

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

AN INFECTED MEDIA SYSTEM

The Sources of Political Information in Hungary,
2020

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November 2020



This representative survey was conducted in the autumn 2020. It captures the patterns, preferences and attitudes of Hungarian's news consumption.



The data shows a surge in the interest in politics and public affairs – which appears to be connected to the pandemic. At the same, the relative weight of online news in the public's overall news consumption has practically caught up with that of television, and social media has made more impressive gains still.



On the whole, Hungarians tend to believe that independent news outlets are the most credible sources of news. However, those in support of the governing party believe that the media outlets which support the government are the most credible. The polarisation of Hungarian society is also reflected in the news consumption and news interpretation patterns.

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1.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since 2013, Mérték Media Monitor has been performing recurring surveys to learn about the media consumption and information patterns of the Hungarian public (the results of the previous surveys are available on our website at mertek.eu, under the heading Media Freedom). All our surveys were conducted in collaboration with the Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute. Among the distinctive features of the current Hungarian media situation is that the most widely read daily newspapers have disappeared from the market in recent years; the most prominent players in the radio market have been replaced by other stations; and a variety of other media outlets with a major audience reach have experienced changes in ownership as a result of which the editorial guidelines that govern their work have been fundamentally and comprehensively rewritten. Our recurring surveys also provide us with a picture of how sensitively and quickly the audiences react when the media sources they rely on begin to cover the daily events in a tone and/or manner that is markedly different from their previously established approach. Based on our review, we found that markets change far more swiftly than consumption patterns.

Despite the constantly changing – and in fact volatile and unstable – media environment, our survey provides a vital glimpse of the prevailing situation in the media today. It captures what type of media the various segments of the audience tend to consume; how they view the political orientation of the various media outlets and their credibility; and whether they actively strive to consult news sources which espouse political views that differ from their own. In recent years, we have also focused more intensely on examining the use of social media (Facebook), and over time we have found unequivocally that for many users social media have emerged as a new arena for the public discussion of politics.

The data in our research provide clear evidence that the respondents' party preferences not only inform their choice of news sources but also have a substantial impact on their overall assessment of media outlets. The supporters of the governing party obviously prefer pro-government media and consider these more credible. At the same time, these respondents also interpret daily events in line with the government's narrative. This attitude also prevails when they encounter news sources that present news with a narrative that is antithetical to the govern-

ment's viewpoint. The polarisation of Hungarian society is also distinctively reflected in the public's news consumption and news interpretation patterns.

The year 2020 has been out of the ordinary in many respects, including news consumption patterns. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a substantial increase in the demand for news, and the measures taken in response to the pandemic have moved into the centre of political and public discourse. On the one hand, our most recent data reflect a surge in the interest in public affairs, which was accompanied at the same time by a rise in the role of online and social media news sources, which are more adept at satisfying the public's growing appetite for rapid news. The fundamental question of the coming period is whether these patterns will become fixed and established as the dominant paradigm, or whether once the pandemic subsides, the television-centred news consumption and the concomitant moderate level of interest in public affairs will prevail again.

The transformation of Hungary's leading news site, Index, and the launch of a new news site, Telex, by the former staff of Index who quit in protest of meddling by the management, appears to indicate a breakthrough in terms of the public's willingness to pay for news. One of the most dramatic events of 2020 was the joint and simultaneous resignation of the entire Index team, and it appears that the import of this development is being appreciated even by some segments of the general audience who generally tend to pay less attention to media market developments. Large segments of the public have also taken notice of the Media Council's decision threatening the future of Hungary's only major critical radio station, Klubrádió. Telex – which is seeking to replace Index – and Klubrádió were the most successful fundraisers in the period examined.

The continuous changes in the Hungarian media system pose a challenge even to those news consumers with the highest level of awareness. It is our hope that the joint research by Mérték and Medián, carried out in collaboration with the Budapest office of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, can provide some measure of clarity amidst the confusion.

Budapest, 17 November 2020

Gábor Polyák, Ágnes Urbán – Mérték Media Monitor

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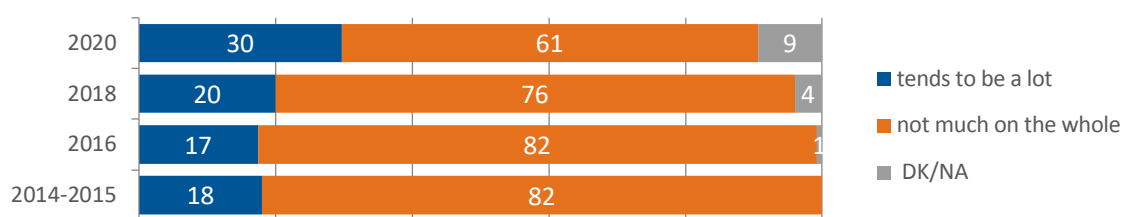
INTEREST IN POLITICS AND THE SOURCES OF POLITICAL INFORMATION

Almost every second Hungarian citizen claims they are “very” or “fairly” interested in politics. This marks a substantial increase over the levels of political interest we found in previous years, since in the surveys we have performed since 2015, this ratio has fluctuated between 34-36%. It is conceivable that the surge we observed owes to some non-obvious methodological explanation, but it appears more likely that the explanation stems at least in part from the impact of the corona pandemic. Over the past six months or so, the pandemic has led many people to follow the news more intensely than previously, and to also look beyond the healthcare implications of the crisis, at the political dimension. This is also supported by the fact that we not only found that more people indicated spending more time on obtaining information about politics than the timeframe they had previously indicated allocating to such activities, but is also supported by the finding that many individuals subjectively felt that they devote more attention and time to doing so (Figure 1).

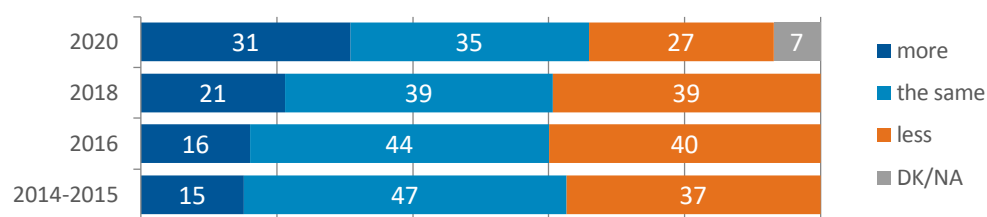
Even as the interest in politics and the desire for information have obviously intensified, there was a major shift in the structure of political information: The role of television has declined markedly, while that of the internet in turn has become more pronounced. Previously, including the most recent 5-6 years, television was unequivocally and by some distance the top source of political/public affairs news. But as of today, its importance has declined substantially, while that of the worldwide web has grown appreciably, with the result that today the latter is used by almost the same number of users as a regular source of political information as television. And if we home in on the three-quarters of the audiences who have internet access and use the internet, then we find that the latter is far and away the most important source of news (71% use it regularly to this end as compared to only 50% of respondents who indicated the same for television). The respective consumption curves of radio and the print media are nearly flat, by contrast, which means that their

Figure 1
Time spent on informing oneself about politics (percent)

How much time do you devote to informing yourself about politics/public affairs?

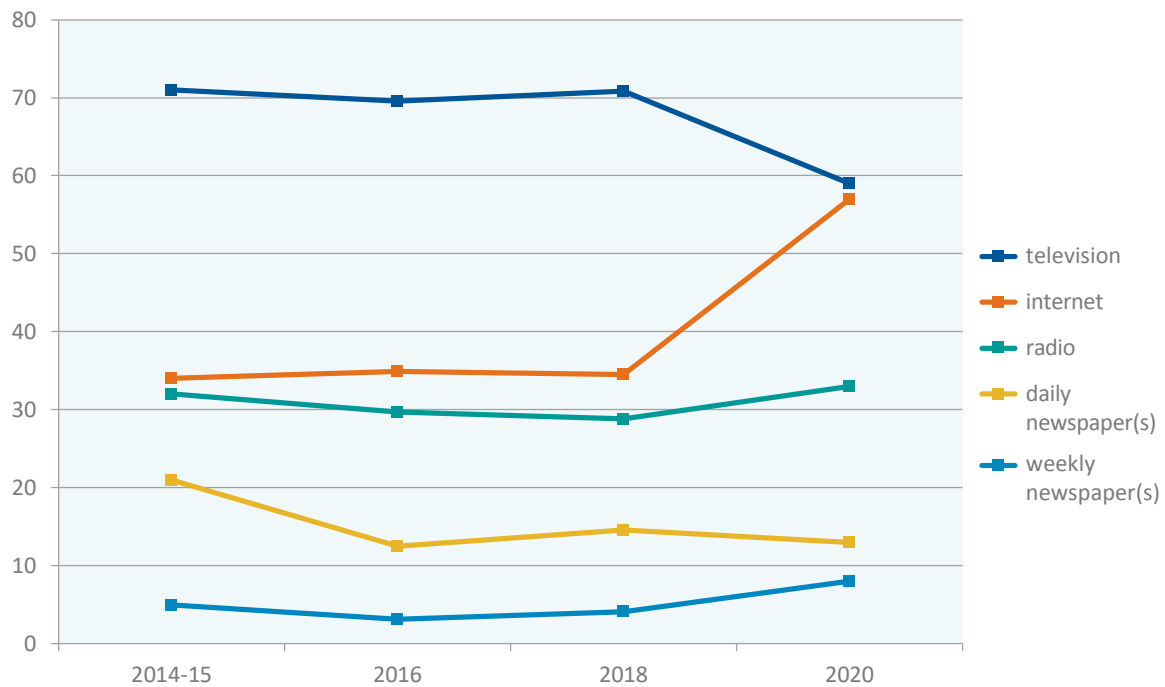


As compared to a few years ago,* how much time do you devote to informing yourself about politics/public affairs today?



*In 2014/15: “As compared to five years ago...”

Figure 2
Changes in the sources of political/public affairs information (percent)



role in political information has essentially stagnated since 2014 (*Figure 2*).

The coronavirus pandemic probably played a role in the rapid breakthrough of the internet as a source of political information. All signs indicate that many people – especially among the elderly – have turned online for news as a result of the isolation into which the pandemic has forced them. Online they found – in addition to a wide variety of practical and entertaining information – medical information and interesting political/public affairs contents. This does not imply, however, that the differences between the various generations in terms of their respective internet usage have entirely vanished, since the share of regular internet users among those under 50 stands at 74%, while among those between the ages of 50-59 it is 65%, and among those 60 or older it is merely 28%. The above refers to *political* information, and the overall picture is nuanced by the fact that young respondents are somewhat less likely to be interested in public affairs: The share of citizens who barely inform themselves about politics or do so only to a limited extent is highest in the youngest cohort (28% among those under the age of 30%, while this is true of only 8% among those over the age of 60).

At the other end of this equation is television. Eighty-four percent of the respondents over the age of 60 indicated that they use television as a source of political information. Shifting our focus towards the younger cohorts, we found that this ratio declined steadily, with only 30% of those under 40 indicating that they use this type of media regularly as a source of political information. And there is one more type of media which the oldest cohort is most

likely to use, namely the print press, including both daily newspapers and weeklies.

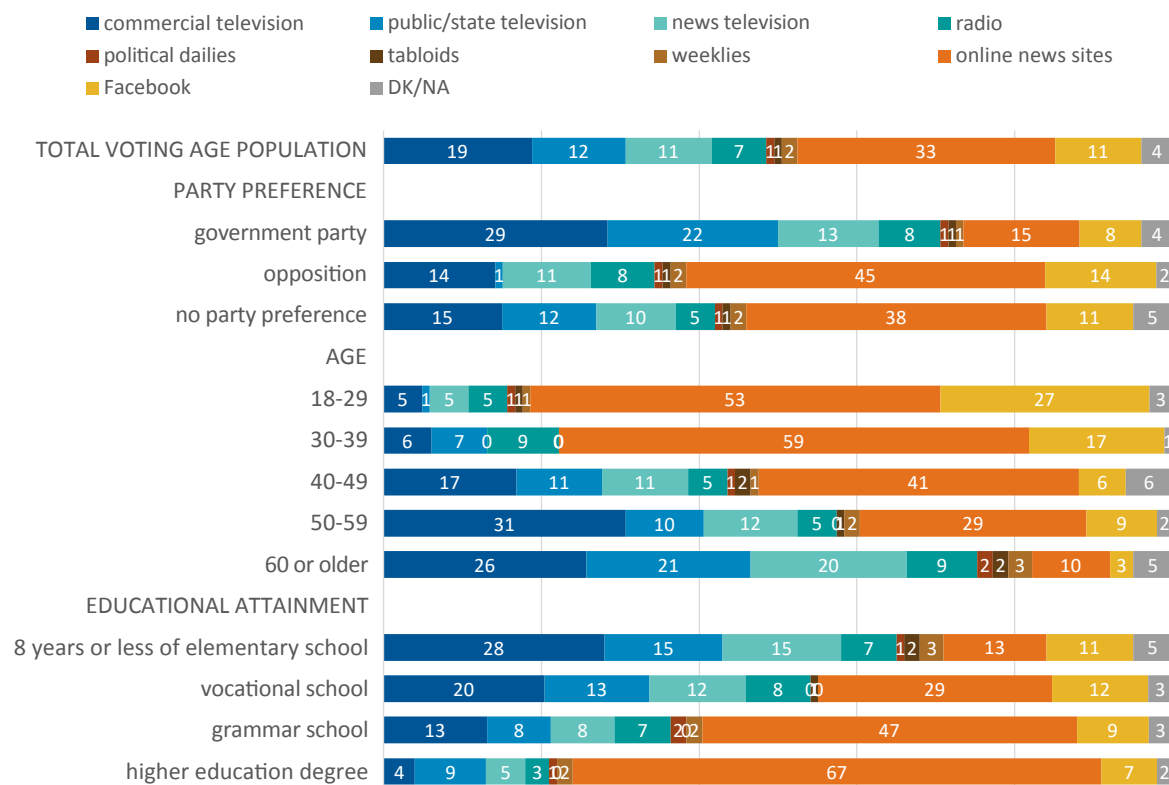
The differences between the various age groups were especially pronounced when the survey asked respondents about a hypothetical scenario where they would have access to only one media outlet. Most of the respondents were willing to hypothesise about such a theoretical scenario, and they picked an “essential” source of information, with a plurality (44%) opting for the internet or Facebook specifically, while a sliver less (41%) preferred television. The younger the respondents, the more overwhelming their preference was for the internet, and the more marginal television became.

The fault line between “declining” television and “rising” internet also manifests itself increasingly starkly along the ideological divide, as the respective importance of the two types of media was exactly reversed among government party and opposition supporters. In terms of the specific figures, Fidesz voters preferred television to internet by a ratio of 64 to 23 percent, while among opposition voters these figures were almost exactly reversed, with 26% preferring television compared to 59% who opted for the internet. The distinctly higher ratio of preference for the internet among opposition supporters is in all likelihood also a corollary of the massive ground that the government has gained in the market of legacy media in recent years. Voters without a party preference took an intermediate position between the two politically committed sides, but on the whole they hewed more closely towards the news consumption patterns of opposition supporters: The ratio of those who use television and the internet for political information, respectively, were 37% and 49% (*Figure 3*).

Figure 3

The types of political/public affairs media preferred by the public

If for any reason you could only inform yourself from one type of media in the future, which one of those listed on the card would you opt for? (percent)



3.

THE ROLE OF THE VARIOUS TYPES OF MEDIA IN THE POLITICAL INFORMATION OF THE PUBLIC

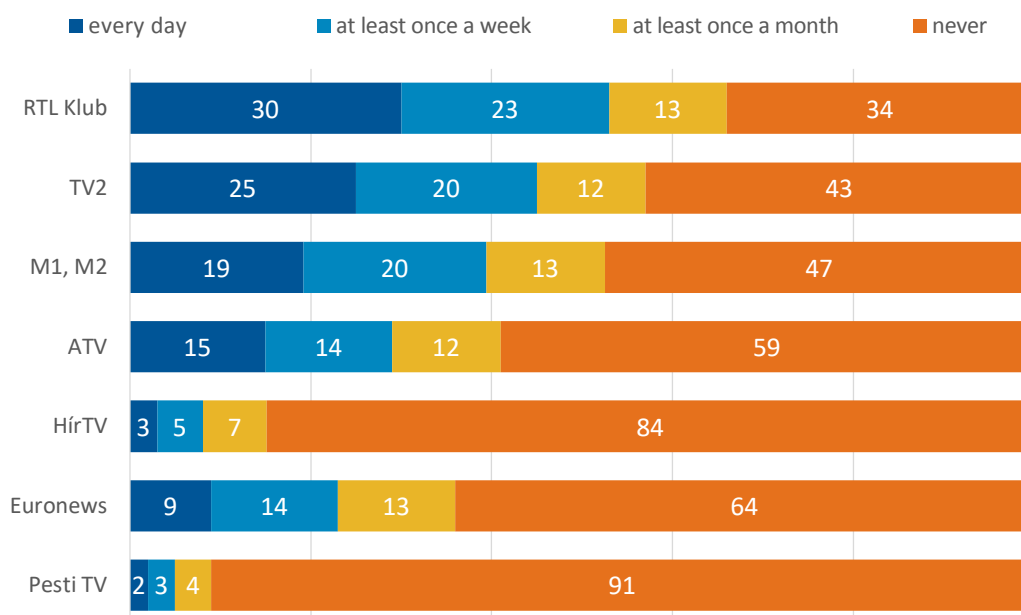
In terms of the citizens' efforts to inform themselves about politics and public affairs, there have been no major changes recently in the "consumer market" for **daily newspapers**. The one change that needs to be pointed out is that we found a further decline in the readership of county newspapers. Furthermore, political affiliation is a massive driving force behind this process: As compared to 26% of government party supporters, only 14-15% of opposition supporters and of those without a party preference inform themselves from county newspapers.

There was no change in the ranking of **television channels**: For years now, RTL Klub has topped the list, with TV2 coming in second. Public service television only came in third behind the two leading commercial television channels despite the fact that this category of the survey lumped all the public service television channels operated by the Media Services and Support Trust Fund (MTVA, the

central corporation governing Hungarian public media) together under one heading. In addition to the unchanged rankings, a striking finding is that on the whole there has been a decline in the role of television in the political information of the public. Except for the designated news channels (HírTV, ATV), all other television channels were less frequently mentioned as sources of political information than in previous years. This is difficult to explain by any other factor than the fact that recently – especially as a result of the pandemic – people have increasingly turned towards the internet for news, and for many of them the role of television as a source of information has become less pronounced.

The public service radio stations have also lost ground in their market segment, especially Kossuth Rádió. Despite being a music radio, Retro is the leading radio station when it comes to political information (*Figure 4*).

Figure 4
Political/public affairs information from television (percent)



An important development in the **radio** market is that the frequency of Hungary's only major opposition radio, Klubrádió, has recently been threatened as the Media Council failed to automatically renew the frequency at the beginning of the year. As of the conclusion of this study, this news had reached roughly a third of the adult population. The demographic groups that are more likely to be affected by this decision (opposition voters, Budapest residents) were naturally more informed about this than the average. Of those who are aware of the situation of Klubrádió, 10% are certain that in the event that the radio will not be available by traditional means, they will nevertheless continue to listen it online, while another 20% consider this likely. In terms of the total voting age population, this corresponds to 6% and 13% of respondents, respectively.

Among those who indicated that they currently use Klubrádió as a source of political information, 31% said that they will certainly continue to listen to the station over the internet; among those who listen to it regularly (at least once a week), this ratio stood at 41%.

Roughly half of the station's listeners are 50 years or older. This age group is also more committed: Despite the fact that they are less comfortable moving about online, they were more likely to indicate that they would follow the station to a potential new platform than the younger listeners. Nevertheless, the expected audience figures of an

online-only Klubrádió are influenced by the lack of digital literacy: Currently, those in the age group between 50-59 are roughly equally likely to listen Klubrádió as those 60 or older; in the future, however, 46% of those between the ages of 50 and 59 are likely to do so over the internet, while only 31% of those aged 60 or older indicated that they would do so (Figure 5).

The intense competition between **online news sites** has intensified further still: As the internet has gained ground in news consumption in recent years, all leading online news sites have managed to expand their audiences as compared to a few years ago. Currently, 24.hu, index, hvg.hu and origo are most frequently mentioned as sources of information, while 444.hu has consolidated its 5th position (Figure 6).

At the time of our survey, the controversy surrounding Hungary's leading online newspaper, **index.hu**, was still raging hot. In the first half of October, nearly three-quarters of the public had heard that the entire newsroom of Index had quit over the summer. In other words, the decisive action taken by the Index staff had achieved its objective, and the efforts at controlling the online newspaper's contents had not gone unnoticed by the public. Just as we had seen in the context of other issues, we found here, too, that the level of respondents' information about this question correlated with their social status: Those with a lower social status tend to be less sen-

Figure 5

What do you think, will you continue to listen to Klubrádió over the internet if it won't be available as a traditional radio station any longer? (as a percentage of those who currently listen to Klubrádió)

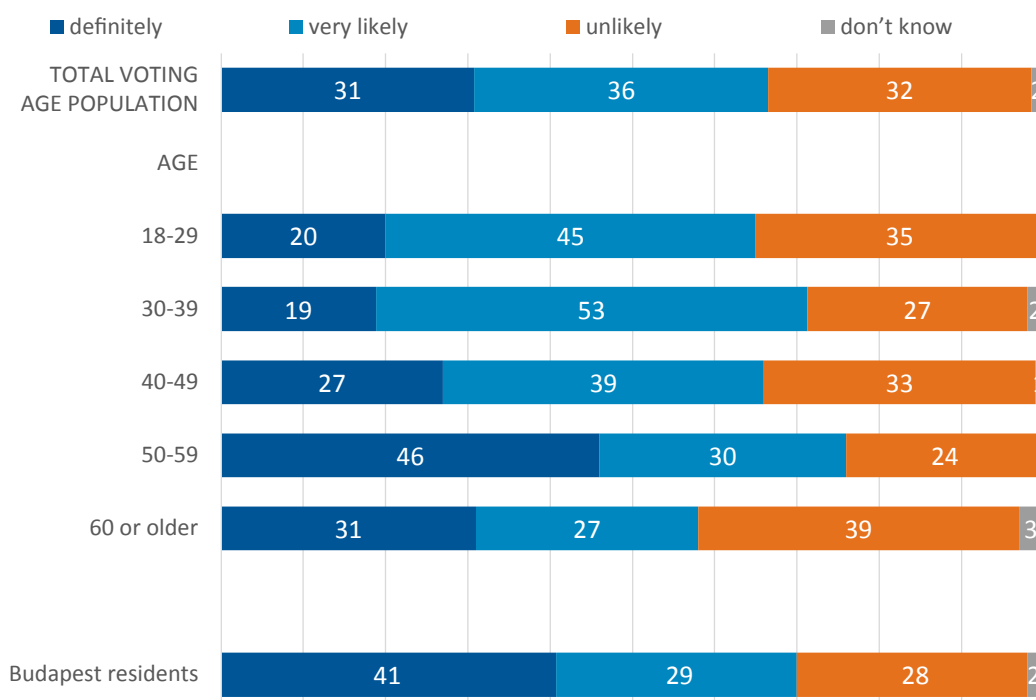
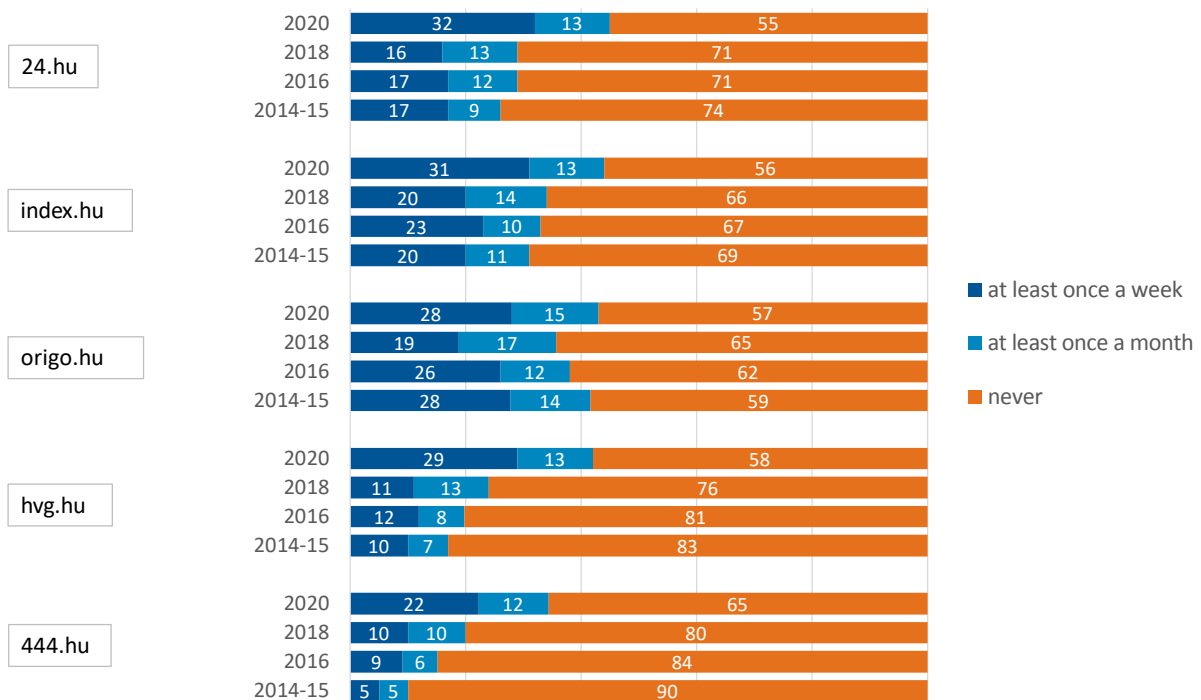


Figure 6

Trends in seeking political/public affairs information on online news sites (percent)



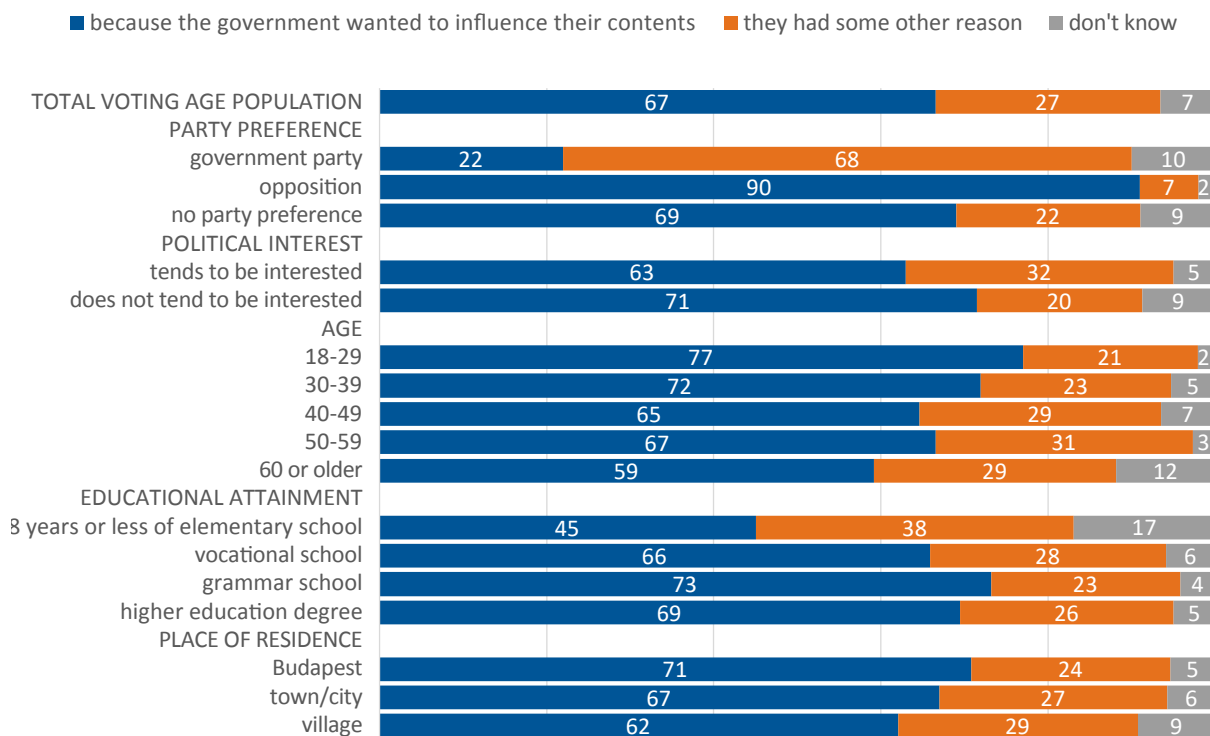
sitive about the state of the media and, correspondingly, even news about the media tend to be less likely to reach them.

Among those who were informed about the departure of the Index newsroom, an overwhelming majority (67%) considered that the government had attempted to influence the contents of the newspaper, while only 27% assumed that there was some other type of conflict in the background. The latter view was most typical of government party supporters, two-thirds (68%) of whom believe

that the plans concerning Index and the relevant changes were not a result of attempts by the government to influence the news site (*Figure 7*).

Eighteen percent of informed readers have been boycotting the website since the incident, while a further 23% read it less regularly than previously. If we zoom in on the previous readers of Index in particular, we find that 28% have completely turned away from the news site, 35% visit it less frequently, and 37% have not changed their reading habits concerning Index.

Figure 7

Perceptions of the reasons underlying Index's transformation**In your opinion, what was behind the resignation of Index's staff?** (percentage of respondents who have heard about the issue)

4.

ASSESSMENTS OF THE POLITICAL BALANCE IN THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA AND MEDIA INDEPENDENCE

The public takes a relatively grim view of the situation that prevails in the media today and of the possibilities of finding quality information in the media. Those who consider the Hungarian media a solid source of information constitute a minority and, moreover, their share has been continuously declining. In 2016, some 38% assessed that one could rely on the media to learn what was actually happening in the world; today, a mere quarter of the adult population share this view. An overwhelming majority (74%) agree that the Hungarian press is biased, and that the views of one political side will always be more prominently featured than the views of the other side. Further research on the Hungarian media situation suggests that although these negative and increasingly unfavourable views tend to be substantially influenced by the public distrust in the pro-government media, the latter is not the

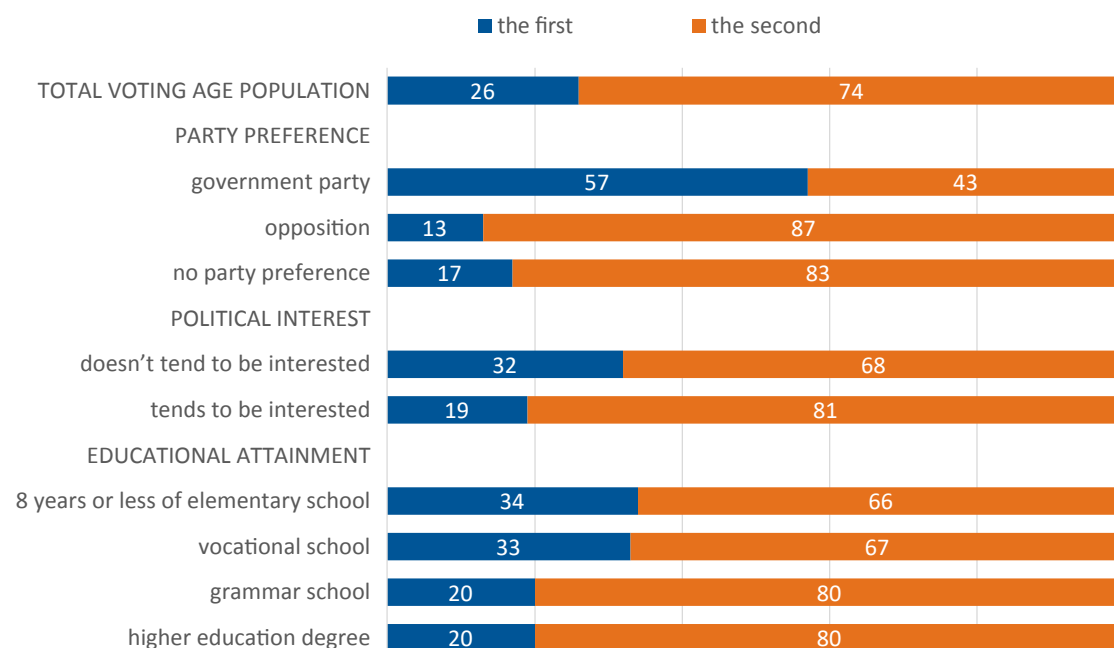
sole factor driving this trend: There are also quite a few respondents who view the media which are not supportive of the government as biased and lacking in credibility (Figure 8).

The majority (57%) assess that all major sources of news are influenced by one of the political sides. Government party supporters and opposition voters are almost in agreement when it comes to this point, although it is fair to assume that their views do not completely align when it comes to the underlying cause of the situation. There is a high level of agreement within the Hungarian public that Fidesz wields greater influence than the opposition on the media today: 82% of those who responded agree with this assessment, while only 5% believe that opposition views tend to predominate in the media. Even 65% of

Figure 8

Assessments of the objectivity of political/public affairs news sources

There are those who say that (1) one can inform oneself properly from the Hungarian media, that one can learn what the actual reality is by consulting these media; others (2) hold that the Hungarian press is biased and that the views of one side will always be featured more prominently than those of the other side. Which of these two views hews closer to your own?
(Percentage of respondents who responded substantively)



government party supporters agree with the assessment that Fidesz has more influence on the media. It is also worth noting, however, that 12% in this group believe that the opposition parties have a greater influence on the media. Thirteen percent of the voting age public believe that the media are balanced – 23% of government party supporters shared this assessment – and that no political side has a greater influence on the media than the other. (Figure 9).

An overwhelming – almost four-fifths (78%) – majority do not believe that it is acceptable for parties or other political players to interfere with the contents disseminated by a media outlet or to decide whether something may be published or not. A substantial majority of government party supporters believe that this is not how the media should operate, even though the percentage of those who believe that such interference is “totally” or “rather” acceptable is far higher in this cohort than among the average respondents (28%). It is noteworthy that young people – specifically the cohort of 18-29-year-olds – are less likely to view direct political influence as completely unacceptable than respondents in the older cohorts. A narrow majority of the public (56%) believe that direct political influence on the media is very typical, while another 27% perceive that such influences occur from time to time but are not typical of the way the media in Hungary operate. Government party supporters tend to see the phenomenon as less prevalent on the whole and are more likely to perceive it as an occasional rather than a typical occurrence. One interesting finding is that 39% of the population regularly consume pro-govern-

ment press products (TV2, public television, HírTV, Pesti TV, Magyar Nemzet, Ripost, county newspapers, Kossuth Rádió, Petőfi Rádió, 888.hu, origo.hu, ripost.hu, pestisracok.hu, Demokrata) even while they believe that it is completely unacceptable for political players to interfere with media contents.

The table below sums up how government party and opposition supporters view the question of attempts at influencing the media and direct interference with editorial content. With respect to Fidesz voters, the data show that they typically do not think direct interference into contents is acceptable, but the majority of them also believe that such interference is not typical in the pro-government media or they mitigate their assessment of the situation by arguing that such interference is typical in both pro-government media and media that are not sympathetic towards the government (Table 1).

Only a quarter of the adult population have heard about the Central European Press and Media Foundation (Közép-Európai Sajtó és Média Alapítvány – KESMA) or the fact that it is the sole owner of a vast majority of pro-government media. At a mere 16%, among government party supporters the level of awareness on the subject is even lower than the average. The data show that the news about KESMA was more likely to reach informed voters who typically support the opposition. Based on the above, it is unsurprising that two-thirds of those who have heard about KESMA view the concentration of the media market as problematic, while only 10% indicated that they were not concerned about this

Figure 9

Political influence on the media

In your opinion, which political side or party wields a greater influence in the Hungarian media?

(percentage of respondents who provided a substantial answers)

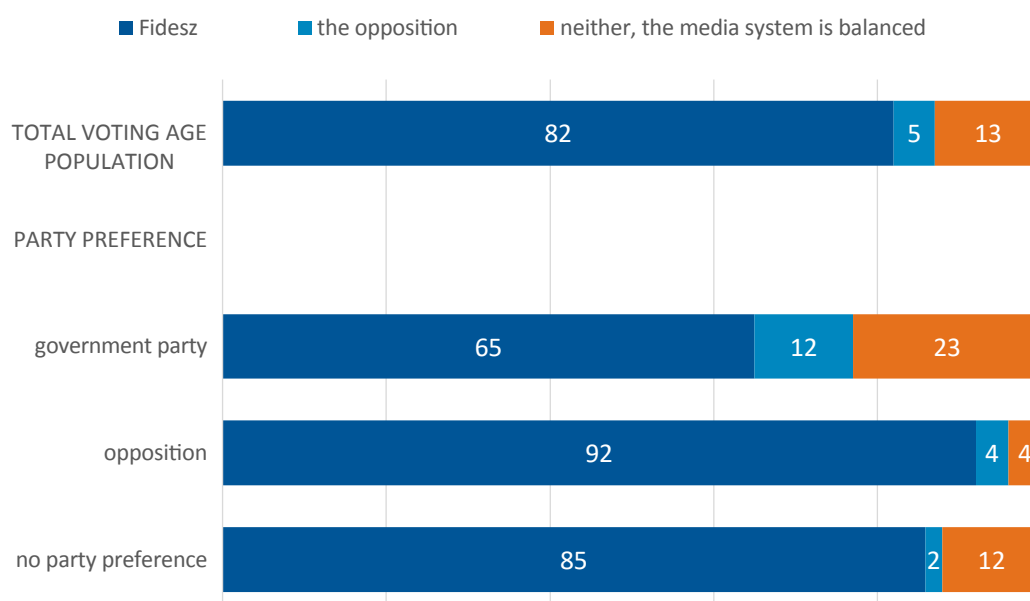


Table 1

Summary of the public perceptions concerning the direct political influence on press products percentage

	Voting age population	Government party voter	Opposition voter	No party preference
Such influence is acceptable				
Is typical of or occurs occasionally in the pro-government press	5	6	8	2
Is typical of or occurs occasionally in the opposition press	1	4	–	1
Is typical of or occurs occasionally in both the pro-government and the opposition press	7	11	4	6
Other combination of opinions	3	6	1	2
Such influence is unacceptable				
Is typical of or occurs occasionally in the pro-government press	34	5	63	31
Is typical of or occurs occasionally in the opposition press	6	16	3	2
Is typical of or occurs occasionally in both the pro-government and the opposition press	24	30	13	26
Other combination of opinions	10	13	5	13
Doesn't know whether this is acceptable	10	8	4	18

at all. Those Fidesz voters who are aware of KESMA typically do not believe it to be a problem (or they view it as a limited problem at most) for the ownership of pro-government media to be this concentrated in a single foundation.

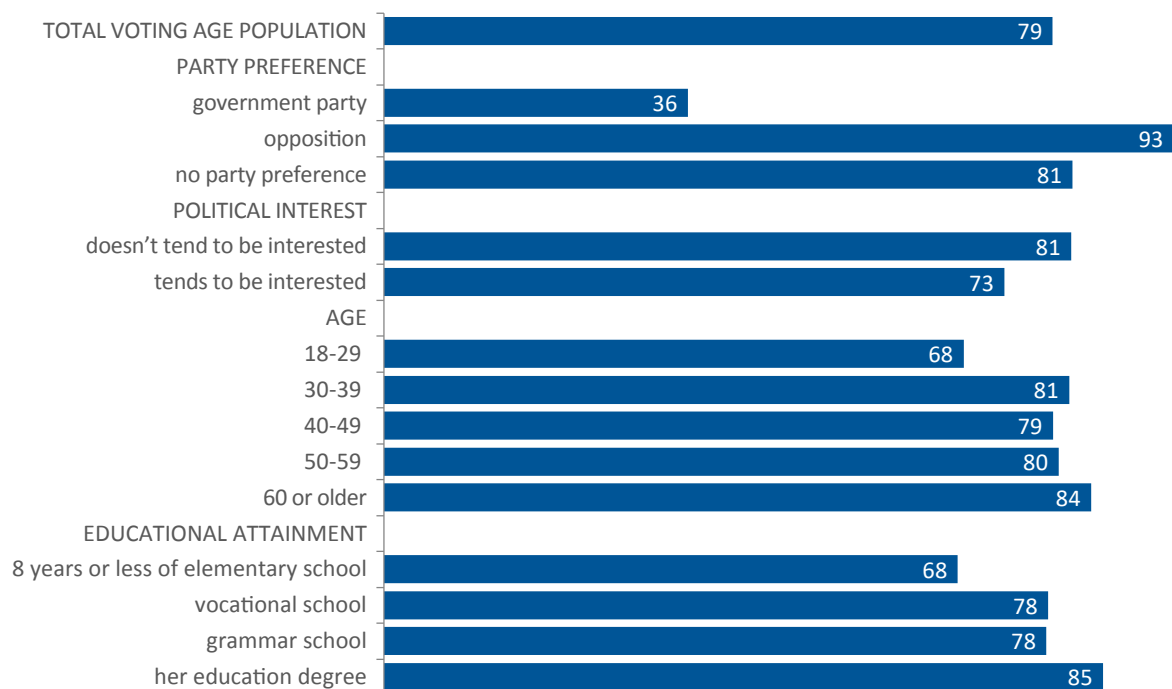
Once again we found that youths tend to be slightly less concerned about the independence of the press than the older cohorts. It would take further research to ascertain whether this reflects a lower level of sensitivity towards the freedom of the press specifically; a reflection of a less

pronounced interest in politics in general; or whether it is simply the result of the lower importance that this age group tends to attach to legacy media, where the above-mentioned processes tend to be predominantly centred. What the numbers reveal is that – the otherwise manifestly discernible – lower level of interest in politics among youths does not in and of itself explain this lack of concern, since the sensitivity towards this particular issue was less pronounced among both, those in the cohort who lack an interest in politics as well as those who follow public affairs more intensely (*Figure 10*).

Figure 10

Assessments of KESMA's media monopoly position

In terms of the need for balanced coverage, how much of a problem is it in your assessment that all these press products are owned by the same owner? (average values on a scale from 0 to 100 among respondents who have heard about the KESMA – N=509)



5.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE MEDIA'S FUNCTIONS

The majority of the public – including government party supporters – tend to agree that the function of the press is to uncover abuses in the world of politics. They think it is important for the public to have access to press products that shine a critical light on the activities of the government, and on the politicians and entrepreneurs with ties to the government. A relatively widely accepted idea – and one that did not tend to divide respondents along political fault lines – is that it is only natural for those in government to try to ensure that their views reach the public while the views of the opposition do not. Fidesz voters are more likely to agree with this claim, but the responses of opposition voters and those without a party preferences also tended to strongly reflect this idea (*Figure 11*).

Unlike the previous statements, the proposition that “it’s disconcerting that the media are increasingly controlled by Fidesz” proved to be a highly divisive claim; although the average level of agreement with this claim (66 points on

the 100-point scale) was rather high, government party supporters were far less likely to share this view than opposition voters or those without a party preference. The public takes a somewhat dimmer view of the situation today than two years ago.

A significant proportion of government party supporters believe that the opposition press typically tries to discredit the government with false claims, and the majority of this cohort also agree that it is annoying that many media outlets present information that casts Fidesz’s activities in a negative light. This is revealing not only with respect to the intensity of their political commitment and their confidence in the government, but at the same time it also highlights that their liberal views concerning the role of the press (to wit, a majority agree that balanced information and the possibility of presenting information that is critical of the government are important) only apply at the level of rhetoric (*Table 2*).

Figure 11

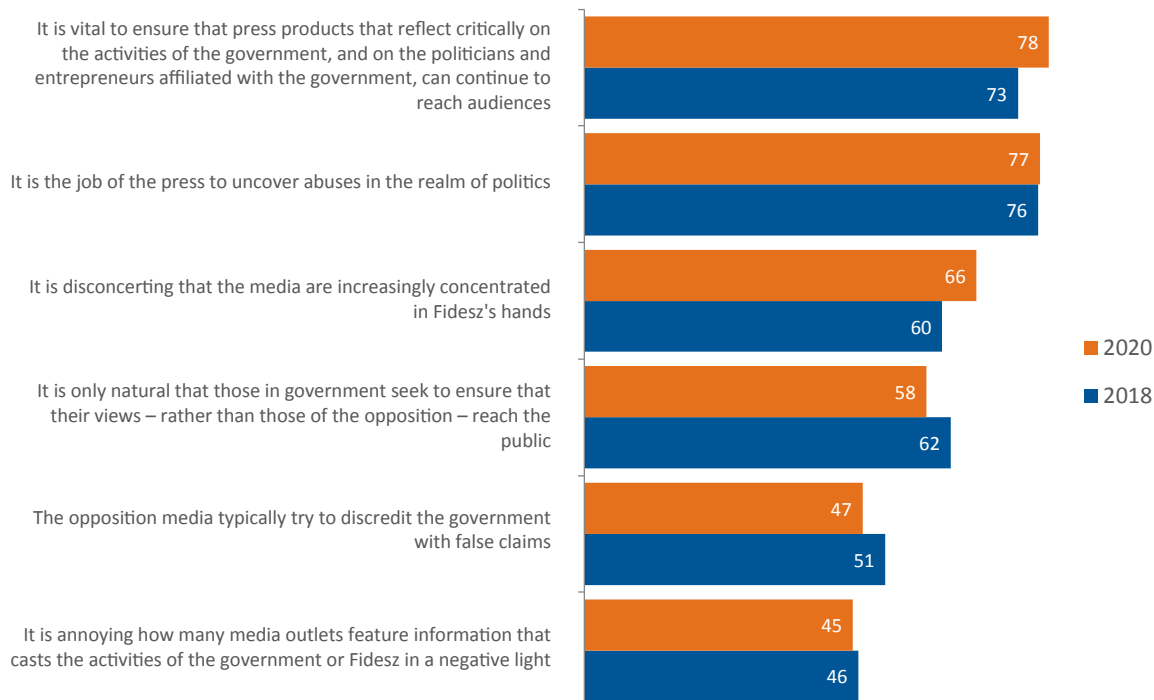
Opinions about the media (average values on a scale of 0 to 100 among respondents who provided a substantial answer)

Table 2

Opinions about the media, broken down by the respondents' party preferences

(average results on a scale from 0-100, by party preferences)

	voting age population	government party supporters	opposition party supporters	no party preference
It is vital to ensure that press products that reflect critically on the activities of the government, and on the politicians and entrepreneurs affiliated with the government, can continue to reach audiences	78	71	86	77
It is the job of the press to uncover abuses in the realm of politics	77	73	82	74
It is disconcerting that the media are increasingly concentrated in Fidesz's hands	66	37	86	68
It is only natural that those in government seek to ensure that their views – rather than those of the opposition – reach the public	58	65	51	57
The opposition media typically try to discredit the government with false claims	47	69	29	46
It is annoying how many media outlets feature information that casts the activities of the government or Fidesz in a negative light	45	67	30	44

6.

SUBSCRIPTIONS, DONATIONS

A tenth of the adult population subscribe to a political newspaper or weekly, while 8 percent subscribe to a local newspaper (county dailies). The latter data point explains why the share of subscribers is higher among government party supporters than among opposition supporters or those without a party preference.

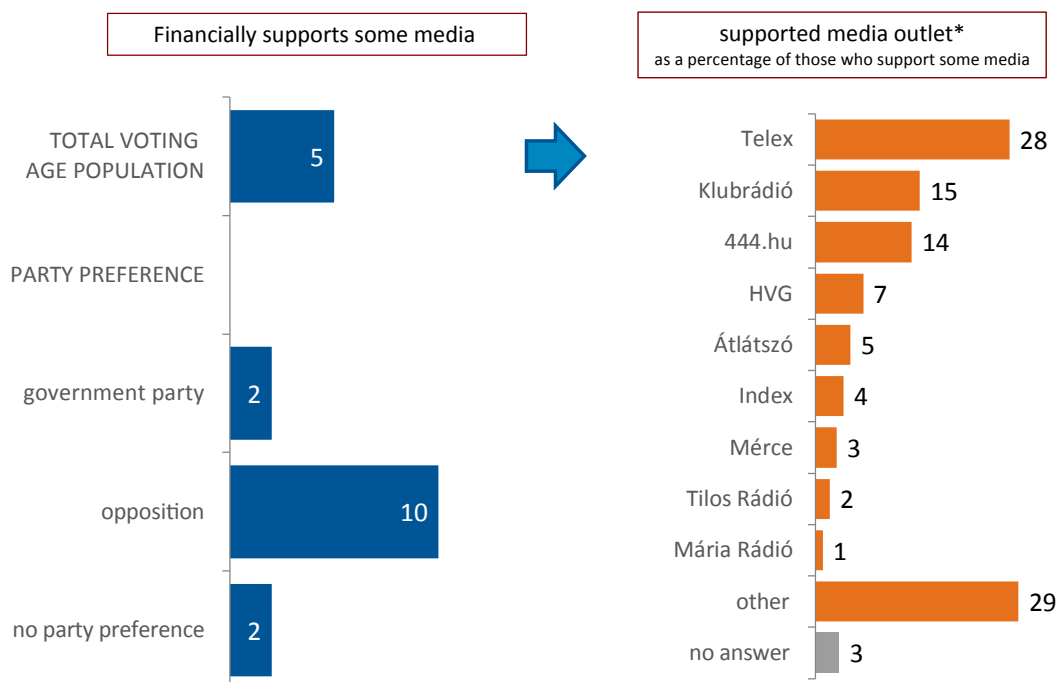
As compared to the long-established practice of subscriptions, voluntary donations for media products are a novel phenomenon. Nevertheless, 5% of the voting-age public already contribute money to media outlets. This is mainly typical of opposition voters, 10% of whom finan-

cially support some media either occasionally or regularly. Respondents were most likely to donate to Telex (over a quarter of all donors), but the share of those who support Klubrádió or 444.hu was also high (15% and 14%, respectively).

Most donors do not expect access to exclusive contents in exchange for their donations. Only 12% of them said that such exclusive features motivated their donations; the majority indicated that they wanted independent media to survive and to help ensure that such contents will be available to everyone (*Figure 12*).

Figure 12

Financial support for press products



*The question was open-ended, respondents submitted their own answers

7.

CONCLUSIONS

The year 2020 has been out of the ordinary in many respects, including news consumption patterns. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, we found a substantial increase in the demand for news, and the measures taken in response to the pandemic have moved into the centre of political public discourse. On the one hand, our most recent data reflect a surge in the interest in public affairs, which is at the same time accompanied by a rise in the role of online and social media news sources, which are more adept at satisfying the public's growing appetite for immediate news. The fundamental question of the coming period is whether these patterns will become fixed and established as the new dominant paradigm, or whether once the pandemic subsides, the television-centred news consumption and the concomitant moderate level of interest in public affairs will prevail once again.

These developments allow for the conclusion that from the perspective of political communication, the opposition parties would be well advised to focus even more intensely than until now on their online and social media presence; not only because they lack access to much of the legacy media in any case but also because their (potential) voters will also be more likely to look for news online.

The youngest cohort of voters is still most likely to either completely eschew political information or to consume it only irregularly. At the same time, the wide range of measures taken by the governing party that have an impact on this generation in particular provide an opening for the independent media and the opposition side to reach out to younger voters more effectively than until now.

Our data provide powerful evidence that individuals' partisan preferences have a substantial impact not only on their choice of news source but also on how they interpret and assess the news. Government party voters obviously prefer pro-government media outlets and are more likely to consider these credible. At the same time, they also interpret everyday events in line with the government's narrative, even in situations when they encounter news sources that present news in a context that is anti-

thetical to the governmental narratives. The differences are especially pronounced in the respondents' assessment of the credibility of individual news sources. The intense polarisation of Hungarian society is readily apparent in the respondents' news consumption and interpretation patterns. Regrettably, this will constitute a long-term impediment to a reasonable and measured public discourse across the political divide, since those who stand on the mutually opposing sides of said divide do not consider the media outlets they associate with the respective other side as credible.

A substantial portion of government party supporters are aware that Fidesz dominates the entire media system, but they do not consider this a problem at all. Nevertheless, even to an overwhelming majority of government party voters, the practice whereby a newsroom is controlled from the outside and essentially disseminates prewritten materials is considered unacceptable. It seems, however, that government party supporters are either unaware that such practices exist or they fail to acknowledge this reality in the context of pro-government media outlets.

An important challenge for the independent media, NGOs and the opposition is to reach out to government party supporters and to present them with the most indisputable facts at hand to demonstrate beyond doubt that editorial freedom does not prevail in the pro-government media in the manner that government party supporters would expect from the media they consume.

The transformation of Hungary's leading news site, Index, and the launch of a new news site, Telex, by the former staff of Index who quit in protest of meddling by the management, appears to indicate a breakthrough in terms of the public's willingness to pay for news. For the independent media, this leads to the conclusion that they will not attract the highest number of subscribers or donors with the promise of exclusive contents, but rather with the promise that by operating sustainably they can furnish an increasing number of voters with reliable and credible information.

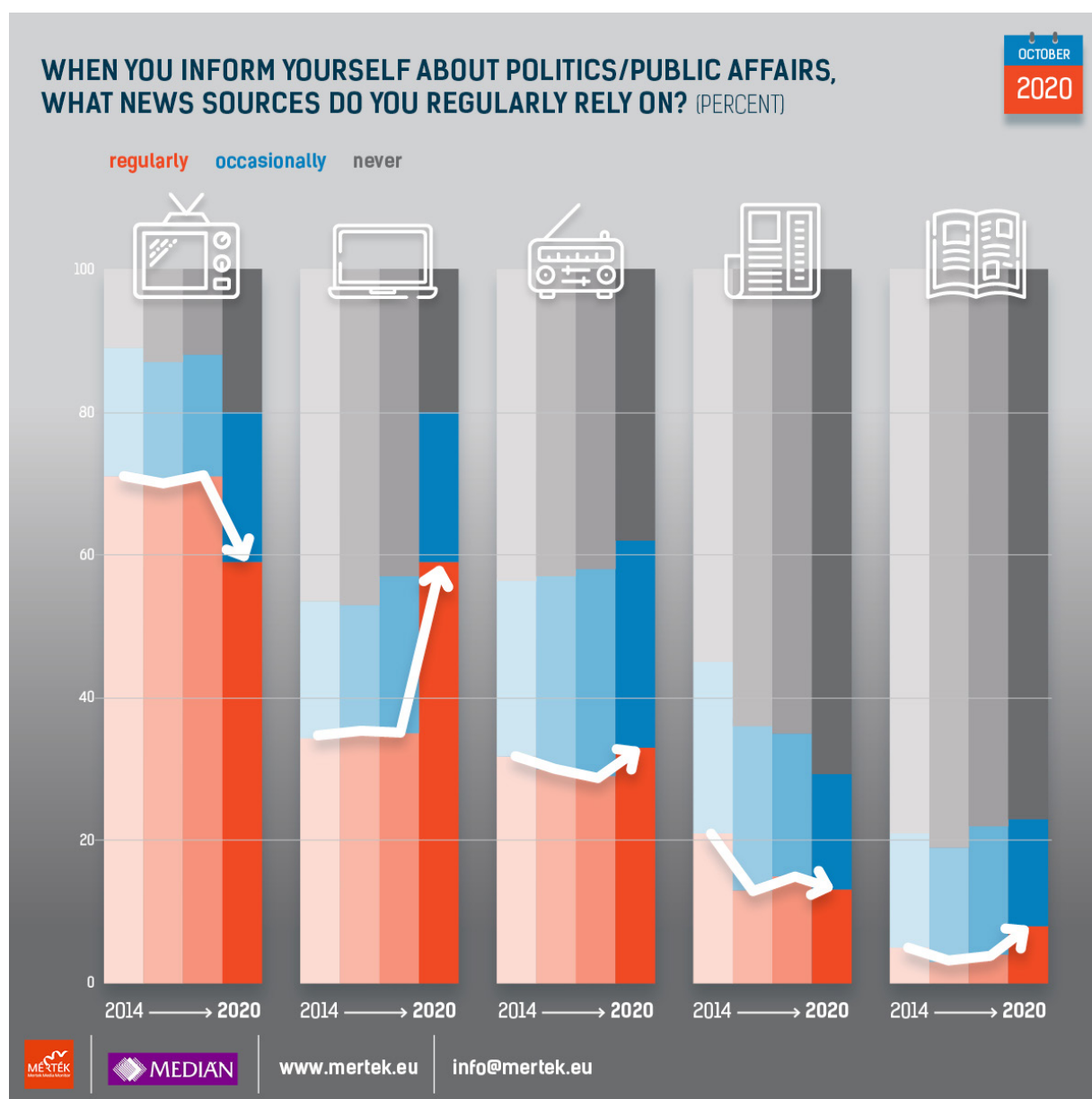
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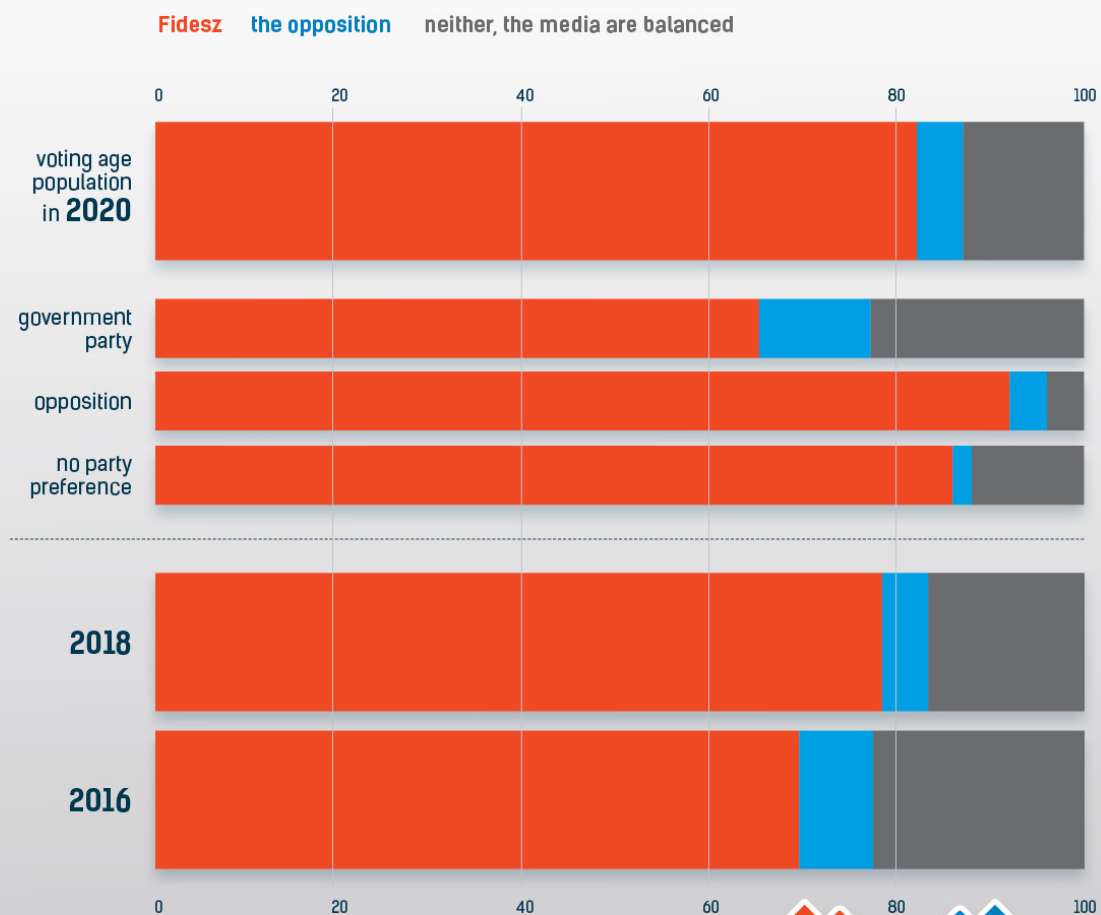
APPENDIX



IN YOUR ASSESSMENT, WHICH POLITICAL SIDE OR PARTY WIELDS A GREATER INFLUENCE IN THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA?

(as a percentage of those who provided a substantive answer)

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2020



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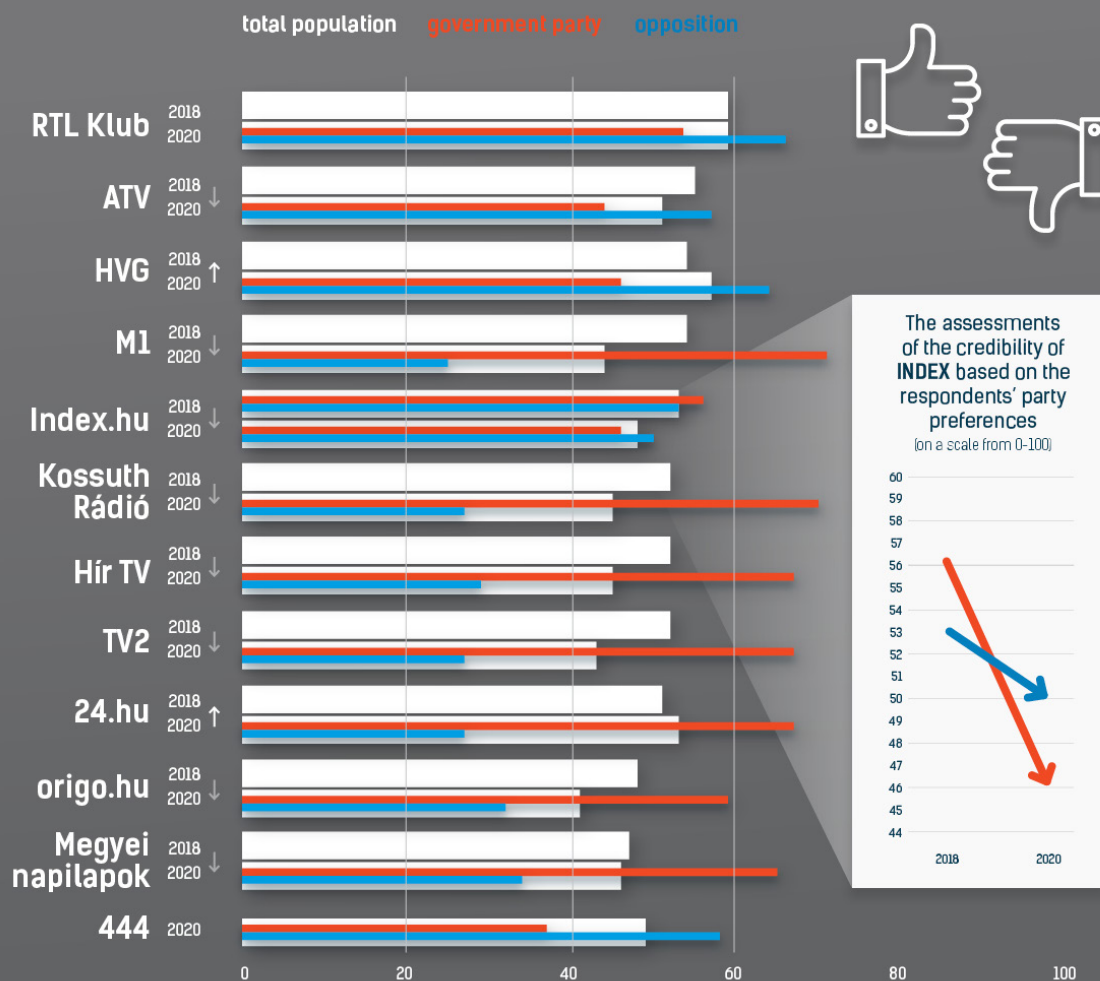


ASSESSMENTS OF THE CREDIBILITY OF NEWS SOURCES

(on a scale from 0-100)

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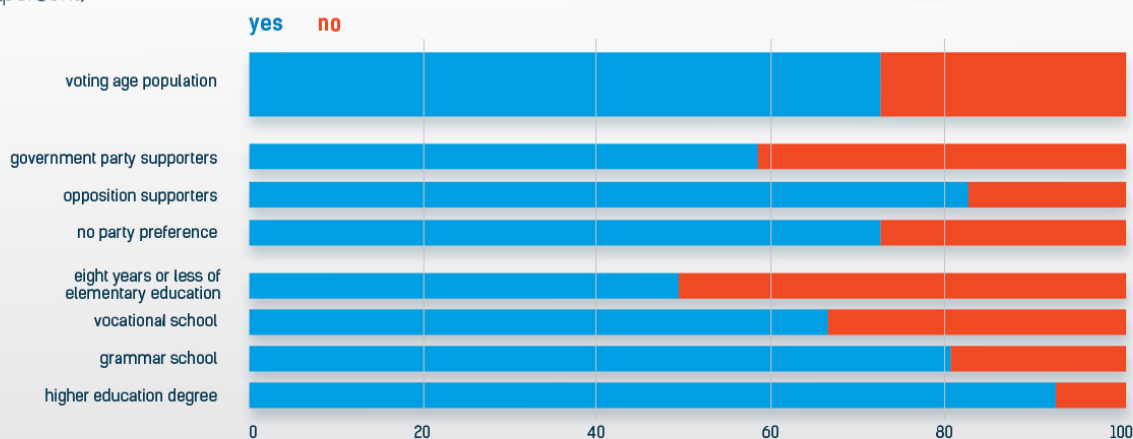
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HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE FACT THAT THE ENTIRE NEWSROOM OF THE INDEX NEWS SITE RESIGNED THIS SUMMER?

(percent)

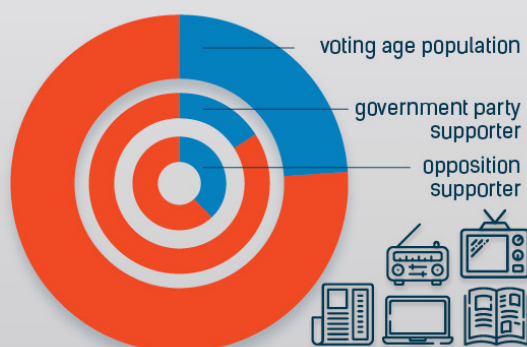


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2020



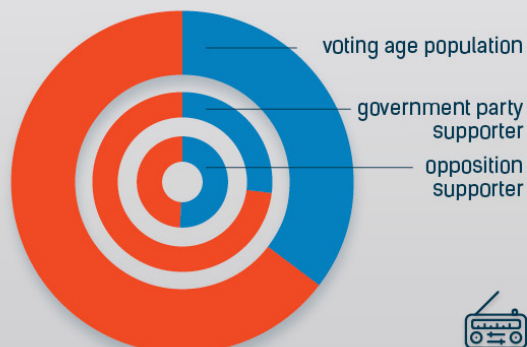
HAVE YOU HEARD ABOUT THE FACT THAT THERE IS A HUNGARIAN FOUNDATION WHICH OWNS NEARLY ALL OF THE PRO-GOVERNMENT MEDIA? IT IS CALLED CENTRAL EUROPEAN PRESS AND MEDIA FOUNDATION, ABBREVIATED AS KESMA [IN HUNGARIAN] (%)

have heard about this have not heard about this



HAVE YOU HEARD THAT KLUBRÁDIÓ WILL NOT BE ALLOWED TO CONTINUE BROADCASTING ON THE RADIO FREQUENCY IT CURRENTLY USES WITHOUT REAPPLYING FOR THE FREQUENCY IN A COMPETITIVE TENDER, IN OTHER WORDS ITS FUTURE OPERATION AS A RADIO IS IN JEOPARDY? (%)

have heard about this have not heard about this



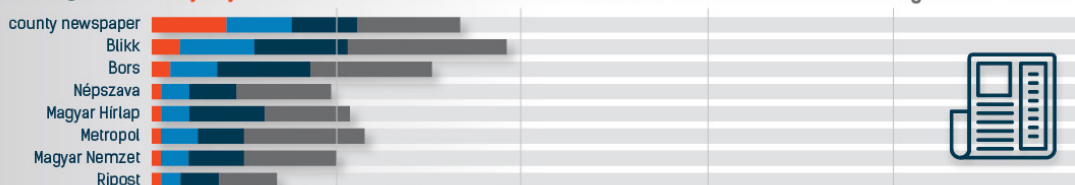
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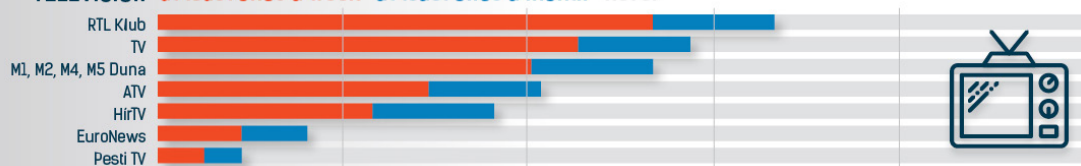
WHAT MEDIA CITIZENS USE TO INFORM THEMSELVES ABOUT POLITICS/PUBLIC AFFAIRS (percentage)

OCTOBER
2020

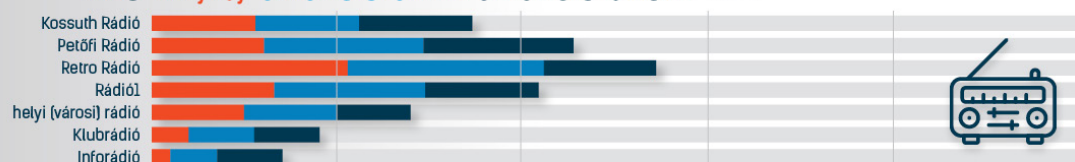
DAILY NEWSPAPER Every day at least once a week at least once a month used to read it but no longer does neither



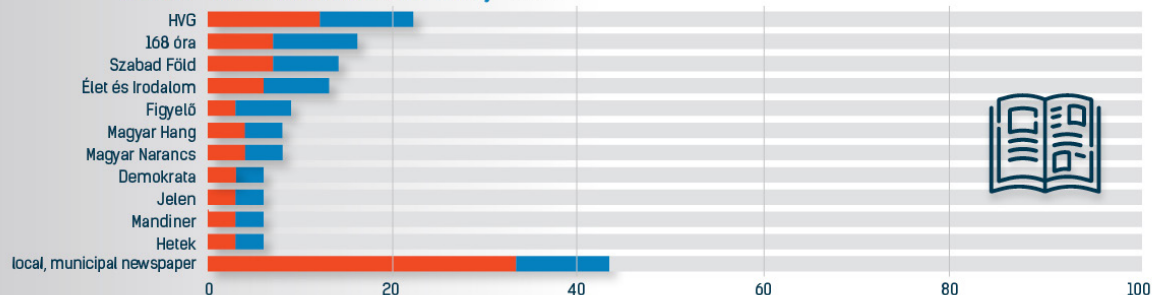
TELEVISION at least once a week at least once a month never



RADIO every day at least once a week at least once a month never



WEEKLY at least once a month rarely never



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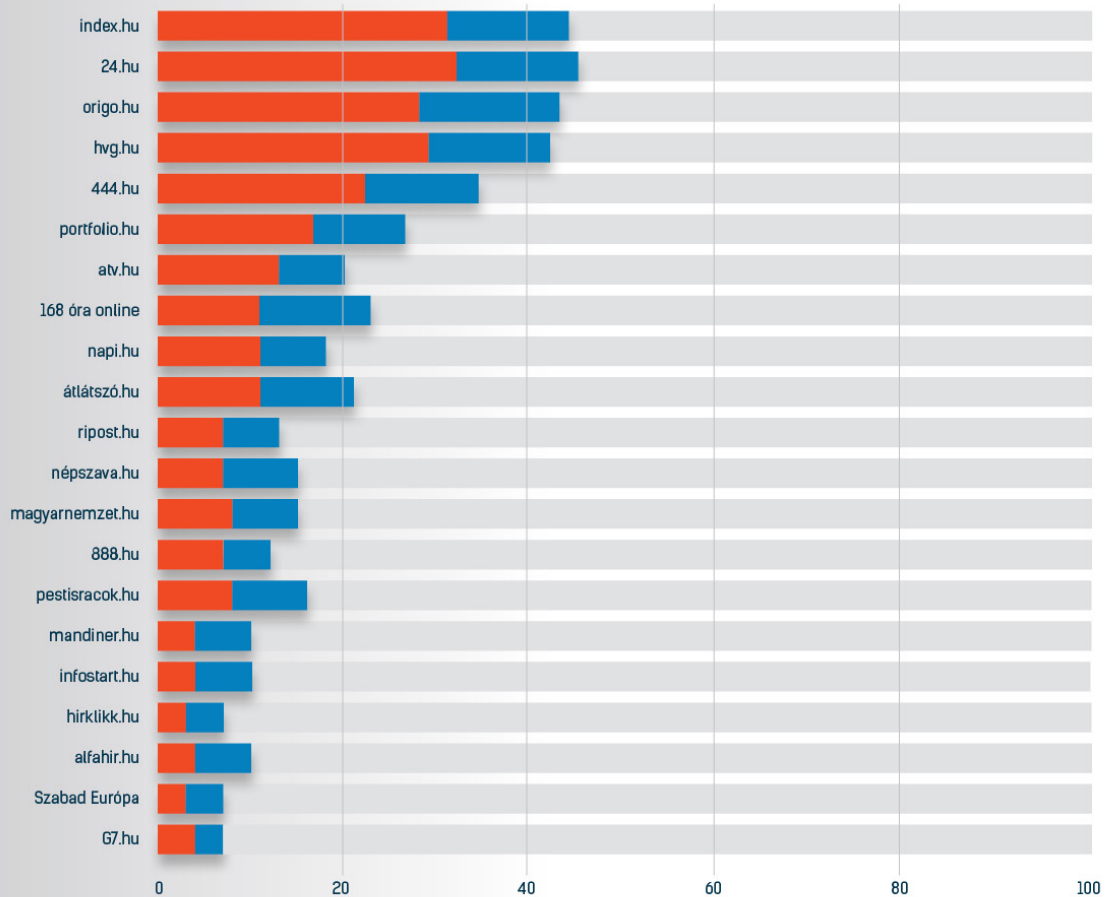
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CITIZENS USE OF INTERNET NEWS SITES IN INFORMING THEMSELVES ABOUT PUBLIC AFFAIRS/POLITIC (percentage)

OCTOBER
2020

at least once a week once in a while never



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ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS

Mérték Media Monitor was established in 2011, when the Orbán government used its two-thirds majority in parliament to adopt the new media laws. Ever since, Mérték has been monitoring the media authority's activities, as well as the broader impact of the media regulations on the diversity of the media markets and of media contents, as well as on the work and professional conduct of journalists. Mérték's work has been continuously featured in the main public professional and civic forums, thereby helping to promote press freedom and the principle of democratic public discourse.

The **Medián Public Opinion and Market Research Institute** was founded in 1989 by social science scholars with decades of experience. It is one of Hungary's most renowned public opinion research companies. It focuses mainly on market research, but ever since its founding it has also been committed to tracking social trends and the evolution of public opinion on politics.

The **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung** (FES) is committed to the fundamental values of social democracy: it stands for the principles of freedom, justice, solidarity, peace, and cooperation. The FES aims to contribute to the development of democracy, the rule of law, and social justice in political and public life, fostering understanding between the people of a shared Europe.

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AN INFECTED MEDIA SYSTEM

The Sources of Political Information in Hungary, 2020



Our research findings suggest that the stable news consumption patterns of the past years have been shaken up. The role of the internet has practically caught up with that of television, while the role of social media in particular has appreciated even more distinctly. The Covid-19 pandemic has led to a substantial increase in the demand for news, and at the same time the measures concerning the pandemic have moved to the fore of political discourse and debates. The data reflect a surge in the public's demand for and interest in politics and public affairs information, while at the same time they also highlight the increasing role of online and social media news sources that can swiftly satisfy the desire for news.

The share of those who do not inform themselves at all or do not do so regularly is still highest in the youngest cohort of voters. At the same time, these young people are also the most likely to turn towards the internet for news rather than to rely on offline media.



Naturally, government party voters prefer pro-government media outlets and believe these to be more credible; at the same time, they interpret the daily events in line with the government's narrative. The differences stemming from partisan preferences are especially dramatically pronounced when it comes to assessment of the credibility of news sources.

The intense polarisation of Hungarian society is also strikingly reflected in the patterns of news consumption and news interpretation.

A significant share of government party supporters are aware that Fidesz dominates the media system, and they do not view this negatively at all. At the same time, the overwhelming majority of them also believe that the practice whereby a newsroom is controlled from the outside and must publish pre-written articles is unacceptable. It seems, however, that government party supporters are either unaware that such practices exist or they fail to acknowledge this reality in the context of pro-government media outlets.



The transformation of Hungary's leading news site, Index, and the launch of a new news site, Telex, by the former staff of Index who quit in protest of meddling by the management, appears to indicate a breakthrough in terms of the public's willingness to pay for news. One of the most dramatic events of 2020 was the joint and simultaneous resignation of the entire Index team, and it appears that the import of this development is being appreciated even by some segments of the general audience who generally tend to pay less attention to media market developments. Large segments of the public have also taken notice of the Media Council's decision threatening the future of Hungary's only major critical radio station, Klubrádió. Telex – which is seeking to replace Index – and Klubrádió were the most successful fundraisers in the period examined.

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