

„It will be decided in the countryside anyway...”

Impact of rural voters on the outcome of the parliamentary election in Hungary

AN ANALYSIS BY REPUBLIKON INSTITUTE



June 2026

INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequently repeated claims in Hungarian political discourse is that elections are decided in the countryside. This notion is based on the experience of recent parliamentary elections, in which Fidesz achieved particularly strong results in smaller settlements, especially villages, while Budapest and a significant share of larger cities increasingly shifted toward the opposition. As a result, Hungary's electoral map has often been portrayed through a simplified rural-versus-urban divide, where rural Hungary served as the bastion of incumbent government support, while large urban areas became the primary terrain of opposition politics.

The issue, however, is considerably more complex. The fact that a political force performs better in villages does not necessarily mean that elections are decided there. To answer this question, it is also necessary to examine the actual political weight of rural areas within the electoral system, the distribution of single-member constituencies, differences in turnout across settlement types, and the extent to which rural society is politically homogeneous. It is particularly important to ask whether rural dominance alone is sufficient to secure electoral victory, or whether it represents only one element of a broader political and electoral structure.

WHERE IS THE ELECTION DECIDED?

The distribution of constituencies by settlement type is illustrated in the table below.

Nature of constituency	Number of constituencies	Percentage within the 106 constituencies of Hungary	Number of constituencies where residents of such settlements are in absolute majority	Of this, percentage within the 106 constituencies of Hungary
Budapest	16	15.09%	16	15.09%
Large cities (settlements with more than 50 thousand residents)	17	16.04%	17	16.04%
Mid-sized cities (settlements with 20-50 thousand residents)	22	20.75%	15	14.15%
Towns (majority live in settlements with less than 20 thousand residents)	8	7.55%	5	4.72%
In villages	43	40.57%	32	30.19%

Based on the segmentation of Hungary's single-member constituencies (electoral districts) by settlement type, five major categories were identified. Of the 106 constituencies, 16 are in Budapest. In addition, there are 17 large-city constituencies, where residents of cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants constitute the majority of voters. The medium-sized city category—where the relative majority of voters live in settlements with populations between 20,000 and 50,000—contains 22 constituencies. The small-city category, dominated by towns with fewer than 20,000 inhabitants, includes only 8 constituencies. The largest group, however, consists of rural constituencies: there are 43 electoral districts in which village residents constitute the largest voter bloc. This means that 40.57 percent of all constituencies are characterized by a rural majority in relative terms. This constitutes a significant overrepresentation compared to the actual population share of villages. Only 29.91 percent of Hungary's population lives in villages, yet rural areas occupy a disproportionately large place within the

constituency structure. This situation has emerged partly for historical reasons and partly because of administrative and demographic factors, but it also carries clear political consequences.

The significance of rural areas is somewhat qualified, however, by the fact that village residents do not constitute an absolute majority in all 43 rural constituencies. According to the data, there are 32 electoral districts in which rural voters form not only a relative but also an absolute majority. This accounts for 30.19 percent of all 106 constituencies, a figure much closer to the actual share of village residents within Hungarian society. It also means that roughly one-third of Hungarian constituencies are districts in which village residents could, by themselves, decide the outcome of the mandate.

This is a particularly important feature of Hungary's political geography. While rural Hungary does not constitute a majority of the population nationwide, it possesses concentrated political weight within the single-member constituency system. The logic of the electoral system means that individual mandates are determined not by national demographic proportions but by relative or absolute majorities within each constituency. Consequently, in districts where village residents form a majority, their political preferences acquire disproportionate significance.

The political importance of villages does not, however, mean that they automatically dominate elections. One of the most important factors that qualifies this influence is voter turnout. Rural society is generally less politically mobilized than urban voters. This pattern was clearly visible in the 2026 election as well. Turnout reached 83.1 percent in Budapest, 81.0 percent in large cities, 80.9 percent in medium-sized cities, 79.2 percent in small cities, and "only" 76.9 percent in villages. At the same time, this continued the gradual trend of rural turnout converging with that of the capital. In 2026, the gap was only 6.2 percentage points, compared to 6.56 percentage points four years earlier. Nevertheless, the difference remains significant.

At first glance, this turnout gap may not appear significant, but politically it is highly consequential. Differences of only a few percentage points in participation

can generate substantial differences at the national level. Thus, although villages possess considerable structural weight within the constituency system, their political influence is reduced by lower turnout levels. Consequently, the political power of rural society is both significant and constrained. It is significant because of the constituency structure yet constrained by lower levels of political mobilization.

The 2026 election results also demonstrated that a substantial portion of Fidesz's remaining strength was concentrated in rural areas. The party won a total of 10 constituencies, and all ten were districts in which more than half of eligible voters lived in villages. This indicates a very strong relationship between rural social structure and Fidesz's electoral performance.

The phenomenon is particularly noteworthy because it demonstrates the extent to which Fidesz's support has become territorially concentrated. The party was able to win—or even come close to matching the Tisza Party—only in constituencies where village residents formed an absolute majority. This suggests that smaller settlements continue to represent the party's most important social base.

At the same time, this does not mean that all rural constituencies automatically belong to Fidesz. There are several electoral districts in which village residents account for more than 50 percent of the electorate, yet Fidesz nevertheless lost and, in some cases, performed quite poorly. One example is Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Constituency No. 7. This serves as an important counterargument to the simplified interpretation that rural society is politically homogeneous.

One of the most important developments of the 2026 election was precisely that the opposition—and particularly the Tisza Party—became competitive in several constituencies with a strongly rural character. This suggests that the political behaviour of rural voters has become more differentiated and that the previously almost automatic Fidesz advantage has weakened in a number of regions. Although Fidesz remains strongest in rural constituencies, villages can no longer be regarded as exclusively pro-government territory.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the constituency structure clearly demonstrates that rural Hungary continues to possess substantial political significance. More than 40 percent of Hungary's 106 constituencies are rural in character, and in nearly one-third of them village residents form an absolute majority. This gives villages considerable structural weight within the Hungarian electoral system. At the same time, villages alone cannot decide elections, since—even though they are overrepresented—they do not constitute a majority of all rural constituencies.

The results of the 2026 election show that Fidesz was able to win only in constituencies where village residents constituted a majority, indicating that a strong connection remains between the governing party and rural areas. However, this does not mean that a rural majority automatically produces a Fidesz victory, as the party also suffered defeats in several constituencies with similar demographic structures. All of this suggests that villages remain key actors in Hungarian elections, but that their political behaviour is now far more complex and less predictable than the simplified assumptions often found in public discourse would imply.