Let's call a spade a spade!

What can we call the system we live in?

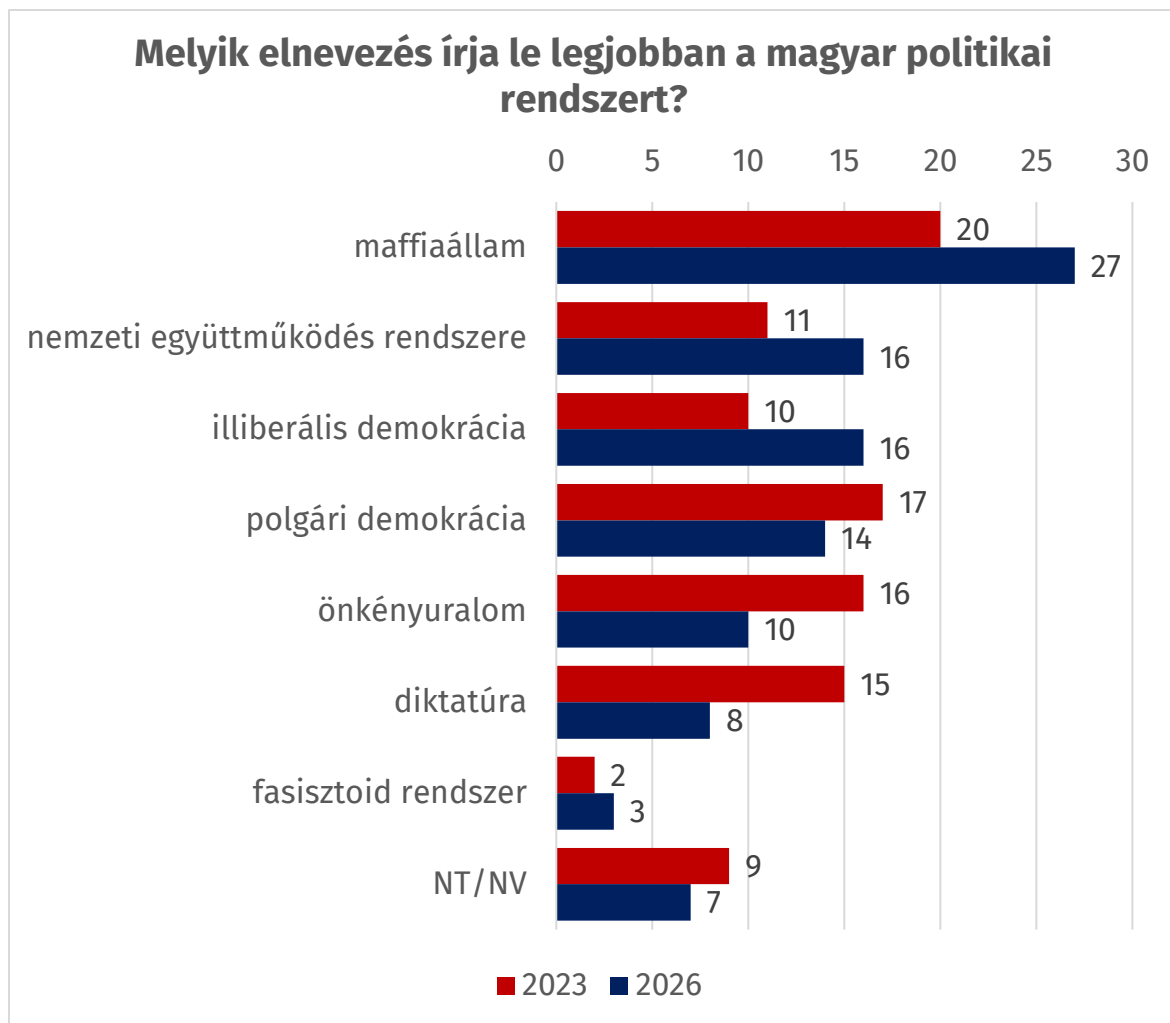Analysis by Republikon Institute

February 2026

Ri REPUBLIKON INTÉZET

After sixteen years in power, the political era that began in 2010 can rightly be called the Orbán system, especially since during this decade and a half, the Fidesz-KDNP governments built a completely new system in Hungary, both legally and politically. Although there is common agreement that the new system that emerged in 2010 marked the end of the world that had been built up since 1989 through competition between successive governments; opinions differ on what kind of system has been built in its place over the past decade and a half, and what it should be called. Many define the Orbán system in different ways, and the prime minister himself has introduced several definitions into public discourse: NER, illiberal democracy, national sovereignty. Political science has used many different names and definitions to describe today's Hungarian political system, such as hybrid regime, electoral autocracy, or mafia state, a term introduced by sociologist Magyar Bálint in his 2013 book Magyar Polip (Hungarian Octopus). Fidesz's political opponents have not shied away from extreme definitions, sometimes calling the Fidesz-KDNP governments a dictatorship and a fascist system.

In a nutshell: there are many ways to describe the Hungarian political system, and several studies have examined public opinion on this issue. Our current analysis compares two sets of data: Medián's 2023 research on the topic and Republikon's recent 2026 survey, in which we asked respondents which term best describes the Hungarian system. Respondents could choose from 7 different terms with negative and positive connotations, selecting the one they felt was most accurate.

Most respondents consider the term "mafia state" to be the most accurate definition of the system in 2026. 27 percent of respondents chose this option. Compared to 2023, the use of this term has increased by 7 percentage points, essentially standing out from the previously fairly even field in recent years. The terms "system of national cooperation" (NER) and "illiberal democracy" were each chosen by 16 percent of respondents, an increase of 5 and 6 percentage points, respectively, since 2023. 14 percent of respondents believe we live in a "civil democracy," with the popularity of this term declining by 3 percentage points, meaning that although it was the second most common term in 2023, it has now slipped off the podium. The term "autocracy/despotism" has lost popularity, with 10 percent choosing it in 2026, compared to 16 percent in 2023. The biggest decline was observed in the term "dictatorship," which fell from 15 percent to 8 percent, placing it second to last, ahead of the term "fascist system," which ranked last in both surveys.
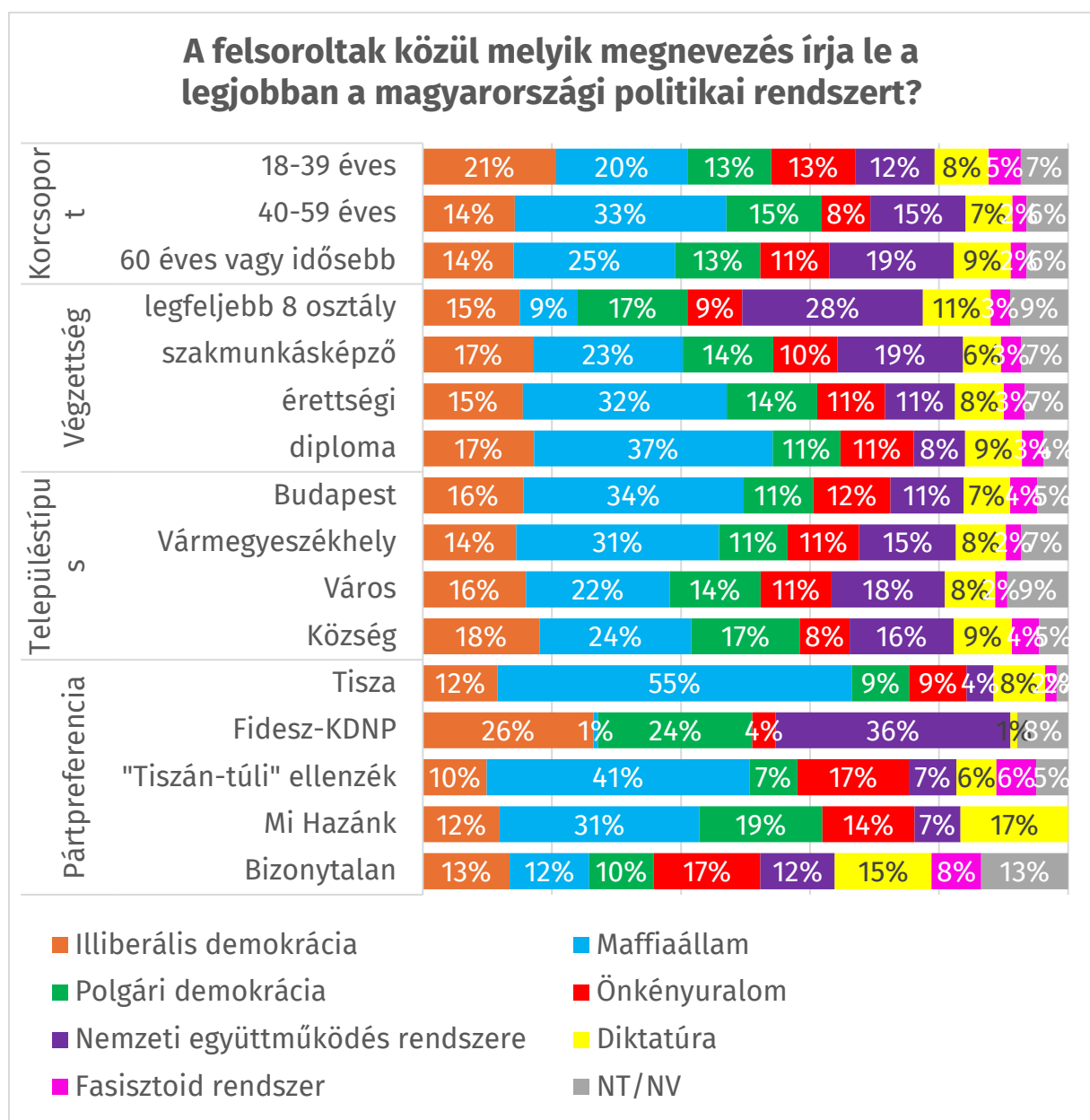
Since 2023, the term "mafia state" has become increasingly widespread, while the term "dictatorship" has declined in popularity, for a number of reasons. On the one hand, unlike in 2023, critics of the system have focused on corruption concerns rather than the rule of law in recent years, and numerous corruption cases have come to light in the last three years, with new details emerging about a growing number of well-known cases. On the other hand, while previous opposition challengers liked to call the Orbán system a dictatorship or the prime minister a dictator, the current strongest opposition party's campaign again focuses on corruption and talks about criminals instead of dictators.

Melyik elnevezés írja le legjobban a magyar politikai rendszert?

	2023	2026
maffiaállam	20	27
nemzeti együttműködés rendszere	11	16
illiberális demokrácia	10	16
polgári demokrácia	17	14
önkényuralom	16	10
diktatúra	15	8
fasisztoid rendszer	2	3
NT/NV	9	7

■ 2023 ■ 2026

1. Graph: Which concept best describes the Hungarian sytem?
Order of terms from top to bottom: mafia state, NER, illiberal democracy, civil democracy, autocracy, dictatorship, fascist system, don't know

We also examined how party preference influences how we view the system. Unsurprisingly, the differences are particularly sharp. Fidesz–KDNP voters divided their votes among the three most permissive system descriptions. The most popular among them was the system of national cooperation, chosen by 36 percent of pro-government voters. Illiberal democracy came in second, chosen by a quarter of Fidesz-KDNP voters, followed closely by civil democracy in third place with 24 percent. In contrast, the term "mafia state" was the most popular among Tisza voters, with 55 percent choosing it. This group of voters liked the term the most, with all others lagging behind. Illiberal democracy came in second with 12 percent, followed by autocracy, civil democracy, and dictatorship, which were chosen by only 8-9 percent of Tisza voters.

The mafia state also dominated among the opposition besides the Tisza party, with 41 percent choosing this term, followed by autocracy with 17 percent, with all others lagging behind. Among supporters of Mi Hazánk, the term "mafia state" also leads with 31 percent, but in second place is a more positive description, "civil democracy," with 19 percent, followed by "dictatorship" with 17 percent. The opinions of those who were uncertain varied the most, with almost every term receiving 10-15 percent, meaning that those who were uncertain were not even sure what to call the system in which we live. Autocracy came in first among them with 17 percent.

A felsoroltak közül melyik megnevezés írja le a legjobban a magyarországi politikai rendszert?

	Illiberális demokrácia	Maffiaállam	Polgári demokrácia	Önkényuralom	Nemzeti együttműködés rendszere	Diktatúra	Fasisztoid rendszer	NT/NV
Korcsoport								
18-39 éves	21%	20%	13%	13%	12%	8%	5%	7%
40-59 éves	14%	33%	15%	8%	15%	7%		6%
60 éves vagy idősebb	14%	25%	13%	11%	19%	9%		6%
Végzettség								
legfeljebb 8 osztály	15%	9%	17%	9%	28%	11%	3%	9%
szakmunkásképző	17%	23%	14%	10%	19%	6%	3%	7%
érettségi	15%	32%	14%	11%	11%	8%	3%	7%
diploma	17%	37%	11%	11%	8%	9%	3%	4%
Településtípus								
Budapest	16%	34%	11%	12%	11%	7%	4%	5%
Vármegyeszékhely	14%	31%	11%	11%	15%	8%	2%	7%
Város	16%	22%	14%	11%	18%	8%	2%	9%
Község	18%	24%	17%	8%	16%	9%	4%	5%
Pártpreferencia								
Tisza	12%	55%	9%	9%	4%	8%	2%	2%
Fidesz-KDNP	26%	1%	24%	4%	36%		1%	8%
"Tiszán-túli" ellenzék	10%	41%	7%	17%	7%	6%	6%	5%
Mi Hazánk	12%	31%	19%	14%	7%	17%		
Bizonytalan	13%	12%	10%	17%	12%	15%	8%	13%

Legend:
- Illiberális demokrácia
- Maffiaállam
- Polgári demokrácia
- Önkényuralom
- Nemzeti együttműködés rendszere
- Diktatúra
- Fasisztoid rendszer
- NT/NV

2. Graph: Which of the following terms best describes the political system in Hungary?

The demographic breakdown of the responses is particularly interesting. Among those under 40, illiberal democracy and mafia state were the most common terms, while those between 40 and 60 clearly leaned toward mafia state, with one in three people in this age group choosing this term. The mafia state also came out on top among the elderly, with 25 percent, but the NER did not perform badly in this group either, with 19 percent. Although it was previously clear that the ruling parties were most popular among the elderly and the opposition among young people, Tisza has reorganised the party system, and the age-specific characteristics of the voter base seem to have dissolved somewhat; as seen by the fact that the most system-critical comments this time came from the 40-60 age group, and system-critical descriptions also dominated among the elderly.

The breakdown by educational attainment helps a lot in understanding the situation. Among graduates, high school graduates, and skilled workers, the term "mafia state" proved to be the most popular definition. This clearly illustrates the party political divide based on educational attainment: the higher a respondent's level of education, the more likely they are to choose the mafia state definition. 37 percent of university graduates, 32 percent of high school graduates, and 23 percent of skilled workers chose this description. In contrast, those with at most an eighth-grade education primarily view Hungary as a "system of national cooperation," with 28 percent choosing this description and only 9 percent choosing "mafia state." In addition, the term "civil democracy" is also relatively popular in this group (17 percent). Among those with vocational qualifications, the second most popular description is "system of national cooperation," suggesting that this group also includes supporters of the ruling party, while among those with a high school diploma or university degree, the term "illiberal democracy" ranks second in popularity. This result clearly illustrates the educational divide between voter groups, which is already known from several studies.

The breakdown by settlement type also paints a very interesting picture. Although it is apparent that the larger the community in which a given respondent lives, the more likely they are to choose the system-critical "mafia state" option (34% in Budapest, only 24% in villages), this option still ranks first in all settlement types. These results also reflect what is beginning to emerge from party preference

surveys: previously, there were deep divisions between the opposition and ruling parties' voter bases in terms of settlement size, age, and education, but today, settlement size and age are less decisive factors, with the main difference lying in educational attainment, where there are extreme differences and deep political divisions.

It can be said that party preference is the primary factor determining how we describe the Hungarian political system, and that the differences between party voter bases are essentially reflected in the demographic breakdown. It is also important to note that the preference for the term "mafia state," which refers to opposition-minded respondents, occurred in several demographic groups and stood out from the field overall, suggesting that voters critical of the Orbán system now constitute the majority.

The term "mafia state" probably became dominant in public discourse due to the heightened attention paid to corruption cases and the strongest opposition challenger's focus on the issue, and it became the most popular definition among respondents leaning toward the opposition, while even these respondents refrain from using harsher descriptions of the system, such as "dictatorship" or "fascist system." As expected, those who support the government prefer the terms introduced by the prime minister. In the final stages of the campaign, we can expect that the narrative focusing on corruption and the crimes of the Orbán regime will continue to be an important part of the Tisza Party's communication. Meanwhile, the government will continue to rely on the tactics that proved successful in 2022, when they secured a two-thirds majority: fearmongering about war, promises of security, and the associated distribution of election handouts, the benefits of which we can enjoy in the immediate run-up to the election, but the price of which we will only pay in the years after the election.

Methodology: The survey was conducted between January 15 and 20, 2026, with 1,000 people interviewed by telephone. The survey is representative of the adult population of the country in terms of gender, age, educational attainment, and type of settlement. The margin of error is +/- 3.5%.