

# EP voters

*One year before the elections for the European  
Parliament*

ANALYSIS BY REPUBLIKON INTÉZET



June 2023

## SUMMARY

- Hungarian voters will go to the polls again in one year: on 9 June 2024, both local elections and European Parliament (EP) elections will be held simultaneously. Republikon Institute has examined how Hungarian voters feel about the EP party lists and their potential list leaders.
- The popularity of the EP list leaders is currently roughly at the same level as the popularity of their parties. The main reason for this is that personal campaigns are yet to start so for now voters are thinking about the election in terms of parties, not candidates.
- Compared to the popularity of his party, only Fidesz-KDNP's Trócsányi László performed worse, and only Donáth Anna and Tüttő Kata were able to do marginally better than their respective parties.
- We also examined the parties' potential voters: those who, although sympathetic to a given party, are not yet committed to it. Fidesz-KDNP is the most popular party overall, but its growth potential is the lowest. DK is in a similar position within the opposition, with many committed voters but few potential additional ones.
- Overall, opposition voters are open to voting for most other opposition parties, showing strong support for the opposition in general, rather than a specific party. One of the main reasons for this is the ongoing cooperation and alliance formation between these parties, which has led voters to remain open to options within the camp.
- The LMP-Párbeszéd list, led by Benedek Jávor, has few committed voters, but it has the most potential voters, with 17 per cent of all voters showing a willingness to vote for this list. It is unsurprising, as it is an established phenomenon that green politics is a popular second choice for left-liberal voters.
- Although DK is currently winning against Momentum for the title of the strongest party in the opposition, Momentum has a larger growth potential, which could turn the tide in the EP elections.

## INTRODUCTION

Hungarian voters will go to the polls again in a year, on 9 June 2024, when local elections and European Parliament elections will be held simultaneously in Hungary. Many things could change until then, including who will run for office in the election. Although the official campaigning is yet to begin, both the parties and the voters have started to tune in to the coming, presumably intense campaign. Our Institute has examined how Hungarian voters feel about the EP party lists and their presumed list leaders, and we also attempted to assess the parties' growth potential. Clearly, this recent, one-off measurement of popularity cannot determine how well candidates will perform in 2024. The campaign has barely begun, and we do not know for sure (although we can guess) the candidates and alliances that the parties will field. Therefore, in this research, besides different parties' committed voter bases, we have also tried to gauge the size of their potential voter bases. We will attempt to give a simple account of the scope for manoeuvre, the growth potential of individual parties and list leaders; what they can build on during the campaign, and which voters they might be able to mobilise. Our research demonstrates that due to voters' high propensity to switch between parties within the opposition, any of these parties may be able to perform unexpectedly well, with a well-targeted campaign and a strong candidate.

### **Methodological basis**

In our current survey, respondents did not choose from a party list but were asked to comment separately on the EP list leaders and their parties<sup>1</sup>, i.e. they could express their opinion on the likelihood of voting for a given list leader and his/her party. This implies that respondents could express a favourable opinion towards several candidates, and had the opportunity to explicitly reject list leaders and parties that they would not vote for under any circumstances. This allowed us to look at trends in swing-voting, and more specifically, whether certain candidates might find sympathisers in the camps of other parties, and how many additional votes they may be able to secure for their party.

It is important to underline here that we currently have no definite information on which parties or party alliances will run and who the list leaders will be, so the questionnaire was based on what we believe to be the most likely potential configuration. We chose the presumed list leaders based on the experiences of previous EP elections, and we hypothesised that the two Green parties, LMP and Párbeszéd, would form a joint list, based on the parties' public communications in recent months, which implies a strong chance of a joint candidacy.

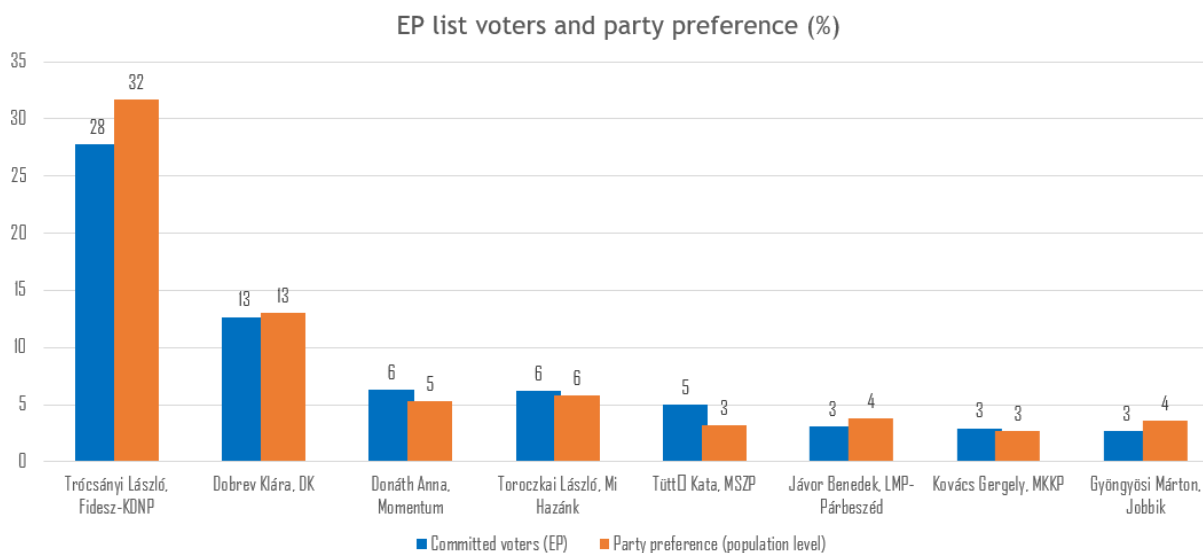
### **Politicians above and beyond party politics**

First, we looked at whether the politicians leading the EP list have an “extra pull” compared to the popularity of their party. It depends, of course, but the simple answer is that on average party list leaders have roughly the same level of popularity as their parties. This will change during the campaign: for now, voters think in terms of parties, and the importance of individuals will be amplified throughout the campaign. This does not mean that there is no data at all yet. First of all, Trócsányi László does not reach the level of Fidesz-KDNP's popularity, which is not surprising, considering he is less established in national politics than ministers and the prime minister are. 28 per cent would vote for him, which is 5 percentage points lower than the percentage that would vote for Fidesz-KDNP. Secondly, there are minor discrepancies within the opposition as well. Donáth Anna and Tüttő Kata were able to slightly outperform their own parties' popularity. The former may be because Donáth Anna is the only politician who has recently been the subject of a national campaign. Tüttő Kata's popularity may be explained by the fact that Budapest is now attracting a lot of attention, partly due to Fidesz's campaign against the capital and its mayor, and partly due to the opposition's

---

<sup>1</sup> Our question was: “How likely are you to vote for the following list-leading politicians and their parties in the 2024 European Parliament elections?” Respondents could choose between the following options: “a) definitely would vote for them b) would probably vote for them c) probably would not vote for them d) definitely would not vote for them”.

manoeuvres in the capital and in the upcoming local elections. Tüttő Kata, a politician from the capital and vice-mayor of Budapest, is getting more attention than her party, MSZP. Considering the list leaders' popularity and extrapolating from it leads us to believe that Fidesz-KDNP, DK, Momentum, Mi Hazánk and MSZP could win seats in the European Parliament next year.



**Figure 1: EP list leaders' committed voters and the national-level party preferences**

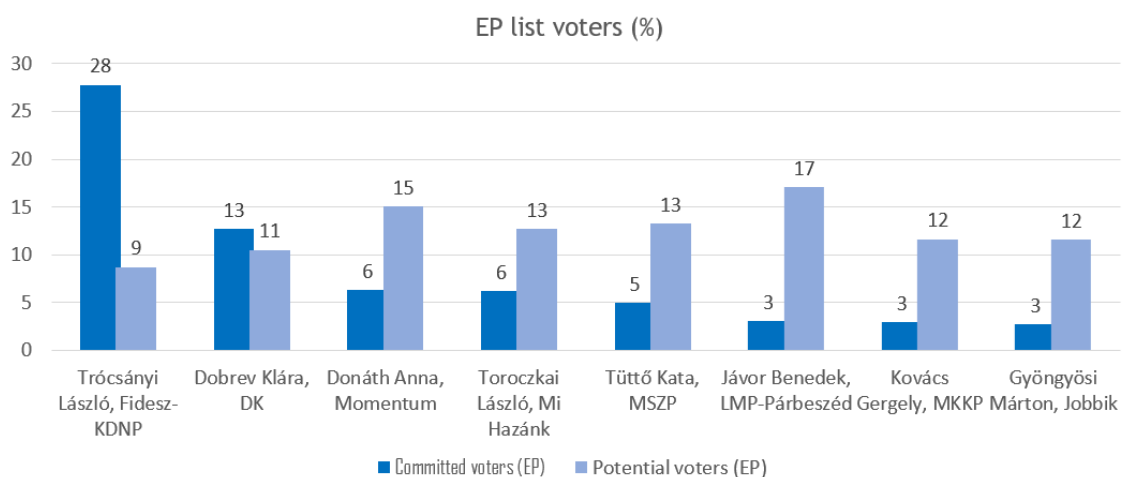
### Core and periphery

The analysis of the core, committed voters of the list leaders does not contain any big surprises: essentially the rank order of the parties seems to be the same as party preference polls have been suggesting for months.

Fidesz-KDNP is strongly in the lead, while DK leads the opposition in popularity. Momentum and Mi Hazánk are at a similar level of popularity, despite their vastly different voter bases, MSZP is just about reaching the parliamentary threshold, while Jobbik has fallen back to the same level as the smaller parties, LMP, Párbeszéd, and the Kutya Párt.

However, the potential voters, the periphery, yield some surprising results. These are the respondents who indicated that they would be likely to vote for the candidate and his/her list, but are not certain voters of the given party lists. They are the ones that these parties could seduce into their camp with minimal effort. These data contain some interesting revelations. First, Fidesz-KDNP is by far the strongest party, but its growth potential is limited, and as the incumbent it has little potential for extra votes from other parties. On the other hand, there is considerable openness to switch camps within the opposition. DK is the strongest party in the opposition, with more than twice as many core voters as any other opposition party, but similarly to Fidesz-KDNP, which has little room for expansion in the total population, the DK is the party with relatively low growth potential within the opposition. The most striking outlier is the LMP-Párbeszéd joint list,

which has only 3 per cent of core voters, but another 17 per cent of respondents would be open to voting for them. It has been noted time and time again that green parties and green values, although they are prioritised by a small minority, they are also rejected by few in society, thus they can offer a popular alternative to the political mainstream. It is also worth mentioning Momentum. A recurrent element in current political discourse is that DK and Momentum are fighting for the leadership of the opposition. Some say that this fight is over, as DK confidently leads the opposition popularity contest, but it could also be argued that for the EP elections, it is not clearly the case. DK has a larger core voter base than Momentum, but its growth potential is much smaller. If we take into account the total number of certain and potential voters, DK is barely ahead of Momentum. Of course, every party prefers to have committed voters, but it is important to know if a party has a significant number of potential supporters outside its camp.



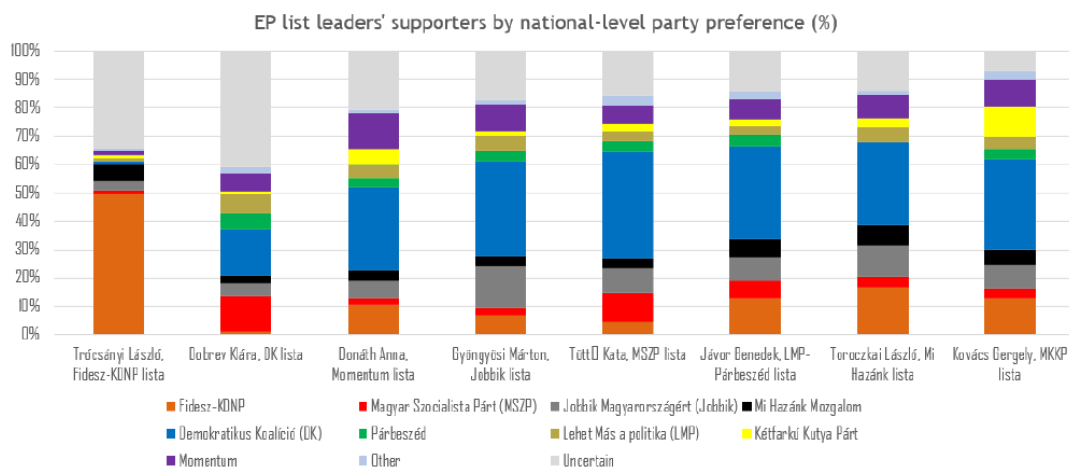
**Figure 1: EP list leaders' committed and potential voters (%).**

### Who are the potential voters?

We looked at which party's voters make up the group of potential voters for each EP list leader. These are respondents who would be willing to vote for a particular candidate and his/her list but have not committed themselves to it<sup>2</sup>. The simplest formula is for Trócsányi László and his list: their potential voters are either at the periphery of Fidesz-KDNP, some undecided voters who are drawn to the incumbent party, and certain Mi Hazánk voters who are attracted by the government's message. The rest of the opposition supporters are not attracted by the government party list. Turning to the opposition, generally speaking, voters are open to a certain extent to most opposition options. Due to continued cooperation between these

<sup>2</sup> In this figure, a lower element count may slightly increase the measurement error margin

parties, their voters have learned to be open within the bloc. A relatively numerous fraction of DK voters would be happy to vote for other opposition candidates. The same good faith is not extended by others towards DK, which is the party with the second lowest growth potential, after Fidesz-KDNP. Among non-DK voting opposition supporters, DK may succeed to seduce only a few new voters, predominantly from MSZP, which is logical, given the number of former MSZP politicians who joined DK over the years. Regardless, the party has been able to attract so many voters since 2022 that there is a good chance that everyone who wanted to vote for DK has already done so. Jávör Benedek and the LMP-Párbeszéd list have the greatest growth potential. Similarly to all other opposition parties, they can siphon voters from DK, but they also have potential supporters among undecided voters, and even certain Fidesz-KDNP supporters would be open to voting for the green party.



**Figure 3: EP list leaders' potential votes by national party preference (%).**

Donáth Anna and Momentum, as we wrote earlier, have good chances of performing well in the EP elections, as they may be able to steal voters away from DK. On the contrary, Dobrev Klára doesn't attract Momentum voters. Tüttő Kata can also trust in the sympathy of DK voters, although from other opposition parties' camps, she can only hope to sway a few voters. Kovács Gergely has fewer potential voters, who are split among the opposition parties. Even some Fidesz-KDNP voters were open to voting for him as a protest vote option. Although there has been a recent increase in the popularity of MKKP, previous experience suggests that voters prioritise different considerations in the voting booths than in the opinion polls, which is generally not favourable for the Kutya Párt.

## Summary

A year before the EP elections there are more unknown variables and obscure details than the opposition parties would prefer. There is a visible uncertainty among opposition voters, which the campaign will help to clarify, although presumably only by the end of the summer. Opposition strategising is made much more complicated by the concurrence of municipal and EP elections, which is undoubtedly one of the main motivations behind the government's decision to move them on the same day. In the current set-up, whereby the opposition parties partially join forces for the local elections but run separately for the EP elections, and the municipal contest takes all the attention, there are two extreme outcomes. This situation could at best significantly upset the status quo in the European Parliament and allow a joint list of Greens, or even the more locally embedded MSZP, to outperform expectations. In the worst case, it could also lead to a significant number of wasted votes for the smaller parties stuck below the parliamentary threshold, and narrow the Hungarian opposition's room for manoeuvre in the EU. Based on the present research it can be said that the difference in support between the EP lists and the parties behind them is minimal at present, but with the start of the campaign, the personal importance of the list-leading politicians will be amplified. This might result in a more significant difference between the national popularity of the parties and their chances in the EP elections, while the multi-directional openness of potential voters towards different parties could upset the balance that has been established since the elections in 2022.