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Why Fidesz Won

The 2018 national elections have ended with a surprise supermajority for Fidesz. This gives the party a strong legitimacy to form its third consecutive government. Both the opposition and major international media outlets have shown disbelief at the outcome. Initially, the high voter turnout seemed to suggest that change was in the books for Hungary. Young voters lined up for hours at a time both at embassies abroad and in Budapest to cast their votes. At the end of a long election night wait, it turned out however that despite the left wing opposition making gains in the capital, on a national level voters showed strong support for the policies of Fidesz.

There are several factors that contributed to Fidesz's victory. The fact that the opposition could not speak to rural voters is perhaps the strongest cause for their loss. Fidesz campaigned actively in these areas, and their anti-migrant message was also better received here than in the capital. This anti-migrant message built on the need for security and stability. The rhetoric of Fidesz according to which the opposition parties' migration policy would bring chaos to Hungary definitely contributed to further polarizing these already split regions. Those areas which were Fidesz leaning in 2014 became even more pro-government. While Fidesz did not have significant voter reserves, in the last few weeks of the campaign, it could actively mobilize those reserves in the countryside following its high profile loss at a by-election in Hódmezővásárhely. The left wing opposition failed to campaign as prominently in the area, while the formerly far-right Jobbik seems to have lost its previous supporter base in this region following its ideological turn towards the centre.

This brings us to the second prominent reason for Fidesz's victory. Fidesz campaigned with the most modern campaign methods. The aggressive use of social media campaigns, local campaigning and targeted voting messages that may be familiar from US politics appeared in Fidesz's communication strategy this year. Despite the serious corruption charges there were no cracks in Fidesz's very unified communications strategy. Meanwhile the opposition parties repeated the same exact motions that led to their loss four years ago. The public power struggles, the failure to cooperate, the lack of ideological renewal and a real vision for the future led to even non-Fidesz supporters to vote for the governing party. The opposition mobilization came too late, the refusal for parties to form alliances led to the loss of several mandates for example that could have been won in the capital. In each of these cases if just one or two of the fragmented

opposition's candidates had made the sacrifice of not running in the district it would have been enough to take the mandate for the opposition. This would have led to a much smaller Fidesz majority.

While there are rumors according to which Fidesz had „agents” within the opposition parties whose job was to make sure the opposition alliance did not come about, it is safe to say, that even if these were indeed just rumors, the opposition did not live up to its voters' expectations. The new generation of opposition parties could not yet make their mark, the former opposition parties who had been in power earlier could not renew themselves. The frustration of non-Fidesz voters with the parties that set out to represent them was almost greater than with the government. With parties calling for their voters to follow tactical voting strategies many opposition voters felt that they had been betrayed by them. After all the parties should be serving the voters and not the other way around.

The failure for opposition parties to provide a competitive narrative to voters has led Fidesz to dominate the battle of ideas and win. The opposition will now have to face the task of reevaluating not just their strategy but also its ideological stance to provide more guidance to voters than just the failed prospect of dethroning Viktor Orbán. The opposition parties will have to start from step one, which will likely mean not just changes in party leadership but also a significant transfer of power from those politicians who have dominated the party scene in the past decades to a new generation of leaders who have yet to prove themselves.

Meanwhile Fidesz is expected to continue its current policy, hoping to shape not just Hungarian but European politics as well. With unprecedented support behind them they will aim to further strengthen their regional alliances in the fight against Brussels hoping to gain greater national sovereignty while also continuing to reap the benefits of the European Union.