

HISTORIC GENERAL ELECTIONS IN HUNGARY

ANDREA ÉLTETŐ

ELTE CENTRE FOR ECONOMIC AND REGIONAL STUDIES,
INSTITUTE OF WORLD ECONOMICS

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The Orbán regime faced a domestic crisis in 2026, including economic stagnation, record-high inflation, systemic corruption and other factors. At a time of erosion of the rule of law and the deterioration of public services, the Tisza party emerged as a political alternative. Orbán had aggressive campaign tactics, built on war hysteria and a highly conflictual relationship with the European Union (EU). They did not succeed.

Election results

The participation rate was a record high: 79.5% on 12 April 2026, the day of national elections in Hungary. The Tisza party, founded just two years ago, gained a landslide victory with over two-thirds majority (138 seats) in the Parliament. Viktor Orbán's party, Fidesz, will hold 55 seats, and the far-right party Our Homeland will hold 6. What is the reason for this? Hope triumphed over fear and intimidation, as the Hungarian people sent a clear message to their leaders.

Citizens' discontent with Orbán's regime

Before the 2022 elections, Orbán provided a massive fiscal stimulus package to the population, worth 4-5% of the GDP (family tax refund, tax exemptions for under-25s, etc). This resulted in the highest inflation rate (25.7%) in the EU in early 2023, with food prices doubling. As of 2026, the Hungarian economy has stagnated for at least three years, and budgetary debt (75% of GDP) and deficit (5% of GDP) have remained relatively high. Housing prices experienced the highest increase in the EU in the past 10 years. In advance of the 2026

elections, there was no significant financial tool left to cheer up voters, and people had good reasons to be gloomy. Over the course of 16 years, the Orbán regime eroded not only the economy but also the rule of law, society, morals, environmental protection, human relations, and public services. In the past decade, Orbán declared and extended a state of emergency and ruled by decree, sidelining the Parliament. The opposition parties were powerless and ineffective.

It is well known that corruption is high in Hungary, but for an average European, it is difficult to imagine its extent and characteristics. We speak about the [creative use of law](#), a centrally organised corruption network system reaching faraway rural areas as well as high-ranking offices. Several companies, politicians, and other actors have transformed public money (and EU funding) into private wealth, systematically and on a large scale. According to [recent calculations](#), at least EUR 28 billion in the form of transferred capital, government loans, subsidies, monopoly profits, dividends, and other ways enriches the Fidesz elite - roughly the cost of 18 subway lines. Single-tender public procurement cases and other practices (such as corporate raiding, special taxes, and price caps) largely eliminated domestic competition, dampened companies' will for growth and innovation. Special "private equity funds" were established, offering low taxes and anonymity for the loyal elite - similar to offshore companies - and hundreds of billions of forints have been channelled into these funds.

In early 2025, it was revealed that the director of the National Bank (between 2013 and 2025) and his son were involved in the loss of EUR 1.5 billion in public funds via opaque foundation networks and poor investments. Despite the official complaints, there has been no police questioning in the case since then. Police or the prosecutor's office has not launched investigations into many other cases either; the

legal institutions have been taken over by Fidesz. As the rule of law eroded, people no longer knew where to turn to seek justice. Orbán has built a deep state by capturing all institutions and nominating loyalists to the main posts.

For the people, everyday life has become more and more difficult, not only because of inflation, but also because of a general dysfunction of the state. Public services, including healthcare, education systems, railway and public waterworks, have been dismantled or hardly function. Rural areas are underserved, without proper facilities. 25% of Hungarian students are functionally illiterate. The system has created high levels of poverty and inequality, and the middle class has [significantly eroded](#) over the past decade. Orbán neglected the threatening draught, water problems, packed the country with greenfield factories and forced polluting Asian battery plants on the population. Even in protected areas, forests are being cut down to fuel crony-run biomass power plants. Companies close to the government collaborate even with the Italian mafia in illegal waste disposal in Natura 2000 areas. Rather than supporting the struggling Hungarian railway's day-to-day operations, enormous sums were spent on vanity projects like the Budapest-Belgrade [railway](#) line.[1]

At the same time, public media owned completely by Fidesz has built a parallel world, continuously spreading domestic and Russian propaganda, creating enemies (Brussels and Ukraine), emphasising Christian values and the importance of families and work. However, subsidies favour only the middle-class, working families, and disadvantage [the poor](#). [2] A significant portion of housing subsidies was neutralised by soaring real estate prices, which

saw the sharpest increases in the EU. Many young people have emigrated from the autocratic regime. It is telling that, in 2025, the birth rate in Hungary dropped to the lowest levels since records began in 1949. The "child-friendly government" image got a hard hit at the beginning of 2024, as a scandal erupted over the granting of a presidential pardon to a man covering child sexual abuse in a children's home. Orbán sacrificed the careers of two women to avoid further investigation: the President of the Republic and the Minister of Justice. The ex-husband of the latter, Péter Magyar, emerged soon as a leader of a new oppositional party: Tisza.

Scandals every day of the campaign

The Tisza party embodies the people's dissatisfaction and resentment. Small local groups and islands of resistance organised events and promoted Péter Magyar, who represents the united opposition forces. At the same time, other, so far 'pseudo' oppositional parties were practically dissolved. Magyar travelled around the country several times with incredible energy (5-8 rally events per day), visiting even the smallest villages, and once walked all the way to Transylvania. He communicated exceptionally well, avoided prepared 'traps', demonstrated strength, and surrounded himself with some credible experts.

As the date of the election approached, more and more scandals and cases of abuse came to light by investigative journalists or respected public officers, and Fidesz was constantly forced into a defensive position, denying even documented and proven facts. These included the cover-up of environmental, health and safety violations at battery factories, as well as

[1] The railway cost EUR 12 million per kilometer, with the project involving Orbán's close associate Lőrinc Mészáros.

[2] Family allowances have remained unchanged since 2008, at EUR 30 per month, with no regard for inflation and rising cost of living.

child abuse scandals; attempts to sabotage the Tisza party and mass-surveillance of citizens by the secret service; and various instances of corruption. Orbán's reputation also experienced a major blow as the close ties of his government and himself to Russian dictator Vladimir Putin were revealed.

Autocratic tools to gain votes

For years now, it has been standard practice that no genuine opposition figures or critics of the ruling party are allowed to express themselves on public media. In 2026, as Fidesz began to sense defeat, it resorted to increasingly aggressive and unfair tactics distributed via media channels. They forged damaging photos and videos with artificial intelligence, and even a 600-page fake party programme for Tisza (containing tax increases). Although even the court had to rule that the programme was false, the propaganda media and social media troll farms spread it far and wide. A defamatory comic book was also published about Magyar, titled 'Me, the Two-Faced One', alleging his betrayal of Hungary to the EU and Ukraine. In one electoral district, a 'neutral' candidate with ties to Fidesz, named Péter Magyar, ran in the election, while in another, the candidate was "Péter Tisza." Hungarians in Transylvania and Serbia had two weeks to vote by mail, enabling widespread [fraud](#).

Orbán called on local mayors to mobilise everyone in Hungary, even in the smallest villages. The week before the election day, several tons of food packages were distributed throughout the country's rural regions to encourage voter registration, where poverty, inequalities, and threats [are harnessed to influence voters](#). In Orbán's rallies, he had his own "assault squad," pushing people away to prevent critical voices while police were nowhere to be seen.

Apart from intimidation, war hysteria was taken to the extreme. Alongside Brussels, Ukraine was framed as Hungary's main enemy. The streets were filled with posters of a smiling Zelensky and Orbán calling for peace, implying Ukrainian influence behind Tisza. The official TV news studio was set up to look like war-torn ruins, and an AI-generated video was often played showing a little girl searching for her father, who was being executed in the war. Russian-inspired false flag actions took place. These included Hungary's anti-terrorism police stopping and detaining a regular and allowed convoy transporting gold and money from Austria to Ukraine; Orbán ordered the government to seize the cargo, detaining delivery staff in poor conditions for over 24 hours. Furthermore, on Easter Sunday, explosives were found in two backpacks near the gas pipeline at the Serbian border. Orbán dramatically convened a war council, ordered soldiers to attend, and his people hinted that Ukrainians might have been the perpetrators.

Europe's black sheep

With an anti-EU rhetoric similar to that of the European far-right parties, the Orbán government has often pursued a [confrontational diplomacy](#) with the EU, vetoing some joint EU declarations and international agreements. Orbán used a wide range of political and legal measures (public campaigns, national consultations, regulations, etc.) to support his Eurosceptic populist narrative and influence public opinion. Euroscepticism in Hungary is prevalent among the older, less educated, more socially isolated and Fidesz-voting citizens.

EU membership, financial transfers, and the support of the European People's Party and [political leaders in Germany](#) have [enabled the establishment](#) of an autocratic regime in Hungary and the dismantling of the rule of law. Starting in 2010, Orbán made steps (new election law, takeover of the media, harassing nongovernmental organisations, etc.) all

pointing to the same direction, but - with a slight exaggeration - the European Commission only expressed its "concern" or "deep concern." This lack of action made the progressive erosion of Hungarian democracy possible. Unfortunately, the EU woke up too late, and after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Orbán's behaviour became openly pro-Russian. The Article 7 TEU procedure and all legal procedures were ineffective. The only significant impact came from the application of financial pressure from 2022 and the suspension of some payments based on the conditionality mechanism and milestones, as well as the imposition of financial penalties for non-compliance with rulings by the Court of Justice of the EU.

Through his propaganda, Orbán has slowly and gradually eroded Hungarians' high trust in the EU. He has also emboldened populist forces in other Member States and become a role model for the American MAGA movement. This is demonstrated by United States Vice President JD Vance's open endorsement of Orbán in Budapest only five days before the election, during which he berated the EU for attempting to interfere in the Hungarian elections.

The 2026 general elections in Hungary have become a choice between East and West. Between the manipulation and freedom. Between values and dishonesty. Now, the hard work begins to build a normal country. There is a new chance, but there are severe internal challenges ahead, and the geopolitical situation is insecure. Financial markets have reacted positively to the election results, and investors are pricing in a more predictable economic policy. A return to the European mainstream could significantly lower Hungary's risk premium and borrowing costs. The likelihood of fully unlocking frozen EU recovery funds and cohesion resources has increased, although trust in Hungary should be restored. Public finances are under huge pressure, with the annual deficit target half-exhausted within

the first two months of the year. The promises made during the campaign may be impossible to fulfil. Inflation and rising prices continue to erode the purchasing power of citizens. But hope returned.

All the opinions expressed in this publication are the sole view of the author, and do not represent the position of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) or its members.

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Andrea Éltető is a Senior Research Fellow at the ELTE Centre for Economic and Regional Studies, Institute of World Economics in Budapest. She regularly publishes in and reviews for international and local economic journals and coordinates international and national research projects. Her fields of research are foreign direct investment in Central Europe, global value chains, foreign trade, and Hungary in the EU.

