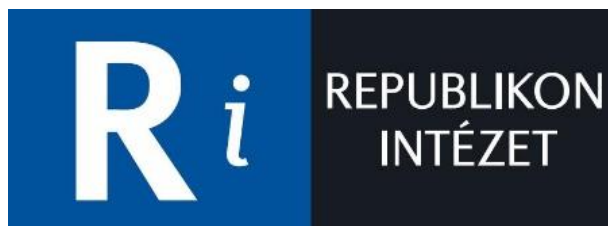


Slogans versus reality

Are we worse off than four years ago?

AN ANALYSIS BY THE REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



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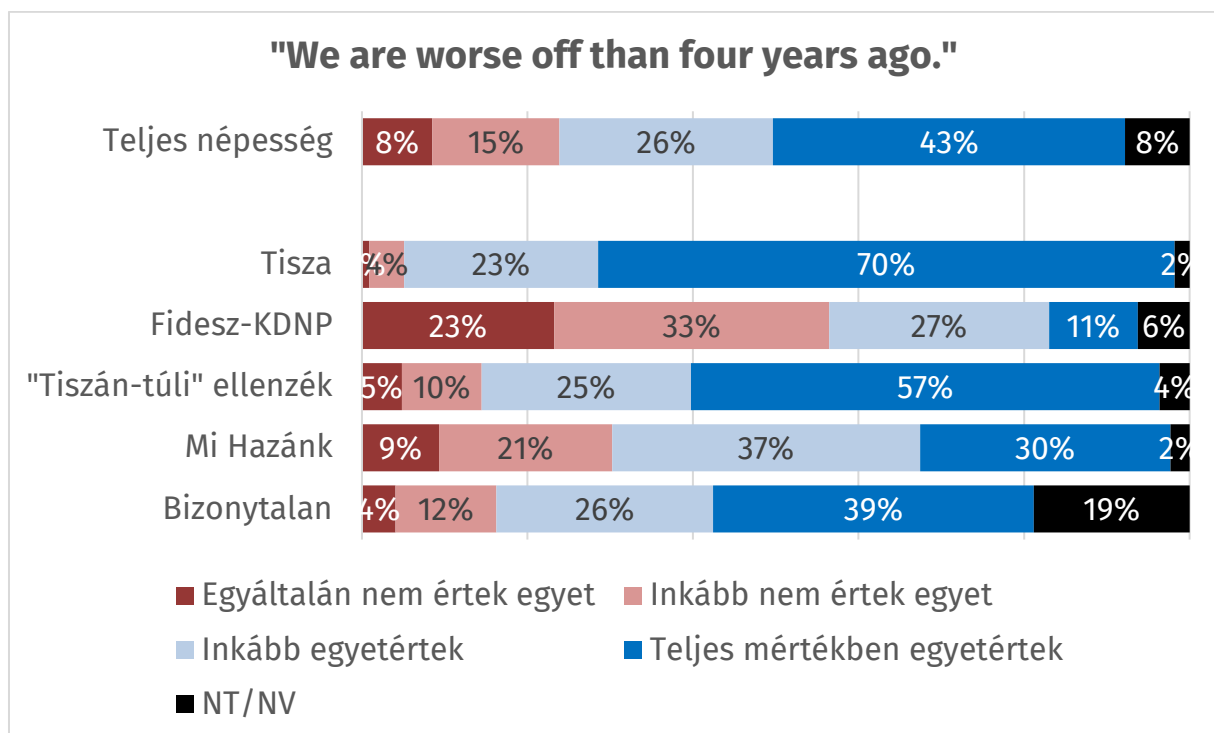
INTRODUCTION

"We are worse off than four years ago!" – this was Fidesz's slogan for the 2006 parliamentary election campaign, at least according to their most memorable poster campaign. The slogan criticized the performance of the Medgyessy and Gyurcsány governments since 2002. Fidesz focused primarily on unemployment and price increases, the poor economic situation, and the cost-of-living crisis. It is an interesting historical parallel that in the same campaign, the ruling MSZP boasted about introducing one extra month of pension called the 13th month pension ("We did it!"), which the Fidesz faction initially criticized sharply. In the end, the "we are worse off" campaign was not enough to win the 2006 election, with the majority of voters placing their trust in the ruling parties and Ferenc Gyurcsány. Based on this, the "we are worse off" message did not resonate with voters' perception of the situation at the time (although this perception was complicated by the fact that the government was not sufficiently transparent about the state of the country). It is difficult to judge in hindsight whether we were "worse off" in 2006 than in 2002. EU accession and the promise of development may have given cause for hope, and we could note both positive and negative economic tendencies: public debt and the budget deficit increased, but inflation decreased and GDP grew steadily. We could keep listing the figures, but the point is that in 2006, Fidesz claimed that the situation of Hungarians had deteriorated under left-wing governments, while MSZP's campaign posited that they had successfully revitalized the country. Ahead of the 2026 elections, the cost-of-living is once again a key issue. The Fidesz-KDNP coalition has been trying to demonstrate its successes, but the economy is in a bad shape, about which even Fidesz is sometimes forced to talk openly. Over the past four years, Hungary has had the highest inflation rate in the EU, and GDP growth was 0 percent in the third quarter of 2025. The budget deficit has exceeded all expectations, and the real election handouts are only just beginning. We are in a bad position in terms of consumption, housing prices, wage levels, pension expenditure, health, education, and R&D expenditure, and the list goes on. The global economy has been struggling with successive crises in recent years, and the Hungarian economy has fared worse than most. Since the cost-of-living crisis is a central theme of the 2026 campaign, in Republikon's new survey¹ we asked respondents to decide: are we worse off now than four years ago?

¹ The survey was conducted between December 10 and 15, 2025, and included 1,000 people interviewed by telephone. The survey is representative of the adult population of the country in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, and type of settlement. The margin of error is +/- 3.5%.

RESULTS

Three-quarters of respondents believe that we are worse off than four years ago. Only 8 percent of the total population clearly rejects the idea that we are worse off, and overall, only a quarter of respondents have a positive opinion, meaning that the social mood is gloomy when it comes to livelihoods. The breakdown by voter group is particularly interesting. Even pro-government voters are divided on the issue, with 38 percent of Fidesz-KDNP voters saying that we are worse off than four years ago. The opinion of Tisza voters is the most devastating: 93 percent of them say that we are worse off than four years ago. Eighty-two percent of the opposition camp "beyond the Tisza" has a negative opinion of the livelihood situation. Those who are uncertain clearly see the situation as negative, with four-fifths, 80 percent, saying that we are worse off than in 2022. This also means that on a key issue such as cost-of-living, three months before the election, undecided respondents clearly share the opposition voters' position. The question, of course, is to what extent they hold the government's policies responsible for these difficulties.



For years, Fidesz-KDNP has been campaigning in two ways: primarily through intimidation and secondarily through communicating successes. One of the most important questions for the 2026 election is whether, in a Hungarian economic

environment that has been faltering for six years and is underperforming in all areas as a result of crisis management, whether Fidesz-KDNP will be able to continue its success-communication strategy, or whether, as in 2022, the next three months will be dominated by fearmongering (alongside the usual unrestrained handouts). Another important question is whether the challenger Tisza Party will be able to successfully highlight the economic and livelihood difficulties in its campaign, and more specifically that the responsibility lies not with some international, anti-Hungarian conspiracy, but with the Hungarian ruling parties that have been in power for 16 years. In 2006, in connection with the "we are worse off" campaign, analysts debated whether it was possible to win an election with a negative message. In 2006, the "worse off" campaign ultimately failed to resonate with voters. In 2022, after the outbreak of war, the negative campaign and the ruling party's war scare tactics worked. Now, at the start of 2026, we see that voters—including a significant portion of Fidesz voters—feel that their living conditions have deteriorated. The question is whether they believe that a change of government would improve the situation, or whether they find the government's message, already effective in 2022, more credible, namely that electing the opposition candidate would pose a mortal danger in times of war, from which only Viktor Orbán can protect us.