

The complaint of Lake Balaton

The EP elections in the settlements along Lake Balaton

A REPUBLIKON INTÉZET ELEMZÉSE



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SUMMARY

- Lake Balaton has been one of the most popular destinations for the middle class looking to move out of the cities over the past decade, but they are not the only ones who have seen the lake as an opportunity
- In recent years, the towns and villages around Lake Balaton have been buzzing with news of scandalous investments, and in the local elections Fidesz lost the mayor's seat and the control of the two symbolic towns (Keszthely and Tihany).
- While in 2019 Fidesz achieved a better result at Lake Balaton than nationally, this year it was slightly below its already weaker national result
- The number of voters for the governing party was roughly the same as five years ago, but turnout was significantly higher, and the party's decline was therefore higher in 34 lakeside municipalities than nationally
- The turnout along Lake Balaton was higher than the national turnout in 2019, as it was this year, which ultimately resulted in the relatively worse performance of Fidesz
- The Tisza Party alone won as many votes on the shores of Lake Balaton as the six parties that united in 2022 combined in the previous EP elections, with the parties of the coalition losing almost two-thirds of their voters
- Fidesz continues to be the largest party in the Balaton-coastal settlements, but while they managed to increase the number of voters in the country despite the weaker results, they lost more than 800 votes on the lakeside.

INTRODUCTION

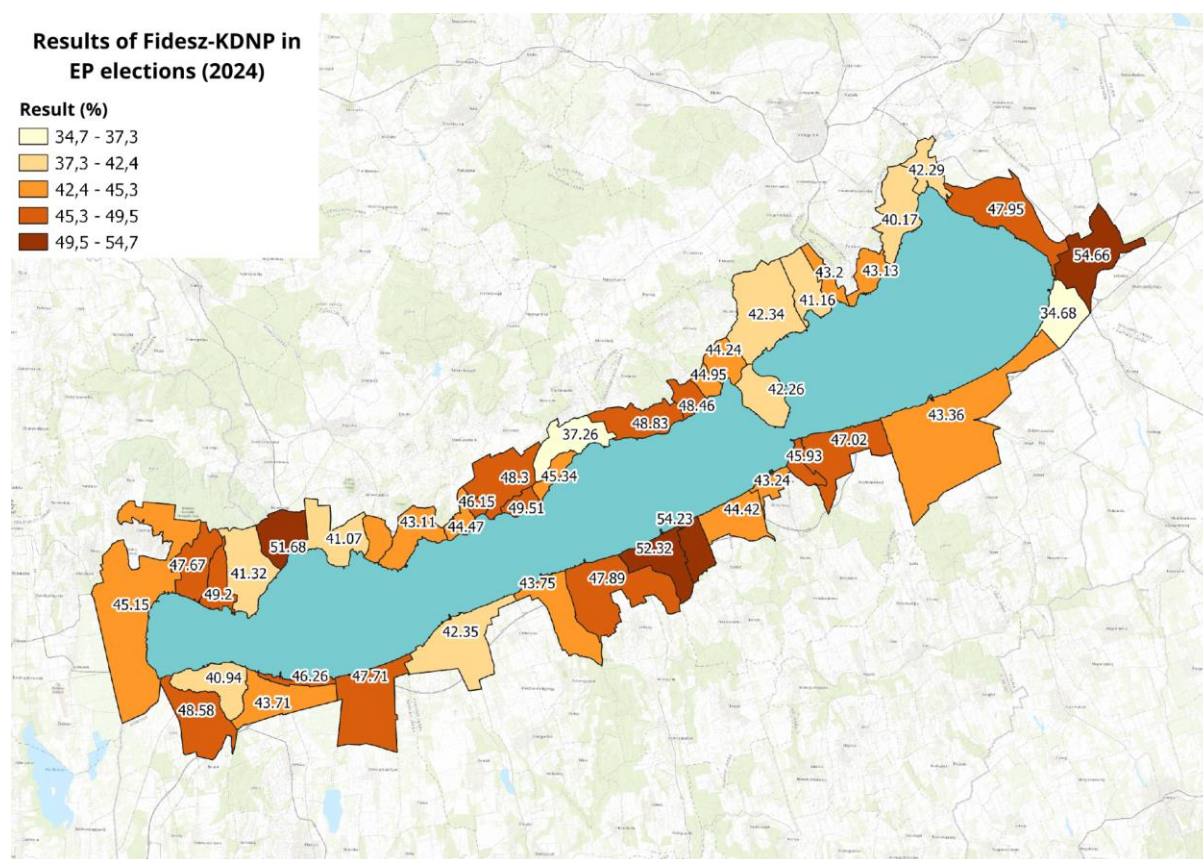
The Őrség is an iconic site of the decades before the regime change. From the 1960s onwards, the south-western part of Vas county provided a place where many intellectuals and artists who moved there or bought holiday homes could work in peace and quiet in a highly aesthetic natural environment. The popularity of the area was only enhanced by the 1974 sociography *The Complaint of the Őrség* by György Moldova.

Nowadays, however, the Őrség has been replaced by Lake Balaton, especially the Balaton Highlands. Both the coastal towns and the smaller settlements in the Káli basin became highly popular holiday and residential destinations in the 2010s, a trend that was only intensified by the spread of hybrid work in the wake of the COVID epidemic. And the movers and holiday home buyers come from similar demographic groups as the earlier migrants to the Őrség. They are higher income earners, typically professionals, who can work from the peace and quiet of their holiday homes/gardens.

But they are not the only ones who have their eyes on Lake Balaton. The popularity and growing demand for the lake naturally attracts capital, investment and economic elites. In Hungary, this is often to some extent intertwined with the governing parties, so there is an overlap between the political and economic elite. In recent years, the public life of many municipalities along Lake Balaton has been organised around large investments in towns and villages. One only has to think of Balaland in Szántód, the various projects in Tihany and Keszthely, or the Club Aliga port in Balatonvilágos. In many cases, just the news of these investments was enough to spark off a kind of civil resistance. The loss of Keszthely in the local elections was a sensitive point for Fidesz, which had given the town a mayor since 1994, and now only 1 of the 8 single-member constituencies was won by a Fidesz candidate. Fidesz also suffered a symbolic defeat in Tihany, where neither the outgoing Fidesz mayor nor the candidate he supported could even get into the council. In this context, Republikon's latest analysis examines how Fidesz performed in the EP elections, and to what extent the opposition parties managed to channel social discontent in Keszthely and other coastal settlements.

FIDESZ IN THE 2024 AND 2019 EP ELECTIONS

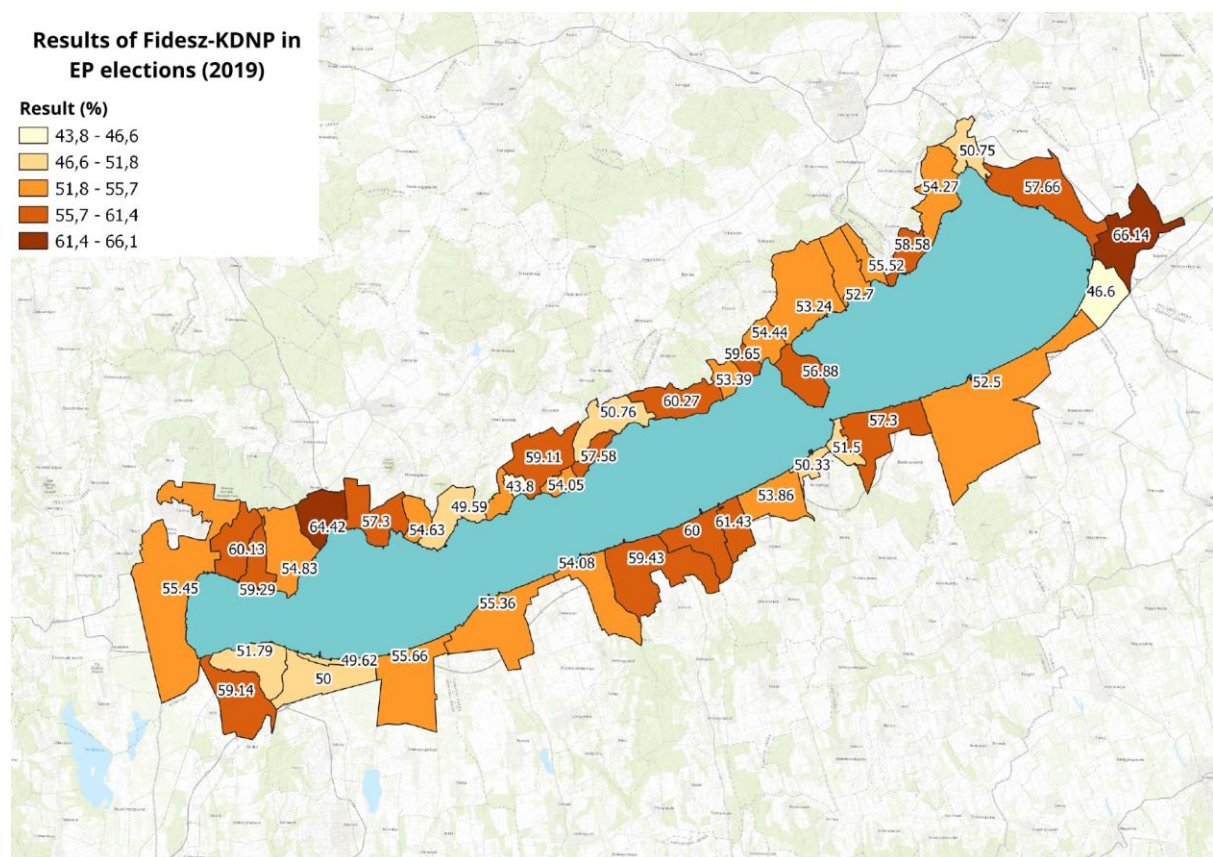
In our analysis, we examined the 43 settlements along the shores of Lake Balaton in the light of the Fidesz-KDNP party alliance's national performance. The governing parties achieved a national result of 44.82 percent in the European Parliament elections. In the municipalities along the Balaton, Fidesz won 44.17 percent of the votes on average. All in all, the party alliance achieved roughly the same result as in the country as a whole in these municipalities, with a result that was only just over half a percentage point worse. The percentage results by municipality are shown in the map below:



With the exception of a few positive or negative results, Fidesz performed in the 40 to 50 percent range in all municipalities. However, the Tisza Party performed slightly above the national results, with an average of 31,47 percent in the coastal towns and villages. This is almost 2 percentage points better than their national result.

Fidesz-KDNP's results on the Balaton coast are thus broadly in line with the national results, with Fidesz still the strongest party on Lake Balaton (except in Balatonvilágos, where Tisza beat the governing party by 2,5 percentage points).

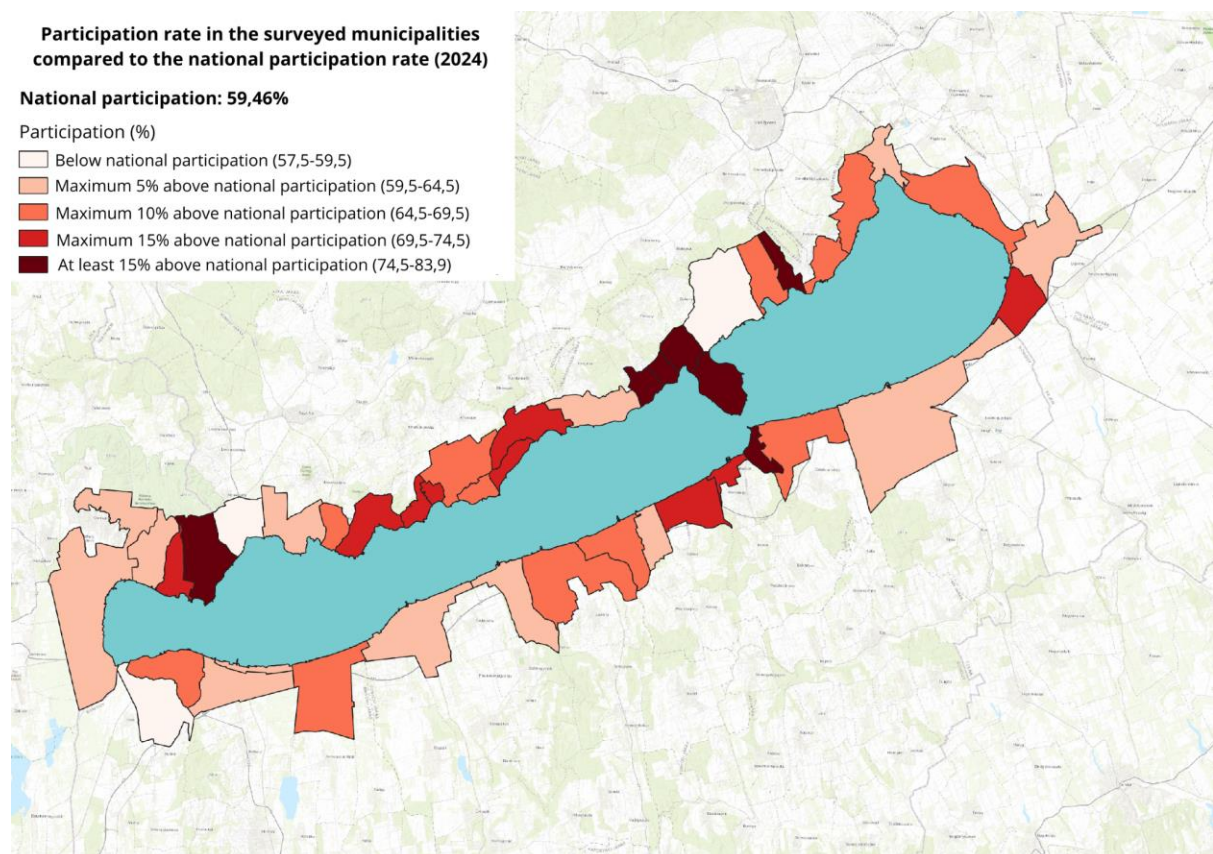
In order to better understand Fidesz's performance in 2024 in these municipalities, it is essential to look at their 2019 EP election results. Nationally, the party alliance received 52.56 percent of the vote 5 years ago, and 54.63 percent of the votes cast in the settlements along Lake Balaton, a result that was more than 2 percentage points better.



As the map above illustrates, they were particularly strong in the Balaton Highlands, where they neared or even exceeded 60 percent in several municipalities.

In fact, participation in the settlements along Lake Balaton is also high. With the exception of Balatonfőkajár, the participation rate was higher in all municipalities than nationally in 2019. In Hungary, 43.58 percent of voters took part in the EP elections, while 50.64 percent of voters in the settlements around the lake took part.

Out of the 43 municipalities surveyed in this year's EP elections, 28 had turnout at least 5 percentage points higher than the national turnout (59.46 percent), of which 16 exceeded the national turnout by at least 10 percentage points. It should be added that the majority of these municipalities were smaller municipalities, while in the larger coastal towns (Siófok, Keszthely, Balatonfüred) the turnout was around the national level. There were only 4 municipalities where the proportion of voters who turned out to vote was lower than the national figure, but none of them were more than 2 percentage points behind.



Overall, in the 2024 European Parliament elections, 63.71 percent of the residents of the Lake Balaton municipalities voted for a party, which is 4 percentage points higher than the national turnout.

CONCLUSION

So Fidesz has not weakened on the shores of Lake Balaton, at least not in terms of the absolute number of votes. In relative terms, however, it has suffered a spectacular decline in these municipalities, because while it could not increase its own voter base, the opposition side was able to attract new voters. This is of course true for the Tisza Party in the first place. While in 2019, the parties of the six-party coalition received a total of 23,078 votes, in 2024 the same parties received only 8,443 votes. Tisza, with 22,972 votes, thus gained almost as many votes in the lakeside municipalities as the parties of the coalition 5 years earlier. Despite this, Fidesz is still the largest party on Lake Balaton, but it is clear that while nationally, even with the worse relative result, they were able to turn out 200,000 new voters, the number of government party voters in the 43 municipalities surveyed not only increased, but even decreased slightly.