

# [***Orbán challenger in Hungary mobilizes thousands at a rare demonstration in a government stronghold***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BYH-DPP1-JC5B-G3NH-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

DEBRECEN, Hungary — A rising [*challenger to Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán*](https://apnews.com/article/hungary-orban-magyar-3a11b8bdee1e7e129214f167d9639b8b) held what he called the largest countryside political demonstration in the country’s recent history on Sunday, the latest stop on his campaign tour that has mobilized thousands across Hungary’s rural heartland.

Some 10,000 people gathered in Debrecen, Hungary’s second-largest city, in support of Péter Magyar, a political newcomer who in less than three months has shot to prominence on pledges to bring an end to problems like [*official corruption*](https://apnews.com/article/hungarian-influencers-protest-orban-government-29d1fd478abec8ed94297ae5bdda94b0) and a declining quality of life in the Central European country.

Supporters endured a brief but unexpected rain shower ahead of the afternoon demonstration, turning the city's central square into a sea of umbrellas. They waved Hungarian flags bearing the names of towns and villages across the country from which they had come.

“Today, the vast majority of the Hungarian people are tired of the ruling elite, of the hatred, apathy, propaganda and artificial divides,” Magyar told the crowd. “Hungarians today want cooperation, love, unity and peace.”

Magyar, a former insider within Hungary’s ruling Fidesz party, has since February denounced [*the nationalist Orbán*](https://apnews.com/article/hungarys-orban-boosts-trump-at-cpac-event-0eb4b7165847cbfca65f5333d7bb972c) as running an entrenched “mafia state,” and declared war on what he calls a propaganda machine run by the government.

His party, TISZA (Respect and Freedom), has announced it will run 12 candidates in [*June 9 European Union elections,*](https://apnews.com/hub/european-parliament) with Magyar appearing first on the party list. TISZA has also announced it will run four candidates in local council elections in the capital Budapest.

His appearance on Sunday in Debrecen, a stronghold of Orbán’s ruling Fidesz party, reflected the focus his fledgling campaign has placed on the Hungarian countryside, where Orbán is popular.

The Mother’s Day event was the latest stop on a tour of the country where Magyar has appeared in dozens of cities, towns and villages, often drawing thousands of supporters — numbers that few Orbán opponents have ever been able to mobilize in rural areas.

Addressing the crowd, he said that “government propaganda” had tried to discredit his movement as "just a downtown Budapest media hack,” and criticized Hungary's traditional opposition parties as having abandoned rural Hungarians.

“We’ve heard for 14 years from the opposition that it’s impossible in these circumstances to defeat Orbán, that it’s not worth traveling to the countryside, that young people aren’t interested in ***politics***, that you can’t break down the walls of propaganda,” he said. “But look around! What’s the truth?”

Katalin Nagy, who traveled several hours to the rally, said she finds Magyar credible “because he comes from the inside.”

“He’s aware of the things that are really causing problems in this country, and I think he can provide solutions to problems so that we can come out of the hole that this country is currently in,” she said.

Recent polls show that Magyar’s party may have become the largest opposition force little more than a month before the election. Pollster Median this week measured TISZA at 25% among certain voters, with Orbán’s Fidesz well ahead at 45%.

Governing party politicians have dismissed Magyar, who describes himself as a moderate conservative, as a leftist in disguise, and suggested that foreign interests lie behind his rise.

Orbán and has party have ruled Hungary with a constitutional majority since 2010.

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