

**The Return of Rural Liberalism in
Hungary? –A Regional Analysis of the
2019 and 2014 EP Election Results**

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After the 2019 EP election, a phenomenon that had been valid for twenty years seems to have come to an end regarding Hungarian party system. **Two exclusively liberal parties, the youngish technocratic Momentum and DK led by former leftist PM was able to reach remarkable results in the Hungarian countryside:** their vote share summed up to 18%, which attained half of the opposition votes as conservative governing party Fidesz-KDNP grabbed a bulk of the votes in the villages, a share of 61%. The almost two-third share in the votes for the governing party in the rural areas was not so unexpected as from around 2000 onwards¹, the Fidesz won the majority of rural constituencies as a verification of the conventional wisdom in political science: the countryside is rather conservative, the city is rather liberal.

Nonetheless, this was not almost the case. In the first election after the transition, the rural-urban cleavage was not a significant matter on the ballot. The strongly liberal party SzDSz and at that time Fidesz could expect more votes in the countryside than in the towns². However during the first government of Fidesz and its allies 1998-2002, Fidesz finished its turn to a conservative party from the early days' liberal one, which made substantial change in the party system of Hungary.

As a consequence in the '00s, a bipolar party system stabilized with ruling left-liberal ally popular in the cities and poor regions of Northern Hungary and Fidesz as conservative party capable of getting votes mainly in the countryside. Thereafter the fall of the left-liberal ally during the crisis paved the way for further strengthened Fidesz in the rural areas. Newly grounded far-right party Jobbik took over the votes in Northern Hungary from MSzP, while liberal parties have been trapped in towns and Budapest. Thus in the '10s, the liberal-city and conservative-countryside was true in a tripolar party system- until the 2019 EP election.

In this short essay, I attempt to investigate the latest revival of rural liberalism in Hungary. I chose the liberal-conservative divide as I see it fitting the most to the party system of the country.³ Firstly, I will assess the election program of the parties in order to classify them as liberal or conservative. Secondly, I describe the regional patterns in the 2014 and 2019 EP election with a focus on the liberal-conservative divide with a closer look on the votes of DK and Momentum to decide whether the change could be permanent or only happened at the 2019 EP election.

¹ Notable example is the 2002 general election, when Fidesz, together with conservative MDF, won the majority of constituencies in rural areas and the party list voting was extremely tight with major opponent leftist MSZP and its ally liberal SzDSz, however the cities were taken almost entirely by the left-liberal parties, who were able to form a government.

Infographic: http://nol.hu/archivum/egyeni_valasztokeruletek_eredmenyei_1990-tol_2006-ig-544141

² And most of the Budapest district was won by conservative MDF. One explanation could be the dawn of democracy leaving more roles to individual candidates. Another explanation could be the strong anticommunist stance of the liberal parties potentially appealing to rural voters as well. The 1994 general election reinforced this trend in the case of SzDSz, however the event was not favorable to conservative parties as leftist MSZP won the vast majority of settlements.

http://www.mtafki.hu/konyvtar/Magyarország/Magyarország_terkepekben_Parlamenti_valasztasok.pdf

³ The commonly used left-right division is less relevant in Hungary in my view due to the economic connotation of the phrases. As every major party was and is in for a relatively large government and high public spending to GDP ratio, from an economic respect, most of the parties are leftist with pro-market exemptions mainly liberal layer parties which are in the focus of the study: SzDSz, Együtt, Momentum. But overall, rather the symbolic political questions, nowadays referred as identity politics matters most in Hungary.

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/GC.XPN.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=HU>

EP Programs and Ideology

In this section I evaluate the election programs of each party in 2014 and 2019 in order to classify them as liberal or conservative. As EP elections deals mainly with integration topics, I closely look for the openness pattern, however human rights and general freedom are also of high interest. Note that the 2014 EP election coincided with the general elections in Hungary, thus most of the parties made programs only for the 2019 EP election. So I will strongly rely on the analysis of Bakó.⁴ Based on the findings, I present the election results by ideology stance at the end of this section.

Liberal parties: The leftist party **MSzP** was in for Euro Atlantic partnership in 2014 with a support for the European integration and would like Hungary to join the Eurozone. In the 2019 program, the party maintained these ideas and involved more aspects of human rights regarding women and the youth, moreover it took a more widely leftist approach with the plan of common minimal wage and pension in the EU.⁵ Notable change does not characteristic the stance of the liberal party **DK**, either. Before 2014, its most important message was the European United States, a deepening concept of the EU and in 2019, the message of the party remained the same with an intention of a European federalization in several public policy⁶ coupled with leftist approach similar to that of MSzP. Regarding **LMP**, the green liberal party expressed its pro-EU stance in 2015 aiming for a Europe of sustainable development and just society.⁷ In the 2019 program, the party confirmed its human concept instead of business interest for protecting the environment with a complement of regional minority rights. Liberal party ally **Együtt-PM** was active only during the 2014 election, their stance was to strengthen civic movements for enhancing common European values. Frivolous party **MK KP** was able to compete only in 2019 and it provided satire of Hungarian political agenda's nationalism and anomalies in its 2019 program.⁸ Centre-liberal **Momentum** also attended only in 2019 and its program foresees a cohesive EU community with common security and economic policy.

Conservative parties: In 2014, **Jobbik** was Eurosceptic as it would have held general vote about leaving the EU if there had been any deepening of the integration. Nonetheless, the 2019 EP program hints to another picture. The values of the 2019 Jobbik are Christian heritage and human rights and moderation is clearly observable in issue politics as wage convergence in Europe and supranational dealing with illegal migration⁹. This is not the case with the radical group split from Jobbik in 2018 called **Mi Hazánk**¹⁰. The far-right party can be seen as the continuation of the 2014 Jobbik as it considers migration as a conquering process, is against Roma minorities in Hungary and aims to protect 'Northern Civilization'. The 2014 **Fidesz** can be mainly assessed upon its governance due lack of program. Around the time of the election it backed earlier pro-integration stance as postponing the Eurozone joining, closer political relationships with Russia, and a national control of energy prices. As for 2019, Fidesz only attributed importance to the stopping of illegal migration and the general critique of the bureaucratic EU institutions.¹¹

⁴ <http://visegradrevue.eu/magyarorszagi-partok-az-ep-valasztasokon-program-nelkul-a-foldkerdesrol/>

⁵ <https://mszp.hu/page/download?ct=doc&cid=345&dt=atch&did=674>

⁶ <https://dkp.hu/uploads/docs/10/176/dk-ep-program-fuzet-web.pdf>

⁷ <https://lehetmas.hu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/371969095-Az-LMP-europai-parlamenti-valasztasi-programja-2014-pdf.pdf> ; <https://lehetmas.hu/a-zold-europa-programja/>

⁸ <https://ketfarkukutya.mkkp.party/ep-valasztas-program/>

⁹ <https://www.jobbik.hu/biztonsagos-europat-szabad-magyarorszagot-ep-valasztasi-program-2019>

¹⁰ https://mihazank.hu/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ep_fuzet_WEB-1.pdf

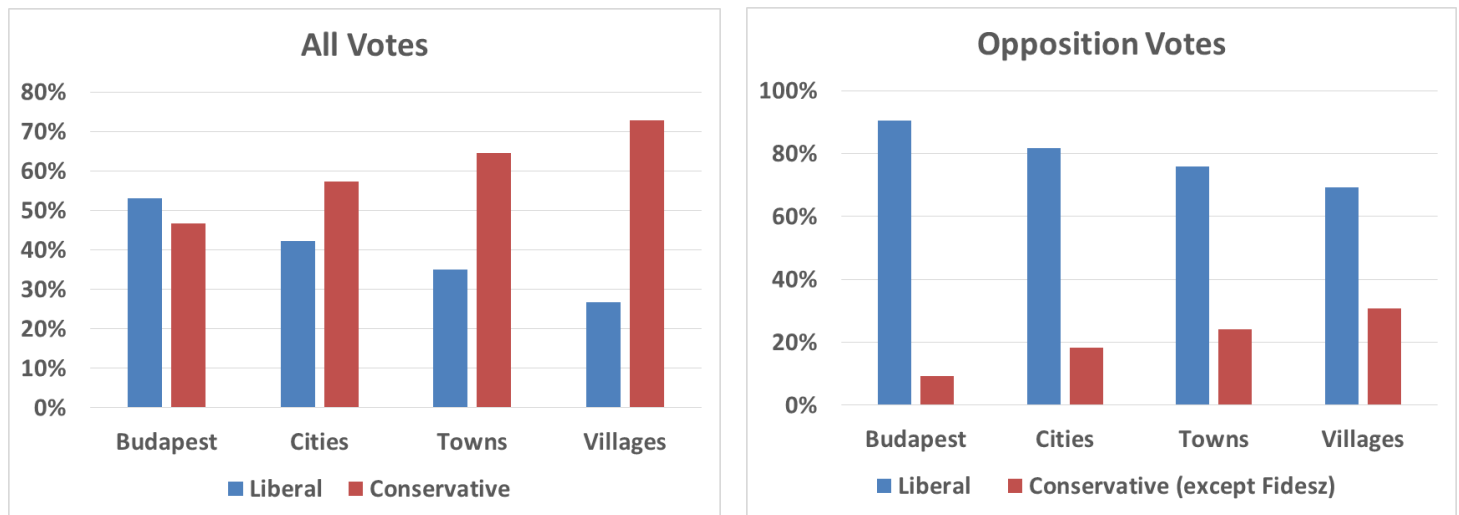
¹¹ <https://fidesz.hu/hirek/orban-viktor-programot-hirdetett-a-bevandorlas-megallitasaert>

	Liberal	Conservative
2014	33%	66%
2019	37%	62%

1. Table Election results by ideology stance, source: valasztas.hu

Regional Analysis of the Liberal and Conservative Divide

Therefore, liberal ideology is in a minor role in present Hungarian politics. However **liberal vote share increased from 2014 to 2019 which might be in connection with disorganized conservative opposition** with transitioning Jobbik and newly formed Mi Hazánk. This pattern holds for the regional data for the 2019 EP election, too. Liberal votes are outnumbered by that of conservatives outside Budapest but among opposition, liberal votes are more than conservatives in every settlement group even though the decreasing liberal vote share in the settlement type. That is to say, a more rural type settlement tends to be more conservative both in the case of all votes and opposition votes.



1. Graph 2019 election results by ideology and settlement type, with and without governmental votes, source: valasztas.hu

So liberal parties got fewer votes in villages compared to towns, cities and Budapest at both election but **the advance of liberalism is clearly visible in the villages as well.**

	All Votes	Opposition Votes
2014	23%	56%
2019	27%	70%

2. Table Liberal vote share in villages, n=100 sample

And the increase can be attributed mainly to DK and Momentum as it was foretold in the introduction. However, the regression analysis reveals that **the liberal parties could increase vote share in villages where liberal ideology was already present** and the main factor could be simply gathering votes of ceased party Együtt-PM and parties losing substantial vote share as LMP and MSZP while **leaving rural conservatism insensitive to liberal thoughts upon the 2019 EP election.**

	Együtt-PM (2014)	LMP (2014)	DK (2014)	MSZP (2014)
DK (2019)	0,47***	-	0,78***	0,1*
Momentum (2019)	0,53***	0,37***	-	-

3. Table Regression analysis coefficients of liberal parties' vote share in villages, n=100 sample

Appendix

Election results by parties, source: valasztas.hu

	MSZP-PM*	DK	LMP	Együtt-PM*	MKKP	Momentum	Jobbik	Mi Hazánk	Fidesz
2014	11%	10%	5%	7%	-	-	15%	-	51%
2019	7%	16%	2%	-	3%	10%	6%	3%	53%

*PM was ally to MSzP in 2019 and ally to Együtt in 2014

2019 election results by ideology and settlement type, with and without governmental votes, data from 1. Graph

	All		Opposition	
	Liberal	Conservative	Liberal	Conservative (except Fidesz)
Budapest	53%	47%	91%	9%
Cities	42%	57%	82%	18%
Towns	35%	64%	76%	24%
Villages	27%	73%	69%	31%

2019 election results by parties and settlement type, source: valasztas.hu

settlement type	MSZP-PM	MKKP	JOBBIK	FIDESZ	MOMENTUM	DK	MI HAZÁNK	LMP
Budapest	9%	4%	3%	41%	17%	20%	2%	3%
Cities	8%	3%	6%	48%	11%	18%	3%	2%
Towns	6%	2%	7%	53%	8%	16%	4%	2%
Villages	5%	2%	8%	61%	6%	12%	4%	2%
Stance	Liberal	Liberal	Conservative	Conservative	Liberal	Liberal	Conservative	Liberal

The number of votes were around equal in the categories of Budapest and cities, while towns and villages had more votes in 2019, source: valasztas.hu

number of votes	settlement type
686 313	Budapest
711 629	Cities
1 068 642	Towns
928 889	Villages

Since only the 2019 dataset was downloadable, I assessed the 2014 results through estimation by taking an n=100 sample of villages. This table is used as a check for the validity of the sample by comparing the results of the random sample and the whole database in villages for 2019. Source: valasztas.hu

	MSZP-PÁRBESZÉD	MKKP	JOBBIK	FIDESZ	MOMENTUM	DK	MI HAZÁNK	LMP
All, N=2809	4,80%	1,95%	8,03%	61,06%	5,82%	12,40%	3,78%	1,68%
Sample, n=100	4,79%	2,24%	7,61%	61,94%	5,86%	11,72%	3,58%	1,75%

Villages in the sample:

Bikal	Jászszenlászó	Olaszliszka	Fertőboz	Jászboldogháza
Drávaiványi	Pirtó	Sajóivánka	Jobaháza	Tiszagyenda
Görcsönydoboka	Csabaszabadi	Szászfa	Nagybajcs	Bakonyszombathely
Kékesd	Medgyesbodzás	Tizacsermely	Rábatamási	Mogyorósbánya
Kölked	Alsógagy	Vilmány	Újkér	Bánk
Matty	Boldogkőújfalu	Felgyő	Darvas	Etes
Okorvölgy	Detek	Tömörkény	Nyírábrány	Kishartyán
Siklósbodony	Gagyapáti	Füle	Bátor	Nógrádsáp
Szilvás	Hernádkak	Nadap	Gyöngyösoroszi	Szuha
Véménd	Kenézlő	Tabajd	Mónosbél	Dánszentmiklós
Pilisborosjenő	Csaroda	Csörötnek	Nyárád	Csolyospálos
Taksony	Hermánszeg	Hegyhátszentjakab	Somlószőlős	Makkoshotyka
Verőce	Levelek	Kétvölgy	Vászoly	Bőny
Berzence	Nyírgyulaj	Nagyrákos	Barlahida	Tarnalelesz
Gálosfa	Pátyod	Petőmihályfa	Dobri	Kisnémedi
Kaposhomok	Szorgalmatos	Szakonyfalu	Hernyék	Vízvár
Látrány	Túristvándi	Vasszilvagy	Kissziget	Zomba
Pálmajor	Csikóstóttós	Balatoncsicsó	Muraszemenye	Malomsok
Somodor	Keszőhidegkút	Döbrönte	Pakod	Várvölgy
Szena	Németkér	Káptalantóti	Sőjtör	Zalaszentlászó

I regressed the vote share of Momentum and DK in 2019 on vote share of each parties in 2014 as explanatory variables using the n=100 sample to see where the new voters of the two liberal parties could come from. Note that the 2014 Fidesz was estimated in a different equation because of the strong negative multicollinearity between Fidesz, Jobbik and MSzP.

$$(1) DK_{2019} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * MSzP_{2014} + \beta_2 * Jobbik_{2014} + \beta_3 * DK_{2014} + \beta_4 * Együtt - PM_{2014} + \beta_5 * LMP_{2014} + \epsilon$$

$$(2) DK_{2019} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Fidesz_{2014} + \epsilon$$

$$(3) Momentum_{2019} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * MSzP_{2014} + \beta_2 * Jobbik_{2014} + \beta_3 * DK_{2014} + \beta_4 * Együtt - PM_{2014} + \beta_5 * LMP_{2014} + \epsilon$$

$$(4) Momentum_{2019} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 * Fidesz_{2014} + \epsilon$$

Results:

Dependent variable: DK

coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	0,0223020	0,0123855	1,801	0,0750 *
MSzP2014	0,0996459	0,0548413	1,817	0,0724 *
JOBBIK2014	0,0674270	0,0439620	1,534	0,1284
DK2014	0,781828	0,0914316	8,551	2,20e-013 ***
EGYATTPM	0,468626	0,141792	3,305	0,0013 ***
LMP2014	0,148102	0,156511	0,9463	0,3464
R-squared	0,576114	Adjusted R-squared	0,553567	

coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	0,319961	0,0221057	14,47	4,49e-026 ***
FIDESZ	-0,323646	0,0338802	-9,553	1,13e-015 ***
R-squared	0,482177	Adjusted R-squared	0,476893	

Dependent variable: MOMENTUM

coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	0,0190234	0,00954489	1,993	0,0492 **
MSzP2014	-0,0371955	0,0422636	-0,8801	0,3811
JOBBIK2014	0,00150055	0,0338794	0,04429	0,9648
DK2014	0,0906225	0,0704620	1,286	0,2016
EGYATTPM	0,538244	0,109272	4,926	3,59e-06 ***
LMP2014	0,371449	0,120615	3,080	0,0027 ***
R-squared	0,384531	Adjusted R-squared	0,35179	

coefficient	std. error	t-ratio	p-value	
const	0,138679	0,0173423	7,997	2,58e-012 ***
FIDESZ	-0,140082	0,0265796	-5,270	8,11e-07 ***
R-squared	0,220836	Adjusted R-squared	0,212885	