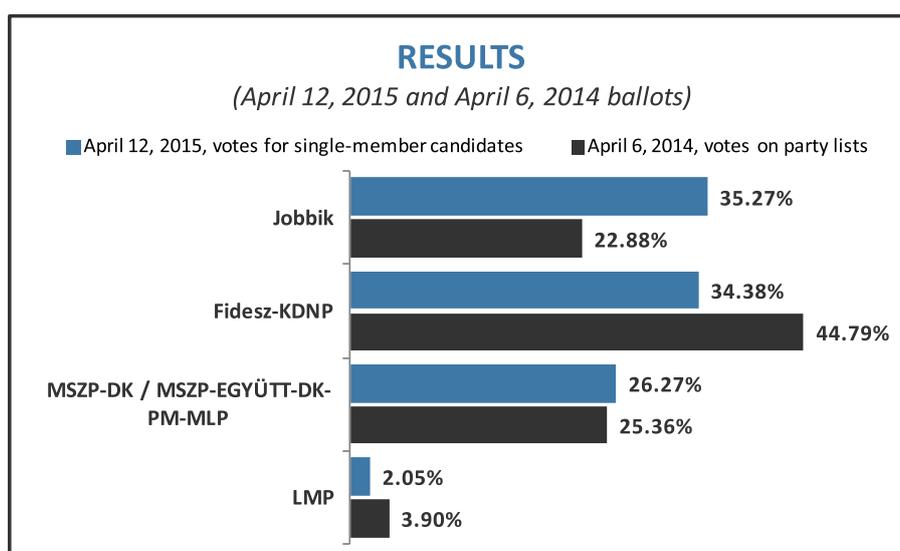


## Jobbik won its first individual constituency

*- reasons and consequences -*

On April 12, the far-right Jobbik candidate won a by-election in the individual constituency of Tapolca. The election took place due to the death of former Fidesz MP Jenő Lasztovicza in early January 2015. The electorate dissatisfied with the performance of the government turns to the political side it considers capable of defeating Fidesz. On February 22, in the Veszprém by-election this meant giving the mandate to the individual candidate supported by left-wing parties, Zoltán Kész, and in Tapolca backing Jobbik candidate, Lajos Rig. With this the governing party's "central power field" strategy that worked well in 2014 has suffered a setback, just as the myth that Fidesz can stop the rise of the far right. Jobbik can consolidate its position as the challenger of Fidesz, and could even go first in the polls.

### Results in the Tapolca by-elections on April 12, 2015, compared to the results in the 2014 general elections



## Mobilization matters

As the mobilization rates below suggest, in the two interim elections held this year less than half of Fidesz supporters abandoned the party. However, due to lower turnouts, in Veszprém and Tapolca (both are constituencies in Western Hungary) alike Fidesz’ challengers managed to attract more voters to the polls than those voting for the respective party lists one year earlier in the same individual constituencies. Jobbik could gain a lot of new voters, especially from the small villages.

Mobilization rates<sup>1</sup>

RATE OF MOBILIZATION			
Veszprém 3. (Tapolca)		Veszprém 1. (Veszprém)	
Jobbik	105.0%	55.6%	Jobbik
Fidesz-KDNP	52.3%	53.27%	Fidesz-KDNP
MSZP-DK	70.5%	110.82%	Zoltán Kész
LMP	35.7%	47.88%	LMP

## Jobbik: breakthrough at the individual level, steady move to the centre

Jobbik could expand its support for three main reasons: a) their moderate shift, b) their comfortable position as the only relevant, “clean” political force that have not discredited itself in power; c) the lack of strong and united left-wing opposition. Research does not indicate rising anti-Semitism and racism in Hungary as the driving force of Jobbik’s current rise and success. **The success of Jobbik suggests that most of the voters no longer look at the party as extremist:** taboos that have once kept a large number of undecided voters away from Jobbik have fallen to the wayside. **That might sound surprising if one considers the views of Jobbik candidate Lajos Rig:** on the one hand, he was accused of having a tattoo similar to the German SS’ infamous motto. On the other hand, Rig regularly published Facebook posts with clear anti-Semitic and racist stance. In one of his posts he shared his thoughts about the Roma being the biological weapons in the hand of the Jews in order to eliminate the non-Roma and non-Jewish population of Hungary.

Jobbik’s electoral victory has confirmed what we have maintained all along: **there is no limit to Jobbik’s expansion, and the process could only be checked by its political rivals**, although there are no signs for this to happen any time soon.

Following the parliamentary and municipal elections, the results of the current election serve as additional proof that **Jobbik’s attempt to re-brand itself as a moderate party has been largely successful.** All this consolidates party president, Gábor Vona’s position within the party: in the future he can move the party in the direction of the centre-right with more confidence. Simultaneously, the result offers Vona the opportunity to eliminate his opponents inside the party who accused him of being “soft”.

<sup>1</sup> The rate of mobilization was calculated by dividing the number of voters casting valid votes in interim elections with the number of valid list votes cast by citizens in the 2014 general election (the votes cast for Zoltán Kész were compared to MSZP-DK-Együtt-PM-MLP-list votes)

Incidentally, similar to what we have seen in Veszprém, Jobbik's victory can also be attributed to the fact that it fielded a local candidate, working hard up and down the electoral district and managing to profit even from an anti-establishment sentiment. The current victory will clearly have an impact on support for Jobbik; **there may be a widespread perception that Jobbik is a party capable of replacing Fidesz, and with this the party may consolidate its second place or even take the leading position in public-opinion polls.**

## Fidesz: no magic bullet

The governing party's "central power field" strategy (built on the concept that Fidesz remain the sole governing force whose position cannot be challenged by weak opposition forces lined up at the two ends of the political spectrum) has failed. **In fact, the party suffered two defeats at the hands of leftist candidates (in November 2014 in an individual constituency in Budapest and in February this year in Veszprém in Western Hungary) and in Tapolca it received a blow from the (far-)right direction.** Moreover, it is precisely in this fundamentally right-wing district (in April 2014 the Fidesz candidate received almost as many votes as his challengers from the right and the left combined) where the "central power field" strategy would have been expected to work. Yet, this time Fidesz simply managed to make the mark. Presumably, **the party is in an even poorer condition nationwide.**

**The current election also made it patently clear that the party has no magic bullet when it comes to mobilization: neither the so-called "Kubatov-lists" (databases used for door-to-door campaigning), nor Victor Orbán's personal appeal sufficed to guaranteed victory at the polls.**

The interim election in the constituency around Tapolca has also confirmed the assumption that the durability of established institutions is a function of the prevailing balance of power in party politics – and not the other way around. As hard as Fidesz has tried to consolidate its power through a series of election reforms and centralization keeping everyone in a dependent position, once support is withdrawn the whole structure collapses as a house of cards. With all that, **Fidesz may attempt to redraw the electoral system once again** (after Tapolca, the governing party may reconsider whether the elimination of the second-round ballot would serve its purpose in the 2018 general election). **However, to pass another reform Fidesz would have to find an ally in the Parliament as it has lost its two-thirds majority in the Veszprém by-election** (currently it has but 131 delegates in a 199-seat parliament and 133 would be needed for the two-thirds).

At this point there are no signs that Fidesz is capable of adjustment, and even the current tight loss is unlikely to force it to change course. **Apparently, Viktor Orbán hopes to turn the tide of public mood, putting his trust in the government's next secret weapon, tax-cuts.** In the meantime, with intensifying internal conflicts, recurring management blunders, a rhetoric of "the electorate will understand it all by the end of the term" and the collapse of the party's media and intellectual background, increasingly the third Orbán administration's future foreshadows the ordeal faced by the leftist government after 2006.

In addition, apparently **Fidesz has no adequate response for the Jobbik-phenomenon: for years having essentially failed to attack its rival to the right on ideological grounds, in the final stretch of the campaign it opted for a tactic of the left that clearly failed in the past few years: the stigmatisation of Jobbik (“Jobbik is a neo-Nazi party” – as leading politicians of Fidesz repeatedly said in recent days).** Although Fidesz will continue to maintain that it represent a guarantee against the far right, the message no longer carries much weight either in Hungary or abroad.

## **The left: a defeat after two victories**

A win over Fidesz not only on its “home turf” (i.e., in Budapest districts) and not merely by supporting an independent candidate (as in Veszprém) would have meant a breakthrough for MSZP. It failed to achieve its goal (clearly more daunting than in the past) and with this **its role as a potential challenger has become even more doubtful. This, in turn, will intensify tensions within the leftist camp and rekindle demand for new political players, a recurring issue since 2010.**

For the leftist opposition the Veszprém strategy may offer a more successful recipe: in the long term the left should stand behind locally known and popular candidates and try to attract undecided voters disaffected with the government (and by now turn them away from Jobbik).

*\*The two tables reflect conditions as of the night of April 12, 2015 with 99.13% of the votes counted.*