

ELECTIONWATCH HUNGARY



Hungary Post-Election Watch: April 2010 Parliamentary Elections

In a landslide victory, Hungary's Fidesz captured 68 percent of the seats in April's parliamentary elections and a super-majority that gives the center-right party sweeping authority, including the power to change the constitution. "A revolution took place in the voting booth," declared Viktor Orban, Fidesz's chairman and the presumptive future prime minister, in his election night victory speech. "Hungarians have affirmed that there's a reason to believe in democracy," he said, "because within a democratic process, we will be able to bring the kind of enormous change that was once possible only through revolution." An election that is being portrayed as finally bringing to a close the country's post-communist transition has brought major changes to the country's political landscape.

Political Environment

Leading up to Election Day of the first round, April 11, significant changes to the political landscape presented a number of issues to watch (for the International Republican Institute's (IRI) pre-election report on Hungary [click here](#)). Most forecasts indicated that Fidesz would win a majority outright and be able to govern alone. But the big question prior to April 11 was whether Fidesz's get-out-the-vote operation could deliver strong enough results in the 176 single-mandate contests to put it within reach of a two-thirds majority, which would give the party power to change the constitution. Who would take second place also carried much significance. If a new far-right party, the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), could finish close to or even overtake the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP), it would be a crushing defeat for the Socialists and have a major impact on the future direction of the left. Finally, what, if any, other parties would cross the five percent threshold and fill out the rest of the parliament? A successful showing for a new party, Politics Can Be Different (LMP), would mean the emergence for the first time of a potentially viable green party in Hungary. Failure on the part of conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), including its handful of Union of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) candidates, could mean the end of two parties that had been major players in Hungarian politics since 1990. These were the key questions heading into the first round of voting.

The Electoral System and Results of the First Round

Hungary's electoral law is among Europe's most complex and combines three systems to elect the 386-member parliament: voting for single candidates from single-mandate district (SMD) contests (176 seats), voting for party lists in larger territorial districts using proportional rules to award seats (152 seats), and proportionally allocated compensation seats from national compensation lists (58 seats). The first two levels each require a ballot, while the national compensation list uses "surplus" votes not counted at the primary levels. In each SMD, candidates compete directly, and each voter chooses his or her most preferred

candidate on the ballot. Candidates may be nominated by parties or may run as independents. The candidate with the most votes wins, although if no candidate obtains more than half of the votes in a first round of voting, a run-off election is held two weeks later. The top three candidates and any candidate with more than 15 percent of the vote compete in the run-off election, in which the top vote-getter wins the seat.

The results of the first round of voting, held April 11, were:

Party	Vote (%)	Number of Mandates from SMD	Number of Mandates from List	Total Number of Mandates
Fidesz-KDNP	52.76	119	87	206
MSZP	19.3	0	28	28
Jobbik	16.7	0	26	26
LMP	7.43	0	5	5
MDF	2.65	0	0	0

Voters turned out in higher than expected numbers, 64.42 percent compared with 67.8 percent four years prior.

One hundred and nineteen of the 176 single-mandate districts were decided in the first round (which means that one candidate took 50 percent plus one of the votes). Fidesz won all 119 of those.

Among the 57 SMDs that remained undecided, MSZP finished first in only one. Fidesz finished first in all the others. Twenty-one of the undecided SMDs were in Budapest; most of the rest were in the eastern half of the country, particularly in the northeast. In those districts, many of them former industrial centers suffering from high unemployment, the Jobbik candidates finished strongly. Jobbik also did well on the party preference vote in those regions. Out of a total of 20 county lists, Jobbik finished second in nine. In the elections for European parliament last June, Jobbik finished second in seven counties.

LMP, the first round's other big winner, won most of its support in Budapest and surrounding Pest county. With the collapse of SZDSZ (as well as MSZP and MDF), LMP predictably picked up a sizeable portion of the urban center-left and liberal vote. MDF (and SZDSZ) failed to cross the threshold and will not be in the next parliament.

Fidesz having secured a comfortable majority and the power to govern alone, the only real issue in play leading up to the second round of voting, April 25, was the question of a two-thirds majority. Of the 57 SMD seats still undecided, Fidesz needed to win 52.

Preventing the super-majority became the essential goal of what would be the new opposition parties. MSZP unilaterally withdrew its candidates from two undecided districts in Budapest and endorsed the LMP candidates, creating a two-way race with the Fidesz candidate. LMP, for whom cooperation with the Socialists was anathema to its message that politics can be different, publicly dismissed the gesture of cooperation but nevertheless benefited from it. In a similar move, Jobbik stepped down in support of an independent candidate in one of the districts in the northeast. Meanwhile, Fidesz focused its message on the need for a strong, effective government to carry out necessary changes and concentrated

its considerable get-out-the-vote machinery on the 57 districts still in play.

Second Round of Elections

Not long after the precincts closed at 7 p.m., it became clear that Fidesz had won its two-thirds. By the end of the evening, Fidesz had captured 54 of the remaining seats, losing two to MSZP in Budapest and one to an independent candidate in the northeast. Excellent spring weather on Election Day and an already certain winner combined to dampen turnout, which was the lowest in 20 years, at 46.6 percent. According to the National Elections Bureau, the results after the second round of voting, April 25, are:

Party	Percentage of Mandates	Number of Mandates from SMD	Number of Mandates from List	Total Number of Mandates
Fidesz-KDNP	67.88	173	90	263
MSZP	15.28	2	57	59
Jobbik	12.18	0	47	47
LMP	4.15	0	16	16
Independent	.26	1	0	1

The president of Hungary has announced that he intends to seat the new parliament on May 14, and the new government under prime minister-elect Viktor Orban is expected by June. With broad, national support, the new government's top priorities will include economic growth and job creation as well as public security. They intend to re-negotiate the aid from the International Monetary Fund that was brokered under the previous government to avoid insolvency. Plans also include a major overhaul in the country's tax system to make it more competitive with neighboring countries; public administration reform including changes to the election law that would reduce the number of MPs in the parliament and changes to the law on local government, reducing through rationalization the number of municipal governments; reform of the national radio and television authority; and likely a law granting dual citizenship to Hungarians residing abroad.

After what was for its supporters a disappointing finish, Jobbik is positioning itself as the only serious check on Fidesz's power but will struggle to maintain the support of what is a disparate coalition of voters. In the aftermath of their defeat, both the chairwoman of MSZP, Ildiko Lendvai, and the chairwoman of MDF, Ibolya David, stepped down from their leadership positions. MDF, now out of parliament, may be in its final days. The Socialists, who saw some of their former ministers and leading figures soundly defeated in single-mandate contests, now face the most significant turning point in the life of the party since 1990, searching for new leadership and a new direction on which to re-build.

IRI in Europe

In Europe, IRI focuses on helping political parties become more issue-oriented and responsive to voters' concerns. IRI's training helps parties create more coherent platforms, better strategic communications, more effective grassroots organizations, and stable party foundations or institutes that can provide necessary training and analytical support. IRI is also active in expanding political participation among women, youth and minorities. By working with governments and civil society to concentrate more on policy, IRI seeks to

make the region's democracies more responsive and sustainable.

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