

POLICY SOLUTIONS'
HUNGARIAN POLITICS IN-DEPTH
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**ANALYSIS: ELECTION HAS
POTENTIAL TO RESTRUCTURE
THE ENTIRE LEFT**

The election is over and it has ended in a clear victory for the governing party, Fidesz. This was the first sentence of our analysis in April, and it is the first sentence again. Apart from that, the election was primarily an internecine competition on the left and a battle between the far-right and the left. MSZP loses the former and the left wins the latter.

EP election results in Hungary, 25 May 2014

Party list	Fidesz-KDNP	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Együtt-PM	LMP
Average poll forecast	54.75%	16.75%	14.75%	3.75%	4.25%	4%
Actual result	51.49%	14.68%	10.92%	9.76%	7.22%	5.01%
Seats	12	3	2	2	1	1

This is all about the Left

Since Fidesz' massive victory was once again a certainty, two crucial questions remained which made this ballot intriguing: would Jobbik be able to clinch second place and how would the parties of the left fare relative to one another?

Unlike in April, this time the discrepancies between the polls and the election outcome proved very relevant indeed. Actually, to be more precise, the polls' wrong estimations revealed exactly what our report in April observed: in a close scenario, the couple of percent that Hungarian pollsters have difficulty gauging can make a key difference in terms of forecasting the result. And with regard to the two key questions - Jobbik vs. MSZP and MSZP vs. other left - the few percent shift provided a veritable earthquake.

As usual, Fidesz was overestimated by a few percent, except by (interestingly right-leaning) Századvég, which was dead on with its forecast of 52%. Jobbik, too, performed slightly better in the polls than in real life. However, the difference was most significant in the case of MSZP. Though its figure of almost 4% below the level forecast by the polls was not far worse than Fidesz' (-3.26%) or Jobbik's (-2.07%) "loss", but it was psychologically devastating on several accounts.

Most importantly, this was MSZP's worst result in a national election in 24 years, the year of the first free elections in Hungary. Even in 2010, coming off an extremely calamitous and unsuccessful term in government, it did nearly twice this well. Second, in reality the party's leadership and its supporters had hoped that MSZP - often underestimated in surveys - would pull off a second place finish despite lagging slightly behind Jobbik in the polls. In reality, it was not even close.

Third, its performance relative to the left-wing splinter parties led by former PMs Gordon Bajnai (Együtt-PM) and Ferenc Gyurcsány (DK) was disastrous. The anticipation had been that with a low turnout MSZP would do fairly well in comparison with the other two parties, because it is better organised and has an activist base, while the two new parties had less time to build national organisations. This only made a difference in rural areas, however, where MSZP ran significantly ahead of the two others. In Budapest, MSZP led DK by a mere 1,500 votes and even Együtt-PM hardly lagged behind. In urban areas outside the capital MSZP was ahead of its main left-wing competitor, DK, by only 10,000 votes.



Correspondingly, Attila Mesterházy and the entire party presidium offered their resignation. The party's executive board, which is scheduled to meet next Saturday, will be called upon to decide whether it accepts their resignation, which would necessitate the election of a new leadership during the summer. The new leaders would certainly face a challenging situation, having to prepare for the nationally held municipal elections in October, within a month or two of their taking office. Apart from Attila Mesterházy's strong positions on the executive board, this consideration might also make the executive board pause before delving into a leadership crisis. But regardless, the MSZP leadership's position is severely shaken, and it is difficult to see how it could survive such a disastrous outcome without significant changes, both at the personal and the programmatic level.

An election contest without second place

Despite its second place finish, Jobbik also had little reason to be happy. The far-right dropped a substantial 6% since its strong performance in April. The party leadership's reaction provided an ironic twist. In April Jobbik's leaders had been visibly upset despite the party's strong showing, because in defiance of the polls they had hoped for more. Now, faced with an objectively disappointing result, the party leaders put on a show of cheerfulness. Jobbik naturally remains a significant political force and a higher turnout election can easily put it back on a rising trajectory. In fact, the municipal elections will be key in this regard. But the Russian spy allegation against its MEP Béla Kovács obviously exacted a heavy toll. It shows that Fidesz has some key tactical weapons in its arsenal that can be launched against Jobbik when the latter's strength becomes menacing.

The real winners - in terms of outperforming expectations - were the three minor parties, though with Jobbik's and MSZP's weak performance that concept is increasingly relative. DK, despite going into the election with the lowest predicted result of the three, performed best, almost reaching MSZP's tally nationally. It ran especially strong in Budapest, was slightly ahead of the Socialists in the Central Hungarian counties and on par with MSZP in large parts of western Hungary. In the East, MSZP retained a sizeable lead for the most part.

Apparently, DK managed to win over a significant number of (former) socialist voter, which makes Gyurcsány the most important opponent of the Socialist Party. Gyurcsány's victory speech packaged the inevitable attack on the Socialists into a highly conciliatory tone. Seemingly sparing MSZP, he said that the opponent was Fidesz, not the parties of the left, so it made no sense to speak of victory in that context. To the layperson, this must have seemed like a friendly gesture. But then he added that for the municipal elections in October



the left must unite again and agree on a distribution of candidates among them - proportionally. What he meant is that DK should be given a vastly higher ratio of municipal candidacies than the share of candidates it was offered in the parliamentary elections. In other words Gyurcsány is staking out his claim as the (nearly) equal leader of the left.

Though Együtt-PM was below its leaders' expectations, it took the 5% threshold easily and also remains a viable force on the left. Though it was fairly strong in Budapest, barely finishing third among the left-wing parties and ahead of MSZP in some districts, it was significantly weaker than the other two left-wing parties in the smaller towns and virtually absent in the rural municipalities. More than the other parties on the left, Együtt-PM is a Budapest party. Over 63% of all its votes came from Budapest, while for MSZP this ratio was slightly under 50%, and for DK slightly over. To remain competitive in the long run, Együtt-PM must work on its national presence.

Finally, despite its dedication to rural issues, LMP also remains very Budapest-centred, drawing almost 60% of its votes from there. And once again, Budapest saved the Greens, as early on during election night it seemed as if the party would fail to take the 5% hurdle, but then it very slightly exceeded it as the Budapest and other urban results started coming in. Still, this must be a disappointment for András Schiffer, with his party running far behind Együtt-PM and much further still behind Gyurcsány, whom Schiffer rather openly despises. LMP appears stuck at a level which, though barely sufficient for political survival, offers few opportunities for breaking out of the small party mould.

Though at a much higher level of support, on the whole the left suffers from a similar phenomenon. It is far too strong to fret about its very survival, but is further still from being strong enough to be able to compete for a victory involving a parliamentary majority. But there are two pieces of good news it can nevertheless take away from this election. First, it gained two percent as compared to April. Slight as that may be, it is still a plus. Moreover - and this is the major piece of good news - together the parties of the left were nearly twice as strong as Jobbik. That puts Jobbik's second place in perspective. While the difference between the left and the far-right was only 5.5% in April, now it is a whopping 13.2%. That's significant. For the time being Jobbik's dream of becoming the main opposition force are on hold. But the left's situation has not become much easier either.

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