



Hungary's 2022 Election: Issues for Congress

April 7, 2022

Hungary's parliamentary election on April 3, 2022, resulted in a victory for the incumbent Fidesz party, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Fidesz defeated a six-party alliance of opposition parties, [winning](#) 53.1% of the popular vote and 135 out of 199 seats in Hungary's unicameral parliament. The conservative-nationalist Fidesz has won the past four Hungarian elections, each with a two-thirds parliamentary supermajority, and has led the government of Hungary since 2010. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [concluded](#) that the 2022 election was well-managed but was conducted on an uneven playing field due to overlap between state and party and the dominance of pro-government media. Orbán's renewed leadership likely signifies continued tensions between Hungary and the rest of the European Union (EU), as well as the United States, over various issues.

Issues for Congress

A member of NATO and the EU, Hungary factors into numerous areas of congressional interest. Members of the 117th Congress may monitor policies and developments in Hungary in relation to the allied response to Russia's [invasion of Ukraine](#), European [energy dependence](#) on Russia, China's [influence in Europe](#), and [criticisms](#) over democratic backsliding.

Hungary's Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

Hungary's government has [condemned](#) Russia's attack against Ukraine and has expressed [support](#) for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Hungary has backed the [EU sanctions](#) adopted against Russia since the invasion, which the 27 EU member countries must approve by consensus. Hungary also has played a central humanitarian role in the [refugee crisis](#), with nearly 405,000 refugees arriving from Ukraine between February 24 and April 6, 2022. (Hungary and Ukraine share an 85-mile border; see [Figure 1](#).) On March 23, NATO announced it would deploy a new multinational battlegroup to Hungary as part of the alliance's [reinforcement of its eastern flank](#).

At the same time, [observers have strongly criticized](#) aspects of Hungary's response to the invasion. As most NATO countries arranged emergency deliveries of weapons to Ukraine, Hungary [ruled out](#) providing Ukraine with military assistance or allowing the use of its territory to transport arms into Ukraine. Hungarian officials repeatedly have [asserted](#) that their government's priority is to stay out of the war. [Many observers](#) have pointed to Orbán's [close relationship](#) with Russian President Vladimir Putin to criticize Hungary's arguably ambivalent stance toward the war. In a March 25 [speech](#) to EU leaders,

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

IN11909

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky specifically addressed Hungary with the statement, “You have to decide for yourself who you are with.”

President Zelensky’s words followed Hungary’s [announcement](#) that it would not approve any expansion of EU sanctions against Russia to include energy exports. Hungary receives 85% of its natural gas and two-thirds of its oil from Russia. Hungary [renewed](#) its long-term gas contract with Russia in 2021 and awarded the contract for the expansion of its Paks [nuclear power plant](#) to Russia’s state-owned Rosatom in 2014.

Figure 1. Map of Hungary



Source: Created by CRS. Boundaries and locations from U.S. Department of State and ESRI.

Note: The population of Hungary is 9.764 million (IMF).

Criticisms over Democratic Backsliding

Fidesz’s governance of Hungary over the past 12 years has been polarizing and subject to international criticism. Many [democracy experts](#) have accused the Orbán government of undermining the rule of law and creating an “illiberal democracy” by dismantling institutional checks and balances, entrenching Fidesz personnel in state institutions, and suppressing independent media and nongovernmental organizations. [Critics](#) also accuse Fidesz of corruption and condemn the Hungarian government’s campaigns against [LGBTQI+ rights](#) and migration. Some nongovernmental [measures of democracy](#) no longer categorize Hungary as a democratic country. Criticisms over governance and rule-of-law issues have caused the EU to launch [procedures](#) against Hungary under mechanisms designed to prevent member state backsliding on the bloc’s fundamental values and the rule of law. The Biden Administration [did not invite](#) Hungary to its December 2021 Summit for Democracy.

The Orbán government [argues](#) that this narrative is based on political bias and double standards. Supporters of the government [admire](#) what they [perceive](#) as its defense of traditional, Christian values versus Western European liberalism, its advocacy of national sovereignty versus purported EU overreach, and its insistence on strong borders versus pressure to adopt looser migration policies. In winning the [2022 election](#), Fidesz appeared to be successful in portraying itself to its rural base as protecting Hungary’s interests in relation to the war in Ukraine. The victory provides Fidesz with a renewed argument that its policies have a strong mandate from Hungarian voters.

Hungary’s Ties with China

In the context of U.S. concerns about China’s investment and influence in Europe, Hungary and China have developed significant [economic ties](#). Hungary’s share of a rail link between Budapest and Belgrade, Serbia, is [financed](#) mostly by a state loan from China. China views the railway as an important means for transporting Chinese goods from the port of Piraeus, Greece, into markets in Central Europe. Hungarian

officials have dismissed concerns about the security risks posed by using equipment from Chinese telecommunications firm [Huawei](#), indicating that Huawei is expected to have a central role in constructing Hungary's 5G network. Hungary hosts Huawei's largest logistics center outside of China.

Congress and U.S.-Hungary Relations

U.S. positions regarding Hungary and the Orbán government have grown [polarized](#) and increasingly [partisan](#). Prior to the Biden Administration not inviting Hungary to the democracy summit, President Biden and Prime Minister Orbán had traded [criticisms](#) over governance issues on [several occasions](#). The [Hungarian government](#) previously cultivated [close ties](#) with the Trump Administration and achieved one of its long-standing diplomatic goals with Prime Minister Orbán's 2019 [visit to the White House](#). Earlier, the U.S.-Hungary relationship had [developed tensions](#) during the Obama Administration after U.S. [criticism](#) of the Orbán government's policies.

Members of Congress have expressed mixed views of Orbán's Hungary. Whereas some Members have joined in criticisms of Orbán's governance and his close relations with Russia and China, others have defended his policies and questioned criticism of the Hungarian government.

As the EU and NATO operate largely by consensus, political developments in Hungary will continue to impact collective transatlantic action regarding Russia and Ukraine.

Author Information

Derek E. Mix
Specialist in European Affairs

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.