

# The wage of fear

Future outlook and sources of fear in Hungarian society

Analysis by Republikon Institute



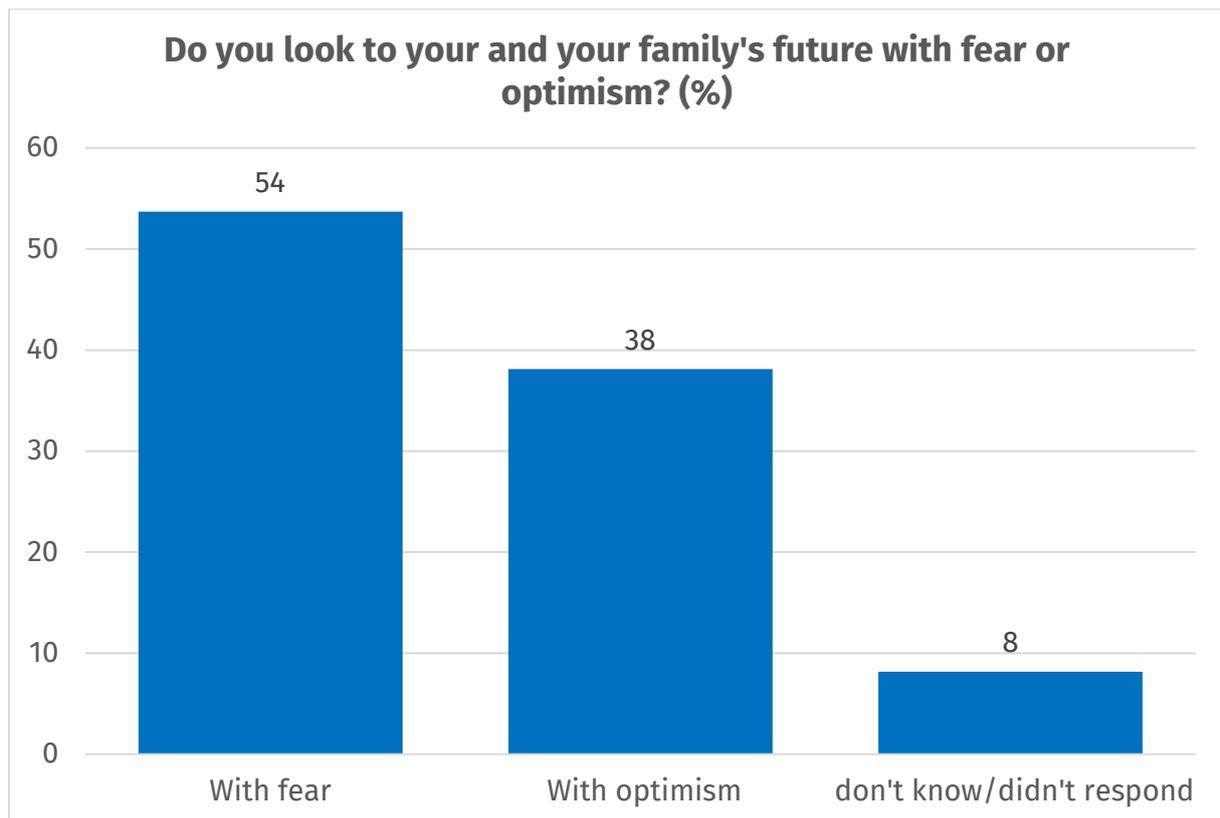
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## INTRODUCTION

Fear-mongering is a potent political tool, perfectly suited to winning elections, but also to damaging the national psyche. The communication strategies and methodologies of the Hungarian governing parties are studied by a range of political scientists, which unfortunately can be considered the height of both fear-mongering and creating enemies. One of the main enemies of the 2022 election was originally planned to be the LGBTQ community, but the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war prompted Fidesz-KDNP to change; hence we were introduced to the communication package of war and peace with "pro-war" positions, "dollar leftism", and Zelensky. We could also cite migration, the "Soros plan" or Brussels, but the point is that Hungarians have had plenty to fear over the past decade, not to mention the worries of everyday life arising from the difficulties of making a living and the economic situation. In a new analysis, Republikon Institute has looked at what Hungarians are afraid of, and what differences can be observed between social groups and party voter camps.

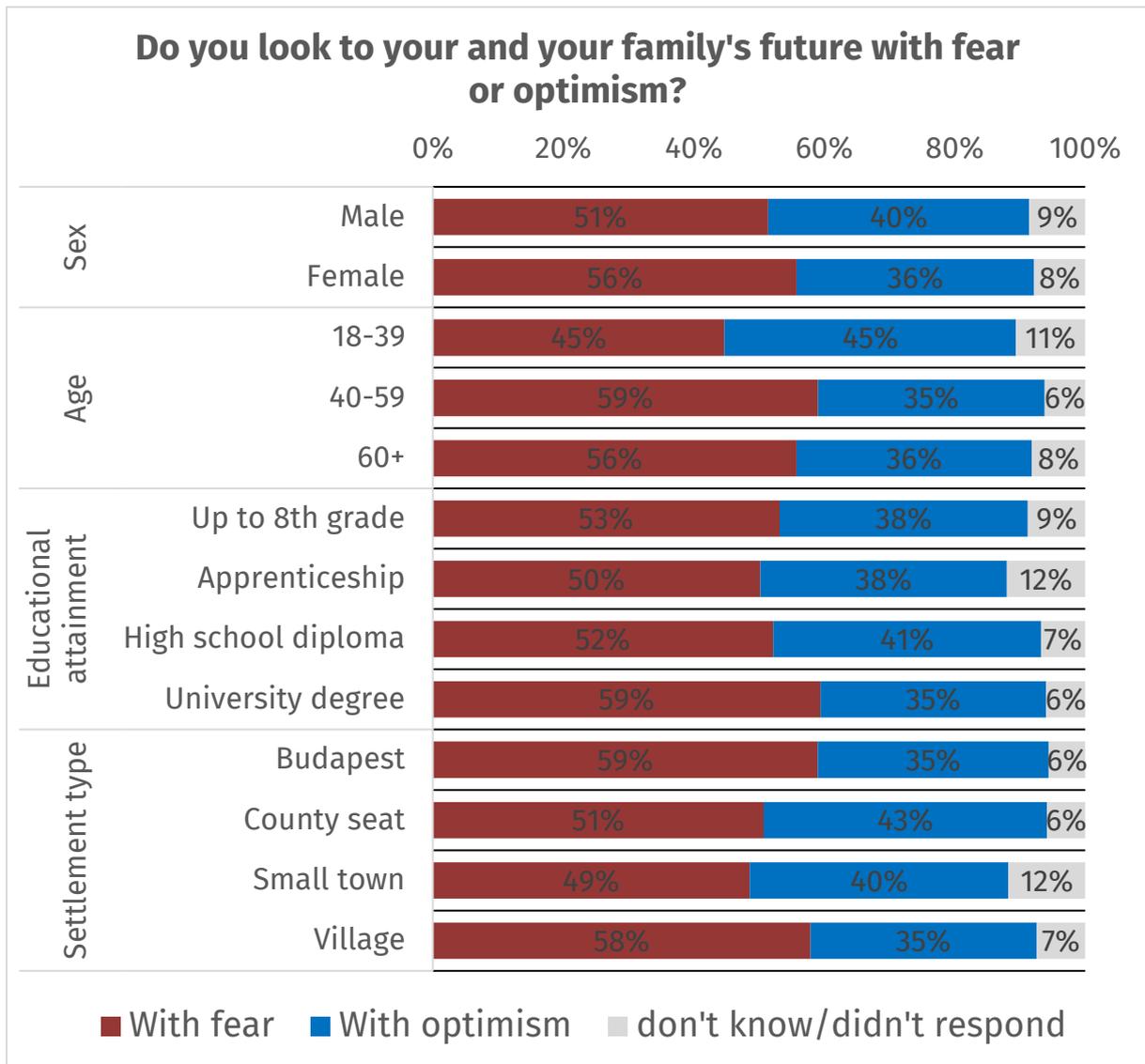
## RESULTS

The results of the survey show that Hungarians look to the future with fear. The absolute majority of respondents, 54%, said they were afraid when thinking about their and their family's future, while only 38% of respondents were optimistic about the future.



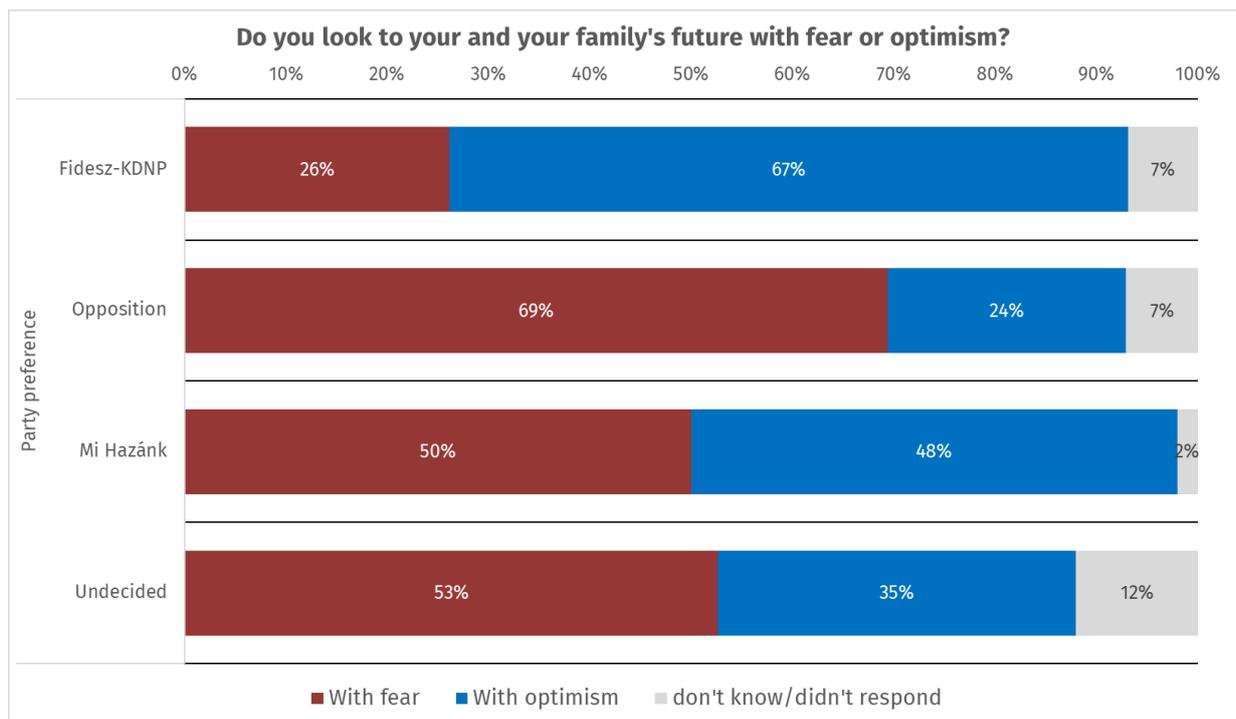
**Figure 1: Future outlooks amongst the adult population (%).**

We also looked at differences between social groups. In terms of gender distribution, female respondents were more negative about the future than male respondents. The breakdown by age group is also interesting, as, somewhat surprisingly, those under 40 were the most optimistic about the future. Indeed, half of those under 40 are optimistic about the future, while the 40-60 age group is the most worried about the future. Those with the highest and lowest levels of education were the most negative. There is no clear trend by type of settlement, but those living in Budapest and the smallest settlements seemed to be the most pessimistic.



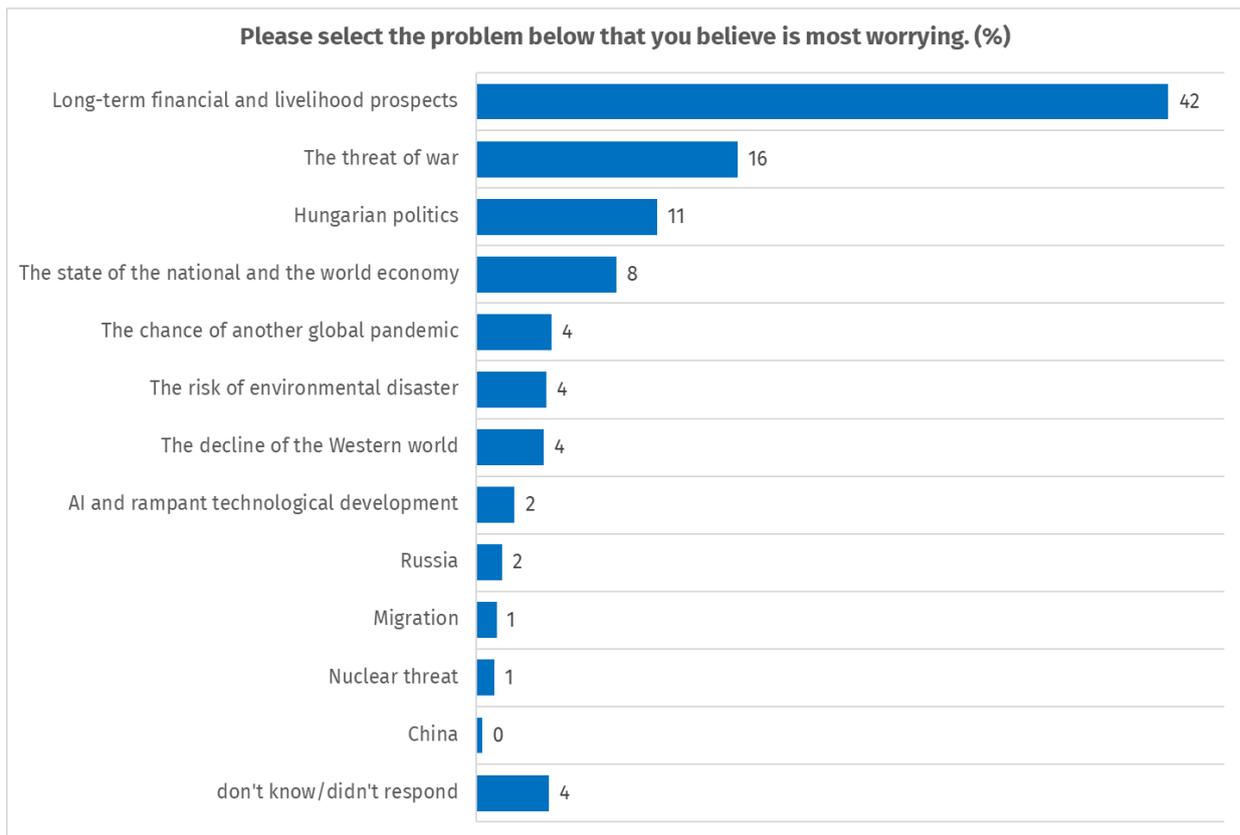
**Figure 2: Visions of the future by given demographic group (%)**

Party preference has the most significant influence on future outlooks. Only a quarter of government voters are afraid of the future, two thirds are optimistic. By contrast, nearly 70% of opposition voters have a rather negative outlook and only a quarter are optimistic. The undecided are similar to opposition voters with an absolute majority fearful about the future and only a third optimistic.



**Figure 3: Associations between future outlook and party preference (%)**

If we consider demographic fault lines and the demographic profile of voters in each political bloc, it is understandable that highly educated respondents in Budapest are afraid of the future as they are mostly opposition voters. However, the fear of those living in villages and those with low education levels cannot be explained by party preference as these groups form the core of the Fidesz-KDNP base. It can therefore be argued that fear of the future may stem from two different sources. The first is more abstract, it is about the state of the world and the country, and it is partly a political statement and occurs among the opposition, although it is only a secondary source of fear amongst them as well. The other is more concrete, and is the consequence of a crisis in livelihoods that affects everyone, and which hits the poor hardest, regardless of party-political affiliation. A third source of fear, fear-mongering government party communication which causes fear of war in some groups, subsequently emerged alongside the previous two, and will be discussed in more detail later.



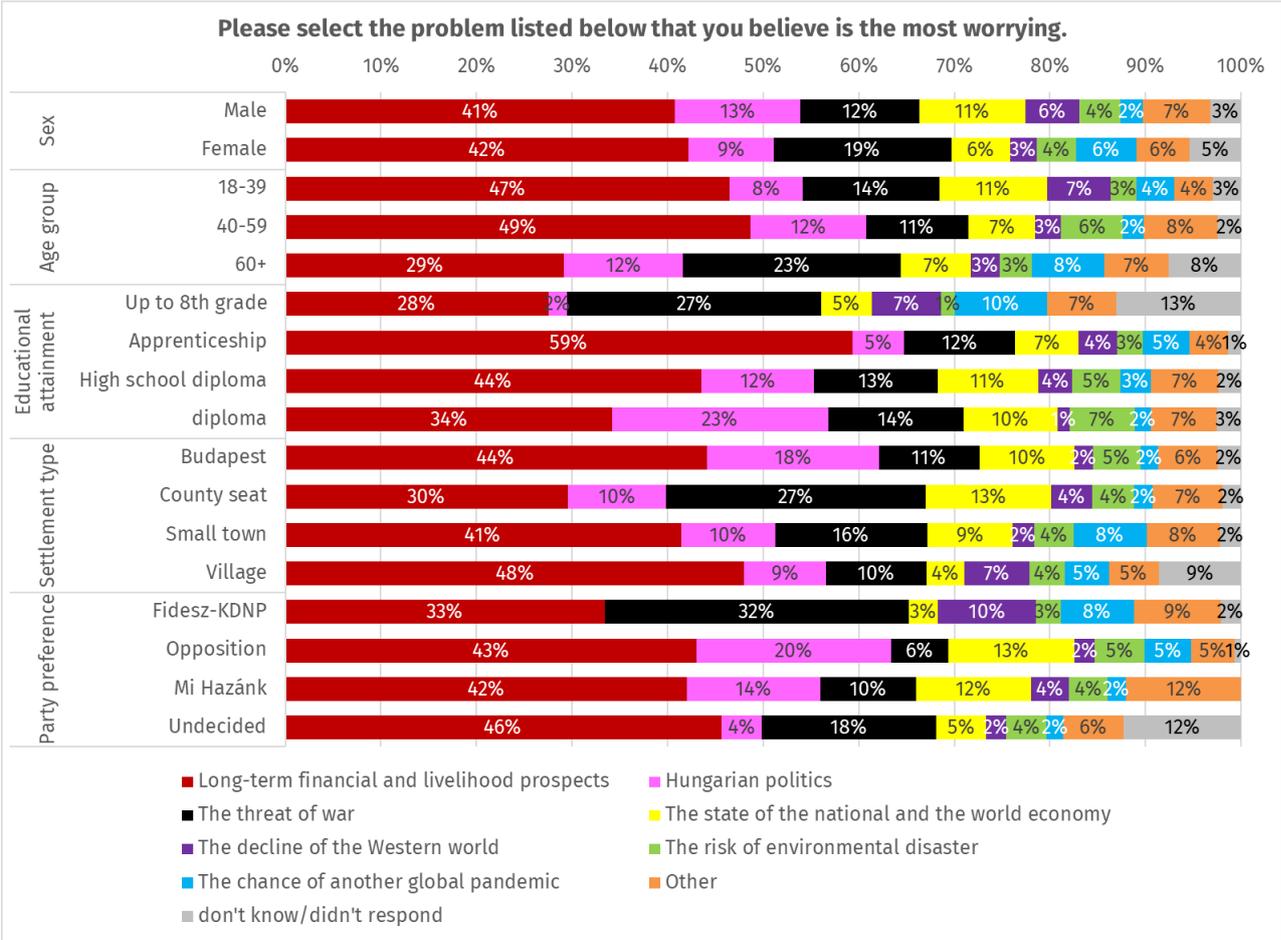
**Figure 4: Most worrying problems amongst the Hungarian adult population (%)**

We also asked respondents what they were most afraid of. Respondents were asked to select the problem they were most worried about from a predetermined list. By far the most fear is caused by long-term financial and livelihood prospects, with 42% of respondents worried about these. This highlights that the main source of anxiety for Hungarians remains the low standard of living and financial situation. The threat of war came second, and the Hungarian domestic political situation was third, followed by the state of the economy.

Respondents are least afraid of China, nuclear war, migration and Russia. This is particularly interesting given that war came in second place with 16%, yet Russia, the country that started the war, is only feared by 2% of respondents. Of course, it is possible that those who fear Russia tended to cite the threat of war, but it is also possible that, in line with the pro-government narrative, people fear war but are not repugned by Russia, the aggressor. It is also interesting that only one per cent fear migration, despite the fact that Fidesz has been building its anti-migration narrative for a decade now. Of course, the rejection of immigration is still sky-high in Hungary,

but the fear factor does not seem to come close to the war scare. Perhaps precisely because the war is taking place in a neighbouring country, but the majority of Hungarians still have not seen an immigrant in real life.

Moving on to the demographic breakdown of the greatest fears, the political fault line emerges here too. While livelihood and financial prospects are the main worries for almost all groups, among Fidesz-KDNP voters, livelihood prospects and the threat of war are neck-and-neck. A third of government party voters fear war the most. This also shows that war is not only frightening because it is close by, but also because of the war psychosis in which Fidesz-KDNP keeps its voters. In fact, the data perfectly illustrate the communication strategy of the governing parties: they wanted to make their voters fear war more than their livelihood prospects, thus strengthening the voter camp. Differences of opinion between demographic groups also suggest party politics: the war is of most concern to the low-educated and the elderly, the most important target audience for the governing party.



**Figure 5: Main sources of fear by demographic group (%). Response options included in the category 'other': AI, Russia, nuclear threat, migration, China**

It can be seen that communication surrounding the war achieves its goal to a certain extent, and the desire for stability overcomes the general dissatisfaction with the difficulties of making a living. For supporters of the governing parties in the county seats, war is still competing for the primary bogeyman title, but when you get down to the village level, livelihood challenges overwhelm war fears. Nearly half of people in villages fear the future because of their livelihoods, and only 10 per cent fear war, compared to 30 per cent in county seats, where livelihood scored 30 per cent and war 27 per cent. Fear of livelihood difficulties also dominated for skilled workers, with nearly 60 per cent citing it as their main source of fear, and only 12 per cent citing war. The undecided are also worried about war, with 18 per cent citing it as the biggest threat, slightly higher than the average for the population as a whole. This shows that the fear propaganda being disseminated from public expenses through public services and bought-up commercial media is reaching beyond core

voters. In addition to war, the decline of the Western world is a source of worry amongst government supporters, more than the economic situation, environmental disaster or even migration amongst this group. This data also shows the destructive effect of governmental communication.

In contrast, opposition voters are most concerned about their livelihood (46%), followed by the domestic political situation (20%) and the state of the domestic and global economy (13%). As explained earlier, there are two main sources of fear, one linked to specific livelihoods and affecting the poorest, and the other related to the direction of national and world politics, which is more typical of opposition voters.

In addition, some smaller demographic peculiarities are also apparent from the data, such as the increased fear of war among female respondents, which may also be fear of conscription of partners and children.

All in all, the data paint a regrettable picture in terms of future outlook. The majority of the Hungarian population look to the future with fear, only the psyche of pro-government voters is protected by the otherwise endlessly damaging communication web woven by Fidesz, through whose cracks the poorest fall when faced with daily reality. Fear-mongering is a favourite tool of the governing parties, and its unfortunate results are reflected not only in their own camp, but also amongst undecided voters. At the same time, the economic situation has really hit Hungarians, and the question is how long the theme of war can serve the ruling parties, whether it will take them to 2026.