Institute of European Right

ANALYSIS

Hungarian Election 2026: Actors, Strategies, and Possible Scenarios

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Summary

- The 2026 Hungarian parliamentary elections are expected to be the most competitive since 2010.
- The main contest is between Viktor Orbán's Fidesz and the new opposition force, Tisza, led by Péter Magyar, which has quickly emerged as a credible challenger.
- Polls in 2025–2026 indicate growing opposition support, with many independent surveys placing Tisza ahead, sometimes by over 10%. In recent weeks, Tisza has often polled at or above 50%, partly due to smaller parties withdrawing or failing to qualify.
- The outcome remains uncertain due to Hungary's mixed electoral system, where seat distribution depends heavily on single-member constituencies and geographic vote distribution — opposition support is concentrated in cities, while Fidesz is stronger in rural areas.
- This study presents four possible election scenarios.

I. The Hungarian Electoral System

Understanding Hungary's electoral system is essential for interpreting the possible outcomes of the 2026 parliamentary elections. While polling data often receives the most attention in public debates, the institutional structure and unique mechanisms of the electoral system play a decisive role in determining how votes are converted into real parliamentary seats. Hungary uses a mixed electoral system combining elements of majoritarian and proportional representation. Because of this institutional design, even relatively small differences in constituency outcomes can significantly affect the outcome.

Structure of the Electoral System

The Hungarian National Assembly consists of 199 members, elected through two separate mechanisms:

1. 106 seats are elected in single-member constituencies using a basic plurality system.
2. 93 seats are allocated through national party list using proportional representation.

Each voter can cast two votes: one for a candidate in their local constituency and one for a national party list. In the constituency tier, a first-past-the-post system is applied — the candidate who receives the most votes wins the seat, and no second round is organised. In the proportional tier, parties that surpass the 5% threshold are represented in parliament.

Despite a relatively clear system, there is one important element that distorts it and creates an advantage for the ruling Fidesz party — the vote compensation mechanism.

The Vote Compensation Mechanism

Hungary's electoral system includes a vote compensation mechanism that directly affects how proportional (list) seats are allocated. The core idea is that votes which do not contribute to winning a constituency seat are not "wasted" but are instead transferred to the party's national list, where they are added to the party's total in the proportional tier.

Two types of votes are included in this compensation process:

1. Votes cast for losing candidates in single-member constituencies.
2. Surplus votes of winning candidates — that is, all votes received beyond what was necessary to defeat the second-place candidate.

Both categories are aggregated at the national level and increase the party's list vote total, which is then used in allocating proportional seats.

Formally, the purpose of this mechanism is to compensate parties whose candidates lose in constituency races, thereby making the system more proportional. In practice, however, it also advantages larger parties. Parties that win many constituencies tend to accumulate substantial surplus votes, which are then transferred to the list tier. This creates a cumulative effect: success in single-member districts not only yields constituency seats but also boosts performance in the proportional allocation.

As a result, the interaction between constituency victories and vote compensation can produce outcomes where a party secures a disproportionately high share of parliamentary seats relative to its national vote share.

II. Electoral Advantages and Informal Practices

One of the most decisive factors in this parliamentary election is gerrymandering. After the electoral reform adopted in 2011, Hungary was divided into 106 single-member constituencies with noticeable differences in size. Opposition support is mostly concentrated in urban areas, whereas most Fidesz support is in rural areas. As a result, votes are not equally weighted across the country — some reports have shown that specific districts can deviate by more than 10%, which raises concerns about the system's fairness.

Moreover, the media environment has been shaped significantly over the last decade. A large part of the Hungarian media landscape has become closely aligned with business actors connected to the governing elite. Independent media exists, but its reach is significantly more limited, especially in rural areas, where many voters are primarily exposed to narratives coming directly from the government.

In addition to institutional design, several other factors play an important role. The first is "voter tourism," which allows voters to register in constituencies even if they do not permanently reside there, creating the possibility for voter relocation to more competitive districts. The second is the extension of citizenship and voting rights to ethnic Hungarians living abroad. Since 2014, around 2 million Hungarians living in neighbouring countries have received the right to vote, leading to approximately 500,000 additional voters. People who cast ballots in these territories have shown strong support for Fidesz — some estimates suggest up to 90%. Meanwhile, participation among emigré Hungarians living further abroad (usually younger people) has remained significantly low due to complicated voting procedures. Near-abroad voters can vote by mail; emigrés must rely on embassies. As a result, turnout differs significantly: around 50% for near-abroad voters and 20–25% for emigrés.

Finally, there are repeated allegations of vote-buying, particularly in economically vulnerable regions. Such practice is often referred to as "Krumpliosztás" (potato distribution) — claims that basic food supplies, or small cash payments of around 10,000 forints (approximately 25 euros) per vote, are offered during the main campaign.

III. Political Actors and Campaign Strategies

The 2026 Hungarian parliamentary election is largely defined by the competition between two main political forces: the long-dominant governing coalition Fidesz-KDNP, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, and the emerging opposition party Tisza, led by Péter Magyar. Although a few smaller parties are also participating, the political battleground is framed as a direct confrontation between the two biggest players.

Fidesz-KDNP (Viktor Orbán)

[IMAGE: Fidesz campaign photos]

The governing coalition of Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) has dominated Hungarian politics since 2010, securing repeated parliamentary majorities and implementing significant institutional and constitutional reforms. One of the key strengths of Fidesz is its highly developed party organisation and strong local networks, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas — regions that play a crucial role in parliamentary elections because many of Hungary's single-member constituencies are located outside major urban centres.

The campaign strategy has been primarily focused on international affairs: national sovereignty, regional stability, and security issues. In the current campaign, Viktor Orbán has bet heavily on the war in Ukraine. During campaign speeches in early 2026, Orbán warned that Hungary must avoid becoming part of the war and stated the priority is to "keep Hungary out of the war." Fidesz members have also insisted Magyar is "financed by Ukraine" with the aim of installing a puppet government loyal to Kyiv and Brussels. These narratives frame the election in terms of stability and national leadership.

At the same time, relations with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky have been strained due to disagreements over energy policy and the minority rights of Hungarians in western Ukraine. Viktor Orbán accused Kyiv of using energy transit as political pressure and stated that Hungary must prepare a strategy "to counter Ukrainian blackmail."

On the international right, Orbán has maintained strong ties with conservative leaders in Europe and the United States. During a February 2026 visit to Budapest, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio explicitly supported Orbán ahead of the elections, stating: "President Trump is deeply committed to your success, because your success is our success." For the final stage of the campaign, Donald Trump sent US Vice President JD Vance to amplify the MAGA endorsement of Viktor Orbán.

Orbán's relations with Brussels, by contrast, have been considerably more confrontational. The European Commission suspended several billion euros in EU funds over concerns about judicial independence and corruption, which Hungarian officials have framed as political pressure threatening national sovereignty — disputes that help Orbán portray EU institutions as interventionist.

TISZA (Péter Magyar)

[IMAGE: Tisza campaign photos]

Péter Magyar's party Tisza is the main challenger to the governing coalition. Magyar gained substantial visibility in Hungarian politics in 2024 when he publicly criticised the government and accused the political elite of constant corruption and abuse of power. His central message — "a country where a small political elite controls state institutions and public resources" — highlighted a readiness to fight for fundamental renewal of the political system.

Magyar's rise has been closely linked to his strong stance on institutional integrity. During campaign rallies and interviews, he repeatedly stressed that the central goal of his movement is to "restore the rule of law and rebuild trust in public institutions." His speeches frequently call for transparency in public spending and stricter supervision of government contracts. Consequently, the Tisza movement has gained support especially from the urban population, younger generations, and a politically dissatisfied middle class. Large campaign events in Budapest, Szeged, and Debrecen have drawn thousands of participants.

In contrast to Orbán's focus on international conflicts, Magyar's campaign has concentrated on domestic problems: corruption, public services, and economic governance. He has repeatedly criticised the state of Hungary's healthcare system, arguing that "Hungarian hospitals and schools are collapsing while political elites enrich themselves." Magyar has also promised to unlock frozen EU funds — but only after achieving genuine transparency and judicial independence, and to bring Hungary and EU partners closer together.

The major structural disadvantage for Tisza is its lack of the extensive local network that Fidesz has built over more than a decade in power. This organisational gap may limit the party's ability to compete effectively in all 106 single-member constituencies.

IV. Constituencies: The Urban-Rural Divide

One of the most important structural characteristics of Hungarian elections is the urban-rural divide. Electoral results from recent parliamentary elections demonstrate clear geographical polarisation between major urban centres and smaller towns or rural regions. Opposition parties perform significantly better in large cities, while Fidesz holds much stronger support in the countryside.

Urban areas such as Budapest and regional cities including Szeged and Pécs consistently demonstrate stronger support for opposition candidates. Magyar's campaign messages about corruption, the worsening of public services, and economic mismanagement have strongly resonated with young and urban voters. Analysts note that Magyar's criticism of everyday problems — including the rise of living costs — has mobilised voters who had previously been less politically engaged.

Reports from towns such as Nyíregyháza in eastern Hungary suggest that younger voters are significantly more open to political change, while older voters often remain loyal to the governing party. In the words of one young voter interviewed during the campaign: he supported Tisza because he believed the country was "heading in the wrong direction culturally and economically" — but his mother and her friends would continue voting for Orbán because of the government's message about the war in Ukraine and the need for stability.

Fidesz, in contrast, has built serious political networks in small towns and rural districts through close cooperation with local officials and political organisations. Orbán has long portrayed himself as a politician with humble rural roots, frequently referencing his upbringing in the village of Felcsút — a narrative that reinforces the perception among many rural voters.

Constituency targeting: where the election will be decided

Based on our analysis, the two parties target different types of constituencies, with overlap in the most competitive segments:

Constituency type	Tisza target seats	Fidesz target seats
Budapest	18	—
Urban	15	—
Semi-urban	15	—
Semi-rural	20	—
Rural	—	38
Total targeted	**68**	**73**

[IMAGE: Constituency map diagram — Tisza Párt / Fidesz overlap in semi-rural and semi-urban zones]

The decisive battleground lies in the semi-urban and semi-rural constituencies, where both parties compete for roughly 35 seats and where the overall election outcome is likely to be determined. Opposition parties may achieve large vote margins in urban constituencies, but these victories transfer into a relatively limited number of parliamentary seats. Meanwhile, Fidesz can secure a larger number of seats by winning many rural constituencies with narrower margins.

V. Small Parties and the 5% Threshold

Although the 2026 election is primarily framed as a contest between Fidesz-KDNP and TISZA, several smaller political parties may still influence the outcome. Under Hungarian electoral law, parties must receive at least 5% of the national vote to gain representation in the National Assembly. Parties that fail to reach this threshold receive no list seats, and their votes effectively benefit larger parties.

Current polling data suggests that Mi Hazánk Movement (Our Homeland Movement) is the most likely smaller party to cross the threshold. The party is generally described as a nationalist and far-right movement focused on national sovereignty, anti-immigration policies, and criticism of EU influence. Several recent surveys estimate its support at around 5–7%, placing it just above the parliamentary entry requirement. Other smaller parties appear less likely to qualify: the centre-left Democratic Coalition (DK) and the satirical Two-Tailed Dog Party (MKKP) are polling at roughly 3–4%.

[IMAGE: Party logos — various parties including Tisza Párt, Fidesz, Mi Hazánk, dk]

The threshold creates a dilemma for voters who oppose the governing party: supporting a smaller opposition party that fails to reach 5% reduces the overall opposition vote share and indirectly strengthens the governing coalition. Several minor opposition parties — including Momentum Movement, Dialogue (The Greens' Party), and the Hungarian Socialist Party — have announced they will not run independently after polls showed support at only 1–3%, and have encouraged their supporters to vote for the larger TISZA movement.

VI. Media Narratives, Propaganda, and Campaign Controversies

The 2026 Hungarian election campaign has been shaped not only by polling trends and party programmes, but also by a constant flow of controversies, emotional messaging, digital manipulation, and international narratives. The ruling Fidesz team has framed the election as a choice between "war and peace," while the opposition has tried to keep attention on domestic issues such as corruption, living standards, and institutional decline.

[IMAGE: Campaign imagery collage]

Russian interference and Moscow's interest in an Orbán victory

One of the most serious concerns in this campaign is Russian interference in favour of Viktor Orbán. An orchestrated programme backed by the Kremlin seeks to support Orbán's re-election by spreading pro-Fidesz narratives through Hungarian influencers and disinformation channels. Russia's Social Design Agency — already under Western sanctions — is working on messages that portray Orbán as a sovereign leader with powerful international allies, while presenting Péter Magyar as a weak figure controlled by Brussels. It has also been reported that GRU-linked operatives were present in Budapest, and that the operation was specifically designed to appear domestic rather than openly Russia-connected. Orbán's government and the Russian embassy deny all allegations.

Prisoners of war, ethnic Hungarians from Ukraine, and the anti-war narrative

Another unusual and politically sensitive topic is the issue of ethnic Hungarian prisoners of war from Ukraine. According to reports, Russia transferred two dual Hungarian-Ukrainian POWs to Hungary after diplomatic contact involving Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and President Putin. This was condemned by Ukraine as a provocation and breach of humanitarian norms. Evidence also suggests that at least one former Ukrainian POW transferred from Russia to Hungary was later drawn into Orbán's campaign environment — promoting the narrative that Hungarians in western Ukraine are endangered by the war and that only Budapest can defend them.

The Magyar sex-tape scandal

The most widely discussed campaign scandal was leaked photo and video material allegedly involving Péter Magyar and his former partner Evelin Vogel, published on 12 February 2026. Both denied wrongdoing; Vogel described the situation as political blackmail and Magyar said he had been deliberately set up. The scandal briefly shifted attention away from Fidesz's vulnerabilities and forced Magyar onto the defensive. Interestingly, the opposition tried to turn the situation into proof that their rivals are capable of using dirty methods to win.

Posters, AI images, and the visual war against Ukraine and Brussels

The visual side of the campaign has been especially aggressive. Fidesz and government-linked messaging have relied heavily on posters linking Péter Magyar, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ursula von der Leyen, and Manfred Weber together as one unfriendly political group. Campaign posters for the government's "National Petition" explicitly display AI-generated portraits of von der Leyen, Zelenskyy, and Weber together. This makes the campaign not just anti-opposition but rather an attempt to convince voters that domestic change would mean capitulating to Ukraine and Brussels.

Orbán's claims that Ukrainians threatened him and his family

In March, Orbán released an emotional video claiming that Ukrainians had threatened his children and grandchildren. This accusation came after provocative remarks by a retired Ukrainian politician. Orbán's government also reportedly planned to release a security report claiming Ukraine

was illegally supporting his political rival. Although no evidence has been publicly established, the situation illustrates Orbán's strategy of personalising the conflict to make it appear immediate and family-related, rather than abstract or geopolitical.

TikTok, fake accounts, and digital interference

TikTok has become a powerful tool in the campaign. According to reporting from Népszava, TikTok removed a coordinated pro-government network in late 2025 involving about 95 accounts and roughly 131,000 followers. Later investigations also uncovered fake TikTok accounts impersonating opposition politicians and Tisza-linked MEPs, some of which began posting coordinated controversial messaging designed to create confusion among opposition supporters.

The tone of the two camps on TikTok has been sharply different. Orbán's TikTok communication is serious, security-focused, and dominated by anti-Ukraine and anti-Brussels rhetoric. Magyar's TikTok is more dynamic and movement-driven, using trending music, fast cuts, memes, and rally footage aimed at younger audiences. Although Magyar's videos generally receive more views than Orbán's official account, this reflects TikTok's demographic skew toward younger users rather than broader population support.

AI-generated war video and fear as campaign strategy

Fidesz circulated an AI-generated election video showing a fictional execution of a Hungarian soldier on a battlefield, implying that a Tisza victory could drag Hungary into war. The video reportedly showed a girl watching her blindfolded father being shot, with the message framing Fidesz as "the safe choice." Magyar called it a manipulative and immoral move. The government did not deny the use of AI.

The March 15 rally and the latest slogans

The most recent major rally, held on March 15 in Budapest, again illustrated Orbán's framing of the election as a choice between saving the country or being drawn into war. Posters and banners at the rally displayed messages such as "Hungary will not be a Ukrainian colony" and "Zelenskyy is not in charge here."

Prediction markets and expectations

Beyond polls, election expectations are also visible in prediction markets. On Polymarket's Hungary election page (accessed March 15, 2026), Tisza was at 65% in the "Hungary Parliamentary Election Winner" category, while the "Next Prime Minister of Hungary" market gave Péter Magyar 64%. The same page showed Tisza at 70% to win the popular vote. Prediction markets reflect money-backed expectations, and currently lean clearly toward a Tisza victory.

VII. Possible Election Scenarios

Scenario A: Tisza majority and opposition-led government

This scenario assumes that Tisza converts its current momentum into a decisive electoral victory, capturing a large share of the remaining contested seats. Starting from a baseline of 78 guaranteed seats (45 proportional and 33 constituency), Tisza would expand to approximately 112–117 seats, including around 51 proportional and 66 constituency mandates. This implies strong performance not only in urban areas but also in competitive semi-urban and semi-rural districts. Fidesz, despite its stable base of 80 guaranteed seats (42 proportional and 38 constituency), would reach only around 82–87 seats. Under these conditions, Tisza secures a clear parliamentary majority and forms a government, with capacity to pursue institutional reforms and shift Hungary's political direction.

Scenario B: Fidesz majority through constituency dominance

This scenario reflects a situation in which the national vote remains competitive, but Fidesz successfully translates its territorial advantage into constituency victories. Building on its 80 guaranteed seats, Fidesz would win a substantial share of the 35 contested constituencies, increasing its total to around 103–108 seats (45 proportional and 63 constituency). Tisza, while maintaining strong national performance, would reach only 91–96 seats. The outcome is driven by Fidesz's dominance in rural and small-town districts, combined with the vote compensation mechanism, which amplifies its gains through surplus votes. This allows Viktor Orbán to retain power despite a close overall vote distribution.

Scenario C: Tisza majority with Mi Hazánk entering parliament

In this scenario, the far-right Mi Hazánk crosses the 5% threshold and enters parliament with approximately 6 seats, all from the proportional tier. Despite this fragmentation, Tisza still achieves a majority by securing 109–114 seats (48 proportional, 66 constituency), indicating strong performance in contested districts. Fidesz would fall to around 79–84 seats, partly due to vote losses to Mi Hazánk and weaker performance in competitive constituencies. Although a third party enters parliament, it does not prevent a Tisza-led government, as the opposition maintains a clear numerical advantage.

Scenario D: Hung parliament with Mi Hazánk as kingmaker

This scenario produces a highly competitive outcome in which neither Tisza nor Fidesz secures a majority. Tisza would obtain around 95–99 seats (48 proportional, 51 constituency), while Fidesz would reach approximately 94–98 seats (39 proportional, 55 constituency). Mi Hazánk enters parliament with about 6 proportional seats, becoming pivotal in coalition formation. With both major parties falling short of the 100-seat threshold, Mi Hazánk gains a decisive role. The most plausible outcome in this configuration is a Fidesz–Mi Hazánk alliance, which would surpass the majority threshold and allow Viktor Orbán to remain in power.

VIII. Conclusion

The 2026 Hungarian parliamentary elections represent one of the most competitive political events in the country since Viktor Orbán's return to power in 2010. While recent polling data suggests victory for the opposition Tisza movement, the final result may shift due to the specific structure of the electoral system. The dominance of single-member constituencies, the vote compensation mechanism, and the strong urban-rural political divide mean that national vote shares are not always directly translated into parliamentary seats.

The campaign itself has become increasingly influenced by international tensions, AI use, and media controversies. Whether Hungary experiences a political transition under Péter Magyar, the continuation of Viktor Orbán's leadership, or a fragmented parliament will depend largely on how effectively each political force converts national support into constituency victories. These 2026 elections will not only determine the next Hungarian government but will also serve as an important test of how institutional rules, electoral geography, and modern campaign strategies shape political outcomes in contemporary Hungary.

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