




## **Weekly Briefing**

**Hungary political briefing:**  
**The Results and the Long-Term Political Consequences of the**  
**Municipal Elections in Hungary**  
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# The Results and the Long-Term Political Consequences of the Municipal Elections in Hungary

*This week the briefing analyzes the results of the Hungarian municipal elections that took place on October 13, 2019. After looking at the main figures, the paper investigates the main campaign events before the local elections that might have impacted the results as well, and it also evaluates the strength of the cooperation among opposition parties. Afterward, the briefing tries to draw conclusions on the broader and long-term implications of these figures and trends and the paper also discusses the way of how government and opposition can cooperate in the local governments.*

## 1. Municipal Elections Captured in Figures

In October, Fidesz-KDNP received 53.3 percent of the votes, while the opposition collected 44.82 percent of the votes. When comparing these figures to the results of the 2014 municipal elections, we can conclude that in general Fidesz-KDNP became stronger (51.14 percent in 2014) and the opposition weaker (46.67 percent in 2014). We arrive at the same conclusion when analyzing the absolute numbers of the votes. (See table 1!)

However, the breakdown of the votes also points out that Fidesz-KDNP's support – measured in percentage points – was lower in the capital city this time than four years ago, which led to the victory of the opposition candidates in the capital. The irony of these numbers is that the Fidesz-KDNP mayor candidate received more votes this time (306.608) than four years ago (290.675) when he had been elected as mayor of the city of Budapest.

Table 1. Results of the Hungarian Municipal Elections in 2014 and 2019				
	2014 municipal elections			
	Fidesz-KDNP		Opposition	
	Number of votes	Shares	Number of votes	Shares
County lists	1.218.008	52.64	1.040.992	44.99
County cities	284.461	47.40	294.720	48.93
Capital city	290.675	49.06	301.793	50.94
Aggregate numbers	1.794.144	51.14	1.637.505	46.67
	2019 municipal elections			
	Fidesz-KDNP		Opposition	
	Number of votes	Shares	Number of votes	Shares
County lists	1.364.048	57.23	979.056	41.08
County cities	346.385	49.08	332.408	47.10
Capital city	306.608	44.10	384.565	55.32
Aggregate numbers	2.017.041	53.30	1.696.029	44.82
Source: HVG.hu				

Though the news portals wrote about the landslide victory of the opposition, this statement cannot be confirmed by data, but it must be underlined that improvement in the capital and some county cities helped the opposition to important political positions (the mayor of the city of Budapest, mayor positions in 14 Budapest districts, several mayor positions of county cities .) This improvement can be explained by the cooperation among opposition parties, but only partly, since a few weeks before the municipal elections were held, a political scandal broke out around the mayor of Győr who had been running for the position with the support of Fidesz-KDNP again. Though he was reelected, the scandal most likely weighed in on the results on a country level too. (See the results of the survey about that later!)

## **2. The Campaign Leading Up to the Elections**

The main events of the political campaign are difficult to summarize in this short analysis since the political struggle had many local scenes during the campaign, however the political scandal around the former Fidesz mayor, Mr. Borkai might have been of critical relevance to the results.

Zsolt Borkai is a former Hungarian Olympic Games champion, who has been serving as the mayor of the city of Győr since 2016. Shortly before the elections, an anonymous blogger uploaded a video and pictures confirming his extramarital affair. The blog accused him of corruption and cocaine use as well. He apologized for his behavior but denied corruption and other crimes. Despite the uploaded video and the pictures, he won the local election in October and was re-elected as mayor of the city. (The left-liberal mayor of Budaörs was reelected the same way, though a sex video was uploaded in his case too.)

As said before, the scandal might have impacted the results of the elections nationwide and contributed to the loss of the mayor position in Budapest too. Although he left Fidesz after the elections, it is very likely he will be forced to resign from this post later.

The pollster Publicus tried to capture the different elements with the potential to influence the results of the municipal elections. According to the newly published survey of the Publicus, 3 percent of those voters who were aware of the scandal – circa 74 percent of the voters, 8 million people had information about the scandal – participated in the local elections because of the scandal. This 3 percent makes out around 180 thousand people. Based on the questionnaires, one-seventh of the responders assumed that the advances of the opposition in the capital city and county cities can be traced back to the Borkai-scandal, around one-fifth of the government supporters agreed with this assumption.

The survey pointed out too that 37 percent of the responders think that opposition advances go back to people getting tired of Fidesz. At the same time, 53 percent of the Budapest citizens and 20 percent of the village and countryside-city dwellers reason that the cooperation of the opposition forces was the crucial element in the elections.

### **3. Local Politics after the Elections**

As several political pundits have already underlined, the cooperation of the opposition forces in the capital city worked well in the campaign, but it is bound to face challenges when implementing policies and fulfilling campaign promises. The reason for the upcoming problems is the diversity of political beliefs and ideas behind these opposition parties. Mr. Karácsony campaigned f. ex. with green slogans, while other parties emphasized order and found high criminality as the biggest problem.

At the same time, it must be pointed out that Mr. Karácsony must cooperate with the government too if he wants to show results later to the voters. (A bumpy road ahead can be predicted when looking back at the period between 1998 and 2002 when the liberal mayor and the Fidesz-KDNP government were supposed to cooperate and it was not frictionless, to say the least.)

The need for cooperation is imminent and strong since Hungary is going to host the IAAF World Athletic Championship in 2023 and the European Handball Championship in 2021. To properly organize and host these events, new infrastructure must be built in Budapest. Similarly, the so-called Liget-project, which is very close to its completion as of right now, must also be managed. The problem is that one of the main campaign promises of the new mayor was to scrap these sports infrastructure construction works, until other projects, mainly healthcare-related projects can start and can be implemented. (Computer tomography machines in every district were promised by him in the campaign.) According to the communication of the government, the government is willing to cooperate with the new local governments and if they request so, the government will denounce already signed international contracts.

Another question that arises after the municipal election is whether conclusions can be drawn based on these results as for country politics generally. In Poland, the opposition won in the municipal elections, particularly in the capital city last year, however, the same opposition could not repeat this performance in the parliamentary elections, moreover, the ruling party could increase the number of its representatives in the parliament (Sejm). In other words, there is no guarantee for the Hungarian opposition either that they will be able to repeat the performance in 2022. We can also add the upcoming years might show whether this opposition

cooperation can last longer, and the local governments will be where the strength of this opposition cooperation can be shown and proved.

#### **4. Summary**

Despite the media coverage of the local elections, Fidesz still dominates Hungarian politics, and a major shift in the political landscape did not occur, however, the victory of the opposition in the capital city and some county cities raise several questions

One of these questions this briefing raises is whether the cooperation between the government and the opposition will work out in a way that can attain both sides' political beliefs while hosting sports events that were previously planned to the elections and implementing a mostly healthcare-based infrastructure as well. Based on the Hungarian history of opposing parties unsuccessfully cooperating, and the outcome of this election being mainly the result of a political scandal involving Mr. Borkai, a formal Fidesz mayor, it is likely that the opposition will not have nearly as much success in the next municipal elections, especially if they will not be able to perform well and fulfill their campaign policies in the upcoming four years. Looking at the results on an international success rate level for opposing parties cooperating, for example considering Poland, it would not be surprising if the opposition parties could not repeat this performance. We are probably looking ahead to a period filled with smaller conflicts of political opinions and uncertainty on municipal governments too.

Another main question is whether the opposition will be able to cooperate nationwide, or this cooperation will be restricted to the local level. In our understanding, the diversity of political beliefs is a clear barrier in the way of nationwide cooperation. Even though the opposition forces could reach consensus in basic concept, its credibility could be called into question easily.