

# Four Recurrent Themes in the Interpretation of Municipal Election Results

An analysis by Nézőpont Intézet

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## Summary

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On this occasion, our analysis examines four “recurrent themes” related to interpreting the results of municipal elections: the degree of the governing party’s victory, the situation of Jobbik, how parties’ support developed in the countryside, and the way LMP fared.

Fidesz-KDNP is the absolute winner of the municipal elections. In terms of proportions, this nationwide governing party success is most apparent at county level, i.e. based on county list votes cast directly in villages and towns without county rank. The holding together and successful mobilisation of the governing party’s core supporters is indicated by the fact that regarding proportions, the party alliance achieved a better percentage result in every county, in villages and towns without county rank than during parliamentary elections last spring, considering an identical base and reckoning with parliamentary list votes. Expectations were also eclipsed by Fidesz-KDNP ultimately winning absolute majorities in every county assembly, meaning that it will be able to pass decisions without any local coalition bargaining. Taking the 20 mandates it did in the Budapest Assembly also exceed preliminary forecasts.

In contrast, Jobbik could hardly be considered a winner in the elections or a true “contender” for the governing side. The party continues to remain weak in Budapest, the stage of national politics. At county level, i.e. considering the votes cast in villages and towns without county rank, it can indeed seemingly claim to be the second largest political force in the competition of parties, there is, however, a downside to this impression: the party would not have secured the runner-up position in the party contest everywhere on this basis as it did were we to add up votes cast on left-wing political forces. Additionally, Jobbik failed to compete with the ruling parties yet again, still opting to go up against the left, and it clearly profited from the weakness of the left-wing. Jobbik’s nationwide performance in relation to the left-wing is further overshadowed if one looks at the proportions of county votes and reckons with list votes cast in villages and towns without county rank, as the party achieved a worse percentage result in eighteen counties than in the parliamentary elections this April, on an identical basis. In other words, Jobbik has lost ground almost everywhere in terms of proportions at the said level compared to the spring.

Municipal elections may also impact the fight for dominance in the left-wing. It is clear that MSZP is twice as strong as DK at the level of villages and towns without county rank, the socialist party has thus

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**stabilised its leading position in the left-wing at countryside level, while Együtt-PM practically does not exist outside Budapest. The newly established left-wing parties were unable to reach a breakthrough against the socialists in the countryside, and have no substantive basis in smaller settlements.**

**LMP's results were also examined in connection with the municipal elections. LMP outdid the Együtt-PM alliance by more than 6 thousand county list votes despite the fact that it set up county lists in half as many counties (in just 5 counties, in contrast to the Együtt-PM's 11 county lists). This also shows that the main loser in the municipal election was not LMP, but Együtt-PM, just like we forecast.**

## Recurrent theme one: Fidesz-KDNP is the absolute winner

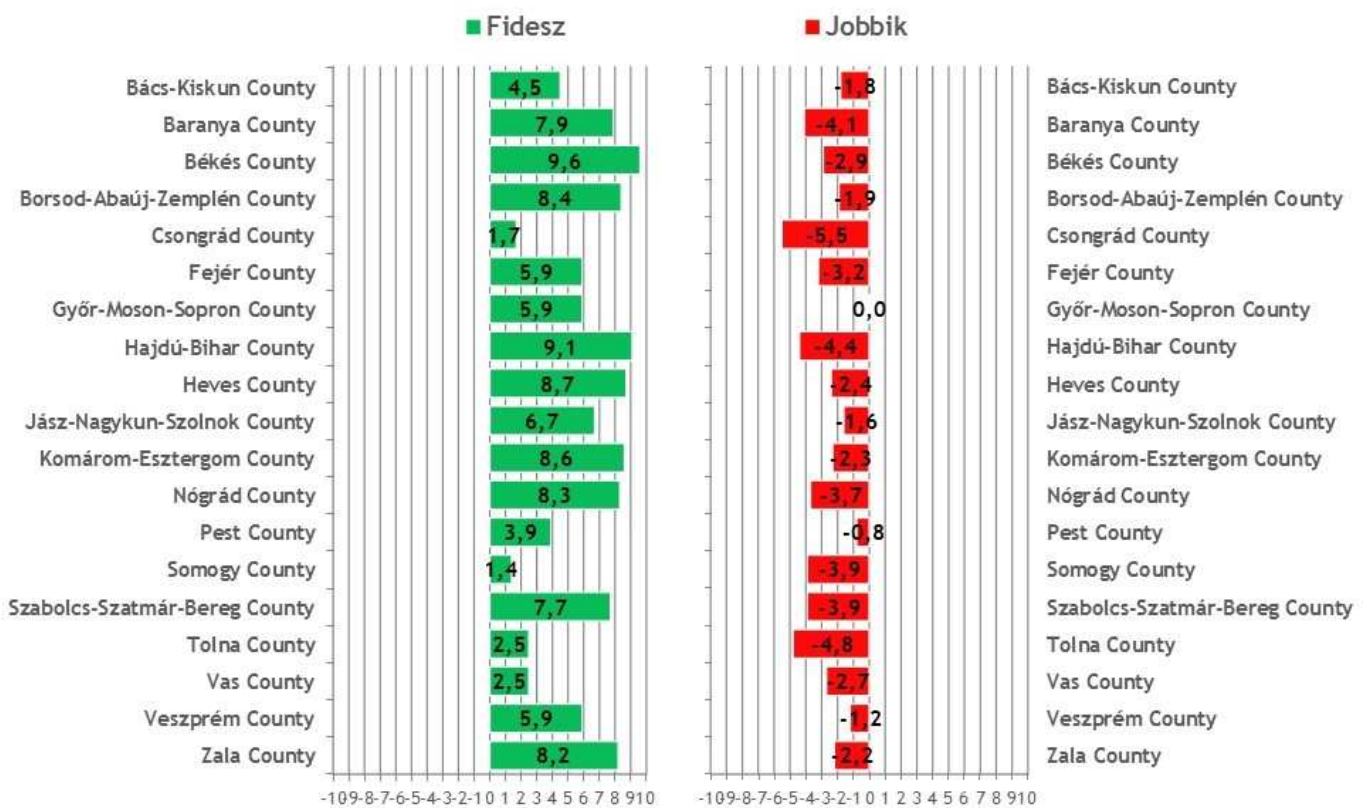
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The ruling party's victory was not a question before October 12, its degree, however, all the more so. Important conclusions can be deduced from the degree and proportion of its win in terms of the Fidesz-KDNP's ability to mobilise. The results of the municipal elections showed that all in all, the governing party alliance managed to activate its potential voter base very well even for an election that did not appear to have much on the line to start with, a done deal, as it were.

In terms of proportions, this nationwide governing party success is most apparent at county level, i.e. based on county list votes cast directly in villages and towns without county rank. This is because expectations were also eclipsed by Fidesz-KDNP ultimately winning absolute majorities in every county assembly, meaning that it will be able to pass decisions without any local coalition bargaining. In addition to absolute majority triumphs in every county assembly, the governing parties came away with 52.64 per cent of county list votes, meaning list ballots cast in villages and towns without county rank, i.e. with an absolute majority of such votes. The proportion of votes cast on Fidesz-KDNP's county lists stayed below 50 per cent in but five counties, and even reached 60 per cent in Győr-Moson-Sopron County.

The holding together and successful mobilisation of the governing party's core supporters is likewise indicated by the fact that regarding proportions, the party alliance achieved a better percentage result in every county, in villages and towns without county rank than during parliamentary elections last spring, considering an identical base and reckoning with parliamentary list votes. In Békés County, for instance, it improved on its April results by 9.6 percentage points on that basis, but the degree of even the "least improvement" came to 1.4 percentage points (in Somogy County).

Although the government side could look forward to obtaining a double majority in the Budapest Assembly even according to our preliminary expectations, but the 20 mandates it ultimately raked in exceeded projections. Fidesz-KDNP's mayoral candidates came away with wins in 17 of the 23 districts in Budapest, i.e. ruling party candidates were also able to take the majority of the undecided districts. The governing party candidate caused the biggest upset in Csepel, but the party alliance also gained ground in Újpest, where the left-wing won back in the spring elections. In addition, István Tarlós' outstanding success is reflected in the fact that the re-elected Budapest Lord Mayor received almost 15 thousand more votes at the level of the capital city than the otherwise successful district mayoral candidates running in Fidesz-KDNP's colours did.



*Percentage change in county list results (list votes cast in villages and towns without county rank) in relation to national party list votes cast at the parliamentary elections on an identical base (in villages and towns without county rank) (Source: valasztas.hu)*

## Recurrent theme two: Jobbik is not a winner

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Similarly to the parliamentary and European Parliament election, Jobbik fought for the position of “the second force” again. Citing reference to election results, the party even staked the claim to have become the “alternative party”. Although the far-right party did indeed manage to show success in several cases—and they can apparently cite these effectively—they are still far from being a true challenger for the governing side.

Jobbik still does not have strong positions in Budapest, the stage of nationwide politics, so the party is trying to turn attention to its countryside results for the obvious reasons. At the level of towns with county rank, the party’s politicians are talking most about “replacing the mayor” in Békéscsaba, the winning independent candidate, however, was averse to embracing Jobbik’s “unsolicited” support.

At county level, i.e. considering the votes cast in villages and towns without county rank, Jobbik can indeed seemingly claim to be the second largest political force in the competition of parties, there is, however, a downside to this impression: the party would not have secured second place in the competition of the parties everywhere on this basis as it did were we to add up votes cast on left-wing parties. Jobbik would only have outrivalled an “informal” joining of left-wing forces in nine counties (based on list results from villages and towns without county rank), while in the parliamentary elections last spring, they came away with a better result in fifteen places looking at an identical basis. In addition, this time Jobbik received 7 093 fewer county list votes on that basis than the three left-wing party’s did collectively.

All in all one may say that Jobbik was not a threat to the nationwide success of Fidesz-KDNP even now. The far-right party failed to compete with the ruling parties, still opting to go up against left-wing parties, and it clearly profited from the weakness of the left-wing. Jobbik’s nationwide performance in relation to the left-wing is further overshadowed if one looks at the proportions of county votes and reckons with list votes cast in villages and towns without county rank, as the party achieved a worse percentage result in eighteen counties than in the parliamentary elections this April, on an identical basis. In other words, Jobbik has lost ground almost everywhere in terms of proportions at the said level compared to the spring.

Incidentally, this allows inferring that Jobbik is pronouncedly a “turnout dependent” party. Which is to say that while the Fidesz-KDNP camp can be mobilised with good chance anytime, anywhere, this is not as automatic in Jobbik’s case, and all of that could already be seen in the party’s EP election results, as well. On top of that, protest voters are more likely to go cast their votes when the turnout is higher, and Jobbik can also profit from this; on the other hand, mobilisation by the ruling parties, as we saw, is the only one that works well when participation rates are low.

The change in Jobbik's level of regional support is also important to mention, because the party is no longer only strong in the northern and eastern parts of the country, but can produce increasingly better nationwide results. This is corroborated by the fact that the party also won a few mayoral seats in the western counties, although admittedly not in the most significant settlements in that region.

## Recurrent theme three: there are three parties with a substantive base in the countryside

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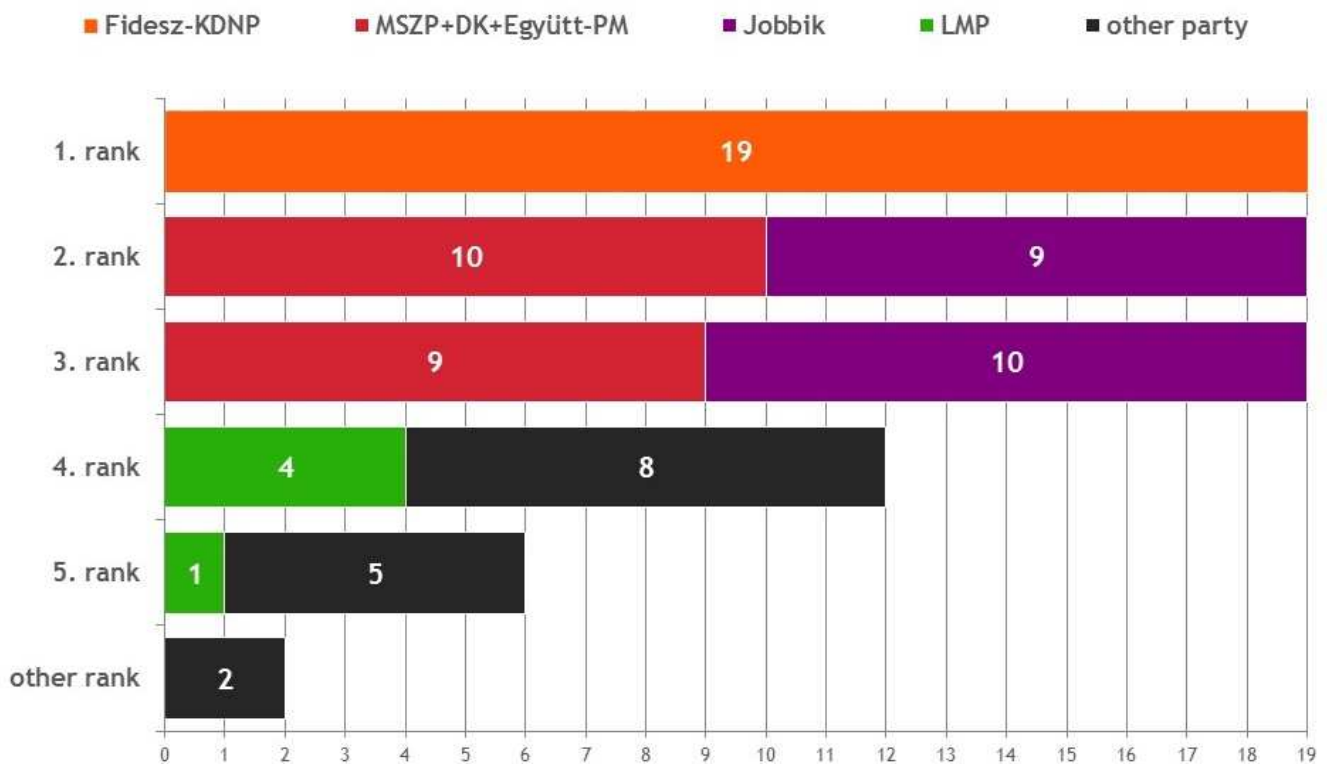
After the European parliamentary elections it seemed that there were three parties of roughly equal weight on the left-wing, although this result was of course somewhat distorted due to low turnout. EP results nonetheless did provide ammunition for Demokratikus Koalíció (Democratic Coalition, DK) and Együtt-PM (Together-PM) in terms of communication amid the struggle for dominance in the left-wing. After Sunday's municipal government voting one can see much more clearly, and the impression we now have is more realistic as to the order of these parties' precedence.

At county level, i.e. looking at county list votes cast in villages and towns without county rank, this order developed as follows. Fidesz-KDNP (the ruling party alliance won more than 50 per cent of county list votes), is followed quite a distance behind by runner-up Jobbik with 21.26 per cent, MSZP came in third with 13.7 per cent, DK fourth with just 6 per cent, with LMP (2.12 per cent) and Együtt (1.85 per cent) at the bottom of the ranking. It is thus clear to see that MSZP is twice as strong as DK at the level of villages and towns without county rank, the socialist party has thus stabilised its leading position in the left-wing around the countryside, while Együtt-PM practically does not exist outside Budapest. The newly established left-wing parties (DK, Együtt-PM) were unable to reach a breakthrough against the socialists in the countryside, and have no substantive basis in smaller settlements. All of this can be ill-boding for the two small left-wing parties regarding 2018, as they will hardly be able to mobilise properly during parliamentary elections without representation in the countryside.

Looking at county list voting, MSZP was the runner-up in a single county (Csongrád), finished behind Jobbik in seventeen counties, and only ranked fourth in Somogy County. Still, the socialists outperformed the other left-wing parties in every county based on county list votes. The socialists thus secured 63.51 per cent of the hypothetical left-wing union's votes, as they obtained 2.27 times more votes than Demokratikus Koalíció (DK) did. In the 11 counties where all three parties participating in the former left-wing union ran, MSZP won 57.31 per cent of county list votes, DK obtained 28.34 percent, whereas Együtt-PM got 14.35 percent.



*The order of dominance from county list results (county list votes cast in villages and towns without county rank) per parties (Source: valasztas.hu)*



*The order of dominance from county list results (county list votes cast in villages and towns without county rank) reckoning with left-wing votes as blocks (Source: valasztas.hu)*

## Recurrent theme four: The main loser is not LMP, but Együtt-PM

In terms of county list votes in five counties, LMP took fourth place in one, and fifth in three. The party secured 2.12 per cent of county votes, but considering just the counties where they ran, they got 6.39 per cent of the votes (their 8 per cent result in Pest County contributed to this significantly). LMP outdid the Együtt-PM alliance by more than 6 thousand county list votes even so, despite the fact that it set county lists in half as many counties (in just 5 counties, as opposed to Együtt-PM's 11 county lists). This also shows that the main loser in the municipal election was not LMP, but Együtt-PM, just like we forecast. On top of that, the single mayoral position Együtt-PM obtained in one Budapest district only lessens this last conclusion upon first glance, since the left-wing does not have a majority in the assembly there. The question therefore stands: what exactly will this "display victory" be enough for in terms of Együtt-PM?