

Polity IV Country Report 2007: Hungary

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2006</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2007</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>10</td> <td>10</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td colspan="3">17</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td colspan="3">No</td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2006	2007	Change	Polity:	10	10	0	Democ:	10	10	0	Autoc:	0	0	0	Durable:	17			Tentative:	No			
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Tentative:	No																								
SCODE	HUN	CCODE	310	Date of Report	1 November 2008																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
3	3	4	7	5	5																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date			Begin Date																						
22 May 1988			3 February 1990																						
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution																									
1949/1989																									
Executive(s)																									
President László Sólyom; elected by dominant party in the National Assembly, 6-7 June 2005 Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany (MSzP); elected at special party congress to replace Peter Medgyessy who resigned on 25 August 2004																									
Legislature																									
Unicameral: National Assembly (386 seats; 176 directly elected, 146 proportionally elected and 63 elected to realize proportional representation; most recent elections, 9 and 23 April 2006) Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP): 192 Alliance of Young Democrats-Hungarian Democratic Forum (Fidesz-MPS): 164 Other parties: 30																									
Judiciary																									
Supreme Court																									

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Competitive Elections (8)

The prime minister of Hungary is recruited through a competitive multiparty electoral system. The majority party (or majority coalition) in the National Assembly selects the chief executive. Members of the National Assembly are popularly elected. In April 2006, Ferenc Gyurcsany's Socialist-led coalition won a decisive victory in parliamentary elections, becoming the first government to win consecutive terms since the restoration of democracy in 1990.

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Executive Constraints: Executive Parity or Subordination (7)

The parliamentary structure of governance found in Hungary places significant constraints on the political autonomy of the chief executive. The prime minister is elected by, and is directly accountable to, the legislature. The coalition-based nature of governance in Hungary further limits the independence of executive action. The judiciary is independent from executive influence.

Political Participation: Institutionalized Open Electoral Competition (10)

Democratic politics resurfaced in Hungary in 1989 following the ouster of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party after four decades of one-party rule. Over the past two decades Hungary has developed a competitive multiparty political system in which center-right and center-left parties actively compete for power. Freedom of speech and assembly are constitutionally protected and the civil liberties of citizens are generally respected. However, Hungary's Roma and Jewish populations continue to be subject to social and economic discrimination. A recent controversy involves the June 2001 "Status Law" that grants ethnic-Hungarians living in countries surrounding Hungary special rights, including the right to work or live in Hungary for specified periods. The law had been championed by the ruling Fidesz-MPP party and was defended by then-Prime Minister Viktor Orban. The law has drawn severe criticism from neighboring countries and the EU, as well as provoking internal tensions. These tensions resulted in a boycott of the legislature by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) in February 2002 after the Prime Minister had labeled MSzP opposition to the law as "treasonous." However, legislative elections in April 2002 were narrowly won by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP), though the party failed to win an outright majority. The MSzP subsequently entered into a formal coalition with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SzDSz) in May 2002; Fidesz and MDF announced they would form separate floor groups in the legislature.

In April 2006 Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany's Socialist-led coalition won a close electoral victory, however, by the end of the year his government faced significant political unrest. In September 2006 a tape recording of the Prime Minister surfaced in which he admitted to lying about the state of the economy during the campaign. This revelation triggered the first violent protests in the capital since the fall of communism. Encouraged to take to the streets by the main opposition party, Fidesz, the police responded with excessive force. Fidesz, who had publicly questioned their electoral defeats in 2002 and 2006, encouraged a belief that the protesting crowds would be able to overthrow the government. While these protests were eventually put down, in early 2007 violent clashes once again occurred on the streets of Budapest between police and far-right protestors. These protests were sparked when the nationalist leader, Gyorgy Budahazy, who had been wanted by the police since the disturbance of September 2006, was detained.

Increasingly this country is dividing itself into two factional camps: the Hungarian Left and the Hungarian Right. The Left views itself as European and progressive and embraces both the market and globalization. The Right, by contrast, is nationalist in orientation and wants to protect the Hungarian people from the influences of the EU, globalization and market capitalism. These "movements" tend to be led by personalist politicians and loose coalitions which embrace (or at least tolerate) extremist agendas and use street protests to overturn constitutionally derived political outcomes. Since the electoral defeat of the Hungarian Right in 2002, former Prime Minister Orban has engaged in an anti-parliamentary populist strategy. Orban wants to weaken the parliamentary system which he believes gives too much power to the Socialist prime minister. He has consciously and repeatedly mobilized large numbers of people in street protests and, in the process, his populist agenda has become increasingly tied to the radical right of the country. While these far right and fascist groups operate independently from Orban's control, nonetheless, their participation has been integral to the strategy of street democracy that he has orchestrated. Most of the support for these radical groups comes from the uneducated laborers who have become increasingly marginalized in the post-communist era. The unemployed youth have been the key actors in the violent demonstrations that have surfaced in Hungary in recent years. Orban's populist – and often anti-Semitic and anti-Roma – rhetoric appeals to the economic discontent of this sector of society. While Orban is dependent on the mobilization of this sector to achieve his political goals, nonetheless, he simultaneously seeks to distance himself and his party from these organizations that espouse hate.