

Behind Every Successful Man...

Challenges and Opportunities for Women's
Political Participation in Hungary

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 E21 Research Center



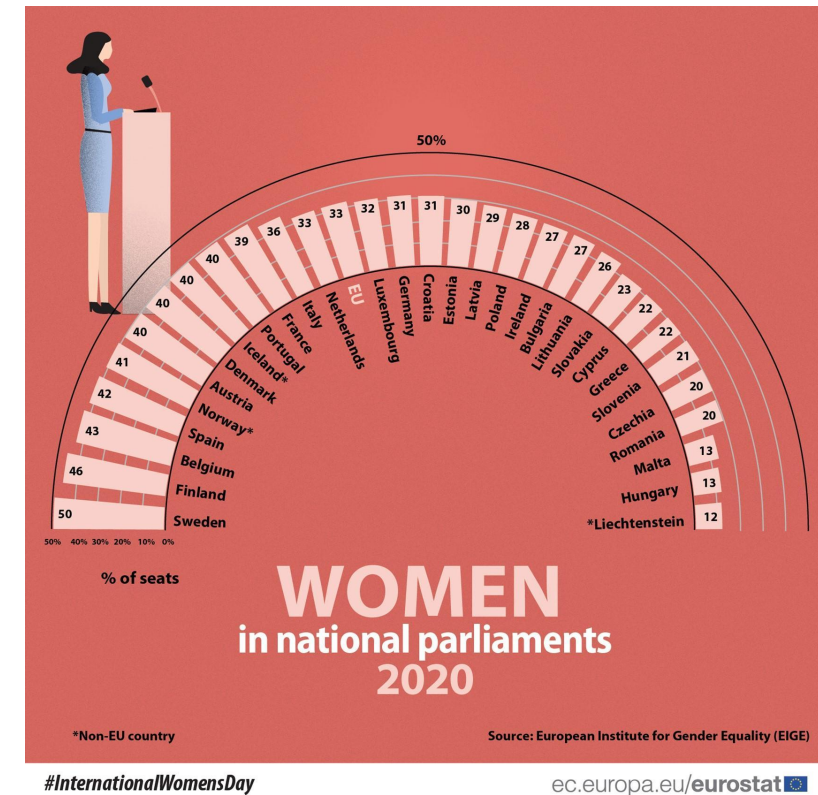
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Contextualization

CONTEXTUALIZATION

Research Objective: To identify the barriers to women's political participation, with a special focus on women in background roles (campaign staff, municipal workers, advisors).

- **Global and EU Trends:** Interest in women's political participation is growing, yet significant disparities between EU countries.
- **Decline in EU Female Representation:** The proportion of women in the European Parliament decreased from 40.6% to 38.5% in 2024
- **Hungarian Context:** Female representation is very low on country and EU level.
- **Visibility and Equality of Women:** Recognizing women in political roles can contribute to a more diverse political landscape and support gender equality.



Research Design

RESEARCH DESIGN

	Media Analysis	Public Opinion Survey	Focus Group Interviews	In-Depth Interviews with Women in Politics
Objective	Explore how female politicians are portrayed in Hungarian online media.	Provide a representative view of Hungarian public opinion on female politicians, gender equality, and quotas.	Examine gender equality issues across different demographic groups.	Gain insights into the personal stories, career paths, motivations, and experiences of women in background political roles.
Method	Online media content analysis.	Quantitative public opinion survey	Focus group interviews with conservative, opposition, male, female and mixed groups.	Narrative interviews with ten women in background roles.
Key Findings	Women are often depicted in stereotypical roles (caring, emotional), while male politicians are presented as assertive and competitive.	Significant gaps exist between public perceptions and the personal experiences of women working in politics.	Views vary across groups; women emphasize breaking down stereotypes, while men are more focused on balancing family and career.	Reveal how media and public stereotypes influence women's experiences and motivations in the political field.

Media Content Analysis

2024 May

MEDIA CONTENT ANALYSIS

Main Scope: "Pardon Scandal" (2024 february)

Female politicians are often depicted in passive roles, while men are shown as active and decisive figures.

Men are frequently portrayed as leaders, while women are shown in emotional or nurturing roles.

Examples:

- Katalin Novák portrayed as a "resigned" head of state (444.hu).
- Judit Varga appears in the shadow of male politicians (e.g., Zoltán Balog), depicted as a "resigned minister" (*Demokrata*).

Differences Between Pro-Government and Opposition Media

- **Pro-Government Media:** Subjective portrayal, e.g., Judit Varga described as a "fearful wife" (*Mandiner*).
- **Opposition Media:** More objective, yet female politicians are still sidelined compared to their male counterparts.

Findings and Conclusions

- The higher visibility and active portrayal of male politicians may contribute to a societal perception that female political figures are less competent.
- Passive portrayals can undermine the credibility of female politicians, reinforcing gender stereotypes within the political sphere.

	Total articles	Opposition media	Pro-government media
Katalin Novák	4,673	3,893	896
Judit Varga	3,185	2,346	645
Péter Magyar	7,191	4,116	2,792
Zoltán Balog	2,524	1,886	415
Viktor Orbán	5,607	2,074	1,315
Endre K.	1,570	1,362	200

Public Opinion Survey

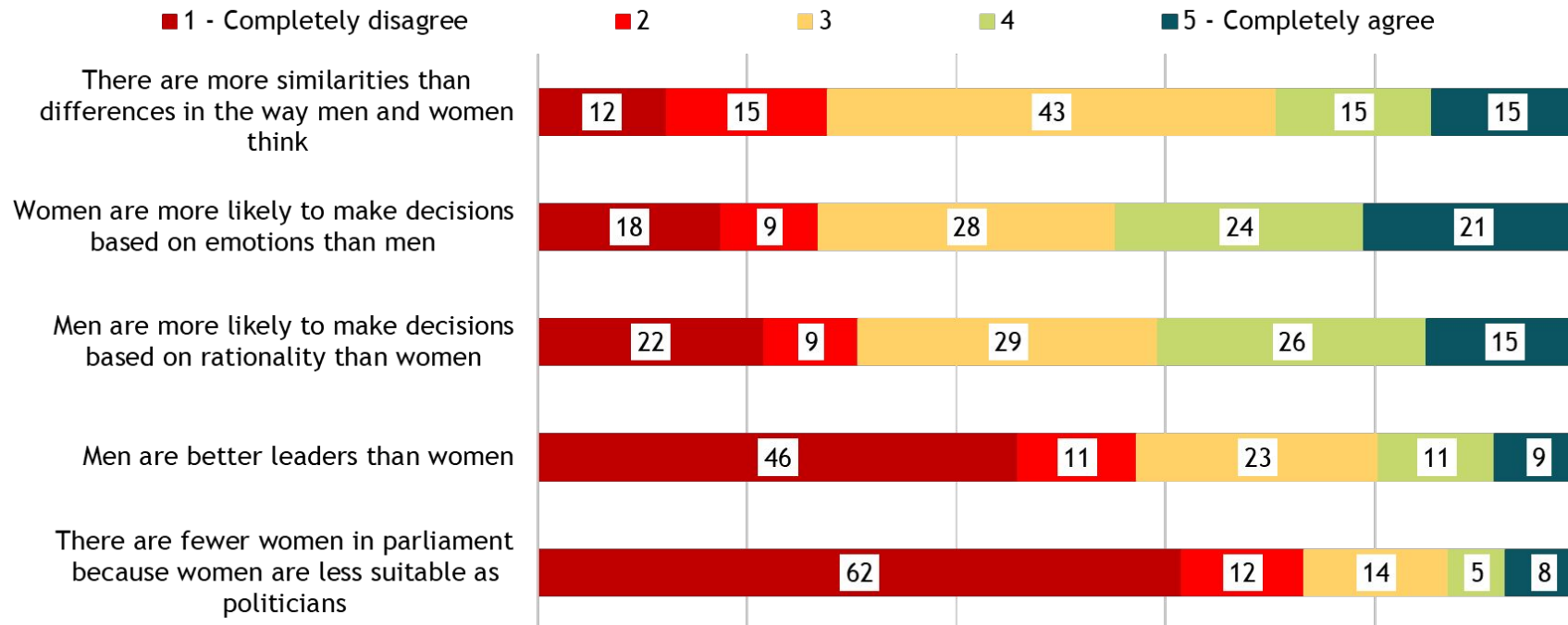
2024 June-July



Gender Stereotypes

Respondents Evaluated 10 Statements on Gender Roles

- 45% perceive women as more **emotional**, while 41% consider men more **rational**.
- 70% disagree with the notion that men are better suited for **leadership** roles.
- The similarity in thinking between men and women is divisive: 30% agree, while 27% disagree.



Social Roles in Family and Labor Market

Strong Agreement on Equality in the Family:

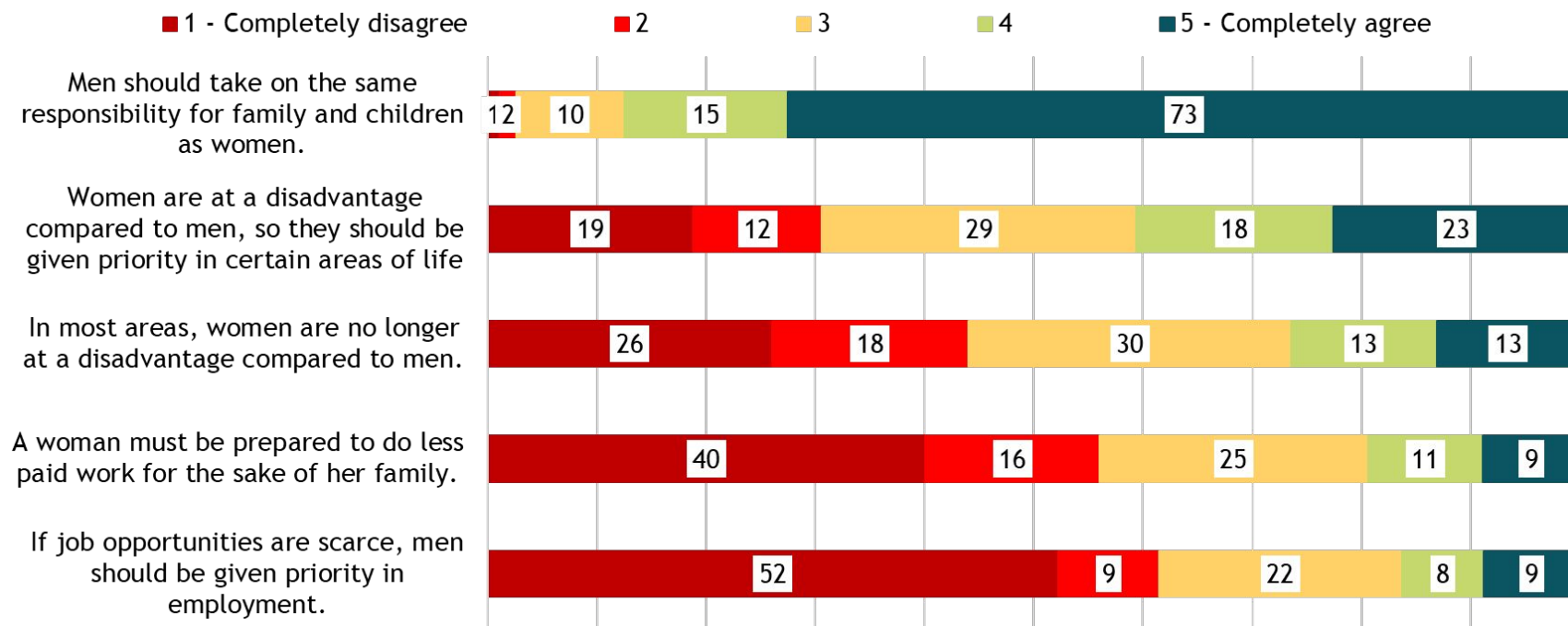
- 73% believe that men should share family responsibilities equally with women.

Labor Market:

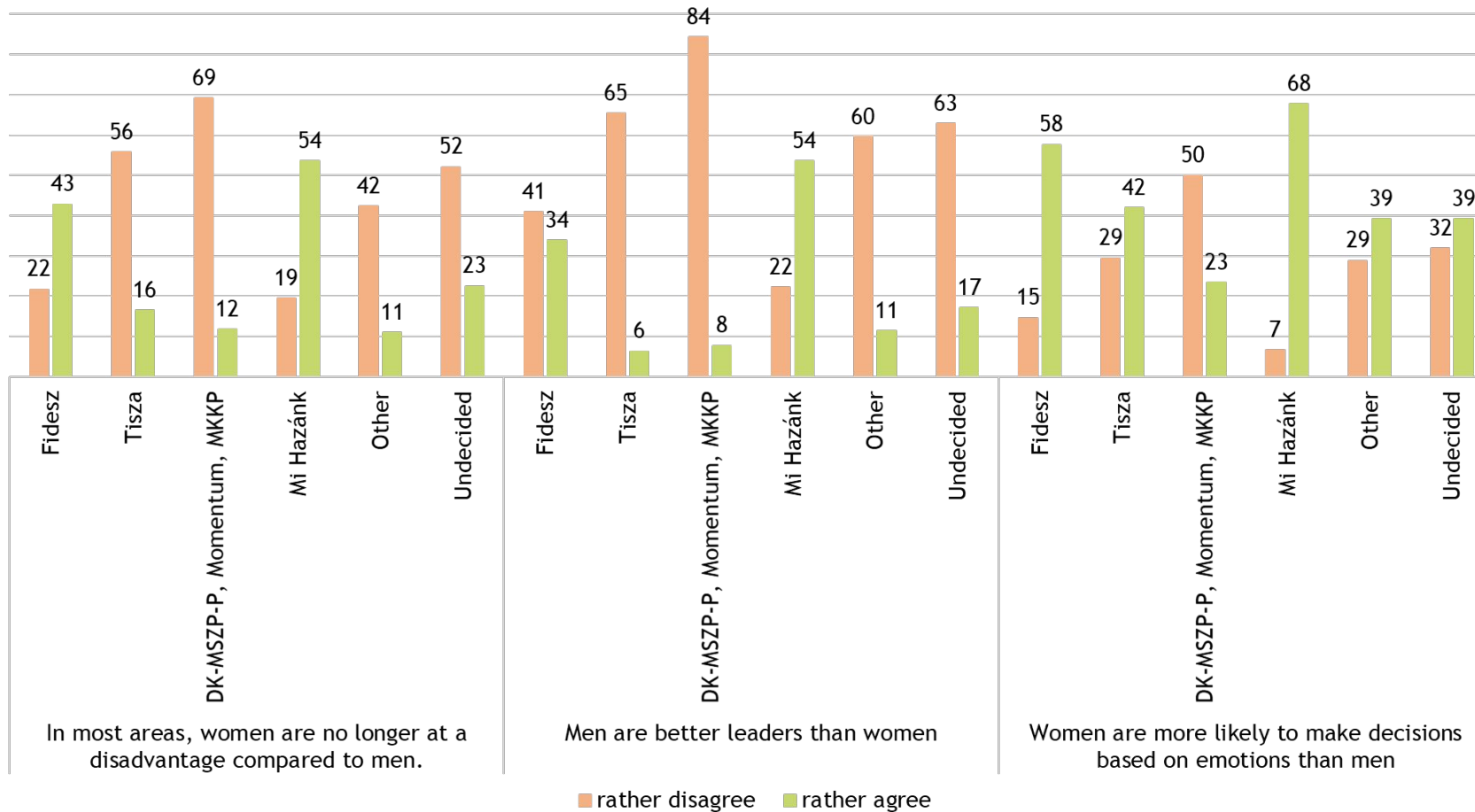
- 61% opposed giving women an advantage in an oversaturated job market.
- 56% do not find it justified for women to work fewer paid hours due to family obligations.

General Perception:

- 41% believe women are at a disadvantage, while 31% do not.

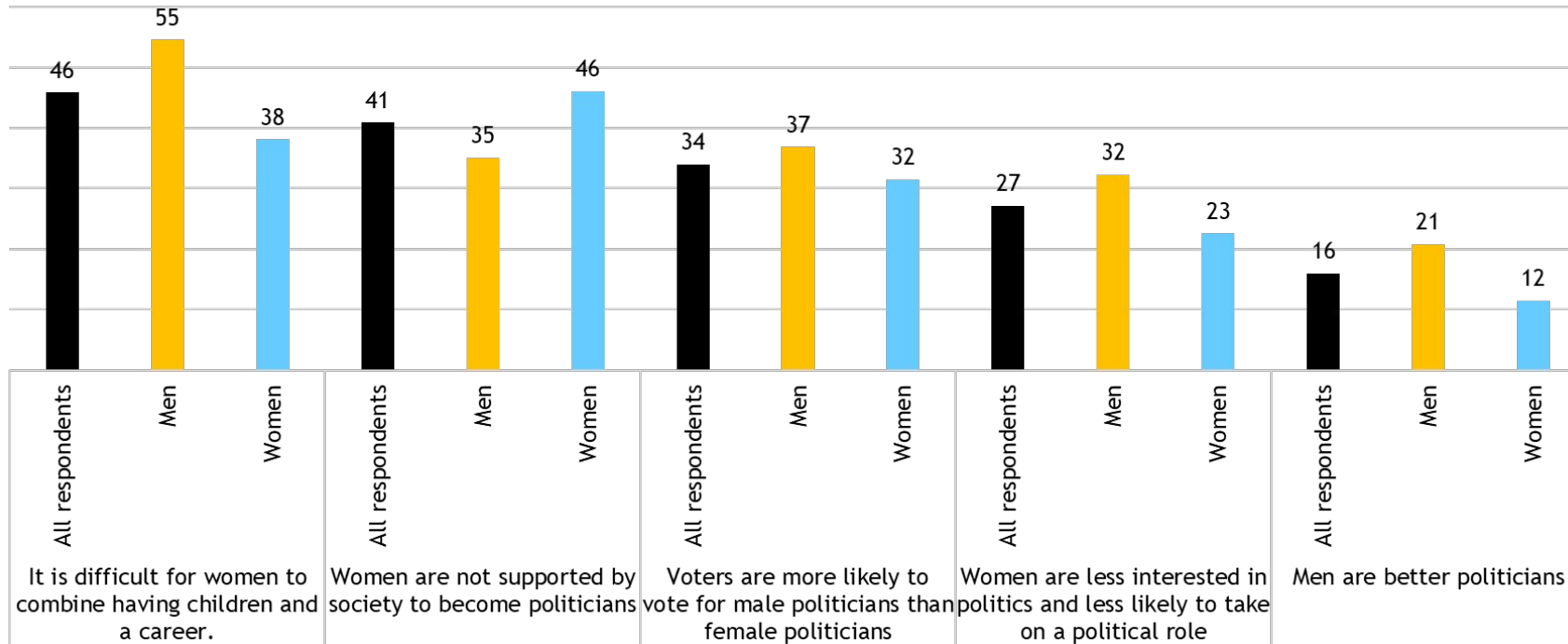


Differences by Party Preference



- Voters of **Mi Hazánk** voters most closely align with gender stereotypes, followed by Fidesz voters.
- **Opposition party** voters tend to support gender equality more strongly.
- The majority of **Fidesz** voters disagree with giving women an advantage in the labor market.
- 43% believe that women are no longer disadvantaged in most areas.

Women's Political Participation



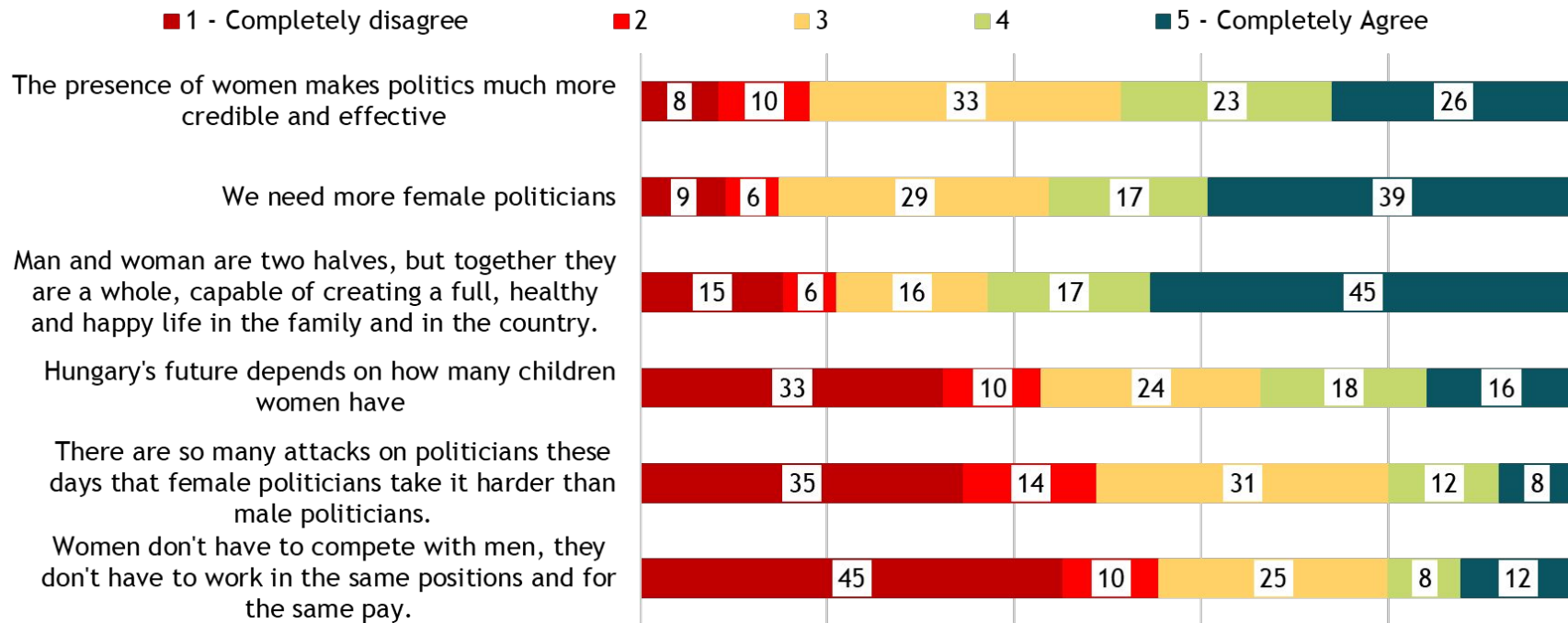
Main Obstacles:

- Men: Balancing career and family.
- Women: Lack of social support.

Gender Differences:

- For women, the lack of social support is a more significant obstacle.
- Men tend to view balancing career and family responsibilities as the primary challenge.

Politicians' Views on Women



- 62% of respondents agree that "men and women together form a whole."
- There is broad support for increasing the presence of female politicians and strengthening women's political credibility.
- 55% reject the idea that women should work for lower pay.
- 43% disagree with the notion that the country's future depends solely on women's decisions regarding childbearing.

Focus Group Interviews



2024 June-July

What Makes a Good Politician?

General Perception: A good politician is seen as credible, consistent, and mindful of community interests. Beyond these traits, different groups emphasized various qualities:

- **Right-Wing and Mixed Groups:** The concepts of a "strong leader" and a "credible politician" were frequently highlighted, along with the importance of setting an example and maintaining a consistent stance.
- **Opposition and Female Groups:** Ethical values and social responsibility were highly emphasized. A politician should be trustworthy and morally reliable.
- **Empathy and Pragmatism:** The female group placed particular emphasis on empathy and social sensitivity, while the mixed group highlighted pragmatism and an action-oriented approach.

Perception of Specific Politicians

- **Right-Wing Group:** Péter Szijjártó and Katalin Novák were highlighted as positive examples, praised for their decisiveness and credibility. One participant emphasized Szijjártó's "vast knowledge" and consistent defense of Hungarian interests.
- **Opposition Group:** Péter Jakab, Klára Dobrev, and Anna Donáth were mentioned positively. Dobrev was appreciated for her qualifications and credibility, though her husband's political background was seen as divisive.
- **Mixed Group:** László Toroczkai and Gábor Vona were considered respectable for consistently standing by their positions.
- **Female Group:** Lower trust was expressed toward domestic female politicians, while international figures, such as Angela Merkel, received greater recognition for their credibility and balance.

Women in Politics: Challenges and Prejudices

Different focus groups evaluated the opportunities and challenges for women in political roles in varying ways:

- **Right-Wing Group:** Politics is traditionally seen as a "masculine" field, making it harder for women to succeed. They believe that motherhood and politics are often incompatible.
- **Opposition Group:** They were critical of societal norms that hinder female politicians. One participant noted that women have to work twice as hard to achieve the same results.
- **Mixed Group:** They emphasized that political careers and family roles often conflict, making political involvement challenging for many women.
- **Female Group:** It was frequently noted that Hungarian politics offers few opportunities for female politicians. Many highlighted that they are often seen as "second-class players."

Can Men Represent Women's Issues Credibly?

- **Mixed Group:** Some felt that men could represent women's issues if they possess empathy and understanding, but emphasized that a lack of personal experience could be a barrier in certain areas.
- **Right-Wing Group:** Believed men could be credible representatives if they work with appropriate experts and do not necessarily need to be directly affected by the issue.
- **Female Group:** Felt that women's issues are more credibly represented by women, as only those with personal experience can truly understand these challenges.
- **Opposition Group:** Men can also be allies in representing women's issues if they actively support women's interests and give space to female perspectives in political decision-making.

Political Quotas and Gender Ratios

Perceptions of quotas varied among the groups:

- **Right-Wing Group:** Skeptical about quotas, believing they could undermine the principle of merit-based advancement and lead to unqualified individuals filling positions due to quotas.
- **Opposition Group:** Supportive of quotas as a tool to promote equality, while emphasizing the need for a societal shift in mindset.
- **Mixed Group:** Took a middle-ground view; quotas could help increase women's political participation but would only be effective alongside societal and cultural changes.
- **Female Group:** Many supported quotas, believing women are disadvantaged in politics, and that quotas could enhance female representation and help dismantle stereotypes.

Interviews with female political workers

2024 August



Political Socialization and Motivation

Family Influence and Socialization

- The political views of family members often guided many towards politics from an early age.
- Childhood experiences and family discussions were significant influences.

Activism and Civil Sector

- Initial political experiences were often tied to activism and civil work.
- Social sensitivity and a strong sense of justice motivated their political commitment.

Educational Experiences

- School student organizations, protests, and political movements shaped their perspectives.

Sexism and Social Roles

Sexism and Discrimination

- Women often face stereotypes at universities and workplaces.
- In politics, women are frequently assigned background roles, while leadership positions predominantly go to men.

Patriarchal Political Culture

- Hungarian politics is often a "macho" environment, where women are kept in subordinate roles.
- Female politicians are often compelled to adopt masculine or maternal traits to gain social acceptance.

Quota, Mentorship, and Emotional Challenges

Quota and Political Representation

- Opinions on quotas are divided: some view them as an effective tool, while others believe they undermine women's merit.

Emotional Burden and Burnout

- The "masculine" political culture imposes an emotional burden on women, who often feel overwhelmed, leading to burnout.

Mentorship and Support Networks

- Women's political engagement could be supported by mentorship networks, ethical standards, and feminist circles that enhance a sense of security.

Conclusions of the Research

Patriarchal Political Culture

- The Hungarian political environment is male-centered, where women are often seen in traditional, nurturing roles, while men are portrayed as decisive leaders.
- The "macho" culture, competitive norms, and sexist expectations hinder women's equal participation.

Underrepresentation of Women

- Women's low representation in EU and domestic elections reflects structural barriers.
- Women in background roles receive less recognition, which undermines their self-esteem and political commitment.

Stereotypes and Social Division

- Public opinion and media continue to portray women through gender stereotypes.
- Traditional gender roles are more prevalent in conservative, smaller communities.

Political Quotas and Need for Reform

- Quotas may help increase female representation, but they are insufficient on their own. Breaking down social stereotypes is also essential.
- Mentorship networks and ethical regulations could facilitate women's safe participation in politics.

Emotional and Psychological Challenges

- Women face heightened emotional pressure, with overwork and burnout being common.
- Their desire for political credibility and self-realization often encounters obstacles in the actual environment.

Recommendations to Support Women's Political Participation

Enhancing Female Representation and Use of Quotas: Implement legal and internal party quotas to ensure female representation.

Establishing Mentorship and Support Networks: Develop mentorship programs and support networks to assist women in their political careers.

Raising Awareness Against Gender Stereotypes: Conduct training and establish ethical guidelines to reduce gender biases and address workplace sexism.

Creating Positive Role Models: Increase visibility of female political leaders in the media, highlighting credible role models.

Supporting Societal Attitude Change: Promote public campaigns and educational programs for gender equality, and build community partnerships.

Facilitating Organizational and Cultural Reforms: Ensure a supportive political environment and provide emotional support for women.

Strengthening the Role of Civil Organizations: Implement advocacy programs and encourage men's roles as allies.

Building Closer Ties with Media: Promote balanced representations of women and enhance the visibility of female experts.