

Hungary's 2026 Elections: Scenarios and Implications for the EU and Ukraine

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Executive Summary

Hungary's 2026 parliamentary elections will play a pivotal role not only in determining the country's domestic political future, but also in shaping the European Union's geopolitical response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. A clear opposition victory offers prospects for restoring constructive Hungarian engagement with EU policy on Ukraine. Conversely, scenarios involving electoral manipulation, constitutional engineering or renewed nationalist mobilisation by the ruling party will deepen divisions within the EU and further complicate Europe's collective response to Russia's war against Ukraine.

EU policymakers should urgently prepare policy responses to a range of election outcomes and proactively build support for these in dialogues with member states at the highest political level. European capitals should be clear about their expectations of the OSCE election observation mission in Hungary and react appropriately to the role of Daria Boyarskaya, Russian President Vladimir Putin's former interpreter, as a senior advisor to the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly election observation mission to Hungary.

Hungary's parliamentary elections on 12 April 2026 are poised to be one of the most consequential political contests in Europe this year. The outcome will determine the domestic political trajectory of Hungary after 16 years of government by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party. The results will also have far-reaching consequences for the European Union's ability to act collectively and for Ukraine's economic and political resilience in wartime. For the past decade and a half, Hungary has increasingly acted as a spoiler within EU decision making, repeatedly obstructing sanctions against Russia, delaying EU financial support to Ukraine, and challenging the EU's institutional cohesion.

As of mid-March 2026, the political landscape of the campaign remains fluid. Polling data show a substantial divergence between pro-government polling institutes and independent agencies. While the former report a narrow but consistent lead for Fidesz, independent surveys suggest a clear advantage for the centre-right opposition party, Respect & Freedom (Tisza), led by Péter Magyar. Aggregated polling [estimates](#) show that Tisza enjoys a lead in national voting intentions. Nonetheless, the Hungarian electoral landscape, which is characterised by single-member constituencies, strong incumbency advantage and an uneven media environment, creates structural obstacles for the opposition. Historically, these institutional features have translated vote advantages for Fidesz into parliamentary supermajorities.

The current election campaign is a fight between two narratives. Tisza focuses on domestic political problems, such as economic stagnation, inflation, deteriorating public services and corruption scandals. The ruling Fidesz party, in contrast, focuses on foreign policy, telling voters that “it could be worse if Orbán was not governing the country in such turbulent and dangerous times”.

Disputes over oil transit through the Druzhba pipeline, Hungary blocking a €90 billion financial support package for Ukraine, and the arrest and expulsion of Ukrainian nationals on Hungarian territory have brought bilateral relations to an unprecedented low. These developments have enabled the Hungarian government to reframe the election campaign around national sovereignty and security concerns linked to Ukraine. If this narrative becomes dominant, it could benefit Fidesz by diverting attention away from domestic governance issues.

Against this backdrop, five election scenarios emerge, each with distinct implications for the EU and Ukraine.

Scenario 1: Opposition victory with a governing majority

The first scenario envisages a clear electoral victory for Tisza, resulting in a stable parliamentary majority. Such an outcome would require current polling trends to remain stable and that the process stay free of major manipulation or irregularities on election day. Hungarian elections have been widely [criticised](#) for their lack of fairness due to the government's structural advantages, involving media dominance, campaign finance opacity and misuse of state resources. However, public dissatisfaction with the government might be strong enough to overcome these obstacles.

A Tisza government would inherit a deeply entrenched system, where key positions within the Constitutional Court, the prosecutor's office, the presidency and independent regulatory bodies are occupied by Fidesz loyalists, potentially limiting the scope of immediate institutional reform. Magyar is clearly more liberal than Orbán, but he still holds some fairly conservative views. Nonetheless, a new government could initiate a gradual normalisation of Hungary's relationship with the EU and signal a return to more cooperative decision making.

For Ukraine and the EU, this scenario offers the most positive outlook. Hungary's obstructionist behaviour in EU decision making – particularly on financial assistance to Ukraine and sanctions against Russia – would be likely to come to an end. Even though Magyar's stance on Ukraine remains unclear, Budapest would probably drop its veto on a first cluster opening, the next formal step in Ukraine's EU accession negotiations. Even without providing direct military assistance, a Tisza government could pursue sectoral cooperation with Kyiv in areas such as energy transit, reconstruction, and cross-border economic integration. In the broader EU context, Hungary's return to a constructive role would significantly strengthen the Union's geopolitical coherence at a time of heightened security challenges.

Scenario 2: Opposition plurality but parliamentary deadlock

A second scenario involves Tisza winning the popular vote but failing to secure a parliamentary majority. The structural bias of the electoral system means that the opposition could require a nationwide vote several percentage points higher than Fidesz to achieve a majority of seats. If the far-right party, Our Homeland (Mi Hazánk), crosses the 5 percent parliamentary threshold, the resulting three-party parliament could produce a situation in which no single political force can command a majority.

Under such circumstances, government formation could be protracted and the situation might become politically volatile. President Tamás Sulyok – who is widely seen as aligned with Fidesz – might grant Viktor Orbán a mandate to attempt to form a government even if Tisza wins more votes. A coalition or cooperation agreement between Fidesz and Our Homeland would then be possible, although negotiations would be difficult and politically contentious.

From the perspective of Ukraine and EU governance, this scenario carries significant risks. A prolonged period of political uncertainty in Budapest could delay decisions on EU financial assistance to Ukraine, pushing Kyiv closer to a fiscal crisis. Furthermore, nationalist competition between Fidesz and Our Homeland would be likely to intensify anti-Ukrainian rhetoric in Hungarian politics. Any compromise with Ukraine – whether related to minority rights, energy transit or EU policy – could be politically costly for the coalition partners, making constructive engagement more difficult.

Although such a coalition government might initially survive based on mutual strategic interests, long-term instability or paralysis would be likely, which could lead to snap elections.

Scenario 3: A stolen election

A third scenario involves a substantial escalation in electoral manipulation. Hungary has already experienced extensive democratic backsliding over the past decade. International observers have repeatedly [criticised](#) the fairness of the electoral environment.

If the Fidesz government were to conclude that its existing structural advantages are insufficient to secure victory, it might resort to more direct forms of interference. External democratic pressure on Hungary may also be weaker than in previous elections, reducing the perceived costs of electoral manipulation. There might be significant irregularities on election day, or more large-scale information operations designed to influence voter perceptions.

This outcome would represent a major institutional crisis for the EU. A significantly manipulated election in a member state would challenge the credibility of the EU's commitment to democratic standards and the rule of law. However, the EU's legal instruments for addressing such a development are limited. Procedures under [Article 7](#), designed to sanction violations of fundamental EU values, have so far proved politically ineffective due to the requirement for unanimous member state support.

For Ukraine, this scenario would likely be the most damaging. A government that retains power through manipulated elections would face growing international isolation within the EU and might respond by deepening its alignment with external actors that are hostile to Ukraine. Anti-Ukrainian rhetoric would intensify further as a domestic political tool to consolidate support and deflect criticism. Formal EU accession negotiations would remain blocked.

Scenario 4: Constitutional manipulation or postponement of elections

Another possible pathway for regime survival could involve altering the institutional framework of the political system itself. Its two-thirds parliamentary majority gives Fidesz the constitutional authority to amend Hungary's Basic Law without significant legal constraints. This raises the theoretical possibility of a last-minute constitutional "reform" designed to preserve political control even in the event of an electoral defeat.

One variant of such a strategy could involve transforming Hungary's political system from a parliamentary model into a semi-presidential one, concentrating significant executive authority in the presidency and allowing Viktor Orbán to continue to exercise power in that role. Another possibility might involve declaring a state of emergency following a major security incident, thereby postponing elections under constitutional provisions or declaring the results annulled, with reference to the Romanian precedent.

Although legally possible, such a step would carry enormous political risks and might provoke large-scale domestic protest. If implemented, this would generate severe tensions between Hungary and the rest of the EU. Because such constitutional amendments would not necessarily violate EU law, Brussels would face considerable difficulties responding effectively.

For Ukraine, this scenario would be likely to exacerbate the deterioration in bilateral tensions. The security incident used to justify emergency measures might be framed as involving foreign interference, falsely implicating Ukraine and worsening already poor relations.

Scenario 5: Fidesz victory following a shift in campaign dynamics

Finally, a Fidesz victory without major manipulation on election day remains a plausible outcome if campaign dynamics shift decisively in the government's favour. Two developments would be particularly critical: successful agenda-setting that centres the campaign on security threats associated with Ukraine or a major breakdown in the opposition campaign as a result of scandal, internal division or aggressive political tactics.

In this scenario, Hungary's domestic political trajectory would continue along the path established over the past decade. The international implications would be significant. An electoral victory achieved against the expectations of many observers would strengthen Orbán's political confidence and encourage a more assertive approach to EU negotiations.

For Ukraine, this would mean continued obstruction of EU financial assistance and sanctions policies, as well as prolonged disputes over energy transit. Budapest could also exploit the urgency of Ukraine's financial needs to extract yet more political concessions in negotiations with Brussels. The EU accession process would remain stagnated.

Conclusion and recommendations

The election in Hungary represents a critical moment for the EU's strategic cohesion and its capacity to support Ukraine at a time of existential challenges. Among the possible scenarios, a clear opposition victory offers prospects for restoring constructive Hungarian engagement with EU policy on Ukraine. Conversely, scenarios involving electoral manipulation, constitutional engineering or renewed nationalist mobilisation would deepen divisions within the EU and further complicate Europe's collective response to Russia's war against Ukraine.

Given the high stakes involved and that the result is far from clear, European policymakers will need to act proactively and strategically. The following steps are recommended:

1. EU policymakers should urgently **prepare policy responses to a range of outcomes from the Hungarian parliamentary elections** and work proactively to build support for these. Key European leaders should put joint pressure on reluctant member states to make an [Article 7.3](#) procedure, which suspends voting rights for breaching the EU's founding values, a genuine option. They could also prepare to conduct informal European Council meetings in an EU26 format, to signal that member states breaching [Article 4.3](#) on the principle of sincere cooperation can be isolated from discussions on issues of strategic importance to the Union.
2. European policymakers should be **clear about their expectations of the OSCE election observation mission in Hungary**. If the OSCE wants to retain confidence, the organisation must be impartial, evidence-based, and call the election as it sees it. European policymakers should react appropriately to the role of [Daria Boyarskaya](#), President Putin's former interpreter, as a senior advisor to the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly election observation mission to Hungary.
3. EU policymakers should **advance Ukraine's sectoral integration, especially in security and defence, as well as strategic economic areas** such as industrial products and energy. This will bring Ukraine closer to EU institutional structures regardless of the political blockages in the formal accession process. It would also send a clear signal to Moscow that the EU's geopolitical agency does not hinge on electoral outcomes in one member state.



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