Karácsony versus Vitézy

Evaluation of election of the Lord Mayor

ANALYSIS BY REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE

R *i* REPUBLIKON INTÉZET

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SUMMARY

- Alexandra Szentkirályi's last-minute withdrawal intensified the mayoral election, which had seemed decided, but following the recount, Gergely Karácsony still managed to win by 41 votes
- Although Szentkirályi's withdrawal almost helped Dávid Vitézy to win, it was a huge loss of prestige for Fidesz that they had to withdraw their first internal candidate in 26 years
- Dávid Vitézy was backed by Fidesz voters, but many opposition voters also chose him, while Karácsony was less able to reach his own potential camp
- Vitézy was stronger in the suburbs, and in districts with a higher number of cars per thousand inhabitants, thus Fidesz successfully built the "car chaser" topos against Karácsony

The campaign

A few months before the municipal elections linked to the European Parliament elections, we could hardly have imagined that the latter would cause more surprises in Budapest. On Monday, the Budapest Election Committee announced the results of the mayoral election, and on Friday the votes were recounted. According to the results, incumbent mayor Gergely Karácsony won by only 41 votes against LMP candidate Dávid Vitézy, who was even unseated at the last minute by Alexandra Szentkirályi, thus enjoying the support of the governing parties.

During the campaign, two strong positions emerged on Vitézy: while his supporters emphasised his expert image, his critics warned that the former CEO of BKK (Budapest Transport Centre), the state secretary of the Orbán government, actually represented Fidesz. This latter view was also confirmed by Péter Magyar, the de facto leader of the Tisza Party, which has burst onto the domestic public scene, who called Vitézy's candidacy a media hack by Fidesz. Whether he was right or not, we will never know for sure, but Szentkirályi's withdrawal and Vitézy's last-minute positioning reinforces the suspicion of a sophisticated electoral strategy.

After Szentkirályi's withdrawal, the situation became clearer: the claim that Dávid Vitézy was the Fidesz candidate was now filled with substance. From now on, the most important question in the mayoral election is who will outnumber the opposition voters who had previously emphasised his expert credentials and turned away from Vitézy because of his support for Fidesz, or the pro-government voters who, after Szentkirályi's withdrawal, will vote down Vitézy, who, incidentally, was treated with a conspicuous lack of gloves by Fidesz during the election campaign.

The dismissal of the Tarlós-era deputy mayor and former government spokesman is a serious loss of political prestige for Fidesz, the first since János Latorcai's candidacy in 1998, Fidesz has nominated a politician from the party's inner circles for Budapest (neither Pál Schmitt nor István Tarlós were part of this circle when

they were nominated for mayor), but this time, too, a candidate from outside the party was nominated with the support of the governing party.

The mobilisation

The support of Fidesz has significantly increased Vitézy's support in the polls. While Fidesz only won 9 of the 23 Budapest districts (including the victory of Lénárd Borbély in Csepel, who was disqualified by Fidesz and his former Fidesz challenger, but still cannot be considered an opposition mayor), Dávid Vitézy beat Karácsony in 13 districts. The data show not only that Dávid Vitézy's voters outperformed the Fidesz camp, but also that the good performance of the Fidesz mayoral candidates and Vitézy's strong performance are linked.
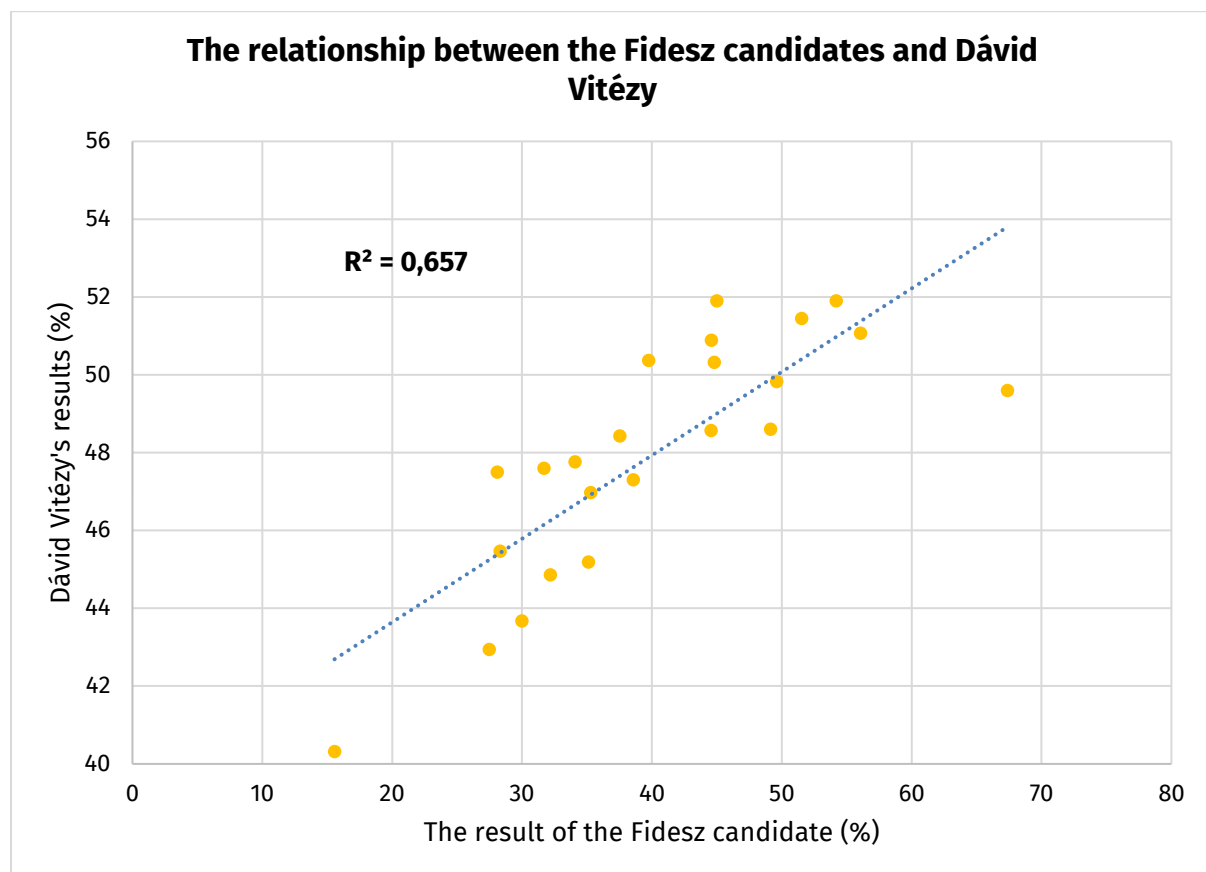
The graph above also shows that there is a strong linear relationship between Dávid Vitézy's performance and that of the Fidesz candidates. It also shows that Vitézy was able to outperform poorly performing Fidesz candidates, so that a significant

proportion of his voters come from outside the circles that traditionally support the Fidesz.

In contrast, if we examine the same relationship between Gergely Karácsony and opposition candidates, the data show that the correlation between the performance of opposition candidates and the result of Gergely Karácsony is less strong.

The relationship between the opposition candidates and Gergely Karácsony's results

$R^2 = 0{,}488$

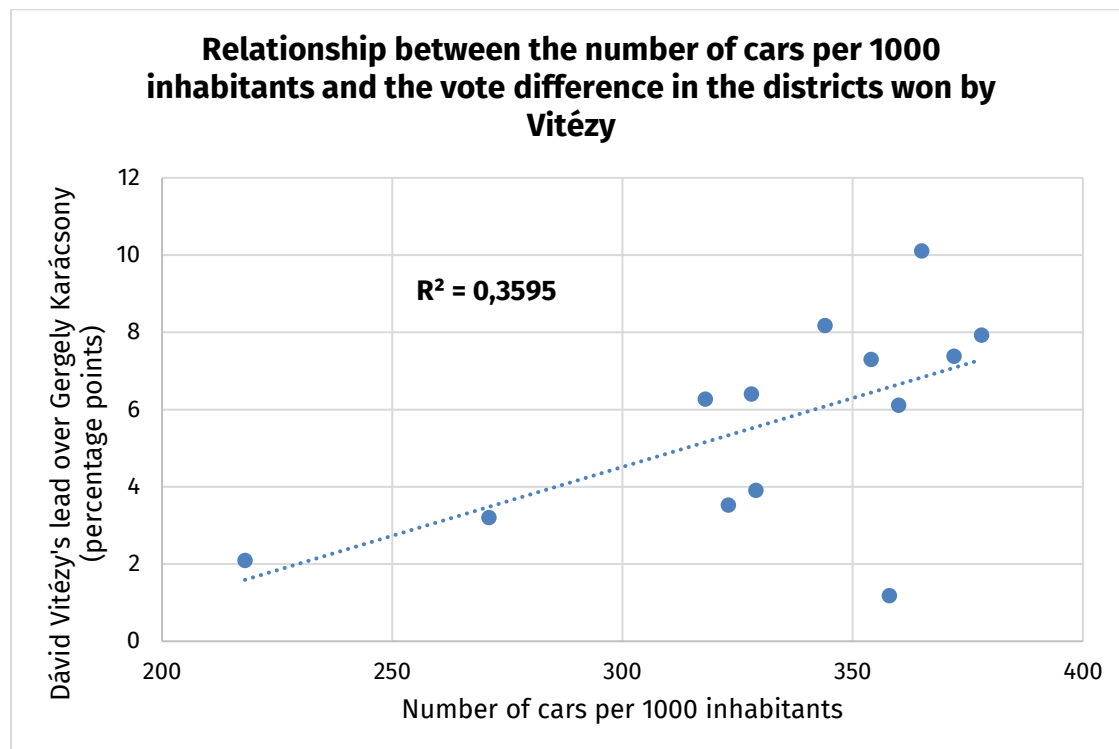Gergely Karácsony'srResult (%) vs Opposition candidate's result(%)
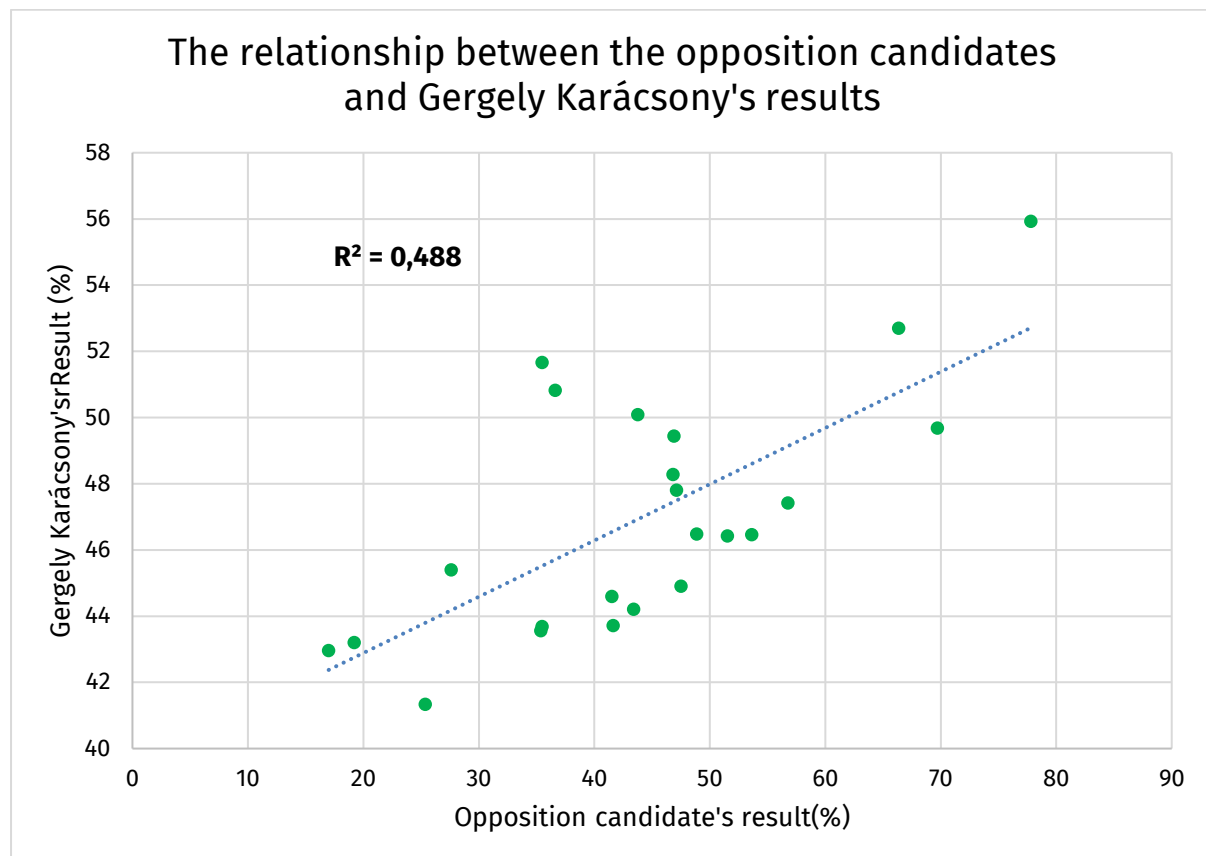
There were several opposition candidates who won a landslide victory, but Dávid Vitézy finished only marginally behind Karácsony, and in several cases (XII district, XVIII district) Vitézy even overtook him. Of the opposition candidates who performed very well, Tamás Soproni (VI), Krisztina Baranyi (IX) and József Tóth (XIII) managed to confidently outperform Vitézy in the districts of Tamás Soproni, Krisztina Baranyi and József Tóth. Outstanding among these is district XIII, where Karácsony not only won by a large margin (56% compared to 40.5% for Vitézy), but also, due to the high population, this meant a margin of about 9,000 votes, which is about 2.5% of the total votes for Karácsony.
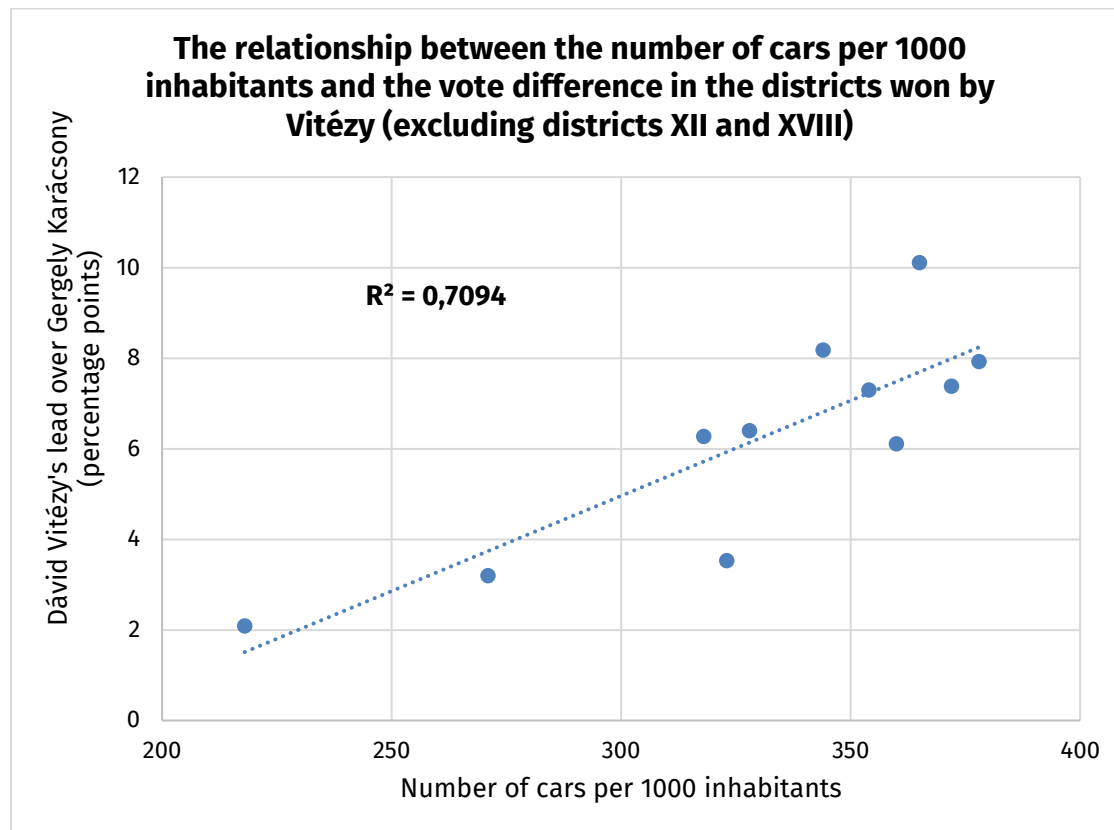
Demographic factors

Karácsony and Vitézy had very close results in several districts, and of course there were also districts where one of them beat the other by a larger margin. Each district is sociographically very diverse, with many traditionally measured social indicators (income per head, education, religiosity) that are not at all correlated with either Karácsony's or Vitézy's results. What we see is that Gergely Karácsony is typically stronger in the inner city of Pest, while Vitézy has performed above average in the suburbs. However, it is not clear that the people of the suburbs are clearly Vitézy voters either, Karácsony won the IIIrd and relatively confidently the IVth district, while in the XVIIIth district Vitézy only managed to outperform Karácsony by 1 percentage point.

However, a moderately strong correlation can be observed if we look at the 13 districts where Vitézy beat Karácsony in terms of the number of cars per 1000 inhabitants. Districts with a higher number of cars tend to show that Vitézy won by a higher percentage point margin.

Relationship between the number of cars per 1000 inhabitants and the vote difference in the districts won by Vitézy

$R^2 = 0{,}3595$

Number of cars per 1000 inhabitants

Dávid Vitézy's lead over Gergely Karácsony (percentage points)

This is a weaker correlation, but a reasonable assumption that there were 4 of the 13 districts where, although Vitézy won, the mayor was ultimately given to the

opposition, and here a good opposition performance may have somewhat neutralised the characteristics that might be inferred from a vote for Vitézy. To test the plausibility of the hypothesis, we have taken out the two districts where opposition candidates won with a result above 50% (districts XII and XVIII).

The relationship between the number of cars per 1000 inhabitants and the vote difference in the districts won by Vitézy (excluding districts XII and XVIII)

$R^2 = 0{,}7094$

Dâvid Vitézy's lead over Gergely Karácsony (percentage points)

Number of cars per 1000 inhabitants

In this case we see a very strong correlation. This shows that Dávid Vitézy, who is perhaps even more critical of car traffic than Gergely Karácsony, seems to be a better alternative for car voters with the support of Fidesz. It also shows that Fidesz has been able to successfully thematise their supposed opposition to Karácsony's car. So, if Gergely Karácsony wants to continue as mayor in five years' time, he will have to find a way to implement his traffic calming ideas without being able to burn the 'car-chasing' brand on him. It is questionable, however, to what extent concessions to motorists would be accepted by voters who support him because of his green image.

CONCLUSION

The withdrawal of Alexandra Szentkirályi was ultimately not such a good decision, as Gergely Karácsony still managed to win against Dávid Vitézy, and Fidesz essentially said that they do not have the right person to lead Budapest. Although Karácsony won by 41 votes in the final result, the narrow margin shows that Vitézy has the support not only of Fidesz voters, but also of a significant proportion of opposition voters. Vitézy's good performance is strongly correlated with that of the Fidesz mayoral candidates, but the correlation is less strong for Karácsony and the opposition candidates. Karácsony's support is lower in districts where the number of cars is higher, so Fidesz's strategy of portraying the mayor as anti-car has worked. It will not be easy for Karácsény to win back these voters, as one of the central elements of his green policy is to discourage car use and promote sustainable modes of transport (public transport, micro-mobility, walking).