

How to govern a state?

Ideal governance according to Hungarian voters

AN ANALYSIS BY REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



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INTRODUCTION

Determining political party preferences of voters is a relatively straightforward process. The majority of voters know which party they would vote for, and they often declare their opinion in public opinion polls and interviews. However, if our main question is not which party would be ideal for governance according to Hungarians, but rather which values should the ideal governing party have, we have much less information at our disposal. A number of surveys focus on Hungarian voters' party preference and their opinion on policies, but not much is said about the values and principles of governance they find important. In theory, modern democracies are based on similar principles and democratic standards, however, no two countries are the same, and certain values receive different levels of emphasis in the political culture of different states, whether it's the method of governance or the expectations of the voters. How important is the preservation of traditions? Is it worth giving it up for the development of the state? Is it the state's duty to have solidarity towards its citizens or is everyone responsible for their own lives? How important is it that the government acts in accordance with the state legislation? Does the end really justify the means? All in all, how differently do we think about the meaning of ideal governance? Is there some type of correlation between the voters' party preference and their views on ideal governance? Is there a social standard that we can agree on? Republikon Institute's latest analysis attempts to find answers to these questions.

In our research¹ we examined how much the respondents agreed with certain governance principles. They had to mark on a scale of 1 to 5 how much they agreed with certain statements, all of which related to a basic element of governance. We tried to cover all expectations and value systems of voters with our choice of governance principles. Thus, we ended up studying the social presence of the following six basic principles: authoritarianism, rule of law, individualism, solidarity, progressivity and traditions².

This survey made it possible for us to create different governance profiles desired by certain groups of voters. Furthermore, it enabled us to compare the relative importance of the six examined principles in the Hungarian society. We also

¹ The research was conducted by interviewing 1000 people between March 24, 2023, and April 10, 2023; it is representative of gender, age, level of education and place of residence. Margin of error +-3,1%. Research funded by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom.

² The claims were the following: Hungary needs a government, that... authoritarianism: "not only talks, but also takes strong action if needed", rule of law: "acts according to the laws, even if it means being slower at achieving its goals", individualism: "rewards people based on their merits", solidarity: "helps those in need, regardless of the economic return", progressivity: "is devoted to progress, even if it means giving up certain national traditions", tradition: "believes that progress is only possible if traditional Hungarian values are protected"

examined how the attitudes regarding principles of the pro-government voters and those in opposition compared to each other and to the whole population.

RESULTS

First, it is worth taking a look at the answers given by the total population. Altogether it is safe to say that none of the observed principles were entirely rejected, although there are important nuances. In regards of the total population, progressivity had the lowest rating, even though the average of 3,45 is quite good. All in all, this means that no governance principle is consistently rejected by the Hungarian society. The respondents found rule of law to be the most important value, namely that the government rules the state in accordance with the laws. On a scale of 1-5, with the highest possible rating being 5,00, rule of law got a rating of 4,27, meaning that it is exceptionally important for the voters. The majority of Hungarian population also agreed with the individualist idea that everyone should get a share of the common resources based on their merits. We must add that respondents also supported the idea of governance based on solidarity, which is not unexpected even though it might seem to be in contradiction with the previous results.

The ratings of different governance principles (average, 1-5)			
	Total population	Pro-government	Opposition
Authoritarianism	3,60	3,75	3,55
Rule of law	4,27	4,41	4,27
Individualism	4,23	4,35	4,26
Solidarity	4,18	4,15	4,24
Progressivity	3,45	3,05	3,73
Traditions	3,76	4,28	3,28

Figure 1: The ratings of different governance principles in certain groups of voters

Next, it is worth looking at the differences that can be observed according to the party preference of voters. Certain differences can be found if we compare the pro-government voters to the total population. Voters of Fidesz-KDNP rated the principle of rule of law exceptionally high. One might think that pro-government voters don't care about the rule of law, as they stuck with their party of choice despite the number of corruption scandals the government has been involved in and the the frozen EU funds. However, this is not the case. It could be its own research goal examine how certain voters define rule of law, but one thing is certain: pro-government voters claim that Fidesz-KDNP stands for the rule of law. Thus, even though pro-government voters are often accused that they don't care about the demolition of democracy, with rating rule of law so highly, they confirmed their belief that Fidesz-KDNP is in accordance with the laws, justifying their own way of

thinking and party preference. Furthermore, it is clear that pro-government voters prefer individualism over solidarity, which makes sense considering that Fidesz-KDNP has been representing the principle of a work-based society ever since the beginning of their governance, and their supporters also agree with the mentality that only those who work deserve to reap the benefits. Authoritarianism is less significant than the previously mentioned principles with its rating of 3,75, but it received a noticeably higher rating among pro-government voters than in the total population (3,60). Expectedly, pro-government voters gave traditions a higher rating. Tradition and heritage provides the basis for Fidesz-KDNP's political communication, making it the most significant contrast between those in favour of the government and those in opposition. On the other hand, the lowest rating in the entire research is the opinion of pro-government voters on progressivity with a rating of 3,05, meaning that it is barely supported by them.

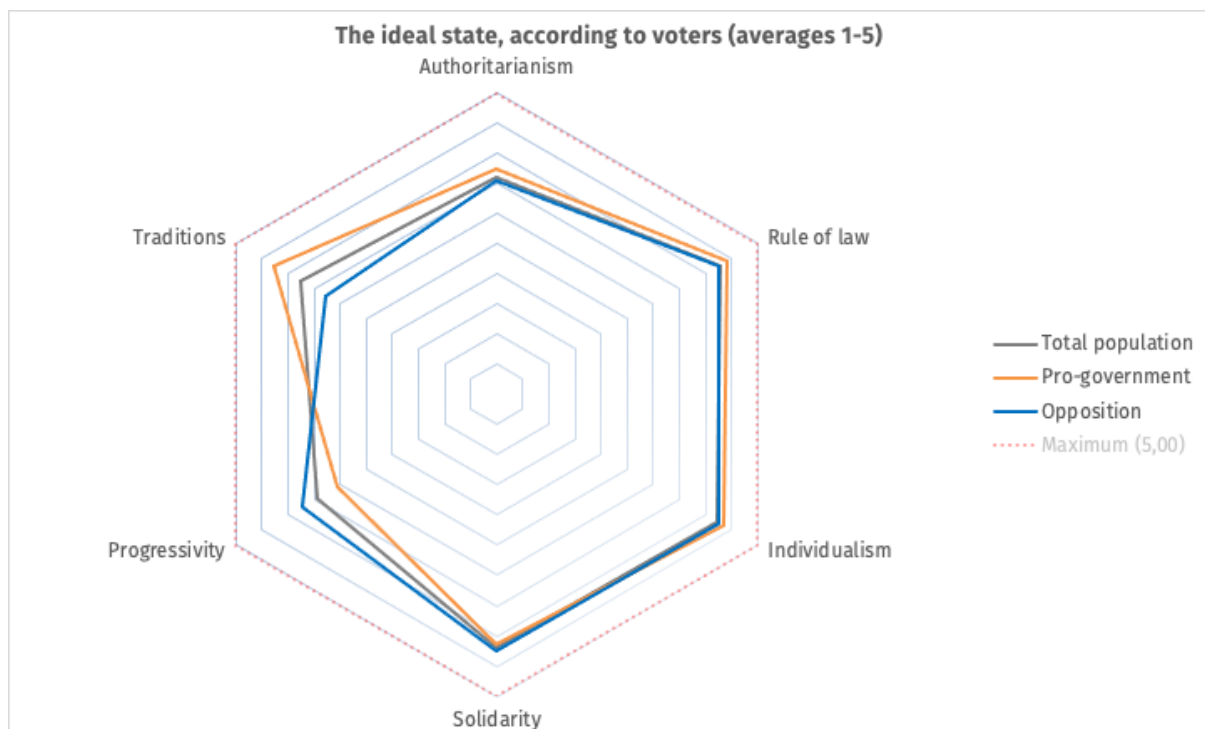


Figure 2: The support for certain governance principles in political camps (average)

Rule of law was also the highest rated principle among voters in opposition. It is obvious that they find it important, as this is what they miss the most in the current government. Compared to pro-government voters, those in opposition found individualism less important, however, they did present the need for merit-based distribution. They found solidarity much more important than those supporting the government, with a rating of 4,24. The Hungarian society has a traditionally social attitude, but voters in opposition found left-wing values particularly important. Progressivity was quite important to this group of respondents, whether we

compare it to pro-government voters or the total population. Even though opposition-voters agree less with the idea that traditions should be protected at all costs (3,28), the protection of traditions is still more important to them than progress is to pro-government voters.

Reading this analysis, one might think that the social differences between the two main political groups run deep, but altogether (figure 2.) it can be said that the Hungarian society's view of the ideal governance is quite homogeneous. The only exception to this is the question of traditions versus progress. There are certain differences, those in opposition have more solidarity and pro-government voters are more authoritarian, but that is not where the main gap lies. Hungarians have a general expectation for rule of law and they have a historical legacy of solidarity and authoritarianism. The majority would prefer a democratic state based on rule of law with the state taking an active role.

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