

20 years of Fidesz core voters

Social background and political opinion of committed Fidesz voters between 2002 and 2021

ANALYSIS OF THE REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



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SUMMARY

- In our analysis, we looked at core Fidesz voters - electors who still have strong ties to the party between two elections - between 2002 and 2021, based on their social background and cultural characteristics, as well as their political opinions.
- It is important to note that the core group of voters considered in the analysis does not completely include Fidesz voters. In the 2022 elections, 39 percent of all eligible voters voted for Fidesz, but the share of core voters in the total population was only 19 percent in 2021. Therefore, the importance of marginal voters in Fidesz's electoral victory in 2022 is greater.
- Consistent with general political sociological trends, main voters have a higher level of education than marginal voters and are not considered to be specifically small-town voters by place of residence.
- Apart from a change in the sex ratio in favor of women and a rising average age, there is no apparent significant change in the Fidesz camp. During the 20 years analyzed, there are only moderate shifts in terms of residence, education, culture, and politics.
- The results suggest that core Fidesz voters express their opinion on policy issues, such as education and health care, based on their general political satisfaction.
- Fidesz's policy of conflict generation and mobilization from above keeps the attention and commitment of sympathizers and core voters rather than influencing their opinions on the issues under scrutiny. In this regard, the achievement of Fidesz in politics is to conform to its camp and hold it together.
- In terms of gender balance, Fidesz had a balanced core voter base in 2002, but by the early 2020s, it had become a distinctly female party.

- Between 2002 and 2021, the average age of Fidesz core voters increased by more than 10 years. According to the 2002 data, their average age was 43, but in 2021 it had risen to 54.6.
- 44,6 percent of Fidesz core voters lived in a village or a commune in 2002, compared to 37.7 percent in 2021. The share of Fidesz supporters in large cities increased by 6 points to 24 percent in 2021 compared to the 2002 results.
- Between 2002 and 2021, the overwhelming majority of Fidesz core voters, 74-82 percent, will have a secondary education. The share of college and university graduates is almost identical in 2002 and 2021, 16.4 and 16.5 percent respectively.
- At the beginning of the timeframe, 26.7 percent of Fidesz supporters went to church at least once a month, at the end 26.9 percent.
- They take a neutral position towards gays and lesbians both at the beginning and at the end of the period.
- Although immigration was not a tangible phenomenon before 2015, Fidesz supporters did not think it was good for the country even before that.
- There is also no significant difference between 2002 and 2021 in terms of trust in the European Parliament, although Fidesz has had many conflicts with the European Parliament over the last decade. According to Fidesz core voters, education and health care have been steadily improving since 2006.

INTRODUCTION

In the year since the 2022 elections, Fidesz's popularity has not been significantly affected by inflation, which is high by European standards, the escalation of energy prices, or the Völner-Schadl affair. Based on representative polls, Fidesz still has 2.6 million supporters. The largest governing party has been able to keep its voters together through previously effective means, such as targeted benefits (13th-month pension), mobilization from above with the help of public funds (national consultation), and a communication campaign in public and social media, as well as in public spaces, also with the help of public funds.

While there have been some major realignments in the liberal and left-wing parties over the past 20 years, Fidesz has been the dominant party on the right since the 2002 elections. In the spirit of "one camp, one flag", Fidesz has gradually integrated both organisationally and personally with other right-wing parties and their voters.

Given the continuity, it is worth examining the core of this constituency, its social background, and its political opinions over the past 20 years. A long, time-series comparison allows trends to be identified. In particular, we wanted to see whether there is a significant difference in the electorate between the opposition and the government, and between the beginning of the regime's establishment in the early 2010s and the entrenched regime in the early 2020s.

The research focused on the respondents who named Fidesz in the given year when asked if there was a political party that was closer to them than the others. We consider these respondents as core Fidesz voters.

RESULTS

The core voter group considered in the analysis does not fully cover the Fidesz electorate. As shown in Figure 1, by the end of the 2010s, the share of core voters in the total electorate is decreasing and the number of marginal voters is increasing. In our analysis, we, therefore, focus on the former, the committed core Fidesz voters, marked in dark blue in the figure. The share of Fidesz core voters about the total population was the highest in 2010, at 30%, and in the same year, 34% of eligible voters voted for Fidesz on the list. In the 2022 elections, 39 percent of all eligible voters voted for Fidesz, but the share of core voters about the total population was only 19 percent in 2021, down from 21 percent in 2002. The role of marginal voters in Fidesz's electoral victory is therefore larger in 2022.

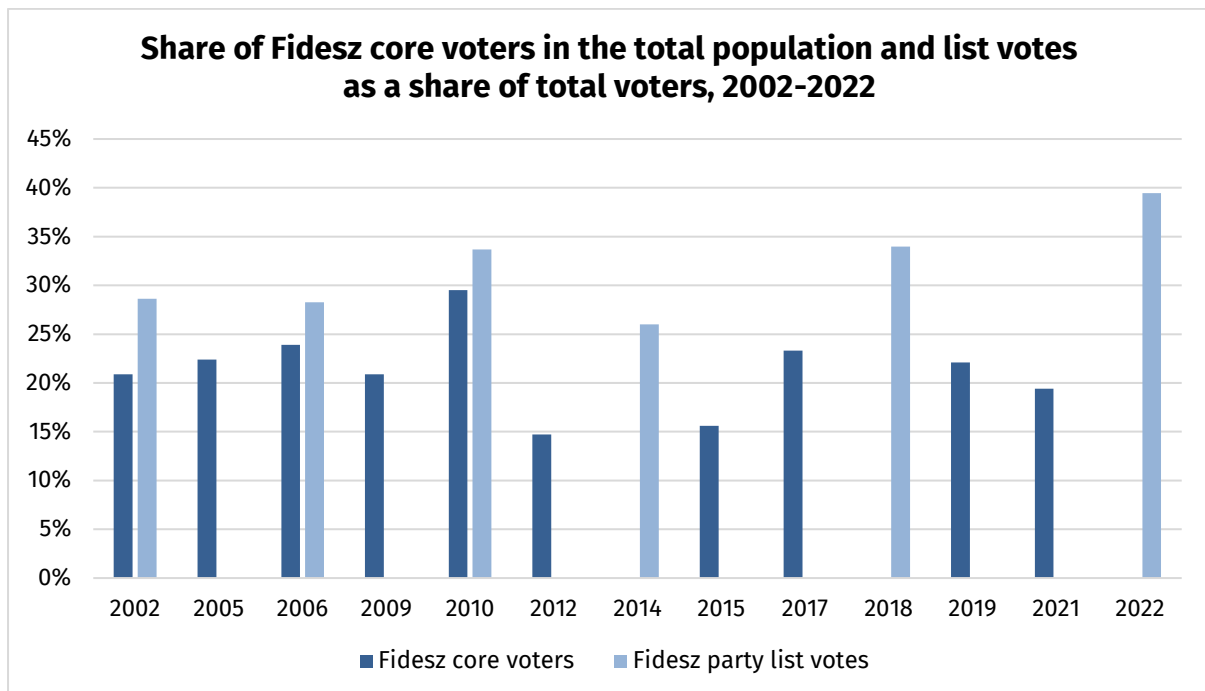


Figure 1: Share of Fidesz core voters in the total population and list votes as a share of total voters, 2002-2022

In terms of gender balance, Fidesz had a balanced core voter base in 2002, but by the early 2020s Fidesz had become a distinctly female party. While the proportion of men was 51.4% in 2002, it fell below 40% by 2022 (Figure 2). During the opposition period, and in the early 2010s, the share of women voters who were engaged was stable at around 55%, gradually increasing to 60% by the end of the 2010s. The

higher number of female supporters may be related to Fidesz's successful communication of its family policy and its family-friendly self-identification.

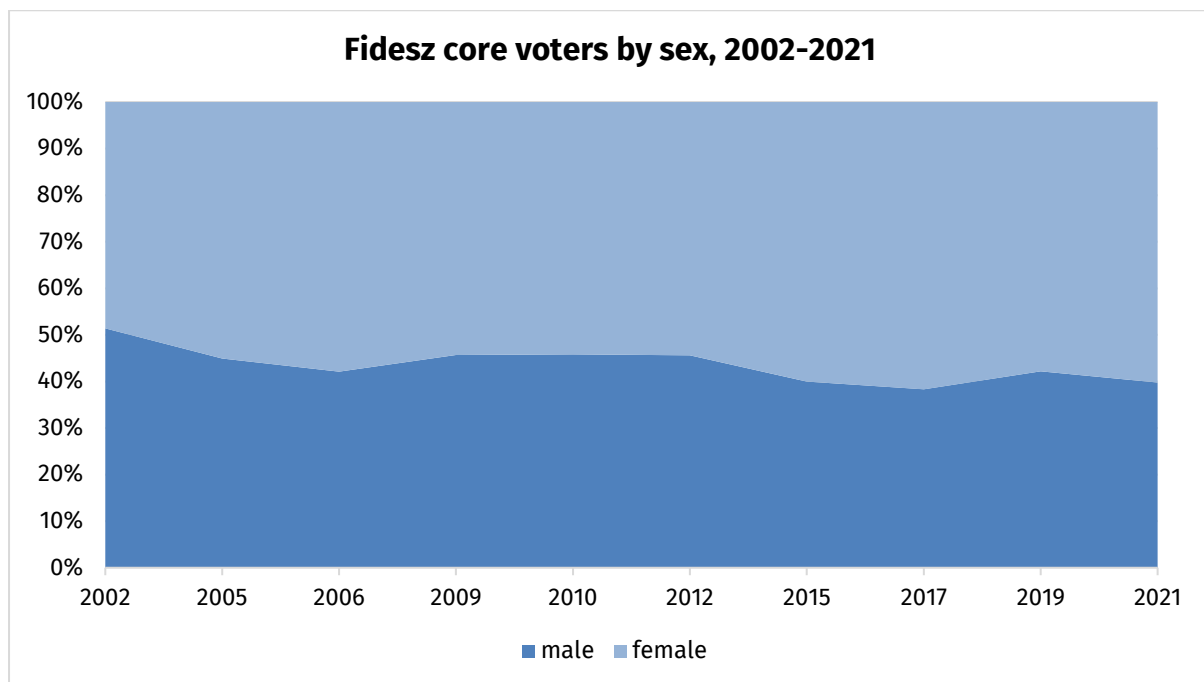


Figure 2: Fidesz core voters by sex, 2002-2021

The average age of Fidesz core voters has grown between 2002 and 2021. In the 2002 survey, their average age was 43, rising to 54.6 in 2021. Thus, the average age of Fidesz committed voters increased by more than 10 years over the period. As we will see, the Fidesz supporters' camp has changed most in these two respects, in terms of gender and average age.

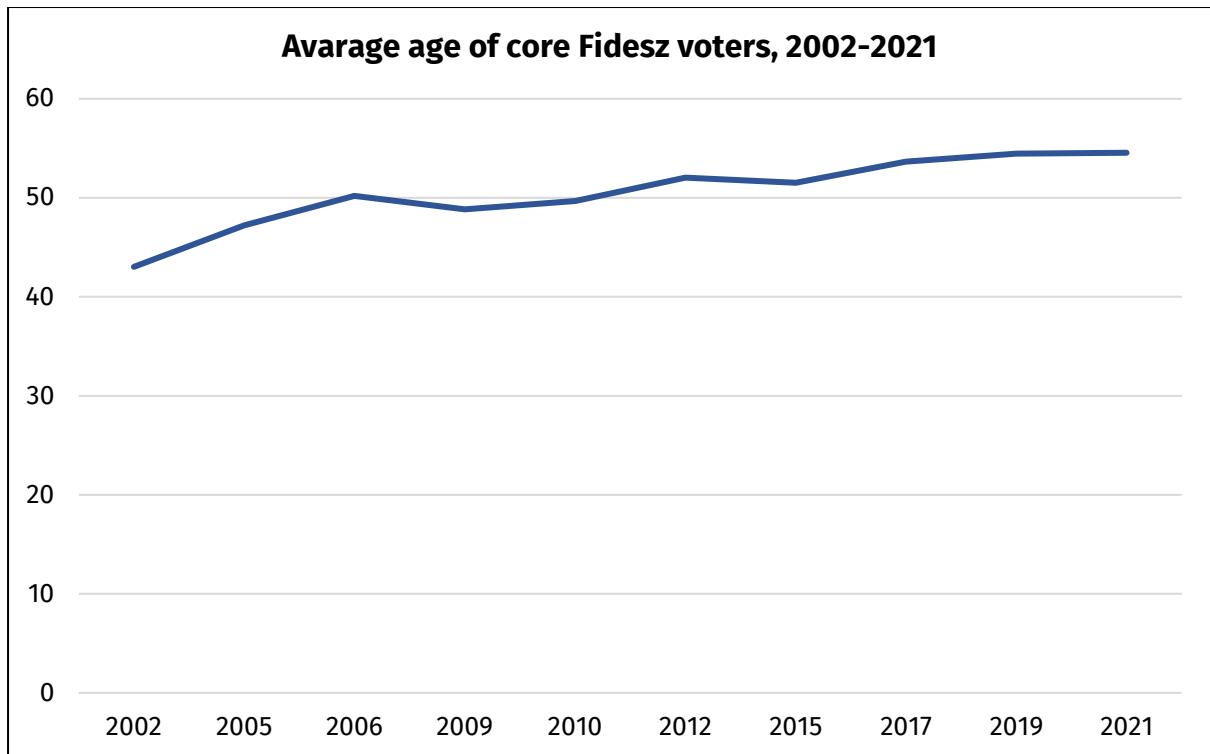


Figure 3: Average age of core Fidesz voters, 2002-2021

44.6 percent of Fidesz core voters lived in villages or villages in 2002, which is 37.7 percent in 2021 (Figure 4). The share of Fidesz supporters in large cities was the highest in the 2017 survey, accounting for more than a third of the total (35.9 percent). Compared to the 2002 results, their share increased by 6 points to 24 percent in 2021. Compared to them, the urban, small-town core Fidesz voters are more dominant, accounting for slightly more than a third of the camp. However, there is no sign of an increasing role for those living in specifically smaller settlements among the committed voters compared to the early 2000s. The implication is that small towns may have a higher proportion of marginal voters.

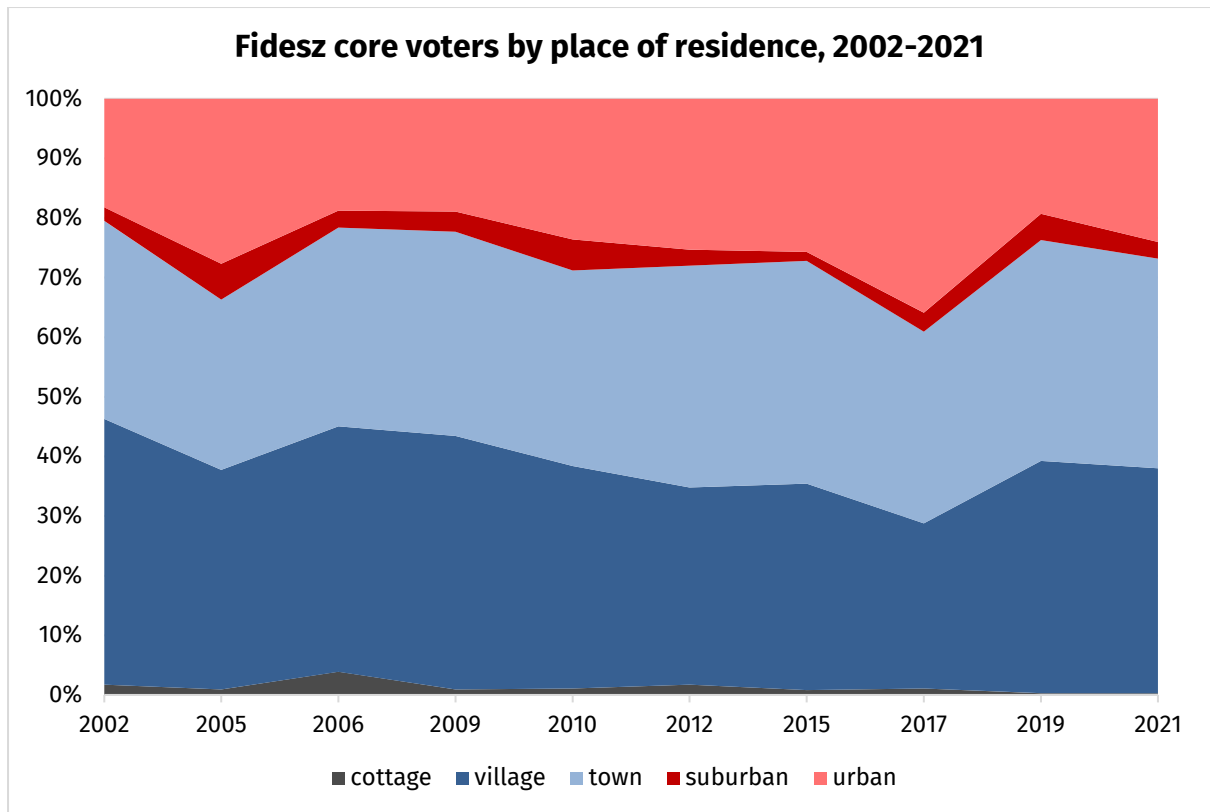


Figure 4: Fidesz core voters by place of residence, 2002-2021

A similar phenomenon can be observed for educational attainment as for residence. While there are some movements over the period, the composition of the Fidesz core voter camp does not change significantly based on educational background. In line with the general demographic trends, the share of people with primary education, namely those with eight or fewer years of primary education, is decreasing. The overwhelming majority of Fidesz core voters, 74-82% between 2002 and 2021, will have completed secondary education. The share of college and university graduates was highest in 2015, at 21.3 percent, but is almost identical at the two endpoints in 2002 and 2021, at 16.4 and 16.5 percent respectively. However, the data show that the share of graduates increased until 2015, before bottoming out in 2017.

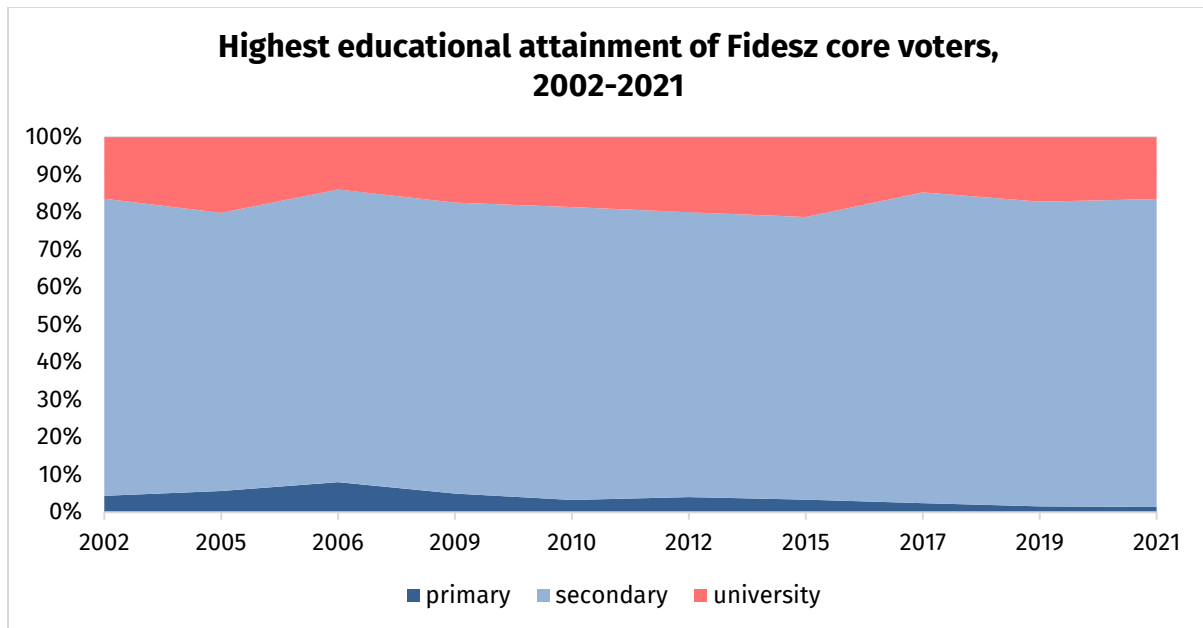


Figure 5: Highest educational attainment of Fidesz core voters, 2002-2021

Finally, we looked at how often Fidesz core voters attend religious services, apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals (Figure 6). We were primarily interested in the extent to which the committed camp follows the religious worldview of Fidesz in practice. The results show that there was no significant trend in this aspect between 2002 and 2021. At the beginning of the period, 26.7% of core Fidesz voters went to church at least once a month, at the end 26.9%. In 2021, this proportion was 18.6 percent of the total population. Apart from a spike in 2015, the number of people attending services on major public holidays has steadily decreased (2021: 21.2%). In 2021, 22.1 percent of Fidesz supporters will attend less often than this, and about a third (29.9%) will never attend. The highest proportions of Fidesz core voters who did not attend the ceremony were after the critical 2010 election and the 2016 quota referendum. It was during these periods that the party's committed voter base expanded, bringing non-practicing religious voters into Fidesz.

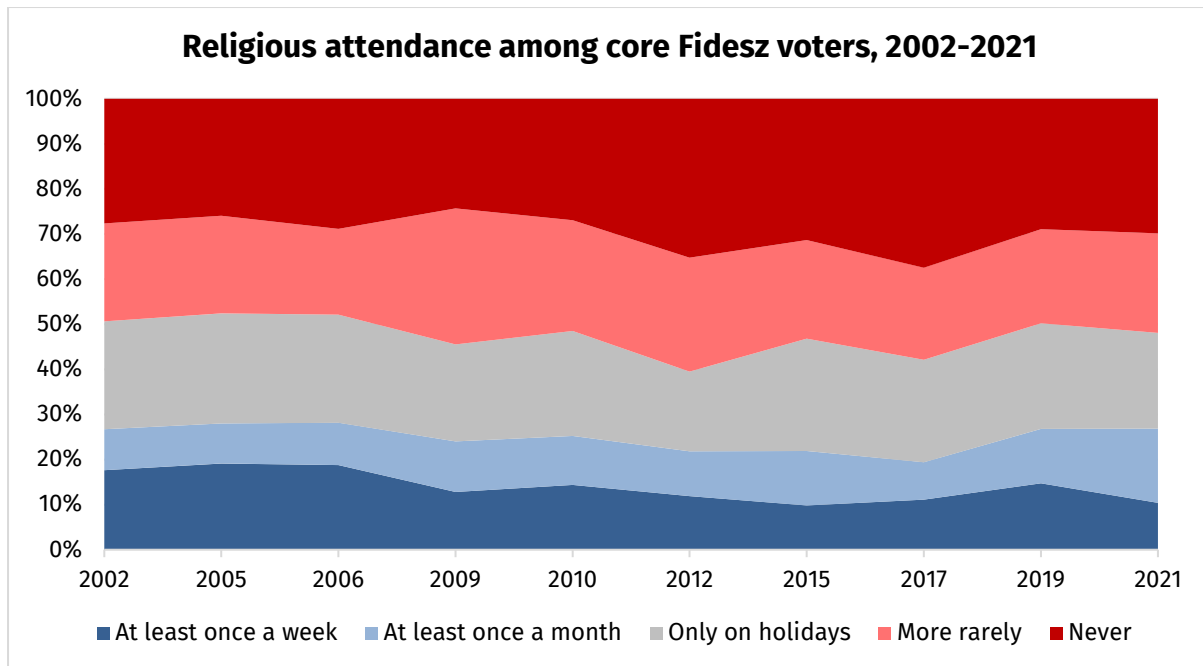


Figure 6: Religious attendance among core Fidesz voters, 2002-2021

In addition to the social background, we also examined how the opinion of Fidesz's core voters has changed on certain policy issues and in terms of their perception of political institutions. We looked at the 1 in 5 opinions of government party members themselves on key policy issues such as reducing income inequality and tolerance of gays and lesbians (Figure 7). Like the majority of Hungarian society, Fidesz's committed voters are also characterized by a left-wing redistributionist policy. This is slightly diminishing in 2012, which may be due to the economic crisis and the bailout of foreign currency borrowers. They have a neutral stance towards gays and lesbians at the beginning of the period under review and also at the end, despite the growing anti-gay campaign. In this case, the lower tolerance measured in 2017 may be a consequence of anti-refugee and anti-foreigner government communication. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that the acceptance of immigration among Fidesz core voters also decreased during this period. While immigration was not a tangible phenomenon before 2015, Fidesz's committed supporters did not think it was good for the country before then either.

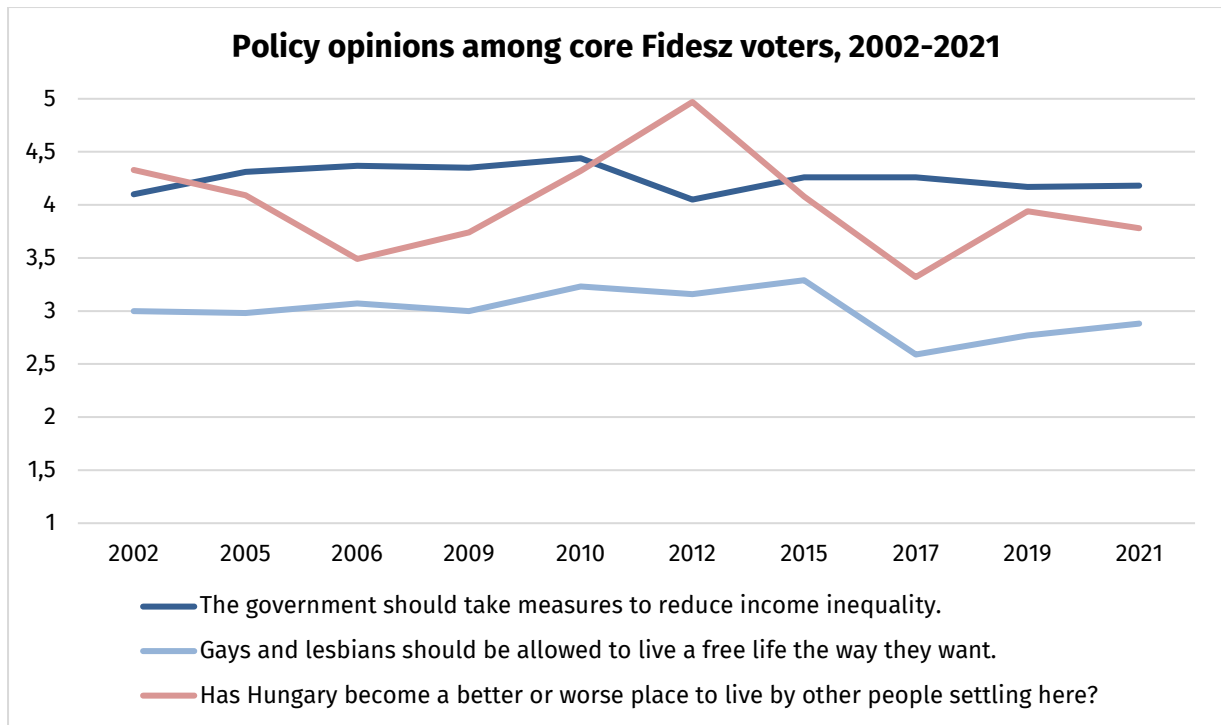


Figure 7: Policy opinions among core Fidesz voters, 2002-2021
 (1=not at all, very bad; 5=totally, very good)

Figure 8 illustrates the trust of Fidesz core voters in the European Parliament on a scale of 0 to 10. This data may tell us more about Fidesz's committed voters' views on the EU than the support for membership. Interestingly, there is no significant difference between 2002 and 2021, with the two averages being 5.71 and 5.58 points respectively. The lowest level of trust was measured in 2009. Although Fidesz has many conflicts with the European Parliament, core Fidesz voters tend to form their opinion of the institution in light of their general political assessment of the situation.

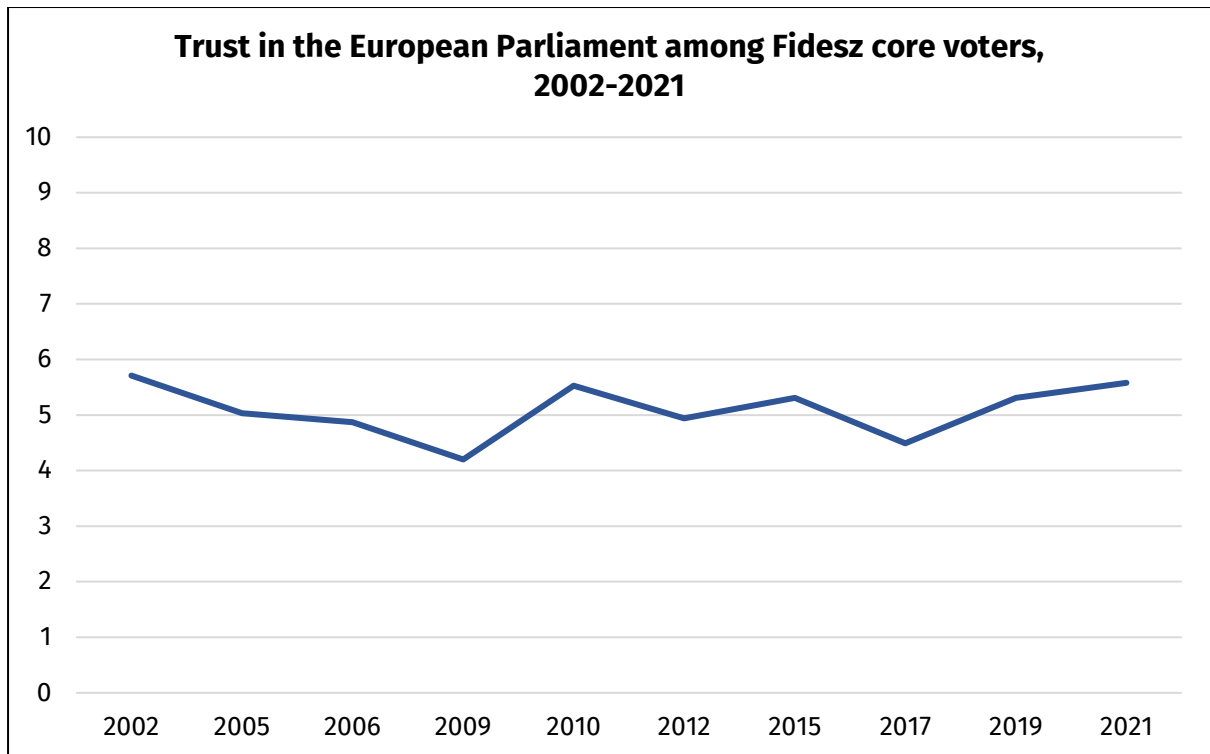


Figure 8: Trust in the European Parliament among core Fidesz voters, 2002-2021 (0=not at all confident; 10=totally confident)

In the opinion of Fidesz's committed supporters, the state of education and health care has been steadily improving since 2006, even according to 2009 data (Figure 9). A decline in health care can be measured in 2015.

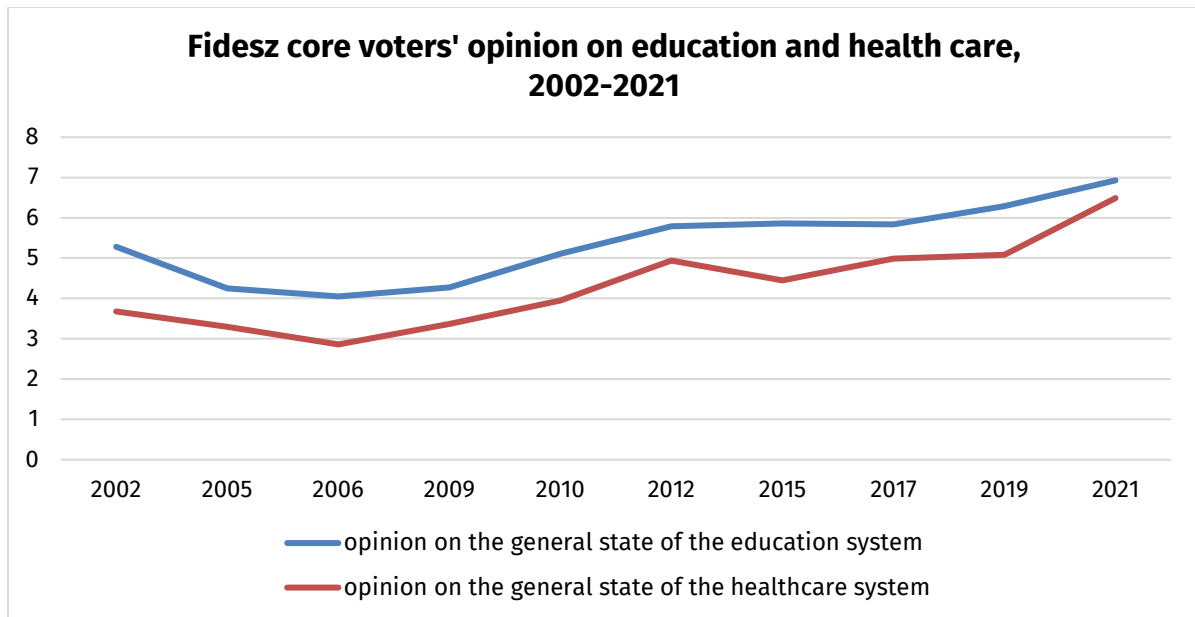


Figure 9: Fidesz core voters' opinion on education and health care, 2002-2021 (0=very bad, 10=very good)

In our analysis, we looked at Fidesz's core voters between 2002 and 2021, based on their social background and cultural characteristics, as well as their political opinions. Apart from a change in the sex ratio in favor of women and a rising average age, no other clear and significant changes can be detected in the Fidesz committed camp. Over the 20 years under study, there have been small major movements in terms of residence, education, culture, and policy. The data suggest that core Fidesz voters express their opinions on policy issues, such as education and health, based on their overall political satisfaction. Fidesz's politics are getting characterized by anti-Westernism, and political campaigns against refugees and sexual minorities, but the opinion of committed voters does not change linearly, even church attendance is not more typical among them. Fidesz's policy of conflict generation and mobilization from above tends to maintain the attention and commitment of core voters, committed voters, rather than influence their opinion on the issue.