

Polls predict victory for right-wing Fidesz in Hungarian elections

Markus Salzmann
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In Hungary, 2014 is a “super election year.” On April 6, there are parliamentary elections, European elections take place on May 25, and municipal elections in October. Despite catastrophic social conditions, polls predict that the League of Young Democrats (Fidesz) of current president Victor Orban will emerge victorious from the elections.

A leading important polling organisation stated at a conference in Budapest that Orban could once again achieve a two-thirds majority. This is in spite of the fact that the percentage of voters who favour a change in government has risen sharply to over 50 percent.

Fidesz, which is running in the election along with the small, ultra-conservative KDNP, received around 52 percent of the vote in the 2010 parliamentary elections. Since it won 173 of 176 direct mandates along with the seats awarded on the party list system, Fidesz controlled a two-thirds majority in parliament. The previous governing Social Democrats (MSZP) won 19 percent of the vote, while the neo-fascist Jobbik took close to 17 percent.

Orban used his two-thirds majority in parliament to establish authoritarian state structures. A new media law virtually eliminated press freedom. Government opponents were laid off from public office, authorities and universities. The election law was also changed on several occasions. A larger proportion of mandates were awarded on the basis of majority vote, and the composition of voting districts was changed in favour of Fidesz. Election advertising is banned on private television stations, while on the public broadcaster, which is close to the government, pro-Fidesz advertisements are run.

But the most important reason why Orban can expect to win the election is the complete bankruptcy of the opposition. The opposition social democratic alliance,

which also includes several extra-parliamentary opposition groups and a section of the trade unions, is broadly discredited among the population.

The MSZP, the successor to the Stalinist state party, implemented draconian austerity measures at the expense of the working class between 2004 and 2009 under Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, and subsequently under the transitional government of Gordon Bajnai. Gyurcsány and Bajnai both now lead their own parties: Gyurcsány, the Democratic Coalition (DK), and Bajnai, the United Party for Epochal Change (EKP). They have concluded an electoral alliance with the remainder of the so-called socialists and two liberal parties.

The programmatic differences between Fidesz and the opposition are minimal. Gyurcsány, Bajnai and MSZP leader Attila Mesterházy have long been advocates of right-wing policies corresponding with the demands of business, the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund. Now they intend to bring Hungary even closer to the EU. Declarations that they will ensure increased social justice following a change of government are pure electoral propaganda. These parties were themselves responsible for much of the social destruction over the past 25 years.

They are therefore demonstratively holding back in the election campaign. None of the opposition parties can discuss the burning social issues that are affecting the majority of Hungarians. “Hardly a recognisable election campaign, hopeless non-government candidates who only serve to prove the democratic character of the system,” the weekly magazine *HVG* lamented.

At the same time, social conditions under the Orban government have sharpened drastically. While pointing to the economic crisis in order to impose austerity

measures, they have ruthlessly attacked the weakest sections of society. With a law against homelessness, they drove homeless people out of urban districts and at the same time slashed resources for the provision of assistance. They introduced forced labour for the unemployed.

During a recent election tour, Orban declared proudly on local television that Hungary had left the “European culture of the social state” behind and was “more competitive” than the rest of Europe as a result. He announced a further reduction in the flat rate of tax from 16 percent in the coming term of government.

Since Orban took power, poverty in Hungary has exploded. According to projections from the research institute Táarki at the end of last year, almost half of the Hungarian population (46.6 percent) live below the poverty line. Among the Roma minority, the figure is much higher, at 92 percent.

Poverty researcher István Kun wrote recently in the weekly newspaper *Élet és Irodalom* (Life and Literature), “The Roma mainly live in regions of Hungary which are seen as the poorest in the EU, and even there, most of the Roma families are among the poorest of the poor.... They are only able to avoid freezing in winter if they can somehow ‘organise’ wood. What do they eat? The cheapest things. Many families have even become accustomed to buying cheap animal feed, like dog salami, for their own nourishment.”

At the end of December 2013, Hungarian households owed debts of 6,414 billion forint (€20.7 billion). This equates to 20 percent of GDP. The enormous debt burden is forcing an increasing number of families to sell their homes well below value. A large number of households are so indebted that they are on the verge of collapse, according to support organisations.

Since 1998, debt per head has risen from €2,400 to more than €8,000. In search of a better standard of living, 500,000 Hungarians have left the country since 2010. State debt, at 80 percent of GDP, is more than 20 percentage points higher than Poland’s.

The growing social polarisation in Hungary is increasingly incompatible with democratic forms of rule. Orban has systematically rehabilitated right-wing forces. Across the country, statues and busts have been erected of regent Niklos Horthy, who led an authoritarian regime from 1920 to 1944 and aligned

himself with Hitler’s Germany.

Members and sympathisers of the fascist Jobbik party march through the streets with police protection to commemorate Horthy and at the same time to urge for the Roma to be forced out. Openly extreme right-wing writers have been honoured with public prizes, while critics are silenced. Fidesz works closely with Jobbik on many legislative proposals.

Under these conditions, the fascist terror of groups close to Jobbik has strengthened significantly in recent years. In a series of terrorist attacks up to 2009, right-wing extremists murdered a total of six Roma and severely injured a further 55 people. Despite a number of promises to compensate the victims, the government has yet to provide them with any money.



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