

The deeper meaning Orbán's demise

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Viktor Orbán has been defeated in Hungary. After sixteen years in power, during which authoritarian rule, rampant corruption, the systematic dismantling of Hungary's free press and independent judiciary became the norm, and the deliberate undermining of the European Union and Ukraine took place, the Hungarian people have delivered a supermajority to the country's opposition. Orbán is gone. And this matters far beyond Hungary's borders.

This was not supposed to happen. Orbán was the template for the global far right. He was the proof of concept; the man who demonstrated that once you captured the institutions, rewrote the rules, and weaponised the media, you could hold power indefinitely. Nigel Farage openly supported him. Reform modelled itself on his movement. MAGA looked to Budapest as a blueprint. JD Vance flew to Hungary to lend personal support ahead of the election. Russia backed him. The US administration backed him. None of it was enough.

The Hungarian people voted him out anyway. And in doing so, they have broken the myth of the far right's invincibility.

The implications are enormous. Hungary's sixteen-year obstruction of EU policy, on climate, on Ukraine, and on democratic norms ends. The policy gridlock Orbán manufactured to serve Russia's interests and his own family's financial ambitions is removed. The path opens for constitutional restoration, judicial independence, and genuine accountability for the corruption that defined his regime. A reckoning is coming.

But the deeper significance is political and psychological. The far-right has spent years cultivating the narrative that it is unstoppable and that history is moving in one direction, and that liberal democracy is a spent force. Hungary has just demolished that narrative. Authoritarianism can be peacefully defeated by voters through democratic means. And that sends a message to every country in Europe and to the United States, where the same forces are at work.

The USA remains the most acute problem. Its democracy is under greater strain than Hungary's ever was, and its institutions are being dismantled with greater

sophistication. But the Hungarian result demonstrates that the capacity for democratic correction exists and that the far-right's confidence in its own invincibility is its greatest weakness.

This is a rare moment of political optimism. Orbán's defeat matters. Fascism can still be beaten.

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This is the audio version:

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This is the transcript:

Viktor Orbán, the far-right prime minister of Hungary, has lost power in that country's general election. Now, that is a cause for celebration. Orbán had been in power for the last 16 years, and altogether for nearly 20 years in Hungary, and during that period, he promoted what he called an illiberal project. He might have called it illiberal, I called it totalitarian, authoritarian, and neofascist, and most people would agree.

The fact is that during the period that he was in office, corruption was rife, the economy was failing, and he used his position of authority to try to undermine the EU and the position of Ukraine. He was trying to use his position as well to promote the financial interests of his family. Corruption looked rife, and now the people of Hungary have rejected his party.

They have not only taken it out of power. They have given what was the opposition a supermajority in the new parliament, which means that now the new prime minister can set out to reverse the positions that Orbán put in place so that the constitution can be restored and democracy can be revived in that country. This is a decisive political break, and we need to talk about it.

Orbán's fall from power is a major political shock. A longstanding regime has been overturned, and external backing for him did not save him in this election. The fact is

that the narrative of inevitability about the progress of the far-right in Europe has been broken. As a consequence, I think that something much more important is going to happen, and that is that far-right confidence is also going to be disrupted, and there will be consequences of this in Europe and also in America, where the MAGA movement looked to Orbán as one of its inspirations.

The other dimension to all of this is that external support did not keep Orbán in power. We know that Orbán was backed by Russia. We know that the USA was backing Orbán's return to power. JD Vance went to Hungary in the week before the election to try to muster support for Orbán, and that has failed. The point is: international far-right alliances are not now enough to keep a far-right politician in power. Domestic voters can still be decisive; fascism can be defeated.

The people of Hungary made a clear choice. They rejected corruption. They rejected authoritarian rule. Democratic capacity was reasserted by them. They took back power. Agency was restored to the electorate as a consequence. People have had their say, and this is vital.

It's as vital as the fact that Orbán has conceded defeat. I know there was speculation about whether he would: remember Donald Trump did not in 2020, and as a consequence, the fear was that he might not do so now and claim victory even though it wasn't the case. The level of support for the opposition did, however, make that almost impossible. He has accepted the outcome of this election, and a peaceful transfer of power now looks to be possible, and I hope it will happen. Note me crossing my fingers there.

The Hungarian political system still retains democratic form as a result, and an immediate political crisis has been avoided; one that I anticipated.

What is more, everything in Europe changes as a consequence of this. Hungary did have an ally in Poland in its far-right position in Europe until a while ago, but over the last couple of years or more, Hungary has stood out against EU power. It has gained enormously financially from its membership of the EU, but has hated everything that the EU has stood for. And as a consequence, it has blocked the EU's position on many things, including climate change and support for Ukraine. That looks as though it will change. Hungary's obstruction to EU progress is likely to end, and the policy gridlock in the EU that has resulted from its objection to so many policies looks as though it will be removed. Alignment with EU norms is now more likely.

Now, I know there are consequences for that, which could be unfortunate. There are some of those norms that are neoliberal, but this is a major shift in European political balance as a result, and at least it is not the far-right who are dominating the agenda now. The voice of others will be heard, and moderation could be on the table.

Most importantly, the far-right has lost its role model. Orbán, as a template, was a

model that others have followed, and his style has now been discredited. The claim of permanent dominance that the far-right liked to claim for itself, which 16 years in power by Orbán seemed to reinforce, has been weakened. The myth of unstoppable has been challenged. The political momentum has been disrupted.

As I've already noted, this has serious implications for the MAGA movement and also for parties like Reform in the UK. Nigel Farage has been open about his support for Orbán in the past, and now Orbán has failed, so too can the other parties that have modelled themselves on his progress. The narrative has collapsed. Voters can now reassess alternatives, and political space has been reopened.

The constitutional reset that Hungary needed is now possible, and that is important too because in countries like the UK, we are seeing a challenge to the rule of law. The Labour government is, after all, declaring people to be terrorists in this country for simply holding up pieces of cardboard, which is totally ridiculous. It's not only Hungary that needed a legal reset; so do we. We also need to reappraise the rule of law in this country. State structures do need to be open to reform, and what this change makes clear is that the possibility of that is now on the agenda. That is vital.

At the same time, Hungary might enjoy judicial independence again, something that is vital to a free and open democracy, and free media space could also reopen because the media in Hungary has been greatly oppressed during the period of Orbán's rule. Totalitarianism was the order of the day, and as a consequence, political suppression should also be over now; that is another important development. The fact that this shift has happened, despite that political suppression, is some indication of the desire within Hungary to rebuild democratic norms, and at the same time, corruption may now be addressed.

Channel 4 in the UK recently highlighted just how corrupt Orbán had been. The village where he lives has had vast amounts of funding placed into it. A railway line was built to it, but it has never been opened. There is a football stadium that can seat three times the level of the population of the village in question. Orbán's father has mysteriously become a very wealthy man with extensive properties. The abuse of public funds does need to be exposed now. Family enrichment must be under scrutiny as a consequence, and legal accountability must be made possible. This could create a precedent for prosecution, and the significance of that should not be lost upon people like Donald Trump. They, too, should be open to challenge. If Orbán is, others should follow in their wake.

The possibility of rooting out corruption is very real, and I do hope it is followed.

The international implications of accountability are also very clear. There is a message here to all authoritarian leaders, and we have them. We have them in Italy, we have them in the UK. We have them in France and in Germany. The message from Hungary is that they can be beaten. People should believe in that possibility, and the same

should be said for the USA. The MAGA could be cornered as a consequence of this. The rule of law and the right of virtuous democratic politics could be upheld if countries are willing to talk about that. The USA is the biggest problem. There is only a sham democracy there.

This, then, is a rare moment for political optimism. The reversal of a neofascist direction of travel is a rare event. The democratic correction in action is something to be celebrated. Even if outcomes are still uncertain, the possibility that change will now be put in place is something to celebrate. At a time when there is very little to talk about that is good news, this message from Hungary stands out in a dark world; fascism can be beaten. Let's not forget that. It's a moment to enjoy.

That's what I think. What do you think? There's a poll down below. Let us know your opinions. Put them in the comments. Please share this video if you like it, and subscribe to our channel. Thanks for doing so.

Poll

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