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What happened in Hungary?



The 2022 Hungarian elections ended with an unexpected twist. Fidesz not only hung on to its majority but managed to receive a 2/3 supermajority for the fourth consecutive time. Only the capital has a strong opposition majority, the rest of the country voted overwhelmingly for Fidesz. If the governing party will be able to fill out its four year mandate it will have been in power altogether for as long as it has been in opposition. While Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair have both served 11 years in office respectively,

such a turn of events is unprecedented in Europe. What led to such a great majority, when for the first time in over a decade, the opposition parties managed to form a united alliance against Viktor Orbán?

The institutional changes and restrictions, the media influence of the government cannot explain the victory in itself, as the opposition received less votes than four years ago. The situation was well known, the opposition had to campaign accepting the given circumstances. This is why, after several unsuccessful attempts at winning individually, six opposition parties decided to cooperate and run on one platform against Fidesz. This was a great innovation for the opposition, which was strengthened further by the organization of opposition primaries for the first time. While this had its problems, it gave a very strong legitimacy to the winner, Péter Márki-Zay, the Catholic, conservative mayor of Hódmezővásárhely who was often at odds with the more liberal-left leaning majority of the opposition.

The technical innovation that the opposition introduced provided a better chance for winning than previously, nevertheless the fact that the focus was on forming the alliance and keeping it together till the election didn't provide a chance to work out the ideological differences of the opposition. The leaders of the opposition always thought that first they put all

their resources towards winning the elections and then they can iron out their differences. As a result, politicians and voters alike made the compromise of accepting positions completely opposite of their political views in order to remove Viktor Orbán from power. This is the weakest link in the opposition's strategy. No amount of technical innovation can replace the power of a political community. It took Fidesz close to a decade to build its network of civic supporters on which its success is based. The opposition has always been putting it off because the stakes of the upcoming election were more important. This time however, the project may have been pushed aside for too long. While the opposition anticipated that if it just did everything within its powers to create the appropriate technical situation victory would follow, it actually ended up losing supporters because they couldn't see what sort of future the opposition promised, aside from ousting Orbán from power. For many the promise of this was enough, not for everyone though. Content matters. Ideology matters. Community and solidarity matters.

This ties in to the major issue of the divide between the capital and the rest of the country. Opposition pundits have repeatedly called rural voters "brainwashed", as there is a widespread view that due to the media dominance of Fidesz only government propaganda reaches them. With widespread internet penetration in Hungary, this is simply not the ultimate cause of

the opposition's weak positions outside of Budapest. Once upon a time, in the 90s, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP) used to have the greatest political network outside of the capital, none of that exists anymore. Instead, Fidesz has built its own network. The opposition has to see that without community building, without better understanding the needs of those voters that make up the majority of the country, it cannot win, no matter what alternative forms of media or marketing they obtain.

The opposition must start defining its political character or risk disintegration. They must innovate not just in the technical ways of reaching voters, but in working out what they stand for as a community in order to gain power. Until then, many voters will continue to vote for Fidesz, cast protest votes, or not vote at all, leaving the international community to wonder, what happened in Hungary?