

Together, separately, with a primary?

Voters' perception of opposition cooperation strategies

AN ANALYSIS BY REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



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SUMMARY

- In our analysis, we examined how those who voted for the party list of the opposition alliance and the *Magyar Kétfarkú Kutypárt* in 2022 think about the cooperation strategies of the opposition parties.
- They are basically divided on whether they principally supported their party (29%) or the unity itself (27%) in 2022.
- Opposition to the regime (45%) was not a political matter, but the main aspect of voting for the opposition coalition.
- European values, belonging to the West, and the protection of democracy together represented a voting aspect for only 15 percent of the respondents.
- After the parliamentary elections, it says a lot about the opposition's mobilization when their supporters decided who they would vote for; 73 percent of them are returning voters or decided to vote for the opposition more than a month earlier.
- The majority of opposition voters continue to support a joint run for the 2024 local government (60%) and European Parliament elections (62%).
- To a lesser extent, however, the majority of them do not support holding a primary election in the candidate nomination process (53%), the only party where supporters of a primary election are in the majority is the *Kétfarkú Kutypárt* (51%).
- According to the overwhelming majority of opposition voters, there are too many parties on the opposition side, and roughly equal proportions approve of the existence of a single strong party (36%) and the merger of some parties (35%).
- However, institutional merger entails conflicts, which ultimately endangers the 2024 election cooperation.
- If opposition parties do not take into account the expectations of opposition voters, it will be more difficult to mobilize their core voters in 2024.

INTRODUCTION

The novelty of the 2022 parliamentary elections was the broad coalition of opposition parties. The opposition, which was previously divided on the basis of the assessment of the government before 2010 and ideological fault lines, stood with joint candidates in constituencies and a joint party list. The entire coalition corresponded to the will of the majority of voters critical of the government, and the governing parties' changes to election regulations also favored the establishment of the joint list.

However, the electoral defeat and the larger-than-expected Fidesz advantage in the number of list votes showed that the broad cooperation of opposition parties was not enough for success in itself. After the latest failure, with one or two exceptions, there was no joint action on the part of opposition parties, on the contrary, the dominance of certain parties emerged on the opposition side. However, it is still questionable whether opposition parties will run together in the 2024 local government and European Parliament elections, and whether there will be a primary election during the nomination process.

The following analysis fills a void, insofar as it examines the attitudes of opposition voters with regards to opposition cooperation. We will examine their voting motivations related to the 2022 parliamentary elections, as well as their opinions on opposition cooperation (DK, *Jobbik*, LMP, *Momentum*, MSZP, *Párbeszéd*).

The survey on which the analysis is based was conducted by personal interviews of 2000 people between September 15 and 30, 2022. The interviewees are Hungarian citizens who took part in the April 2022 parliamentary elections and voted for party list of opposition alliance or the MKKP list. The research is representative of Hungarian opposition voters in terms of gender, age, education, and type of residence. The margin of error of the survey is 2,2%, the data was collected by Závecz Research.

RESULTS

Before the election, it was a recurring question whether voters critical of the government would form a unified opposition block based on their political identity, or whether they would continue to be tied to the parties participating in the coalition. Respondents had the opportunity to name two voting motivations, and as it turns out, 29 percent of them supported an individual party and 27 percent supported the entire coalition (Figure 1). Thus, both partisan and coalition motivation appeared among opposition voters. The chance to replace Fidesz was also a significant motivation, which was mentioned by roughly a quarter of the respondents, as well as the values represented by the opposition (19%). According to the retrospective answers, the personality of the joint prime minister candidate, Péter Márki-Zay did not integrate and mobilize opposition voters, nor did the election program in particular.

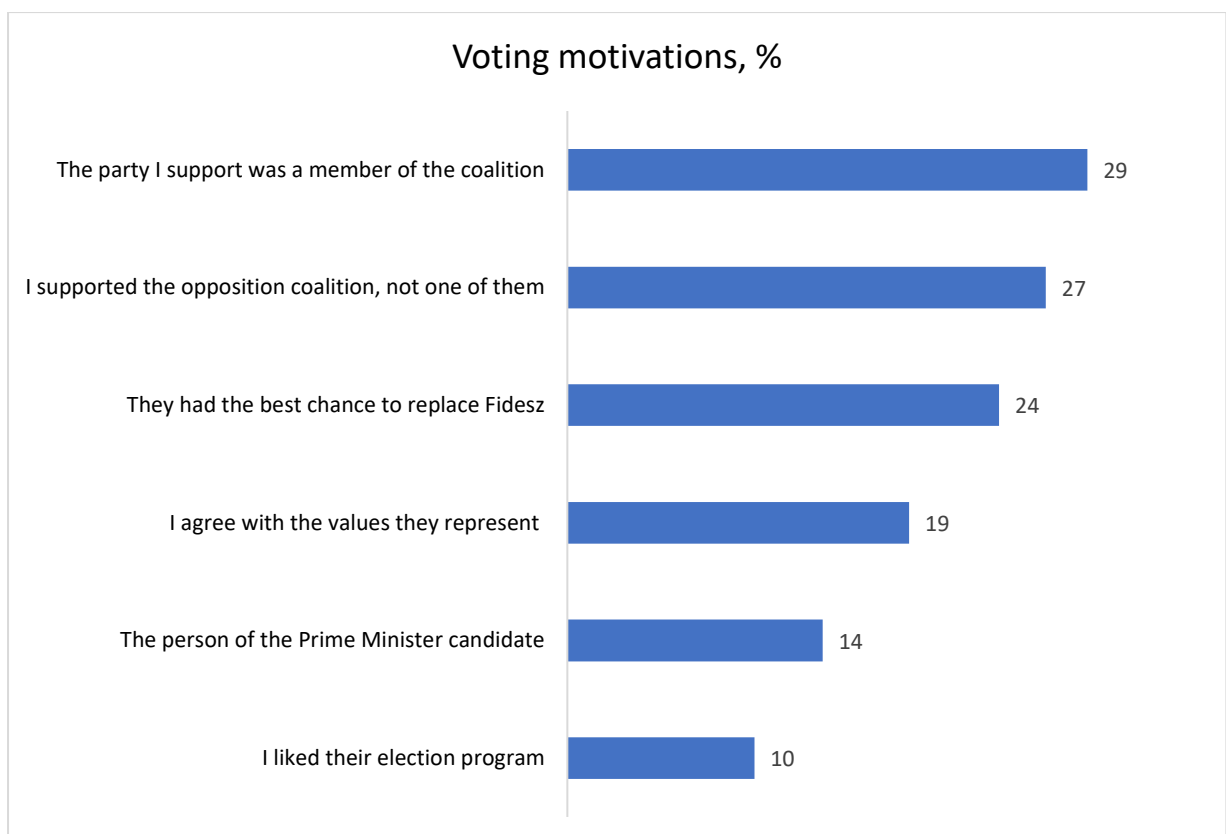


Figure 1: Voting motivations of opposition voters, %

In addition to more general motivations, we also asked about specific political issues that influenced the voting behavior of the respondents (Figure 2). In this case, respondents could name only one option. The results show that opposition to the regime, not policy issues, was the primary aspect of voting for the opposition coalition. For the opposition, corruption (24%) makes the operation of NER difficult, and the close relationship between of Viktor Orbán (21%) and the regime is self-evident. The standard of living and the protection of Hungarian people’s interest in general were important to a total of 28 percent of the respondents. European values, belonging to the West and, the protection of democracy together represented a voting aspect for only 15 percent of the respondents.

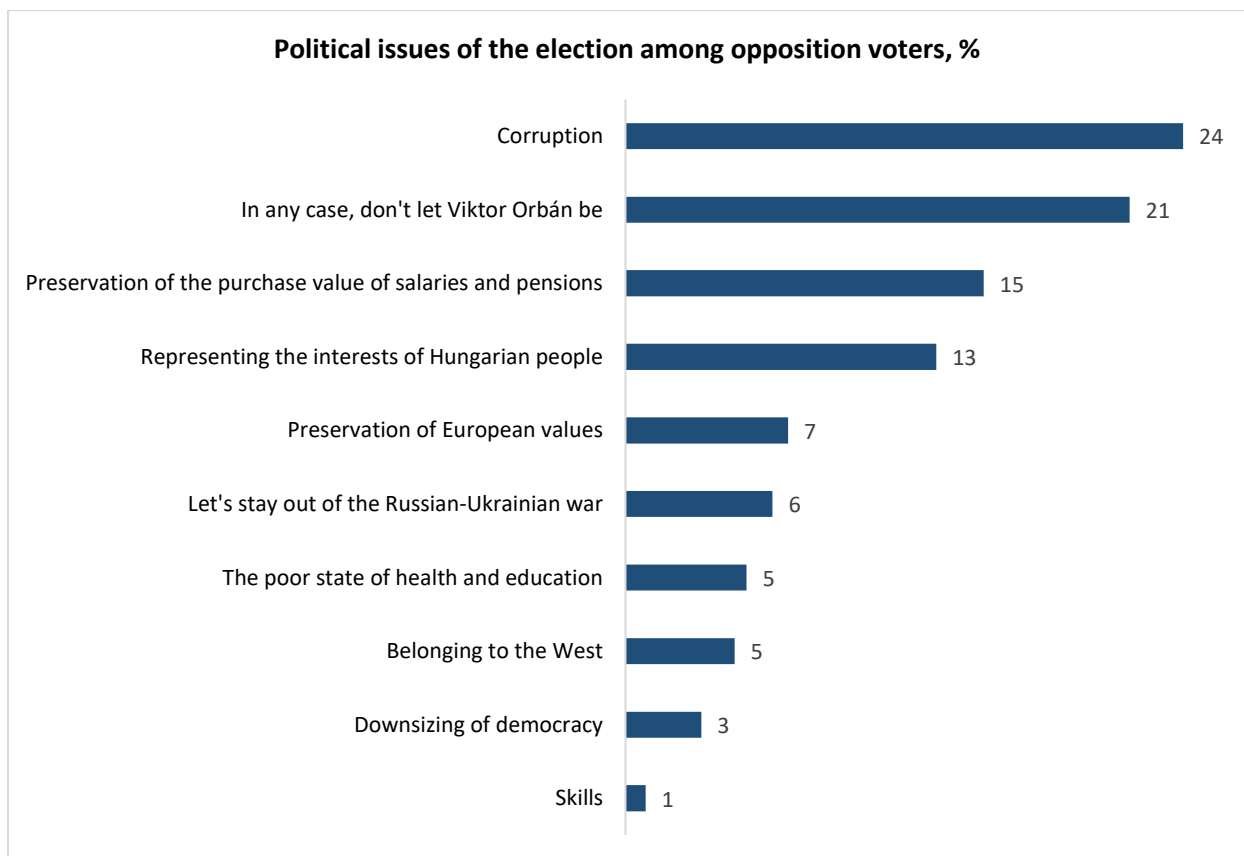


Figure 2: Political aspects of the election among opposition voters, %

It says a lot about the opposition’s mobilization performance after the parliamentary elections when their supporters decided who they would vote for. As the third figure shows, 73 percent of them are returning voters who decided to vote for the opposition more than a month ago. Another 14 percent decided in favor of

the opposition one month before the election at the beginning of the campaign. Only 13 percent of the opposition voters committed in the last week or days.

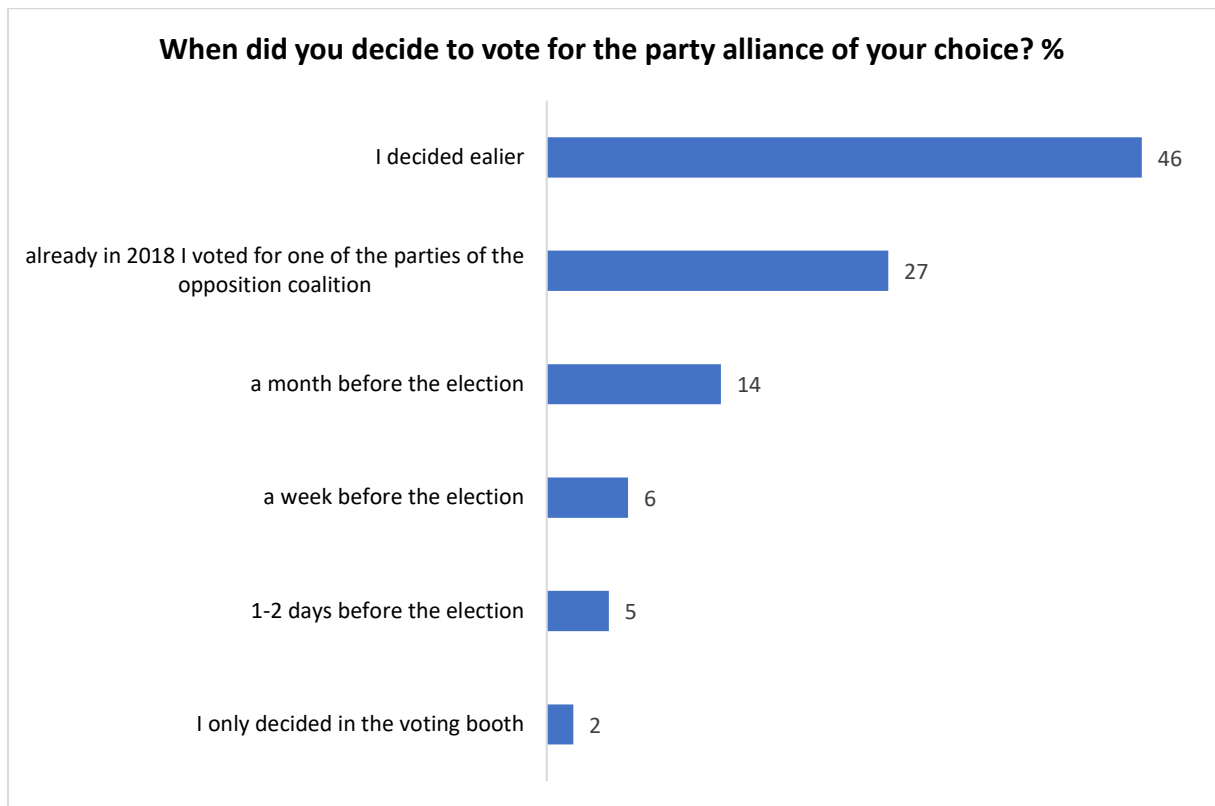


Figure 3: Date of engagement of opposition voters, %

In our research, we asked for the opinion of opposition voters not only about the 2022 election, but also about the future opposition cooperation strategy. Despite the failure of opposition cooperation in 2022, the majority of opposition voters support opposition cooperation in the local government elections in 2024 (60%) and in the European Parliament elections in 2024 (62%) (Figure 4). Interestingly, the proportion of those preferring cooperation is somewhat higher in the pure-list EP election, which does not require close cooperation by the opposition.

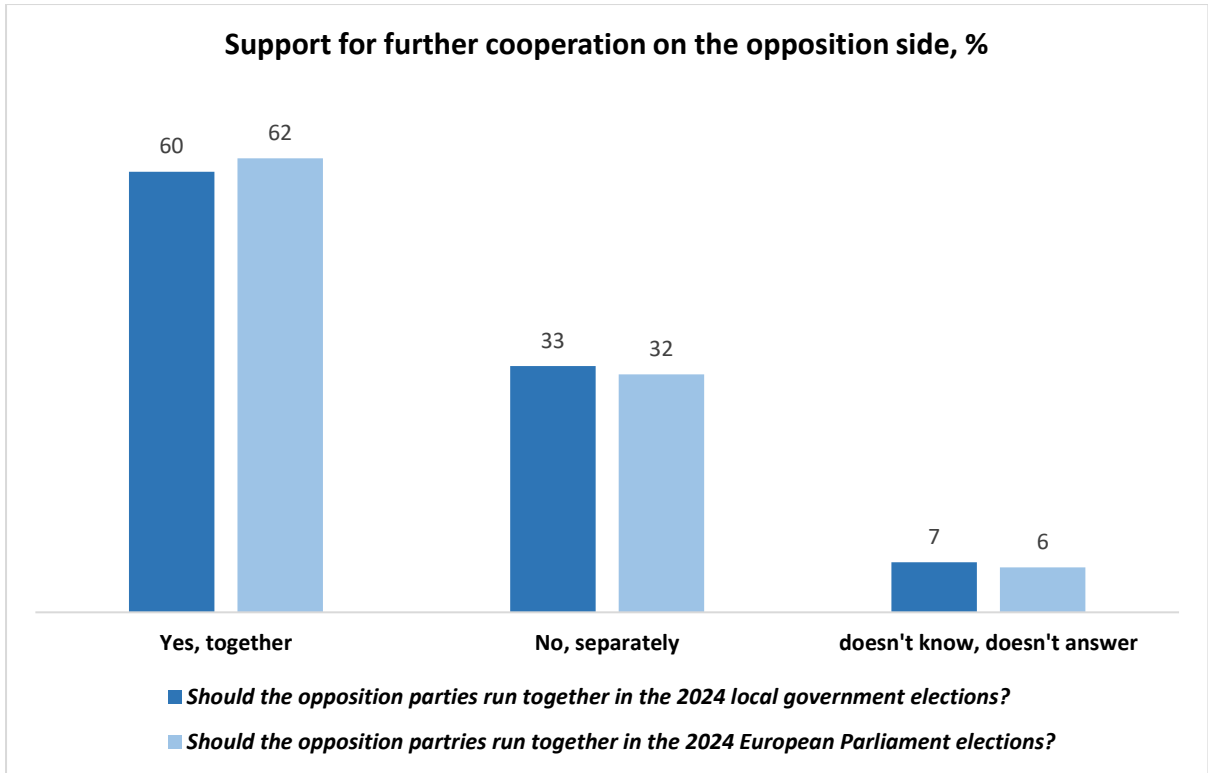


Figure 4: Support for further cooperation with the opposition, %

We also examined the support of a joint run in 2024 among opposition voters, broken down by party support (Figure 5). DK sympathizers are traditionally supporters of unity, followed by the voters of the previously split LMP. Among the parties examined, *Jobbik* and *Magyar Kétfarkú Kutypárt* have slightly more supporters of a separate run. There is therefore no clear enthusiasm for further opposition cooperation among *Jobbik* voters who supported the party alliance in the 2022 election.

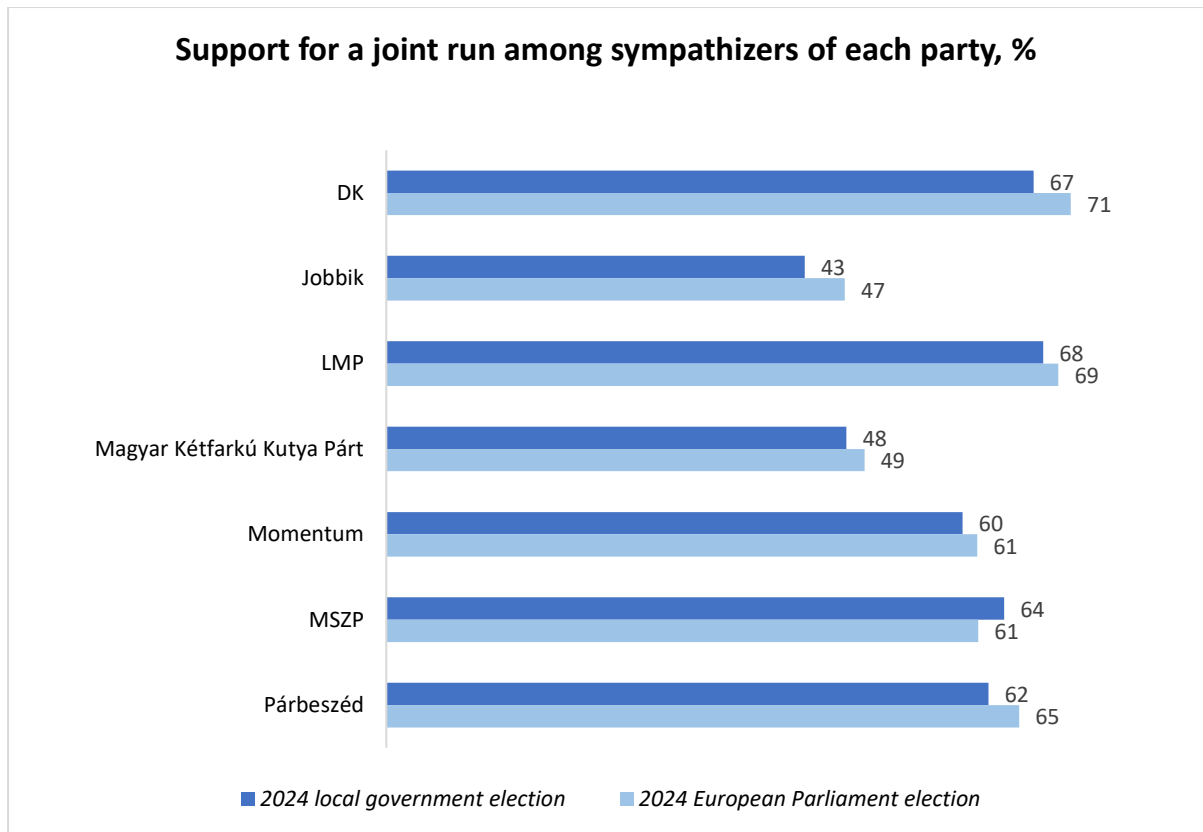


Figure 5: Support for a joint start among supporters of each party, %

The novelty of the 2022 opposition election cooperation was the individual and prime ministerial candidate primaries held in 2021. The primary campaign successfully mobilized the opposition voters, but the momentum in the fall of 2021 dwindled by the spring of the following year. Although the essence of the pre-election is the involvement of the voters in the candidate nomination process, according to our results, the majority of opposition voters (53%) rather support coordination between parties (Figure 6). Among the parties scrutinized, LMP voters mostly oppose the pre-election, followed by DK and MSZP sympathizers. In the case of LMP, the reason for this may be that the co-chairman of the party, Péter Ungár, repeatedly claimed after the election that the primary election was a flawed concept. There is majority support for the pre-election only among the voters of *Kétfarkú Kutya Párt*.

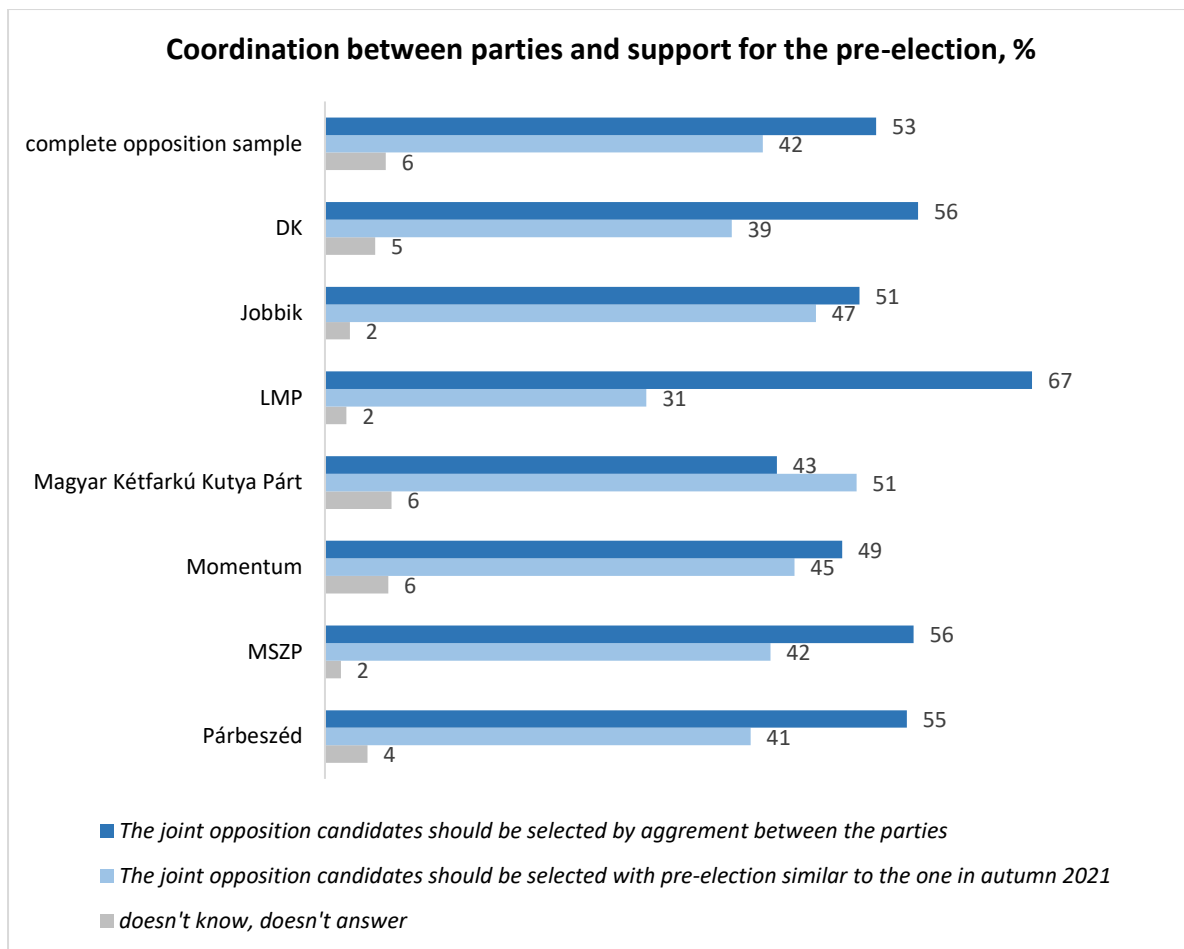


Figure 6: Support for coordination between the parties and the primary election, %

Regarding the effectiveness of opposition politics, the issue of fragmentation, in other words, the number of parties on the opposition side arises. After the 2022 elections, this topic was related to the dominance of a particular party on the opposition side. Based on its voter support, DK designated itself last fall as the „center of the opposition”, which can integrate the other parties (Figure 7). In the entire opposition sample, 71 percent say that there are too many parties on the opposite side, but they are divided as to whether one strong opposition party is needed, or whether only some of them should merge. However, according to 23 percent of the respondents, the number of parties is not a problem. It is not surprising that DK voters mostly support the creation of a strong opposition party. In addition to the *Kutyapárt*, MSZP voters oppose the dominance of a single party, who, compared to other voter groups, may sense the absorbing effect of the DK more.

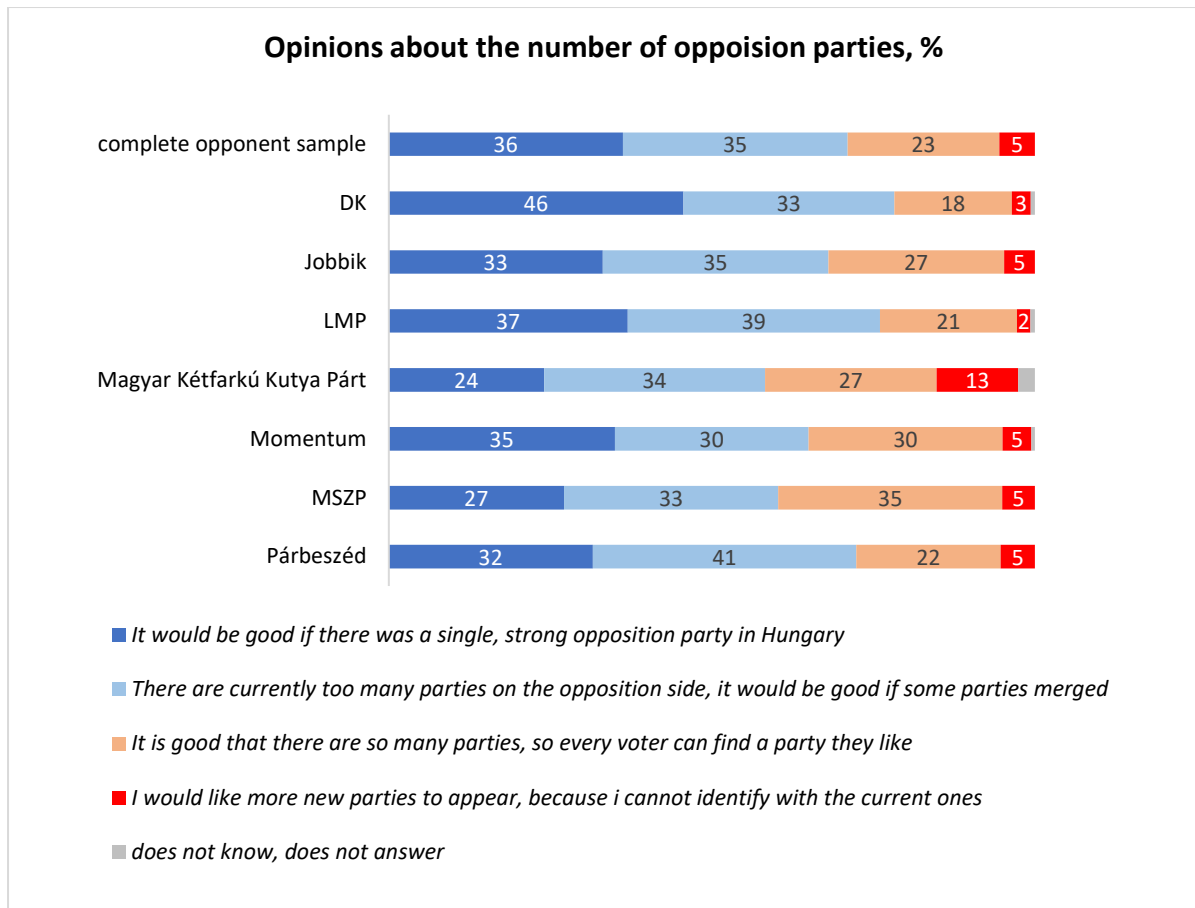


Figure 7: Opinions about the number of opposition parties, %

In our analysis, we examined how opposition voters feel about their parties' cooperation strategies. They were fundamentally divided on whether they supported their party or the coalition itself in 2022. The majority of opposition voters continue to support a joint run for the 2024 local government and European Parliament elections. To a lesser extent, however, the majority of them do not support holding a primary election in the nomination process. According to the overwhelming majority of them, there are too many parties on the opposite side, they approve of the existence of a single strong party and the merger of some parties in roughly equal proportions. However, institutional unification may lead to conflicts, which ultimately endangers cooperation in the 2024 elections. If opposition parties do not take into account the expectations of opposition voters, it will be more difficult to mobilize opposition core voters in 2024.