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## Stability, Strength, Traditions



In Hungary, the institution of early elections has no real tradition, but the demand for early elections certainly does. Before delving into why this is the case and what makes this topic relevant today, it is worth briefly addressing the role of early elections within the context of the governmental system—especially because this institution is often misunderstood.

One of the key characteristics of parliamentary systems is that the maximum duration of a government's term is set, but elections can be held at any time within this period. Unlike presidential systems, where elections are held at fixed intervals regardless of circumstances, early elections are a natural element of parliamentary systems. They are typically triggered by either a political crisis or a tactical calculation—both of which have occurred in Europe in recent years. Simplifying somewhat, it can be said that while stability is the organizing principle of power in presidential systems, flexibility defines parliamentary systems.

In Hungary, this topic dominated public discourse during the first weeks of January because Péter Magyar, leader of the largest opposition party, demanded early elections in his New Year's address. The situation is particularly striking because the last time the possibility of early elections captured public attention for an extended period, it was Fidesz, then in opposition, who demanded this from the ruling left-liberal government. Between 2006 and 2010, Fidesz consistently called for early elections in response to the crises generated by the governing coalition.

Fidesz demanded early elections when the infamous recording of Ferenc Gyurcsány privately admitting to having lied during the campaign became public.

They demanded early elections again after police crackdowns on the resulting riots, during coalition crises, amid minority governance, during a prime ministerial change, and during the period of expert governance. The left-liberal government provided ample crises that naturally evoked demands for early elections, yet even with a strong and determined opposition, these demands went unfulfilled.

This raises the question: why would Péter Magyar bring up this issue now if even more justifiable cases in the past failed to yield results? The call for early elections by Péter Magyar was, in reality, a political maneuver. It aimed to reduce the likelihood that Fidesz, exploiting its advantageous position, might itself opt for early elections.

The prospect of early elections currently presents both an opportunity and a risk for both sides. For the opposition, an early election poses a risk because it would catch them unprepared and drastically narrow the time frame for selecting their 106 candidates. At the same time, demanding early elections is a political act that energizes and vitalizes their base. For the governing side, the opportunity lies in holding elections at a moment when their opponents have yet to regroup, while their own candidates—equipped with the necessary resources and tools—are ready to compete.

However, the risk for the government is that they might lose power prematurely and thus forfeit the opportunities of the next year and a half of governance.

The question of early elections has not shaken Hungary's political agenda, and it is clear that this is a short-lived topic of discussion. However, it is worth observing the movement and positioning of the political actors. This moment vividly illustrates how the concept of political rationality, often used in political theory, manifests in practice. The essence of this concept is that the strategies of political actors are not based on everyday logic, and some decisions may appear incomprehensible to outside observers: those who seemingly have no interest in early elections demand them, while those who stand to benefit resist.

We have already touched on Péter Magyar's motivations, but the government's rationale is rooted in the appearance of stability. This is one of the Orbán regime's most important political products: operating a parliamentary system that exudes the stability of presidential systems. For Fidesz's voter base, stability is a particularly important value, and as long as this remains the case, they will not sacrifice it for tactical advantage.