



Hungary — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[Until 10/30/1918 Hungary refers to the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Empire.]

12/25/1000 Start Autocratic Monarchy: The Principality of Hungary was formed in 895. The Kingdom of Hungary was founded by Stephen I of Hungary in 1000, who received his crown from the Pope on Christmas day in 1000 (12/25/1000).¹ The Kingdom of Hungary was a diverse, multiethnic state from its establishment, encompassing present-day Hungary, Slovakia, Transylvania, and other regions of Romania, Carpathian Ruthenia (currently part of Ukraine), Vojvodina (present-day Serbia), the territory of Burgenland (now part of Austria), Međimurje (currently part of Croatia), Prekmurje (now part of Slovenia), and a handful of villages that are now situated in Poland.² According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held until 1913, from 1914 to 1916 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held, in 1917 only multiparty legislative elections were held. For this time LIED codes political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI indicates an ambiguous state of political liberties. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

10/30/1918 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date, Count Mihály Károlyi and his Independence Party, in conjunction with the Radical Party and Social Democrats, formed a National Council that assumed control. Following King Karl's abdication on 11/16, Hungary was proclaimed a republic (Molnár 2001: 250-51, Casey et al. 2020: 10). On 11/03/1918 independence was finally gained.³ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

03/21/1919 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Communist Ideocracy: Following public outcry over Károlyi's decision to cede substantial territory to the Entente powers, Károlyi stepped down and transferred authority to the Social Democrats, who had clandestinely aligned with the Communist Party. On this day, they proclaimed the establishment of the Socialist Federative Republic of Councils in Hungary (commonly known as the Hungarian Soviet Republic) (Molnár 2001: 252-53, Casey et al. 2020: 10).⁴ Sándor Garbai and Béla Kun were leading the country until Romania and Czechia invaded Hungary. On 02/08, Kun escaped Hungary and headed towards the Austrian border, eventually arriving in the Russian SFSR (Balogh 1976, Grotz/Hubai 2010). As per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time.

08/08/1919 End Communist Ideocracy/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: A Romanian intervention ousted the Hungarian Soviet Republic in August 1919 and departed in November (Molnár 2001: 261, 264-68, Berman 2019: 310-311). In Budapest, a socialist government led by Gyula Peidl was established with support from the Allied council, but its time in power was brief.⁵ The cabinet, comprising four of Kun's previous government commissioners, swiftly shifted allegiance to the Social Democrats, who retained key ministerial

positions, such as Defense and Foreign Affairs. During its inaugural session on 02/08/1919, it formally dissolved the Hungarian Soviet Republic and reinstated the Hungarian People's Republic. Additionally, the people's courts were dissolved, and former political detainees were freed from incarceration. The release of these opponents bolstered the ranks of the counterrevolutionaries. Consequently, the country operated without a head of state or head of government.⁶ As per Polity5's classification, the executive wielded unrestricted authority without any formal limitations during this time. LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is also classified by us as indicating that political liberties are absent.

11/16/1919 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Right-Wing (Semi-Fascist) (Military) Autocracy: After the Romanian departure, Admiral Miklos Horthy and his army entered Budapest on 11/16/1919 (Molnár 2001: 261, 264-68, Berman 2019: 310-311, Casey et al. 2020: 10). Men could vote from the age of 24 while women only gained the right to vote from the age of 30. There were also educational and economic criteria set for both genders, but all criteria were higher for women.⁷ Horthy was crowned regent on 03/01/1920. The regime swiftly launched an extensive campaign of political repression known as the "white terror," resulting in the execution of thousands of suspected leftists, along with members of political opposition groups and Jewish individuals (Molnár 2001: 261, 264-68, Berman 2019: 310-311, Casey et al. 2020: 10). During Horthy's tenure, Hungary was defined by its conservative, nationalist, and staunchly anti-communist disposition. The administration relied on a fragile coalition of conservatives and right-wing factions.⁸ As per Istvan Deak, from 1919 to 1944, Hungary existed as a right-leaning nation molded from a legacy of counter-revolution. Despite its formal designation as a kingdom, Hungary functioned as a kingdom devoid of royalty. Amid extensive civil unrest that hindered the selection of a new monarch, the decision was made to officially appoint Horthy as the Regent of Hungary. The lack of elections for the executive was a key feature of the Horthy regime. It meant that Horthy was not accountable to the people, and that he could rule without any checks or balances. Formally, Horthy was elected by the National Assembly in 1920. However, this election was held under duress, and it is widely considered to be illegitimate. Since the regime came into being by a military coup and was led by a military officer backed by a network of high-ranking military officers who shared a common goal of maintaining the Horthy regime and promoting Hungarian nationalism the regime is classified as a military [semi-fascist] autocracy. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1919, from 1920 onward multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. From 1920 to 1943, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1944, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. For this time LIED continued to code political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI indicates them as ambiguous until 1919 and from 1920 to 1940 and as not really present afterwards.

03/19/1944 End Right-wing (Semi-Fascist) (Military) Autocracy/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]: On this date, as an ally of Nazi Germany and a combatant on the eastern front against the Soviet Union, Hungary sought an armistice from Moscow after Soviet troops entered the country on 10/15/1944. Subsequently, German forces occupying Hungary removed Horthy from power. During this period, LIED lists universal suffrage as absent. Ultimately, Hungarian and German forces were defeated by the Soviet Red Army by 04/04/1945 (Molnár 2001: 281, 290-91, 294, Casey et al. 2020: 10). According to LIED only executive elections were held. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

04/04/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Germany, Right-Wing (Fascist) Autocracy]/Start Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date, Soviet operations in Hungary ended and the last German troops were expelled from the Hungarian territory. The regime was heavily dominated by Soviet influence. Although there was initial cooperation between the Communist Party (MKP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), political life was tightly controlled by the Soviets. In this phase, formal elections were delayed, and while multiple parties were allowed to operate, the Communists began consolidating power by cooperating with and, eventually, absorbing other leftist forces. The Communist Party played a moderate role initially to avoid alienating the population, distancing itself from the radicalism of the short-lived 1919 regime of Béla Kun. Despite outward cooperation, tensions remained between the Communists and other political forces, particularly as the MKP sought to dominate political institutions, eventually leading to a one-party system. In this period universal suffrage for both men and women from the age of 20 was introduced.⁹ In these two years political liberties are coded as absent per LIED and can be interpreted as not really present in 1945 and 1947 and as ambiguous in 1946. LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present in 1945 and are ambiguous in 1946. According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

05/14/1947 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Communist Ideocracy: On 02/25/1947 the arrest of the secretary general of the Smallholders' Party and a number of other opposition activists marked an important step in the gradual takeover of the Communists. The Communists forced the arrest and recall of over 50 of MPs of the Smallholders' Party, robbing the party of its democratically won majority.¹⁰ On 05/14/1947 a communist de facto coup against Ferenc Nagy (Smallholders Party) while he travelled to Switzerland finalized the takeover. Despite intimidation and fraud, the communists won only a plurality (22%) of the vote in 1947 but were able to control the succeeding government through a coalition with allies in other parties (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 68). The disorganization and repression of the Smallholders' Party, which had been the largest, was completed in 1947, and the Social Democrats, the other authentic large party, were forced to merge with the communists in June 1948 (Rakosi 1952, Nysssonen 2001: 892, Wittenberg 2006: 56-57, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 68).¹¹ On 07/15/1956 the Soviets forced the communist party to remove Rakosi to put Hungary back on the Soviet line. Gero was promoted to replace him. In October/November 1956 a popular uprising against the Gero and Soviet-backed regime began with the aim of overthrowing the government. The revolt regime was crushed. On 04/11/1956 Nagy was deposed as premier and later as party secretary. Kadar replaced him. During roundtable negotiations in 1989, the government and moderate opposition figures reached an agreement to conduct elections (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 35). Despite legalizing other parties, relinquishing its constitutional role in governing the country, and implementing several significant reforms throughout 1989, the communist party did not truly lose its grip on power until the elections of 1990 (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 68). According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1947 and executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty were held from 1948 onward. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For 1948, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. From 1949 to 1988, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For 1989, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. As classified by FH for the regime period until 1984, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Between 1985 and 1988 a score between 9 and 10 makes the country not free, which aligns with our interpretation of rather not free. In 1989 the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6

to 7, which we place in the rather free category. Furthermore, the state of political liberties is coded as absent by LIED. V-Dem's PCLI indicates them as not really present from 1947 to 1948, in 1988 and as ambiguous in 1990.

04/08/1990 End Communist Ideocracy/Start Liberal Democracy: On this date, free and fair parliamentary elections which were won by an opposition party, the center-right Hungarian Democratic Forum, took place (Haggard/Kaufman/Teo 2016: 35, Racz 1991: 112).¹² This period was characterized by multiple competitive elections with changes of government, peaceful transitions of power and an independent judiciary. Furthermore, civil liberties were effectively upheld (Puddington 2010: 288-289). As per FH's classification for this regime period, the country is considered free with a score ranging from 2 to 4, which we also interpret as free in our framework. According to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI political liberties were constantly present for this time. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections during this period as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score them as free, fair and clean. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. Until 2009, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating comprehensive constraints on the executive. For 2010, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

04/11/2010 End Liberal Democracy/Start Electoral Democracy: From 2010 to 2014, Hungary can be characterized as an electoral democracy. During this period, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz-KDNP coalition, which gained a two-thirds parliamentary majority in 2010, used its power to make sweeping constitutional and legislative changes. Democratic institutions remained formally intact, but systemic flaws emerged as the government tightened control over the judiciary, altered the constitution to centralize power, and implemented media regulations that increased state influence over public and private broadcasters. Restrictions on political freedoms and electoral reforms, including gerrymandering and rules favoring the ruling party, further eroded the fairness of political competition. While the democratic process was still functional, these deficiencies increasingly compromised Hungary's democratic standards, gradually shifting it towards a less competitive and more controlled political environment. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes all elections during this period as competitive. However, V-Dem's EF&FI and CEI score elections between 2010 and 2013 as free, fair and clean. Per FH, for this regime period, the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. Moreover, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicates that political liberties were present in this period. For the year 2011, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were comprehensive, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For the rest of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive.

01/01/2014 End Electoral Democracy/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: The specific event marking Hungary's transition from an electoral democracy to an electoral hybrid regime is the electoral law reform, which came into effect on this date. This reform introduced significant structural changes to the electoral system, which disproportionately disadvantaged the opposition. One major aspect was the unequal redrawing of electoral boundaries, leading to gerrymandering that favored the Fidesz-KDNP coalition, allowing them to secure more seats with relatively fewer votes. Another significant change was the introduction of a bonus system for the leading party, awarding extra seats to the strongest party, which benefited Fidesz and disadvantaged smaller opposition parties. This made the electoral system less proportional and distorted democratic competition. Additionally, new restrictions on election advertising severely disadvantaged the opposition, as pro-government media and institutions received more favorable access to public attention, while the opposition's reach was curtailed. In balloting for the assembly on 04/08/2018, the FiDeSz-MPSz-KDNP coalition came first with 133 seats (Lansford 2021: 711). The OSCE recognized that the elections were largely

well managed but pointed out an "overlap between state and ruling party resources." They also highlighted issues such as opaque campaign financing, media bias, and the presence of "intimidating and xenophobic rhetoric," which impeded voters' ability to make informed decisions. Although there was no evidence of electoral fraud capable of influencing the election results, some irregularities were reported. The OSCE also noted that the strict adherence to formal regulations by the National Election Commission effectively restricted access to legal recourse.¹³ As per FH, the state of "national governance" in Hungary exhibits autocratic inclinations, accompanied by a growing disregard for the rights of marginalized communities. While elections are technically free, fairness is compromised, exacerbated by alterations to the electoral laws that disproportionately disadvantage opposition parties (Bogaards 2018).¹⁴ FH characterizes Hungary as a "hybrid regime," situated in the ambiguous territory between democracies and autocracies, often referred to as the "gray zone."¹⁵ However, this is only partially reflected in the FH scores. Per FH, for the period until 2015, the country is classified as free, scoring between 2 and 4, which we also place in the free category. In 2016 and 2017 the country is rated as free with a score of 5, which we interpret as rather free in our framework. From 2018 onward the country is partly free with a score ranging from 6 to 7, which we place in the rather free category. V-Dem CEI and EF&FI view elections as somewhat free, fair and clean. In addition to that the political liberties changed to absent scores (LIED). However, V-Dem's PCLI considers them as present until 2014 and as somewhat present ever since 2015. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive was subordinate to or held equal power with other institutions, indicating executive parity or subordination. According to our observations Polity5 misjudges executive constraints in Hungary in this period. Until 2017, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating robust constraints on the executive. From 2018 onwards, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. However, in a comparative perspective Hungary is a borderline case between an electoral democracy and an electoral hybrid regime.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Bánkúti/Halmai/Scheppele 2012, Saxonberg 2001)

Notes

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Hungary_\(1000%E2%80%93931301\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Hungary_(1000%E2%80%93931301))

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Hungary

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Hungarian_Republic

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_Soviet_Republic#Coup_d'%C3%A9tat

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian%E2%80%93Romanian_War#Romanian_occupation_of_Budapest

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyula_Peidl

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

⁸ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Hungary_\(1920%E2%80%93931946\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Hungary_(1920%E2%80%93931946))

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferenc_Nagy

¹¹ <http://tinyurl.com/8kochvl>

¹² <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-hungary/>

¹³ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/freedom-world/2022>

¹⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/hungary/nations-transit/2022>

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