization in Hungary while fostering a more cohesive and inclusive society.

For NGOs and Civil Society

Promote Shared Values Through Narrative Framing: NGOs and civil society actors should actively utilize the shared values identified in the research, particularly family, freedom, and cultural pride, as central themes in their campaigns. By emphasizing these non-political but deeply valued aspects, civil society can create narratives that transcend political divisions. Campaigns should highlight how these values are integral to both individual well-being and collective national identity, framing them as universal concepts that unite, rather than divide, Hungarian society.

Engage Local Communities in Dialogue on National Identity: Given the diverse and at times polarized perceptions of national identity, civil society organizations should facilitate community-based dialogues that encourage the exploration of inclusive narratives about what it means to be Hungarian. Localized discussions can bring together individuals from different political and social backgrounds to explore their views on national identity, highlighting shared cultural elements like language, heritage, and historical events that evoke pride across the spectrum.

Create Platforms for Cross-Political Engagement: Civil society should create spaces, both online and offline, that encourage cross-partisan dialogue. Platforms that allow individuals to engage in constructive conversations around less divisive topics—such as family and cultural achievements—could help bridge the gap between politically opposed groups. Sports achievements, for instance, are seen as a unifying force across political lines and could be used as an entry point for broader discussions about unity and national pride.

For Future Research

Examine the Impact of Economic Inequality on Polarization: Further research is needed to deepen our understanding of the relationship between economic inequality and political polarization. While this study highlights the correlation between economic insecurity and feelings of exclusion, more detailed investigations into how economic policies can either exacerbate or mitigate polarization will be crucial for developing effective interventions.

Explore Generational Differences in National Identity: The research reveals generational differences in how Hungarians perceive elements of national identity. Future studies should explore these differences in greater depth, focusing on how younger generations understand and engage with national symbols and values. This could inform strategies aimed at fostering intergenerational dialogue and creating a more cohesive sense of national identity.

Investigate Strategies for Engaging Politically Disengaged Groups: The data suggests that certain groups feel alienated from the broader political discourse. Further research into strategies for engaging politically disengaged populations—such as those facing economic insecurity or those from underrepresented communities—could provide insights into how to create more inclusive political and social systems that reduce feelings of exclusion and foster greater participation.

Concluding Remarks

The research conducted by the 21 Research Center highlights the deep political, social, and economic divides that define contemporary Hungarian society. While polarization remains a significant challenge, particularly in the interpretation of national identity, historical events, and values like human rights, the findings reveal areas of potential consensus that can serve as foundations for depolarization efforts. Family, in particular, emerges as a unifying value, while shared cultural achievements offer moments of national pride that transcend political divisions. However, the challenge of bridging the gap between competing national narratives, especially in the context of economic insecurity and divergent political ideologies, remains significant. The project underscores the importance of promoting inclusive dialogue and fostering shared values to mitigate the divisive effects of polarization. By focusing on these shared aspects and addressing the underlying economic concerns of different segments of society, efforts to foster unity and strengthen

democratic governance in Hungary can move forward with greater potential for success.