The Party Page Carried the Message: Fidesz, Viktor Orbán and the Hungarian Opposition on Facebook, 2014 to 2020

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Abstract

Fidesz won every Hungarian national election from 2010 to 2022, and from 2015 migration was central to its campaigns. I use 66,587 posts from the Facebook pages of seven Hungarian parties and two party leaders, Viktor Orbán and Ferenc Gyurcsány, from January 2014 to September 2020, collected through CrowdTangle, to ask three descriptive questions. First, did Fidesz's share of Facebook engagement match its share of the vote? In the 60 days before the 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections and the 2014 and 2019 European elections, the Fidesz party page drew between 0.87 and 1.00 times its vote share among the lists compared, and between 1.02 and 1.20 times when Orbán's page is counted with the party. Smaller parties diverged much more, in both directions. Second, who carried the party? Orbán's page drew 25% of the interactions on the two Fidesz pages in 2014 and between 41% and 56% in each year from 2015, and Gyurcsány's page followed a similar path within the Democratic Coalition. Third, where did migration appear? Between 31% and 41% of posts on the Fidesz party page mentioned migration in each year from 2015 to 2019, against under 4% on Orbán's page, whose captions are short. Migration posts drew about the same engagement as other posts on the Fidesz page and about 1.5 times as much on Jobbik's. Results allow for a change in CrowdTangle's capture of photo posts in May 2015. The pattern fits a division of labour: the party page carried the written message, the leader's page the leader.

Keywords: Hungary; Fidesz; Viktor Orbán; Facebook; election campaigns; party leaders; personalisation; migration; engagement; CrowdTangle

1 Introduction

Fidesz governed Hungary from 2010, with a two-thirds parliamentary majority for most of the decade, and observers describe substantial change in the media environment during its time in office (Krekó and Enyedi 2018). The opposition was divided between Jobbik, a radical right party that moved towards the centre during the decade; the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP); Ferenc Gyurcsány's Democratic Coalition (DK); two green parties, LMP and Párbeszéd; and, from 2017, the liberal Momentum.

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Table 1. Pages in the sample, January 2014 to September 2020.

Page	From	Posts	Interactions (m)	Median per post
Fidesz (governing party)	Jan 2014	8,419	19.6	1,434
Viktor Orbán (Fidesz leader, prime minister)	Jan 2014	1,805	14.2	5,032
Jobbik	Jan 2014	9,136	14.2	840
MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party)	Jan 2014	9,657	7.3	414
DK (Democratic Coalition)	Jan 2014	15,846	9.1	281
Ferenc Gyurcsány (DK leader)	Jan 2014	1,985	6.9	2,296
LMP (Politics Can Be Different)	Jan 2014	8,026	1.0	60
Párbeszéd (Dialogue)	Jan 2014	7,141	4.1	315
Momentum	Jul 2016	4,572	2.6	320
Total		66,587	79.1	

From 2015 migration was the dominant theme of Fidesz's communication. The government's 2015 "national consultation" and poster campaigns presented asylum seekers as a threat (Bocskor 2018), the 2016 referendum on EU refugee quotas kept the issue prominent, and migration dominated the 2018 campaign (Bíró-Nagy 2022). So one can ask where the main message was carried: on the party page or the leader's.

Personal posts by politicians tend to draw more engagement (Metz et al. 2020; Bene et al. 2022). For Hungary, Bene (2017) studied candidates' posts in 2014, while the migration campaign has been studied mainly through advertising, speeches and surveys (Bocskor 2018; Bíró-Nagy 2022). This paper uses the CrowdTangle export from my doctoral research (Hotham 2021), as do earlier studies of populist parties in Europe (Hotham 2026a), the Nordic radical right (Hotham 2026c), Spain (Hotham 2026b) and leaders' pages in Britain (Hotham 2026d).

RQ1. Did Fidesz's share of Facebook engagement match its share of the vote at four national elections? **RQ2.** How much of the engagement of Fidesz, and of DK, came through the leader's own page? **RQ3.** How much did each side post about migration, and did those posts draw more engagement than others?

2 Data and method

Pages and posts. The data are all posts from a CrowdTangle list of Hungarian political pages, exported in October 2020 (CrowdTangle Team 2020). The list holds seven party pages and twelve politicians' pages. I keep the seven party pages and the pages of the two people who led their party for the whole period: Viktor Orbán, Fidesz leader and prime minister, and Ferenc Gyurcsány, who has led DK since it became a separate party in 2011. The other politicians' pages are not comparable across parties: several belong to Fidesz ministers or officials, leadership changed several times in MSZP, Jobbik and LMP, and Párbeszéd's co-chair Gergely Karácsony was also a district mayor and, from October 2019, mayor of Budapest. I keep posts from 1 January 2014, as coverage of earlier years is incomplete, to 30 September 2020. After removing 329 duplicate posts from the full export of 109,575, the sample is 66,587 posts with 79.1 million interactions, the sum of reactions, comments and shares (Table 1). Every page has posts in every month except three in 2016, just after Momentum's page began. The list does not include KDNP, Fidesz's permanent electoral partner, Együtt, the Two-Tailed Dog Party or Mi Hazánk.

Capture change in May 2015. CrowdTangle's capture of photo posts rose sharply in May 2015. Across the nine pages, photo posts per month rose 3.5 times from January to April 2015 to May to December

2015 (65.8 to 227.8), while link posts rose 1.15 times (385.2 to 444.8). The jump appears on the Fidesz, DK, MSZP, Párbeszéd, Jobbik and Gyurcsány pages and is small on Orbán's. Jobbik's rise from 344 posts in 2014 to 1,021 in 2015 is partly this change (photo posts rose from 48 to 365). I therefore repeat every comparison that spans or precedes May 2015 without photo posts.

Elections. I compare each party page's share of interactions in the 60 days before an election with its list's share of the vote: the parliamentary elections of 6 April 2014 and 8 April 2018 and the European Parliament elections of 25 May 2014 and 26 May 2019, using the official national list results (Nemzeti Választási Iroda nd). Vote shares are renormalised among the lists compared. Fidesz ran with KDNP, which has no page, so the Fidesz list is represented by the Fidesz page alone. Where parties ran a joint list I add their pages: MSZP, DK and Párbeszéd for the Unity alliance in 2014 (which also included Együtt and the small Liberal Party), and MSZP and Párbeszéd in 2018 and 2019. I leave out the joint Együtt and Párbeszéd list at the 2014 European election, because half of it has no page. As checks, I use 30 and 90 day windows, add the leaders' pages to their parties and exclude photo posts. Starting the 2014 European window after the parliamentary election, seven weeks earlier, gives a Fidesz ratio of 0.83, not 0.87.

Leaders and migration. For Fidesz and DK, I calculate the leader's share of the interactions on the leader's and the party's page together in each year. A post mentions migration if its text or link title contains any of the stems *migr*, *bevándor* (immigration), *menekült* at the start of a word (refugee), *kvót* (quota), *határzár* or *határvédel* (border closure or protection), or *betelepít* (resettlement). An AI model (Claude, by Anthropic), blind to the flag, coded a random sample of 60 flagged and 60 unflagged posts: 53 of the flagged posts (88%) were about immigration, asylum, refugees or border protection, including all 29 from the Fidesz page, and none of the unflagged posts was. With few migration posts, the unflagged sample says little about recall. Orbán's page is mostly photos (50%) and videos (41%) and his median caption is 54 characters, against 153 to 420 on the party pages, so the text flag will miss migration content in his images and video. For engagement, I compare mean interactions of migration and other posts from 2015 to 2019 in each group of pages, with 95% intervals from a bootstrap resampling calendar months (2,000 draws); the ratio of medians; and the weighted geometric mean of within page-year ratios (page-years with 10 or more posts of each kind), also computed from May 2015 within page, year and post type.

3 Results

3.1 Fidesz's share of engagement was close to its share of the vote

At all four elections, the Fidesz party page's share of party-page interactions was close to its list's vote share (Table 2): 46.4% against 46.7% in 2014, 48.8% against 56.1% at the 2014 European election, 51.4% against 51.5% in 2018 and 54.6% against 56.1% in 2019, ratios of 0.87 to 1.00. With 30 or 90 day windows the ratios range from 0.86 to 1.13. With Orbán's page counted, Fidesz drew somewhat more than its vote share at all four elections (1.02 to 1.20), and adding Gyurcsány's page to DK as well gives 0.96 to 1.09. For the two 2014 elections, which precede the capture change, excluding photo posts on every page gives ratios of 1.02 and 0.88, so the early comparisons are not driven by missing photos. The match does depend on format later, however: in 2018 and 2019 much of the Fidesz page's engagement came from photo posts, and without them its ratio falls to 0.62 and 0.34.

The smaller parties diverged much more. LMP drew 0.20 to 0.46 times its vote share at every election.

Table 2. Facebook and vote shares in the 60 days before each election. FB % is the share of interactions on the pages of the lists compared; Vote % is the list vote share renormalised among the same lists; Ratio is FB % divided by Vote %. Parl.: parliamentary; EP: European Parliament.

Election	List	Posts	FB %	Vote %	Ratio
2014 parl.	Fidesz	280	46.4	46.7	0.99
	Unity	829	37.3	26.6	1.40
	Jobbik	64	14.3	21.1	0.68
	LMP	219	2.0	5.6	0.36
2014 EP	Fidesz	190	48.8	56.1	0.87
	Jobbik	61	17.6	16.0	1.10
	MSZP	169	17.4	11.9	1.47
	DK	444	13.7	10.6	1.29
	LMP	152	2.5	5.5	0.46

Election	List	Posts	FB %	Vote %	Ratio
2018 parl.	Fidesz	312	51.4	51.5	1.00
	Jobbik	328	17.0	19.9	0.85
	MSZP-P	640	13.4	12.4	1.07
	LMP	187	1.5	7.4	0.20
	DK	460	10.9	5.6	1.94
	Momentum	204	5.9	3.2	1.85
2019 EP	Fidesz	330	54.6	56.1	0.97
	DK	392	16.4	17.1	0.96
	Momentum	214	3.3	10.6	0.31
	MSZP-P	805	13.9	7.1	1.97
	Jobbik	305	11.0	6.8	1.62
	LMP	184	0.8	2.3	0.34

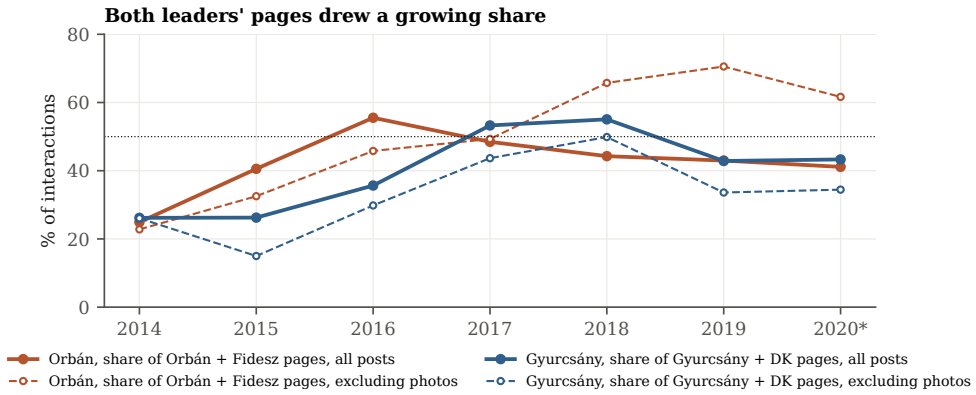


Figure 1. Leader's page as a share of the interactions on the leader's page and the party page together, by year, with all posts (solid) and excluding photo posts (dashed). *2020 runs to September.

DK drew 1.94 times its vote share in 2018 but 0.96 times in 2019, when it won 16%; Momentum drew 1.85 times in 2018, when it won 3%, and 0.31 times in 2019, when it won 10%. Jobbik drew less than its vote share at the parliamentary elections and more at the European ones. For the opposition, engagement was a poor guide to the vote, and the direction of the gap changed from one election to the next.

3.2 Leaders' pages drew a large share of their party's engagement

Orbán's page drew 25% of the interactions on the two Fidesz pages in 2014, 41% in 2015, 56% in 2016 and 41% to 48% in each year from 2017 to 2020 (Figure 1). His median post drew 4.6 to 6.0 times the median party post from 2016, though he posted far less (183 to 335 posts a year, against 702 to 2,773). Without photo posts the rise is, if anything, steeper: from 23% in 2014 and 33% in 2015 to between 46% and 71% from 2016. Gyurcsány's page followed a similar path within DK: 26% of the interactions on the two DK pages in 2014 and 2015, 36% in 2016, 53% and 55% in 2017 and 2018, and 43% in 2019 and 2020, with a median post 4.3 to 9.0 times the party's. His page had almost no photo posts captured before May 2015, so his early share may be understated, but the rise is also clear without photos, from 26% and 15% in 2014 and 2015 to 44% and 50% in 2017 and 2018. So a large leader's share was not

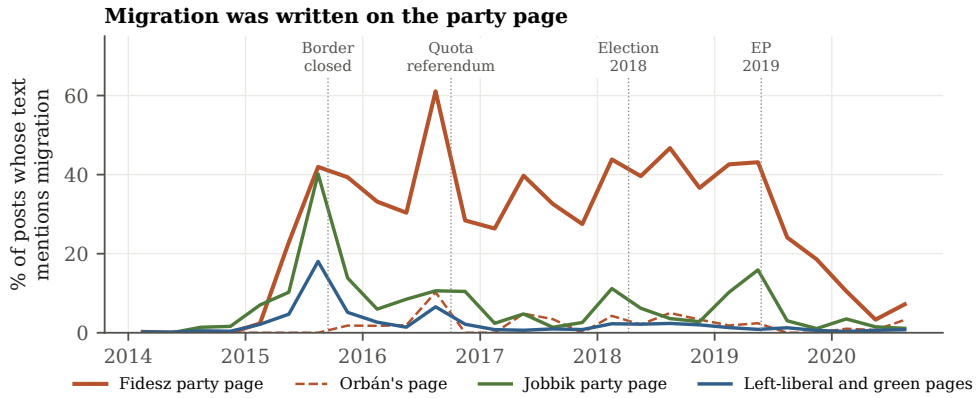


Figure 2. Share of posts whose text or link title mentions migration, by quarter. Left-liberal and green pages are the MSZP, DK, LMP, Párbeszéd and Momentum party pages and Gyurcsány's page combined. Orbán's posts are mostly photos and videos with short captions, so the text measure undercounts migration content on his page.

unique to the governing party.

3.3 The written migration message appeared on the party page

On the Fidesz party page, the share of posts mentioning migration rose from almost none in 2014 to 23% in the second quarter of 2015 and 42% in the third, when Hungary closed its southern border in mid-September (Figure 2). It peaked at 61% in the quarter before the October 2016 quota referendum and ran at 37% to 47% in each quarter of 2018. In each year from 2015 to 2019, between 31% and 41% of the party page's posts mentioned migration (32% to 49% without photo posts), falling to 6% in 2020. On Orbán's page, under 4% of posts mentioned migration in their text in any year, and only 27 posts from 2015 to 2019 were flagged. That is a lower bound, not a measure of what his videos said. Jobbik's share was 21% in 2015, between 3% and 9% a year from 2016 to 2019 and 2% in 2020. On the left-liberal and green pages it peaked at 18% in the third quarter of 2015 and was about 3% or less in every year from 2016.

On the Fidesz page, migration posts drew about the same engagement as other posts. From 2015 to 2019 its 1,641 migration posts drew 0.95 times the mean interactions of its other posts (95% interval 0.77 to 1.13), 1.08 times the median and 0.91 times within page-years; within page, year and post type from May 2015 the ratio was 1.09. On Jobbik's page migration posts drew more: 1.46 times the mean (1.08 to 1.86), 1.65 times the median, and 1.34 and 1.39 times on the two within-page measures. On the left-liberal and green pages the ratios were 0.97 (0.84 to 1.14), 1.06, 0.98 and 0.99. These are comparisons of averages, not effects. From March 2016 to 2019, a larger share of reactions to migration posts were "angry" on every side (Fidesz 3.8% against 1.6% for other posts; Jobbik 15.6% against 11.5%; left-liberal and green 11.4% against 7.9%), though the data cannot say at whom the anger was aimed. On Jobbik's page the angry share of all reactions rose from 6.5% in 2016 to 26.2% in 2020, while on the Fidesz and Orbán pages it stayed between 0.2% and 2.8%.

4 Discussion

The results fit a division of labour: the party page carried the written campaign message, while Orbán's page carried Orbán, through photos and video with little text. That would be consistent with evidence

that personal content draws more engagement (Metz et al. 2020; Bene et al. 2022), but the data show only where content appeared, not why. On the Fidesz page, migration posts did no better than its other posts; on Jobbik's they drew more.

There are clear limits. The page set is what the CrowdTangle list contained, and only two leaders' pages could be compared fairly. Historical coverage is not guaranteed to be complete: the May 2015 change in photo capture is one visible gap, handled here by repeating comparisons without photos, but others may be invisible. The 2018 and 2019 election comparisons depend on counting photo posts. Interactions are not support: they include opponents and may reflect paid promotion, and government advertising ran largely outside these pages. The migration flag reads text only, its recall is unknown, and its validation was coded by an AI model, not a person. Four elections are too few to show that Fidesz's match is more than coincidence.

5 Conclusion

Fidesz's party page drew a share of engagement close to its vote share, while its opponents' engagement was a poor guide to theirs. Leaders' pages drew a large share of their parties' engagement in government and in opposition. Fidesz's written migration message appeared on the party page rather than in the text of the leader's posts, and there it drew no more engagement than other posts. The page with the most engagement was not necessarily the one carrying the message.

Data and code

The posts were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020. CrowdTangle's terms do not permit sharing the raw posts. The analysis code, the list of pages, the migration keyword list and aggregate data (counts and interactions by page and quarter, the election comparisons, leader shares, migration shares and validation counts) are available from the author.

Provenance and AI use

The data were exported from CrowdTangle in October 2020 for my doctoral research. This paper builds on my doctoral thesis (Hotham 2021). The analysis and writing were completed in 2026.

I designed the study and am responsible for the analysis and conclusions. I wrote the text, with drafting and editing assistance from Claude (Anthropic), which also helped prepare the analysis code. I reviewed and checked all text and results. Claude was also used to code the validation sample for the migration keyword list, as described in the method.

Ethics

Not applicable: the study involves no human participants. The data are public posts by the official Facebook pages of political parties and party leaders, analysed only as counts and aggregates by page and period. No post content is quoted or reproduced, and no data on individual users are used.

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