



The Endgame for Hungary: Disinformation, AI, Prohibited Ads and Russian Interference in the Election Campaign

Brief for the press and policy professionals

On April 12, Hungarians will vote in a high-stakes general election where Viktor Orbán's Fidesz is facing its toughest challenge since its rise to power in 2010 from the Tisza Party of Péter Magyar. This brief builds on the work of Lakmusz, an independent Hungarian fact-checking site. It summarizes the main disinformation themes and techniques we have observed in the campaign so far and outlines three important phenomena that affected the (dis)information ecosystem: the use of generative AI, the prohibition of political advertising by major social platforms, and foreign interference.

Main findings:

- As with previous elections, state-sponsored disinformation plays a dominant role in the campaign. The main targets of falsehoods spread by the governing party, its media and its proxy organizations are Ukraine and the EU, and their most important technique is the manipulative editing and presentation of videos. Tisza uses more common forms of political distortion like the misleading presentation of statistics.
- On the government's side, the use of AI is omnipresent in the campaign. However, in most cases, AI-generated content has been rather easily recognizable as such and therefore its deceptive potential has been relatively low.

- The governing party and its allies have repeatedly breached the political ad ban imposed by Meta, and enforcement by the tech company is inefficient. Still, the use of online political ads clearly decreased in volume compared to previous elections.
- Press reports about a Russian interference operation have caused widespread concern. Several disinformation campaigns have been linked to known Russian groups. However, their reach and impact so far have remained limited compared to disinformation spread by domestic actors.

A note on the scope of this report: while the official campaign started on February 21 (50 days before the election), we decided to cover a wider period, since some of the analyzed trends were already ongoing in the fourth quarter of 2025.

Disinformation

Many researchers characterize Hungary by the dominance of state-sponsored disinformation. False and misleading claims that remain on the fringes in other European countries are often brought into the mainstream in Hungary by Fidesz, its many proxy organizations or the media outlets controlled or influenced by the party.

That is no different in this election campaign, the main theme of which from the government's side is the same as was in 2022 or in 2024: the Russia-Ukraine war. But while in 2022 Fidesz emphasized "peace" and in 2024 its main target was the "Brussels elite", this time the communication of the party took a decidedly anti-Ukrainian turn. The overarching message of the Fidesz campaign is that in case of government change, Brussels and the Tisza Party would prioritize the needs of Ukraine, take money away from Hungarians to give it to Ukraine, and drag Hungary into the war.

This political message is often supported by disinformation, for example the manipulative editing and presentation of videos. Some examples debunked by Lakmusz:

- In October, the youth wing of Fidesz started a campaign against Tisza politician Romulusz Ruszin-Szendi, claiming he wanted to reintroduce mandatory military service. They used a video snippet in which Ruszin-Szendi is heard as saying "we should reintroduce mandatory military service". [In reality](#), the first part of the politician's sentence was purposefully omitted. What he really said was "today, the situation in Hungary is not such that, in optimal circumstances, we should reintroduce mandatory military service". The misleading quote [was later repeated](#) in an official government pamphlet sent to pensioners.
- In February, foreign minister Péter Szijjártó claimed NATO secretary-general Mark Rutte had given a "pro-war" statement when he said: "Our commitment to support Ukraine is steadfast. Troops on the ground, jets in the air, ships on the Black Sea". [Actually, Szijjártó pasted together two sentences by Rutte](#) that appeared in different parts of his speech; to make it look like NATO would immediately send forces to Ukraine. In the original speech,

Rutte referred to the peacekeeping missions offered by some allies in case a peace agreement was reached.

- In March, several Fidesz politicians claimed that Manfred Weber “admitted” he fights on the frontline for Ukraine with Péter Magyar, leader of the Tisza Party. [That again was manipulative editing and a distortion of Weber’s words](#). First, he said the EU was on the side of Ukraine, then, later in his speech he mentioned Péter Magyar and the fight the EPP is fighting. But at this point he did not refer to Ukraine but the fight against right-wing populism and extremism.

The misleading interpretation of texts is also part of Fidesz’s repertoire. In January, Viktor Orbán claimed that Brussels wanted to abolish several Hungarian social benefit policies to support Ukraine from the money gained, including a loan scheme for young workers. He said this was written in the Commission’s European Semester country report. [But the report merely states](#) that the loan “might be less effective for supporting young people with a lower level of education”.

In the campaign, the government took every opportunity to seek confrontation with Ukraine. When a Hungarian tennis player received threatening text messages before a game with a Ukrainian opponent, foreign minister Szijjártó was quick to jump to conclusions: he blamed Ukraine. [However, it turned out](#) that several players received similar threats, irrespective of the nationality of their next opponents. The threatening messages were likely connected to a sports betting fraud and had nothing to do with the tensions between Hungary and Ukraine.

Lakmusz also fact-checked many statements by Tisza politicians. The opposition party uses more common forms of political distortion, like the misleading presentation of statistics. For example, [their program falsely presents](#) price statistics as if the prices of some products increased 15- to 24-folds between 2010 and 2025, while one of their leading politicians [cited misleading data to suggest](#) that emigration from Hungary was worse than emigration from Poland.

AI

The most striking novelty of this campaign is the use of generative AI, which is omnipresent in the communication of the governing party and its allies. The most memorable example was [the AI-generated video](#) posted in January by the Budapest branch of Fidesz, in which a Hungarian soldier is executed in the war while his daughter is waiting for him at home. [As Lakmusz reported](#), many similar videos emphasizing the threat of war and therefore strengthening the government’s messaging were posted by smaller Facebook-pages with opaque backgrounds, specifically targeting voters in the electoral district where the Fidesz candidate is justice minister Bence Tuzson.

The so-called National Resistance Movement, a relatively recently created Fidesz proxy had managed to reach millions of views with their AI videos, [like the one](#) in which Commission president Ursula von der Leyen calls Péter Magyar and orders him (in Hungarian) to send money to Ukraine in case of an opposition victory. This video was also posted by the Facebook page of

Viktor Orbán, but the connection between Fidesz and the National Resistance Movement is even more direct: [as reported by Telex](#), Gábor Szűcs, one of the founders of the movement, is a candidate on the Fidesz party list.

AI content like the fictional war or the telephone scene, although not labelled, are quite clearly recognizable as AI. The deceptive potential of such content is relatively low (even taking into account the varying levels of AI literacy in the population), so we decided not to fact-check them. That said, [experts warn](#) that AI-generated content can have a strong emotional effect on viewers even when they know what they are seeing is not reality.

We also detected some instances of more realistic (and therefore more deceptive) use of generative AI. In October, Balázs Orbán, campaign director of Fidesz [posted a realistic AI video of Péter Magyar](#), in which the opposition politician said things about Tisza's alleged pension policy he never said in reality. After the Hungarian authorities stopped a Ukrainian van transporting money and gold in March, [the pro-government outlet Ripost created an AI-generated photo](#) of the incident that inflated the amount of money involved and depicted the arrested Ukrainian bank officers as mafiosi.

Quite often the use of AI augments more traditional forms of disinformation. For example, in one AI video of the National Resistance Movement, Péter Magyar and Romulusz Ruszin-Szendi break into a young couple's home and forcefully enlist the man in the army. The AI video [features a snippet of a real video](#) of Ruszin-Szendi with the manipulatively cut-out quote about military service mentioned above. In another case, pro-government media distorted a quote by another Tisza politician, István Kapitány, to make it look like the opposition party purposefully hid its program. Then a Fidesz politician, Balázs Hidvéghi [created an AI video of Kapitány](#) saying the sentence he never actually said (in that case, there was a rather inconspicuous AI label on the video).

We have not encountered AI-generated content pushed by opposition parties in similar volumes. [We detected an AI video campaign](#) by a media outlet in February-March that repeated the main political message of the opposition Democratic Coalition party, namely that postal voting for Hungarians living abroad should be abolished.

Political ads

On October 6 Meta (following a similar step by Google) decided not to allow political ads on its services anymore in the EU. In the Hungarian campaign, Fidesz and its proxies have repeatedly breached this prohibition, and Meta was slow and inconsistent in enforcing its own rules.

- The National Resistance Movement managed to advertise all of its AI-generated videos on Meta, even though they contained clear political messages. In the month after the ad ban came into effect [they spent at least 24 million HUF](#) (62 thousand EUR) on political advertisement.

- The Digital Civic Circles movement, an online activist network supporting Fidesz, [ran hundreds of ads recruiting new members](#) after Meta's ban.
- Even [the official accounts of some Fidesz candidates](#) were able to successfully place hundreds of ads on Meta.
- In the electoral district mentioned above, where the Fidesz candidate is the current minister of justice, [we found three Facebook-pages running ads in support of him](#), on top of his official account. The AI-generated war videos were also advertised in a way to target voters in that district. Plus, we identified ads promoting smaller opposition candidates and disparaging the Tisza candidate. The smaller opposition parties denied they had anything to do with the ads and said they suspect Fidesz was behind them.

Our experience shows that Meta usually stops these ads, but only retroactively, and in many cases not before they have reached hundreds of thousands or even millions of voters. The reaction time of the platform seems to have become faster since October, but Meta is still not doing anything against repeat offenders, so an advertiser whose ad is stopped because of the political ad ban has no difficulty in placing that same ad again and again.

The overall volume of political advertising on Meta still decreased after the October ban, before which Hungarian spending [was truly exorbitant in European comparison](#).

Russian interference

Foreign interference in the election became a hot topic in the press in March, after investigative sites reported on a Russian plan to keep Viktor Orbán in power. [The Vsquare newsletter wrote](#) that a three-man team directed by Putin's first deputy chief of staff Sergei Kiriyenko was sent to Budapest, while [according to the Financial Times](#), the Kremlin endorsed an election meddling plan by the infamous Social Design Agency, responsible for the Doppelganger operation in several Western countries.

Researchers attributed some targeted disinformation attacks in the Hungarian campaign to known Russian groups. However, their reach and impact so far have remained limited, at least compared to the disinformation exhibits discussed in the first part of this report.

- We analyzed three disinformation campaigns that the Gnida Project linked to the Russian group Storm-1516. All of them involved a freshly created fake news site that published articles targeting prominent opposition figures without any real evidence: [a priest critical of Orbán was accused of pedophilia](#), [one Tisza politician was accused of recruiting Hungarians for fighting in Ukraine](#), while [another Tisza politician was connected with the Epstein case](#). Although in the first two cases the articles were advertised on Facebook and reached around 100 thousand users, the disinformation stories did not manage to get into the mainstream media.
- The Antibot4Navalny collective identified many posts on X containing disinformation about Hungary. They linked the posts to the Matryoshka bot network. The videos featured in the posts used the logos of reputable news or civil society organizations to spread ideas like

Zelensky's stance was diminishing in Europe because of his conflict with Orbán. All of the posts and videos were in English, and the stories [failed to gain traction in the Hungarian information sphere](#). Moreover, many of the posts were sent to Lakmusz by suspicious e-mail accounts, suggesting that one of the operation's goals might be to spread its messages and boost its perceived influence via debunking and artificially pumped-up media attention.

[We asked Partizán's foreign policy expert Botond Feledy](#) about the possible effects of Russian disinformation. He offered this analysis:

“The assumption that people can be manipulated through disinformation into voting in a specific direction on election day is far less substantiated than the sad fact that disinformation campaigns play a major role in dividing societies and spreading conspiracy theories. And this division, along with the spread of conspiracy theories, ultimately benefits the parties that the Russians support. In other words, what we should be afraid of is not that on April 12, Russian disinformation AI videos will mobilize 500 thousand voters, but rather that, thanks to years of dedicated work, Russian influence will have a long-term impact on the various camps. We underestimate the latter effect and overestimate the impact on the election alone.”