

From Joke to Legitimacy:
The Transforming Role of the Hungarian
Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) in the
Opposition Landscape

By

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Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) was used in this work. I, the author, have reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content, claims, and references.

An overview of the use of GenAI is provided below.

- I used Google Gemini to assist with data visualization. The tool was used to provide Python code scripts for generating the data visualizations presented in the thesis.
- I used Grammarly to assist with language editing. The tool was used to provide spelling and grammatical checks to ensure the correctness of the English language.

Vienna, 11 December 2025

David Fenyves

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the political evolution of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (*Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt*, MKKP) within the context of Hungary's hybrid regime. It argues that the MKKP has transcended the traditional "joke party" typology by shifting from satirical critique to "Micro-Performance Legitimacy," a strategy wherein political authority is constructed through the tangible remediation of local infrastructure and civic action. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates a targeted online public opinion survey (N=257) with a semi-structured elite interview to analyze voter behavior and internal party strategy. The empirical findings reveal that the opposition electorate overwhelmingly views the MKKP as a credible actor (83.7%), refuting the notion that it functions solely as a vehicle for nihilistic protest. Voters display a coherent progressive-green value profile rather than chaotic anti-establishment sentiment. However, the analysis identifies a structural "Competency Ceiling": while the party enjoys high trust regarding local problem-solving, voters express skepticism regarding its national governing capacity. This limitation is framed as a strategic trade-off: by prioritizing authenticity and organic growth over the intangible promises of traditional politics, the party distinguishes itself from the establishment but simultaneously reinforces the "joke" heuristic that limits its perceived executive viability. Consequently, the study uncovers a significant "hidden electorate" that aligns with MKKP values but votes strategically for the Tisza Party to ensure government change. The thesis concludes that while MKKP successfully functions as a hybrid civil-political actor, its electoral growth remains constrained by the coordination dilemmas inherent to the Hungarian dominant-party system.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DK — *Demokratikus Koalíció* (Democratic Coalition)

EP — European Parliament

Fidesz — *Fiatal Demokraták Szövetsége* (Alliance of Young Democrats)

KDNP — *Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt* (Christian Democratic People's Party)

MKKP — *Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt* (Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party)

MSZP — *Magyar Szocialista Párt* (Hungarian Socialist Party)

NER — *Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere* (System of National Cooperation)

NGO — Non-Governmental Organization

Tisza — *Tisztelet és Szabadság Párt* (Respect and Freedom Party)

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Political Context of the Hybrid Regime

The consolidation of Hungary's "System of National Cooperation" (*Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere*, NER) under the Fidesz-KDNP coalition since 2010 has significantly changed the political landscape. It has created a hybrid regime where democratic institutions exist but are systematically forced to favor those in power (Bozóki and Hegedűs 2018, 1174–76). This political environment features high levels of power centralization (Bánkuti et al. 2013, 268) blurred distinctions between party and state (Ágh 2022, 14), and a media landscape largely dominated by government-aligned interests (Ágh 2022, 9–11). This centralization has led to a structural weakness: the regime often centralizes resources while pushing responsibility down. Local municipalities frequently face statutory duties, such as maintaining roads and public spaces, but lack the funding to fulfill them. This situation results in clear signs of state failure, such as potholes, deteriorating bus stops, and unmaintained parks (Le 2020).

To further intensify the imbalance in power dynamics, the electoral system is a mixed system that favors majorities. It heavily penalizes fragmentation and forces diverse opposition groups into cooperation dilemmas. This often leads to strategic paralysis (Végh 2024). Because of this situation, traditional opposition parties have experienced a dual crisis. First, they face a crisis of effectiveness, as evidenced by repeated and severe electoral defeats in 2014, 2018, and 2022. Second, and perhaps more damaging, they face a crisis of credibility. Voters often see these parties as either complicit in maintaining the regime or unable to present a viable alternative to the dominant populist narrative of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. This ongoing failure to challenge the status quo has resulted in

significant voter disillusionment and apathy. It has created a gap in representation for voters who oppose the government but find the traditional opposition unappealing (Susánszky et al. 2020).

1.1.1 The Emergence of the Tisza Party

The political landscape changed dramatically in early 2024 with the sudden rise of the Tisza Party (*Tisztelet és Szabadság Párt*), led by Péter Magyar. He came from the NER elite, and his movement quickly brought together the discontented voters. More importantly, it started to weaken Orbán's once firm hold on his supporters. Magyar did so by campaigning on a platform of anti-corruption, technocratic competence, and national unity. Unlike the fragmented traditional opposition, Tisza managed to position itself as a singular, viable challenger to Fidesz, drawing support from across the ideological spectrum. This development altered the strategic environment for smaller parties like the MKKP (Kovarek 2025). Before the rise of Tisza, the dominant narrative was that smaller parties should either run together or not at all to avoid splitting the anti-Fidesz vote. This often resulted in a "wasted vote" narrative for MKKP. However, Tisza's consolidation has transformed the same dynamic to a different narrative: it is now the "one party everyone should vote for" to defeat Fidesz, creating an even more intense pressure on MKKP sympathizers to vote instrumentally rather than expressively (Szabó 2025; Tóth 2025).

1.2 The Research Puzzle

This phenomenon presents an important puzzle for political science. Historically, satirical parties have struggled to last, often functioning as temporary expressions of countercultural or anti-establishment sentiment. There's a clear lack of continuity in this party family: nearly all "classic" joke parties that emerged in the latter half of the 20th century vanished by the 1990s (Glied and Szegedi 2024). Even among the second generation, few have achieved the consistent organizational stability needed to endure beyond a single crisis period. However, MKKP's journey suggests

something different. Despite maintaining a humorous exterior and using satire as its main communication tool, the party has existed for nearly 20 years, demonstrating organic growth and increasing political success.

How does a political entity based on irony and absurdity gain real political legitimacy in a system that values strength and stability? Why do voters in a polarized, high-stakes election system, now dominated by the Fidesz-Tisza rivalry, choose to support a "joke" candidate when there are "serious" options available to challenge the incumbent? These questions challenge our understanding of political legitimacy in hybrid regimes, suggesting it can be established through non-traditional means that overlook conventional measures of political success.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

This thesis examines how the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party has turned its unconventional political methods (satire, street art, and direct urban intervention) into a source of alternative political legitimacy. It argues that MKKP represents a shift from traditional ideological legitimacy, which relies on clear policy platforms and ideological alignment, to a hybrid form of performance legitimacy, based on the tangible improvement of local infrastructure, the civic policing of the hybrid regime, and an authentic representation of the active liberal left. This form of legitimacy stems from the visible, often humorous, correction of state failures, positioning the party as a practical problem-solver in contrast to the perceived ineffectiveness of both the government and the traditional opposition.

The central research question guiding this study is: How did the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party's unconventional methods contribute to its growing political legitimacy, and what mechanisms explain its increasing support across different segments of the Hungarian electorate?

To answer this, the thesis investigates five sub-questions:

- 1) How do voters assess MKKP's credibility compared to traditional parties, and how does this assessment affect different levels of electoral commitment among voter segments?
- 2) Which specific methods (humor vs. local action) contribute the most to this credibility, and how do these methods interact to influence voter perceptions?
- 3) Where does MKKP stand in the ideological space of the opposition?
- 4) Is there a noticeable "strategic voting" segment within the opposition that aligns with MKKP values but chooses a larger party due to concerns about viability?
- 5) Does the party have a "competency ceiling" that limits its potential to local rather than national governance?

1.3.1 Hypotheses

Based on preliminary data and theoretical expectations, this study tests the following hypotheses:

- H1: MKKP's unconventional methods (street art, humor) significantly contribute to its perceived political legitimacy.
- H2: MKKP voters form a distinct ideological cluster characterized by progressive, green, and anti-corruption values, distinguishing them from simple protest voters.
- H3: The majority of politically active voters do not view MKKP as a joke party anymore but as a serious political actor.
- H4: Support for the MKKP is characterized by high normative approval but comparatively low electoral commitment.
- H5: A segment of opposition voters show greater value alignment with MKKP than with their chosen party, consistent with strategic voting behavior.
- H6: MKKP's legitimacy is constrained by a "Competency Ceiling": voters rate its local problem-solving capacity high but its national governing viability low.

- H7: MKKP functions as a "hybrid civil–political actor" whose legitimacy is partly derived from perceptions of civic activism rather than party politics.

1.4 Roadmap

The thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework, integrating literature on "Second-Generation Joke Parties" and the "Politics of Infrastructure." It explains how MKKP's methods create legitimacy in a hybrid regime. Chapter 3 outlines the mixed-methods research design, detailing the online public opinion survey (N=257) and the elite interview with the party's political coordinator. Chapter 4 presents the first part of the empirical analysis, focusing on sources of legitimacy. It deconstructs the "joke" myth, showing that the electorate views MKKP as a credible player with a distinct, progressive value profile. Chapter 5 examines the limits of growth. It analyzes the "Strategic Voter" dilemma within the Tisza electorate and consolidates findings on the "Competency Ceiling." Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the thesis.

CHAPTER 2 – THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To understand MKKP's organic growth, one must look beyond the traditional divide between "serious" and "joke" politics. The relevant theoretical landscape includes the role of satire in countering populism, the evolution of satirical parties into civic actors, and the emergence of infrastructure as a site of political contest. This framework allows for a detailed analysis of how MKKP uses these elements to build a unique form of political authority.

2.1 Satire as a Counter-Hegemonic Weapon

In the context of the Hungarian hybrid regime, political satire serves not just as entertainment, but as a powerful tool for accountability and resistance. Boukes and Hameleers (2020) argue that satire is especially good at undermining populist rhetoric by exposing the lack of real solutions in populist claims. Their analysis shows that humorously holding populists accountable can decrease their appeal more effectively than dry, factual rebuttals, since it targets the emotional and performative core of populism rather than trying to engage in rational debates that populists often avoid.

For MKKP, this idea is central to their "negative campaign" strategy. By adopting the persona of the populist and promising "everything to everyone," such as providing eternal life as a healthcare policy or putting the national debt up for a lottery as their economic plan, they use a form of absurdity that makes both the government's and the traditional opposition's propaganda seem ridiculous. This act of over-identification with populist metaphors serves to deconstruct the official narrative, exposing its emptiness. As Hyttinen (2024) notes in her ethnographic study of MKKP, this humor becomes a coping mechanism and a form of resistance in a constrained public sphere where direct political opposition is often pushed aside. It allows the party to bypass the apathy frequently generated by traditional political discourse, re-engaging citizens who have otherwise

exited the political process by breaking through the noise and creating a network of activists (called *passivists*) who essentially become the party itself.

2.2 The "Second-Generation" Joke Party

The academic literature on satirical parties has evolved to recognize distinct typologies. Early joke parties were often single-issue or purely frivolous, like the "Beer Lovers" parties of the 1990s. Glied and Szegedi (2024) identify a new phenomenon: the "Second-Generation Joke Party." These parties are characterized by a more sophisticated approach that combines humor with useful political critique and action. According to Glied and Szegedi, these entities, MKKP being a prime example, blend satire with genuine political involvement. They do not just mock the system; they engage with it to spotlight its failures and propose, often implicitly, alternative ways of governing. This fits into a broader global trend noted in 'The Rise of Satirical Political Parties' (Naeem 2023), which highlights how satirical parties are increasingly achieving electoral success by filling the void left by unresponsive traditional parties. MKKP fits this model by operating as a "hybrid actor": it uses the tools of a joke party, such as absurdity, irony, performance, to perform the functions of a serious civic organization, such as charity, transparency, community building.

2.3 The Politics of Infrastructure and Performance Legitimacy

A key theoretical lens for understanding MKKP's staying power is the "politics of infrastructure," which redefines the maintenance of public goods as a political act. Marietta Le (2020) examines how grassroots initiatives in Hungary tackle infrastructural decay, like potholes and run-down bus stops, as a direct critique of state failure. In this view, fixing a pothole, or painting it four colors to make it visible, is not just about making things look better; it is a claim to performance legitimacy. In a hybrid regime where the state claims a monopoly on competence but fails to deliver basic public goods, the actor who "fixes the bench" claims legitimacy by showing greater effectiveness.

The idea of "Micro-Performance Legitimacy" suggests that voters assess MKKP not based on its satirical ideological platform, but on its actual results, which are serious. This shifts the foundation of political trust from promises to actions, a crucial distinction for the empirical analysis in Chapter 4. By consistently performing these small acts of governance, MKKP builds a reservoir of trust that traditional parties, focused on abstract policy debates, often struggle to compete with.

2.4 Strategic Voting in Dominant Party Systems

Finally, understanding the behavior of the opposition electorate requires looking at strategic voting, especially in a dominant party system like Hungary's. In systems dominated by a strong incumbent like Fidesz, opposition voters often face a coordination problem: they must choose between their sincere preference, such as MKKP, which reflects their values and style, and a more viable challenger like Tisza or the United Opposition, which has a better chance of defeating the government. Research shows that joke parties hit a structural ceiling, not due to a lack of support for their platform, but because electoral conditions lead sympathizers to switch to larger parties to avoid "wasted votes." This pressure creates the basis for Hypothesis 5 ([H5](#)), which examines the "hidden electorate" residing within the voter base of major opposition parties.

2.5 Historical Context: The Evolution of MKKP

To fully appreciate the party's current status, it's essential to understand its unique development. MKKP began not as a political party but as a street art project in Szeged in 2006, founded by Gergely Kovács. For nearly 10 years, it operated as a loose group of artists and activists, gaining attention for its street art campaigns that mocked the political elite with absurd promises like "eternal life" and "free beer." These satirical promises, however, faced institutional pushback. The Metropolitan Court rejected the party's registration three times, arguing that such goals did not serve the public interest and that the name "Two-Tailed Dog" violated moral standards (Asbóth

2014). The party contested this absurdity all the way to the Constitutional Court, claiming that the refusal violated their right to associate. They ultimately won in 2014, proving that their satire was a serious exercise of democratic rights (Asbóth 2014).

A turning point came in 2016 during the government's referendum campaign against EU migrant quotas. While traditional opposition struggled to respond, MKKP launched a massive "counter-poster" campaign funded by small donations. Using slogans like "Did you know? The average Hungarian sees a UFO more often than a migrant" (Rényi 2016), they effectively sought to neutralize the government's fear-mongering through ridicule.

The subsequent registration as a formal party allowed MKKP to receive state campaign funds, which they radically repurposed into the "Rózsa Sándor State Waste Fund" (*Rózsa Sándor Népi Kampánypénz Tékozló Alap*), a public tender system for local community projects. This structural innovation helped cement the "Robin Hood" narrative: taking money from the state and returning it to the people (Kétfarkú Kutya Párt 2017).

This evolution is evident in their electoral performance. While they started as a satire project, national election results show their growing support: from 1.73% of the national vote in 2018 (Nemzeti Választási Iroda 2018) to 3.27% in 2022 (Nemzeti Választási Iroda 2022). The party's most significant electoral breakthrough came in the 2024 municipal elections, where it secured 51 local mandates nationwide and gained seats in the Metropolitan Assembly of Budapest. In the same election, co-chair Gergely Kovács was elected mayor of Budapest's 12th district with a commanding majority (Nemzeti Választási Iroda 2024).

This historical overview sets the stage for the empirical analysis that follows. Specifically, it grounds the concept of "Second-Generation Joke Parties" (discussed in Section 2.2) in concrete Hungarian

reality, illustrating how MKKP has moved beyond satire to what Le (2020) calls "infrastructural politics."

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

To investigate the mechanisms of MKKP's legitimacy and the strategic behavior of its potential electorate, this thesis employs a mixed-methods research design. This approach integrates quantitative survey data to map broad voter patterns with qualitative elite interviewing to understand the internal strategic logic of the party.

3.1 Quantitative Strand: The Online Survey

The primary empirical data for this study are derived from an online public opinion survey conducted in late 2024. The survey was designed to probe beyond standard vote intention, focusing instead on the deeper structures of political credibility, value alignment, and strategic reasoning within the electorate.

3.1.1 Sampling and Fieldwork

The survey used a non-probability convenience sampling method, mainly distributed through digital channels to reach the politically active population. The survey link was shared in specific Facebook groups related to Hungarian public life and political discussions. These groups have high levels of political engagement and often serve as platforms for opposition discussions. The survey gained considerable response within a Facebook group that included MKKP supporters and activists (passivists). This led to an overrepresentation of MKKP-aligned respondents, with 97 out of 257 indicating MKKP as their primary choice. While this departure from a nationally representative sample limits the generalizability of the findings, it offers a unique advantage for this research question. By capturing a dense sample of the party's core and broader electorate, the data enables a detailed analysis of the motivations of MKKP voters, a group that is often too small for analysis in traditional national polls. The final sample includes $N = 257$ valid responses.

As shown in Figure 1, the sample is skewed towards urban residents (54.8% from Budapest), younger cohorts (56.1% under 35), and opposition sympathizers. However, this demographic closely reflects the relevant public sphere for MKKP.

Figure 1.1: Demographic Profile of the Survey Sample (N=257)

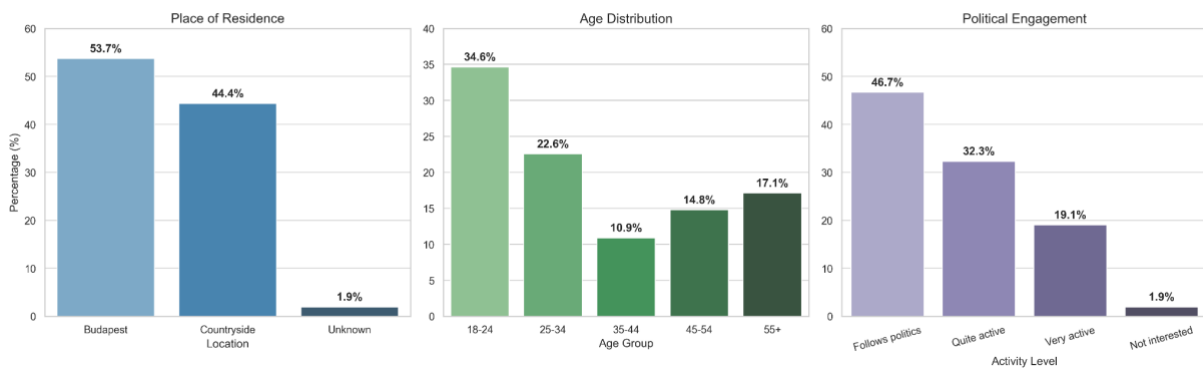


Figure 1 – Demographic breakdown of the survey sample by residence, age, and political activity level (N=257).

3.1.2 Operationalization of Key Variables

To test the hypotheses regarding legitimacy and strategic voting, the survey instrument employed several specialized metrics:

- **Credibility Assessment:** Legitimacy was measured not as a binary variable but as a composite spectrum. Respondents were asked to complete a comprehensive 5-point Likert scale battery evaluating nine specific dimensions. These dimensions were strategically split between Local Competence (e.g., "The MKKP understands the problems of the local community well," "The MKKP is capable of achieving real change in municipalities") and National Viability (e.g., "MKKP is a real political alternative," "It is worth voting for MKKP"). This granular approach is designed to strictly test the "Competency Ceiling" hypothesis (H6). By separating emotional support from cognitive assessment, the survey enables analysis of the party's image. It differentiates between voters who see MKKP as a useful civic organization versus those who recognize it as a legitimate political force.

- **Ranked Choice Voting:** Unlike standard opinion polls that ask only for a primary vote intention, this survey utilized a full ranking system. Respondents were asked to rank seven major parties (Fidesz, Tisza, DK, Momentum, MKKP, Mi Hazánk, MSZP) from 1 (closest to values) to 7 (furthest). This metric is critical for identifying the "Strategic Voter" ([H5](#)). A single-choice question would hide the "latent electorate," those who prefer MKKP ideologically but feel compelled to vote for a larger challenger. The ranking system reveals MKKP's position in the hierarchy of preference, specifically testing if it functions as the primary "backup option" for the mainstream opposition.
- **Value Alignment and Representation:** First, respondents chose their top three public policy priorities from a list of 12 (e.g., Anti-corruption, Environmental Protection, Quality Education, Social Equality). Second, they rated how well each party represented those chosen values on a 4-point scale (from Does not represent to Fully represents). This approach goes beyond vague self-identification labels and tests the "Nihilism vs. Values" hypothesis ([H2](#)). If MKKP voters consistently select significant issues like "Anti-corruption" and "Environment," it indicates their votes are driven by policy rather than randomness. Moreover, comparing a voter's alignment score for MKKP with that of their chosen party allows for measuring strategic sacrifice, defined by the gap between value alignment and electoral choice based on perceived viability.
- **Coalition Potential and Threshold Anxiety:** Respondents were asked, "Which two parties would you most like to see in a coalition in parliament?" This question serves as a proxy for sincere parliamentary preference, designed to address the strategic anxiety linked to the 5% electoral threshold. In the Hungarian majoritarian system, voters often hesitate to support smaller parties for fear of wasting their votes if the party does not make it into parliament. By framing the scenario as a pre-formed coalition, this question allows respondents to indicate if they want MKKP in the legislature, testing if they avoid the party out of genuine dislike or simply out of fear of a wasted vote.

3.1.3 Limitations and Statistical Uncertainty

It is crucial to recognize the statistical limitations in this study. The sample size of N=257 results in a margin of error of approximately ± 6 percentage points at a 95% confidence level for proportions around 50%. This margin increases significantly for subgroup analyses (e.g., examining only Tisza-first voters, n=88). Therefore, small differences in percentages should be interpreted cautiously and seen as indicative trends rather than strict statistical proof. Findings related to the "Tisza electorate" or the "Opposition" should be viewed as patterns within this specific, politically active digital sample, not as predictions for the national populace.

3.2 Qualitative Strand: Elite Interviewing

To complement the voter-focused quantitative data, a semi-structured elite interview was conducted with Balázs Sándor, the Political Coordinator of MKKP and a municipal representative in Ajka.¹ The interview was conducted in Hungarian and subsequently translated into English by the author.

3.2.1 Selection and Relevance of the Interviewee

Balázs Sándor offers a critical perspective for understanding the party's development. He joined the movement in 2017 during its transformation from a street art collective to a formal political entity. Now serving as a coordinator and elected official, he connects the party's activist roots with its current institutional role. His insights are particularly valuable for testing Hypothesis 7 ([H7](#)) and understanding the party's internal awareness of the "competency ceiling."

¹ Following the data collection period, Sándor was announced as one of the party's lead candidates for the 2026 parliamentary elections.

3.2.2 Analysis Strategy

The interview data is analyzed using thematic coding to extract key narratives regarding the party's self-conception. Key themes explored include:

- The tension between maintaining the "joke" identity and the need for "serious" governance.
- The strategic philosophy behind "pothole politics" as a legitimacy-building tool.
- The party's perception of the strategic voting dilemma faced by its sympathizers.

Quotes from the interview are integrated directly into the empirical analysis in Chapters 4 and 5 to contextualize the statistical findings and provide a behind-the-scenes explanation of the voter patterns observed in the survey data.

3.3 Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

In qualitative and mixed-methods research, acknowledging the researcher's position relative to the subject of study is essential for maintaining academic rigor. It is therefore important to note that the author of this thesis is a registered member of the Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt. This "insider" status provided significant advantages during the research process, particularly regarding access. It facilitated the recruitment of the elite interview subject and enabled a deeper understanding of the internal linguistic and cultural codes of the party, which was instrumental in designing context-sensitive survey questions.

However, this positionality also necessitates a conscious effort to mitigate potential bias. To ensure objectivity, the survey instrument relied on standardized political science metrics. Furthermore, the analysis focuses strictly on the statistical data and the verbatim transcript of the interview, avoiding anecdotal evidence or personal experiences. The data collection phase, particularly the distribution of the survey in broader "public life" groups beyond the party's own network, was designed to

capture a wider range of voices, ensuring that critical perspectives (such as those from Tisza or DK voters) were also represented and analyzed.

CHAPTER 4 – EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS I: THE NATURE OF MKKP’S LEGITIMACY

This chapter presents the first stage of the empirical analysis, focusing on the nature and depth of the Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt’s legitimacy among the opposition electorate. Contrary to the common belief that satirical parties exist only as temporary outlets for protest (Glied and Szegedi 2024), the data show a support structure grounded in real local competence and a clear ideological profile. This section addresses Sub-questions 1-3, breaking down the 'joke party' myth and examining the party's position in the Hungarian political landscape.

Key Findings Summary:

- MKKP is overwhelmingly viewed as a credible political actor (83.7%), refuting the "joke party" stigma ([H3](#)).
- Credibility is driven primarily by local competence and civic action ("Micro-Performance Legitimacy"), validating Hypothesis 6 ([H6](#)).
- MKKP voters form a distinct "Green-Progressive" value cluster, challenging the notion of nihilistic protest voting ([H2](#)).

4.1 Deconstructing the Credibility Myth

The central premise of MKKP's critics (and often the media narrative) is that the party functions primarily as a source of entertainment rather than a serious political actor (Tari 2024). Hypothesis 3 ([H3](#)) challenges this idea, suggesting that most politically active voters no longer see MKKP as just a "joke." The survey results confirm this, showing a strong perception of seriousness and credibility across the opposition.

4.1.1 The Structure and Limits of Perceived Credibility

When asked to evaluate the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party’s credibility, an overwhelming 83.7% of respondents answered affirmatively. This finding sharply contrasts with the mere 4.3% who described the party as a “joke party / not serious” in a follow-up question. Overall, MKKP’s credibility is therefore not in dispute.

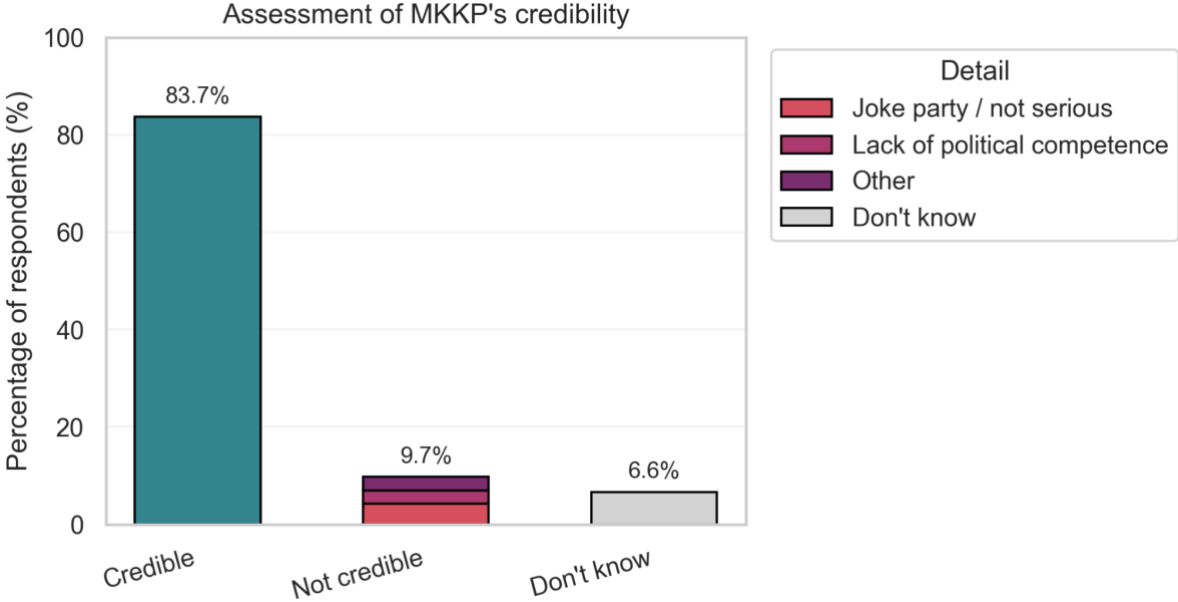


Figure 2 – Assessment of MKKP’s credibility

4.1.2 The Skeptic Minority and the Nature of Rejection

Although small in number (N = 25), those who questioned MKKP’s credibility provide valuable insight into the limits of its legitimacy. Instead of outright rejection, their responses highlight specific concerns. Most common objections include the lack of a clear political program, the perception that humor dominates, and doubts about national governance capabilities. Some respondents acknowledged the value of MKKP’s local initiatives and engagement while doubting its qualifications as a governing party. This pattern supports the main empirical finding of the chapter. Even among skeptics, criticism focuses on the extent of MKKP’s legitimacy rather than questioning its existence. Credibility is recognized in civic and local matters but withheld regarding national leadership, indicating a ceiling on legitimacy rather than widespread dismissal.

4.1.3 Variation in “Seriousness” Across Opposition Electorates

Views on MKKP’s seriousness differ based on primary party preference. Among MKKP-first voters, nearly all (89.7%) reject the idea that the party is “too unserious,” showing strong internal coherence. Momentum-first voters also demonstrate high acceptance, with 75.5% dismissing the “not serious” claim, indicating shared activist and cultural perspectives between the two groups.

Tisza-first voters show greater skepticism. In this group, agreement with MKKP’s seriousness drops to 63.6%, with about one-third viewing the party as too unserious. This divide likely reflects differing political orientations: while MKKP and Momentum voters are more open to unconventional, movement-based politics, Tisza voters prioritize technical competence and readiness for leadership amid regime change.

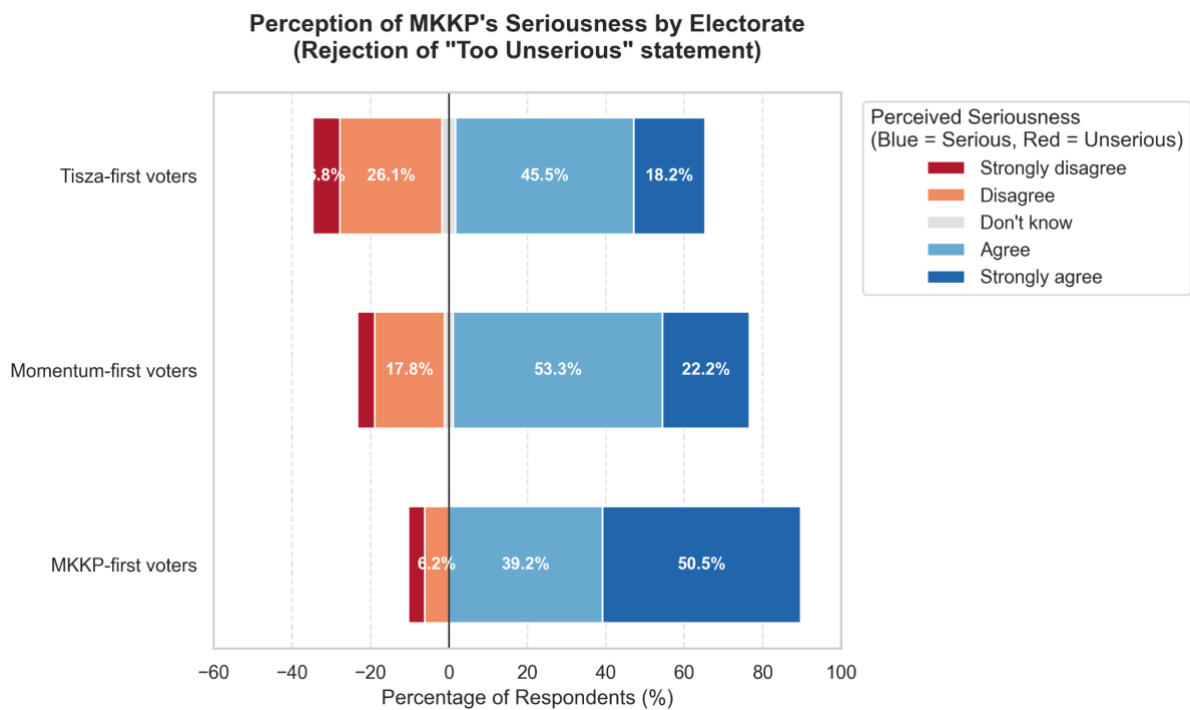


Figure 3 – . Perceptions of MKKP’s Seriousness by Primary Party Preference

4.2 Performance Versus Ideology: Explaining Credibility

While Section 4.1 demonstrated that MKKP is generally seen as credible, this section explores why that credibility exists. Hypothesis 6 (H6) posited that MKKP's legitimacy is rooted primarily in performance-based signals rather than ideological or programmatic commitments. To test this claim, the survey included two distinct instruments:

- 1) A multiple-choice attribution question identifying perceived sources of credibility.
- 2) A Likert-scale battery measuring agreement with evaluative statements about the party.

This design allows for a clear separation between credibility attribution and legitimacy evaluation.

4.2.1 Credibility Attribution: What Makes MKKP Credible?

Respondents were asked to identify which attributes they believe make MKKP credible, with the option to select multiple items. Selection indicates that a certain attribute is seen as contributing to credibility, while non-selection suggests it is not significant for that respondent. The results show a strong action-oriented credibility profile. The most commonly selected attributes are Citizen Participation (63.04%), Direct Connection to Voters (57.59%), and Anti-Corruption (55.64%). Humor (45.91%) and Transparent Communication (38.52%) also receive notable support. In contrast, traditional party political markers are chosen much less frequently. Political Program and Goals (30.35%) and Achieved Political Success (26.46%) hold a secondary position, while Political Alternative is selected by only 14.01% of respondents.

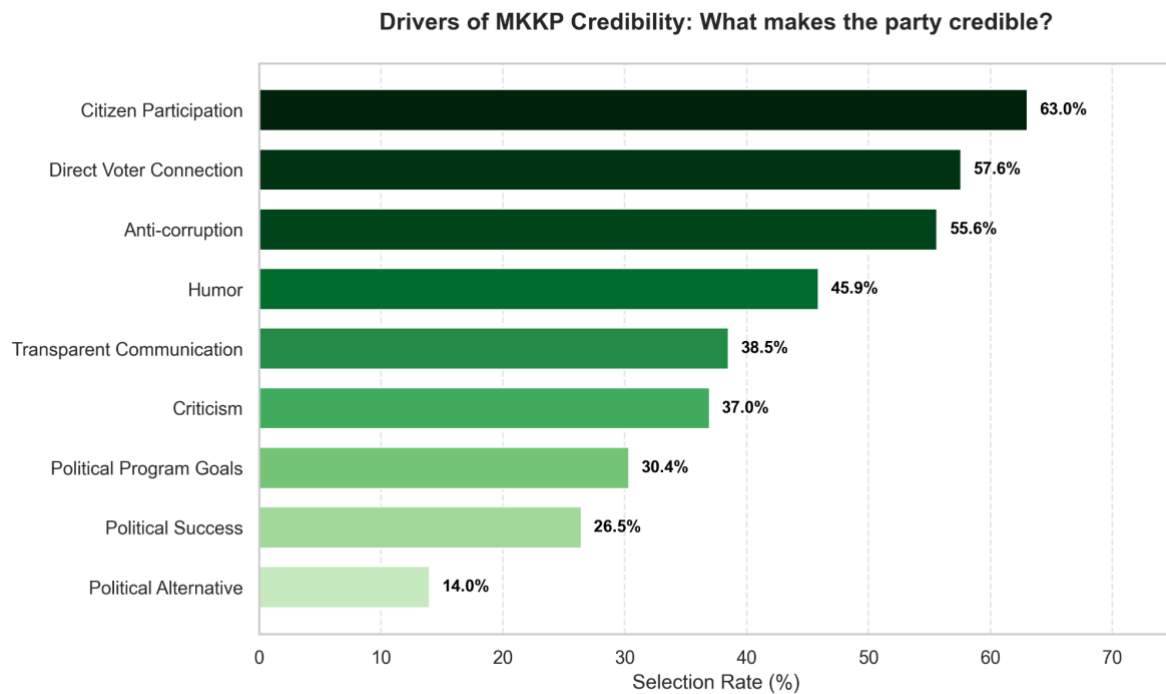


Figure 4 – Perceived Sources of MKKP’s Credibility (Multiple-Choice Attribution)

This distribution reveals a clear divide between civic-performance attributes and institutional-political attributes. Respondents largely associate MKKP’s credibility with visible action, participation, and integrity rather than with programmatic clarity or governance ambitions. Importantly, this does not contradict the high overall credibility observed in Section 4.1; rather, it clarifies the type of credibility voters recognize.

4.3 Value Structure and Voter Identity: Locating the MKKP Electorate

If MKKP’s credibility is based on concrete action rather than ideological expression, an important question arises: who are the voters drawn to such a party? Hypothesis 2 ([H2](#)) suggests that MKKP voters are not random protest voters; they form a distinct and coherent value-based cluster. The empirical results support this hypothesis.

4.3.1 Aggregate Issue Priorities

At the aggregate level, respondents' issue priorities focus on quality healthcare, education, and economic stability, followed by anti-corruption and social equality. This sets the general value context for party-specific electorates. Importantly, these priorities are not niche concerns; they reflect widely held expectations for state performance and public service provision.

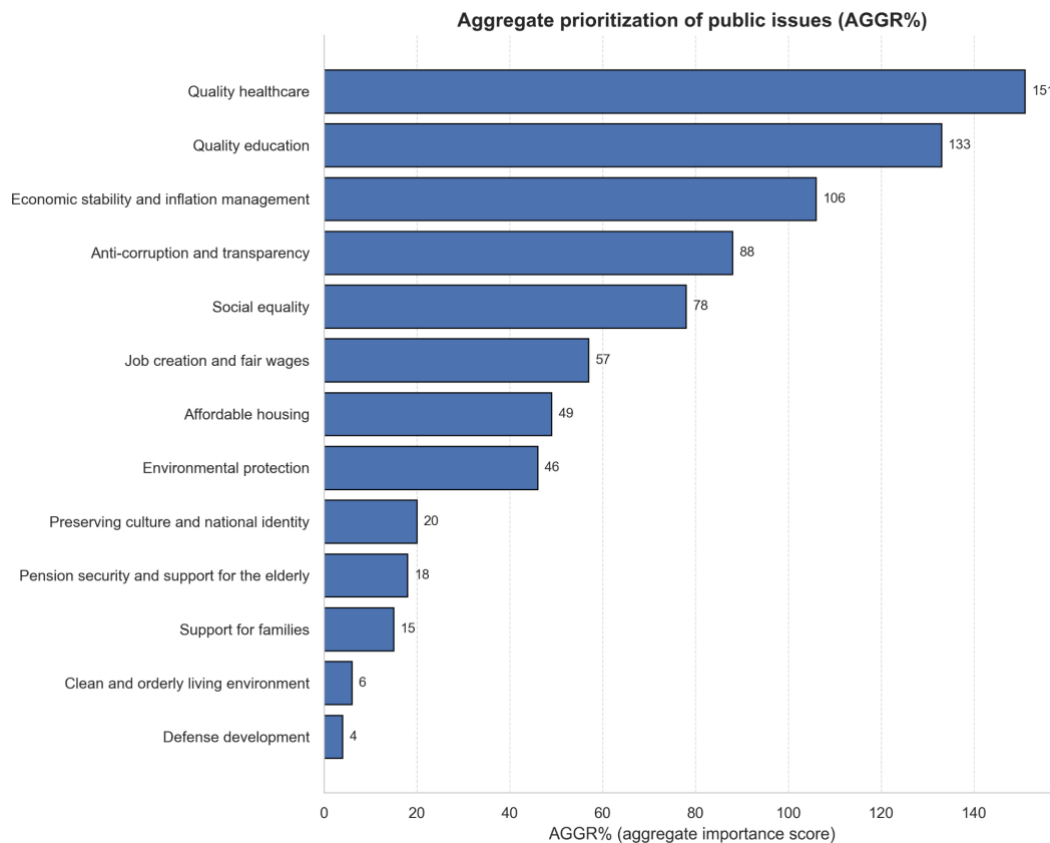


Figure 5 – Aggregate Prioritization of Public Issues (AGGR%)

4.3.2 Comparative Value Profiles Across Electorates

Breaking down these priorities by rank-1 party preference reveals distinct value differences among electorates. MKKP voters show a unique profile with a strong emphasis on environmental protection (9.28%), social equality (12.37%), and anti-corruption (11.00%), along with significant concern for healthcare (17.18%) and economic stability (11.34%). This profile sets MKKP voters apart from the radical right (Mi Hazánk), which focuses on national identity, defense, and security, and from the technocratic center (Tisza), where economic stability and institutional effectiveness

prevail. MKKP voters therefore do not fit the mold of being ideologically scattered or simply protest-oriented; instead, they display a consistent progressive and civic value approach.

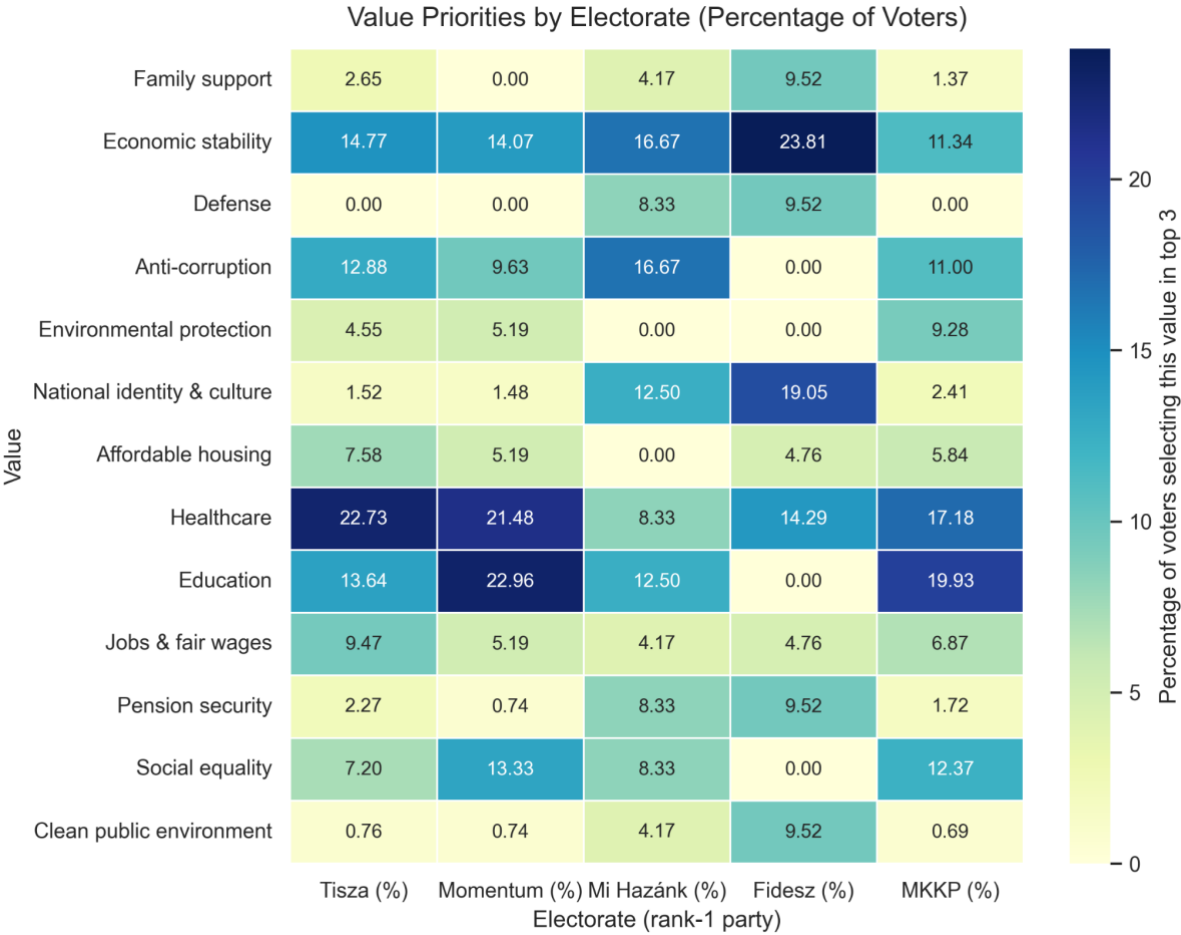


Figure 6 – Value Priorities by Electorate

4.3.3 Relational Positioning and Cluster Structure

Hierarchical clustering of value priorities further clarifies the relational position of the MKKP electorate. In the resulting dendrogram, MKKP clusters closely with Momentum, confirming that both parties share a similar urban, progressive value foundation. This closeness explains the electoral competition and overlaps between the two groups.

However, the clustering also highlights systematic differences. Compared to Momentum, MKKP voters place greater emphasis on direct participation, local environmental issues, and everyday civic

matters, rather than on institutional reform or national policy abstraction.

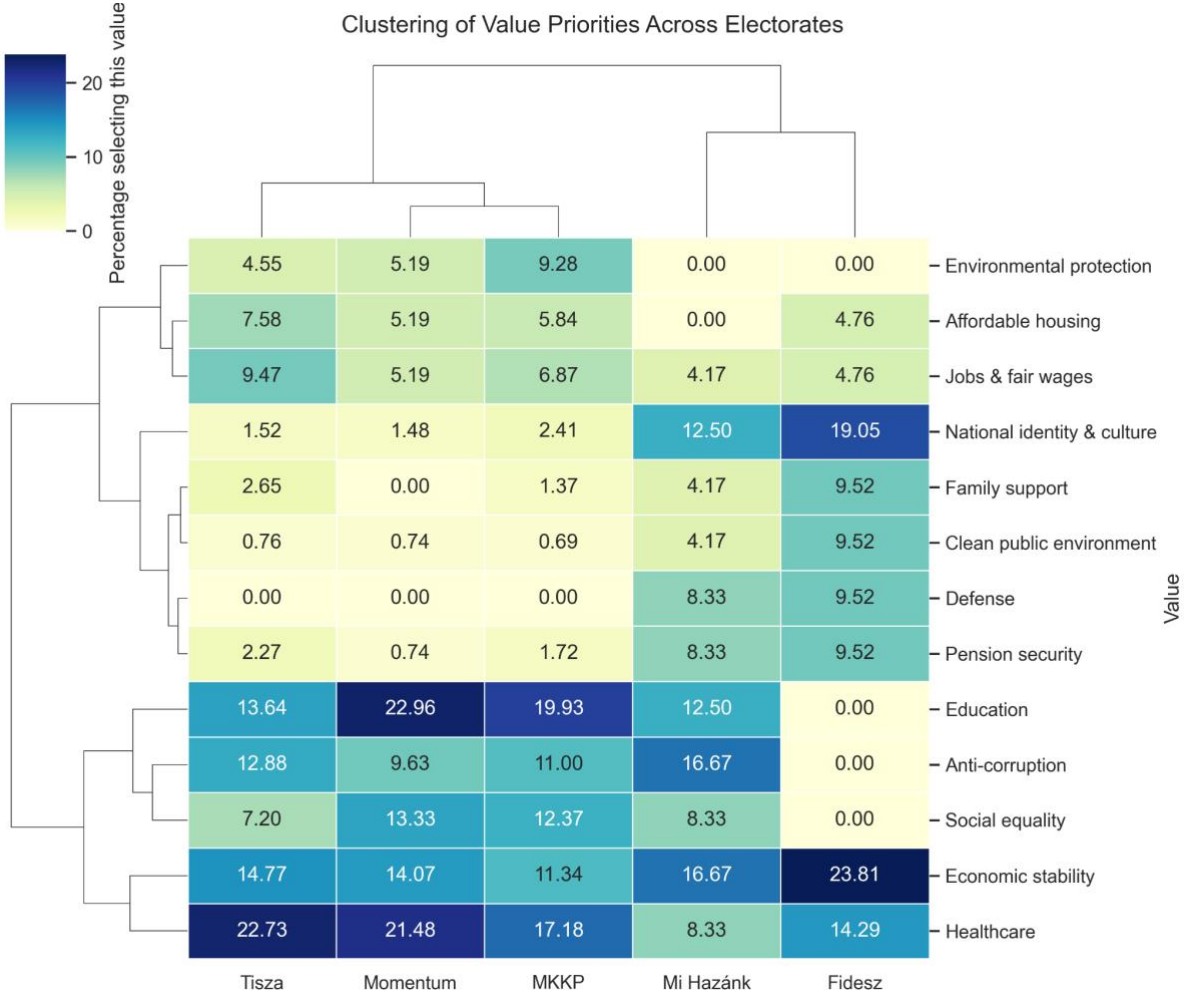


Figure 7 – Clustering of Value Priorities Across Electorates

4.4 Interpretive Implication

Taken together, these results confirm Hypothesis 2 (H2). MKKP voters form a coherent value-based electorate, not a leftover group of disengaged or ironic voters. Their priorities align with progressive, anti-corruption, and participatory values, and their focus on action-oriented, local engagement helps explain a key paradox noted earlier: voters see MKKP as credible and valuable, yet they remain cautious about applying this legitimacy to national governance.

CHAPTER 5 – EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS II: STRATEGIC VOTING AND THE LIMITS OF GROWTH

This chapter explores the structural and psychological barriers that limit MKKP's growth. Specifically, it examines Hypothesis 5, which suggests that there is a "hidden electorate" voting strategically for the stronger opposition. It also looks at Hypothesis 6, which claims that MKKP's credibility is restricted by a "Competency Ceiling."

Key Findings Summary:

- A significant "Hidden Electorate" exists: 25% of Tisza voters are strategic voters who align with MKKP values ([H5](#)).
- MKKP faces a "Competency Ceiling": Voters universally rate local competence higher than national viability ([H6](#)).
- Coalition potential is highest with Tisza.

5.1 The Strategic Dilemma: The "Hidden Electorate" within Tisza

The rise of the Tisza Party in 2024 changed the opposition landscape, consolidating the anti-establishment vote. For voters who support MKKP, this created a classic dilemma: they can vote for their preferred values (MKKP) or opt for the most viable competitor (Tisza). This issue is not unique to this study; data from the Republikon Institute (2025) shows that MKKP is the most popular second choice among opposition voters (12% overall). Importantly, among Tisza voters, 26% see MKKP as their primary alternative if Tisza is not an option. This external data supports the idea that there is a significant overlap between the two voter groups.

5.1.1 Anatomy of the Tisza Electorate

To measure the extent of strategic voting within the Tisza electorate (N=88), this analysis looked at the relationship between respondents' second-party preferences and their perceived value match. The evaluation of values was conducted by converting survey responses into a numerical scale (0–3), allowing for direct comparison between the value representation of Tisza and MKKP. The sample was categorized into three groups.

The first group, the "Standard" Tisza voter (N=33, 37.5%), represents Tisza's core supporters. These voters chose Tisza as their first option but did not list MKKP as a second choice, showing little electoral affinity for the party.

The second group, the "Strategic" segment (N=22, 25.0%), shows a disconnect between values and vote choice, which is typical of tactical voting. While these voters rank Tisza first and MKKP second, they view MKKP's value representation as equal to or better than Tisza's. This group can be further divided into "Tie-Breakers" (N=19), who consider both parties ideologically equivalent, and a smaller "Hard Strategic" core (N=3), who recognize MKKP as more representative of their values despite voting for Tisza.

The final group, "Consistent Sympathizers and Unclassified" (N=33, 37.5%), serves as a control group. This group mostly consists of "sincere" sympathizers (N=25) who see MKKP as their second choice but consistently rate Tisza's value representation as better. This confirms that their primary vote aligns with their values. The remaining respondents (N=8) could not be clearly classified.

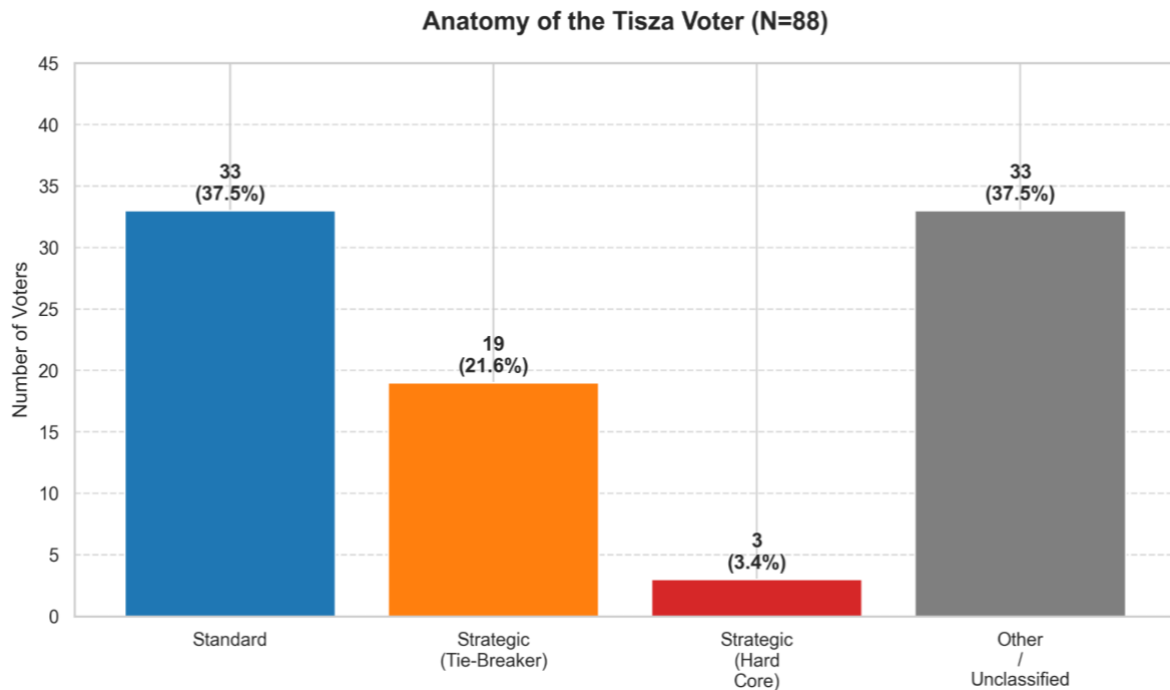


Figure 8 – Segmentation of Tisza-first voters based on their secondary preferences and value congruence.

This finding confirms Hypothesis 5 (H5). A significant portion of the Tisza vote does not reflect an ideological commitment to the center-right agrarian-technocratic platform but rather a strategic decision from the progressive-green MKKP voter base. These voters are "constrained sympathizers." They see MKKP as legitimate but consider Tisza more effective.

5.1.2 The Supply-Side Perspective

Balázs Sándor, MKKP's Political Coordinator, expressed a clear understanding of this dynamic in an interview. He described the political environment not as a contest of programs but as a structural trap where MKKP is the last representative of a certain set of values:

The next parliamentary composition will likely include Fidesz, Tisza, and Mi Hazánk, three right-wing parties, and the Dog Party will be the only force with a realistic chance of entering parliament that can provide left-wing and liberal representation. I consider this extremely important, because the other three parties do not address human rights, the needs of vulnerable groups, or, for example, the situation in Ukraine (B. Sándor, interview, April 18, 2025).

5.1.3 Path Dependence and the Conditioning of the Electorate

The last EU parliament election results are valuable in identifying key strategic voting behavior and harmful voting conditioning. MKKP's weak performance in the 2024 European Parliamentary election coincided with the rapid rise of the Tisza Party in the opposition electorate. Pre-election polling by Medián (Medián Közvélemény- és Piackutató Intézet 2024) Závecz (Bicsérdi-Fülöp 2024) shows that as support for Tisza increased sharply leading up to the election, support for MKKP dropped to around the electoral threshold.² The European election outcome, where MKKP did not meet the threshold, can thus be seen as a partial redistribution of opposition votes following the rise of a significant new opposition player rather than a sudden loss of support for MKKP. Nonetheless, MKKP still received over 160,000 votes in the European contest. This amount indicates a relatively stronger performance compared to the 2022 parliamentary elections. This support suggests a stable base of genuine endorsement that is somewhat hidden in parliamentary elections.

This pattern shows that strategic voting alone cannot explain the gap between MKKP's broad acceptance and its weaker parliamentary results. In previous cycles, MKKP encouraged supporters to engage in split-ticket voting, supporting MKKP on the party list while backing other opposition candidates in single-member districts to strengthen opposition against Fidesz (Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt 2022). While this approach enhanced the party's authenticity and credibility at the time, it also established a culture of conditional commitment. This dynamic supports Hypothesis 4 ([H4](#)) and helps explain why the MKKP can sustain substantial affective approval and second-preference support (Republikon Institute 2025) while continuing to struggle with the translation of that support into consistent first-choice electoral commitment.

² The support for all parties (not just the MKKP) declined or stagnated.

5.2 The Competency Ceiling

The data also reveals a structural "Competency Ceiling": a sharp divergence where voters trust the party's capacity for local civic action but express skepticism regarding its viability as a national governing force. This finding explains the paradox of why a "credible" party struggles to convert sympathy into parliamentary votes.

5.2.1 The Divergence of Trust

Survey results show a clear tiered structure of legitimacy. When evaluating the party's capabilities, respondents distinguish between "micro-competence" (addressing specific local issues) and "macro-competence" (governing the state).

Agreement with Evaluative Statements about the MKKP (All Respondents)

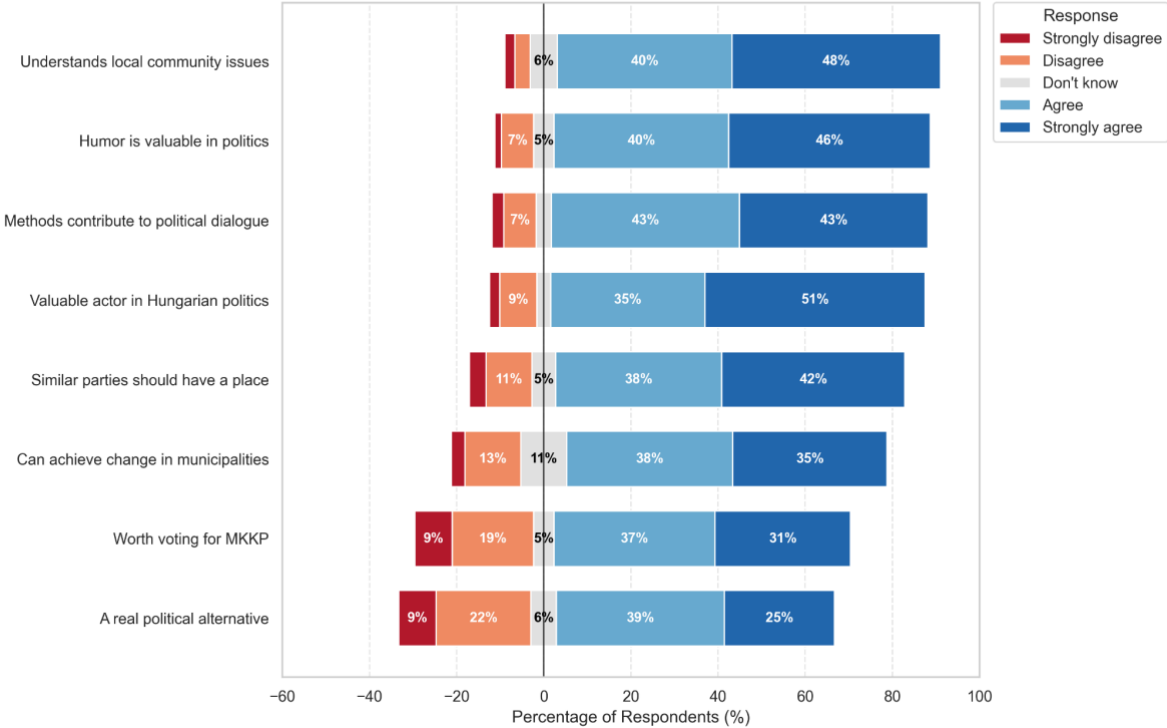


Figure 9—Agreement with Evaluative Statements about the MKKP

Local Trust is High: Over 88% of respondents agree that MKKP "understands local community issues," and 74% believe it can "bring real change in municipalities." National Viability is Low: Agreement drops sharply for statements related to national influence. And the most amount of negative responses come from seeing MKKP as a "real political alternative," with a significant rise in uncertain ("don't know") responses.

Even among the small "skeptical minority" (N=11) who initially rejected the party's credibility in Chapter 4, the qualitative feedback followed this same pattern. This suggests that the "joke party" label primarily acts as a signal for a "non-governing party," a label that limits power but not affection.

5.2.2 The Universal Gap and Strategic Self-Limitation

Crucially, this competency gap is not partisan.

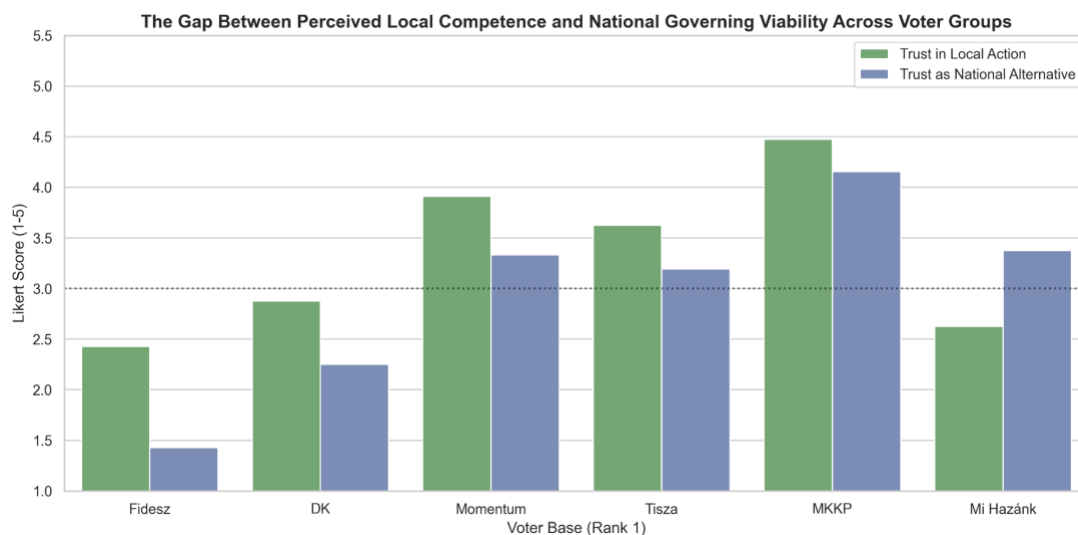


Figure 10 – The gap between perceived local competence and national governing viability across voter groups.

Supporters of Momentum, DK, and Tisza all rate MKKP's local competence noticeably higher (by 0.4–0.6 Likert points) than its national viability. Even supporters of the government, who ideologically oppose the opposition, concede some local utility to MKKP.

Interview findings suggest this ceiling is partly self-imposed due to the party's principle of "radical realism." Political Coordinator Balázs Sándor indicated that creating detailed national programs, like a healthcare reform plan, would be performative dishonesty for a small party:

I think it is unnecessary to write a detailed healthcare program, because there is no realistic chance of implementing change. I also find it unconvincing when a small party publishes a 70-page program full of slogans without knowing how they would implement it (B. Sándor, interview, April 18, 2025).

This refusal to "perform" governance creates a feedback loop. By prioritizing authenticity and achievable local wins ("pothole politics") over the "intangible promises" of traditional campaigning, MKKP reinforces the voter heuristic that it is an effective civil actor but not a "serious" government-in-waiting. Consequently, the "Competency Ceiling" is the trade-off for the party's unique form of legitimacy, but this very focus disqualifies them, in the eyes of the strategic voter, from running the country.

5.3 Coalition Potential and Future Alliances

Given the noted limits of MKKP's legitimacy at the national level, an important question arises about the party's role within the opposition coalition landscape. Figure 11 presents coalition partner preferences based on respondents' first-ranked party choice and reveals a structured but uneven pattern of coalition willingness among opposition electorates.

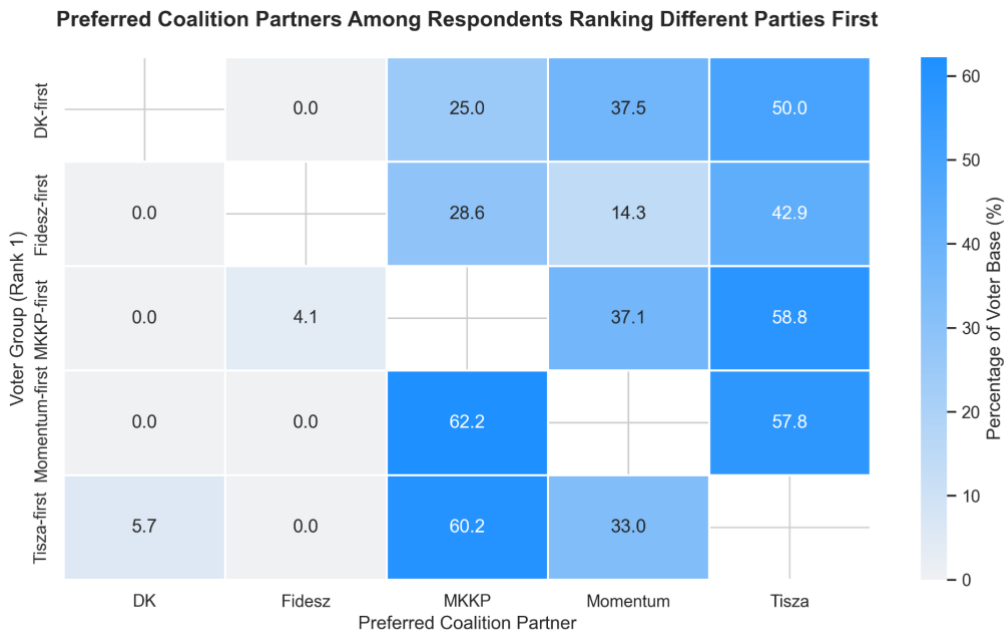


Figure 11 – Preferred coalition partners among respondents ranking different parties first.

Among MKKP-first voters, coalition preferences lean heavily towards other opposition parties, especially Tisza (58.8%) and Momentum (37.1%). Preferences for teaming up with Fidesz or DK are minimal (1-2%). This shows that MKKP voters mainly think about coalition participation within the opposition, while being selective about ideological and strategic compatibility.

Momentum-first voters show the greatest openness to MKKP. In this group, 62.2% see MKKP as a preferred coalition partner, along with a similarly high preference for Tisza (57.8%). This reciprocal relationship reflects the value closeness identified in Chapter 4 and indicates that Momentum and MKKP attract overlapping voter segments, particularly in urban and post-materialist issue areas.

Tisza-first voters also view MKKP as a relevant coalition partner, with 60.2% showing willingness to cooperate. However, this openness fits within a broader strategic view: Tisza voters also express substantial interest in partnering with Momentum (33.0%) while showing minimal engagement with other parties.

This data suggests that MKKP is no longer a solitary "island" in the party system. It acts as the "reserve army" of the progressive opposition, an essential ally for any future coalition aiming to engage urban, youth, and anti-corruption voters.

CHAPTER 6 – CONCLUSION

The transformation of the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party from a satirical street art group to a legitimate political player provides a unique example of how opposition strategies can develop in hybrid regimes. This thesis aimed to explore how MKKP's unconventional tactics have enhanced its political legitimacy and what factors explain its support. The findings challenge the common view of joke parties as just signs of voter apathy. Instead, they offer a new way to understand resistance in constrained democracies where traditional political pathways are blocked or discredited.

6.1 Synthesis of Findings

The analysis points to three main conclusions about MKKP's role in the Hungarian party system:

1. **Legitimacy through Performance:** MKKP has successfully shed the "joke" label. The data shows that 84% of the respondent consider the party credible. This legitimacy does not come from ideological promises or parliamentary talk but from what can be called "Micro-Performance Legitimacy." This is about the real improvements in local infrastructure. Even voters who do not politically support the party recognize its practical utility in addressing the state's failures on a local level.
2. **The Normative-Electoral Gap:** Support for MKKP features strong moral approval but relatively low electoral commitment. While voters see the party's value (as shown by the 160,000 votes it won in the 2024 European election), this support does not always translate into a preference for parliamentary representation. This gap relates partly to historical patterns: by encouraging voters to split their tickets for better opposition coordination, the party has unintentionally created an environment where its own supporters prioritize "viability" over "sincerity" in key elections.

3. The Identity of the "Joke" Voter: MKKP voters are not simply protest voters lacking in purpose. They form a connected ideological group with progressive, green, and anti-corruption beliefs. This value profile closely matches that of the Momentum electorate, indicating a shared cultural and political identity among urban intellectuals and young people.
4. The Strategic Ceiling: Despite high normative support, MKKP's ability to grow electorally is limited by a "Competency Ceiling." The analysis shows a clear divide in voter trust: voters believe the party can act effectively at the local level but doubt its ability to lead nationally. MKKP's emphasis on real, tangible action sets it apart from traditional parties, which often rely on vague promises. This choice acts as a filter: it appeals to voters looking for genuine civic engagement but may annoy those demanding a conventional challenger to the hegemonic incumbent. Ultimately, MKKP illustrates that in a hybrid regime, staying true to one's principles means sacrificing ambitions for national governance. This reality causes a sizable part of its potential supporters to vote for the most viable opponent (Tisza) instead of their preferred option (MKKP).

6.2 Theoretical Contribution: The "Infrastructure Party"

This thesis contributes to the literature on "Second-Generation Joke Parties" (Glieb and Szegedi 2024) by proposing that in hybrid regimes, the most effective form of satire is constructive. MKKP does not merely mock the regime through absurdity; it exposes the regime's hollowness by replacing its functions. This shifts the theoretical understanding of political satire from a "weapon of the weak" to a "tool of governance" in miniature. Supported at the interpretive level through elite testimony and organizational analysis we can conclude that MKKP functions as a "hybrid civil-political actor," blurring the lines between NGO activism and party politics.

6.3 Future Outlook and Limitations

The findings suggest that MKKP has stabilized as a permanent fixture of the Hungarian opposition, occupying a niche that no other party can fill: the "conscience" of the left-liberal block. However, its path to becoming a major party is blocked by the "Competency Ceiling." Unless MKKP can articulate a vision of national competence without losing its authentic, grassroots character, it risks remaining a "beloved but unelectable" force.

In conclusion, MKKP proves that in a post-truth political environment, the most serious political statement might be a joke that actually gets the job done. By prioritizing action over rhetoric, the party has not only survived the consolidation of the hybrid regime but has offered a blueprint for how to reconstruct political trust from the pavement up.

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