

April 2026

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Hungary's 2026 election

*Five Scenarios the EU
Must Be Prepared For*

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**Brace for Impact**

Hungary's 2026 Elections: Five Scenarios and Implications for the European Union and Ukraine

Introduction

Hungary's general election on April 12 will be one of the most consequential electoral contests in Europe in 2026, with far-reaching implications for both the European Union and Ukraine.

The illiberal regime of long-time Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has not only turned Hungary into an [electoral autocracy](#) during his 16 years in power since 2010, but has also become a spoiler of strategic decision-making in the European Union, a threat to the EU's democratic and political integrity, and a disruptor of Ukraine's EU accession process and even its war of self-defence—particularly through the repeated blocking of EU financial support for Ukraine.

In this context, it is worth taking a closer look at the most plausible election scenarios and outlining their consequences not only for Hungarian democracy and society itself, but also for the European Union and key EU partners, like Ukraine.

State of Play

Regarding the domestic political situation as of early March 2026, there is a significant divergence between the results of polling agencies close to the government and those of independent ones: the former measure a solid and consistent advantage for the incumbent Fidesz party (between 3 and 7 percentage points), while the latter indicate a robust advantage (between 8 and 17 percentage points) for the centre-right opposition party "Respect & Freedom" (Tisza), led by its emblematic prime ministerial candidate, Péter Magyar. For reference, Politico's aggregate polling engine, [Poll of Polls](#), highlights a clear advantage for Tisza (48% of respondents with voting intentions) over Fidesz (39%).

So far, Tisza has been rather successful in setting and dominating the agenda in January and February by periodically announcing its ministerial candidates and publishing its [election manifesto](#) on February 7.

In contrast, while Fidesz has been struggling with multiple scandals, triggered, among others, by the [racist remarks of János Lázár](#), Hungary's minister for construction and public transport and a leading figure in the Fidesz campaign, as well as by revelations that [pollution levels at the Samsung battery factory in the municipality of Göd](#)—a key government investment project in recent years—in some cases exceeded regulatory thresholds by as much as 500%, with the government allegedly aware of the health hazards but remaining idle.

In addition, Balázs Orbán, the political director of Prime Minister Orbán, publicly [raised the possibility of electoral fraud](#) in favour of the opposition in early February—an unusual move for an incumbent government that has centralized and politicized public administration over the past 16 years.

However, this status quo of the campaign was fundamentally shaken during the first week of March, when the governments of Hungary and Ukraine exchanged mutual blows, resulting in an [unprecedented escalation in their bilateral relationship](#).

Amid escalating tensions between Budapest and Kyiv, Hungarian special [forces hijacked a money-transit convoy of Ukraine's Oschadbank](#) travelling on Hungarian territory. The incident followed a dispute over the repair of the Druzhba pipeline—[damaged in a Russian attack on January 27](#)—the [Hungarian government's blockade of the EUR 90 billion EU financial aid package for Ukraine](#) and the EU's [20th sanctions package](#), as well as a [controversial statement by President Volodymyr Zelensky on March 4](#) that was interpreted in Budapest as a threat to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's personal safety.

Reportedly, the convoy was delivering \$40 million and EUR 35 million in cash, in addition to 9 kg of gold, which was withheld by the Hungarian authorities. The seven Ukrainian operatives of the convoy, most of whom had

a military or intelligence background, were first arrested and then expelled from Hungary.

At the same time, PM Orbán claimed that Hungary would force Ukraine with power to relaunch oil transit via the Druzhba pipeline without entering into any compromise.

The escalation has brought Ukraine back into the focus of the Hungarian election campaign. President Volodymyr Zelensky's unfortunate communication on March 4, which contained what was widely interpreted as a barely veiled threat to Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, played into the Fidesz campaign strategy. It reinforced Orbán's narrative that Hungary faces a genuine bilateral conflict with Ukraine and that Kyiv poses a threat to Hungarian sovereignty. In this context, [opposition leader Péter Magyar also felt compelled to condemn Zelensky's statement](#).

As bilateral tensions increasingly dominate the election campaign—diverting attention from domestic issues such as economic performance, strategic corruption, and the deteriorating state of public services—Fidesz stands to benefit at the expense of Tisza.

Thus, the escalation, on the one hand, poses a significant challenge for the campaign strategy of Tisza and, on the other, raises the stakes of the election even further for the future bilateral relationship between Hungary and Ukraine.

Taken together, these developments suggest that the campaign entered a qualitatively new phase in the first week of March. The shift created structural advantages for the previously underperforming incumbent, Fidesz, while posing new challenges for Tisza as the campaign narrative moved from issues dominated by the opposition to the government's core agenda.

Against this background, the scenario analysis is based on the assumption that the electoral competition has become extremely open, and it cannot be excluded that party preferences may shift to a significant extent during the last five weeks of the campaign.

Bearing this context in mind, five distinct electoral scenarios can be distinguished and will be presented

below—together with their impact on the European Union and Ukraine—in order of their perceived probability.

The five scenarios represent distinct political trajectories with far-reaching and differing domestic and international implications. They outline five scenarios for which Hungary’s European partners must be prepared—not necessarily five different election outcomes. In short, they are as follows:

1. Opposition victory with a stable mandate to govern
2. Opposition victory with a parliamentary stalemate
3. The EU’s first rigged election
4. Neutralizing the election results or postponing the election through a constitutional coup d’état
5. Fidesz victory in free elections with a stable mandate to govern

Scenario 1: Opposition victory with clear mandate to govern

Hungary had its “last free and fair” elections 16 years ago, in 2010. Since then, [all Hungarian elections have exhibited systemic shortcomings](#) with regard to their democratic quality, on the basis of which they can be characterized as “unfair.”

Europe’s main electoral watchdog, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), covered the [2014](#), [2018](#), and [2022](#) elections and issued highly critical reports. As the 2018 OSCE-ODIHR report formulated it, the parliamentary elections “*were characterized by a pervasive overlap between state and ruling party resources, undermining contestants’ ability to compete on an equal basis. Voters had a wide range of political options, but intimidating and xenophobic rhetoric, media bias, and opaque campaign financing constricted the space for genuine political debate, hindering voters’ ability to make a fully informed choice.*”

The [political playing field is largely uneven](#) due to the incumbent Fidesz’s dominance over the media landscape, its significant advantage in financial and campaign resources, as well as the structure of the

electoral system and the gerrymandered nature of the single-member districts. In the past, these systemic advantages were sufficient to guarantee Fidesz a smooth electoral victory and a constitutional supermajority.

Recent polling and the government’s own communication strategy indicate that dissatisfaction with the governance of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has become sufficiently strong and widespread that even Hungary’s uneven electoral playing field may no longer prevent an opposition victory. With Tisza currently leading Fidesz in the polls, the first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies could work to the opposition’s advantage. However, because of gerrymandered district boundaries, Tisza may still need a lead of three to four percentage points over Fidesz to secure a parliamentary majority.

Against this background, if two fundamental conditions are met it is reasonable to expect a clear victory for the opposition party Tisza.

- a) the elections remain largely free—particularly in the absence of authoritarian tactics aimed at influencing voters or election-day irregularities with a significant impact on the results;
- b) the current trend of electoral preferences remains stable and did not experience significant shifts due to the escalation with Ukraine and its impact on campaign narratives.

The strength of Tisza’s parliamentary mandate will depend mainly on its lead over Fidesz and on whether the far-right Our Homeland party—currently the only other party polling above the 5% electoral threshold—will be able to enter parliament.

However, in the case of a two-party parliament or a significant lead of around or above 7 percentage points in favor of Tisza, the opposition party may secure enough seats for a stable parliamentary majority and form a new democratic government.

While such a government would face an almost complete constitutional state capture and institutional opposition from the president, the Constitutional Court, the attorney general, and the country’s

Budgetary Council, it could still implement meaningful reforms—such as joining the European Public Prosecutor’s Office—that could generate important output legitimacy, particularly if they result in the at least partial release of suspended EU funding.

Furthermore, this is the only scenario that can lay the appropriate political groundwork for a reset in Hungarian foreign and EU policy, transforming the country back into a trustworthy and constructive European partner and enabling a much-needed reconciliation process between Ukraine and Hungary.

Almost certain positive consequences of a Tisza government with a solid parliamentary mandate could be the end of Hungary’s blockade behavior at the EU level, particularly with regard to current and future EU support for Ukraine and Russia-related sanctions policy.

The abandonment of the Hungarian blockade on the start of the accession negotiations under the “Fundamentals” cluster may also be a low-hanging fruit, although it may be subject to high-level bilateral diplomatic engagement between the two countries.

Péter Magyar and his Tisza party are no pro-Ukraine political forces, though. While some of Magyar’s statements critical of President Zelensky were campaign-driven necessities, even when sitting securely in power Tisza will refrain from providing military aid to Ukraine. However, below that engagement level there are plenty of real opportunities in sectoral bilateral cooperation that may help restore trust between the two governments and societies. While Magyar is certainly ready to abandon Hungarian veto diplomacy, deeper bilateral engagement may also require gestures from the Ukrainian side, particularly with regard to minority rights and the legalization of dual citizenship for ethnic Hungarians.

Scenario 2: Opposition victory and parliamentary stalemate

As mentioned above, due to the gerrymandered electoral map of single-mandate districts, Tisza may

need 5–7 percentage points more votes nationwide to achieve a parliamentary majority than Fidesz. Furthermore, majority relations in parliament will also be deeply influenced by whether the far-right Our Homeland (“Mi Hazánk”) party ultimately clears the 5 percent threshold.

Most polls show 5 or 6 percent electoral support for Our Homeland. Considering the fact that this result is still well within the polls’ margin of error, and that last-minute mobilization on the part of both big parties may attract some Our Homeland voters to the Fidesz camp, it is too early to predict whether Our Homeland will be able to enter parliament, and thus whether there will be two or three parties sitting in the next Hungarian legislature.

If Our Homeland ultimately clears the threshold, which currently appears more likely than not, and the margin of Tisza’s victory remains significantly below its current lead in the polls, one may ultimately end up with a three-party parliament in which Tisza has no majority in spite of winning the popular vote and potentially being the largest political group in the house.

While theoretically such a situation could end up with a minority Tisza government, this scenario is rather unlikely. Given their closer ideological proximity and Fidesz’s potential to exert blackmail pressure on the party, Fidesz may be better positioned to form a coalition or confidence-and-support arrangement with Our Homeland. In such a scenario, President Tamás Sulyok—widely regarded as closely aligned with Fidesz—could grant Viktor Orbán the mandate to form a government.

However, while entering government and exercising significant leverage over Fidesz might be an attractive scenario for Our Homeland, coalition negotiations will be far from simple. Government formation under such circumstances may be protracted and conducted amid heavy protests on the part of Tisza.

From a Ukrainian perspective, such a scenario might result in significant negative developments. Protracted government formation dragging into June will significantly lower the chances of any release of the

Hungarian blockade of the EUR 90 billion EU financial aid package to Ukraine, threatening to push Kyiv to the fiscal cliff by Budapest. With an eye to the plausibility of this scenario, EU institutions and member states would be prudent to consider alternative financial modalities to bridge this critical period for Ukraine or circumvent the Hungarian veto.

Furthermore, nationalism-centered mobilization may emerge as a key arena of competition between Fidesz and Our Homeland, as both parties seek to outmaneuver each other and gain the upper hand—whether in a formal coalition or a parliamentary support arrangement, and with an eye on potential snap elections.

This would create a political atmosphere in which compromises with Ukraine become even less likely than under a strong single-party Fidesz government, as any concessions could be immediately exploited by Our Homeland and portrayed as a sign of “national weakness” on the part of Fidesz.

At the same time, such a coalition would be unlikely to last a full parliamentary cycle. If Our Homeland were to enter parliament only narrowly, it would have little incentive to trigger immediate snap elections, which could ensure at least a minimal level of constructive cooperation with Fidesz in the short term. Over the longer term, however, political instability could lead to the dissolution of parliament. Should Tisza weaken significantly in the opposition role, momentum for snap elections could build—an opportunity that both Fidesz and Our Homeland would likely seek to exploit.

This scenario would likely be accompanied by heightened domestic political instability, a further escalation of nationalist rhetoric, and consequently increased tensions in Hungary’s relations with both the European Union and Ukraine.

Scenario 3: The EU’s First Rigged Election

Following 16 years of democratic erosion that, in the assessment of leading democracy-measurement initiatives such as [Varieties of Democracy Institute](#) and

the [European Parliament](#), has turned Hungary into an electoral autocracy, the stakes for the incumbent Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance in the upcoming elections are extremely high. The regime’s extensive exposure to strategic corruption—[effectively making Hungary one of the most corrupt countries in the European Union](#)—means that regime members and affiliated oligarchs risk not only losing power but also facing justified criminal prosecution and its potential consequences.

Although the prosecutor’s office currently remains firmly under the political control of Fidesz, incumbents may nevertheless be concerned that political defections could weaken this control if Tisza were to enter government.

As noted above, since 2014 the Orbán regime has significantly undermined the fairness of Hungarian elections by bringing public and large parts of private media under political control and systematically using state resources for party purposes—developments repeatedly documented in [election observation reports by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights](#).

Thus, [Hungary’s 2026 elections will also certainly be unfair](#). However, the uneven playing field created by the usual practices of Fidesz may apparently not be sufficient to prevent a potential election victory by Tisza.

Under these circumstances, a strategic question arises for Prime Minister Viktor Orbán: given the anti-democratic practices and corruption exposure accumulated over the past 16 years, can he risk losing an election—keeping open the possibility of a democratic comeback in the future—or must he remain in power under any circumstances to avoid criminal prosecution and the end of his political career?

Considering the extent of state capture in Hungary and the outsourcing of substantial public resources into a network of Fidesz-controlled private foundations resembling a “deep-state” structure—such as the [Mathias Corvinus Collegium](#)—the first option may appear more plausible.

However, the potential criminal justice consequences for regime insiders and the apparent desperation behind some recent moves by Fidesz, including the [reported deployment of high-profile officials from Russia's Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation \(GRU\) to Hungary](#) during the election campaign, suggest that the second option cannot be dismissed.

Prime Minister Orbán may also be tempted to use authoritarian measures undermining the freedom of elections in order to remain in power, because the international environment appears to be more conducive to such a strategy than at any time before. Even in 2022, both the EU and the United States watched the integrity of the Hungarian elections very closely, deterring potential malpractices that could negatively impact the freedom of the elections and undermine their legitimacy.

This protective web is gone for 2026. [The Trump administration has not only publicly endorsed PM Orbán multiple times](#), but has also publicly announced in its National [Security Strategy](#) a policy of election interference to support ideologically like-minded, radical-right forces in Europe in order to get or keep them in power.

This creates an enabling environment for a scenario in which Fidesz instigates election-day irregularities or, in cooperation with Russian stakeholders, co-arranges a Romania-like information manipulation operation that may significantly influence or even alter the election results.

If such a scenario were to materialize, it would constitute the first significantly rigged elections within the European Union, with all their devastating consequences for the democratic integrity and decision-making processes of the EU. Unfortunately, the fact that the EU would, even under such extreme circumstances, be unable to suspend the voting rights of the Hungarian government in the Council due to the flawed nature of the Article 7 procedure could further encourage Orbán to pursue this political path. The fact that this could cause a severe institutional crisis in the

EU might also encourage the Trump administration and the Kremlin to provide tacit or effective support for Orbán to deploy election-rigging tactics.

As this scenario can hardly be effectively addressed within the legal framework of the EU, EU institutions and Member States need to think outside the box and develop political solutions to a potential institutional crisis. This may be facilitated by the fact that rigged elections raise the previously unseen question of government recognition within the EU, effectively shifting the relationship between Hungary and the EU to a large extent from the terrain of EU law to that of international law.

If at least one EU Member State does not recognize the manipulated election results, cooperation with representatives of the Hungarian government in Council formats might become impossible. Such a situation could be addressed administratively if António Costa and the rotating Council Presidency were not to extend invitations to European Council or Council meetings to the Hungarian government, and if its representatives were not allowed to participate until concerns related to the legitimacy and legality of the government's mandate are addressed and resolved. In this way, the integrity of EU decision-making could be preserved and a potentially more far-reaching institutional crisis averted, provided that Member States accept the necessity of a political solution to the emerging threat.

For Ukraine, this scenario is certainly the most negative one. Facing even greater political isolation in the EU,—which may be the EU's only available tool in the absence of functioning legal mechanisms—PM Orbán will become even more dependent on external support from Russia and the Trump administration. Considering the fact that Orbán might try to cover up his own election fraud and rally social support by [claiming election interference on the part of Ukraine](#), any sort of rapprochement between Hungary and Ukraine appears to be almost unrealistic in this election scenario, particularly if Russian influence on Hungary's Ukraine policy increases even further.

Scenario 4: Constitutional coup d'état

Aside from creating significant election-day irregularities or deploying a large-scale information manipulation campaign impacting the results themselves, PM Orbán also has other avenues available if he wants to avoid the negative consequences of a potential election defeat.

He might be tempted either to deprive the elections of their real political importance or to try to postpone them until he might be able to gain the upper hand against Tisza, one way or another.

This scenario practically encompasses two different strategies that can be summarized under the banner of a constitutional coup d'état.

In the first case, PM Orbán might try to deprive the elections of their meaningfulness by changing Hungary's political system from a parliamentary model to a semi-presidential one through a constitutional reform or amendment. The Hungarian Basic Law does not contain any restrictions on constitutional amendments in the pre-election period; therefore, Fidesz might pass and implement a constitutional reform, if necessary, even in the last weeks before the April 12 election.

With a constitutional supermajority in the Hungarian parliament and a president likely to facilitate such a process without raising constitutional or political objections, no legal obstacle would prevent the introduction of a semi-presidential system. Such a reform could grant the president powers similar to those in the French system, while maintaining parliamentary election of the head of state, and enable the election of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán as Hungary's president for the next five-year term.

Politically, such a move would amount to a constitutional coup d'état, as it could effectively neutralize any electoral victory by the Tisza Party (Hungary) that falls short of a constitutional supermajority. Legally, however, the reform would remain compatible with Hungary's constitutional

framework, given the governing party's ability to amend the constitution unilaterally.

In the second scenario, an alleged incident—potentially including a false-flag operation—could be invoked as justification for introducing a state of emergency on the grounds that it aims at “*overthrowing or subverting the constitutional order, securing the exclusive acquisition of power, or endangering life and property on a massive scale.*” Under Article 50 of [Hungary's Basic Law](#), the National Assembly may declare such a state of emergency with a two-thirds majority.

According to Article 55 of the Basic Law, “*the general election of members of the National Assembly cannot be called or held during a state of martial law or a state of emergency.*”

The incumbent Orbán regime may be tempted to postpone elections by activating these constitutional provisions, particularly if polling indicates a decisive opposition victory. Such a move could allow the government to buy time until the political threat posed by Péter Magyar can be contained through other means.

From a domestic perspective, however, both scenarios would carry significant risks for the incumbents—potentially even greater than those associated with election manipulation. While sophisticated forms of electoral interference, and especially their scope and impact, often remain subject to interpretation and political contestation, constitutional engineering or the postponement of elections would likely be perceived by a large share of the population as a blatant attempt to deprive Hungarian citizens of the opportunity to determine their political future. Under such circumstances, the regime's legitimacy could suffer even more severely than under a scenario of manipulated elections.

In the case of constitutional reform, competences over EU and foreign affairs could be transferred to the presidency and thus remain firmly under the control of Viktor Orbán. Such a change could effectively neutralize any positive impact of a parliamentary victory by Tisza.

Because such a constitutional amendment could be adopted in a formally lawful manner, it would be difficult for European Union institutions to challenge it on legal grounds. Their response would therefore likely depend primarily on political considerations, including the scale and persistence of domestic protest in Hungary.

For Ukraine, a state-of-emergency scenario could pose particular risks. In the event of a false-flag operation, claims might emerge that Ukraine was responsible for the alleged threat, further politicizing bilateral tensions. Given that the current state of Hungary–Ukraine relations [already complicates Kyiv’s position within the EU](#), such a development could significantly aggravate the situation. In the context of this scenario, any compromise leading to a more constructive Hungarian stance toward Ukraine in EU decision-making would be highly unlikely.

Scenario 5: Breakdown of opposition campaign & last minute Fidesz victory

Despite Tisza’s current lead in the opinion polls, a Fidesz victory under the “usual” conditions of “free but not fair elections” remains plausible and cannot be ruled out.

Such an outcome would depend on two key prerequisites:

a) Successful agenda-setting by Fidesz that shifts the focus of the campaign—and voters’ attention—from poor governance and the economic consequences of the strategic corruption permeating the Orbán regime to the party’s central campaign narrative: the alleged external threat posed by Ukraine to Hungary’s security.

b) A significant breakdown of the Tisza campaign, either through communication failures leading to major scandals or through the use of aggressive campaign tactics by Fidesz—such as surveillance, blackmail, or honey traps.

While the political aftermath of this scenario would, at first glance, suggest continuity with the well-known

dynamics of the Orbán regime, at least one significant disruption should be considered.

A Fidesz victory is primarily conceivable under the premise that the conflict with Ukraine becomes the most salient issue in the election campaign. This would inevitably complicate any pragmatic compromise—for example on oil transit through the Druzhba pipeline or Hungary’s unblocking of the EUR 90 billion EU financial aid package for Kyiv. Although agreement on these issues might not be entirely impossible, Viktor Orbán—reinforced by an against-the-odds electoral victory—could become an even more difficult negotiating partner for both the European Union and Ukraine. In such a context, he may fully exploit the leverage created by Ukraine’s urgent need to access EU financial support.

Conclusion

Hungary’s 2026 parliamentary elections will play a pivotal role not only in determining the country’s domestic political future but also in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the European Union. The outcome will influence whether Hungary remains a persistent obstacle to EU consensus on Ukraine or reemerges as a cooperative partner within the Union.

Among the possible scenarios, a clear opposition victory offers the most promising prospects for restoring constructive Hungarian engagement within the European Union and toward Ukraine. Conversely, scenarios involving electoral manipulation, constitutional engineering, or renewed nationalist mobilization could deepen divisions within the EU and further complicate Europe’s collective response to Russia’s war against Ukraine.

For European policymakers, the election should therefore be understood not merely as a national political contest but as a critical moment for the EU’s strategic cohesion and its capacity to support Ukraine in a time of existential challenge.

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Layout

Julia Winter

ISSN: 2941-0088

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