

What shall I call you?

Parallel Liberalisms in Hungary

ANALYSIS BY THE REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



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FOUNDATION** For Freedom.

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SUMMARY

- Ten years ago, in April 2013, Republikon published an analysis of parallel liberalisms, which divided Hungarian liberals into three main groups: human rights, capitalist and self-declared liberals. Much has changed in Hungarian public life in the last ten years, which has also affected the identities of voters. In the following analysis, we will return to the question: what does liberalism mean in Hungary?
- 36% of Hungarians can be described as liberal. A fairly large group of voters, 19 percent, can be described as self-declared liberal, plus 15 human rights liberals and 10 percent economic liberals, which overlap to make up 36 percent of society, meaning that 64 percent of Hungarians are not liberal in any respect.
- The share of liberals in Hungary has increased compared to our 2013 survey, when only 29% of the population were liberals, following a similar methodology.
- There is a significant gap between those who identify themselves as liberal and those who have been labelled liberal on the basis of their political views. In fact, 69% of self-declared liberals, or more than two-thirds, did not agree with any liberal values on human rights or economics, so they are in fact only liberal in name.
- In terms of demographic characteristics, Liberals are slightly younger and better educated. They tend to live in urban areas but are also present in a high proportion in villages. Liberals have higher political participation and better financial status than the population in general.
- Liberalism in Hungary is closely linked to leftism. Liberals are close to left-wing views, while right-wing views and the government parties are not popular among them.

INTRODUCTION

It is a difficult task to define clearly what liberalism is. For some it means "To live and let live." For others, it may mean freedom, individualism, or the free market, or even national sovereignty. It is not entirely clear what the opposite of liberal is: illiberal? Conservative? Socialist? What is a liberal government or a liberal policy? Particularly in the present day, when labels and content are so sharply divisible, anything and anyone can be liberal, if you call it so; thus, it is possible that the entire Hungarian opposition is simultaneously labelled liberal, even though it does not include any party that explicitly defines itself as liberal. Just as it is not unusual that in the USA the culturally liberal Democratic Party and the economically liberal Republican Party are competing for power. The Fidesz-KDNP government defined itself as illiberal when it took its most economically liberal measures relative to itself, and now, when it began to operate with instruments reminiscent of socialist economic policies, it has completely reversed its rhetoric, choosing leftism instead of liberalism as its imagined enemy.

There is a clear confusion around liberalism, and it is a global phenomenon: if we were to organise an international liberal congress, we could choose from a wide range of topics on which participants from all over the world calling themselves liberal disagree.

Just 10 years ago, in 2013, the Republikon Institute published its analysis "Parallel Liberalisms: who are the liberal voters in Hungary?", in which it divided Hungarian liberals into three main groups: human rights, capitalist and self-proclaimed liberals. Much has changed in Hungarian public life in the last 10 years, which has also affected the identity of voters. In our current analysis, we explore the many shades of Hungarian liberalism based on our most recent research¹ conducted in cooperation with Friedrich Naumann Foundation, 21 Research Centre and Political Capital, partly recalling the approach of our analysis ten years ago, with the aim of highlighting that the group of liberals in Hungarian society is a populous and heterogeneous one, made up of voters with different needs, yet there are some general values that distinguish liberals from the cavalcade of the Hungarian population.

¹ The survey was conducted by interviewing 1,000 people between 24 March and 10 April 2023; it is representative of gender, age, education and place of residence. Margin of error +-3.1%.

Methodological foundations

If our aim is to compare different types of liberal voters, the first task is to create liberal categories. In previous years' analyses of liberals, we have taken self-declaration as the basis, i.e. a liberal was someone who called themselves a liberal. This is an appropriate method when researching what liberalism means to Hungarians, but if we want to identify liberal voters, it is not sufficient to look at self-declaration. For the purposes of this analysis, taking into account the identity and political views of the voters, we have created two additional groups of liberals: the "human rights" and "economic" liberals.

Human rights liberals are respondents who value the protection of individual liberty, self-expression and minority rights, so this category includes, for example, respondents who reject authoritarianism and support LGBTQ rights and gender equality, among other things. **Economic liberals** are in fact capitalists, with respondents who reject the market influence of the state, emphasise individual responsibility and accept wealth inequality. Finally, **self-declared liberals**: respondents who choose liberalism as their primary worldview from a list of major worldviews are placed in this category.

So if we look at the three groups of liberals, we can say that 19 percent of the society is self-declared, 15 percent is human rights liberal, and 10 percent is economic liberal. 36 percent of Hungarian society falls into at least one of the three categories, which means that 64 percent of society is not liberal at all. Of

course, there is also considerable overlap between the three categories (Figure 1), with 8 percent of society falling into at least two categories.

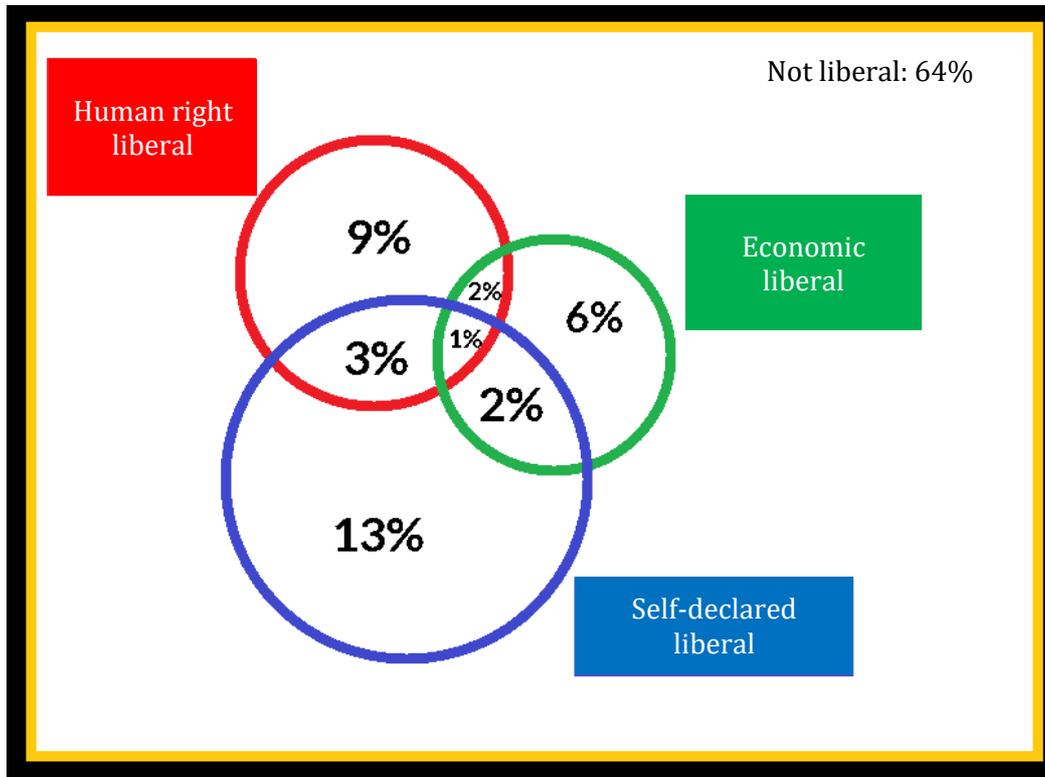


Figure 1: Group composition and overlap of liberals (%).

In the introduction we talked about the confusion around liberalism. This is illustrated very well by the gap between those who identify themselves as liberals and those who have been labelled liberal on their political views. **Indeed, over two thirds of self-declared liberals did not agree with any human rights or economic liberal values.** Apparently, the term liberal is more popular among Hungarians than liberal values.

If we project the 2023 results to the Hungarian voting age population, we can say that more than 1.5 million voters are self-declared, 1.2 million are human rights liberals and 834 thousand are economically liberals in Hungary.

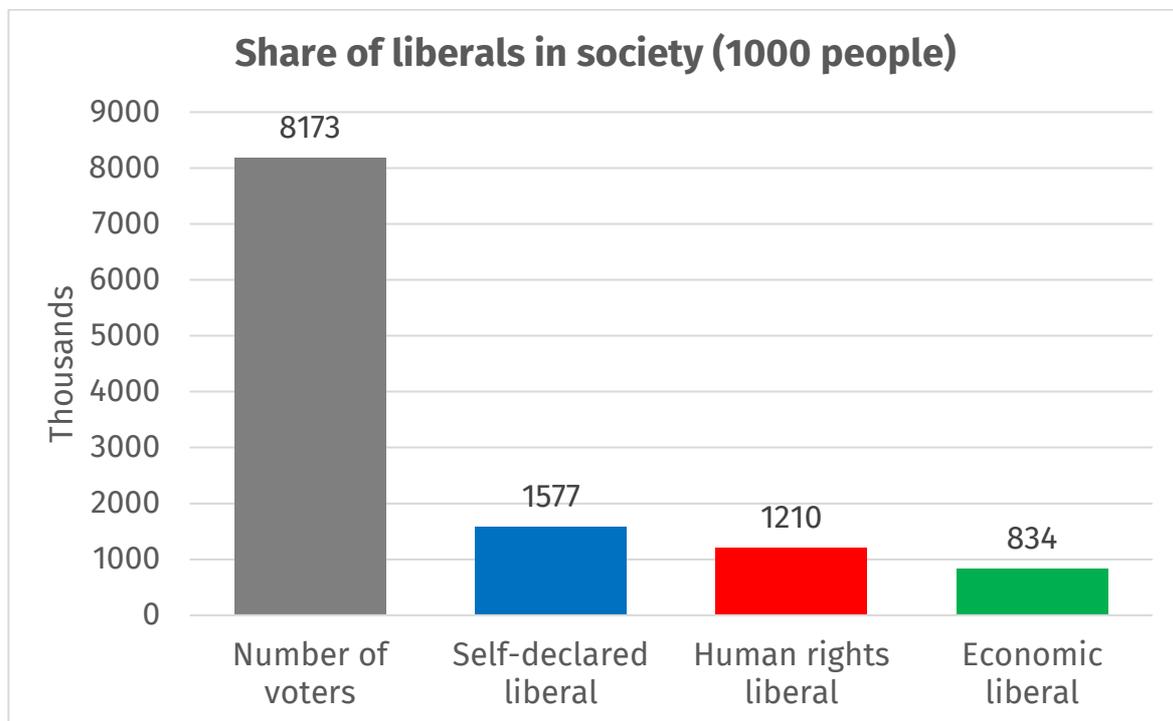


Figure 2: Proportion of different liberal groups in society (in thousands).

Demography

There are also many interesting things to note about the demographic characteristics of the different liberal groups. Starting with the gender distribution, we see that economic liberalism is more male-dominated, while human rights liberalism is more female-dominated. In addition, men are over-represented among self-declared liberals.

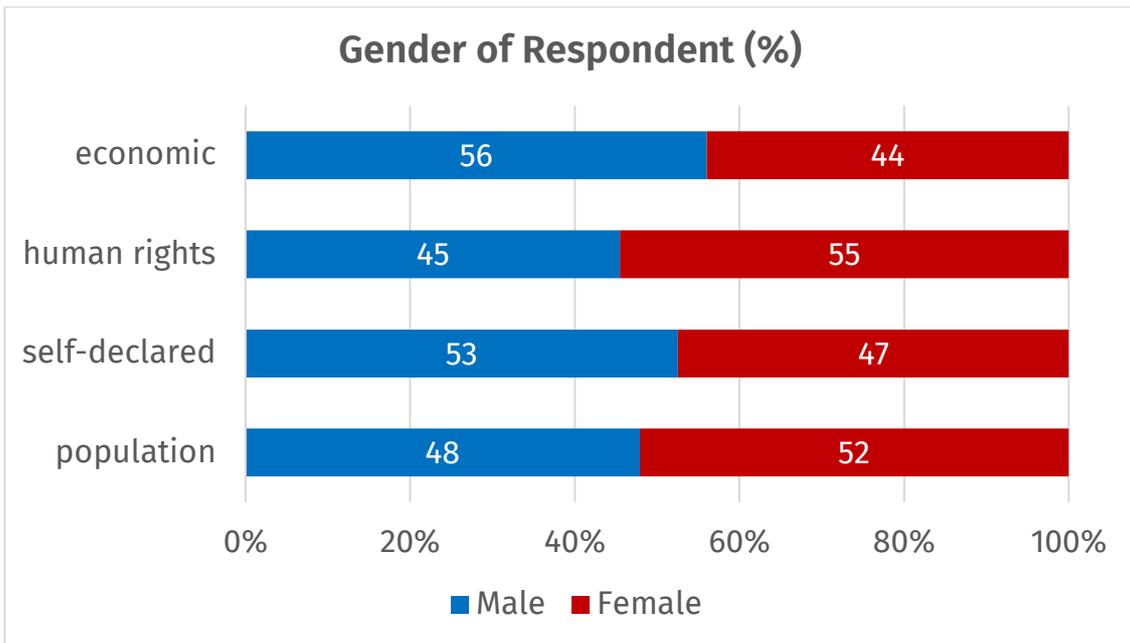


Figure 3: Distribution of liberals by gender (%).

The age distribution is also worth mentioning. The most obvious finding is that liberal values are stronger in the younger age groups. Overall, human rights liberals are the youngest, with two-thirds (67%) under 50, but the group of self-identified liberals also has a high proportion of people under 40. Economic liberals are closest in age to the overall population, with half of capitalists over 50 and only a third under 40.

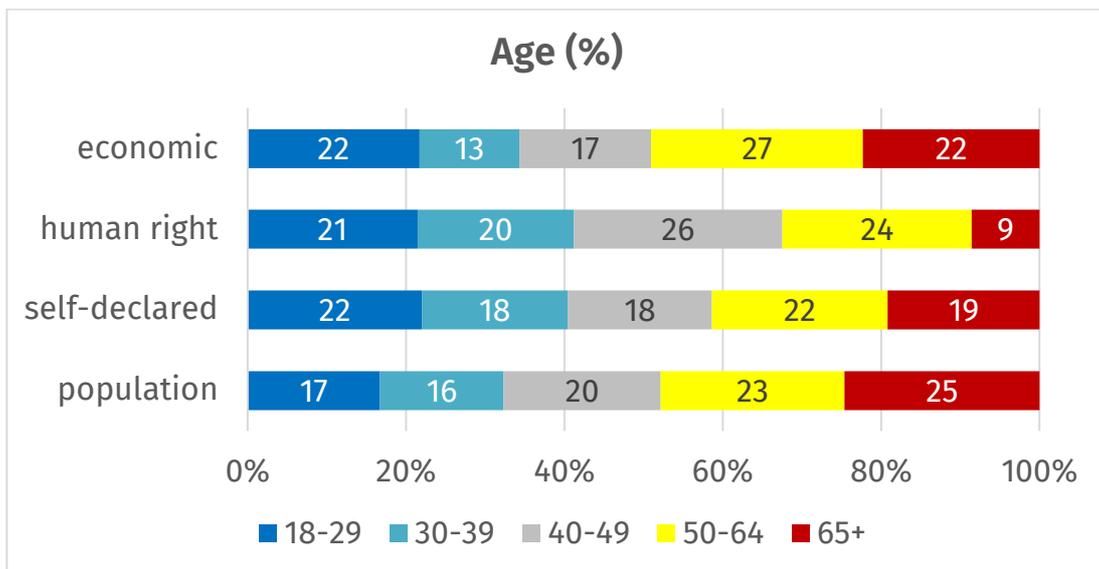


Figure 4: Age distribution of liberals (%).

In terms of education, Liberals are generally better educated than the population. Human rights liberals stand out the most, with three-quarters (74%) having a high

school diploma (56% of the total population) and 36% having a college degree (23% of the total population). Education levels are second highest among economic liberals, and the most populous, self-classified group is closest to the total population in this regard.

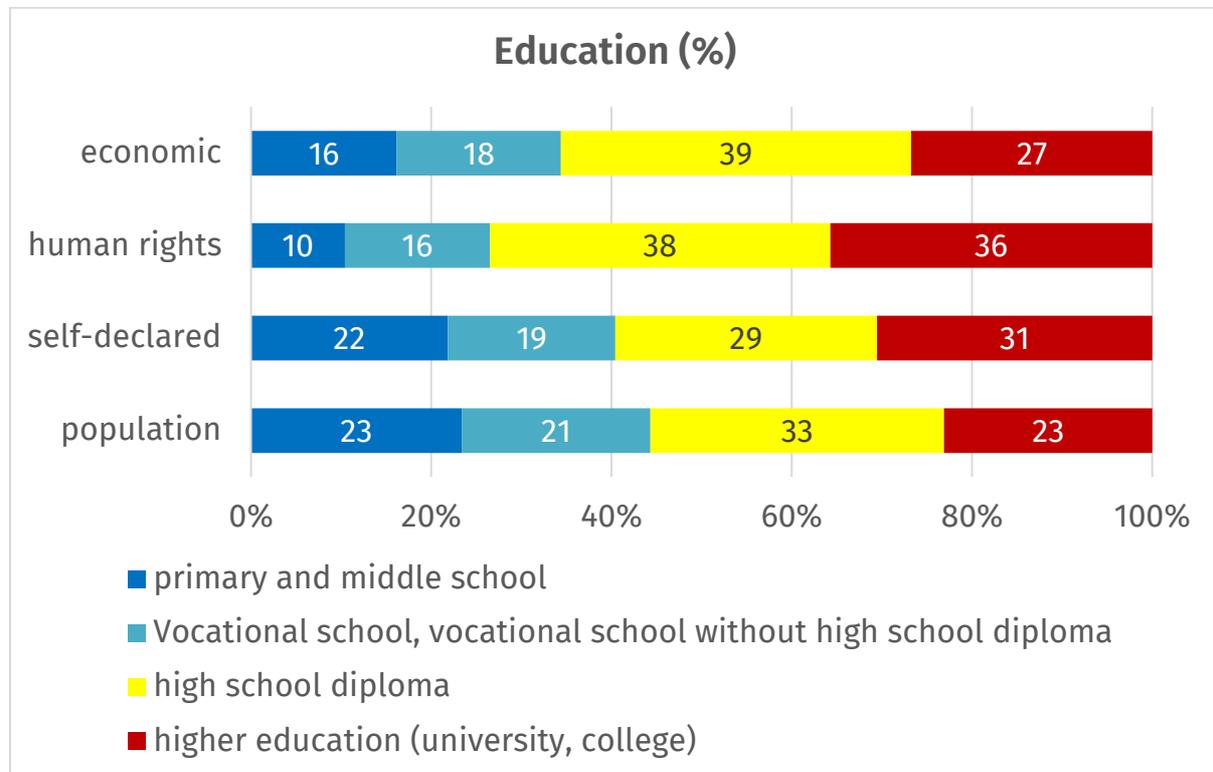


Figure 5: Distribution of liberals by education (%).

Residence data provide interesting information on these groups. On the one hand, there is an over-representation of urbanites among liberals, but on the other hand, there is a misconception that liberals are specifically urban people. Except for human rights liberals, more than half of whom are concentrated in large cities, the majority of liberals tend to live in smaller towns and villages. The distribution of self-identified liberals by place of residence, for example, is barely different from the total population.

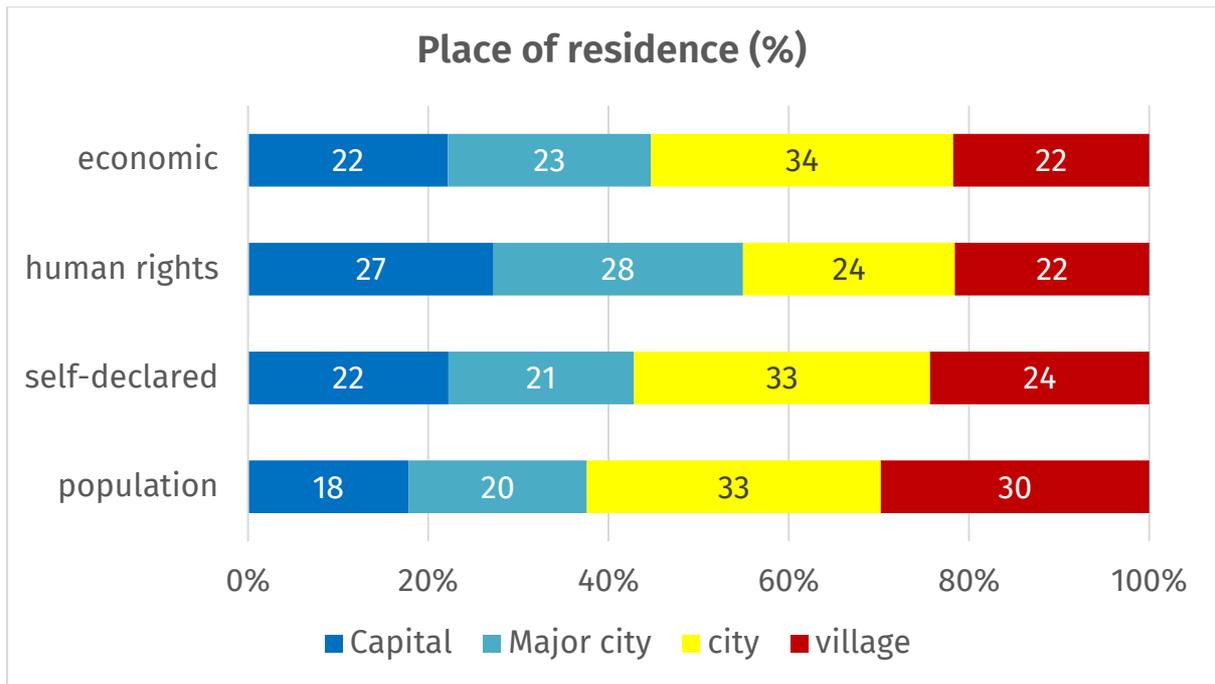


Figure 6: Distribution of Liberals by place of residence (%)

Party preference

We also looked at how liberals relate to party politics. Willingness to participate in the election is highest among human rights liberals, with nearly three-quarters of them saying they would participate in the general election if it were held this Sunday. Interestingly, Liberal self-identifiers are barely more active than the population as a whole, and the propensity to participate among capitalists is slightly lower than the national average.

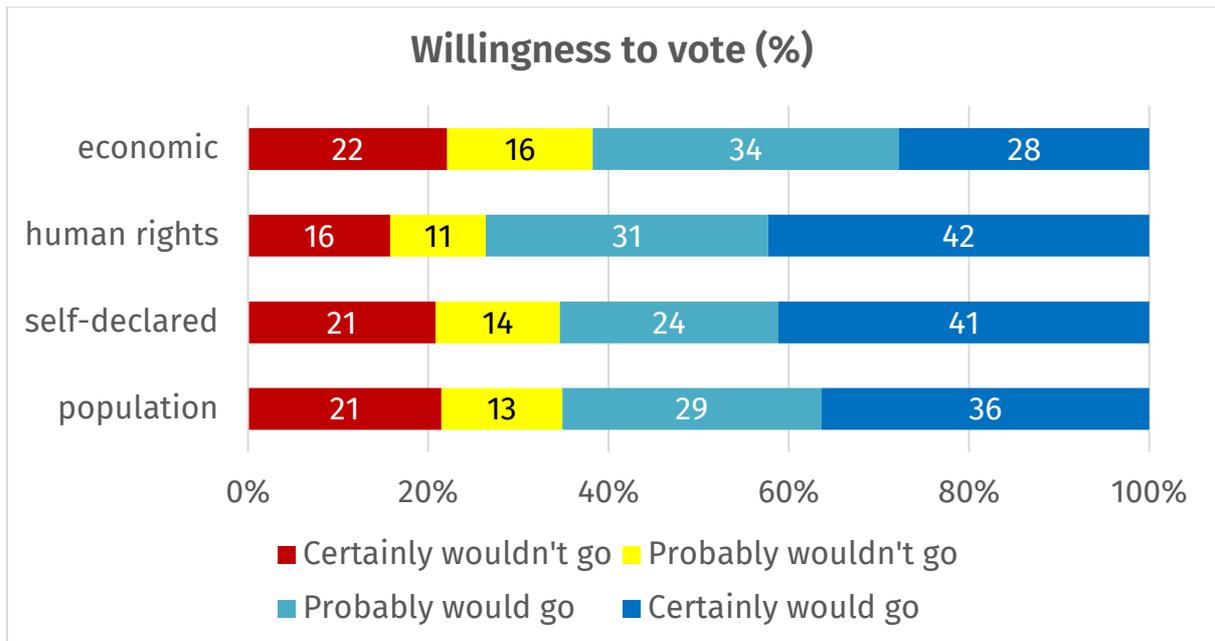


Figure 8: Liberals' willingness to vote (%).

Looking at the party preference, the Liberals are mainly opposition voters, with Fidesz-KDNP doing worse among Liberals than the general population. Nevertheless, there are Fidesz voters here too, as the governing coalition still has a national voter base of half of all party voters, but the Fidesz-KDNP's lead among Liberals is eroding. Among human rights liberals, Fidesz-KDNP fares poorly, coming in only third place, holding one-third of the vote in the economic/self-declared liberal group, compared to half of the vote it holds among the overall population.

Opposition parties generally do better among liberals than in the population as a whole, but Momentum's support jumps the most, two to three times higher among liberals than in the population as a whole. Support for Mi Hazánk was not helped by the liberal screening, nor was support for MSZP, and in this respect the anti-right and anti-socialist bias among liberals is pronounced.

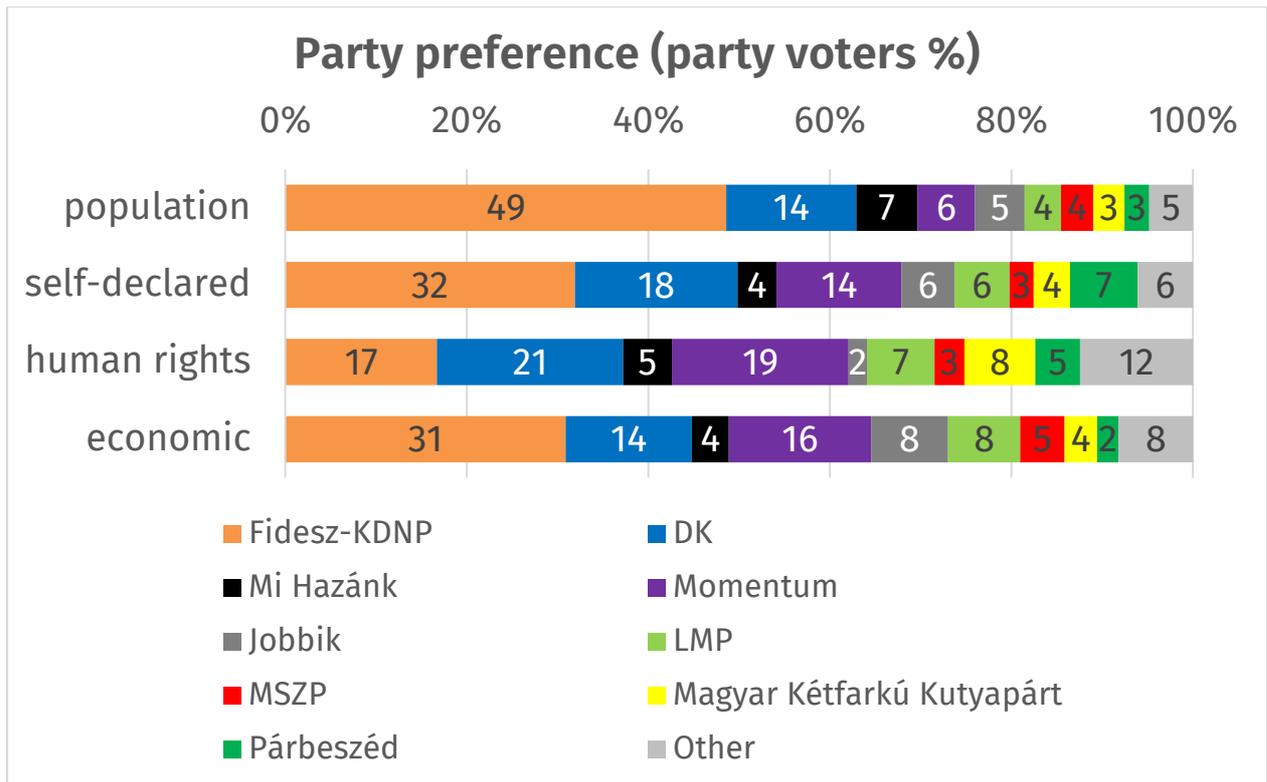


Figure 9: Party preference of liberal party voters (%).

Values and worldview

A key to understanding the nuances of Hungarian liberalism is to examine the data related to values. The first, and perhaps most important finding is that **liberalism and leftism are intertwined in Hungary**. In the case of human rights liberals in particular, and to a lesser extent self-declared liberals, it can be seen that they define themselves as predominantly left-wing, and although economic liberals tend to think of themselves as centrist, they also lean somewhat left. This is particularly striking in relation to the population as a whole (Figure 10). Even those who hold capitalist, economically liberal values identify themselves as more left-wing than the national average, despite the fact that liberals in more developed countries often define themselves as being precisely the opposite of left-wing.

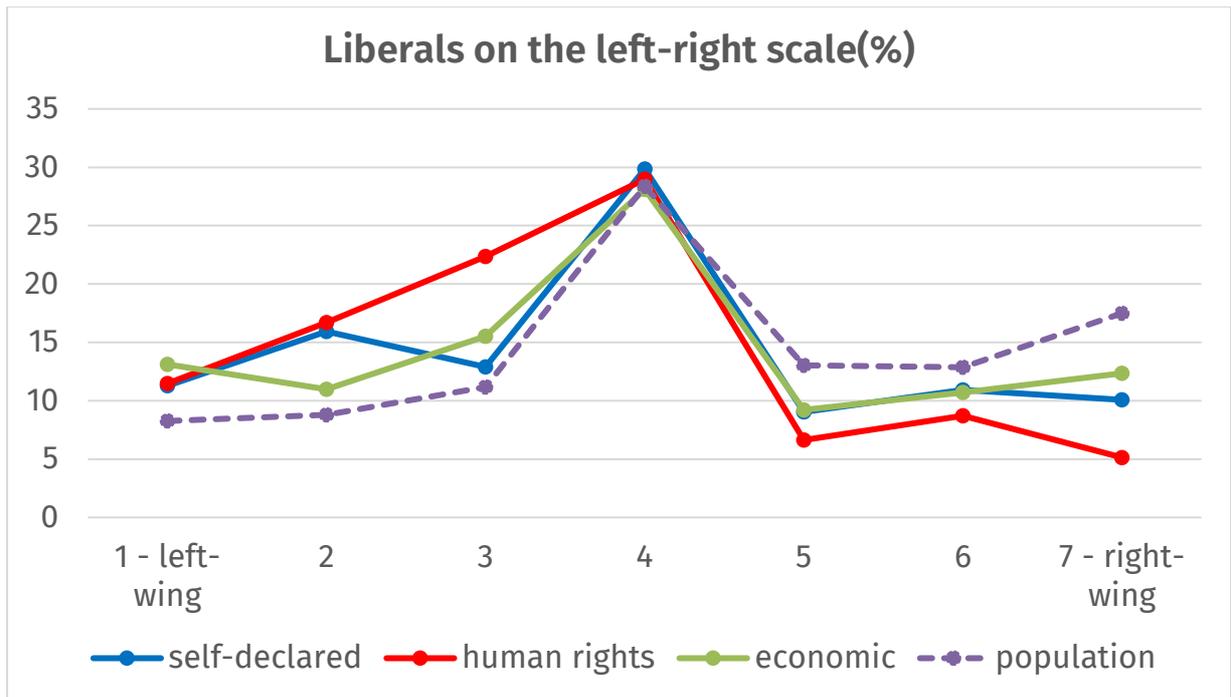


Figure 10: Liberals' position on the left-right scale (%).

Moving on to the liberal-conservative scale, there is much more agreement, which may be taken as confirmation that we have got the methodology for selecting liberals right, with groups clearly leaning towards the liberal self-definition (Figure 11). Of course, the self-declared liberal group was also more confident in declaring themselves liberal than their human rights and economic liberal counterparts on this question, especially as can be seen from the number of radical liberal responses. Given the results so far, it is not surprising that the capitalists are the most conservative of the liberal groups (although they also aren't dominantly conservative), as they had higher proportions of Fidesz-KDNP voters and right-wing voters, and were also the oldest of the three groups, which almost always implies more conservative views.

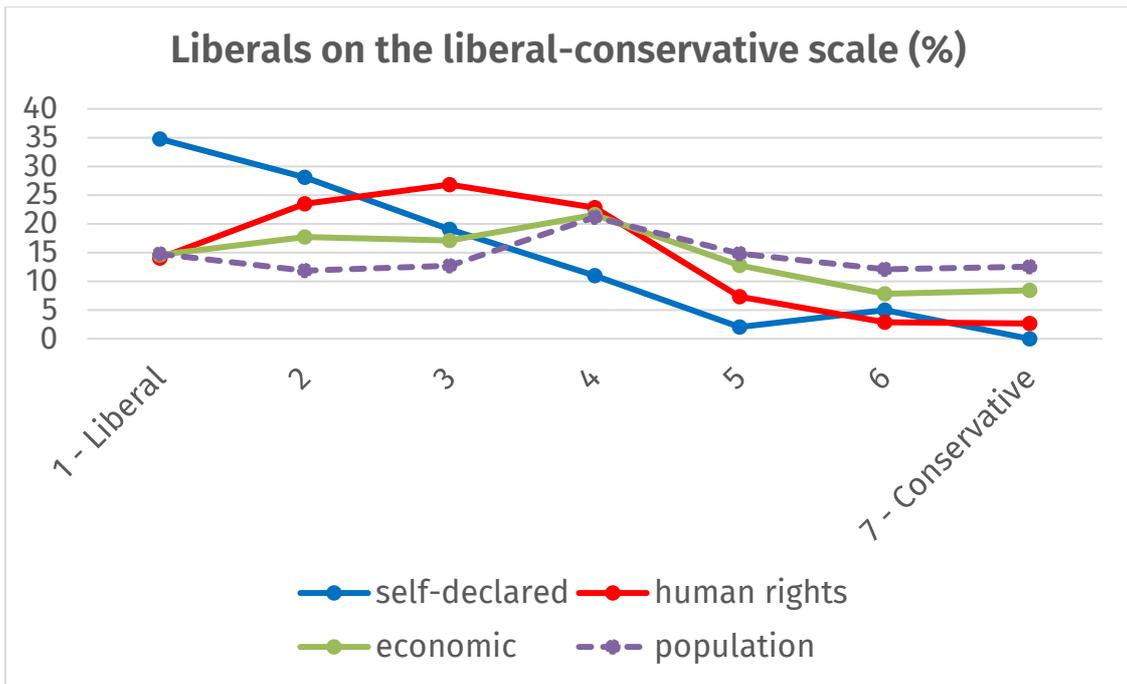


Figure 11: Liberals' position on the liberal-conservative scale (%).

We have already mentioned the data on worldviews, which was used to create the group of self-classified liberals. However, it is also worth examining how this question relates to the groups of liberals that we have created on the basis of other criteria.

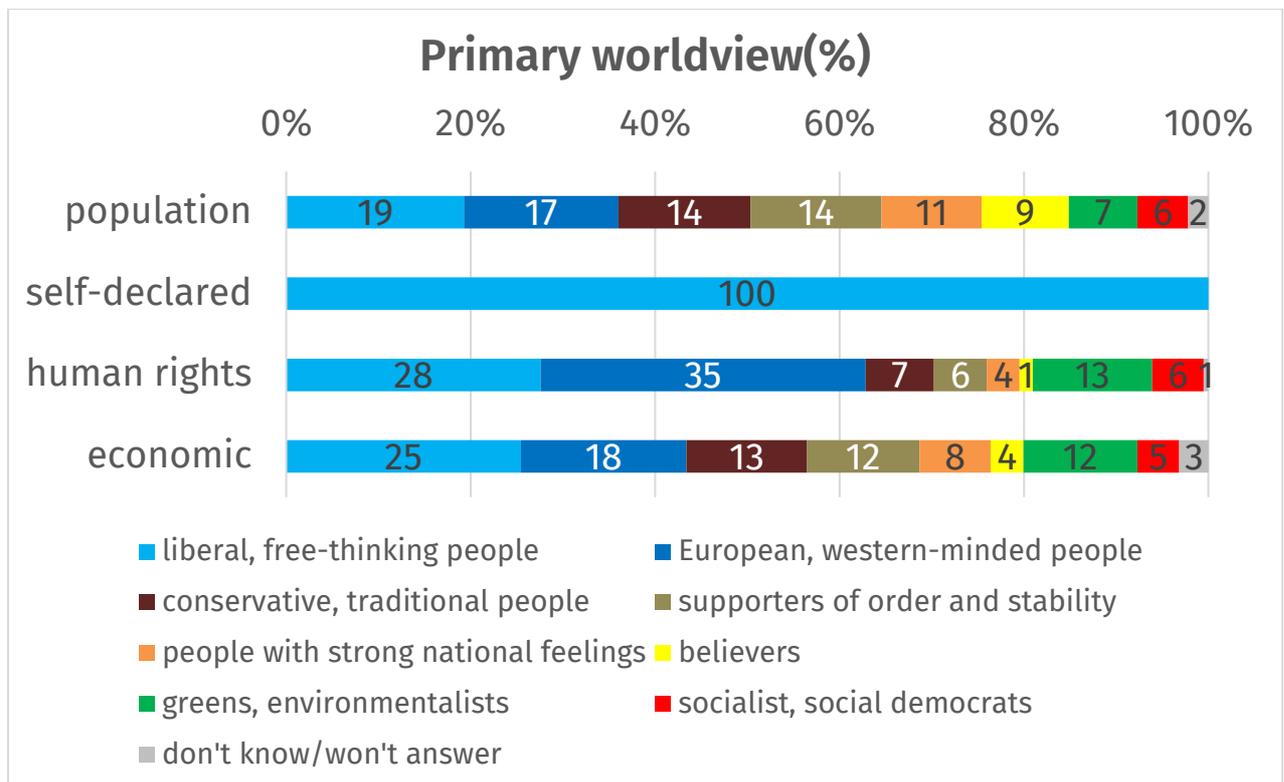


Figure 12: Liberals' primary worldview(%)

It can be seen (Figure 12) that the group of self-classified liberals is 100% liberal, as described in the methodological introduction. Among the two other liberal groups we created, respondents with a primarily liberal or European mindset closely associated with liberal values are also significantly overrepresented. In addition, there is a significant proportion of Greens and a dramatic decline in the proportion of believers, but here too the conservative, rightward-leaning line is emerging among economic liberals. It is also interesting to note that liberalism is the most popular primary worldview in this survey, with the western, European view coming second. This is usual for this type of question, with order and stability or nationalism generally coming out on top. The attraction to the West and the rise of liberalism may be explained by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which puts a special emphasis on the question of Hungary's foreign policy orientation.

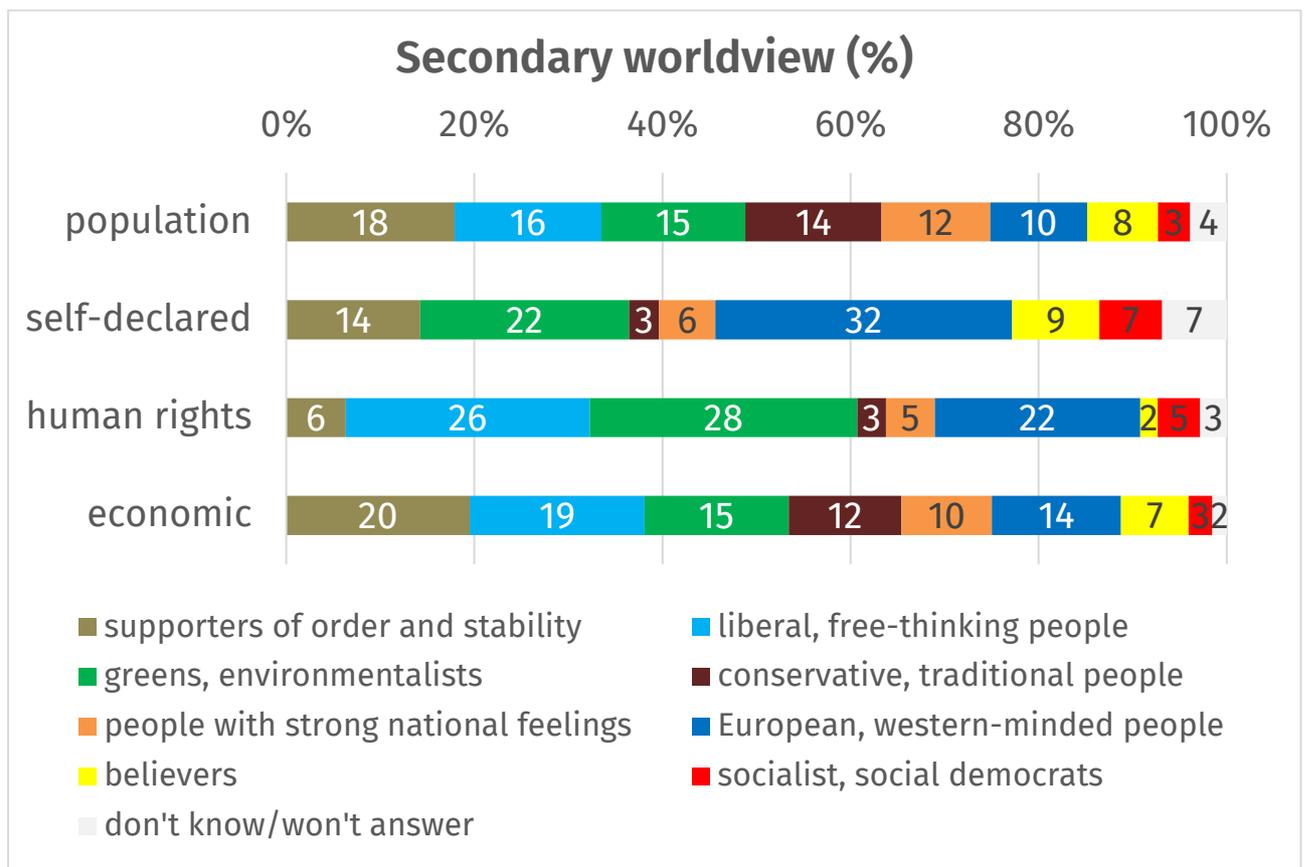


Figure 13: Liberals' secondary worldview (%).

Respondents' secondary worldviews are dominated by the same values, which shows the high degree of interoperability between liberal and Western values. Apart

from these, the green worldview still dominated as a secondary value system, with 28 per cent of human rights liberals choosing the green view as their second choice. In this respect, economic liberals are more similar to the population as a whole than to other liberal groups. This is understandable given that we have grouped the capitalist group primarily on the basis of their views on the economy and have not defined any significant criteria for them in terms of sublime ideals, thus preserving the diversity of worldviews of economic liberals.

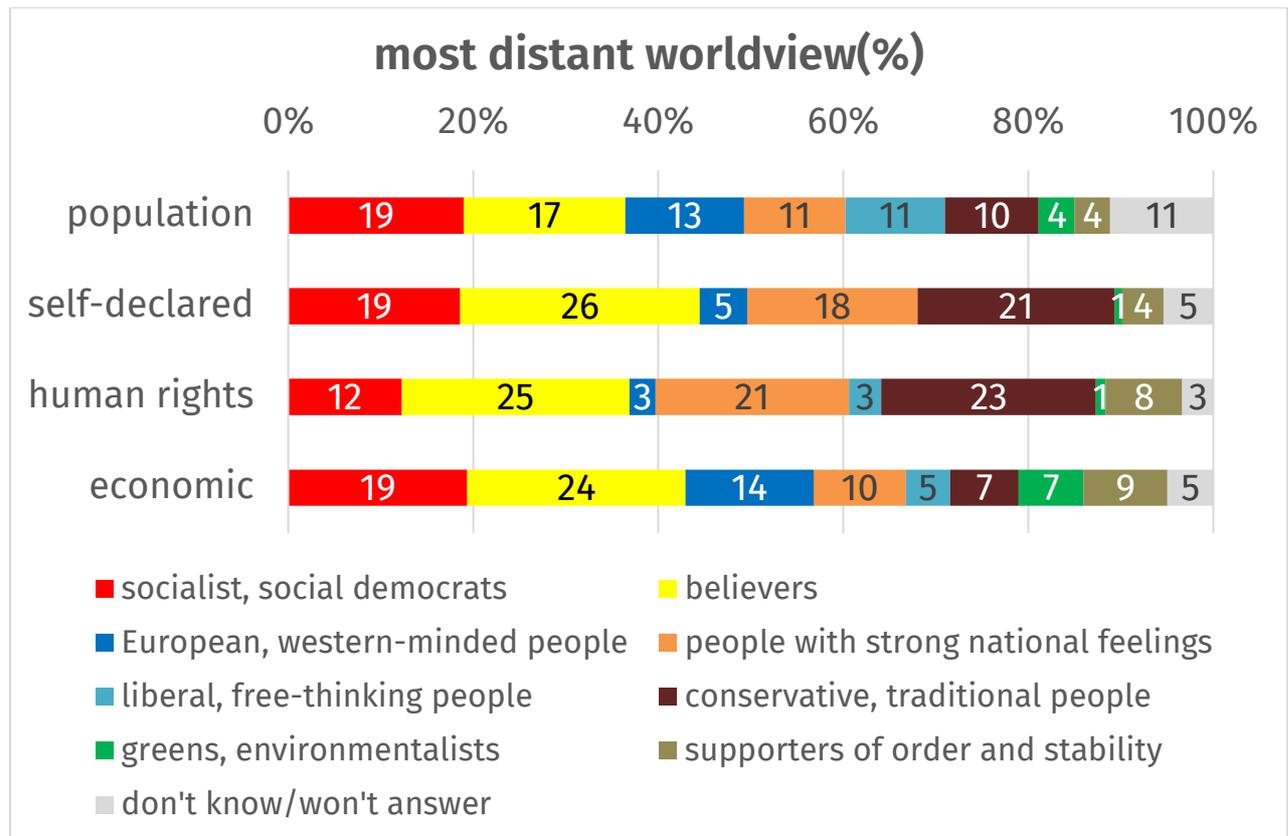


Figure 14: Most distant worldviews from Liberals (%).

Finally, we looked at which worldview is furthest away from each liberal subgroup. Here, the previously mentioned aversion to socialist labels emerges, becoming the most rejected worldview in the overall population. Although liberals were also quite anti-socialist, it was the religious worldview that was the most widely rejected by them, followed by national sentiment and conservatism. It seems that, although few people choose the green worldview first, it is the most widely accepted worldview, that is, very few people say it is far from them.

Conclusion

The aim of this analysis was to show the differences between the parallel liberalisms that exist in Hungary. There is a rather populous Hungarian stratum of what can be called liberals, who differ from the majority of Hungarian society both demographically and ideologically, yet they are also sharply distinct from each other. It is particularly interesting to see how the socialist, left-wing values permeate our society as a whole, and also the group of liberals, despite their rejection of the socialist, left-wing label; and at the same time how many self-proclaimed liberals there are who cannot really be called liberal either from a human rights or an economic point of view. Hungarian liberalism does not follow the Anglo-Saxon, pro-market model, but is a unique, left-wing liberalism that combines the roots of post-socialist countries with the desire for freedom of the 21st century, simultaneously listing values such as collectivism, equality, social security, or even the free market, European integration, and the protection of minority rights.

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