



The Centre For Applied Nonviolent Actions
and Strategies



FROM BACKSLIDING TO BREAKTHROUGH

Lessons from Hungary's 2026 Election and the
Future of Democratic Organizing

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This report examines the political conditions, campaign strategy, and civic mobilization behind Tisza's landslide victory in Hungary's April 2026 parliamentary elections. It traces Péter Magyar's path from the inner circles of Fidesz to the leadership of a movement that ended one of Europe's most durable experiments in competitive authoritarianism, analyzes the structural challenges facing democratic consolidation in the post-Orbán era, and draws transferable lessons for movements operating under similar conditions elsewhere

The Foundation and the Catalyst

On April 13, 2026, Hungarian voters delivered the most consequential electoral verdict in the country's post-communist history. Tisza won 141 of 199 parliamentary seats, a constitutional supermajority. Viktor Orbán, who had spent sixteen years engineering a political system designed to make his defeat structurally impossible, conceded. International observers rushed to explain what had happened, and most landed on the same answer: Péter Magyar.

The conditions that made April 13 possible were not assembled in 2024 when Magyar stepped forward, nor in 2025 when his national tour filled town squares across rural Hungary. They were built over a decade, quietly and without recognition, by people who had far more to lose than a political career. Volunteer networks trained thousands of ordinary citizens to monitor polling stations in a process Fidesz had systematically tilted against them. Independent journalists and YouTubers built audiences on shoestring budgets in a media landscape the regime had largely captured. LGBTQ organizers maintained community infrastructure and mobilizing capacity under a government that had made their legal marginalization a cornerstone of its cultural politics. None of this work was designed for a single election cycle. It was unglamorous, underfunded, and often dangerous, and it constituted the only genuinely durable opposition infrastructure in the country.

This distinction matters analytically, and it matters practically. If Magyar is the story, then Hungary's lesson for other democratic movements is discouraging: find a charismatic insider willing to break with the regime at exactly the right moment. That is not a replicable strategy. But if the civic infrastructure is the story, and this report argues that it is, then the lesson becomes something movements elsewhere can actually use. The candidate needed the infrastructure far more than the infrastructure needed the candidate. It was into this ecosystem that Péter Magyar stepped in early 2024.

Péter Magyar became connected to circles close to the party leadership, likely through professional contacts and the elite social networks his background afforded him. His marriage to Judit Varga, who would later become Justice Minister, further anchored him within this political environment.¹ Political scientist Zsolt Enyedi notes that when Magyar first positioned himself as an opposition leader in 2024, he was still ideologically a Fidesz product—someone who shared the party's nationalism and conservative values but objected to the corruption that had consumed its institutions. His initial critique was not that Fidesz's vision for Hungary was wrong, but that the party had betrayed its own stated principles.

¹ Denes Erdos and Justin Spike, "What's Behind Péter Magyar's Ascent to Power in Hungary After Prime Minister Orbán's Defeat," *Edwardsville The Intelligencer*, April 12, 2026, <https://www.theintelligencer.com/news/world/article/what-s-behind-peter-magyar-s-ascent-from-a-22199209.php>.

Magyar's disillusionment with Fidesz had been building for years. As an insider, Magyar argued that he witnessed firsthand how the party's governance had devolved into systemic corruption and cronyism.² The catalyst for a politically viable exit came in early 2024 with the Katalin Novák presidential pardon scandal, when it was revealed that President Novák had granted a pardon to Endre Kónya, a convicted accomplice in a child sexual abuse case.³ Varga, as Justice Minister, had countersigned the pardon. Both women were forced to resign.⁴ Hours after Justice Minister Varga announced her withdrawal from politics, Magyar published a Facebook post resigning from positions in two state-owned enterprises and relinquishing his board seat at MBH Bank. He wrote that Orbán's ideal of a "national, sovereign, bourgeois Hungary" was nothing more than a "political product" obscuring massive corruption.⁵ It was that video that turned a resignation into a political movement. Magyar's emergence into opposition, unlike previous figures, was not attacking the system from the outside but describing it from the inside. His position as a political insider allowed him to name names, cite specific procurement abuses, and identify the oligarchic networks that had shaped the system from within.⁶

What made this dynamic strategically significant was not Magyar's personal media instincts but the dilemma-action structure he had created. In nonviolent resistance strategy, a dilemma action forces the opponent into a choice where every available response strengthens the movement: repression amplifies the challenger's visibility and legitimacy, while inaction allows them to grow unchecked. Fidesz faced this trap repeatedly throughout 2024 and 2025. The smear campaigns, the four criminal cases filed against Magyar, and the European Parliament immunity-waiver requests all followed the same pattern: each attack drew more public attention to Magyar's allegations, reinforced his narrative of regime persecution, and generated cycles of free media coverage that no opposition advertising budget could have purchased. While the regime's broader smear campaigns ultimately failed to gain lasting traction, Fidesz's efforts were not entirely ineffective—Judit Varga's abuse allegations did appear to damage Magyar's polling, particularly with women.⁷ The dynamic is well documented across nonviolent resistance movements, from Otpor's deliberate provocations against Milošević to the Polish opposition's use of regime

² Dunai, "Who Is Peter Magyar, the Man Set to Take Over from Viktor Orbán in Hungary?"

³ Tibor Dessewffy, "A Star in the Storm: The Rise of Peter Magyar," European Council on Foreign Relations, July 4, 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/article/a-star-in-the-storm-the-rise-of-peter-magyar/>.

⁴ Siladitya Ray, "How Hungary's Child Sex Abuse Scandal Contributed to Orbán's Downfall," Forbes, April 13, 2026, <https://www.forbes.com/2026/how-hungarys-child-sex-abuse-scandal-contributed-to-orbans-downfall/>.

⁵ Iлона Gizińska, "The Year of Péter Magyar: Great Expectations, Great Challenges," OSW, June 5, 2025, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2025/peter-magyar-great-expectations-great-challenges>.

⁶ Gabriella Valaczkay, "Hungary: Could Peter Magyar Bring a Future Without Orbán?" DW.com, July 7, 2024, <https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-could-peter-magyar-bring-a-future-without-orban/a-69538536>.

⁷ Hungarian Observer, "Panel #9 - Does Péter Magyar Have a Woman Problem? Péter Magyar and his Tisza Party is polling worse among women than men. As Fidesz tries to exploit this shortcoming, our panel discusses the implications," January 17, 2025, Hungarian Observer article.

overreaction, and confirms that Magyar's ability to neutralize these attacks was not improvised charisma but a recognizable and replicable strategic pattern.⁸

The Formation and Rise of the Tisza Party (2024-2025)

Magyar's next step for his growing opposition was to attach it to an existing party in order to make the European Parliament election deadline in June 2024—the party formation was improvised by necessity. He took over Tisza (Tisztelet és Szabadság Pártja; the Party of Respect and Freedom), a dormant party registered in 2020 with no public profile, and searched for candidates through a public call.⁹ The new party was rapidly circulated: media strategy was shaped by theatre director Márk Radnai, crowds were mobilized by actor and influencer Ervin Nagy, and Magyar stood behind it all. In parallel, the team built a donor network, an IT system for reaching supporters, and recruited thousands of volunteers. The entire effort was assembled in roughly three months.¹⁰

The European Parliament election result exceeded expectations. Tisza won 29.6% of the vote and 1.3 million voters, the highest share for any non-Fidesz party since 2006, securing seven of Hungary's twenty-one seats in the European Parliament.¹¹ The new Tisza members joined the center-right European People's Party group, the same faction that Fidesz had left shortly before. Fidesz still led with nearly 45%, but the gap was narrower than any opposition party had managed in over a decade.¹² In a country where the opposition had been fragmented and ineffective for years, Tisza established itself as the sole viable challenger in a single election cycle.

The Tisza Campaign Strategy and the 2026 Parliamentary Election

Following the European Parliament elections, Tisza faced a fundamentally different challenge: building a national campaign infrastructure capable of winning a parliamentary supermajority in a system deliberately designed to prevent it. Orbán had shaped Hungary's 106 electoral districts with no input from the opposition, concentrating urban voters into large districts while spreading rural voters across more numerous ones. The results of this gerrymandering had been staggering: in 2014, Fidesz captured just 45

⁸ Popović et al., *Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points*, 2nd ed.

⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Hungary Country Report 2026." *BTI Transformation Index*, Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2026, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/HUN>.

¹⁰ Káplár András, "Nagy Ervin a Tisza Párt építésének koronázatlan királya," *Origo*, January 28, 2025, <https://www.origo.hu/itthon/2025/01/nagy-ervin-tisza-part-radnai-mark-vogel-evelin/>; Zsuzsanna Wirth and András Pethő, "Inside the Covert Operation to Bring Down the Party Threatening Viktor Orbán's Rule," *Direkt36*, March 24, 2026, <https://www.direkt36.hu/en/titkosszolgalati-nyomasra-tortent-hazkutatas-a-tisza-segito-informatikusoknal-aztan-kibukott-egy-gyanus-muvelet-a-part-ellen/>.

¹¹ Endre Borbáth, "Explaining Tisza's Hungarian Breakthrough," *The Loop* (ECPR), April 16, 2026, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/explaining-tiszas-hungarian-breakthrough/>.

¹² "Hungary – European Elections 2024," *Élections Européennes 2024*, 2024, <https://www.electionseuropeennes.eu/en/hungary/>.

percent of the vote but won 91 percent of the districts. Overcoming this structural disadvantage required Tisza to do what no previous opposition force had managed—compete seriously outside Budapest and the major cities.¹³

Magyar's response was the 80-day national tour, launched in mid-2025, during which he visited 158 rural settlements and electoral districts, often in areas considered untouchable Fidesz territory. In May 2025 alone, he walked 250 kilometers from Budapest to Oradea in northwestern Romania to connect with ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries. Using unconventional methods, biking, horse-drawn carriage, canoeing on the Tisza River, he maintained seven to eight public appearances per day alongside an active online presence.¹⁴ The tour's message was deliberately simple: the rising cost of living, crumbling public services, and systemic corruption. By the time he finished in late October 2025, Magyar had built something the Hungarian opposition had lacked for over a decade: a physical, visible presence in communities that had been written off.¹⁵

This ground-level effort was formalized through the *Tisza Islands*—local chapters established across the country that functioned as semi-autonomous organizing hubs. Rather than running a top-down campaign that treated rural volunteers as instruments of a Budapest-based operation, the Islands gave local organizers genuine agency over outreach in their communities. In parallel, Tisza launched *Tisza World*, an initiative aimed at engaging the Hungarian diaspora and building an international support network—recognition that a campaign against an entrenched regime required mobilization beyond national borders.¹⁶ The Islands and the broader civil society infrastructure supporting them (nonpartisan election monitoring networks, independent online media production, underground LGBTQ organizing) were not improvised for election season. They had been built over years, quietly, and Tisza's campaign gave them a vehicle.¹⁷

Throughout 2025 and into 2026, Magyar capitalized on deepening economic grievances. Hungary had suffered the worst inflation of any EU country over the preceding 25 years, with prices rising 57 percent—nearly double the EU average. The healthcare system had deteriorated severely, with hospitals crumbling and doctors emigrating. By 2025, Hungary ranked among the lowest in several EU household

¹³ Bailey Galicia, "Magyar's Victory in Hungary Should Be Studied by Other Opposition Movements," *Atlantic Council*, April 21, 2026, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/dispatches/magyars-victory-in-hungary-should-be-studied-by-opposition-movements/>.

¹⁴ Robert Horvath, "He Exposed Corruption and Walked across Hungary. Now Péter Magyar Has Defeated a Powerful State Machine," *The Conversation*, April 13, 2026, <https://theconversation.com/he-exposed-corruption-and-walked-across-hungary-now-peter-magyar-has-defeated-a-powerful-state-machine-280455>.

¹⁵ Daniel Hunter et al., "What We Can Learn from the Playbook That Defeated Orbán," *Waging Nonviolence*, April 14, 2026, <https://wagingnonviolence.org/2026/04/lessons-from-playbook-defeated-viktor-orban-hungary/>.

¹⁶ Borbáth, "Explaining Tisza's Hungarian Breakthrough."

¹⁷ Hunter et al., "What We Can Learn from the Playbook That Defeated Orbán."

wealth indicators.¹⁸ Survey evidence suggested that only one-fifth of Hungarians believed their living standards had improved over the previous four years, with younger cohorts expressing particular pessimism.¹⁹ The generational dimension was stark: pre-election polling consistently showed Fidesz support concentrated among voters over 65, while younger cohorts overwhelmingly backed Tisza.²⁰ This pattern is not uniquely Hungarian. Across Hungary, Poland, Georgia, Serbia, and Slovakia, the line between autocrat resistance and regime support increasingly tracks with age—a structural feature of competitive authoritarianism in the region that carries direct implications for movement strategy.²¹

The strategic question this raises is fundamental: if democratic renewal in Central and Eastern Europe is essentially generational, should opposition movements invest their finite resources in mobilizing their natural base among younger voters, or should they actively contest the older cohort where authoritarian support is concentrated? Tisza's answer was to do both. The 80-day national tour was, among other things, an explicit attempt to fight on Fidesz's demographic ground—visiting 158 rural settlements where the electorate skewed older and where Fidesz's dominance had gone unchallenged for years. Magyar's message in these communities was deliberately calibrated around material grievances, the cost of living, deteriorating healthcare, crumbling public services, rather than the democratic-institutional arguments that resonated with younger, urban voters. This was a movement choice, not a biographical quirk, and it represents one of the most transferable tactical lessons of the Hungarian case: an opposition that limits itself to mobilizing its existing base is already half-defeated. The question of whether Tisza's rural outreach achieved genuine ideological conversion or merely activated latent anti-incumbent sentiment among older voters remains open, but the willingness to compete on hostile demographic terrain itself represents a strategic departure from the pattern of previous Hungarian opposition campaigns.

The campaign also benefited from events outside Magyar's direct control—but these events are best understood not as lucky breaks but as evidence that the underpinnings of Orbán's regime were already fracturing before the electorate delivered its verdict.²² The earliest visible cracks appeared among business elites. Capital flight data from 2024 onward showed increasing hedging by Hungarian business interests previously aligned with Fidesz, as major investors began repositioning assets in anticipation of political

¹⁸ "Hungary Is Now Officially the Poorest Nation in the EU," *Commerzant.ge*, June 24, 2025, <https://commerzant.ge/en/news/world/hungary-is-now-officially-the-poorest-nation-in-the-eu>.

¹⁹ "21 Kutatóközpont: Csak minden ötödik magyar érzi úgy, hogy jobban él, mint négy éve," *HVG*, April 9, 2026, https://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20260410_21-kutato kozpont-kozvelemen y-kutatas-anyagi-helyzet.

²⁰ Gábor Tanács and Tamás Fencsik, "Hungary's Upcoming Election and the Effects of the Generation Gap," *Euronews*, March 30, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/03/30/hungarys-upcoming-election-and-the-effects-of-the-generation-gap>.

²¹ Gábor Tanács and Tamás Fencsik, "Hungary's Upcoming Election and the Effects of the Generation Gap."

²² Srđa Popović et al., *Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points: A Strategic Approach to Everyday Tactics*, 2nd ed. (Belgrade: Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, 2007), <https://canvasopedia.org/publications/>.

change.²³ State media, long one of the regime's most effective instruments, showed its own fissures: the Magyar Nemzet whistleblowers broke ranks with the government media line, providing an internal confirmation of the corruption narrative Magyar had been building from outside.²⁴ In March 2026, leaked recordings of conversations between Putin and Orbán, as well as between Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, surfaced publicly.²⁵ While suspicions of the Orbán government's proximity to Moscow had long circulated, the recordings provided concrete, damaging confirmation—and drew condemnation from the Polish and Irish Governments.²⁶ The very existence of these leaks implied that elements within the security services had either authorized or failed to prevent their disclosure—a signal, intentional or not, that the security apparatus was no longer fully committed to regime protection. The election result, in this light, was not the cause of Orbán's fall but the public ratification of an elite recalibration that was already underway.

One critical and underappreciated factor in Magyar's ability to mount this campaign at all was his legal immunity as a member of the European Parliament. Hungarian prosecutors pursued charges against him (theft, vandalism, and two defamation suits) in what was widely interpreted as an effort to neutralize him through legal harassment. The European Parliament rejected each request to waive his immunity. Without that institutional protection, Magyar would in all likelihood have been dragged through state-coordinated legal proceedings and smear campaigns, unable to tour the country or unify the opposition.²⁷

This is not incidental—it is a structural lesson with implications well beyond the Hungarian case. Research by Lucan Way, Steven Levitsky, and Yashar Talebirad on autocratization events over the past decade shows that legal harassment of opposition figures constitutes the single most common form of authoritarian repression, accounting for 74 percent of recorded events.²⁸ Magyar's survival as a viable candidate was, in a meaningful sense, an artifact of European institutional architecture. Democratic renewal in semi-authoritarian European contexts now depends, to a degree that is insufficiently recognized, on supranational legal scaffolding: EU parliamentary immunity, Article 7 proceedings, rule-of-law conditionality mechanisms, European Court of Justice rulings, and the broader Rule of Law

²³ Agnes Gagyí, Tamás Gerócs, and Linda Szabó, "Hungary's Reindustrialization: Hedging Geopolitical Conflicts?" *LeftEast*, July 11, 2024, <https://lefteast.org/hungarys-reindustrialization/>.

²⁴ RFE/RL's Hungarian Service, "Hungarians Rally as Whistle-Blower Exposes Alleged Corruption in Orbán's Government," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, March 27, 2024, <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-fidesz-whistleblower/32879788.html>.

²⁵ Sandor Zsiros, "Leaked Call Shows Szijjártó Discussing EU Sanctions Removal with Russia's Lavrov," *Euronews*, March 31, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/03/31/leaked-call-shows-szijjarto-discussing-eu-sanctions-with-russias-lavrov>.

²⁶ Ashifa Kassam and Jakub Krupa, "'Repulsive': Polish and Irish Leaders Condemn Hungarian Foreign Minister's Alleged Links to Russia," *The Guardian*, March 31, 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/mar/31/polish-irish-leaders-condemn-hungarian-foreign-minister-alleged-links-to-russia>.

²⁷ Semuhi Sinanoglu, "Don't Draw the Wrong Lessons from the Hungarian Election," *Global Policy Journal*, April 22, 2026, <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/22/04/2026/dont-draw-wrong-lessons-hungarian-election>.

²⁸ RFE/RL's Hungarian Service, "Hungarians Rally as Whistle-Blower Exposes Alleged Corruption in Orbán's Government."

framework.²⁹ The Hungarian case demonstrates that this architecture functions not merely as a post-hoc accountability tool but as a real-time protective shield for opposition movements under authoritarian pressure. It is precisely this protective function that makes EU membership status so consequential for democratic movements elsewhere in the region: opposition figures in Turkey, Georgia, and Serbia lack comparable institutional cover, and the absence of it shapes what is strategically possible. Funders, EU policymakers, and movement strategists should read the Hungarian case as evidence that the EU's institutional architecture is itself part of the movement protection toolkit—and that its preservation and strengthening is a direct investment in democratic resilience.³⁰

Fidesz, meanwhile, ran a campaign built on a single message: war and peace. The framing cast the opposition as agents of American and Brussels-backed warmongering, while positioning Fidesz as the only guarantor of Hungarian security. It was the same fear-based playbook that had worked in 2022. In that election, a fragmented six-party opposition coalition had failed to offer a coherent alternative, allowing Fidesz to consolidate its base and frame the contest on its own terms.³¹ By 2026, the dynamics had reversed: Tisza had consolidated opposition support behind a single figure and a single message, while Fidesz's framing felt increasingly detached from material reality.

Yet the war-and-peace message was not a failure in absolute terms. Despite the landslide, Fidesz retained approximately 44 percent of the popular vote—a mass base that did not disappear on election night and will not disappear in the years ahead.³² The regional precedent is unambiguous: mass authoritarian electorates regroup. In Poland, PiS remains the largest single opposition party and continues to command organized, ideologically committed support.³³ In Slovakia, Robert Fico returned to power in 2023, four years after his party's electoral defeat, riding the same populist-nationalist coalition that had sustained him previously.³⁴ In Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić has survived³⁵ repeated opposition mobilizations precisely because his base has remained consolidated.³⁵ The parallel media ecosystem that sustained Fidesz, government-aligned television, the Megafon influencer network, and a constellation of pro-regime online outlets, remains operationally intact, and the oligarchic networks that funded the regime retain their capital, their connections, and their interest in political influence.³⁶ Any analysis that treats the Hungarian

²⁹ Sinanoglu, "Don't Draw the Wrong Lessons from the Hungarian Election."

³⁰ Kapronczay and Maksimovic, "The Day After Hungary's Pivotal Election."

³¹ Eszter Farkas, "Parliamentary Election in Hungary, 3 April 2022," *Groupe d'études géopolitiques*, April 3, 2022, <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/parliamentary-election-in-hungary-3-april-2022/>.

³² Kirby, "Orbán Era Swept Away by Péter Magyar's Hungary Election Landslide."

³³ Jan Radomski, "Why Poland Voted Right," *Le Monde diplomatique*, August 2025, <https://mondediplo.com/2025/08/06/poland>.

³⁴ Tim Houghton and Darina Malová, "The Return of Robert Fico," *Journal of Democracy*, November 2023, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/the-return-of-robert-fico/>.

³⁵ Ido Vock and Jovana Georgievski, "Aleksandar Vucic: The Man Who Remade Serbia," BBC News, December 10, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-67654166>.

³⁶ Sandor Zsiros, "Ex-Wife Hits Out at Hungarian Opposition Leader Péter Magyar."

election as a conclusive democratic victory without reckoning with the durability of this 44 percent risks reproducing the same analytical error that characterizes overpersonalized assessments of authoritarian regimes: the system was never just Orbán, and removing him does not remove the structural conditions that produced his support. The question of how to engage, divide, or gradually erode an entrenched authoritarian electorate, rather than simply outvoting it once, is among the most important strategic challenges the Tisza government and Hungarian civil society now face.

On April 13, 2026, Hungarian voters delivered a decisive verdict. Tisza won 141 of 199 parliamentary seats—a constitutional supermajority. The result represented the most significant electoral reversal in Hungary since the transition to democracy, combined with the most significant electorate turnout in the history of Democratic Hungary—with a record of 78.94% turnout.³⁷ Fidesz, which had governed continuously since 2010 and had never lost a parliamentary election under Orbán's leadership, was reduced to its smallest caucus in over two decades. Perhaps most remarkably, Orbán conceded. For a leader who had spent sixteen years constructing a system designed to perpetuate his rule, the decision not to contest the result surprised many observers. But the concession should not be read as vindication of Hungary's democratic institutions. The more plausible interpretation is strategic: contesting the result, given the scale of the defeat and the evident fracturing of key regime pillars, would have been more costly to Fidesz's long-term viability than accepting it. By conceding, Orbán preserved the party brand, the parliamentary caucus, and, critically, the 44 percent base for a future return cycle. Hungary's democratic mechanisms survived, but with significant structural damage, and the concession was an elite calculation about the most advantageous path forward for a diminished but far from destroyed political movement. What the concession signals is not that the system held, but that Orbán judged the system's remaining leverage, the entrenched institutional veto points, the loyal judiciary, the fiscal trap mechanisms discussed below, to be more valuable as instruments of long-term opposition than as tools for contesting a lost election.

Prospects for Hungarian Democratic Governance

The ousting of the Orbán regime does not imply a straightforward or frictionless democratic transition. The incoming Tisza administration inherits a series of entrenched structural challenges, including a high budget deficit and the likelihood of entering a more stringent phase of the European Union's excessive deficit procedure. At the same time, however, Hungary's situation differs in a crucial respect from that of Poland following the fall of Law and Justice (PiS). There, the pro-democratic

³⁷ Paul Kirby, "Orbán Era Swept Away by Péter Magyar's Hungary Election Landslide," *BBC*, April 13, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cd9vg782kx7o>.

coalition led by Donald Tusk has struggled not only to deliver on campaign promises but to pass even basic legislation, largely due to the persistence of PiS-aligned loyalists across key state institutions.³⁸ By contrast, Tisza's parliamentary supermajority, 141 seats out of 199, provides a significantly more advantageous institutional starting point.³⁹

Such a majority opens the possibility for sweeping constitutional and legal reform. It enables amendments to the Fidesz-era "Fundamental Law" of 2011, as well as to the so-called "Cardinal Laws" that Viktor Orbán's government used to entrench long-term influence over the judiciary and other oversight mechanisms.⁴⁰ In the run-up to the election, Péter Magyar pledged to restore a system of checks and balances and to introduce a two-term limit for the office of prime minister. He further signaled an intention to remove Fidesz-appointed officials from a wide range of institutions nominally designed to constrain executive authority, including the Constitutional Court, the State Audit Office, the Economic Competition Office, the media authority, and the office of the attorney general, as well as the presidency itself. In parallel, he proposed the creation of a dedicated body tasked with reclaiming wealth acquired through corruption, indicating an effort not only to reform institutions but to materially unwind the political economy of the previous regime.⁴¹

Despite these ambitions, the judiciary, particularly the Constitutional Court, represents the most significant institutional obstacle to reform. It is widely reported that a decisive majority of sitting judges were appointed under Fidesz parliamentary dominance, embedding ideological continuity within the legal system.⁴² With 12-year terms and no possibility of re-election, several justices appointed as recently as 2023 will retain their seats until 2035, well beyond any single government's mandate.

The presidency itself presents an additional layer of institutional resistance. Tamás Sulyok, who served as president of the Constitutional Court from 2016 to 2024, was elevated to President of Hungary by Fidesz's parliamentary majority in February 2024.⁴³ As Viktor Z. Kazai has argued, Sulyok's trajectory exemplifies how Fidesz converted nominally independent constitutional offices into instruments of regime loyalty: he accepted both his nomination and his presidency "with a clear understanding that the governing parties

³⁸ Zsuzsanna Végh et al., "Hungary's Election Could End Orbán's Rule — But Will It End His Power?" *Just Security*, April 7, 2026, <https://www.justsecurity.org/135860/hungary-election-orban-rule-power/>.

³⁹ Gregorio Sorgi, "Hungary's Tisza Party Widens Parliamentary Majority as Final Votes Are Counted," *Politico*, April 19, 2026, <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungarys-tisza-party-widens-parliamentary-majority-as-final-votes-are-counted/>.

⁴⁰ Mauro Mazza, "The Hungarian Fundamental Law, the New Cardinal Laws and European Concerns," *Acta Juridica Hungarica* 54, no. 2 (2013): 140–155, <https://real.mtak.hu/43237/1/ajur.54.2013.2.2.pdf>.

⁴¹ Zsófia Barta, "What Should We Expect from the Next Hungarian Government?" *LSE Blogs*, April 14, 2026, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2026/04/14/hungary-election-tisza-party-peter-magyar-victory/>.

⁴² Viktor Kazai, "Court Packing Puts the Judicial Protection of Citizens' Rights in Danger: Trend Analysis," *Liberties: EU Watch*, March 18, 2024, <https://www.liberties.eu/en/stories/rolreport2024-justice/45018>.

⁴³ Iлона Gizińska, "The Year of Péter Magyar: Great Expectations, Great Challenges," OSW, June 5, 2025, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2025-06-05/year-peter-magyar-great-expectations-great-challenges>.

would not tolerate any meaningful constitutional control over themselves.”⁴⁴ Magyar has publicly called on Sulyok to resign, declaring him unfit to serve as guardian of the constitution, and has signaled that if Sulyok refuses, Tisza will use its supermajority to amend the constitution and remove him.⁴⁵ As in the Polish case, dismantling entrenched institutional networks may prove considerably more difficult, and more politically fraught, than achieving electoral turnover

Beyond the judiciary, additional institutional veto points persist. The Fiscal Council, composed of the heads of the National Bank, the State Audit Office, and the Council itself, all widely regarded as aligned with Fidesz, retains the authority to approve or block the national budget.⁴⁶ The incoming government must secure its approval to pass the 2027 budget by March of that year. Should the Council refuse, the president would be constitutionally empowered to dissolve parliament and trigger new elections. This mechanism effectively creates a latent “fiscal trap,” constraining the government’s ability to implement its agenda even in the presence of a parliamentary supermajority.⁴⁷

Tisza’s February 2026 manifesto outlines a broadly pro-European trajectory, framed both ideologically and instrumentally. The party explicitly “chooses Europe,” pledging to rebuild trust with EU and NATO partners and committing to eurozone accession by 2030.⁴⁸ Central to this agenda is the restoration of the rule of law, which is presented not only as a normative objective but as a prerequisite for unlocking approximately €17 billion in EU funds currently frozen since 2022 due to systemic violations.⁴⁹ These funds are tied to two primary conditionality mechanisms, the most significant of which concerns judicial independence. Over more than a decade of institutional control, Fidesz has reshaped key components of the judiciary, including the Kúria (Supreme Court), the Constitutional Court, the reduced authority of the National Judicial Council, and the expanded powers of the National Office for the Judiciary. Addressing these structural distortions will be essential not only for democratic restoration but for restoring Hungary’s fiscal capacity.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Viktor Z. Kazai, "A Constitutional Dignitary Conceived in the Orbán-Regime: The Portrait of Tamás Sulyok," *Verfassungsblog*, 2024, <https://verfassungsblog.de/a-constitutional-dignitary/>.

⁴⁵ James C. Reynolds, "Hungary's New Prime Minister Urges President to Resign Immediately," *The Independent*, April 16, 2026, <https://www.independent.co.uk/bulletin/news/peter-magyar-hungary-pm-tamas-sulyok-b2958608.html>.

⁴⁶ "Hungarian National Assembly: The Fiscal Council," *IPU Parline*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024, <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/HU/HU-LC01/law-making-oversight-budget/budget/>.

⁴⁷ Max Griera, "Péter Magyar's Revolt: The Insider Challenging Hungary's Viktor Orbán," *Politico*, April 8, 2026, <https://www.politico.eu/article/peter-magyars-revolt-the-insider-challenging-hungarys-viktor-orban/>.

⁴⁸ Alexander Faludy, "Hungarian Election: Tisza Finally Lays Out Its Vision for Change," *Reporting Democracy* (Budapest), February 17, 2026, <https://balkaninsight.com/2026/02/17/hungarian-election-tisza-finally-lays-out-its-vision-for-change/rd/>.

⁴⁹ Lili Bayer et al., "'Swift Work to Be Done' after Call with Hungary's Magyar, EU's Von der Leyen Says," *Reuters*, April 14, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/world/swift-work-be-done-after-call-with-hungarys-magyar-eus-von-der-leyen-says-2026-04-14/>.

⁵⁰ Végh et al., "Hungary's Election Could End Orbán's Rule — But Will It End His Power?"

However, the manifesto's breadth has prompted skepticism regarding its feasibility. Critics have argued that many of its economic commitments risk being "too good to be true," particularly when considered in conjunction. The platform includes maintaining existing family tax credits, increasing family allowances, preserving tax exemptions for mothers, reducing VAT rates, distributing SZÉP cards to pensioners, cutting taxes for low earners, introducing progressive taxation on higher incomes, expanding pensions, including the proposed "14th-month pension", and significantly increasing public investment.⁵¹ As noted by political analyst Attila Tibor Nagy, the simultaneous implementation of these policies would be extremely difficult under current economic conditions. Measures such as expanded pension schemes or broad tax exemptions would likely require sustained GDP growth in the range of three to five percent, a target that remains uncertain in the near term.⁵²

Energy dependence further complicates the government's strategic flexibility. Hungary has relied on Russian energy imports, particularly via the Druzhba pipeline, for approximately six decades. This dependency cannot be rapidly reversed without significant infrastructure investment and a willingness to absorb higher import costs.⁵³ Reports indicate that Russian oil imports remain roughly 20 percent cheaper than international benchmarks, providing a material advantage to the Hungarian state energy company MOL. While Tisza has pledged to reduce dependence on Russian energy, its proposed timeline, extending to 2035, lags well behind the European Union's 2027 targets, underscoring the tension between geopolitical realignment and economic pragmatism.⁵⁴

Orbán's legacy also extends into the regional sphere. As Fidesz grew increasingly isolated from mainstream European politics, particularly following its suspension from the EPP in 2019, Orbán turned to the Balkans in search of ideological allies.⁵⁵ He cultivated close ties with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, with the two leaders publicly describing each other as "friends," and with Milorad Dodik, who was removed from the presidency of Republika Srpska last year after being convicted of defying the decisions of Bosnia's High Representative.⁵⁶ This Budapest-Belgrade-Banja Luka axis, united by a shared mix of illiberalism, ethnonationalism, Euroscepticism, and proximity to Moscow, represents yet another structural entanglement the incoming government must navigate.⁵⁷ Whether Magyar actively distances

⁵¹ Tisza Párt, *A működő és emberséges Magyarország alapjai* (2026), <https://cdn.tisza.work/működőmagyarország.pdf>.

⁵² "Analysts Predict Economic Strain and Political Challenges for Tisza Party Government," *Hungary Today*, April 22, 2026, <https://hungarytoday.hu/analysts-predict-economic-strain-and-political-challenges-for-tisza-party-government/>.

⁵³ "Druzhba Oil Pipeline," *GEM Wiki*, Global Energy Monitor, January 27, 2026, https://www.gem.wiki/Druzhba_Oil_Pipeline.

⁵⁴ Arthur Sullivan, "Report: Hungary Using More Russian Oil, Despite EU Phase Out," *DW News*, March 23, 2026, <https://www.dw.com/en/report-hungary-using-more-russian-oil-despite-eu-phase-out/a-76487750>.

⁵⁵ Jennifer Rankin, "Viktor Orbán's Party Suspended from Centre-Right EPP Bloc," *The Guardian* (Brussels), March 20, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/20/manfred-weber-calls-for-freezing-of-hungarian-partys-voting-rights>.

⁵⁶ Berta López Domènech, "With Viktor Orbán's Defeat, Balkan Autocrats Lose Their Main Ally inside the EU," *European Policy Centre*, April 20, 2026, <https://www.epc.eu/publication/viktor-orbans-defeat-balkan--lose-their-main-ally-inside-the-eu/>.

⁵⁷ López Domènech, "With Viktor Orbán's Defeat, Balkan Autocrats Lose Their Main Ally inside the EU."

Hungary from these relationships or simply allows them to atrophy, the recalibration will carry consequences for EU enlargement politics and governance reform in the Western Balkans.

In Kyiv, the result will be welcomed with genuine relief. Hungary's repeated blocking of EU financial support for Ukraine was not merely a bureaucratic inconvenience, it signaled to Moscow that European unity was penetrable. That signal has now been revoked, and the unblocking of EU financial instruments for Ukraine will likely be among Magyar's first and most visible acts of European statecraft.⁵⁸ The shift carries implications for NATO as well. Under Orbán, Hungary was a nominal ally that actively undermined alliance cohesion and maintained privileged ties with Moscow. While Magyar has not campaigned on dramatic increases in defense spending, the removal of Budapest's role as NATO's structural exception is itself a strategic gain of considerable magnitude. For the Eastern Flank, even a neutral Hungary is an improvement, and Magyar's openly pro-Western orientation suggests he intends to go further than neutrality.⁵⁹

That being said, on foreign policy Tisza's position is comparatively underdeveloped and, in some respects, deliberately cautious. Its manifesto offers limited detail on Ukraine, beyond opposition to accelerated EU accession. Péter Magyar has repeatedly stated that he would not fully reverse Hungary's existing policy of limited support, even as he signals a broader intention to rebalance relations away from Russia.⁶⁰ Empirical analyses of Tisza's voting behavior in the European Parliament, including those conducted by Eulytix for the European Policy Centre, suggest that while Tisza MEPs generally align with pro-European blocs, they also engage in tactical alignment with Fidesz on politically sensitive issues such as Ukraine, agriculture, and migration.⁶¹ This pattern reflects the persistence of domestic political constraints even within a nominally pro-European reorientation.

Taken together, these dynamics suggest that Hungary's democratic renewal will be structurally constrained, uneven, and contingent on both domestic and external factors. As Kim Lane Scheppele argues in her theory of "Autocratic Legalism," regimes such as that of Viktor Orbán consolidate power through formally legal mechanisms, gradually hollowing out democratic institutions while maintaining a veneer of constitutional legitimacy. In such systems, the constitution itself becomes an instrument of

⁵⁸ Marcin Zaborowski et al., "After the Earthquake: What Tisza's Victory Means for Europe," *Globsec*, April 13, 2026, <https://www.globsec.org/what-we-do/commentaries/after-earthquake-what-tizas-victory-means-europe>.

⁵⁹ Ladislav Pásztor, "Hungary's Position in NATO: An Exception to the Strategy or a Threat to Alliance Unity?" *Security Forum* 18 (2025): 8–22, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/397561541>.

⁶⁰ Eric Maurice and Levente Kocsis, "After Orbán: Why Péter Magyar Would Not Be an Easy Partner for the EU," *European Policy Centre*, February 13, 2026, <https://www.epc.eu/publication/after-orban-why-peter-magyar-would-not-be-an-easy-partner-for-the-eu/>.

⁶¹ Maurice and Kocsis, "After Orbán: Why Péter Magyar Would Not Be an Easy Partner for the EU."

entrenchment rather than constraint, rendering post hoc legal remedies insufficient once the system has fully matured.⁶²

Nevertheless, the electoral defeat of Fidesz constitutes a critical inflection point. The ability of the Tisza Party to secure a parliamentary majority demonstrates that, despite sustained efforts to erode democratic competition, electoral mechanisms and public accountability have not been entirely extinguished.

Hungary's trajectory has therefore shifted in a meaningful way—but the extent to which this shift results in substantive democratic restoration will depend on the government's ability to navigate entrenched institutional resistance, fiscal constraints, and the enduring structural legacies of Orbán-era governance.

Broader Lessons: Reclaiming Democracy from Competitive Authoritarianism

For more than a decade, Hungary served as the defining case study in democratic backsliding within the European Union. After April 2026, it joins a lineage of cases (Slovakia's OK '98 campaign against Mečiar, Serbia's Otpor-driven overthrow of Milošević in 2000, Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003, and Poland's 2023 defeat of PiS) in which organized civic resistance, often combined with elite defection, has dislodged entrenched semi-authoritarian regimes. Much of the playbook Tisza employed was already visible in those earlier campaigns: the combination of insider credibility with grassroots mobilization, the exploitation of regime overreach, the consolidation of a fragmented opposition behind a single vehicle, and the strategic use of international institutional leverage. Hungary's contribution to this lineage is not that it invented a new model but that it demonstrated the model's applicability in what many analysts had considered the hardest case—a regime that had spent sixteen years perfecting the legal and institutional architecture of competitive authoritarianism. Positioning Hungary accurately within this comparative framework, rather than treating it as singular and unprecedented, is itself analytically consequential: it makes the lessons transferable, which is the precondition for them being useful.

Orbán's defeat revealed a familiar paradox of authoritarian rule: the very mechanisms that consolidate power, such as the silencing of dissent, the narrowing of the inner circle, and the insulation from public accountability, eventually erode a regime's capacity to adapt. When a regime retreats into a bubble and excludes dissent, it loses the capacity to renew itself. Stability becomes rigidity, and rigidity becomes fragility, until the system collapses.⁶³ Orbán, after sixteen years in power, may have seemed invincible. But like many authoritarian leaders, he did not exert power alone. He relied on institutions, media outlets,

⁶² Kim Lane Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," *University of Chicago Law Review* 85, no. 2 (2018): 545–584, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26455917>.

⁶³ Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," 545–584.

the Constitutional Court, a patronage network binding the economic elite, that functioned as *pillars of support* for the regime. These pillars are composed of people, and people can be persuaded to shift their loyalty. Identifying which pillars are crucial, and developing a strategy to weaken them, is often what separates successful nonviolent movements from failed ones.⁶⁴

The analytical framework for understanding how entrenched authoritarian regimes fall is well established. Gene Sharp's foundational work on the pillars of support, refined by Robert Helvey and applied empirically by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, demonstrates that regimes collapse not when they lose popular support alone but when the institutional pillars that sustain them (the security forces, the business elite, state media, the judiciary, the bureaucracy) begin to defect or withdraw cooperation.⁶⁵ Daniel Hunter's formulation, that defeating entrenched authoritarian leaders requires elite defection from above combined with mass mobilization from below, captures the dynamic concisely, and the Hungarian case confirms it.⁶⁶ But confirmation requires specificity.

In Hungary, the pillar shifts can be identified with reasonable precision. Business elites began hedging as early as 2024, with capital flight data showing a measurable repositioning of assets away from Fidesz-linked ventures.⁶⁷ State media, one of the regime's most effective instruments of control, showed internal fractures when Magyar Nemzet whistleblowers broke ranks and confirmed elements of the corruption narrative Magyar had been constructing.⁶⁸ The security apparatus, whose loyalty had been assumed, came into question with the March 2026 leaked recordings of Putin-Orbán and Szijjártó-Lavrov conversations—leaks that could not have surfaced without at minimum a failure of regime information security, and quite possibly active cooperation from within the intelligence services.⁶⁹ Resignation rumors circulating around individual Constitutional Court judges in early 2026 suggested that even the judiciary, the pillar Fidesz had invested most heavily in capturing, was not uniformly committed to regime defense.⁷⁰ Magyar's emergence as a credible challenger, a former insider willing to break with the regime, provided the elite fracture. But it was sustained grassroots organizing, and the long-term civic infrastructure discussed below, that converted that fracture into a landslide.

⁶⁴ Srđa Popović et al., *Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points*.

⁶⁵ Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, 4th ed. (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2010); Robert L. Helvey, *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking About the Fundamentals* (Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2004); Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

⁶⁶ Hunter et al., "What We Can Learn from the Playbook That Defeated Orbán."

⁶⁷ Gagyí, Geröcs, and Szabó, "Hungary's Reindustrialization"

⁶⁸ RFE/RL's Hungarian Service, "Hungarians Rally as Whistle-Blower Exposes Alleged Corruption in Orban's Government."

⁶⁹ Sandor Zsiros, "Leaked Call Shows Szijjártó Discussing EU Sanctions Removal with Russia's Lavrov."

⁷⁰ "Hungary's Magyar Urges President and Top Judges to Resign by May 31," *Global Banking and Finance Review*, April 20, 2026, <https://www.globalbankingandfinance.com/hungarys-magyar-renews-call-president-top-judges-resign/>.

The “Tisza Islands” model is a direct rebuke to opposition campaigns that organize from the cities outward or from the top down. Magyar's team built physical, relational infrastructure in communities that had been written off, not because they expected to win every seat, but because showing up was the message.⁷¹ These “Islands”, Influenced by earlier Hungarian civic-network models like Fidesz’s old “citizens’ circles”,⁷² began to emerge after Tisza’s strong 2024 European Parliament performance across Hungary. While the groups themselves were inspired by Magyar’s growing campaigning, they functioned relatively independently. By the 2026 election, there were at least 200 islands across Hungary, concentrated heavily in the rural heartland where Fidesz’s grip had long gone unchallenged.⁷³

The islands proved essential in the communities where opposition felt most impossible—small villages and towns where citizens genuinely believed Fidesz would always hold power and were, as political consultant Gergő Papp puts it, “afraid to speak out, afraid to show they belonged to the opposition.” These islands gave residents a place to voice dissent without fear—functioning less as political organizations than as civic societies where members gathered to discuss local issues, organize community events, and foster openness.⁷⁴ Yet their political weight was undeniable. As former Hungarian national-security advisor David Koranyi argues, the “sheer existence” of these islands is what mattered most: people in villages and small towns needed to feel that enough citizens shared their doubts to safely signal opposition without fear of repercussion.⁷⁵ By treating volunteers in local chapters as agents rather than instruments, the greater campaign fostered both resilience and enthusiasm—core ingredients of movement-based organizing. The lesson is structural: build for the long game, but deploy at election time. And the mechanism is identifiable: elite pillar shifts opened the door, but it was the grassroots infrastructure, built over years, not months, that walked through it.⁷⁶

Another expression of the civic courage the regime had failed to extinguish came from the LGBTQ+ community. The Orbán regime had consistently targeted them: the 2021 “child protection” law banned the “promotion” of homosexuality, the amended Assembly Act prohibited LGBTQ+ events entirely, and most recently, the Budapest Pride parade was banned outright.⁷⁷ In 2025, the community responded by organizing the largest Pride march in Hungarian history and the biggest anti-government protest since Fidesz came to power in 2010—between 180,000 and 200,000 people marched across Budapest's

⁷¹ Hunter et al., “What We Can Learn from the Playbook That Defeated Orbán.”

⁷² Franklin Foer, “Viktor Orbán’s Defeat and the Rise of Tisza Islands,” *The Atlantic*, April 2026, <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/2026/04/viktor-orban-defeat-tisza-islands-hungary/686827/>.

⁷³ Galicia, “Magyar's Victory in Hungary Should Be Studied by Other Opposition Movements.”

⁷⁴ Foer, “Viktor Orbán’s Defeat and the Rise of Tisza Islands.”

⁷⁵ Foer, “Viktor Orbán’s Defeat and the Rise of Tisza Islands.”

⁷⁶ Borbáth, “Explaining Tisza's Hungarian Breakthrough.”

⁷⁷ Stuart Dowell, “Analysis: What Hungary’s Pride March Revealed About the Limits of Orbán’s Control,” *TVP World*, July 2, 2025, <https://tvpworld.com/87601830/analysis-what-hungary-pride-march-revealed-about-the-limits-of-orban-control>.

Elisabeth Bridge in defiance of the government ban. Such a march was a courageous act: participants faced fines of nearly \$600 apiece, while organizers risked up to a year in prison.⁷⁸ The defiance was personal as much as political. “What is most painful for me is to see how stupid they think we all are,” said Edit Rocza, 46, a special-education teacher who had traveled from southern Hungary to take part.⁷⁹ But infrastructure alone does not win elections.

Opposition to the regime, however, was not enough on its own. Magyar ran on corruption, yes, but he ran for something: affordability, public healthcare, housing, a “humane Hungary.” He hammered relentlessly on what Orbán's rule had cost ordinary people in their daily lives. The lesson for any opposition movement is direct: running against the other side's failures, without a clear and compelling alternative vision, leaves persuadable voters with nothing to vote toward.⁸⁰ Elections are usually won and lost on domestic issues—above all, the economy. Magyar wisely focused on material conditions rather than divisive cultural battles, and external influence, however well-intentioned, has limits. Done clumsily, it can even be counterproductive, as JD Vance's pre-election visit to Budapest demonstrated.⁸¹

More broadly, international support for democratic movements is most effective when it reinforces local strategies rather than directing them. As Stefania Kapronczay and Breza Race Maksimovic argue in their most recent *Journal of Democracy* report, the priority should shift from short-term election-cycle engagement toward sustained investment in civic infrastructure, independent media, and grassroots organizing capacity—the kinds of long-term foundations that made Tisza's campaign possible in the first place. Overpersonalizing support around individual leaders weakens the broader democratic ecosystem and creates dependencies that authoritarian regimes can exploit.⁸²

Finally, the Hungarian case underscores a deeper structural point about how modern authoritarianism operates, and therefore how it must be resisted. The new generation of autocrats come to power not with bullets but with laws. They attack the foundations of liberal democracy through constitutional amendments, carefully preserving the shell of the prior state, the same institutions, the same ceremonies, an appearance of rights protection, while hollowing out its moral core—law itself has become the instrument of entrenchment.⁸³ This means that resistance cannot be left to lawyers alone. A citizenry

⁷⁸ Andrew Higgins, “Hungary Pride March Article,” *The New York Times*, June 28, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/28/world/europe/hungary-orban-gay-pride.html>.

⁷⁹ Higgins, “Hungary Pride March Article.”

⁸⁰ “21 Kutatóközpont: Csak minden ötödik magyar érzi úgy, hogy jobban él, mint négy éve,” *HVG*, April 9, 2026, https://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20260410_21-kutato kozpont-kozvelemen y-kutatas-anyagi-helyzet.

⁸¹ Matthew Sussex, “What Orbán's Loss Means for Putin, Trump and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism,” *Press Insider*, April 14, 2026, <https://pressinsider.com/insight/what-orbans-loss-means-for-putin-trump-and-the-rise-of-right-wing-populism/>.

⁸² Stefania Kapronczay and Breza Race Maksimovic, “The Day After Hungary's Pivotal Election,” *Journal of Democracy*, April 2026, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/the-day-after-hungarys-pivotal-election/>.

⁸³ Béla Greskovits, “Is East-Central Europe Backsliding? Economic Woes and Political Disaffection,” *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 4 (2007): 40–46, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/east-central-europe-economic-woes-and-political-disaffection/>.

equipped to challenge legalistic autocrats must be educated in the tools of law themselves. Liberal and democratic constitutionalism cannot remain an elite ideal with no resonance among the general public, because that is precisely the condition that leaves democratic publics vulnerable to autocratic capture.⁸⁴

Elections may open doors, but they do not walk societies through them. Hungary's real test is not whether the regime was defeated, but whether its citizens, civil society, and institutions can sustain the participation, pressure, and imagination required to turn a political opening into lasting democratic transformation.

⁸⁴ Scheppele, "Autocratic Legalism," 545–584.

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