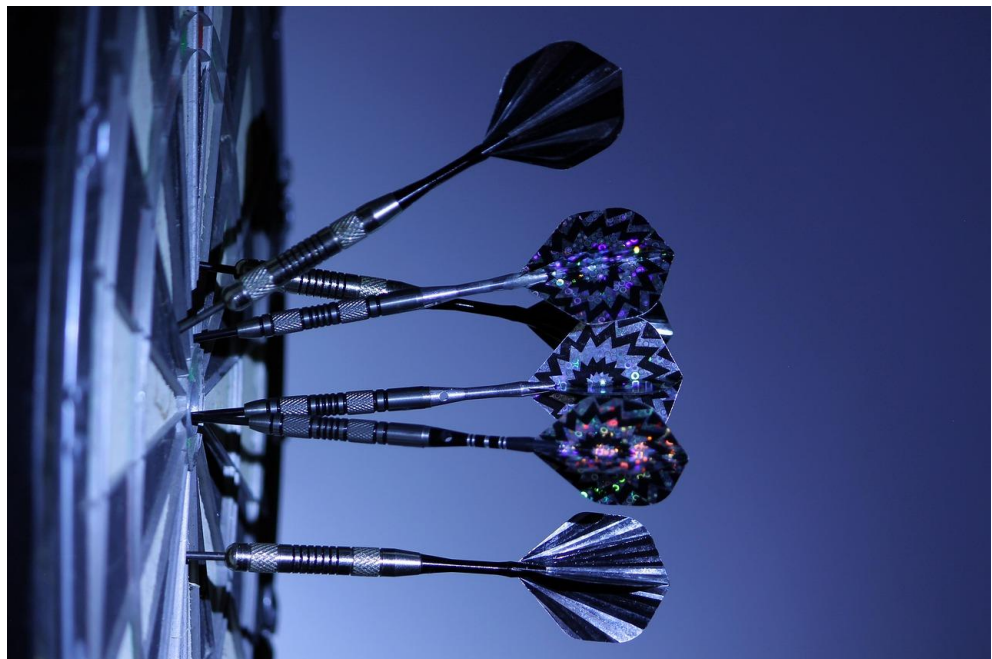


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Politics as an Immersive Experience

The impact of the TISZA Party on Hungarian party politics is not just because of Péter Magyar, but also due to the party's innovative communication strategy. However, we should not think that Hungary is the only country where the government's challengers are experimenting with similar innovations.



Since 2010, the Orbán regime's governing party, Fidesz, has been in a permanent campaign mode, thanks to its highly refined identity politics, professional political consulting institutions, inexhaustible financial resources, and last but not least, a barely competing opposition. Even if there were weaker moments in the ruling party's campaign, the opposition parties have been unable to exploit them in the long term and turn them to their advantage in parliamentary elections.

Until 2024, the success of Fidesz's campaign communication depended on history-based identity building. Active since the regime change of 1989, Fidesz has built deep social roots, but this would not have been possible without a storytelling in which the central character is Viktor Orbán. This includes various moments like:

- the withdrawal of Russian troops, supporting the Hungarian diaspora, resisting migrants and refugee seekers,
- also "fighting against" the Hungarian parliamentary opposition, the international Soros network, the Brussels elite,
- as well as gathering support via national consultations, creating and running the MCC institution and various Fidesz-related events (Tranzit, Tusványos, Békemenet).

This story has a centrally constructed narrative with established roles (we are Christians, national, sovereign, and normal—they are not), which their voters can easily accept.

The well-built Fidesz worldview was recently challenged by the TISZA Party with a new strategy: immersive/experience based politics. This can be defined in the following way: *political action appears as a way to shape experiences, thus involving voters, eliciting participatory and proactive behavior from them, which is accompanied by a sense of actively shaping social reality*. This is not presented in an abstract manner, but rather through everyday situations that everyone has encountered and experienced before. [Péter Magyar's hospital thermometer campaigns](#), his visits to child protection institutions, and "The Country's Homework" are prime examples of immersive politics. Thanks to this immersive politics, the TISZA Party has mobilized disillusioned voters and inactive people whom the opposition was unable to reach using conventional methods.

In the region, the Slovak party Progresívne Slovensko (PS) is attempting a similar immersive politics-based approach to politics, and is the biggest challenger to the ruling Fico government. PS organizes events in regions that fall outside the party's geographical voter base, precisely affecting the areas controlled by Robert Fico's ruling party (SMER). The central figure of this campaign was former Prime Minister Lajos Ódor, who led

a technocrat cabinet for six months until the 2023 parliamentary elections. He later became the PS party's lead candidate in the European Parliament elections, while the party achieved a significant victory over SMER in the European elections. Encouraged by this, PS launched the "Lajos Pub", a series of events, which attempts to bring skeptical voters closer to a high-ranking politician, breaking out of identity bubbles and seeking common ground. This initiative is similar to TISZA Party's immersive politics. In this case, the experience is limited to a smaller community, as the events are held offline, but participants can feel comfortable sharing their opinions and thoughts on public affairs with an influential public figure face to face over a beer.

It is difficult to predict which political strategy will prevail in 2026. In any case, Fidesz has been able to learn from both domestic and foreign examples throughout its history, so it may well master immersive politics too. The TISZA Party has been clearly inspired by the Fidesz's identity-based recipe, while also employing a new method through immersive politics. This seems to have given them a head start, but in politics, everything is relative. At the same time, electoral success may draw greater international attention to immersive politics, which could certainly open up new opportunities in the parties' campaign and communication toolkits, as well as in their relationship with voters.