

Anna Sütő–Péter Molnár–Barbara Báldy–Balázs Böcskei

# Orbán-style hybrid capitalism

## Attitudes toward capitalism among blue-collar young people

### Introduction

It is a key mission of the IDEA Institute to contribute to a deeper understanding of Hungarian social attitudes through its analyses, to build publicly accessible knowledge on these topics, and to support the work of experts engaged in related fields.

Our current study focuses on the experiences, opinions and expectations of blue-collar young people with regard to the economic system. Our goal is to explore the mindset of a significant social segment that has not previously been examined in such detail.

Through a multi-stage research process that combined qualitative and quantitative social research methods, we wanted to find out how young people aged 17–29, working in so-called blue-collar occupations, perceive capitalism and capitalist countries, and how they view Hungary and the Hungarian situation in this context.

The main aim of the research was to approach the topic from multiple perspectives, thereby producing a nuanced analysis that captures both majority and minority viewpoints. This study collects and systematises different approaches to the concept of capitalism, describes and interprets them, and provides information about the prevalence of various ways of thinking and attitudes.

The related public opinion research was conducted between April and May 2025. In the foundational phase of the in-depth interviews, eight in-depth interviews were carried out with blue-collar youth of approximately 90 minutes each. This phase was followed by an online survey of 800 respondents, representing 17–29 year-olds by gender, age, region and settlement type.

In our research, we defined blue-collar workers as persons employed in manual labour positions — skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled workers — as well as those performing physical work or services within self-employment frameworks. This category also includes those engaged primarily in manual tasks that do not require, nor are supported by, secondary or higher-level professional qualifications.

## Executive summary

For the 17–29 year-old blue-collar respondents, the term »capitalism« itself is often unclear. However, this does not mean they lack the knowledge or experience to reflect on how capitalism functions. They are confident in forming opinions about phenomena such as free competition, the consumer society, the relationship between the state and the market, investments, ownership and profit motive.

They tend to interpret the capitalist system not primarily as an economic model, but rather as a political and social system, a form of exercising power. In their perception, capitalism is often seen as an autocratic system based on exploitation, which is regarded as natural and self-evident in modern, developed countries.

Because most perceive capitalism as inherently based on exploitation and inequality, they do not consider it a just system. At the same time, they do not expect capitalism itself to address these injustices. In their view, a well-functioning capitalist system guarantees citizens a better quality of life, greater security and more freedom.

According to most respondents, the injustices of the system can be mitigated through state redistribution, welfare benefits, and democratic frameworks. They believe it is

the state's role to protect society from the harmful effects of the profit motive that, in itself, drives the economy effectively. The majority see one of the main differences between developed and less developed capitalist countries in the extent to which economic power can be controlled.

Alienation from work, the weakening of human relationships, rising stress levels, and the erosion of social morality are all perceived problems within capitalist societies. Nevertheless, the general view remains that a well-functioning capitalist economy contributes positively to societal progress. Although the majority also recognise the issue of overconsumption in Western countries, they consider consumption to be important, because the consumer society is viewed as the engine of capitalism — and in their personal lives, consumption primarily represents freedom of choice and a source of enjoyment.

The majority of blue-collar youth do not fundamentally reject the capitalist system, as long as it operates according to its principles and expectations. However, in their view, this is not the case in Hungary. They perceive a distinct form of capitalism that differs from the Western model, one in which the Orbán regime has imposed political and economic control over capitalism itself. According to them, this fusion of political power and the economic system is the root cause of Hungary's socio-economic problems.

Most young blue-collar respondents described Hungary's system not as a democracy, but as one characterized by autocracy and authoritarianism, in which corruption, state

intervention and non-market-based mechanisms create unfavourable conditions. Many feel that the government, the state apparatus and the general population are in opposition to one another, with conflicting interests. The Hungarian state elite, they suggest, seeks to keep society in a state of perpetual uncertainty and existential anxiety.

Nearly all of the interviewed blue-collar young people expressed fundamental dissatisfaction when speaking about the living conditions of ordinary people and the general state of the country. At the same time, many did not attribute these conditions primarily — or exclusively — to the current government's policies. Instead, they pointed to deeper historical, cultural and geopolitical factors and traditions as underlying causes. Blue-collar young people are more likely than average to believe that a genuine regime change did not actually occur in 1989–1990 in Hungary, and a significantly larger proportion of them think that life before the transition in 1989–1990 was better than it has been at any point since.

According to most young blue-collar respondents, the more developed »Western« model of capitalism differs fundamentally from the Hungarian one. Although blue-collar youth tend to view Western capitalist countries somewhat more critically than the average 17–29 year-old, they still see Hungary as considerably less developed in nearly every respect. Overall, the vast majority evaluate the »Western« version of capitalism much more positively and regard it as a fairer system than the Hungarian one.

Most blue-collar youth believed that the inflow of foreign capital could, in principle, benefit the country. However, since it operates in close alliance with the ruling power, most people perceive few positive outcomes. Compared with the general population, blue-collar respondents are even more likely to believe that the greatest problem in Hungary is the fact that the nation is essentially being plundered by multinational corporations, and that foreign capital makes Hungary increasingly unstable and dependent.

A common perception among blue-collar youth is that achieving success and happiness is considerably more difficult in Hungary than in the »Western« developed capitalist countries. For most respondents, success in today's Hungary primarily means maintaining a good and stable standard of living; even being free from the daily stress of subsistence is viewed as an achievement in itself.

Because many feel it is very difficult to adapt to unpredictable and rapidly changing political decisions, uncertainty about the future is widespread. The majority of blue-collar youth believe that they have no or few opportunities to build a successful life in Hungary, which is why a significant proportion of them are considering moving abroad.

Typically, blue-collar youth have no concrete ideas about how the Hungarian system could be improved, and most are deeply sceptical about the possibility of any meaningful »bottom-up« change. Although they are generally

dissatisfied with the government's performance, they are also highly sceptical of politics and politicians in general. It is widely held that most politicians do not genuinely concern themselves with the interests of the people or of society as a whole. Few expect significant changes in this regard; rather, resignation and a sense of learned helplessness are the prevailing attitudes.

## 1. Capitalism: the familiar unknown

The concept of capitalism is not part of the active vocabulary or mindset of blue-collar youth. For most of them, the term means little; they rarely use it spontaneously when thinking about social structures, economic systems, or socio-cultural values.

At best, most have only vague notions of what the term entails, and it is not uncommon for them to misinterpret it entirely or to attribute contradictory meanings to it. Blue-collar youth are generally aware of their limited understanding in this area. Some even equate capitalism with state autocracy or authoritarianism, interpreting it as a system in which all social and public decisions are made by a single person or a narrow economic-political elite.

Among those who have a somewhat clearer idea of what capitalism means, negative associations dominate. They often describe capitalism as:

- a system in which capital is concentrated in the hands of an elite whose expectations override all rules, leaving much of society vulnerable and dependent;
- a structure in which employers and owners exploit the broader society;

→ a framework in which the economic elite, through the state, keeps ordinary people under constant existential pressure and exploitation, forcing the majority to focus entirely on meeting their most basic daily needs.

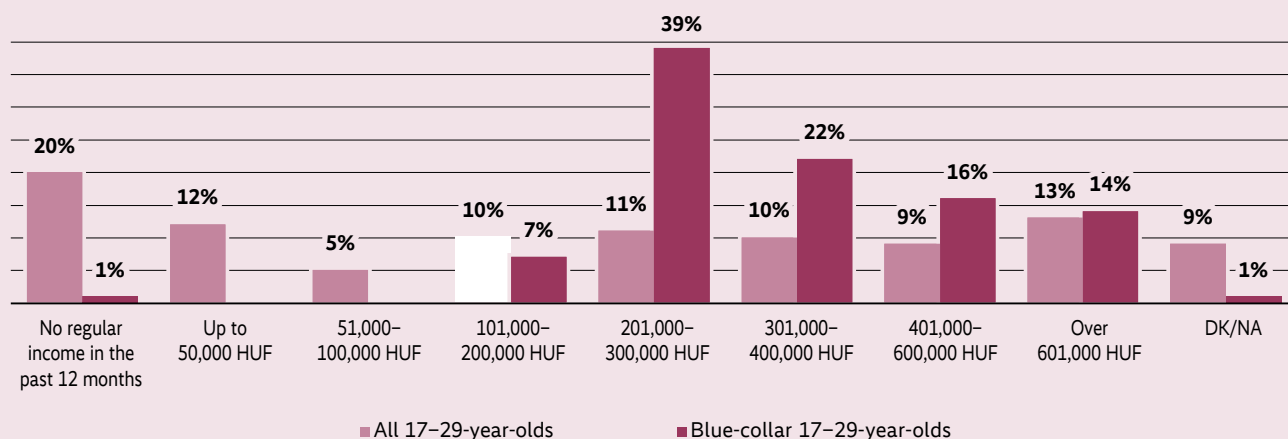
Positive associations with capitalism mainly involve material prosperity and the possibility of a better standard of living. However, many attribute this not to the effective functioning of capitalist economic or political systems, but rather to the »historical advantages« or »fortunate past« of certain groups of capitalist countries.

Despite their vague understanding of the term itself, blue-collar youth are aware of the practical meaning of capitalism and, compared with the average 17–29 year-olds, possess more relevant experience and hold more definite opinions about it. Concepts such as market competition, the free market, consumption, the consumer society, and the »work-based society« appear consciously in their thinking – though usually not explicitly associated with the term »capitalism« – when they talk about the economies of capitalist countries.

It seems clear that blue-collar youth have firmer views on capitalism largely because of their practical, everyday experiences. Compared with the average young person aged 17–29, they are much more active participants in the labour market and therefore have a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between employers and employees, the possibilities for representing their interests, wage relations, and the purchasing power of wages, among other aspects. While nearly two-thirds of blue-collar respondents report a personal monthly income between HUF 200,000 and 400,000 net, this income level characterises only about one-fifth of other 17–29 year-olds (Figure 1).

Fig. 1

Over the past 12 months, taking into account all sources (income from work, state benefits, and other personal income), what was your average NET monthly income? (N=500)



Young blue-collar workers often interpret the capitalist system not so much as an economic model, but rather as a political system or a method of exercising power, while also seeing it as a form of social organization.

According to the majority of blue-collar young people, the main characteristic of a capitalist-type economic system is cooperation based on free competition and a free market. While they are aware of the potential risks and harmful social effects, they regard the organising power of competition – both in economic and, through it, in social terms – as particularly important. The general view is that when the conditions for free competition are fully ensured, it increases market efficiency, leads to lower prices and better quality, and overall has a positive impact on social development.

Alongside these positive assessments, however, there are some negative evaluations. According to some, even if free competition operates strictly according to »academic« principles, it ultimately leads to a heavy concentration of economic and political power and essentially undermines equality among people.

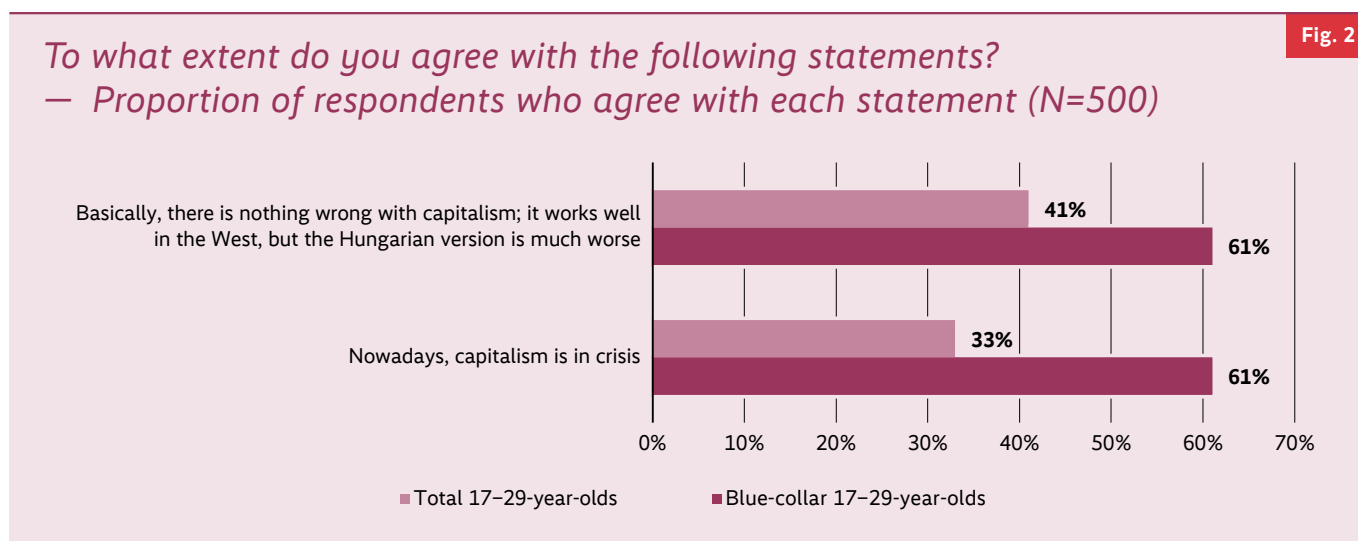
A dominant perception among blue-collar youth is that capitalist societies are fundamentally money-centred, as even basic subsistence requires a relatively large amount of money. The system itself is driven by the constant scarcity of money – most members of society never have enough of it.

Consequently, in capitalist countries, everything revolves around work – that is, around securing the financial resources necessary for survival. For young blue-collar workers, work is primarily a means to an end: a way to earn the amount of money needed to purchase essential goods and services.

### The natural order of capitalism

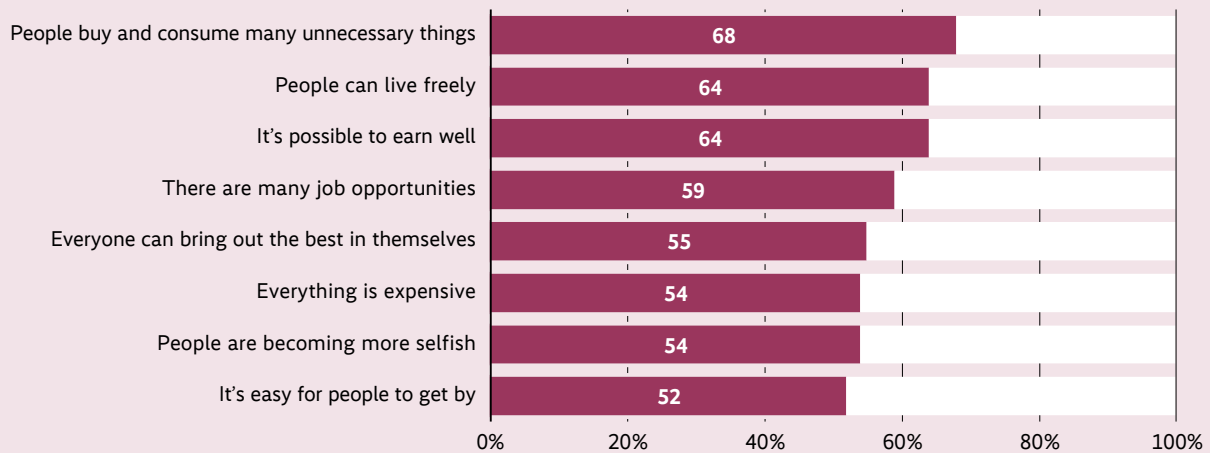
Blue-collar youth do not reject capitalism; nearly two-thirds believe that, in principle, there is nothing wrong with the capitalist system itself – it simply does not function properly in Hungary. Although they are aware of the problems that characterise modern capitalist systems, and two-thirds agree that capitalism is currently in crisis, most attribute these issues primarily to the way the system operates in Hungary rather than to capitalism as it exists in Western countries (*Figure 2*).

In general, blue-collar interviewees do not question the legitimacy of the capitalist system. While they expect some degree of state control over economic processes, they regard the functioning of a capitalist economy as natural, and no alternative systems emerged as potential substitutes. The notions of free competition, the market economy and consumption are viewed more positively than negatively by the young respondents, and in the case



## In your opinion, are the following characteristics typical or not typical of capitalist countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, the United States, or Austria?

Index based on responses (N=500). Comparison of countries according to the average INDEX values calculated from responses. CHARACTERISTIC INDEX: 0 = Not at all typical; 100 = Highly typical



of more developed Western capitalist countries, they recognise the benefits derived primarily from these features (Figure 3).

As young blue-collar workers see it, the consumer society functions primarily as the engine and instrument of capitalism, one that is facilitated from above. They take it as given that continuous consumption and purchasing are essential for economies based on free competition. These activities drive the economy. For many, the experience of ordinary people is that free consumption represents virtually the only true freedom of choice available within the capitalist system. For the majority, shopping and consumption are exciting, fulfilling and pleasurable activities. Although most are aware of the phenomenon of overconsumption, few spontaneously associate it with environmental protection or sustainability concerns. Only a negligible few view it as a serious problem that people are cajoled to buy and consume continuously, even beyond their actual needs. At most, some try to make more conscious purchasing decisions as a way of better managing their personal financial resources.

According to many respondents, the moral state of society is deteriorating under the capitalist system: most people are seen as selfish, concerned only with their own problems and those of their immediate family. The main reason for this, they believe, lies in the stress caused by workplace vulnerability and the struggle for basic subsistence — factors that generate intense tension and impose an overwhelming burden on individuals. Besides that, there is little time left for maintaining meaningful human relationships, which consequently lose their value. The system, in this sense, contributes to loneliness and alienation. At the same time, it is a commonly held view that the stable livelihoods typically available in Western countries generally lead to a calmer

public atmosphere and, overall, to societies that are more cooperative, tolerant and open.

## 2. Checks on capitalism

### The state as the protector of the people

Blue-collar young people generally do not regard the capitalist system itself as fair or moral. In their view it involves the exploitation of the majority and is driven by the interests of capital rather than moral principles. Capitalist actors, they believe, do not concern themselves with the social consequences of their operations — something the respondents tend to see as a natural, inherent trait of capitalist companies. This characteristic, while ethically questionable, is perceived as one of the reasons why capitalist enterprises can achieve exceptionally high levels of economic efficiency. In the absence of control, capitalism is seen as an inherently unjust system that produces rigid, hierarchical societies marked by significant social inequalities, in which opportunities, chances, and burdens are distributed unequally.

According to most blue-collar youth, the role of capitalist economic actors is not to align their decisions with social morality or the common good. Ultimately, the fairness of capitalism depends on the extent to which society is able to keep the profit motives of owners under control. If society and the state are able to counterbalance these interests and impose rational limits on capital, blue-collar youth believe that »developed« capitalism can lead to a fairer social order. Such a system, in their view, largely ensures the protection of individual freedoms, strengthens the foundations of social equality by broadening the principles of free competition, and keeps state power itself in check through the existence

of strong private owners capable of representing their own interests. According to blue-collar young people, it is primarily the responsibility of the state to protect society from the harmful effects of profit maximisation and to prevent economic and political power from becoming concentrated in the hands of a narrow elite. If state control is absent, only members of the elite benefit, while the majority of society – the ordinary people – are left among the losers.

If the state ensures the fundamental conditions for a functioning capitalist economy while maintaining clear oversight of profit-driven interests, it can shield society from harmful effects and excesses. In this way, capitalism can function as a system that contributes to the development of a country and its society (Figure 4).

### Exploitation in exchange for democracy

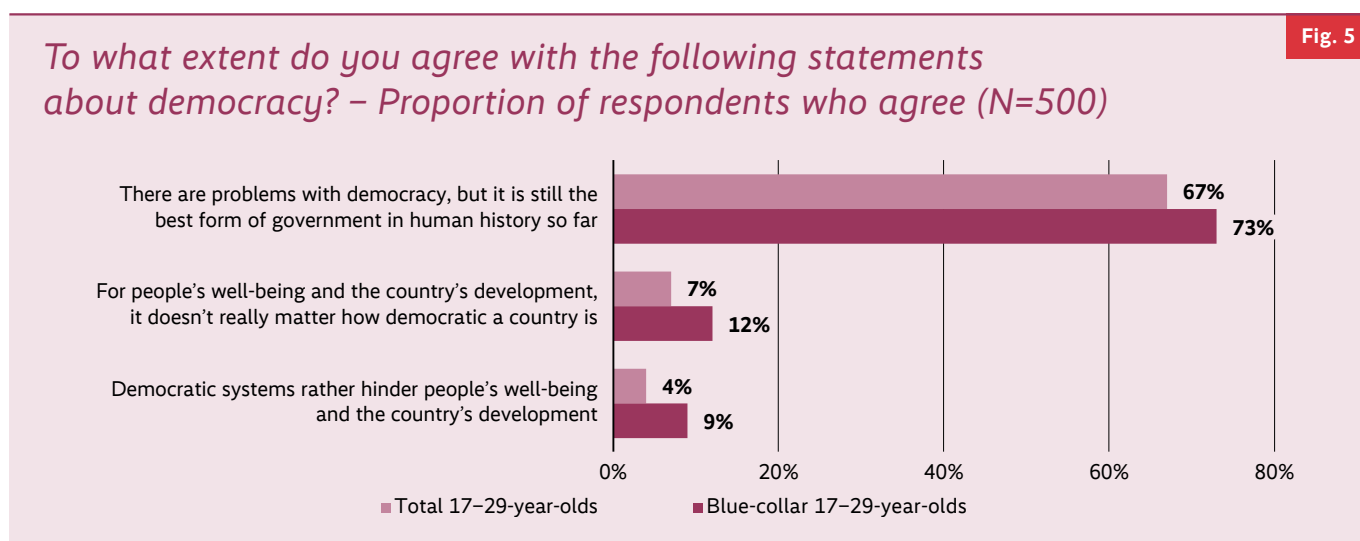
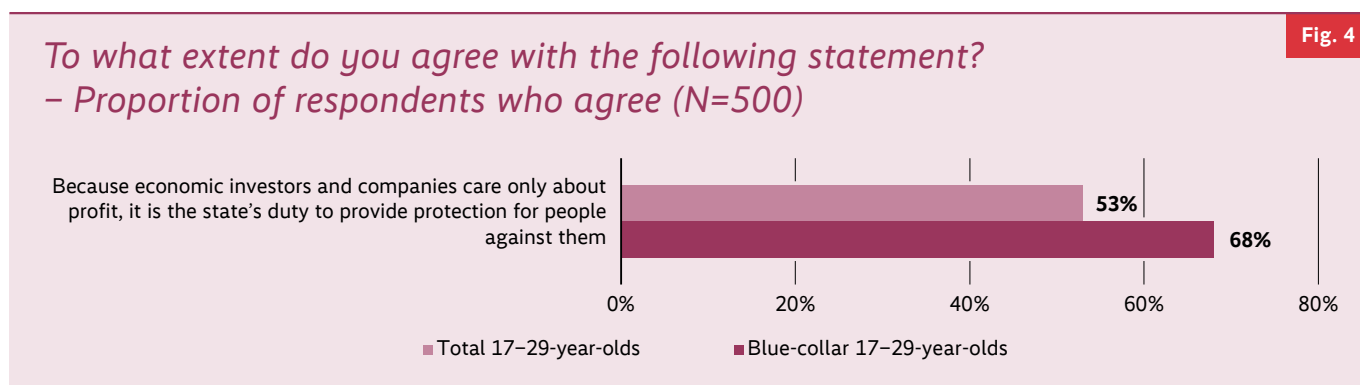
Democratic structures and values are not among the most salient elements in the thinking of blue-collar youth – at least not spontaneously. When they think of countries where life is perceived to be better than in Hungary, they most often refer to higher income opportunities, more favourable working conditions, and a generally higher

standard of living, as well as the more positive social atmosphere that arises from these factors.

Nevertheless, it is a relatively common view among blue-collar youth that in developed, capitalist countries organised along democratic principles, economic exploitation is balanced by higher living standards and by the fulfilment of democratic rights and freedoms, which in turn provide a greater sense of predictability and security.

As is generally true for the 17–29 age group as a whole, blue-collar young people also consider the exercise of democratic rights important and are generally loyal to the principles of democracy. For them, the essence of democracy lies in ensuring equality – everyone starts with equal opportunities, and only individual ability and diligence determine how successful one can become in life. Another essential aspect of democracy, in their view, is that the will of the majority can prevail in public affairs, because ordinary people also have a say in how those affairs are managed.

Three-quarters of blue-collar youth express loyalty to democracy. They believe that although the democratic system has its flaws, humanity has not yet invented a fairer form of governance (Figure 5).



As with the interpretation of capitalism, blue-collar youth also exhibit ambiguity in their understanding of the relationship between democracy and the capitalist system. There is general agreement, however, that in »developed« capitalist countries, the capitalist economy and democracy function mainly in symbiosis.

For many, democracy is the opposite of capitalism, while others see capitalism as inherently embodying the suppression of profit interests, something that democracy is capable of keeping in check. Compared with the average 17–29-year-old, blue-collar youth are somewhat less likely to believe that democracy and capitalism cannot exist without each other, yet this remains the dominant view among them as well. About one-fifth, however, agree with the statement that democracy cannot function within a capitalist system (Figure 6).

### 3. Orbán's path of capitalism

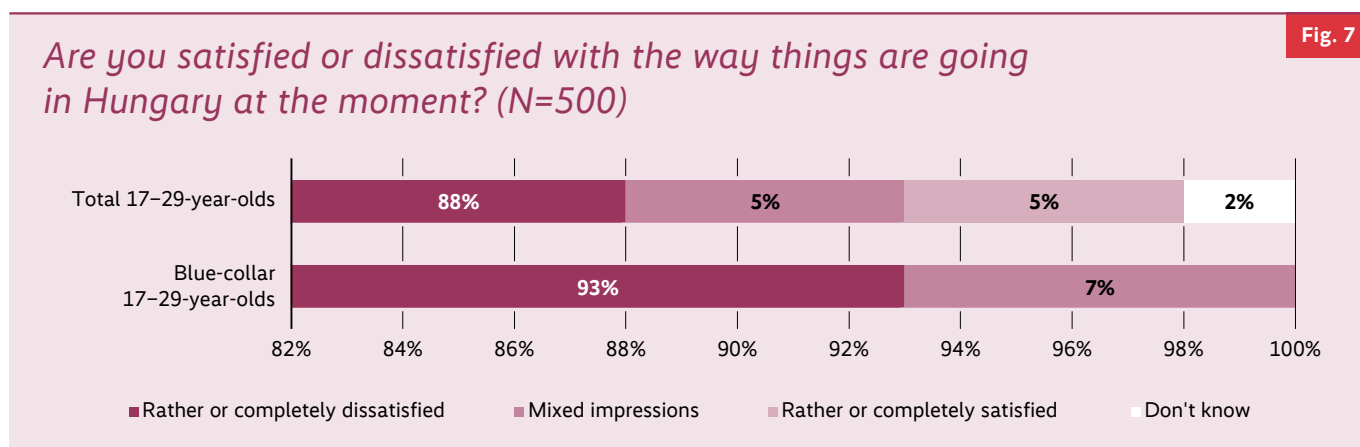
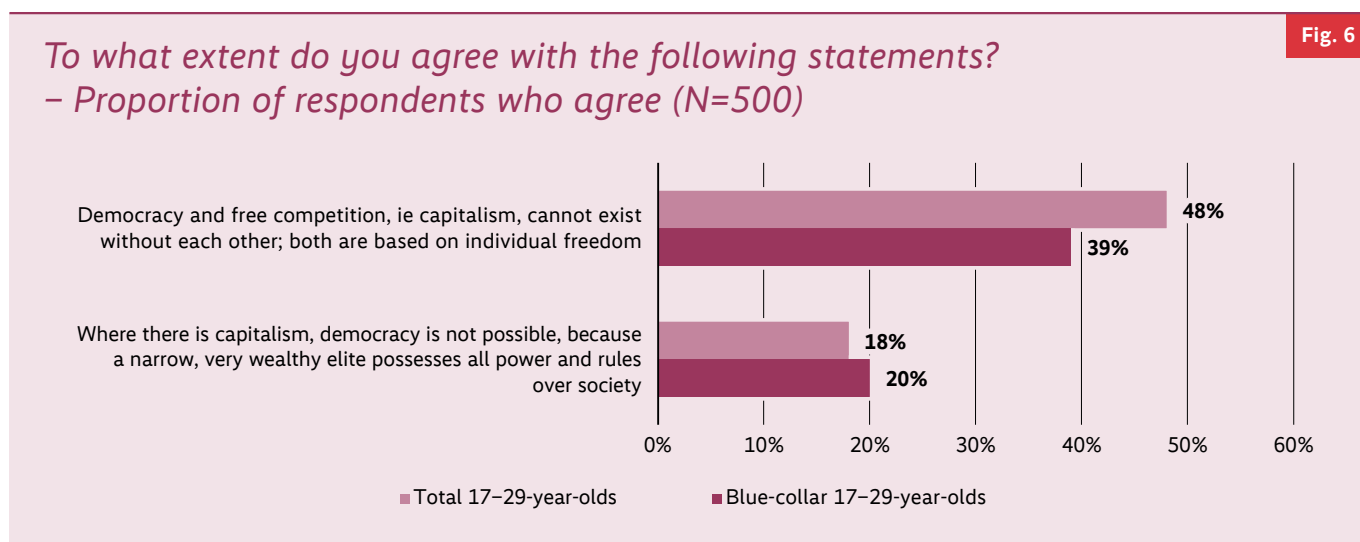
#### Dissatisfaction with the isolationist policy

Young blue-collar workers are even more dissatisfied with the way things are going in Hungary than the general

population of 17–29-year-olds: 93% said they were rather or completely dissatisfied, and the overwhelming majority were also unhappy with how democracy functions (Figure 7).

Even among young blue-collar workers, it is commonly believed that Hungary's resources and circumstances could enable people to live happy and balanced lives. However, this is not the case, and one of the main reasons cited is that the government, state power, and the population are in opposition to one another, with conflicting interests. The prevailing view is that in developed, Western European, capitalist countries, the state strives — at least to some extent — to protect its citizens from the interests of profit-driven large corporations. In contrast, in Hungary, young people believe the situation is the opposite: the state almost exclusively protects the interests of the wealthy and multinational companies, leaving the majority of society vulnerable.

Most young blue-collar workers think that Hungary's ruling elite deliberately keep society in a state of constant uncertainty and existential anxiety, making people easier to control and manipulate. There is broad agreement among young people that Hungarian society has therefore become deeply fragmented, with certain social groups sharply opposed to one another.

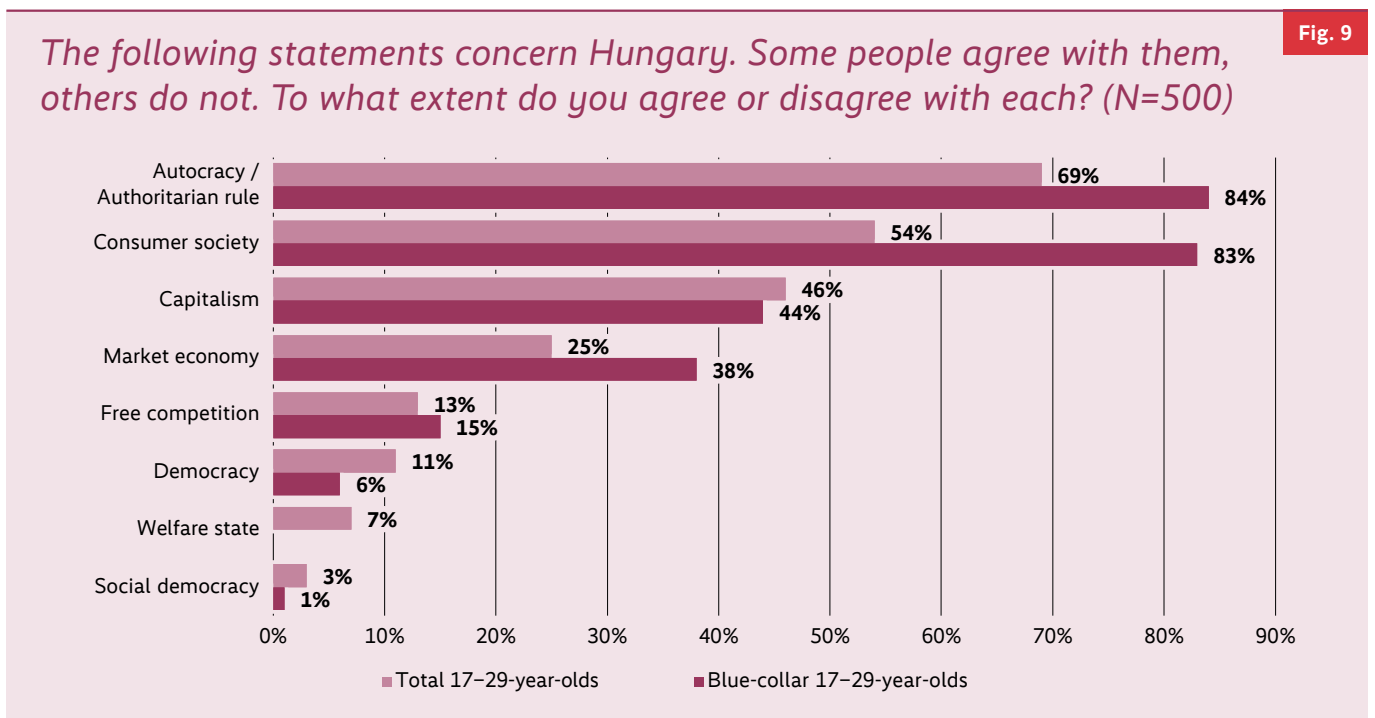
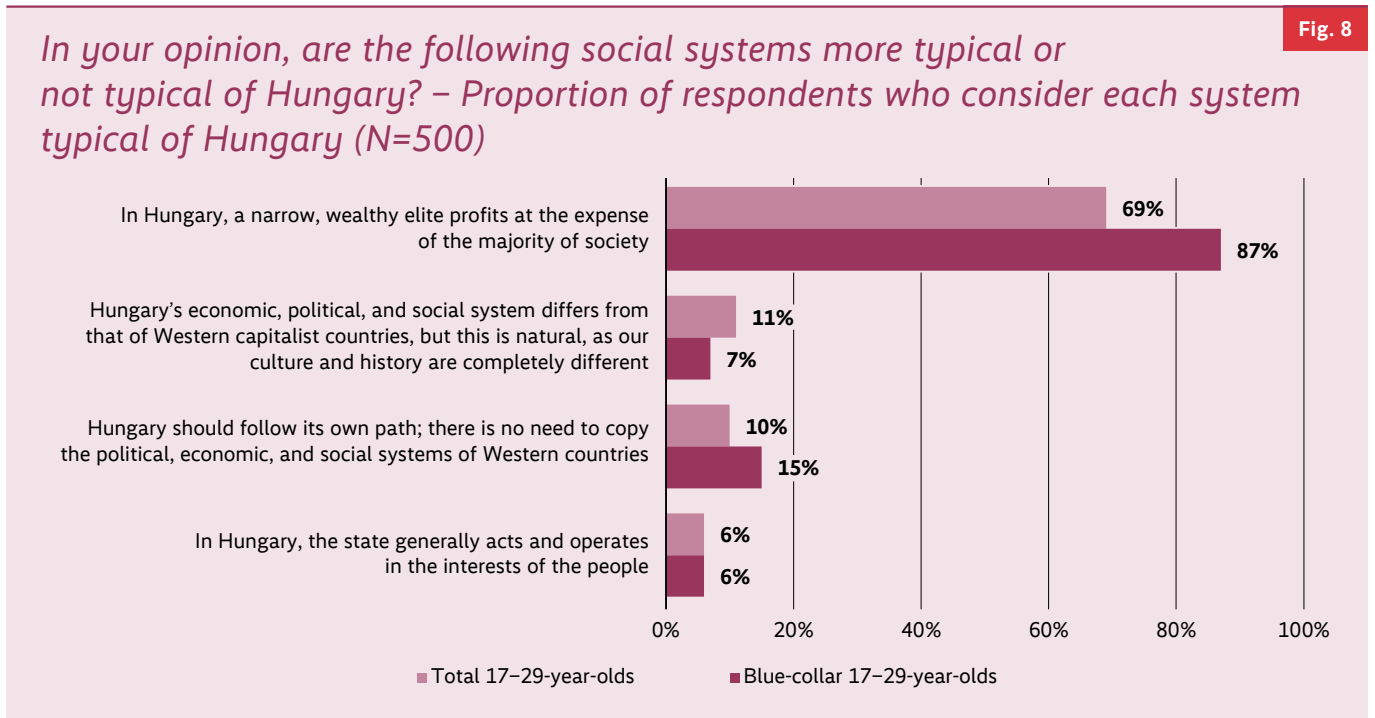


Blue-collar youth overwhelmingly do not believe that the Hungarian state acts in the interests of its people. Compared even with the broader 17–29 age group, they are more likely to think that in Hungary a narrow, wealthy elite profits at the expense of the majority of society – 87% of respondents share this view.

At the same time, they do not consider Hungary’s current system – which differs from the Western model – to be natural or desirable, nor do they believe that there is no need for the country to follow Western patterns (Figure 8).

The vast majority of young blue-collar respondents believe that Hungary’s political and social order is characterized more by autocracy and authoritarianism than by democracy, while at the same time recognising that it functions as a consumer society. Fewer than half consider Hungary’s system to be capitalist, and even fewer perceive the country as characterized by a market economy or free competition (Figure 9).

The majority of blue-collar youth believe that, due to widespread vulnerability, uncertainty and social division, the overall atmosphere in Hungary is extremely negative. People



are unfriendly and distrustful. Most only look after their own interests and avoid interactions outside their family or immediate social circle, which also makes collective action more difficult. Stress is pervasive, and loneliness and alienation are seen as general problems. Many believe that the low level of social solidarity and willingness to cooperate makes changes in Hungarian society very difficult.

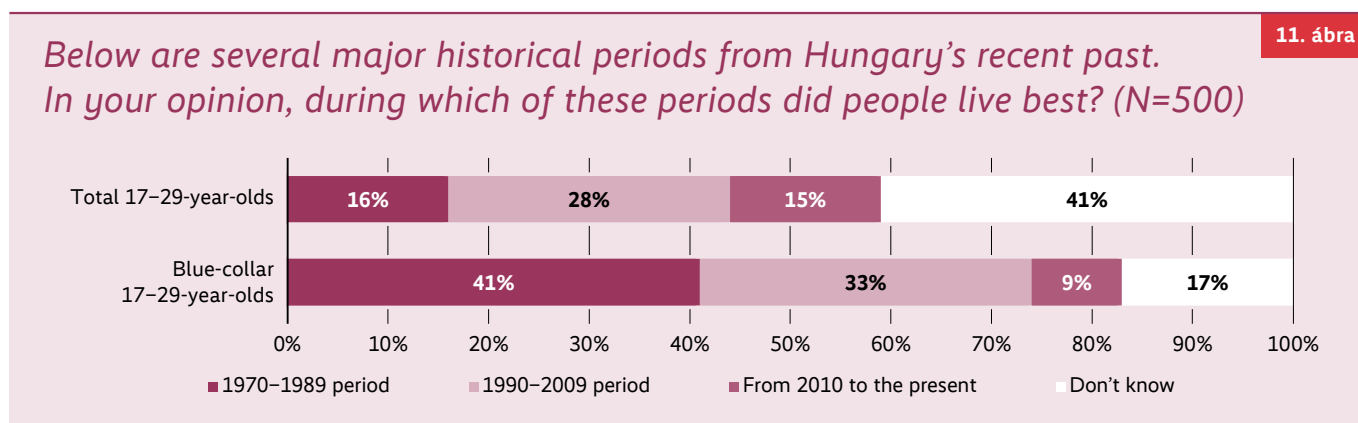
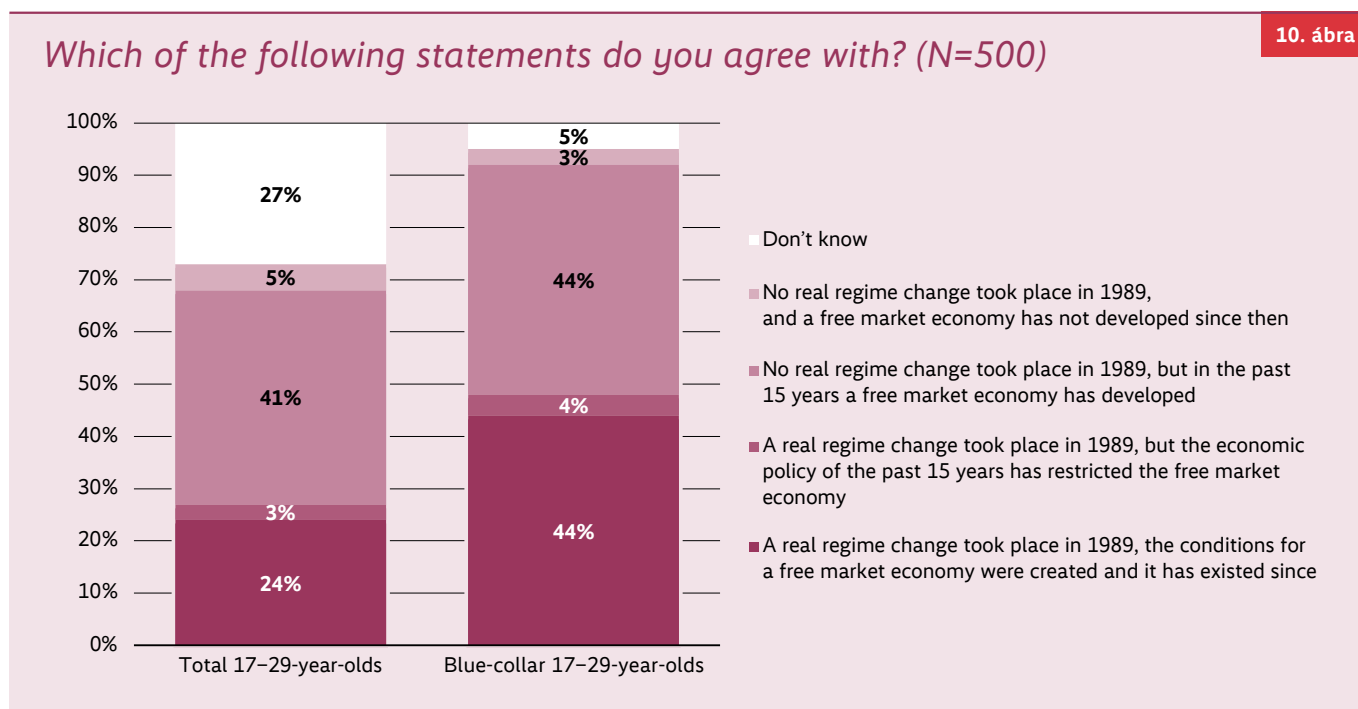
According to many blue-collar respondents, Hungary's situation is unique compared with Western countries, due to its geopolitical position and historical background. For this reason, they consider it practically impossible for Hungary's system to fully correspond to that of the developed Western European countries, with capitalist market economies. Hungary is perceived as being geographically and culturally closer to the »East«, and despite its connections with the West, it remains in a vulnerable position. Consequently, it must make more compromises in areas such as economic functioning, the structure of democratic institutions, political organization, and decision-making processes.

### From regime change to »Orbán's path«

Blue-collar youth are more likely than average to believe that no real regime change took place in Hungary in 1989–1990. Nearly half of them hold this view, even though they tend to express greater confidence than their peers when evaluating the historical periods that have followed the transition (Figure 10).

Young blue-collar workers hold much stronger opinions than average about how Hungary has developed over the past decades. Compared with the general 17–29-year-old population, a smaller proportion of them believe that the years following 2010 were the best period in recent Hungarian history. By contrast, twice as many blue-collar youth think that life was better before the 1989–1990 regime change than at any time since (Figure 11).

The stronger sense of nostalgia for the pre-transition era among blue-collar youth does not mean they are anti-capitalist. However, they are even less satisfied with the



current economic system than the average 17–29-year-old (Figure 12).

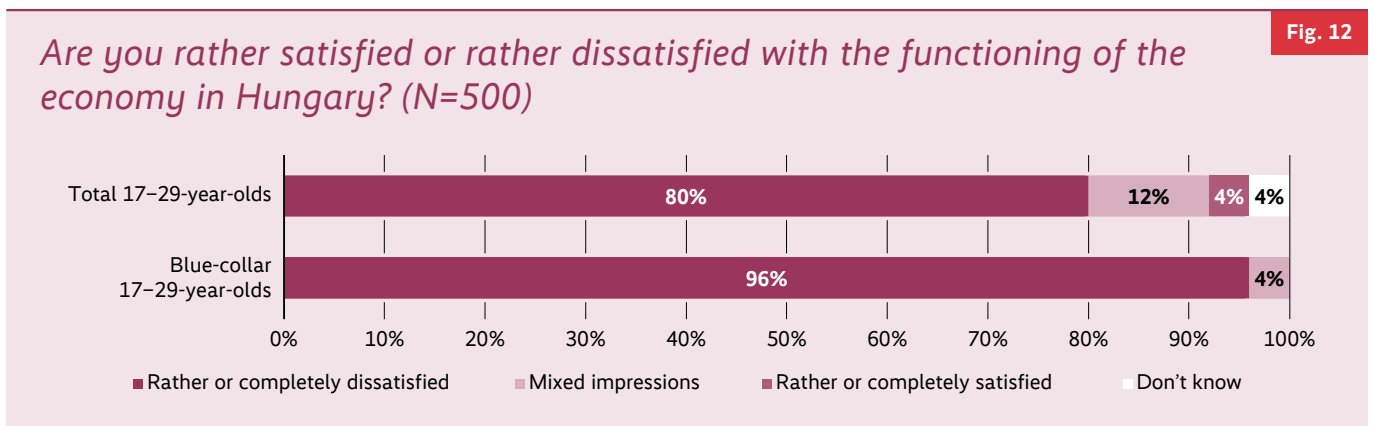
### Hungary’s distorted capitalism

Hungarian young people are deeply divided on whether Hungary’s system can be described as capitalist at all. However, only a very small proportion – 11% – believe that Hungary’s system resembles that of the »developed« capitalist countries.

About half of 17–29-year-olds (47%) believe that there is no real capitalism in Hungary – though they do not necessarily see this as a major problem. A similar proportion (42%) think that while Hungary’s system can be described as capitalist, it is not a developed Western version but a hybrid, distinctly Hungarian form. The majority of blue-collar youth (66%) share this view. Most of those who think this way see the situation very negatively: they feel that the foundations of a well-functioning capitalist system had begun to take shape in

Hungary, but over the past fifteen years these have been gradually pushed into the background. There is only partial free competition, only a partial market economy, and even consumer society exists in a distorted form. The benefits are enjoyed exclusively by a narrow, wealthy elite who completely dominate the market and the entire country (Figure 13).

Young blue-collar workers generally believe that one of the biggest obstacles to Hungary’s development is the fact that market rules prevail only to a limited extent – a competitive, free-market economy exists only under certain conditions. There is often no competition in terms of product quality, pricing or distribution efficiency; instead, it can be found in the constant search for loopholes and in building connections with the economic-policy elite. Corruption, state interference and non-market mechanisms create unfavourable conditions. According to the general view, there is no genuine free competition in Hungary – success can be achieved only through strong political connections, and even then, only if one’s actions do not conflict with the interests of the ruling elite.



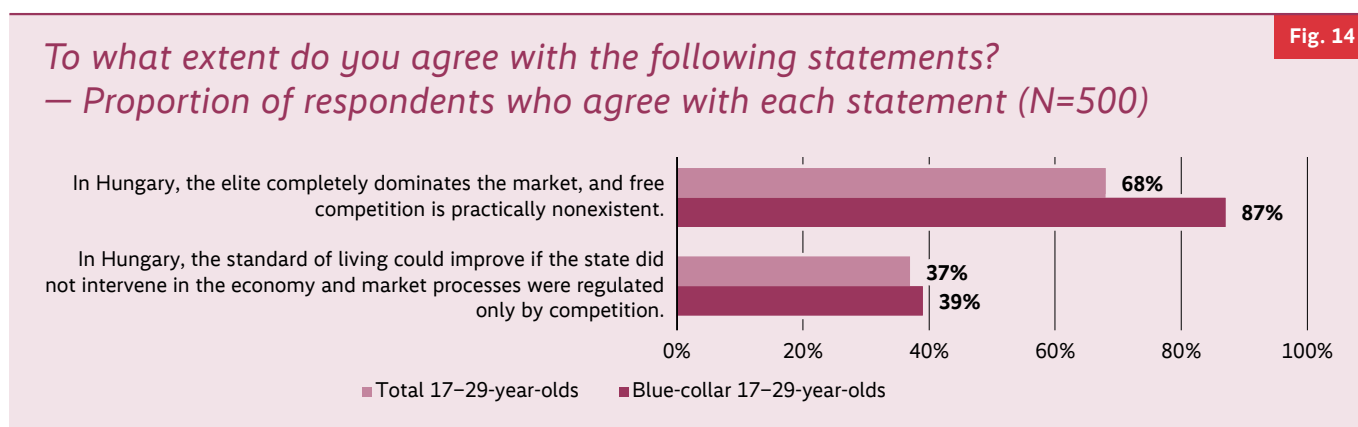
Blue-collar youth are even more likely than the average 17–29-year-old (87%) to believe that free competition does not exist in Hungary because the elite dominates the market. Similar to their peers, the largest share (39%) rather agrees that state intervention has a negative impact on living standards (Figure 14).

Many young blue-collar workers believe that Hungary’s tax system is highly unjust and that redistribution does not serve the interests of society as a whole. The tax burden on income is extremely high, purchases are subject to exceptionally high VAT, and the state does not spend its revenues in ways that genuinely serve the interests of all citizens, including ordinary workers. The general perception is that public services such as education

and health care are underfunded and do not function satisfactorily. In Hungary, benefits and subsidies are also far more easily accessible to those who do not necessarily need them. Most people feel that the majority of people are left to fend for themselves completely and cannot rely on the state for any meaningful support.

According to young blue-collar workers, most members of Hungarian society are trapped in a hamster wheel: they work constantly just to support themselves and their families, essentially becoming slaves to the system. There is widespread frustration that people must expend enormous energy merely to maintain their existing standard of living and social status. While the majority are under constant threat of slipping downward, there is virtually no real chance for individuals to improve their situation through their own efforts. Low wages, high inflation and non-market-based mechanisms are seen as the most important economic problems. A common sentiment is that most Hungarians can only dream about certain things that go beyond basic subsistence — such as a holiday or home renovation — while in reality, they can barely afford such things for themselves and their families (Figure 15).

According to the majority, this is precisely one of the biggest differences between Hungary’s special, »hybrid« capitalist system and the »developed« capitalist systems. In developed capitalist countries, maintaining one’s social



status generally means an acceptable, high standard of living and serious life and career prospects for the majority. In contrast, in Hungary it is mainly about the daily stress of survival, as everything revolves around the minimal maintenance of existence and the fulfilment of basic needs.

#### 4. Western connections

##### The distinctiveness of »Western« capitalism

Although young blue-collar workers are highly critical of the form of hybrid capitalism that, in their view, exists in Hungary, the majority still maintain positive associations with the »West« — meaning the developed countries that operate free-market economies based on open competition. These connections, however, are not primarily value-based; their opinions tend to revolve around the idealized characteristics of »Western life« — such as higher living standards and a greater sense of personal freedom. Young people perceive Hungary’s lagging behind the West mainly in terms of living standards, while differences in political systems, social structures or civil liberties play a far smaller role in their thinking.

According to most young blue-collar workers, developed Western capitalism fundamentally differs from the Hungarian version. There is a widespread belief that in a

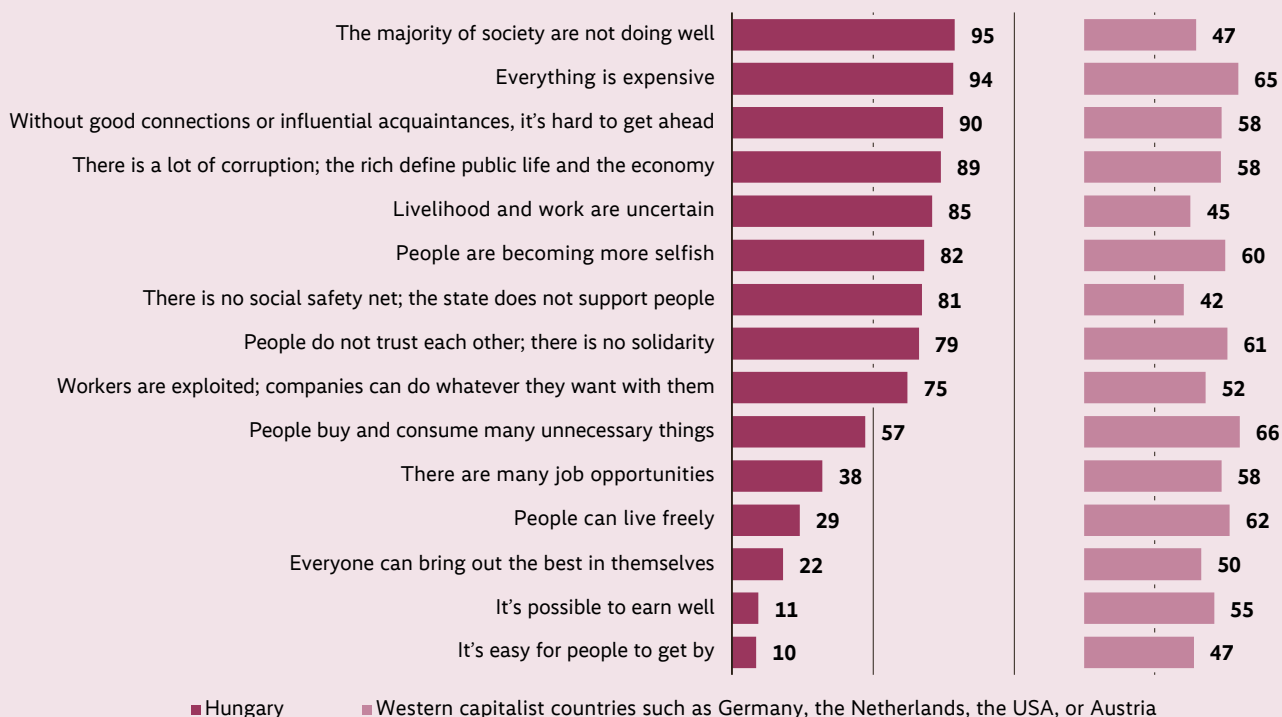
well-functioning capitalist country — where the economy is governed by the rules of free competition and the market — the disadvantages inherent in the system are offset by the majority’s (greater) freedom and relatively high standard of living. By contrast, in Hungary, the benefits of capitalism are enjoyed only by a narrow ruling elite. While an overwhelming majority of blue-collar youth (95%) believe that most people in Hungary do not benefit from the current system, less than half (47%) think the same is true for developed Western countries. At the same time, nearly five times as many believe that people in the West find it easier to get ahead in life than those in Hungary.

Although young blue-collar workers view the developed, Western capitalist countries somewhat more critically than the average 17–29-year-old, they still perceive Hungary as much less developed in virtually every respect. The vast majority rated the Western form of capitalism significantly more positively overall, and considered it fairer than the Hungarian system. In addition to higher living standards, young people also saw key differences between Hungary and the more developed capitalist countries in the following areas: the latter have stronger social safety nets, greater economic security, better appreciation of work, and more personal freedom, which they believe allow individuals to realize their potential to a much greater extent (Figure 16).

Fig. 16

*In your opinion, how characteristic are the following of Western capitalist countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, the USA, or Austria? And how characteristic are they of Hungary? (Blue-collar youth, n=69)*

CHARACTERISTIC INDEX: 0 = Not at all characteristic; 100 = Highly characteristic



Most respondents attribute these differences primarily to the fact that in »developed« capitalist countries, the functioning of the state is far more transparent, those in power are more attentive to the general interests of society, and the economy is organised around free competition, with much less corruption.

However, a minority of blue-collar youth expressed the view that the Hungarian system also has certain advantages. According to them, Western societies are more vulnerable than Hungary's because they are too open and risk losing their traditional identity. Several respondents argued that in the »developed West«, there are too many immigrants living according to cultural values different from European norms, which has disrupted social cohesion and made working conditions and wages more chaotic. At the same time, the struggle for survival is still characteristic of the majority, eroding human relationships and diminishing solidarity. For these reasons, some consider the Hungarian government's social, European and foreign policies to be at least partially, or even fully, reasonable. Those who think this way tend to see Hungary as a safer place than most countries, where life is calmer and public security is better.

### The perception of foreign capital

Most young blue-collar workers believe that the inflow of foreign capital can, in principle, benefit a country, contributing to both economic and, through that, social development. In Hungary, however, the problem lies in the fact that multinational capital is closely allied with the ruling power, meaning that there are virtually no limits placed on its interests. As a result, the majority of people perceive little to no positive impact on their own lives.

For this reason, the perception of foreign capital, investors, and investments among blue-collar youth is mixed. On one hand, it is viewed positively, because most agree that investors create jobs and can lay the foundations for dynamic economic growth. It is generally acknowledged that foreign companies tend to offer wages higher than the national average, yet still much lower than »Western«

salaries — while at the same time, workers' vulnerability is far greater than in Western countries.

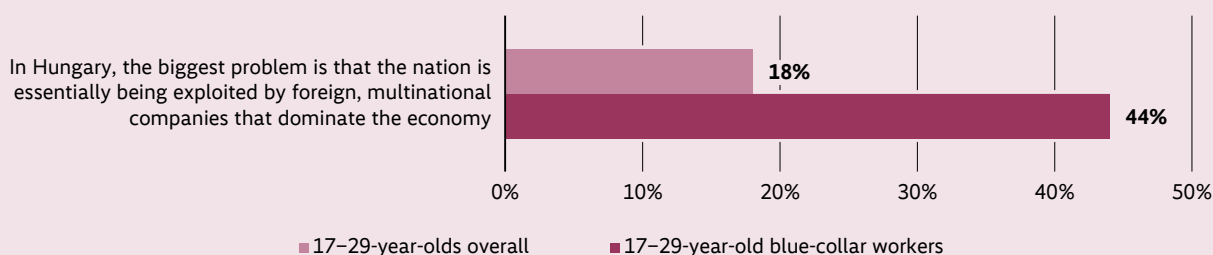
According to the majority of blue-collar youth, nothing restrains the profit-maximizing ambitions of multinational corporations in Hungary. Just like politically connected domestic businesses, favoured multinationals can essentially do whatever they please. They hold monopolistic positions in key markets and face virtually no real competition or meaningful constraints based on »moral« or »social« considerations. In the eyes of young blue-collar workers, therefore, »multinationals« are often seen as the darlings of Hungary's current, distorted form of capitalism — as part of, or in close alliance with, the exploitative economic elite. Consequently, a significantly larger proportion of blue-collar youth than the average among 17–29-year-olds (44%) believe that one of Hungary's greatest problems is that the nation is essentially being robbed by multinational corporations (Figure 17).

Many young blue-collar workers see Hungary's economic problems as stemming from the fact that the inflow of capital is not governed by market rules, but rather by the decisions of the economic and political elite, which often do not align with the country's real interests. Because, in their view, state decisions are driven by individual, short-term profit motives rather than national interests, the arrival of foreign capital only makes Hungary more unstable and dependent, heavily reliant on foreign investment and global markets. Any external fluctuation is felt immediately and has a strong impact on the Hungarian economy. This insufficiently stable and inefficient economic structure causes high inflation and rising prices, which, combined with low wages, make life nearly impossible for the majority of citizens.

At the same time, it is clearly observable that young blue-collar workers employed by international or multinational companies tend to feel that their own personal and financial situation is more secure and stable than average, and they are slightly more optimistic both about Hungary's overall situation and about the role of multinational corporations.

Fig. 17

To what extent do you agree with the following statement?  
— Proportion of respondents who agree (N=500)



## 5. Uncertain prospects

### Learned helplessness

Among young blue-collar workers, there is a general consensus that it is far more difficult to be successful and happy in Hungary than in »Western«, developed capitalist countries.

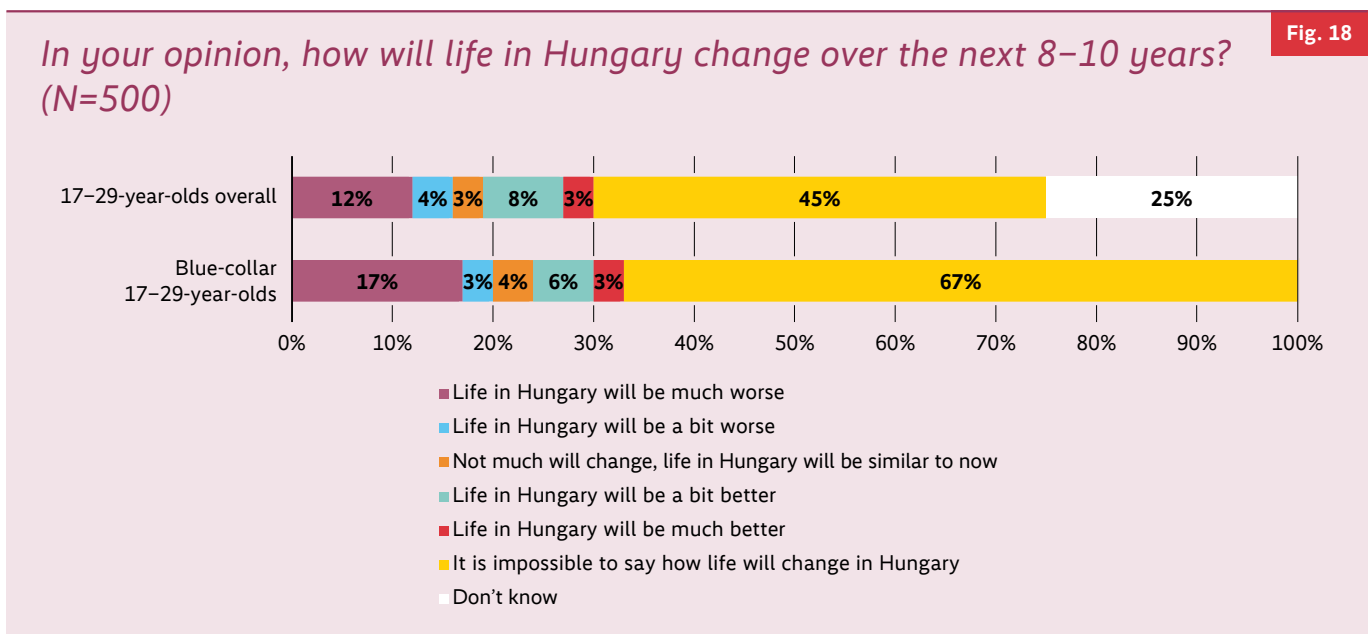
Opinions are mixed on whether happiness and a fulfilled life depend primarily on individual effort and personal ambition, or rather on the surrounding social system and environment. Most believe that both factors play an important role, but that the social system is ultimately more decisive, because people's starting points and opportunities, to the extent they exist, are determined by the structure of the system itself. According to young blue-collar workers, the conditions provided by the Hungarian system weigh heavily on people, leaving many feeling completely hopeless. The majority think that a large part of society is either slipping downward or lives in constant fear of decline, and that only a narrow segment has any real chance of improving their situation.

In this context, young blue-collar workers define success in Hungary primarily as having a decent and stable standard of living, supported by a secure job and good salary. The overwhelming majority believe that very few people currently have access to such opportunities. For most, therefore, success under Hungarian conditions must be understood in a simplified, survival-oriented way: the essential question is whether someone can make a living and support their family or not. In this sense, successful people are those who can free themselves from the daily stress of survival, and who, as a result, can feel genuinely happier.

Although the young respondents were clearly dissatisfied with the current situation in Hungary and viewed both the country's conditions and its future prospects as unfavourable and unpredictable, their attitude was marked more by resignation than by outrage. Among young blue-collar workers, there is a palpable sense of »it's always been this way, and it always will be«, a sentiment likely rooted in the fact that this generation has lived their entire lives under the Orbán system. Most take this situation almost as a given, something unlikely to change. They see politics as offering no reliable points of reference, and the unpredictable, rapid nature of political decision-making makes it extremely difficult to adapt. As a result, a general sense of uncertainty pervades their outlook.

Two-thirds of young blue-collar workers believe that it is currently impossible to predict what direction Hungary will take in the coming years, whether anything changes at all. One in five expect that conditions in Hungary will become even worse over the next 8–10 years, while only about half as many anticipate any improvement. In this respect as well, the opinions of young blue-collar workers are much more decisive – and considerably more pessimistic – than those of their age group overall (*Figure 18*).

A widely held belief among young blue-collar workers is that, while in the developed »Western« countries it is the most talented, intelligent and hardworking people who advance and become members of the economic and political elite, in Hungary it is those with the best connections, who are loyal to the ruling government and most ruthless in pursuing their own interests. The general view is that in a better-functioning country, conscious self-improvement, education and professional development could be the keys to success. In Hungary, however, building a career is already extremely difficult, and without good economic or political connections, it is often virtually impossible.



This is a source of deep frustration for most young blue-collar workers. They feel that, according to societal expectations, the measure of a successful life is a stable livelihood — closely tied to a growing career and advancement at work — yet they also feel that this kind of socially recognised success is almost unattainable for them.

Many young blue-collar workers feel that the state places strong expectations on them — to start families, establish independent livelihoods and build stable lives — yet they find it impossible to meet these expectations, as the necessary conditions and means for a successful start in life simply do not exist. This is one of the reasons why many consider moving to Western Europe, where opportunities are perceived to be much broader. The deep pessimism characteristic of blue-collar young people becomes even more evident when they are asked to assess their own career prospects and future chances of success. Their outlook for the next 8–10 years is far more pessimistic than that of the average 17–29-year-old. A clear majority (77%) believe that there are few or no opportunities to live a successful life in Hungary in the future. A significant minority (15%) are convinced that they will definitely not be living in Hungary within the next 8–10 years, while many others plan to wait a few more years and emigrate if they see no improvement in the country’s situation — or in their own personal circumstances (Figure 19).

A substantial share of young blue-collar workers do not blame the basic principles of capitalism for the country’s problems, but rather their distortion and incomplete application. In other words, they do not fundamentally oppose the logic of a capitalist system, but, based on their social and economic environment and personal experiences, they are dissatisfied with many of its aspects. When reflecting on the causes of this, few believe that the capitalist nature of the economy itself should be changed. Instead, they generally see the Orbán system as having politically and economically suffocated Hungarian capitalism, hindering its proper functioning to a significant degree.

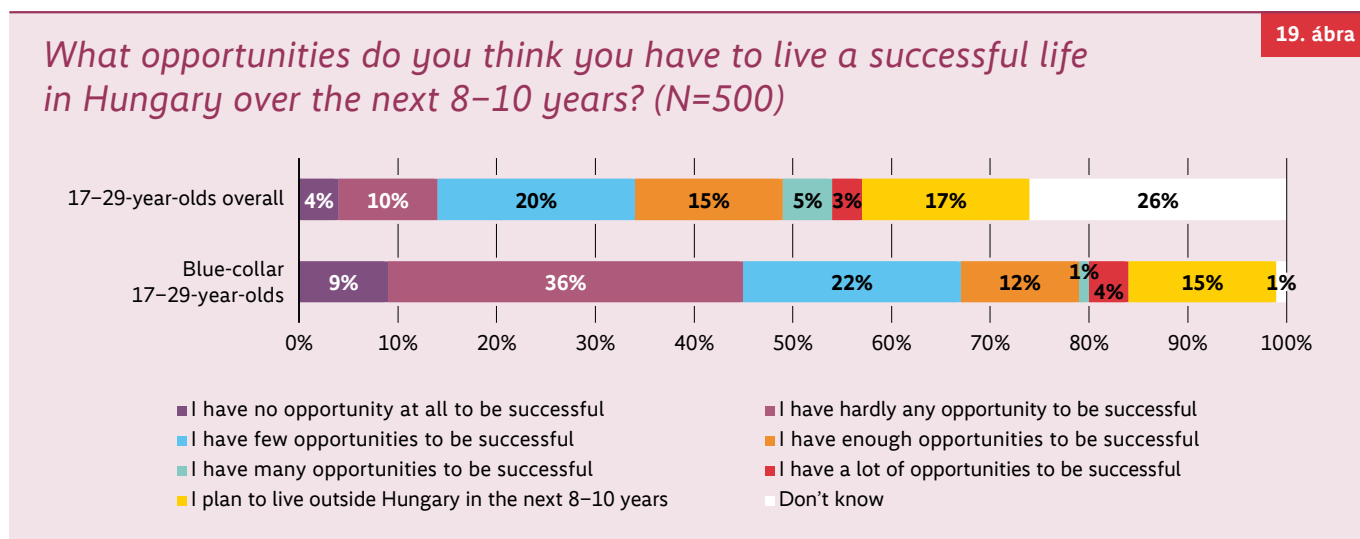
### Left-wing connections

Young blue-collar workers typically have no clear or practical ideas about how the Hungarian system could be improved. Most are deeply sceptical that any kind of »bottom-up« change could emerge. Many believe that change can come only from those currently in power. In their view, »ordinary people« can only adapt to circumstances, as they have no real influence and no say in decision-making. The solution, they believe, must come »from above«, from those who hold power.

Although young blue-collar workers are fundamentally dissatisfied with the government’s performance, they do not necessarily perceive significant differences in quality or competence between government and opposition politicians. The majority tend to be sceptical of politics in general and distrustful of politicians, holding the widespread belief that most politicians do not genuinely care about people’s or society’s interests.

A commonly expressed view is that each political side merely insists on its own truth, endlessly repeating its messages as propaganda. There is no real societal dialogue, and no public policy direction that is worth engaging with. For young blue-collar workers, the constant political and societal conflicts are a major source of frustration. Many are irritated that, for both government and opposition supporters alike, loyalty to one’s own camp seems to matter more than substantive debate.

The general dissatisfaction is clearly reflected in party-preference data from May 2025. Among blue-collar youth, support for Fidesz–KDNP is significantly lower than average for their age group, while support for the TISZA Party is higher than average. These figures showing party preference also reveal the very low level of support for left-wing parties among young people in general: among young blue-collar workers, fewer than 1% said they would vote for any left-wing party. Overall, their widespread



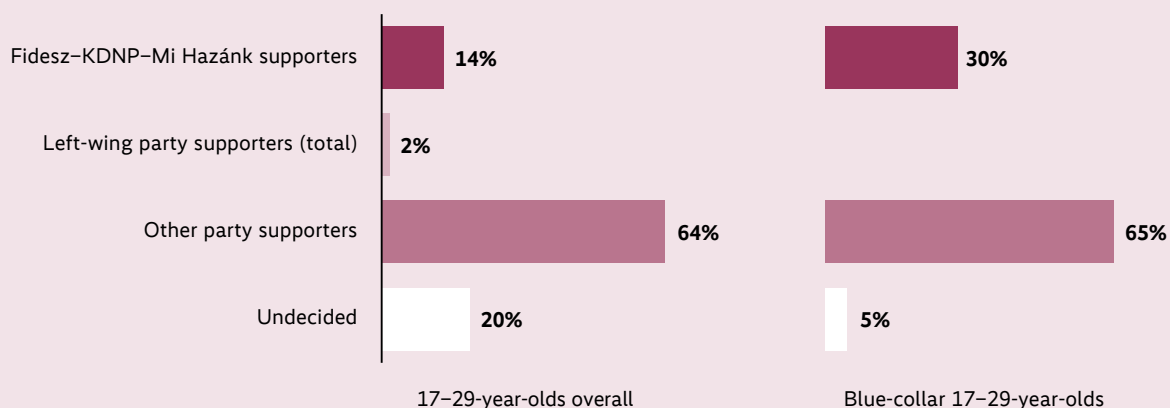
disillusionment appears to push many blue-collar youth toward right-wing extremes, as evidenced by the fact that, in May 2025, one in four of them identified as supporters of the Mi Hazánk party, a rate double the average among young people (Figure 20).

When thinking about politics, very few of the blue-collar interviewees showed any openness towards left-wing parties, partly because they had very little information about them. For most, the term »left-wing« carried no specific meaning; values associated with left-wing ideas were rarely mentioned. To many, the word simply meant »the opposition«. Most respondents also have only vague notions about trade union activities and do not see their significance or usefulness, whether in shaping politics or in representing the interests of workers and employees.

Although no explicit left-wing connection emerged in the thinking of blue-collar youth, they nevertheless expressed a desire for many changes that could be associated with left-wing ideas. Throughout the interviews, recurring central themes included the inequalities of redistribution and the need to ease the burdens on the struggling majority of society. Participants frequently articulated a demand for a more developed social state, one that would provide genuine assistance to those in need and make functional public services accessible to all citizens. A fundamental aspiration among them is to reduce social inequalities and stabilise the situation of marginalised groups, although these concerns are usually framed not as broad social goals, but in terms of individual life chances. Almost all young blue-collar workers think within the framework of a work-based society, and for many, it would be of fundamental importance to see a significant improvement in the societal and workplace recognition of labour in Hungary.

Fig. 20

*If parliamentary elections were held in Hungary this Sunday, which party list would you vote for? (N=500)*



## About the authors

**Anna Sütő** (IDEA Institute, research director)

**Péter Molnár** (IDEA Institute, senior analyst)

**Barbara Báldy** (IDEA Institute, senior analyst)

**Balázs Böcskei** (IDEA Institute, director of strategy,  
ELTE TK Politikatudományi Kutatóintézet)

## Imprint

### Publisher

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung  
Fővám tér 2-3.  
1056 Budapest

### Contact

János Molnár  
janos.molnar@fes.de

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