

Róbert Kiss Név

Hungary's Uncertain Future



In the public discourses of Hungary, mainstream voices frequently discuss the potential defeat of Viktor Orbán and his government, heralding a new era in Hungarian politics. However, these voices often overlook certain aspects of history that cast a shadow over their vision, suggesting that a clear break from the past may not be as evident as hoped. While several opinion polls indicate that TISZA—Péter Magyar's party—currently has more supporters than the governing party and

appears to be more active, a change of government may not result in dramatic changes.

The first issue that is neglected is the nature of [dominant party systems](#). The question of how long and to what extent the current opposition will be able to maintain power after a change in government is rarely raised. The opposition narrative seldom considers the possibility that the current ruling party could quickly return to power, and there is little discussion about its influence even as an opposition party. The return of a dominant party was not uncommon in Hungarian history. During the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, the elite returned to power after a single opposition victory and a brief period of governance. Similarly, no one expected that the successor party of the MSZMP would win the second election after the regime change in 1994, especially with a significant margin. This phenomenon is not unique to Hungary, and similar occurrences can be observed in Japan and Mexico. In Japan, the opposition party won only twice in the post-World War II period—in 1993 and 2009—but in both cases, the former dominant party, the Liberal Democrats, returned with renewed strength. After seventy years of dominance in Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party was defeated but has remained an influential player in politics.

Another key aspect is the role of society. Due to historical experiences, Hungarian political development significantly differs from that of Western countries. Consequently, the political culture and key norms are distinct, which in turn affects the relationship between society and the political elite. In Hungary, a paternalistic approach dominates where society is subordinate to and dependent on the political elite. Therefore, no matter who becomes Prime Minister, the country and society will remain essentially the same, with only some leaders changing. For a drastic change, a similar form of civic education would be necessary as in post-war Germany. After World War II, the US invested significant effort in creating peaceful, democratic countries based on Western norms, including extensive civic education. However this was limited to the Western scope of influence. Following the Cold War, the countries that transitioned to democracy did so independently and appeared committed to democratic and Western values. While they received support to be able to adapt to liberal democracy, it was far less extensive as in the previous wave of democratization. Having quickly adapted Western institutions Hungary seemed to have become a consolidated democracy. Yet, value research shows that this assumption did not hold true.

In conclusion, we can say that a regime change in itself does not generate the profound changes expected by voters.

Therefore, we shouldn't expect Hungary to make a 180-degree turn, as societal reflexes and beliefs tend to be more static than dynamic, even in the case of political transformation. Substantial time and considerable investment in civic education is necessary to see significant changes. While changing the leaders is possible, the country may remain the same. Specifically, in Hungary's case, as seen in historical examples and in other countries, there is a high possibility that Fidesz, the currently dominant party, will remain a significant political player even after a defeat.