



Persistent deficiencies increasingly threaten the integrity of Hungary's upcoming elections

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The Hungarian Helsinki Committee (HHC), an independent human rights watchdog based in Budapest, seeks to draw the attention of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to systemic deficiencies within Hungary's electoral system that continue to undermine the fairness and integrity of elections.

As the 2026 general elections approach, Hungary is entering a pivotal pre-election period. For the first time since 2010, Prime Minister Orbán is expected to face a notable challenger, while the governing parties appear increasingly unrestrained in their use of state power and public resources.

Persistent Non-Compliance with OSCE/ODIHR Recommendations

OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and commitments concerning democratic elections remain largely disregarded. Key and recurring concerns¹ include:

- the blurring of boundaries between state and party functions;
- the lack of transparency and oversight in campaign financing;
- the misuse of public funds;
- weak enforcement of campaign and finance regulations;
- the absence of independent oversight;
- inadequate legal remedies; and
- unequal voting rights for citizens residing abroad and for national minority voters.

As a result, the conditions for a fair and genuine electoral competition remain compromised.

¹ 20K, Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, Hungarian Helsinki Committee, Mérték Media Monitor, Political Capital, Unhack Democracy: *Hungarian Citizen Election Report*, June 2024, hereinafter referred to as: *Hungarian Citizen Election Report*. Available at: <https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/06/2024-Hungarian-Citizen-Election-Report.pdf>.

Blurring state and party functions

The OSCE/ODIHR has consistently urged Hungary to prohibit the misuse of administrative resources and prevent public officials from campaigning in their official capacity.² Nevertheless, the overlap between state communication and party campaigning has intensified in recent years. Government-funded "information" campaigns are frequently indistinguishable from ruling party messages. The state's communication infrastructure – including media outlets and advertising platforms – continues to be deployed for political purposes. These practices distort voter perceptions, marginalise opposition voices, and dissolve the level playing field in the contest for the electorate. As a consequence, the OSCE/ODIHR's call for transparent, equitable, and pre-defined criteria for state-funded advertising and for a ban on public advertising during campaign periods remains especially relevant.

Campaign environment and financing

Hungary's campaign finance system continues to lack transparency and independent oversight. State resources are routinely used for partisan purposes without consequence, while enforcement of campaign finance rules remains weak and selective. Oversight of third-party entities linked to political parties is insufficient. Current legislation does not require the disclosure of domestic donations and lacks adequate safeguards to prevent the misuse of state resources for party campaigning outside electoral periods.³

These systemic deficiencies have created a campaign environment dominated by the ruling parties, characterised by the extensive use of public resources and the involvement of third-party actors. Although campaign rules – such as restrictions on third-party campaigning – are formally in place, they are frequently breached and often reviewed only long after elections. The Electoral Procedure Act⁴ allows parties and candidates to campaign freely during campaign periods with low supervision, while online and social media campaigning remain largely unsupervised, with government spending among the highest in Europe.⁵ In this context, the blurring of state and party functions outside election periods contributes to a continuous and largely unregulated campaign environment.

Electoral framework and its amendments

In late 2024, Parliament adopted amendments to the electoral law redrawing single-member constituency boundaries without public consultation or opposition involvement, leading to a comprehensive realignment of electoral districts in the country, including in Budapest and its surrounding areas. Overall, these changes – and the absence of similar revisions elsewhere – favour

² See e.g. priority recommendation no. 2 of the OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Hungary: *Parliamentary Elections, 3 April 2022, ODIHR Election Observation Mission, Final Report*, Warsaw, 29 July 2022, hereinafter referred to as: *OSCE/ODIHR EOM's 2022 final report*. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/2/6/523568.pdf>.

³ See the joint assessment by Hungarian CSOs *Selected Questions and Recommendations for Hungary in the Article 7(1) TEU Procedure*, October 2025. Available at: <https://helsinki.hu/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2025/10/Selected-CSO-recommendations-Article-7-Hungary-October-2025.pdf>.

⁴ Act XXXVI of 2013 on Electoral Procedure.

⁵ See e.g. Sz. Teczár, "International data clearly exposes the insane amounts of money that Fidesz spends on Facebook ads," *Lakmusz*, 6 October 2025. Available in Hungarian at: <https://lakmusz.hu/2025/10/06/a-nemzetkozi-adatokbol-latszik-igazan-milyen-orult-osszegeket-reklamoz-el-a-facebookon-a-fidesz/>; see also C. Goujard, "Orbán leads the way in EU election advertising," *Politico Europe*, 2 June 2024. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-election-political-ads-spend-online-meta-google-fidesz/>.

the governing party, with several districts exhibiting clear signs of gerrymandering.⁶ In its June 2025 opinion,⁷ the Venice Commission expressed serious concerns about this and other recent electoral developments, highlighting the weakening of checks and balances, minority rights, and Hungary's compliance with European human rights standards.

In May 2025, the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office announced that the government had no intention of amending electoral laws prior to the 2026 general elections. However, in June, the governing parties passed an amendment⁸ removing campaign costs limits during general elections, a change that clearly benefits the incumbents.

The absence of inclusive and transparent consultation in electoral law-making remains a fundamental structural weakness. The National Election Office, while the sole authority consulting civil society on electoral matters, has not advanced proposals addressing major deficiencies concerning the fairness of elections. The legal framework continues to exclude citizen observation of the electoral process, leaving civil society unable to formally participate in election monitoring. Furthermore, equal voting conditions for citizens residing abroad remain unguaranteed: those with a registered address in Hungary may vote only at diplomatic missions, while those without a residence may vote by post. No steps have been taken to implement the *Bakirdzi and EC v. Hungary* judgment,⁹ which requires equal voting opportunities for national minority voters.

⁶ See Tamás Kovalcsik, "Redrawn constituencies favour Fidesz, not Tisza – changes shown on map," *Telex*, 19 November 2024. Available in Hungarian at: <https://telex.hu/valasztasi-foldrajz/2024/11/19/uj-orszaggyulesi-valasztokerulet-terkep>.

⁷ Hungary – Act LXXIX of 2024 Amending Certain Laws Relating to Elections, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 143rd Plenary Session (online, 13-14 June 2025), [CDL-AD\(2025\)018](https://www.venicecommission.europa.eu/media-362868/attachments/CDL-AD(2025)018).

⁸ Act LXVIII of 2025 on the amendment of Act LXXXVII of 2013 on the transparency of campaign costs for the election of members of the National Assembly. Available in Hungarian at: <https://www.parlament.hu/irom42/12109/12109.pdf>.

⁹ See the HHC's latest Rule 9.2 communication in the case of *Bakirdzi and EC v. Hungary* (Application nos. 49636/14, 65678/14): [DH-DD\(2025\)106](https://www.hhc.europa.eu/media-362868/attachments/DH-DD(2025)106), 28 January 2025. See also the Decision of the Committee of Ministers, [CM/Del/Dec\(2025\)1521/H46-16](https://www.coe.int/t/e/treaties/CM/Del/Dec(2025)1521/H46-16), 6 March 2025.

Recommendations

We call on the OSCE and OSCE Participating States to:

1. Continue to support efforts aimed at ensuring that the conduct of elections in Hungary fully in line with OSCE commitments and international standards;
2. Support ODIHR's election observation efforts in Hungary, in line with the recommendations of a potential needs assessment mission ahead of the upcoming elections.

We call on the OSCE and OSCE Participating States to urge the Hungarian Government to:

1. Implement the EOM's recommendations and align legislation and practice with OSCE commitments and international standards;
2. Refrain from misusing state resources and governing power in the electoral competition;
3. Restore the functional independence of oversight mechanisms;
4. Enable citizen observation of all stages of the electoral process;
5. Adopt legislation ensuring equal opportunities for all voters and implement ECtHR judgments related to electoral laws without delay.