

# Hungary

Hungary's internet freedom declined slightly during the coverage period, reflecting the online harassment of government critics. Although the country enjoys high levels of overall connectivity, the shift to distance learning that accompanied the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the continued existence of a socioeconomic digital divide. While there are few overt restrictions on content in Hungary, the government further consolidated its control over the media landscape during the coverage period. Finally, in response to COVID-19, the government set harsh penalties for scaremongering that were quickly used to intimidate critics and temporarily suspended data protection rules in an apparently extralegal manner.

After taking power in 2010 elections, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Alliance of Young Democrats–Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) party pushed through constitutional and legal changes that have allowed it to consolidate control over the country's independent institutions. More recently, the Fidesz-led government has moved to institute policies that hamper the operations of opposition groups, journalists, universities, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) whose perspectives it finds unfavorable.

*While rates of access to the internet in Hungary are high, the shift to distance learning that accompanied the outbreak of COVID-19 laid bare the continued existence of a socioeconomic digital divide. Hungary's telecommunications market is diverse and competitive, although the fairness and openness of the state regulator has been called into question.*

A1 1.00-6.00 pts-6 pts

Do infrastructural limitations restrict access to the internet or the speed and quality of internet connections?	6.006 6.006
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Hungary's internet penetration rate has steadily increased in recent years. According to Eurostat, over 83 percent of the population used the internet in 2019.<sup>1</sup> The European Union's Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) found 82 percent of households had fixed broadband subscriptions in 2019.<sup>2</sup> Of households with fixed broadband subscriptions, 51 percent enjoyed speeds of at least 100 Mbps that year, exceeding the European Union (EU) average of 26 percent.<sup>3</sup> The National Infocommunication Strategy developed by the government aims for 100 percent of households to have access to connections of at least 30 Mbps by the end of 2020.<sup>4</sup> According to outside analysis, the government is not on track to meet this target.<sup>5</sup> (However, it did meet the strategy's goal of providing at least 50 percent of households access to connections of at least 100 Mbps.)

Third-generation (3G) technology is nearly ubiquitous.<sup>6</sup> Fourth-generation (4G) technology reaches 97 percent of households in 2019, according to the DESI, but mobile broadband take-up in Hungary is the lowest in the EU at 70

subscriptions per 100 people.<sup>7</sup> As of April 2020, two providers were already offering limited fifth-generation (5G) services in Budapest, while more extensive 5G networks remained in development.<sup>8</sup>

Public Wi-Fi hotspots are widely available throughout Budapest and other major cities in Hungary. Through its Digital Welfare Program, the government pledged that every settlement will have public Wi-Fi available by the end of 2018.<sup>9</sup> It is not clear whether this pledge has been fulfilled.

A2 1.00-3.00 pts 0-3 pts

Is access to the internet prohibitively expensive or beyond the reach of certain segments of the population for geographical, social, or other reasons?	2.002 3.003
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The cost of internet access is high but not necessarily prohibitive. According to the DESI, in 2019, only four EU Member States had more expensive mobile broadband prices than Hungary, while fixed broadband prices in the country were the 8th least expensive in the bloc.<sup>10</sup> In the 2020 Inclusive Internet Index, Hungary ranked 16 out of 22 EU Member States surveyed in terms of the affordability of prices for internet connections.<sup>11</sup> The monthly cost of a 150 Mbps fixed broadband internet connection was 1.7 percent of gross national income (GNI) per capita in 2019, while the monthly cost of a 6 GB mobile data plan was 1.2 percent of GNI per capita, per the International Telecommunications Union.<sup>12</sup> That year, Hungary's GNI per capita was \$16,140 per the World Bank.<sup>13</sup>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, service providers offered free or low-cost extra data for users.<sup>14</sup>

Levels of access differ based on geographic and socioeconomic conditions; lower access rates exist in rural areas and among low-income families. A digital divide based on ethnicity has also been observed: the Romany community has historically had less access to the internet.<sup>15</sup> The shift to distance learning that accompanied the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Hungary (more on this below) left many Roma schoolchildren behind.<sup>16</sup>

The government's national school curriculum for 2020 introduced a new subject called "digital culture" that covers topics like the use of digital tools, coding, and robotics.<sup>17</sup> It also increased the overall number of information technology (IT) classes in primary and secondary schools compared to the previous national curriculum, which was criticized for potentially exacerbating digital inequality (some schoolchildren from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds do not have access to internet-enabled devices at home).<sup>18</sup>

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, distance learning with digital tools temporarily became the primary method of education for all schoolchildren as of March 16, 2020. According to experts, as many as one in five students could not participate in distance learning because they lacked the proper equipment or sufficiently reliable internet connections.<sup>19</sup>

A3 1.00-6.00 pts 0-6 pts

Does the government exercise technical or legal control over internet infrastructure for the purposes of restricting connectivity?	6.006 6.006
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The government does not restrict commercial information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure,<sup>20</sup> and backbone networks are owned by private companies rather than the state.<sup>21</sup> Legally, however, the internet and other telecommunications services can be restricted or suspended in the event of an attack on Hungary, for preemptive defense, or during a national emergency.<sup>22</sup>

The Budapest Internet Exchange (BIX), which distributes Hungarian internet traffic among domestic internet service providers (ISPs), is overseen by the nonprofit Council of Hungarian Internet Service Providers (ISZT)<sup>23</sup> without any government interference.<sup>24</sup>

A4 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Are there legal, regulatory, or economic obstacles that restrict the diversity of service providers?	5.005 6.006
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The ICT market in Hungary lacks significant competition, with four private companies dominating it. However, there are no onerous legal, regulatory, or economic barriers to entry for potential competitors. Three ISPs—Magyar Telekom, DIGI, and Vodafone-owned UPC—control over 80 percent of the total fixed broadband market.<sup>25</sup> There are three major mobile service providers (market leader Magyar Telekom, Telenor, and Vodafone).<sup>26</sup> A fourth mobile service provider, the Romanian-owned DIGI, launched in 2018.<sup>27</sup> In 2019, the National Media and Infocommunications Authority (NMHH), the telecommunications regulator, excluded DIGI from its initial auction of 5G radio frequencies without offering a detailed explanation.<sup>28</sup> DIGI appealed the decision in March 2020, alleging discriminatory treatment.<sup>29</sup>

A tax on mobile phone calls and text messages was introduced in 2012 (at a maximum rate of \$3 per month per individual subscriber).<sup>30</sup> All mobile service providers have since raised their prices.<sup>31</sup> Previously, in 2010 the government levied two special taxes on the telecommunications industry, both of which triggered infringement proceedings in the EU in 2012. The government subsequently withdrew the taxes and both proceedings were withdrawn.<sup>32</sup>

There are no specific laws or regulations governing the provision of Wi-Fi hotspots or other public internet connections in Hungary.

A5 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do national regulatory bodies that oversee service providers and digital technology fail to operate in a free, fair, and independent manner?	2.002 4.004
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The NMHH and the Media Council, established under media laws passed in 2010, are responsible for overseeing and regulating the telecommunications and mass communications industries. The head of the NMHH is appointed by the president, based on the recommendation of the prime minister, for a non-renewable nine-year term—longer than two full terms of the parliament.<sup>33</sup> The head of the NMHH also chairs the Media Council, Hungary’s media regulator (see B6). Critics charge that this arrangement concentrates too much power in the hands of a single political appointee. At the end of 2019, five new members were elected to the Media Council, all supported only by votes of members of the ruling coalition.

A 2019 report from the Council of Europe questioned the impartiality and transparency of the NMHH, and especially the Media Council, noting that “the Media Council’s decision-making regarding market entry regulations and frequency tendering (linear radio services) has been found [to be] biased” and that “public hearing meeting minutes that would genuinely inform on stakeholders’ positions have not been made available” in some cases.<sup>34</sup>

With the adoption of the Fundamental Law of Hungary, which entered into force in 2012, the government prematurely ended the six-year term of the data protection and freedom of information commissioner, replacing him and his office with the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information. The head of the new authority is appointed by the president based on the recommendation of the prime minister for a nine-year term and can be dismissed by the president if the prime minister recommends it,<sup>35</sup> calling into question the independence of the agency. In 2014, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled that Hungary failed to fulfill its obligations under EU law when it ended the data protection commissioner’s term.<sup>36</sup>

*There are few formal limits on content in Hungary. However, the online information landscape in the country is increasingly dominated by progovernment narratives, as more and more formerly independent media outlets have been bought up by business interests with close ties to the ruling Fidesz party.*

B1 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Does the state block or filter, or compel service providers to block or filter, internet content?	5.005 6.006
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The government does not place any restrictions on access to social media or communications applications.

Unauthorized online gambling is illegal,<sup>37</sup> and ISPs block a few hundred unauthorized gambling websites at the request of the National Tax and Customs Administration.<sup>38</sup> However, unauthorized gambling websites frequently change their URLs in order to circumvent blocking.<sup>39</sup>

The authorities sometimes block content under a criminal code article banning public denial of the Holocaust, but since many of websites guilty of this offense are hosted outside of Hungary, enforcement of these decisions is often inconsistent.<sup>40</sup>

B2 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do state or nonstate actors employ legal, administrative, or other means to force publishers, content hosts, or digital platforms to delete content?	2.002 4.004
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The government and its allies sometimes employ court orders and pressure to compel publishers and content hosts to delete content.

In January 2020, a court ordered Forbes.hu to remove the names of the owners of the Hell Energy company from its list of the 50 richest Hungarians.<sup>41</sup> The owners persuaded a court that the online news outlet had unlawfully processed the owners' personal data in violation of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The editor-in-chief of Forbes.hu assailed the decision, calling it an "extreme interpretation" of the GDPR that could make business journalism "completely impossible." The use of this "extreme interpretation" of the GDPR to take down content is an emerging issue in Hungary.

In April 2019, Hungary's Supreme Court decided that the online news outlet 444.hu violated the privacy rights of István Tiborcz, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's son-in-law, when it published a video interview with him without his explicit consent. The court ruled that Tiborcz was not a public figure and therefore entitled to greater privacy protections, ordering the removal of the video interview.<sup>42</sup> The decision stoked controversy, since Tiborcz has been the subject of numerous corruption allegations that are relevant to the public interest.

After less than two years of operation, the online news outlet Zoom.hu closed in December 2018. Former Zoom.hu journalists anonymously said that the website's owner pressured them to suppress, remove, or change stories that were potentially damaging to the government (see B5).<sup>43</sup>

Also in December 2018, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that 444.hu and its owner could not be held liable for linking to a third-party YouTube video allegedly defaming Jobbik, Hungary's largest opposition political party.<sup>44</sup> Previously, several domestic courts found that, by publishing a link to the video, 444.hu had assumed liability for the defamatory content it contained. The courts had ordered 444.hu to remove the link from its site.

In early 2018, the government-friendly television channel Echo TV aired an interview with a student activist—who had been accused of receiving foreign funding—in which the student was humiliated by the interviewer. Later, Echo TV deleted the video, which was considered embarrassing, from its online platforms, and deployed copyright laws to force the removal of content on YouTube and Facebook that used footage from the interview.<sup>45</sup>

A 2016 ECtHR ruling found that Hungarian courts wrongly held two online outlets liable for user comments defaming a real estate business.<sup>46</sup> The outlets deleted the defamatory comments once they received notice that legal action had been taken against them but were nonetheless found guilty. The ECtHR decision has yet to be incorporated into Hungarian case law. As a result, most sites now prohibit comments altogether, filter comments, or encourage users to comment on social media pages instead, thus transferring liability to social media platforms.

In the second half of 2019, Facebook restricted access to five items reported by the Háttér Society, an LGBT+ rights

organization, “as locally illegal hate speech” and “seven items in response to private reports of defamation.”<sup>47</sup> During the same period, Twitter did not receive any content removal requests from the government.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, the government sent Google five content removal requests (three for “defamation” and two for “privacy and security”) encompassing 93 items.<sup>49</sup> Google removed 74 of these items.

B3 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do restrictions on the internet and digital content lack transparency, proportionality to the stated aims, or an independent appeals process?	3.003 4.004
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For the most part, restrictions on the internet are proportional, but vague language in Hungary’s legal framework leaves some online news outlets at risk of unjustified content removal. Media laws from 2010 stipulate that media content—both online and offline—may not offend, discriminate, or “incite hatred against persons, nations, communities, national, ethnic, linguistic, and other minorities or any majority as well as any church or religious group.”<sup>50</sup> Further, by law, media content must respect the constitutional order and human rights, and must not violate public morals.<sup>51</sup> However, the legal framework does not define the meaning of “any majority” or “public morals.” If an online news outlet allegedly disobeys the law, the Media Council may oblige it to “discontinue its unlawful conduct,” publish a notice of a resolution on its front page, pay a fine of up to 25 million Hungarian forints (\$82,100), or any combination of the three.<sup>52</sup> If a website repeatedly violates the law, ISPs can be ordered to suspend the site’s domain, and as a last resort, the NMHH can delete the website from its administrative registry, making it illegal for the website to publish.<sup>53</sup> Any such action can be appealed in court.<sup>54</sup>

Under the criminal code in effect since 2013, websites can be blocked for hosting unlawful content, such as defamation, Holocaust denial, or child abuse.<sup>55</sup> Hosts are required to make content inaccessible, either temporarily or permanently, upon receiving a court order stating that the hosted content is illegal.<sup>56</sup> The law stipulates that if the illegal content is hosted on a server located outside the country, a Hungarian court will issue a “query” to the minister of justice to make the content inaccessible; the minister then passes the query on to officials in the country where the content is hosted, and if there is no response from that state within 30 days, the court can order domestic ISPs to block the content.<sup>57</sup> The prosecutor, the ISP, and the content provider can appeal the court order within eight days of the decision. The NMHH is the authority designated to manage the list of websites to be blocked based on court orders.<sup>58</sup> The list, known as the Central Electronic Database of Decrees on Inaccessibility (KEHTA), went into effect in 2014, with the primary aim of fighting child pornography.

In 2020, to comply with regulations of the new Audiovisual Media Services Directive of the EU, the NMHH was given powers to oversee video content shared on platforms like YouTube and Facebook. Platforms are liable for moderating content, for example, disabling harmful content for children, and can be fined up to 100 million forints (\$328,400) for failing to comply.<sup>59</sup>

Though the law generally protects against intermediary liability for content posted by third parties, in some cases courts have held individuals responsible for third-party comments on their websites. In two high-profile cases,

Hungarian courts have held online news outlets liable for defamatory third-party content. The ECtHR has overruled the Hungarian courts in both instances (see B2). Additionally, in 2016, László Toroczkai, the far-right mayor of Ásotthalom, was held liable by a court for “disseminating” a defamatory comment posted by another user on his Facebook page, which stated that a journalist “should be hanged.” The court found that, by allowing comments on his page, Toroczkai had accepted responsibility for any unlawful content posted by others.[60](#)

According to national legislation, which is based on the EU E-Commerce Directive, ISPs and other intermediaries are not legally responsible for content so long as they serve as “mere conduits.”[61](#) Intermediaries are also not obliged to verify the content they transmit, store, or make available, nor do they need to search for unlawful activity (see C6).[62](#) However, Hungarian courts have tended to argue that this liability regime only applies to e-commerce and is not applicable to content that violates personality rights. Hosts are not liable for hosted content but must restrict access to content deemed illegal by a court.

However, both print and online media outlets bear editorial responsibility if their aim is to distribute content to the public for “information, entertainment, or training purposes.”[63](#) The law fails to clarify what editorial responsibility entails and whether it would imply legal liability for online publications. A member of the Media Council said in 2011 that the provision could apply to a blog if it generates revenue and is registered as a media content provider with the NMHH.[64](#)

Hungary’s government supported the EU Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market in the European Council.[65](#) Hungarian members of the European Parliament were divided on the measure, though most members from the ruling Fidesz party opposed it.[66](#) The directive was passed by the European Parliament in April 2019. When implemented in Hungary, the directive will hold “online content sharing service providers” liable for copyright violations that take place on their platforms.[67](#) By the end of the coverage period, the EU Directive on Copyright had not yet been implemented in Hungary, although consultations about its implementation had begun.[68](#)

B4 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Do online journalists, commentators, and ordinary users practice self-censorship?	3.003 4.004
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Among ordinary users, self-censorship is not common, although problematic detentions during the coverage period (see C3) may have heightened pressure on ordinary users to self-censor. In a 2017 survey, journalists told the Mérték Media Monitor that self-censorship in journalism is common, particularly in progovernment outlets.[69](#) A 2019 Oxford University survey of journalists throughout Central and Eastern Europe, including Hungary, found that 13.8 percent of respondents “had stopped themselves writing a story because they feared repercussions.”[70](#) During the COVID-19 pandemic, the parliament amended the criminal code to extend the legal definition of scaremongering (see C2).[71](#) The amendments punish those who utter or disseminate false information that “undermines the effort to protect the country in a state of emergency” with up to five years’ imprisonment.[72](#) The vague wording of this law may result in self-censorship among journalists and ordinary users. The Hungarian Civil Liberties Union found that healthcare workers and other professionals involved in the fight against COVID-19 had become less likely to speak publicly for

fear of retaliation, including under the aforementioned amendments. [73](#)

In addition, online media outlets are pressured to only publish politically “safe” content and avoid covering controversial topics such as corruption, for fear of losing government advertisement placements (see B6).[74](#)

B5 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Are online sources of information controlled or manipulated by the government or other powerful actors to advance a particular political interest?	2.002 4.004
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The ongoing consolidation of online media outlets in the hands of progovernment owners has led to significant manipulation of the online information landscape to benefit the ruling party. According to a recent Mérték Media Monitor study, progovernment media outlets account for roughly 41.3 percent of the online media market and 79.3 percent of the overall media market.[75](#) In November 2018, the owners of almost all government-friendly private media outlets, including many online news outlets, donated their holdings to a newly created Hungarian nonprofit entity called the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA). The establishment of KESMA was exempted from regulatory scrutiny because the government determined that its formation was “of national strategic importance in the public interest.”[76](#)

Observers have noted the increasing number of independent online outlets that have been acquired by progovernment entities in recent years; these acquisitions are often followed by shifts toward a more government-friendly editorial slant.[77](#) During the coverage period, this trend continued apace. In March 2020, a progovernment businessperson acquired 50 percent of the advertising business of Index.hu, the country’s preeminent online news outlet.[78](#) Previously, in 2018, the company which controls Index.hu was sold to a member of the Christian Democratic People’s Party (KDNP), coalition partner of the ruling Fidesz party, and another businessperson.[79](#) After the coverage period, in July 2020, Index.hu’s chief editor was abruptly fired, prompting the majority of the website’s staff to quit in protest.[80](#) Subsequently, Index.hu’s began to take a progovernment line, while the outlet’s former staff launched a new portal, Telex.hu.

In addition to favorable coverage from privately owned online media, the government enjoys editorial control over several state-run media outlets that publish online. State-owned news agency MTI offers its news free of charge, making it difficult for other actors to compete. Many online media outlets that have been impacted by the economic crisis lack staff to produce original reporting and tend to republish MTI wire stories. An anonymous MTI journalist told the Mérték Media Monitor that the service introduced daily routines to support the government’s agenda, such as mandating that employees “write a summary of migrant-related scandals every day.”[81](#) In 2018, *The Guardian* revealed that the government gives direct editorial orders to public television employees.[82](#) In March 2020, *Politico* reported that management ordered editors in state media to ask for prior permission when reporting on certain issues, like Greta Thunberg and EU politics. Editors were banned from covering the reports of prominent international human rights NGOs.[83](#)

In a 2019 Mérték Media Monitor survey, 40 percent of interviewed journalists agreed with the statement that politicians have the ability to influence their work, and 71 percent said they were concerned about the impact of outside interference on the credibility of the Hungarian press.<sup>84</sup>

Government-sponsored disinformation continued to mar Hungary’s online information environment. Historically, progovernment content manipulation has intensified before elections, such as the October 2019 local elections. In February 2020, Deputy Defense Minister Szilárd Németh made a Facebook post about a protest by migrants and refugees at Hungary’s border with Serbia that used images from Greece and the border Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia to mislead users about the nature of the protest.<sup>85</sup>

In January 2018, 444.hu reported on a sophisticated network of unpaid users coordinated by the ruling Fidesz party that share progovernment content on Facebook.<sup>86</sup> Commenters are given directives, sometimes several a day, to post particular content within a specified timeline. Those providing the order then confirm that the content was posted. When users post memes, they are provided detailed instructions on how to create the images. Progovernment commentators remained active during the coverage period. Researchers at Oxford University also found evidence that progovernment bots, or automated accounts, were spreading friendly narratives, attacking the political opposition, and engaging in other forms of information manipulation on Facebook.<sup>87</sup>

Far-right blogs and news websites are known to circulate pro-Russia propaganda.<sup>88</sup> Some spam Facebook with fake news.<sup>89</sup> According to a 2017 study by the think tank Political Capital, pro-Russia news and content is disseminated “directly from [Hungarian] government-organized media.”<sup>90</sup> According to a study by the European Values think-tank, a “large portion of mainstream media in Hungary are under the control of the government, some of them using Russian quasi-media like Sputnik or RT as their sources. In certain instances, known Russian disinformation centers are welcomed.”<sup>91</sup>

B6 1.00-3.00 pts0-3 pts

Are there economic or regulatory constraints that negatively affect users’ ability to publish content online?	1.001 3.003
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In Hungary, online media outlets in particular face economic and regulatory obstacles to their operation.

The Media Council is the NMHH’s decision-making body in matters related to media outlets, and its responsibilities include allocating television and radio frequencies and penalizing violators of media regulations. The head of the Media Council appoints the president of the Media Services and Support Trust Fund (MTVA), the body responsible for producing content for public media.<sup>92</sup> The members of the Media Council are nominated and elected by a parliamentary majority, then appointed by the president.<sup>93</sup> All online media outlets are required to register with the NMHH within 60 days of starting operations.<sup>94</sup>

Some of the decisions of the Media Council have been regarded as politicized. For instance, the Media Council

permitted the newly created, progovernment KESMA (see B5) to skirt a regulation aimed at preventing market concentration.<sup>95</sup> A 2019 joint report from seven different press freedom watchdogs observed that the Media Council's decisions related to KESMA "have been taken so as to block mergers involving independent media while approving mergers among progovernment media, facilitating the concentration of progovernment ownership."<sup>96</sup> Critics also contend that the Media Council operates with unclear provisions and can impose high fines,<sup>97</sup> which could lead to uncertainty, fear, and self-censorship among journalists. The 2019 joint report argued that "the threat of targeted legislation and regulatory action hangs like the Sword of Damocles over Hungary's independent media."<sup>98</sup>

Any online media outlets that publish critical content are far less likely to attract revenue from state advertising or private companies owned by government-friendly oligarchs.<sup>99</sup> As the digital advertising market is not yet fully developed, this loss in revenue poses a significant threat to the operations of independent news websites.

On the other hand, the Hungarian government has increasingly channeled advertising revenue to benefit outlets that publish progovernment content. So-called national consultations and other large-scale, government-financed media campaigns are an integral part of the government's communications strategy. For 2020 the National Communications Authority, responsible for government communications, has a budget of 50 billion forints (\$154 million) that can be renewed three times.<sup>100</sup> The political nature of government advertising, which gives partisan outlets a financial advantage, has further distorted the online media landscape. According to 2018 data, over a third of all online news outlets in Hungary depend on the government for at least a third of their advertising revenue.<sup>101</sup>

The introduction of an advertisement tax, which media outlets pay based on their advertising revenues, is also a burden for some media outlets, particularly smaller online ventures.<sup>102</sup> In 2015, the tax was converted from a progressive tax into a flat tax,<sup>103</sup> which the European Commission (and the CJEU) started investigating to determine if it harmed competition.<sup>104</sup> In May 2019, the government decided to decrease the tax to zero percent,<sup>105</sup> although the CJEU found that it had not violated EU law.<sup>106</sup>

Increasingly, independent news websites have turned to crowdfunding to support their operations. Many of these websites launched crowdfunding campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading public media to accuse them of scaremongering and dismissing their efforts as "begging for money."<sup>107</sup>

In a 2019 Mérték Media Monitor's survey, one-third of interviewed journalists reported experiencing some kind of economic pressure on their organization, including threats of losing advertisers and bribery.<sup>108</sup>

In 2016, the NMHH started enforcing EU net neutrality regulations. Two mobile internet providers, Magyar Telekom<sup>109</sup> and Telenor,<sup>110</sup> were found to be in violation of the regulations for giving certain video streaming services preferential treatment. The NMHH ordered the providers to cease the discriminatory practice. The providers appealed, but the decision was upheld in the Telenor case in 2017. The NMHH took further action against Telenor in 2019.<sup>111</sup>

B7 1.00-4.00 pts0-4 pts

Does the online information landscape lack diversity?	3.003 4.004
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The online media environment remains relatively diverse, though independent news websites face increasing pressure to conform to progovernment narratives. The purchase of online media outlets by progovernment entities has negatively impacted diversity (see B5), and the number of independent and opposition-affiliated news websites continues to decline.

In December 2018, online media outlet Zoom.hu closed down (see B2). After the 2018 parliamentary elections, both the print and online editions of the 80-year-old *Magyar Nemzet*, one of the leading daily newspapers, was closed. Its owner, Lajos Simicska, an ally turned enemy of Orbán, blamed the closure on financial struggles at the paper.<sup>112</sup> In February 2019, the political daily newspaper *Magyar Idők* was rebranded and continued its operations under the name *Magyar Nemzet* with a strong progovernment message.<sup>113</sup> Simicska has also shuttered several other media properties. Also in April 2018, after four years of operation, English-language online news outlet the Budapest Beacon was closed. Richard Field, managing editor of the Budapest Beacon, said in an interview that “the severe erosion of media plurality in Hungary makes it nearly impossible for us to continue publishing a fact-based newspaper of record.”<sup>114</sup> In 2019, Abcug.hu, which published long pieces on social issues, closed for financial reasons.<sup>115</sup> In 2020, after the coverage period, preexistent independent news website Index.hu was effectively gutted (see B5).

In 2016, Hungary’s leading opposition newspaper, *Népszabadság*, abruptly shut down. Though the owner said it was a business decision, journalists and NGOs regarded the move as a consequence of political pressure. Before it shut down, *Népszabadság* had published several highly critical articles exposing government corruption and misuse of state funds by ministers. The company that later acquired *Népszabadság* was linked to Lőrinc Mészáros, an oligarch and the former mayor of Felcsút, Orbán’s hometown.<sup>116</sup> Mészáros also owned 13 of the 18 regional newspapers in Hungary through the company Mediaworks; the remaining regional publications belong to two other prominent businessmen close to the current government.<sup>117</sup> Mediaworks has since become the leading corporation in KESMA, functioning as owner of the other member organizations. In secretly recorded footage that surfaced in May 2019, former vice chancellor of Austria Heinz-Christian Strache told a woman claiming to be a wealthy Russian citizen that he was willing to cooperate with her to “build a media landscape [in Austria] like Orbán.”<sup>118</sup> To do this, he suggested that the woman recruit Austrian businessman Heinrich Pecina, the former owner of Mediaworks, who he described as the “investor who bought and prepared every major paper for Orbán in the last 15 years.”<sup>119</sup>

The online media landscape is otherwise relatively diverse. Independent online media outlets have given a voice to minorities, including Hungary’s Roma,<sup>120</sup> LGBT+ people, and religious groups.

B8 1.00-6.00 pts0-6 pts

Do conditions impede users’ ability to mobilize, form communities, and campaign, particularly on political and social issues?	5.005 6.006
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In Hungary, social media platforms are freely available and have grown increasingly popular as a tool for advocacy and protest organization.

According to a new law on assembly that came into effect in October 2018, organizers are obliged to notify the police of any demonstration 48 hours before publicly announcing it. Those who fail to notify the police first are committing a misdemeanor and can be fined. Additionally, inviting participants to a demonstration banned by the police is now a crime.<sup>121</sup> In January 2019, a member of Momentum, an opposition political party, was fined 100,000 forints (\$330) for publishing a call for a demonstration on Facebook prior to notifying local police.<sup>122</sup> Previously, the police accepted notification through email, but under the new law, organizers are required to obtain an official account on a multipurpose e-government platform and fill in a dedicated form. In March 2019, one protest organizer received a warning after notifying the police via email instead of using the required method.

After the adoption of a new law (dubbed the “Slave Law”) in December 2018 allowing employers to extend overtime quotas, large-scale demonstrations—often organized via Facebook—were held in Budapest and other major cities. Opposition legislators often catalyzed the demonstrations by livestreaming their actions from venues that were not accessible to the public, such as the parliament floor or the headquarters of public media outlets. The popular hashtag #O1G, which is an abbreviation that translates to a vulgar insult in Hungarian against Orbán, was used online and offline to communicate dissatisfaction with the government.<sup>123</sup>

Online petitions are also popular in Hungary. For example, over 8,000 people signed an online petition entitled “We are on the Soros list, too!”<sup>124</sup> after the progovernment weekly magazine *Figyelő* published the names of nearly 200 alleged “Soros mercenaries” in April 2018.<sup>125</sup> More than 100,000 people supported an online petition against the law extending the state of danger for an unlimited time (see C1) in March 2020.<sup>126</sup>