

## HOW ARE NEWS CONSUMPTION HABITS CHANGING IN HUNGARY?

- 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 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 rapid news.
- **Almost every second Hungarian citizen claims that they are "very" or "fairly" interested in politics.** This marks a substantial increase as compared to 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%.
- 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 amplified. Previously, thus including the most recent 5-6 years, television was unequivocally and by some distance the top source of political/public affairs news.
- The coronavirus pandemic might have 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. This does not imply, however, that the differences between the various generations in terms of their respective internet usage have entirely vanished.
- With respect to information 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 have found a further **decline in the readership of 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. **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.**
- 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.
- The intense competition in the ranking of **online news sites** has intensified further still: As the role of the internet in general has appreciated, 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 the most frequently mentioned sources of information, while 444.hu has consolidated its 5<sup>th</sup> position.
- At the time of our survey, the controversy surrounding Hungary's leading online newspaper, **index.hu**, was still raging hot. Among those who were informed about the departure of the Index newsroom, **an overwhelming majority considered that the government had attempted to influence the contents of the newspaper (67%)** 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.

- **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.

- **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.

- **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 of 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%). **A narrow majority of the public (56%) believe that direct political influence on the media is very typical**, while another 27% perceive that it happens occasionally but is not typical. 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.

- **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 government party supporters agree with the assessment that Fidesz wields a greater influence in the media.** It is worth noting that 12% in this group believe that the opposition parties have more influence on the media. Thirteen percent of the voting age public believe that the media is balanced – with 23% of government party supporters agreeing with this assessment – and that no political side has a greater influence on the media than the other.

- **A tenth of the adult population subscribe to a political newspaper or weekly, while 8 percent subscribe to a local newspaper (the daily newspaper in the county).** The latter data explain 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 financially 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).

*Mérték Media Monitor and Medián Opinion Research perform regular surveys of the media consumption and information patterns of the Hungarian public (results of previous surveys are available [here](#)), often in collaboration with the **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung**. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the **Friedrich Ebert Stiftung** in Budapest has initiated media research and media diversity projects (see [here](#) and [here](#)).*

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