



Weekly Briefing

Hungary political briefing:
The evaluation of political events in 2019 among voters
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The evaluation of political events in 2019 among voters

In recent weeks, the evaluation of the possible effects of local elections has been an ongoing process in the Hungarian politics. This process basically has two sides; (1) the results of some surveys are already available raising questions related to the municipal elections, and other political events in 2019; (2) the Hungarian political parties already started discussing how to amend their strategies and communication in response to the 2019 events. The recent political briefing looks at the changing political landscape and focuses on how the 2019 political events are being evaluated by voters and how the parties respond to these changes. In the second part of the analysis the briefing discusses the latest survey data and it also tries to shed light on their interpretations.

1. The assessment of the political events among voters

Firstly, it should be pointed out that in the case of the Publicus Institute that carried out a survey with the participation of 1002 persons between 14 December and 20 December 2019, we have the assessment of the voters, however, this assessment is not always in accordance with the facts. Later we will see this point in perception of the municipal elections.

In the survey, people were asked about what they think about the relevance of certain political events of 2019. Based on the results, the EP elections turned out to be the most important political event in the eyes of the questioned persons which is less of a surprise. And looking at the less important events like Prime Minister's office moving from the Parliament's building to the castle or the relocation of the Nagy Imre's¹ statue, we cannot be surprised either by the public evaluation of the events.

It should be noted that based on the survey, the public assessment of the Eastern Opening Policy (see line: Strengthening relations with Russia and China) is very positive, since almost two-third of the persons questioned in the survey think that the policy aimed at strengthening relations with Russia and China is important for the country.

¹ Nagy Imre was the Hungarian leader of the Hungarian revolution in 1956.

Table 1. Relevance of 2019 event for the country		
	Less important (percent)	Rather important (percent)
EP elections	8	79
The launch of the family protection plan	12	77
Municipal elections	27	63
Strengthening relations with Russia and China	32	61
Governmental decisions related to theaters and publishing houses	35	48
The reorganization of the research institutes of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences	36	47
The Borkai-scandal ²	37	36
The Microsoft corruption scandal in Hungary	28	31
The Prime Minister's office moving from the Parliament's building to the castle	73	16
The relocation of the Nagy Imre's statue	69	15
Source: https://publicus.hu/blog/2019-es-fontosabb-esemenyek-megitelese/		

The positive assessment of the Eastern Opening Policy along with the launch of the Family Protection demonstrates that the messages of the Hungarian government are able to achieve their goals and activate the voters.

As for the evaluation of the municipal elections, it should be noted that the original question in the survey was raised with the phrase “municipal elections creating stronger opposition” which shows that the question was not unbiased, since the presupposition is that the opposition became stronger in these elections, which is as a matter of fact not true. As we pointed out in the November 2019 Political Briefing, the governing party received more votes last year than four years ago. (In October 2019, Fidesz-KDNP got 53.3 percent of the votes – 51.14 percent in 2014 –, while the opposition collected 44.82 percent of the votes – 46.67 percent in 2014. (As for the survey we can also raise the question, why these events were chosen. There might be relevant reasons behind the choice, but it is not clear how this list of events was compiled.)

The Publicus Institute is not alone with this interpretation, the Policy Solutions political think-tank puts this in its annual report about Hungarian politics: “After a string of massive electoral victories in three national elections, three nationally held local elections and two EP elections, for the first time the goliath of Hungarian politics finally looks vulnerable. In the meanwhile, the utter hopelessness which had permeated Fidesz's opposition has given way to some euphoria.” In our understanding, the political events and trends of 2020 will be influenced

² Zsolt Borkai was the mayor of Győr city, a former Olympic Games champion. Shortly before the elections, he was accused of having an extramarital affair, corruption and cocaine use as well. He apologized for his behavior but denied corruption and other crimes. Despite the scandal around him, he won the local election in October and was re-elected as mayor of the city, but he later resigned from his post.

by which narrative can be sold to the public opinion regardless of whether it relies on the reality or not.

2. The latest survey data on political support of parties

The latest survey was carried out by the Závecz Research between the 13th and 20th of January, the survey included 1000 persons. The main trend they could detect, and show in this analysis, was the decline in the support of the Fidesz-KDNP. The party's support was 29 percent among eligible voters which marked a drop by 3 percentage points compared to December 2019. At the same time, the camp of opposition voters did not increase, thus the number of uncertain became larger. Since only the voters with weak commitment to the Fidesz-KDNP left the party, the party's support among likely voters remained high. When looking at the distribution of the party's support, voters in their forties seem to be the group losing the most faith in the governing party. This result stands in sharp contrast to several analyses pointing out to younger voters.

	Likely voters	Eligible voters
Fidesz-KDNP	52	29
Jobbik	9	6
MSZP	7	5
LMP	3	2
DK	14	9
Momentum	10	6
The combined support of small parties	5	6
No party	-	37

Source: <http://www.zaveczresearch.hu/a-fidesz-tabora-csokkent-az-ellenzeke-nem-valtozott-tobb-lett-a-bizonytalan/>

The interpretation of the Závecz Research Institute collides with the assessment of the Nézőpont Institute, which stresses that the Fidesz-KDNP has been able to maintain the lead ahead of the opposition parties. According to the Nézőpont survey carried out between the 10th and 16th of January 2020, based on the questionnaire of 1000 persons, 50 percent of the likely voters would cast their votes for the Fidesz-KDNP. When it comes to the data measuring the political support among the most likely voters, the results of the research institutes are almost identical. Significant differences can only be found in the sympathies for the DK and Momentum. The Nézőpont Institute measures them lower than Závecz Research Institute and the difference is showed in the combined support of the small political parties. It should be

noted that the figures about the political support among eligible voters (adult persons eligible to vote in the entire population) are significantly different in the two surveys. The Závecz Research Institute's data show a lower number for the Fidesz-KDNP and a higher figure for the group of uncertain voters (see line: no party). Thus, the main conclusion of the Závecz Research Institute (voters leaving the Fidesz-KDNP) can be questioned and more prove is needed to corroborate the results.

	Most likely voters	Eligible voters
Fidesz-KDNP	52	42
Jobbik	9	7
MSZP	7	5
LMP	3	2
DK	10	7
Momentum	11	7
The combined support of small parties	8	5
No party	-	25

Source: <https://nezopontintezet.hu/2020/01/29/valtozatlanul-vezet-a-fidesz-kdnp-a-teljes-ellenzekkel-szemben/>

3. Summary

As we could see in the surveys, no long-term changes in the support of political parties can be detected at the moment, at least not any that can be proved in a convincing way. The political messages of the governing party can reach the public. The majority of those included in the survey (61 percent) think that strengthening political and economic ties with Russia and China is promising when it comes to the public perception of the Eastern Opening Policy.

In our understanding the maintenance of the public support for this policy is extremely important since the Eastern Opening Policy is one of the most long-term policies of the Hungarian government and it is very likely that concrete and significant results can be only achieved in the long term. There are two reasons for that: the Hungarian economy is deeply embedded in the European regional supply chains, and the other one is that the Hungarian economy still lacks businessmen, experts and scholars, who are good at the Asian cultures, languages and at the same time they understand their profession. The permanent change in these elements needs extra efforts from Hungary.

The public perception that the majority of the people included in the questionnaire (77 percent) finds the launch of the family protection program important also shows that the strategy of the Fidesz-KDNP focusing on economic achievements has been rewarding in terms of political support. In our interpretation, the message is going to be more important in the communication of the Fidesz-KDNP than the highlighting of the threat that is illegal migration.