

Conference Name: HuSoc Seoul – Humanities & Social Sciences International Conference, 17-18 June 2026
Conference Dates: 17-Jun- 2026 to 18-Jun- 2026
Conference Venue: Kwangwoon University, 20 Gwangun-ro, Nowon-gu, Seoul, South Korea
Appears in: PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences (ISSN 2454-5899)
Publication year: 2026

Roland A. Csizmazia, 2026

Volume 2026, pp. 479-480

DOI- <https://doi.org/10.20319/icssh.2026.479480>

This paper can be cited as Csizmazia, R.A. (2026). How Long can the Hungarian Authoritarian Regime Survive? HuSoc Seoul – Humanities & Social Sciences International Conference, 17-18 June 2026. Proceedings of Social Science and Humanities Research Association (SSHRA), 2026, 479-480

HOW LONG CAN THE HUNGARIAN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME SURVIVE?

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Abstract

This political analysis examines the rise and fall of Viktor Orbán's authoritarian regime in Hungary (2010-2026), addressing the fundamental question: what limits the survival of electoral autocracies? Over sixteen years, Orbán consolidated power through systematic institutional manipulation — rigging electoral systems, increased control over media, rewriting constitutions, and dismantling checks and balances — while maintaining the facade of democratic legitimacy. Despite the remarkable durability of these mechanisms, the regime ultimately collapsed in April 2026 under the weight of compounding crises: a corruption-plagued economy (25% inflation, 0.4% growth), the clemency scandal of February 2024 that destroyed core credibility, severe international isolation due to the intensified friendly policy towards Russia and China, and €13 billion in frozen EU funds. Part of the old opposition saw the chance to unify behind Péter Magyar, who has served the regime during for fourteen years. As an insider he weaponized his insider knowledge against his former peers. Hungary's case clearly demonstrates that electoral autocracies are stable as long as the economy allows it; they require constant institutional balancing that eventually breaks under compounding pressures.

Keywords:

Authoritarian Regimes, Democratic Backsliding, Institutional Manipulation, Hungarian Politics, Economic Collapse