

European  
Elections monitor

Corinne Deloy

ANALYSIS

# Viktor Orban, who has been in power for twelve years, remains the favourite in the Hungarian general elections on April 3

On 3 April, 7.8 million Hungarians are being called to the polls to renew the 199 members of the Országgyűlés (National Assembly), the single chamber of parliament. 7 parties are running for this election. According to the latest opinion poll conducted by the Taktikaiszavazás Institute at the end of February, the Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union (FIDESZ-MPSZ) led by Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who has been in power for twelve years, is expected to win 115 seats. United for Hungary (UH), an alliance of 6 opposition parties<sup>[1]</sup> led by Peter Marki-Zay, candidate for Prime Minister, is expected to win 83 seats. However, many Hungarians (about a quarter of those registered) say they have not decided whether to vote or for whom to vote.

On the same day, Hungarians are invited to vote in a referendum on four questions concerning the sexual education of children. The questions are as follows: Do you approve of teaching sexual orientation to underage children in school institutions without parental consent; Do you approve of the promotion of sex change treatments for minors; Do you approve of the unrestricted presentation to minors of media content of a sexual nature that could affect their development? Do you approve of the presentation to minors of media content about gender reassignment? This popular consultation is legally binding. To be adopted, the proposals must of course be approved by a majority of voters and the number of voters must be greater than half of those registered. The outgoing Prime Minister, who claims to be the defender of Christian values, disapproves of all the proposals.

## VIKTOR ORBAN STILL POPULAR AFTER TWELVE YEARS AS HUNGARY'S LEADER

Hungary has been governed since the general elections of 11 and 25 April 2010 by Viktor Orban's FIDESZ-MPSZ. He has transformed the country into an "illiberal democracy", in which he positions himself as the sole representative of the people. He blames the liberals for the decline of the West and has moved closer to Russia and China.

In the elections of 11 and 25 April 2010, the FIDESZ-MPSZ obtained a two-thirds majority in parliament. Viktor Orban was thus able to amend the Constitution and many electoral laws, which allowed him to consolidate his power over the years. He has also taken control of the media and the judiciary, including the Constitutional Court. During its 12 years in power, FIDESZ-MPSZ has economically restored a Hungary that was bankrupt in 2008.

FIDESZ-MPSZ has pursued an ambitious family policy, granting numerous subsidies (for the purchase of a house or a car) to couples who get married and have children or plan to have children. In 2021, Hungary recorded its highest birth rate in 27 years: 1.59 (1.25 in 2010).

Viktor Orban, obsessed with defending the country's Christian identity, has pursued a very hostile policy towards immigrants knocking on his country's door, especially people of the Muslim faith or coming from Muslim countries. He has spoken out against gay marriage or what he calls LGBT propaganda, especially in schools. He has defended the purification of school history programmes and the defence of the white race or the Christian roots of Hungarians.

[1] The Socialist Party (MSZP), the Democratic Coalition (DK), the Party for Dialogue (PM), Doing politics differently-Green Party (LMP), Momentum and the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik).

## General elections in Hungary

3rd April 2022

---

The majority of Hungarians have been satisfied with their leader and the stability of the country for more than ten years. Viktor Orban leads a policy that mixes social redistribution and conservatism. He claims that his only objective is that every Hungarian should benefit from the transition, for which the population is indebted to him. In addition to the social benefits, FIDESZ-MPSZ mobilises and solidifies its electorate by denouncing members of the LGBT community. The opposition forces have so far failed to come up with a credible alternative policy.

On 12 February, the first day of the official campaign for the 3 April elections, Viktor Orban gave his speech to the nation, which he has done every year since 1999, whether he has been in power or not. In this speech he announced that the fuel price cap, which was due to expire on 21 February, would be extended for 3 months, beyond the elections. Earlier this year, the government had already decided to increase the minimum wage by 19.5%, exempt young workers under 25 from income tax, pay a bonus equivalent to 6 months' salary to the military and police, increase the salaries of nurses and social workers by 20% and reduce taxes by €1, 7 billion for families, restore a thirteenth month of retirement pension payments for pensioners and, above all, refund the income tax paid in 2021 to all families raising children (up to the limit of the tax on the average salary).

Viktor Orban, who describes any opposition to his power as communist, has warned his compatriots that a firm stance on the reception of migrants can only be guaranteed by his party. *"The European Union is in favour of migratory waves,"* he said, declaring himself at war, "in jihad" with Brussels.

He invited former US president (2016-2020) Donald Trump to attend an event in Budapest in March. His supporters hope that the former US head of state will be able to attend the big campaign rally that Viktor Orban will hold on 15 March. On 25-26 March, Hungary will also host a meeting of European, Latin American and American ultra-conservatives. Viktor Orban will be the main speaker. The Spanish Santiago Abascal (Vox) and Eduardo Bolsonaro (Social Liberal

Party, PSL), MP and son of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro (PSL), are among the guests.

Ten days after the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, one question is on everyone's lips: will Vladimir Putin be Viktor Orban's killer? The outgoing Prime Minister has understood the danger and, in recent days, he has done everything to forget the special relationship he had with the Russian leader (Viktor Orban has always praised the "Russian model"). His government has nevertheless condemned the Russian aggression and approved the European sanctions. *"At the end of the day, we are part of the West,"* said Viktor Orban. The Hungarian government nevertheless refuses any delivery of arms to Ukrainian forces. *"Let's reach out to those who need it, let's prove that Hungary is a good country inhabited by good people,"* stressed Viktor Orban, who had a border fence built with Serbia in 2015 and is usually strongly hostile to all immigration.

*"Traditionally, conservatives are anti-Russian in Hungary, so the invasion could be a red line for many of Orban's voters,"* said Andras Bozoki, a professor of political science at the Central European University in Vienna. On the other hand, Agoston Mraz, an analyst at the research institute NezoPont, points to the incumbent's premium that most often exists in the event of a crisis *"not so much because the party in power can hope to capture new votes, but because some voters fear the effects of a change in the midst of a crisis"*.

### **A UNITED OPPOSITION TO DEFEAT VIKTOR ORBAN**

To defeat Viktor Orban, the entire Hungarian opposition, left and right, has united behind a single candidate, Peter Marki-Zay, mayor since 25 February 2018 of Hodmezovasarhely (The Beaver Field Market), a town of 44,000 inhabitants located in the south-east of Hungary near the border with Serbia and Romania. During his election campaign, he was backed by the entire opposition, from the socialists to the radical populist right, a union that enabled his victory in this FIDESZ-MPSZ stronghold. During the local elections of 13 October 2019, numerous alliances were formed

between different parties of the opposition to Viktor Orban. A winning strategy that allowed the opposition to secure 7 major cities in the country (20 out of 23 were held by FIDESZ-MPSZ before the elections) including the capital Budapest where Gergely Karacsony won against the incumbent mayor Istvan Tarlos who had been in office since 2010.

Throughout 2020, the six main opposition parties - the Socialist Party (MSZP) led by Bertalan Toth and Agnes Kunhalmi; the Democratic Coalition (DK) of former Prime Minister (2004-2009) Ferenc Gyurcsany; the Hungarian Dialogue Party (PM) led by Budapest Mayor Gergely Karacsony ; Doing Politics Differently-Hungarian Green Party (LMP) of Mate Kanasz-Nagy and Erzsebet Schmuck; Momentum led by Anna Julia Donath and the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) led by Peter Jakab- negotiated at length about the best way to bring down Viktor Orban. They decided to organise a ballot to designate the candidate for Prime Minister who would represent them and drew up a common programme to solidify their alliance. The programme comprises 12 points, including the defence of the rule of law, the defence of press freedom, alignment with the West, entry into the euro and the protection of borders against illegal immigration.

Peter Marki-Zay was nominated by 56.7% of voters on 17 October 2021 as the opposition candidate for Prime Minister in the second round of the primary election. He beat Klara Dobrev, wife of Ferenc Gyurcsany, president of the Democratic Coalition, and former Prime Minister (2004-2009) but the latter is so discredited, including among left-wing voters, that it was impossible for him to run. Peter Marki-Zay received 43.3% of the vote. In the first round held between 18 and 28 September 2021 Klara Dobrev won with 34.84% of the votes, followed by the mayor of Budapest (27.30%) and Peter Marki-Zay (20.40%), who had run as an independent candidate. A few days before the second round, on 8 October, Gergely Karacsony announced his withdrawal from the race in favour of Peter Marki-Zay. "If I don't take this decision, Viktor Orban will stay in power. We have to accept the reality that it is not the liberals or the ecologists who will be able to beat a populist from the radical right. National-populism is very successful

in small towns and rural areas where people are afraid," he said.

In addition to the candidate for Prime Minister, the primary elections also selected the 106 candidates who will compete for the elections under the colours of the United Opposition and who will be elected by single-member constituencies. The Democratic Coalition came first in 32 constituencies, the Movement for a Better Hungary in 29, the Socialist Party in 18, Momentum in 15, the Dialogue Party for Hungary in 6, Doing Politics Differently in 5 and the Hungary for All Movement (MMM), the movement founded by Peter Marki-Zay in November 2018 in 1 constituency.

Peter Marki-Zay considers himself the best defender of a conservative and Christian Hungary. "*Unlike a left-wing candidate, I can go after conservative voters and those who are undecided,*" he repeats. "*Conservative and Catholic, he hopes that his profile can attract some of the FIDESZ-MPSZ voters disappointed by Viktor Orban. He describes himself as "everything that Viktor Orban claims to be".* Peter Marki-Zay is a Christian nationalist, pro-European and traditionalist; he is liberal, pro-low taxes, pro-market and pro-free enterprise. Liberal on moral issues, Peter Marki-Zay is personally opposed to abortion and divorce, but believes that the state should not interfere in people's private lives.

"*For the first time we have a chance to win the elections and defeat Viktor Orban, we will have a united list, a single candidate in each constituency, a single candidate for Prime Minister and a common programme*", Peter Marki-Zay repeats. According to him, unity is the only way to defeat Viktor Orban. And even with a united opposition, a miracle will be needed to dethrone the outgoing Prime Minister... he says.

"*Peter Marki-Zay is a very dangerous opponent for Viktor Orban. He rallies the urban electorate because he has made a career abroad. He holds an anti-establishment discourse but above all, he remains a Christian conservative from a small provincial town. But the election will be played out in these small towns where the inhabitants only get their information from*

## General elections in Hungary

3rd April 2022

television stations that broadcast the government's propaganda," stresses Robert Laszlo, a political scientist at the Political Capital research centre.

Although Peter Marki-Zay has certain strengths, he is nevertheless leading a collection of heterogeneous parties. If he wins on 3 April, he has said he wants to form a government of technocrats. *"We have to build a common programme; then its execution has to be carried out by technicians and experts who can be members of certain parties"*, said Peter Marki-Zay. On the other hand, his systematic opposition to all decisions of Viktor Orban's government (such as the freezing of petrol prices and some basic food products) might not be appreciated by Hungarian voters. *"It is pathetic that Hungary is going back to price controls as it was 30 years ago (i.e. during the communist period)"*, said the opposition candidate.

*"Viktor Orban can afford to lose the elections because the main institutions, such as the public prosecutor, the rights defender, the Supreme Court or the Constitutional Council, are all controlled by affiliates protected by the two-thirds majority. The outgoing prime minister has set traps to obstruct the process,"* said Zoltan Fleck, professor of law and sociology at Eotvos University (ELTE) in Budapest. *"Even the adoption of a new budget requires the agreement of a committee in which the FIDESZ-MPSZ has blocking power,"* he added.

### THE HUNGARIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

The Országgyűlés (National Assembly), the single chamber of the Parliament, comprises 199 deputies elected for a 4-year term: 106 of them are elected by single-member constituencies and 93 by proportional representation within the country. Voters therefore have two ballots: one to choose a political party, the other to vote for a candidate. Voters who are registered as members of a national minority<sup>[2]</sup> vote for their minority lists and not for national parties. Only a quarter of the votes required by national parties is necessary for a minority list to obtain a mandate. National minorities that do not win seats can delegate spokespersons to parliament.

On 15 December 2020, the electoral law changed the minimum number of candidates required for a party to run in the general elections: now only parties competing in at least 71 constituencies in at least 14 counties and Budapest can present candidates under the proportional representation list system.

To be represented in Parliament, a party must obtain at least 5% of the votes cast; an alliance of 2 parties, 10% of the votes and an alliance of 3 or more parties, 15%. Seats on national lists are distributed in proportion to the votes cast; the votes that do not result in a party winning seats and the votes of the party that won the seat that exceeded the electoral threshold are then redistributed according to the d'Hondt method.

Any party wishing to present a list in the single-member constituency elections must collect at least 500 signatures from voters. Within the single-member constituencies, candidates can be nominated either by political parties or by citizens.

6 political parties won seats in Parliament in the previous elections of 8 April 2018:

- the Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union (FIDESZ-MPSZ), established on 30 March 1988 and led by outgoing Prime Minister Viktor Orban, allied with the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP), has 133 MPs;
- the Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik), a nationalist party created in October 2003 and led by Peter Jakab, has 26 seats;
- the Socialist Party (MSZP), led by Bertalan Toth and Agnes Kunhalmi, allied to Dialogue for Hungary (PM), a social democratic and environmentalist party created in February 2013 and led by Gergely Karacsony and Tímea Szabó, has 20 MPs;
- the Democratic Coalition (DK), the social-liberal party of former Prime Minister (2004-2009) Ferenc Gyurcsány, has 9 seats;
- Doing Politics Differently (LMP), an ecologist party founded in 2009 and led by Akos Hádahazy and Bernadett Szel, has 8 MPs.
- Together. Party for a New Era (Együtt), a social-liberal party founded in 2012 and led by Peter Juhasz, has 1 seat.

<sup>[2]</sup> Hungary recognizes 13 national minorities: Germans, Armenians, Bulgarians, Croats, Greeks, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Ruthenians, Serbs, Slovaks, Slovenes and Ukrainians.

Reminder of the results of the elections of 8 April 2018 in Hungary

Turnout: 67.56%

Political Parties	Proportional list system			Single-member constituency vote			Total seats
	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Seats	Number of votes won	% of votes cast	Seats	
<b>Alliance of Young Democrats-Civic Union (FIDESZ-MPSZ) and People's Christian Democratic Party (KDNP)</b>	2 636 203	47,89	91	2 824 206	49,27	42	133
<b>Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)</b>	1 276 842	23,20	1	1 092 669	19,06	25	26
<b>Socialist Party (MSZP) and Dialogue for Hungary</b>	622 458	11,22	8	682 602	11,91	12	20
<b>Democratic Coalition (DK)</b>	348 178	6,28	3	308 068	5,37	6	9
<b>Doing politics differently (LMP)</b>	312 731	5,64	1	404 425	7,06	7	8
<b>Together</b>	58 591	1,06	1	37 561	0,66	0	1
<b>Others</b>	193 928	4,50	0	350 110	6,11	0	0

Source : <https://static.valasztas.hu/dyn/pv18/szavossz/hu/l22.html>

You can read all of our publications on our site :

[www.robert-schuman.eu](http://www.robert-schuman.eu)

Publishing Director : Pascale JOANNIN

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France , Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani