

Changing the terms of conflict: electoral revolution in the 2026 Hungarian parliamentary election

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Abstract

The 2026 Hungarian parliamentary election ended sixteen years of uninterrupted Fidesz rule under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. The Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA), led by Péter Magyar, won 53.18 per cent of the party-list vote and 141 of 199 seats at record post-1990 turnout. We interpret this outcome as an electoral revolution produced through asymmetric agenda competition. TISZA did not primarily challenge Fidesz by taking opposing positions on the incumbent's preferred issues. It shifted attention from war, sovereignty, and Brussels toward government performance, corruption, public services, transport, territorial inequalities, and democratic renewal. Our analysis of party Facebook communication and press coverage documents this divergence, while survey evidence shows how the strategy united most of the former opposition, mobilised some previous non-voters, and attracted a smaller but consequential share of former Fidesz voters. This produced a socially and territorially broad coalition despite persistent age, education, occupation, and settlement gradients. The election transformed the government and party system, although it did not complete democratisation. TISZA's constitutional majority now places rapid institutional repair in tension with legal continuity and pluralist restraint.

Keywords: *Hungary; electoral autocracy; TISZA; issue competition; democratic transition*

On 12 April 2026 in Hungary, the Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA), led by Péter Magyar, ended sixteen years of uninterrupted Fidesz government under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. TISZA received 53.18 per cent of the party-list vote and won 141 of the 199 seats in the National Assembly. Turnout reached 79.56 per cent, its highest level in a parliamentary election since the transition in 1990. The magnitude of the result was striking because TISZA had become a major electoral actor only during the 2024 European Parliament election. It was also institutionally consequential: its seat share crossed the two-thirds threshold required for constitutional amendment.

The result resembles the 2023 Polish election insofar as both removed an illiberal incumbent through electoral mobilisation. The institutional consequences differ. Poland's heterogeneous governing coalition had to govern alongside a hostile president with veto power and lacked the constitutional majority needed to dislodge entrenched office-holders, creating the trade-offs that Bill and Stanley (2025) describe as a post-illiberal trilemma. Hungary is a parliamentary regime, and its electoral system converted TISZA's vote majority into a single-party constitutional majority. The opportunity for institutional reconstruction is therefore wider, together with the risk that concentrated power will be reproduced under a different party.

This article's central claim is that the Hungarian outcome was an electoral revolution produced through asymmetric agenda competition. TISZA did not principally defeat Fidesz by taking the opposite position on an identical set of issues. It changed the terms of conflict. Fidesz emphasised war, sovereignty, relations with Brussels, and the protection of utility prices; TISZA distributed its attention across public services, transport, territorial inequalities, corruption, government performance, and democratic renewal. This valence-oriented agenda was joined to movement-party organisation, direct digital communication, and intensive territorial campaigning. Along with other socio-

economic factors, these elements made one political party a credible national alternative to Fidesz.

The article develops this argument in four steps. The first section places TISZA's emergence in an electoral autocracy characterised by uneven political opportunities. The second examines the campaign and presents our analysis of party and media agendas. The third discusses the electoral outcome, voter flows, social profiles, and threat perceptions. The final empirical section considers the new government and the first disputes over democratic reconstruction.

Background to the election

An electoral autocracy with uneven opportunities

By 2026, Hungary was widely classified as a hybrid regime or electoral autocracy. Elections remained the constitutionally recognised route to office, opposition parties could mobilise, and the result was not administratively predetermined. Yet, political competition unfolded within institutions that systematically advantaged Fidesz. Constitutional revision, cardinal laws, long appointments, state advertising, public broadcasting, and the concentration of private media ownership reduced the separation between governing party and state (Bátorfy and Urbán 2020; Bozóki and Hegedűs 2018). Fidesz also invested in a broader counter-hegemonic project that connected electoral dominance to civil society, education, media, and cultural institutions (Bohle et al. 2024). The peaceful transfer of office in 2026 does not remove these prior asymmetries; it indicates that electoral competition continued to provide a possible, although difficult, route to alternation.

The electoral system reinforced this unevenness and shaped the strategic lessons of successive opposition defeats. Since 2014, 106 members of parliament have been elected in single-member constituencies by plurality rule, while 93 seats have been allocated from

national lists. The list calculation combines direct party-list ballots with transfer votes from individual constituencies. Votes cast for losing constituency candidates enter the transfer pool, as do the votes of winning candidates above the number required to defeat the runner-up. This latter provision, usually called winner compensation, further rewards a party that wins many constituencies (Tanács-Mandák and Horváth 2025). In every parliamentary election held under this system, in 2014, 2018, 2022, and 2026, the party finishing first obtained a two-thirds constitutional majority. In 2026, TISZA would have won a majority even without winner compensation.

External voting adds a second asymmetry. Hungarian citizens without a registered address in Hungary may vote by mail, although they receive only a party-list ballot. This category primarily includes members of historical Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries, among whom Fidesz developed a strong organizational advantage. Citizens who moved to Western Europe or any other countries but retained a Hungarian address must vote in person at a consulate or return to Hungary; they retain both the list vote and the constituency vote attached to their registered address. The two external electorates have displayed different partisan alignments, with postal voters much more supportive of Fidesz and western European emigrants more opposition-oriented (Waterbury 2025). Since mail ballots enter the nationwide list pool and cannot decide an individual constituency, their institutional weight is lower than the two votes available to residents and registered emigrants.

These rules placed a premium on territorial coordination. Fragmented opposition lists in 2014 and incomplete constituency coordination in 2018 allowed Fidesz to translate pluralities into large seat bonuses. The six-party United for Hungary alliance solved the nomination problem in 2022 by offering one opposition candidate in each district, but it did not create a unified organisation or a coherent political brand. Its components retained

distinct ideological profiles, leadership structures, and reputational liabilities. After the alliance's defeat, the relevant strategic lesson was more demanding than electoral cooperation. A successful challenger needed one political party that could concentrate list and constituency votes, benefit from both forms of compensation, and present a single brand without reproducing the fragmentation of the established opposition.

From elite defection to a centrist anti-establishment challenger

The structural potential for a challenger success was provided by the difficult economic situation after 2021, and the inflation shock in 2022–23. The immediate opening followed the clemency scandal of February 2024. President Katalin Novák resigned after it became public that she had pardoned an official convicted of helping to conceal sexual abuse in a children's home. Judit Varga, a former justice minister and the intended leader of the Fidesz list for the European Parliament election, also withdrew from political life. Varga's former husband, Péter Magyar, then broke publicly with the governing elite. His elite defection supplied insider credibility to criticisms of corruption and the concentration of power, while his distance from the established opposition reduced the reputational costs associated with earlier coordination attempts (Baranyai et al. 2025; Kovarek 2025).

TISZA won 29.6 per cent in the June 2024 European Parliament election and displaced every established opposition party. It joined the European People's Party and developed into the only challenger whose support approached that of Fidesz. Following on the work of Engler (2023), Kovarek (2025) characterises this appeal as centrist anti-establishment politics: TISZA brought together voters with heterogeneous ideological origins, low institutional trust, a pro-European orientation, and rejection of both the government and the previous opposition. Key for the appeal of similar challengers is mobilising anti-establishment protest without a distinctive ideological location.

TISZA also developed characteristics of a movement party. Local TISZA Islands provided a low-threshold form of participation, while rallies, volunteer activity, crowdfunding, and candidate recruitment connected decentralised involvement to centralised campaign control. In Hungary, such movement strategies have repeatedly allowed new parties to establish an issue profile, build alliances, and develop a local presence outside Budapest (Borbáth and Susánszky 2025). The repertoire was not exclusive to opposition actors. Fidesz's earlier Civic Circles and subsequent pro-government Peace Marches cultivated visible ties with supportive civil society (Susánszky et al. 2016), and its long-term penetration of social and cultural organisations formed part of its broader hegemonic strategy (Bohle et al. 2024). TISZA therefore confronted an incumbent whose organizational power extended beyond formal party structures by constructing its own combination of electoral party and movement-based mobilisation.

The campaign

Campaigning in an uneven media environment

The media environment made direct communication central to TISZA's campaign. Public broadcasting and a large part of the commercial media remained aligned with the government, while state advertising had altered the financial structure of the media market (Bátorfy and Urbán 2020). TISZA responded through intensive face-to-face campaigning, local organisation, and social media. These channels were mutually reinforcing. Local events generated news and digital content; online communication advertised subsequent events, coordinated supporters, and maintained a recognizable national message across decentralised activity.

Magyar's nationwide tours were particularly important for establishing TISZA as more than a Budapest-centred opposition party. The campaign concentrated many visits

in competitive constituencies and reached almost every district. Available district-level analysis does not identify a larger TISZA swing in constituencies that received additional visits, partly because the tour was strategically targeted (DeSisto and Pop-Eleches 2026). Nevertheless, Magyar's presence in local communities contributed to national branding and played a key organizational function. Repeated visits made rural grievances visible, introduced local candidates, supported activist recruitment, and produced content that circulated beyond the host constituency. The tour is therefore best understood as part of TISZA's movement-party infrastructure than as a series of independent local treatments.

Social media provided the second direct channel. Facebook allowed TISZA to communicate without relying on traditional editorial gatekeepers (Borbáth 2026). At the same time, Facebook campaigning came with its own incentives and limits: post characteristics shaped audience reactions, while platform-specific affordances mediated which topics politicians and audiences discussed (Bene 2017; Stier et al. 2018). Magyar created and maintained his own Facebook profile, blending his public role as a politician with aspects of his private life and connecting with audiences through both political and more private posts. Overall, because Facebook is more directly controlled by strategic political actors, whether parties or individual politicians, it allows us to compare the issue agenda they seek to promote with the agenda offered by the press and examine whether Fidesz and TISZA competed on the same substantive terrain.

Asymmetric agenda competition

Saliency theory expects parties to compete through selective emphasis, giving sustained attention to issues on which their profiles and reputations are favourable (Green-Pedersen 2007), although direct tests find selective emphasis only partly borne out, with parties often confronting each other on the same issues (Dolezal et al. 2014). The theory is further qualified by the issue-yield perspective, which argues that parties benefit from issues that

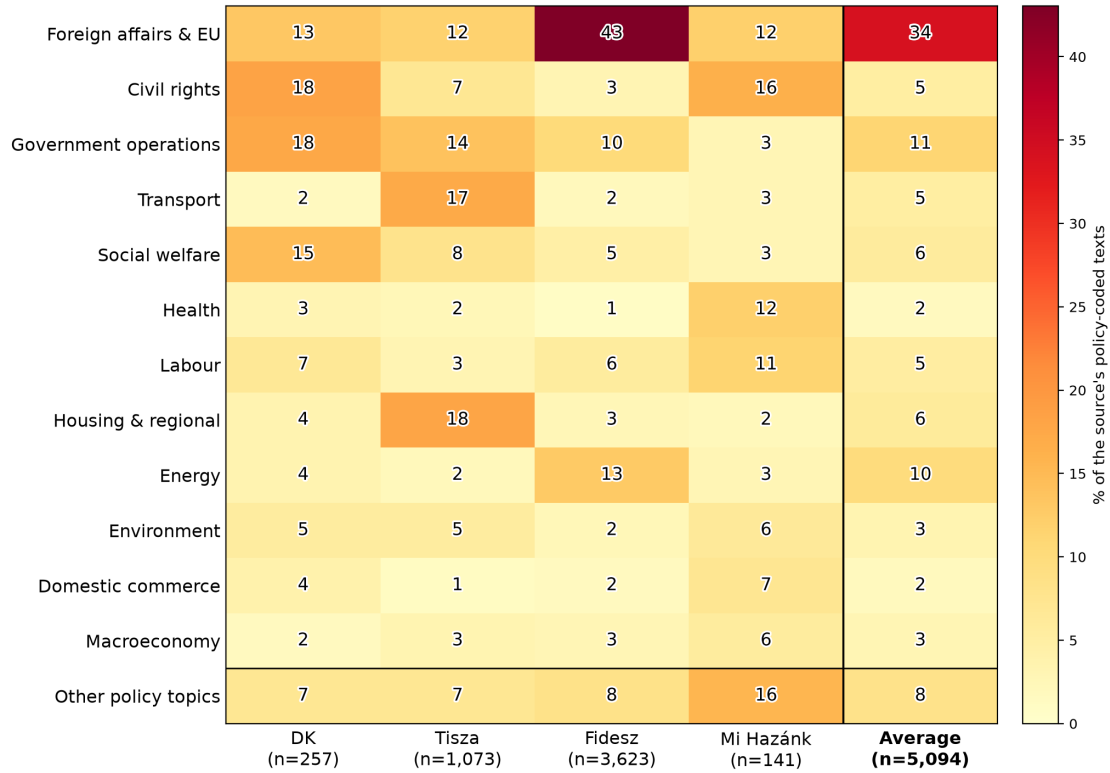
unite their existing electorate while also attracting support from the electorate at large (De Sio and Weber 2014). This criterion was central for TISZA. A coalition including former left-wing opposition voters, centrists, non-voters, and a segment of the Fidesz electorate could not easily be held together by a detailed position on every ideological conflict. Government performance, integrity, and public services provided a broader common denominator.

We examine these dynamics through two machine-coded corpora covering 1 October 2025 to election day on 12 April 2026 (Sebők 2026). The corpus contains 12,511 public Facebook posts from fifteen accounts associated with Fidesz, TISZA, the left-liberal Democratic Coalition (DK), the radical-right Mi Hazánk, and their leaders. The media corpus contains 69,204 articles from five outlets spanning the main ideological blocs: the pro-government portal origo.hu; the liberal-opposition outlets telex.hu and hvg.hu; the radical-right magyarjelen.hu; and the TISZA-aligned kontroll.hu. Both corpora were classified with a Hungarian extension of the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) codebook and the models developed by poltextLAB to code them (Sebők et al. 2025). Since output volume varied sharply across actors, the figures present topic shares within each party or press bloc, rather than raw counts.

Figure 1. Policy-topic salience in party Facebook campaigns and press coverage

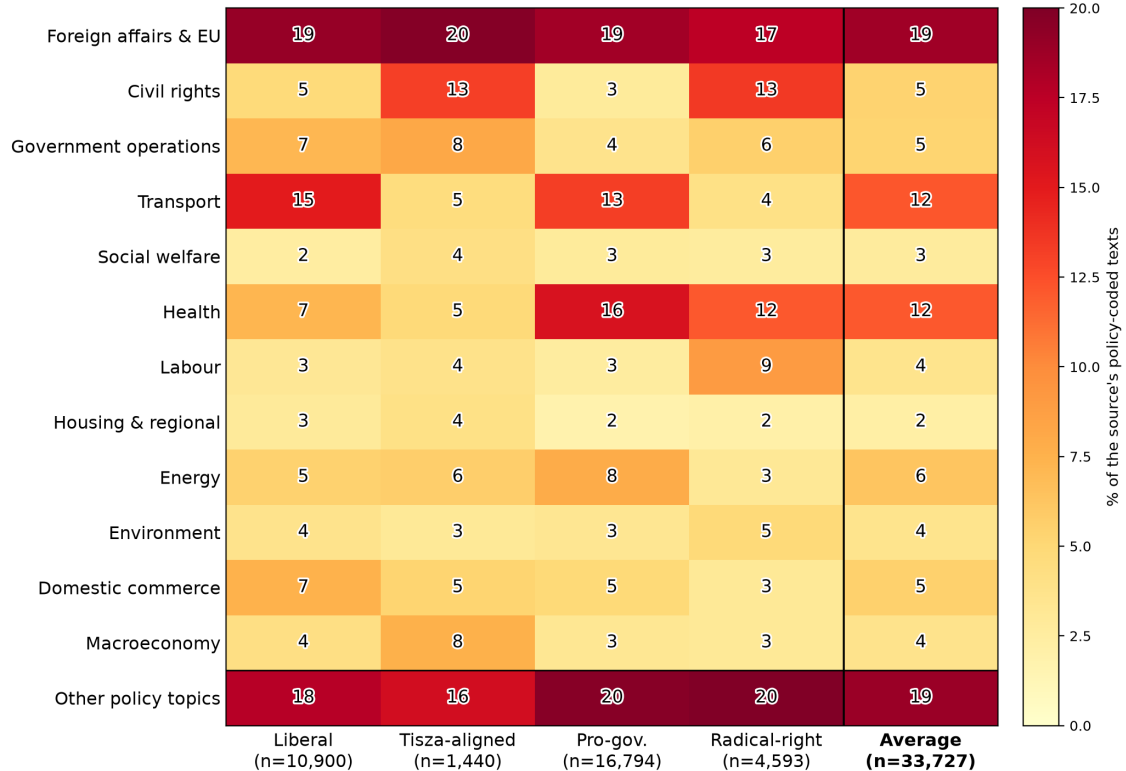
Panel A. Party Facebook agendas

% of each party's policy-coded posts on the topic (CAP majors 1-21); each column sums to 100 — within-party shares, not a ratio



Panel B. Press agendas

% of each bloc's policy-coded articles on the topic (CAP majors 1-21); each column sums to 100 — within-bloc shares, not a ratio



Note: Each cell reports the share of the relevant actor's policy-coded output devoted to a CAP major topic. Columns sum to 100. Panel A: $n = 5,094$ policy-coded Facebook posts. Panel B: $n = 33,727$ policy-coded press articles.

Figure 1 presents the broad policy distributions. Party-political and horse-race communication was common across Facebook, accounting for 39 per cent of all posts. It constituted 58 per cent of DK's posts and 51 per cent of Mi Hazánk's, compared with 39 per cent for Fidesz and 29 per cent for TISZA. Once this residual category is excluded, Fidesz displays the most concentrated policy profile. International and EU affairs account for 43 per cent of its policy-coded posts, followed by energy at 12.8 per cent and government operations at 10.2 per cent. The distribution reflects a campaign organised around war, sovereignty, Brussels, and the protection of regulated energy prices.

TISZA's profile is broader. Housing and regional policy account for 17.9 per cent of its policy-coded Facebook output, transport for 17.1 per cent, government operations for 13.8 per cent, and international and EU affairs for 11.7 per cent. The more contested issue of energy dependence, primarily on Russian sources, receives only 2 per cent. The party connected public services and territorial inequalities to corruption, administrative competence, and responsibility for the condition of the state. Magyar also named Orbán 528 times across 856 posts, whereas Orbán rarely named his challenger. TISZA personalised responsibility for internal performance, while Fidesz more often defined conflict in external, geopolitical terms.

The two smaller parties occupied more specific niches. Among its policy-coded posts, DK emphasised civil and minority issues, government operations, and social welfare. Mi Hazánk combined a high horse-race share with attention to civil and minority issues, health, international affairs, and labour and immigration. Their profiles remained visible in campaign communication, although neither party managed to challenge the two-party structure of the contest. DK's subsequent electoral failure also indicates that high

attention to party competition did not compensate for its declining organizational and electoral position.

The press agenda shows more commonality than the party columns. Foreign affairs and the EU were the largest policy domain in every press bloc, accounting for roughly one-fifth of policy-coded articles. Below this shared ceiling, the liberal press devoted relatively more attention to transport, while the pro-government portal emphasised health and the radical-right outlet gave greater weight to civil and minority issues. The common prominence of foreign affairs partly reflects the news value of events generated by the incumbent. It also shows that control over a party's social media agenda did not remove the wider media environment in which campaigns were interpreted.

Figure 2. Concrete campaign-issue salience in party and press agendas

Panel A. Concrete campaign issues on Facebook

(share of each party's concrete-issue posts, %; top 10 issues + other — within-party shares, not a ratio)

	DK (n=79)	Tisza (n=385)	Fidesz (n=1,298)	Mi Hazánk (n=59)	Average
Druzhba pipeline blockade	1.3	0.3	24.8	6.8	18.0
Peace March rallies	2.5	7.5	20.3	1.7	16.2
Anti-war rally tour (Fidesz)	5.1	23.1	12.3	8.5	14.2
'National Petition' (EU war financing)	16.5	2.1	8.4	0.0	7.1
Drug allegations vs Magyar	1.3	1.3	6.8	15.3	5.7
Tisza espionage affair	17.7	6.8	3.8	0.0	4.9
Budapest city operations (Vitézy)	1.3	21.0	0.2	3.4	4.7
'Tisza tax' austerity leak	0.0	5.2	4.7	0.0	4.4
Lázár forum scandals	2.5	2.9	4.5	0.0	4.0
Frozen Russian assets / Ukraine	0.0	0.0	4.5	0.0	3.2
Other	51.9	29.9	9.8	64.4	17.6

Panel B. Concrete campaign issues in the press

(share of each bloc's concrete-issue articles, %; top 10 issues + other — within-bloc shares, not a ratio)

	Liberal (n=2,225)	Tisza-aligned (n=674)	Pro-gov. (n=3,581)	Radical-right (n=493)	Average
Druzhba pipeline blockade	12.8	8.3	22.9	6.5	17.1
Szóló Street reformatory scandal	15.3	21.2	1.5	8.5	8.3
Peace March rallies	7.8	4.5	9.7	2.8	8.1
'Tisza tax' austerity leak	3.1	5.0	11.4	0.2	7.4
Anti-war rally tour (Fidesz)	3.5	2.8	10.6	0.4	6.9
Drug allegations vs Magyar	3.2	1.8	8.3	4.9	5.8
Tisza World app data-leak	3.5	4.3	4.4	2.0	3.9
Lázár forum scandals	5.3	5.2	2.5	4.7	3.8
Tisza espionage affair	4.5	4.7	3.4	0.2	3.7
Budapest city operations (Vitézy)	5.0	4.5	1.6	4.1	3.1
Other	36.0	37.7	23.7	65.7	31.9

Note: Cells report within-party or within-bloc shares among texts assigned to one of 35 concrete campaign issues. Panel A: $n = 1,821$ Facebook posts. Panel B: $n = 6,973$ press articles. Smaller-party and smaller-bloc estimates are based on lower numbers of texts.

Broad domains identify which areas parties emphasised, but they cannot show whether divergence arose because parties selected different campaign events or framed shared events differently. We therefore supplement the CAP classification with a campaign-specific codebook of 35 named controversies and apply it to both corpora using the same machine-coding procedure. Figure 2 reports the result and shows the within-party shares among the 1,821 Facebook posts, about 15 per cent of the corpus, assigned to one of these controversies. The restricted set of posts helps us isolate the concrete-issue layer and enables direct comparison with press coverage of the same events. Seven in ten of Fidesz's issue-anchored posts belonged to a war and sovereignty complex that included the Druzhba pipeline blockade, Peace Marches, an anti-war rally tour, the National Petition on EU war financing, and the frozen Russian assets debate. Fidesz also promoted allegations concerning a leaked 'TISZA tax' programme and attacks on Magyar. This selection attempted to make external danger and the challenger's alleged unreliability the central criteria of choice.

TISZA's concrete-issue distribution was different. Its largest category concerned Fidesz's anti-war rally tour, which required a response to the government's agenda. A Budapest city-operations dispute followed closely, while the Peace Marches, an alleged espionage attempt against the party and its own Voice of the Nation consultation drew smaller shares. The Göd Samsung battery-plant scandal was one of the few controversies shared across opposition parties. These issues connected local administration, environmental risk, state integrity, and political surveillance to the broader evaluation of regime performance.

Across broad policy topics, the pooled rank correlation between political issue supply and press coverage was approximately 0.45. Across the 35 concrete controversies it

increased to 0.71. Parties and outlets therefore engaged in many of the same campaign events, while assigning them different prominence and interpretation. In other words, TISZA did not fully escape the events generated by Fidesz, but it prevented the incumbent's hierarchy of policy domains from defining the entire campaign. Social media made this divergence particularly visible because parties had greater control over the distribution of their own attention.

The resulting competition combined valence politics with an attempt to redefine the main political divide. TISZA linked healthcare, education, transport, corruption, and access to EU funds through the question of whether the state functioned competently and impartially. Its communication then connected these evaluations to democratic renewal. This resembles what Somer et al. (2021) term transformative repolarisation, which Benedek (2026) identifies in TISZA's rise: conflict remained intense, but blame was focused on the governing regime while former Fidesz voters were invited into a broader national community. The strategy did not remove polarisation (Somer et al. 2021), but it changed its principal object and provided a transition from everyday valence concerns to a regime-change election.

Electoral results

A landslide and a realigned electorate

Table 1 reports the official result. TISZA received 3,385,890 party-list votes, equal to 53.18 per cent, while Fidesz–KDNP received 2,458,337 votes, or 38.61 per cent. Mi Hazánk crossed the threshold with 5.63 per cent; DK received 1.10 per cent and the Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) 0.82 per cent. TISZA won 96 of the 106 individual constituencies and 45 list seats, producing a total of 141 mandates. Fidesz won ten constituencies and 42 list seats, while all six Mi Hazánk representatives entered from the national list.

Table 1. Parliamentary election results, Hungary, 12 April 2026 and 3 April 2022

Party	2026 Seats	2026 Votes (000s)	2026 %	2022 Seats	2022 Votes (000s)	2022 %
Respect and Freedom Party (TISZA)	141	3,385.9	53.18	–	–	–
Fidesz–KDNP	52	2,458.3	38.61	[135]	[3,060.7]	[54.13]
Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk)	6	358.4	5.63	[6]	[332.6]	[5.88]
Democratic Coalition (DK) ^E	0	70.3	1.10	[–]	[–]	[–]
Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP)	0	52.0	0.82	[0]	[184.9]	[3.27]
United for Hungary ^F	–	–	–	[57]	[1,947.3]	[34.44]
Others	0	42.0	0.66	[0]	[..]	[..]
Total	199	6,366.9	100.00	[199]	[..]	[100.00]
Turnout (%)			79.56			[69.59]

Note: Figures are for the national party-list vote; seats combine list and single-member-constituency mandates. The legal threshold is 5 per cent for a single party list and 10 per cent for a joint list of two parties, such as Fidesz–KDNP. ^E Party winning at least 1 per cent of the vote and/or one seat. ^F Party or alliance that contested the previous election but not this one: the six-party United for Hungary alliance of 2022 did not run in 2026. Turnout is the domestic turnout: in 2026, 5,988,778 of 7,527,742 eligible voters.

Source: National Election Office (valasztas.hu).

Turnout was a central component of the result. Of the 7,527,742 voters included in the domestic turnout calculation, 5,988,778 voted, producing the post-1990 record of 79.56 per cent. High participation mainly benefited TISZA; it occurred alongside the party’s concentration of previously separate electorates. The 53.18 per cent list majority resulted in the constitutional majority 70.85 per cent of parliamentary seats because TISZA won nine-tenths of the single-member constituencies and then received transfer votes from both its losing and surplus winning ballots.

Postal voting retained its established partisan asymmetry. Fidesz received 84.23 per cent of mail ballots, compared with 13.82 per cent for TISZA. These ballots affected only the national list tier and were pooled with almost six million domestic party-list votes and the constituency transfer votes. Their effect was therefore limited relative to the two-vote influence of resident voters, although they raised Fidesz’s total list share above its

domestic result. The pattern is consistent with the different enfranchisement and mobilisation of external Hungarian electorates discussed above.

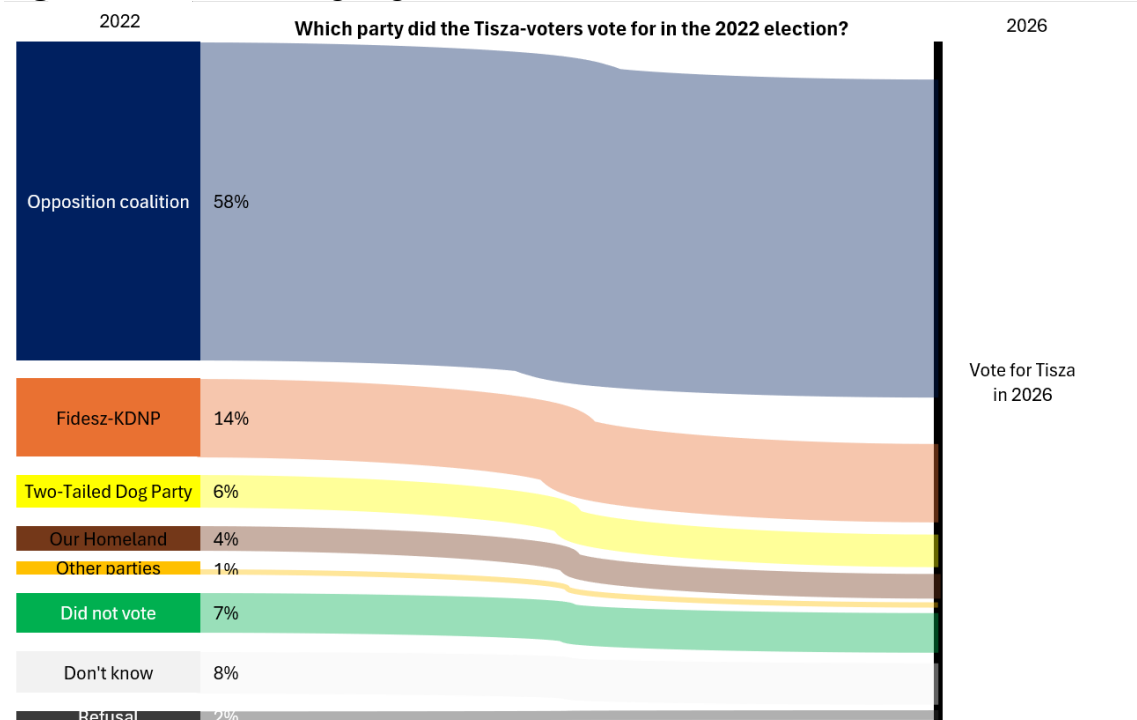
The election also replaced the parliamentary party system. No programmatically left-wing party remained represented. DK failed to cross the threshold, MKKP also remained outside parliament, and the former socialist, green, liberal, and moderate-right components of the 2022 opposition alliance no longer held parliamentary groups. Competition became concentrated among a centre-right TISZA government, the right-wing Fidesz opposition, and the radical-right Mi Hazánk. Using the Laakso and Taagepera (1979) measure and official list and seat shares, the effective number of electoral parties declined from approximately 2.40 in 2022 to 2.30 in 2026, while the effective number of parliamentary parties fell from 1.84 to 1.75. These changes are modest numerically because the 2022 opposition had already run a joint list, but the organizational replacement behind them was extensive.

The term electoral revolution captures four aspects of the outcome: record participation, the nationwide defeat of a sixteen-year incumbent, the replacement of the established opposition by a new party, and a constitutional mandate explicitly connected to regime change (Szabó et al. 2026). It does not imply that the prior regime lacked all electoral uncertainty, or that democratisation was completed on election day. It identifies the unusually rapid and peaceful reconfiguration of political authority through an election.

To examine individual-level electoral preferences, we draw on four surveys fielded during the week before the election. Three were commissioned by the ELTE Survey Methods Room, Budapest, while data from a fourth, independently conducted hybrid (telephone and web) survey fielded during the same period were made available for analysis. Four survey companies independently conducted online and telephone interviews with approximately 6,000 respondents. Each of the four samples, as well as

the pooled sample, was weighted by four demographic characteristics using data from the 2022 Hungarian census. The questionnaires included retrospective party preferences for the 2022 parliamentary and 2024 European Parliament elections. Figure 3 shows the electoral coalition behind the change. Fifty-eight per cent of TISZA voters reported having supported the 2022 opposition coalition. Former Fidesz voters made up 14 per cent, former MKKP voters 6 per cent, and former Mi Hazánk voters 4 per cent. Seven per cent reported that they had not voted in 2022; one per cent named another party, while 8 per cent did not know and 2 per cent refused to answer. The principal mechanism was therefore opposition concentration, supplemented by mobilisation and a smaller cross-boundary transfer from Fidesz.

Figure 3. The 2022 voting origins of TISZA’s 2026 electorate



Note: Percentages are conditioned on respondents supporting TISZA in 2026.

Fidesz followed the opposite coalitional pattern. Ninety-three per cent of its 2026 voters reported that they had already voted for Fidesz in 2022; the remaining inflow was

dispersed, with no previous party contributing a substantial share. This continuity fits a campaign based on boundary formation around war, sovereignty, and symbolic positional issues. Such communication may sustain an established core, but it offered few points of entry for voters outside it. TISZA's broader agenda and single-party organisation instead made it possible for former opposition voters to coordinate without maintaining the previous alliance's separate brands.

These flows also qualify accounts centred exclusively on Magyar's personal presence or rural tour. Leadership and campaigning helped make TISZA visible and electorally credible, but the composition of its voters indicates a longer process of opposition realignment. Repeated failure encouraged voters to abandon the parties and coordination formats used before 2024. The movement-party organisation then provided a common vehicle, while the agenda gave diverse sources of dissatisfaction a shared political direction. The 14 per cent of TISZA voters coming from Fidesz remained consequential, but the election was not primarily a mass conversion of the former governing electorate.

Broad reach, persistent social gradients, divergent threats

TISZA's coalition was broad, but not homogeneous. Table 2 presents party support across the sociodemographic categories. TISZA led among both men and women, all age groups below 60, respondents with secondary or tertiary education, active workers, students, Budapest residents, and respondents in large cities. Fidesz remained stronger among people aged 60 or older, those with primary or vocational education, pensioners, and village residents. The largest contrasts appeared in education and occupation: 54 per cent of respondents with a bachelor's degree supported TISZA, as did 71 per cent of students, whereas 50 per cent of respondents with primary or lower-secondary education and 51 per cent of pensioners supported Fidesz.

Table 2. Party support among selected sociodemographic groups in the final-week survey (%)

	Fidesz– KDNP (31.7%)	TISZA (40.0%)	Mi Hazánk (4.4%)	DK (1.6%)	MKKP (1.6%)	Unaffiliated (20.7%)
<i>Gender (Cramér's $V = 0.132^{***}$)</i>						
Male (48%)	30	43	6	2	2	17
Female (52%)	33	37	3	2	1	24
<i>Age group (Cramér's $V = 0.121^{***}$)</i>						
18–29 years (10%)	16	54	5	1	2	22
30–39 years (15%)	23	50	5	1	2	19
40–49 years (20%)	26	45	5	1	2	21
50–59 years (23%)	34	38	5	1	2	20
60+ years (32%)	43	29	3	3	1	21
<i>Education level (Cramér's $V = 0.156^{***}$)</i>						
Primary/lower secondary (16%)	50	21	3	2	2	22
Vocational (27%)	38	31	6	1	2	22
Secondary/post-secondary (34%)	25	47	5	2	1	20
Bachelor's and higher (23%)	21	54	3	1	2	19
<i>Settlement (Cramér's $V = 0.085^{***}$)</i>						
Budapest (18%)	23	49	4	2	2	20
Big city (20%)	26	45	5	2	2	20
Town (33%)	34	38	4	2	1	21
Village (29%)	39	33	5	1	1	21
<i>Occupation group (Cramér's $V = 0.157^{***}$)</i>						
Active worker (60%)	30	41	6	0	1	22
Pensioner (23%)	51	19	3	3	0	24
Student (5%)	12	71	3	0	3	11
Other [†] (12%)	38	34	6	0	2	20

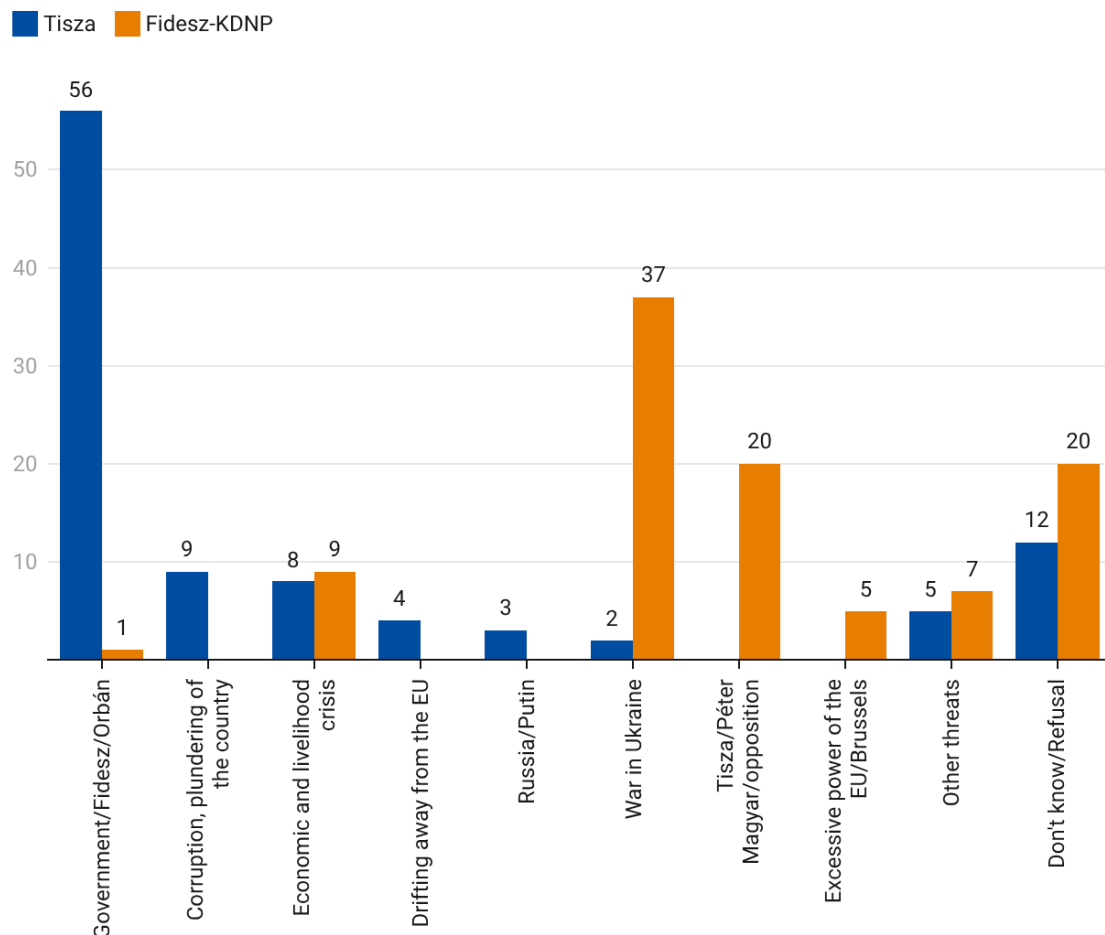
*** $p < 0.001$. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

[†] Individuals receiving GYES or GYED benefits (3%), the unemployed (5%), homemakers (2%), and other economically inactive individuals (2%).

We also examine threat perception as it provides a direct connection between voter motivations and campaign supply. Respondents answered an open-ended question asking what they considered the greatest threat to Hungary; their answers were then aggregated into the categories shown in Figure 4. Among TISZA voters, 56 per cent named the government, Fidesz, or Orbán. A further 9 per cent mentioned corruption or the plundering of the country. Fidesz voters instead emphasised the war in Ukraine (37 per

cent), TISZA, Magyar, or the opposition (20 per cent), and excessive EU or Brussels power (5 per cent). Economic and livelihood crisis was mentioned by 8 per cent of TISZA voters and 9 per cent of Fidesz voters.

Figure 4. Perceptions of the greatest threat to Hungary by party support



Created with Datawrapper

Note: The categories aggregate responses to an open-ended survey item and add up to 100 within each party.

The two electorates were therefore separated by more than positions on a common policy scale. They assigned priority to different objects of danger. Fidesz's campaign supplied an external and geopolitical threat structure organised around war and sovereignty. TISZA voters interpreted the incumbent regime and its use of public resources as the more immediate threat. Since the survey item is open-ended, it captures

evaluative priorities rather than a complete programme. Its distribution nevertheless supports the central interpretation: polarisation persisted through competing definitions of what the election concerned.

The new government

The election changed the government formula from the long-standing Fidesz-KDNP alliance to a single-party TISZA cabinet. The new National Assembly elected Magyar prime minister on 9 May, and sixteen ministers were sworn in on 12 May. Recruitment reinforced the campaign's technocratic emphasis. The cabinet combined former senior public administrators and policy specialists with figures recruited from business, including economy and energy minister István Kapitány, finance minister András Kármán, and foreign minister and deputy prime minister Anita Orbán. Separate ministries for health, education, environmental protection, and transport also translated the campaign's public-service agenda into the organisation of government, and represented a symbolic change compared to the previous administration.

The speed of institutional reconstruction placed Hungary within the post-illiberal trilemma (Bill and Stanley 2025). TISZA presented its measures as the fulfilment of a democratic mandate to dismantle captured institutions, whereas Fidesz and displaced office-holders described them as tyranny and an attack on checks and balances. In June, Parliament limited prime-ministerial service to eight years, counting all terms since 1990 and thereby excluding Orbán from returning to office. A broader constitutional amendment adopted in July ended President Tamás Sulyok's term, limited parliamentary service to twelve years, reduced Constitutional Court judges' terms from twelve to nine years, and restored a retirement age that ended the mandates of the Court's president and three other judges.

Fidesz remained a large and socially rooted opposition after receiving 38.61 per cent in April, but its position weakened during the first months of the new government. Medián measured 21 per cent among decided voters certain to participate in late June, while a Závecz Research survey in mid-July placed it at 19 per cent in that group and 16 per cent in the total adult population (Medián 2026; Závecz Research 2026). These figures may partly reflect a winner's bandwagon effect and post-election disengagement from the losing side, rather than a settled realignment. They nevertheless reinforce the generational problem visible in Table 2: Fidesz depends heavily on older voters and faces the prospect of replacement unless it rebuilds support among younger cohorts.

Conclusion

The 2026 Hungarian election changed the governing party, the parliamentary party system, and the terms of political conflict. Its revolutionary character lies in the conjunction of record mobilisation, nationwide alternation within an electoral autocracy, the rapid replacement of the established opposition, and a constitutional mandate for institutional change. The result was therefore more extensive than ordinary government turnover, while the quality and durability of the subsequent democratic transition remain open.

The campaign analysis identifies a mechanism behind this outcome. Fidesz concentrated its communication on war, sovereignty, Brussels, and energy protection. TISZA developed a broader agenda around government performance, public services, transport, territorial inequalities, corruption, and democratic renewal. Although the two sides often responded to the same concrete events, they assigned them different weight and connected them to different evaluations of political responsibility. TISZA's direct digital communication and movement-party organisation made this alternative agenda credible across the country.

The demand-side evidence shows the coalition that resulted. Most TISZA voters came from the former opposition, followed by a smaller group of previous Fidesz voters and previously inactive citizens. TISZA achieved broad territorial and social reach, although younger, better educated, urban, student, and economically active voters remained overrepresented. Threat perceptions mirrored the supply-side divide: TISZA voters focused on the incumbent regime and corruption, while Fidesz voters emphasised war, the opposition, and Brussels. Asymmetric agenda competition therefore reorganised polarisation instead of removing it.

For opposition actors in electoral autocracies, the Hungarian case suggests that coordination is insufficient when it retains fragmented organisations and inherited brands. A challenger may also require one party, an alternative hierarchy of issues, and a movement-based infrastructure that connects national leadership to local presence. Such an infrastructure may depend heavily on leader-centred political agency: Magyar's visible commitment, nationwide tours, and direct engagement with crowds helped personalise the alternative, and establish an immediate relationship with supporters. For Hungary, the next question concerns the use of the authority this strategy produced. Hungary's democratic transition will be judged not only by how fully the new government dismantles illiberal entrenchment, but also by whether it subjects its own supermajority to pluralist, lawful limits.

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Use of generative AI

Large language models were used as research instruments for the automated text classification underlying this study — topic, sentiment, named-entity and campaign-issue coding — with the models, prompts and validation procedures released with the deposited corpus. All analytical decisions, interpretation and final wording are the authors' own.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study — the CAP-coded Facebook and press corpora, the collection and classification scripts, the classifier codebook, and the weekly topic-salience matrices — are deposited as the Hungarian Election Campaign 2025–2026 MediaText corpus in the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/ptszw/>). Because the press corpus is derived from copyrighted news content under the text-and-data-mining research exception, access is granted to researchers on request.

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